

WHOM, WHAT, HOW, AND WHY EUROPEAN RURAL PEOPLE RESISTED WP # 253

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January 1982

Pulling Down the Poorhouse

On the 15th of August 1765, a Magistrate's clerk transcribed the testimony of John Garneys, a surgeon of Yexford, Suffolk:

Says that about one o'clock in the morning of the 6th instant he heard that the mob who had pulled down the House at Bulcamp were at Mr. Buxtons and threatened to go to Mr. Inghams and pull his House down. He went to Mr. Buxton's and there saw said James Stronger, John Lumkin, John Atikins and _____, his wife, Edward Butters, Jacob Spenlove, _____ Taylor and _____ Slade and heard them say they had destroyed the House at Bulcamp which some of them called Little Hell and that they would go to Mr. Ingham and pull his House down unless he delivered them the Books and Papers.

Says he thereupon went to Mr. Inghams with as much speed as possible to give him any assistance in his Power and says that between 2 and 3 in the morning of the said 6th instant about 100 of said Rioters were assembled about Mr. Ingham's House among whom were said Stronger, Lumkin, and the others named by him to have been at Mr. Buxton's and said Rioters demanded to see Mr. Ingham and declared if he did not come to them they would pull the House down.

That Mr. Ingham's Servant and Examinant did all in their Power to appease said Rioters and assured them Mr. Ingham was not at home (as in truth he was not, he having left his House upon hearing their threats) and to make them quiet gave them Bread and Cheese and Beer but nevertheless they were much Enraged at not finding Mr. Ingham and insisted Examinant had secreted him some where, and threatened that if they discovered he had they would pull his House down, and says that all the Rioters during the time they were there which was bout 3 hours behaved very riotously and outrageous and the said Stronger in particular declared he would eat the flesh and Drink the Blood of the Gent. concerned in erecting the said Poors House.

Says he heard many of said Rioters declare that as they had such Success in this their first undertaking they would reduce the price of Corn or pull down all the mills about (P.R.O. SP 37/4 [Public Record Office, London, State Papers, Series 37, Item 4]). Blanks in text, two words and some punctuation supplied).

However exotic Garney's testimony sounds today, it is familiar stuff to a regular reader of reports on eighteenth-century English rural conflicts. Assembling at the house of a miscreant and threatening to tear it down was a standard tactic of eighteenth-century crowds -- as anyone who has read much about conflicts in England's North American colonies at the same time is likely to know. The high price of grain and the profiteering of millers were frequent eighteenth-century

grievances; they would become the occasions for hundreds of food riots over much of southern England in the following year, 1766. Crowds of protesting rural workers often demanded tribute in the form of bread, cheese, and beer, or of money for drink. It was not unusual to condemn the Overseer of the Poor for mistreatment of local indigents. However, the actual tearing down of a poorhouse under construction -- which was what happened at Bulcamp on the 5th of August, 1765 -- involved far more danger and damage than the everyday resistance of rural people. The thousand people who took part in the attack far exceeded the usual scale and visibility of action against the wealthy and powerful. Large-scale, violent collective action was the exception, not the rule.

Nonetheless, the affair at Bulcamp provides an emblematic introduction to this discussion of conflict in Europe's countryside from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. On the one hand, the issues, actors, and actions in Bulcamp were local, concrete, and familiar. That new workhouse for the local poor really was going up. The parish authorities surely intended to incarcerate and discipline people who had previously received public pittances at home. James Stronger and his fellows certainly knew that Mr. Ingham's "books and papers" sometimes included records of poor farming families singled out for special attention.

On the other hand, the issues, actors, and actions ultimately came into being as a result of the joint development of capitalism and growth of the national state. The rural people of Suffolk were living a page of a very large book: the proletarianization of the European countryside. Grand processes and local issues connected to produce continuous struggle and occasional rebellion. Bulcamp's poorhouse, as we shall see, made tangible an issue which recurred throughout the development of capitalism and the growth of the national state: who was responsible, and how, for the welfare of the propertyless and intermittently penniless people produced by the very logic of capital concentration.

This paper will fall far short of doing justice to those grand processes and local issues. It will, I hope, show why any account of conflict, resistance, and rebellion among Europe's rural people must give capitalization, proletarianization, and statemaking center stage instead of relying on a model of "peasant behavior" and then treating large social changes as disturbances outside the model. It will indicate why non-peasants must figure importantly in the analysis of European peasant experience. It will offer a rough set of categories for the sorting out of different forms of conflict in the countryside. But it will do no more than sketch an agenda - - yes, alas, yet another agenda! -- for a genuinely explanatory history of the conflicts engendered by the great changes: capitalization, proletarianization, and statemaking.

Peasants, States, and Capitalism

Those same processes, in the long run, liquidated the European peasantry. Whether the destructive work of Suffolk's eighteenth-century agricultural laborers offers a suitable emblem of that long liquidation and its consequences is debatable. By any viable definition of the word "peasant", few peasants, or none, attacked those poorhouses in August 1765; the attackers, so far as I can tell, consisted mainly of rural wage-workers with little or no land of their own. By the middle of the eighteenth century, peasants had essentially disappeared from Suffolk.

Paradoxically, we have much to learn about peasant life from observing rural wage-workers and other non-peasants. That, for several reasons. First, throughout the history of the European peasantry, peasants shared the countryside with significant numbers of non-peasants: not only landlords, priests, and officials, but also artisans, wage-workers, and merchants. All of them played parts in rural conflict. Second, by the seventeenth century, wage-workers in agriculture and industry actually constituted the majority of the population in a number of European rural areas. When we observe the conflict of those areas, we are often watching proletarians, not peasants. Third, if we mean to ask what is distinctive about the actions of peasants

as peasants, the most telling comparisons set them against other cultivators rather than against industrial workers and other non-agricultural classes.

Fourth, and most important, the same broad processes that created and destroyed the European peasantry also governed the rise and fall of their rural neighbors. Directly, peasants became merchants, landlords, or proletarians, and peasants who succeeded or failed as peasants helped turn other people into merchants, landlords, or proletarians. Indirectly, such fundamental changes as the expansion of cottage industry and the extension of cash-crop markets affected peasants and non-peasants alike. From the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries -- the limits of this paper's serious discussion -- the most important change in the lives of European rural areas was their massive proletarianization. Even those peasants who remained peasants felt that massive change in their surroundings. So much of European rural conflict connected directly with the process of proletarianization that we ignore it, and its creatures, at our peril.

To be sure, one could still reject England as a "deviant case" in the European rural world. Alan Macfarlane, for one, has done so. With a few thumps on his drum, he has recently announced a discovery: England, he reveals, never had a peasantry. Back to the earliest Medieval records, says Macfarlane, he finds no trace of that supposed world in which agricultural households dominated production, consumption, and ownership. George Homans and many other Medievalists notwithstanding, individual ownership, individual disposition of property, individual mobility, and active markets for labor and land characterized the thirteenth century. Pace Karl Marx and many other schematizers, no "feudal system" worthy of the name ever held English agriculturalists in its wooden grasp. Far, far back in time, Macfarlane tells his breathless readers, observers from the European continent remarked on the peculiarly individualistic character of English life. If so, English experience does not belong in any examination of peasant resistance to exploitation,

to commercialization, or to anything else.

Some of the outraged howls Macfarlane clearly meant to provoke will turn out to be justified -- the seas of individualism he has discovered will shrink to lakes or ponds (cf. Razi 1981). Yet previous scholars have, as Macfarlane complains, generally underestimated the breadth and depth of those individualistic waters. Macfarlane's reminder of the early, extensive commercialization of English agriculture will help us better to understand the stakes of English agrarian conflicts far back in time.

Macfarlane's critique of the peasant image has an unexpected use; in fact, it applies almost as forcefully to the European continent as to England itself. In arguing for English exceptionalism, Macfarlane confronts generalized images of continental life with a partial reading of evidence from English history. Examined closely, those images of continental life resemble the images of Medieval English social structure Macfarlane attacks; they lie open to the same attack by means of similar evidence from the continent. Although he provides no information on division within households, for example, Guy Fourquin describes a Parisian region which by the end of the thirteenth century had so much commercial activity, so active a land market, and so much peasant autonomy that it would be unsurprising to discover in the Ile de France many of the "individualistic" traits singled out by Macfarlane.

If Macfarlane's controversial claims help banish an idea of peasants as somehow prior to, independent of, and incompatible with extensive markets, significant capital accumulation, and substantial states, his hyperbole will have served a useful purpose. If we understand peasants as agricultural producers organized in households which control the land necessary to their survival, produce the bulk of what they consume, supply most of their labor requirement from their own efforts, rely primarily on animate sources of energy, and yield a significant part of their production to outsiders, then European peasants did exist in great numbers. But they existed in constant interaction with extensive markets, significant capital accumulation, and

growing -- if not always full-grown -- national states.

Nothing about that interaction should surprise us. Like the pitch of the siren as a fire truck rushes by, the rise and fall of peasants has for centuries registered the advance of capitalism and of national states. The appearance of peasants in all history has been a relatively rare historical phenomenon, a phenomenon closely linked to the growth of large markets and major concentrations of political power. India, China, Greece, and Rome all created peasantries of one sort or another. But the most recent and most extensive wave of creation -- that of the last five centuries or so -- transmitted the impact of capitalism and of the national state.

In what sense did capitalism and statemaking create peasants? After all, we frequently think of them, and rightly, as the twin nemeses of the peasantry. Certainly cultivators worked on large European estates long before capitalism and national states became dominant. Certainly small-scale subsistence farming long antedated national states and modern capitalism. Certainly small-scale subsistence farming eventually succumbed under their influence. If we regard all cultivators on estates and all subsistence farmers as peasants, then the connection with capitalism and national states virtually disappears.

Nevertheless, the peasant version of subsistence farming -- in which land-controlling households devote a portion of their production to the market -- expanded under the early phases of capitalism and statemaking, before declining under the later phases of the same processes. Capitalism reinforced private appropriation of the factors of production and gave priority in production decisions to the holders of capital. Thus capitalism challenged the collective use of the land, resisted the fragmentation of rights to the same land, labor or commodities, and worked against the autarky of the household or village. By the same tokens, capitalism provided farming households with the means and incentives to dispose of a portion of their products for cash outside the locality. These features of capitalism promoted the

conversion of a large number of peasants into agricultural wage-workers, pushed another large portion of the peasantry out of agriculture toward manufacturing and services, and gave a relatively small number of peasants the opportunity to become prosperous cash-crop farmers.

In this regard, the state provided powerful stimuli to change. The pressure to pay taxes for the support of a national military and administrative apparatus translated almost inevitably into a pressure to market products; peasants needed cash to pay taxes. States developed an interest in the marketing of all the factors of production because a market in land, labor, or commodities assigned a visible, regular, and therefore easily taxable value to them. Under the set of policies loosely called mercantilism, the western states which grew up with capitalism generally promoted the marketing of agricultural products as a way of maintaining their armies, staffs, and capital cities. Likewise, a concern with having well-defined, responsible units from which to collect cash, labor, and commodities led statemakers to reinforce the legal identities of households and villages. Despite many hesitations, under the influence of an exigent, indispensable bourgeoisie, states became guarantors of private property; in the short run, that guarantee increased the prominence of land-controlling households in agricultural production, even though in the long run it became the means by which bourgeois landowners squeezed out the small peasantry.

(To speak accurately, "capitalism" and "states" did none of these things. Real, living merchants, landlords, officials, soldiers, and other people did the controlling, extracting, and guaranteeing. The large abstractions make sense because they stand for relationships and actions that reappeared over and over again.)

Capital concentration and statemaking eventually became interdependent, world-wide processes; that is the sense in which we can most confidently speak of a "capitalist world-system". In the course of that transformation, the world's peasantries expanded, then began to contract. In absolute terms, the number of

peasants grew for several centuries; both the natural increase of the peasantry and the conversion of other kinds of agriculturalists into peasants contributed to the growth. That was true despite an important and accelerating counter-movement of peasants into the worlds of agricultural and industrial wage-labor. As a result, there were probably more peasants in the world -- in absolute terms and in the strict sense of the word "peasant" -- early in the twentieth century than there ever had been before. The absolute numerical decline in the world's peasantry most likely began no more than a few decades ago. No doubt the proletarianization of peasants in Asia and Latin America will continue for decades more.

The European clock, however, ran ahead of the rest of the world. By the outset of the twentieth century, the European peasantry had no doubt gone through at least half a century of absolute decline, and several centuries of relative decline. England, furthermore, was precocious; although in the present state of the evidence all such datings are guesswork (and guesswork which, furthermore, is quite sensitive to minor variations in definition), it is quite possible that the absolute number of peasants in England began to decline in the sixteenth or seventeenth century.

Alan Everitt speculates that around 1600 a quarter to a third of the entire rural population of England and Wales consisted of landless laborers, and that the proportion rose substantially during the next hundred years (Everitt 1967: 398-399). Leaning on the famous and ever-debatable estimates of Gregory King for 1688, H.J. Habakkuk places his bets a bit later; for Habakkuk, "between 1680 and 1780, there must have been a notable decline in the peasant class" (Habakkuk 1965: 655). Neither of these readings contradicts Macfarlane as rudely as it seems, since the definitions of "peasant" implied do not require the immobility of land and labor Macfarlane takes such pains to challenge. Given an identification of peasants as agricultural producers organized in households which control the land necessary to their own survival, produce the bulk of the goods they consume, supply most of their

labor requirements from their own efforts, and yield a significant portion of their production to outsiders, even Macfarlane would probably concede that most seventeenth-century freeholders, copyholders, and small tenants qualified as peasants, and that the number who qualified fell dramatically thereafter.

Occasions and Forms of Conflict

As they fell, many fought the effects of capitalism and statemaking. In looking at how and when they fought, we do not observe all the varieties of rural conflict and collective action. Much of the time, European peasants found themselves dealing with marauding wolves, with floods, with thieves, with rapists, with abandoned children, with unholy priests, with neighbors who encroached on their fields; those unwanted conditions and persons provoked peasants to action against them. On the whole, such plagues had no strong connections with capitalization and statemaking. At the risk of taking the exceptional for the essential, then, let us concentrate on the occasions and forms of conflict, resistance, and collective action which did wax and wane as a function of the development of capitalism and the growth of strong national states.

In what ways did capitalization and statemaking affect the interests of rural people? In simplest terms, the development of capitalism altered the viability of peasant life by making land, labor, and commodities increasingly available and responsive to monetized markets in which holders of substantial capital predominated. That set of alterations increased the power of those peasants who managed to accumulate capital; weakened the effectiveness of multiple and collective claims on land, labor, or commodities; decreased the feasibility (and often the attractiveness) of supplying household goods and services from the household's own land and labor; set wage-labor in competition with unpaid household labor; reduced the chances for a household to maintain itself from one generation to the next; and favored the concentration of land in the hands of people who maximized its monetary return.

Although these changes offered splendid opportunities to some peasants, over the long run they doomed the peasantry as a whole to disappear. And they provided spurs to resistance.

As for statemaking, the largest effects on European rural life were probably not the celebrated ones: the creation of national citizenship, the construction of standardized law, the eclipse of local and household authority, even the adoption of national policies governing the profitability of alternative crops. State reinforcement of the position of capital and capitalists probably had more impact on everyday rural life than any of these political changes. But the largest influence of statemaking most likely operated through the state's own demand for resources, especially the resources required for making war: men, food, lodging, clothing, arms, and the money to buy all of them. Certainly the most visible forms of direct rural resistance to statemaking in Europe involved those demands. Evasion of conscription, taxation, billeting, *corvée*, and requisition of goods for the military built the reputation of European peasants and other cultivators for dissimulation, stealth, and stubbornness.

A tried-and-true taxonomy will help us do a first rough sorting of rural people's varied reactions to capitalization and statemaking. Thinking of the claims people make on others when they act, we can distinguish defensive, offensive, and competitive forms of action. Defensive actions claim threatened rights which people have already exercised routinely, offensive actions claim rights due in principle but not yet established in practice, while competitive actions pit participants against each other within arenas in which their right to involvement is not at issue. Countrymen who fight off tax collectors' demands for their goods engage in defensive actions, countrymen who insist on their previously-denied right to buy noble land engage in offensive actions, and countrymen who join the ritual of inter-village fights engage in competitive actions. Within each of these categories, we may also define a range running from primary emphasis on the effects of capitalism to primary emphasis on

Table 1. A Rough Classification of Peasant Reactions to Capitalism and Statemaking, with Characteristic Examples

<u>REACTIONS TO:</u>	<u>CLAIMS MADE</u>		
<u>CAPITALISM</u>	<u>DEFENSIVE</u>	<u>OFFENSIVE</u>	<u>COMPETITIVE</u>
INDIVIDUAL	hunting on posted land; arson	purchase of church property	bidding at servants' fair
COLLECTIVE	invasion of newly enclosed fields; food riots	creation of marketing cooperatives	leaguings to buy land and keep it in local hands
 <u>STATEMAKING</u>			
INDIVIDUAL	hiding taxable goods	suing local powerholders in royal courts	voting a personal interest
COLLECTIVE	expulsion of military recruiters; tax rebellions	creating a social movement e.g. for price supports, land reform	petitioning on bill before Parliament

the effects of statemaking.

Thus, in the simplest version of the scheme, we distinguish twelve types of reaction: an individual defensive reaction to capitalism (such as hunting on posted land), a collective offensive reaction to statemaking (such as creation of a movement for land reform), an individual competitive reaction to statemaking (such as voting a personal interest), and so on through the permutations. Table 1 lays out the types, with examples of actions which occurred fairly often at one point or another in the European rural experience. The value, if any, of this sort of simplification eventually proves itself in the revelation of the relative frequency and infrequency of different reactions, and its identification of the characteristic conditions under which each reaction occurs. In the meantime, however, we can use it merely to get a sense of which forms of action belong together. If we don't let the taxonomy gain weight, and lumber off on its own to crush reality on its way, it will serve as a sturdy mount for a first tour of rural action, individual and collective.

On a first tour, let us make no effort to draft a complete map of the terrain. It will do to illustrate the variety of reactions to capitalism from English experience, before reflecting more generally on regularities and systematic variations.

Back to East Anglia

To get a concrete sense of rural conflict and resistance, let us return to eighteenth-century Suffolk, and to the new poorhouse at Bulcamp. Benjamin Preston was an agricultural laborer in Theberton, Suffolk. At eight o'clock on Monday morning, the 5th of August 1765, he, Daniel Manning, and fourteen others were hoeing turnips in a farmer's field. Suddenly, as the Magistrate's clerk set down his story ten days later:

several persons whose names he don't know came into the field and took away his and Manning's Hoes, and in a forceable manner compelled them and the other men working in the field to go with them to Bulcamp and assist in pulling down the poor's House which was then Erecting there, . . . they accordingly joined them and were afterwards joined by several hundreds all

armed with sticks, poles, or other instruments . . . some of them (but don't know who, by name) took their Handkerchiefs from their necks and fastened them to poles which they display'd as flags or colours and in this manner proceeded a long huzzaing and making a great noise . . . when they came to Halesworth the people at a publick House (but don't know their names nor can recollect the sign) Invited them to Drink and drew them several Quarts of Beer which they drank and the alehouse people refused to take anything for it . . . as they marched a long a Gentleman who appeared like a Clergyman stop't one of these Riotous persons who was near the Examinant and spoke to those about him and told them the bad consequences of persisting in their design and Desired them to return to their own Homes which the Examinant and others were inclined to do, but immediately another of the said Rioters (whose name he don't know) with a Bludgeon in his hand came up to said Gent. and threatened to strike him if he did not go away immediately, and Compelled the Examinant & the rest to proceed and they accordingly went on hallowing and making a great noise till they came to Bulcamp where they arrived between 6 and 7 in the Evening.

. . . when they were at Bulcamp, believes their number might be about 1000.

. . . he saw . . . John Saws get one of the Poles, belonging to the Scaffolding of said Building and therewith push and throw down the walls of the said Building at the South end thereof and . . . Mills with a Pitchfork, Ralph with a peasemake, Canham, Lumkin and Rachan with Staffs, Poles, and other Instruments at various parts of the said Building throwing down and destroying the same.

. . . there were at the same time many other Persons to the amount of 150 and upwards (whose names he don't know) pulling down and destroying the aforesaid Building.

. . . during the whole time the said Building was pulling down . . . James Stronger was Riding upon a horse, and . . . William Ingledon upon an Ass, huzzaing and Encouraging the aforesaid Riotous persons to proceed in pulling down the aforesaid Building and in particular made use of the following Expressions -- "My Lads work away, work away. Let's pull Hell down to the Ground, pull Bulcamp Hell down to the Ground" (these were the names given to the said Building by the said Rioters) and every time any material part of the said Building was thrown down there was a general Shout or Acclamation of Joy among the said Rioters in which the said Stronger and Ingledon were most remarkably conspicuous.

. . . at the time the aforesaid Building was destroyed there was also pulled down and destroyed a Smith's Shop and forge that had been Erected for the more convenient Executing the Smith's Work for the said Building and a Cottage for the use of the Workmen Employed therein but can't particularize any of the Persons concerned therein.

. . . he heard several of the said Rioters and particularly Canham and Lamkin (sic) say that it would be a very good and Laudable act to pull down the said Building for that Rain had been long wanting and that God Almighty would not suffer it to Rain till that Building was Destroyed and that it happening to Rain the next Day he heard the said Lumkin and Canham say that it would not have rained had they not Destroyed the said Building intended for a Poor's House.

. . . they Continued at Bulcamp aforesaid on the 5th Instant till it was Dark when they went to Sir John Rover's house where they got Victuals and Drink and then to the Revd. Mr. Burton's and did the same (P.R.O. S.P. 37/4; some punctuation supplied; "That . . ." and other indications of indirect discourse elided).

Other witnesses interrogated that day confirmed Benjamin Preston's account in all the essentials, but added significant details: that the first three people to enter the poorhouse under construction were women, that the crowd had forced the local gentlemen to feed them, that they had threatened to pull down the house of one of the gentlemen, that they had torn down a fence at one of the gentlemen's properties, and so on.

On that same day, a few miles to the south, another crowd of thousands ravaged the House of Industry at Saxmundham. There, troops intervened, and several people died in the affray (Gentleman's Magazine 35, 1765, p. 392). A week later, yet another crowd, 400 strong, gathered at Nacton, near Ipswich -- down the road some miles from Saxmundham -- to demolish the House of Industry there (P.R.O. S.P. 37/4; Annual Register 1765: 116-117). Elsewhere in East Anglia, other similar events unfolded that month: groups of agricultural laborers and other local people attacked poorhouses, new or old, and in the process defied troops, constables, citizens' posses, and magistrates. Poor people struck directly at the provisions their wealthier and more powerful neighbors were making for them.

Why should they be so ungrateful? Because, they said, the parish poor had a right to outdoor relief rather than indoor work. Because, they said, the authorities had no right to lock them up merely for being indigent. They had earned better than Bulcamp Hell.

And why were the poorhouses being built in East Anglia? One fundamental factor was the significant increase in the number of landless agricultural workers in the region, itself a joint result of property concentration and of natural increase

among the landless. Landlords and farmers were buying out smallholders, as they had been for several centuries. They were also squeezing out the common rights to glean, to collect wood, to pasture, to hunt, and to gather wild food which had previously made it possible for poor families to survive on tiny plots of land. At the same time, farmers were turning away from the practice of having their laborers live in, and take food at the common board as part of their pay. Employment on farms was becoming more seasonal, with large numbers of workers hired on for peak seasons, and let go for the rest of the year. That meant, of course, seasonal unemployment and dependency for many of the region's laboring families. Finally, the decline of the region's rural industry was sharpening the competition for work in the countryside; that competition held laborers' wages to one of the lowest levels in all England. In short, an acute process of rural proletarianization was in action. Once again the farmers and landlords of East Anglia led the way to innovation in the countryside -- this time toward the establishment of the "indoor relief" that the framers of the 1834 New Poor Law would attempt to generalize.

Poverty and proletarianization themselves were not novelties in East Anglia. East Anglia -- not only Suffolk, but also Norfolk and important parts of Cambridgeshire and Essex -- had long been a major site of rural proletarianization. By the sixteenth century, East Anglia sustained an active export trade in agricultural products:

. . . its rivers reaching into the heart of East Anglia, its long coastline, and its many ports, placed it in easy communication with the markets of London, north-eastern England, Scotland, the Netherlands, and the Baltic. Its farming, in consequences, developed early in the service of national and international markets, and specialization was so far advanced that by the early seventeenth century, even in years of good harvests, many districts were far from self-sufficient in corn: the wood-pasture region depended on corn supplied from the sheep-corn region; the coastal hundreds with their large populations of fishermen and boat builders were hungry for all agricultural produce (Thirsk 1967a: 40-41).

As befits a highly commercialized region, different sections of East Anglia specialized

in different products, with the largest distinction separating areas of dairying or stock-raising from those in which grain and sheep shared the land. An active worsted industry spread into the countryside round Norwich, and along the Norfolk coast stocking-knitting employed many people at least part of the year.

East Anglia as a whole was one of England's prime regions of early agrarian capitalism: Landlords had already enclosed most of the land by 1500; large farms, flocks, herds, and plowteams predominated; and its sixteenth-century farmers "had by far the most numerous and the widest range of vehicles and arable tools of any district in England" (Thirsk 1967a: 43-44; cf. Kerridge 1968: 83-91 and Kerridge 1973: 86-87). Whenever we date England's Agricultural Revolution, East Anglia will figure in it; in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the region's farmers were reorganizing their fields and crop rotations, while in the eighteenth century it produced both new agricultural machines and such experimental gentlemen-farmers as Coke of Norfolk and "Turnip" Townshend.

Prosperity brought proletarianization. East Anglia was also famous for its contrasts of rich agriculture and poor people. No paradox there: profitable capitalist agriculture thrived on cheap labor. Many of the region's wage-laborers worked on farms, but some combined agricultural work with cottage industry; the regional division of labor appears to conform nicely to Franklin Mendels' specifications of the conditions for extensive rural industry. In bad times, like many other regions of proletarianization, East Anglia specialized in the production of migrants. George Homans reminds us that about a quarter of all England's emigrants to New England before 1650 came from Norfolk, Sussex, or Essex, and that twenty Massachusetts towns founded before 1690 took their names from towns in those three counties (Homans 1962: 184); Framingham, Ipswich, Sudbury, Braintree, Billerica, Needham, Haverhill, and Hingham are among the names East Anglia bequeathed to Massachusetts.

Those who stayed behind acquired a reputation for unruliness. East Anglia had been one of the chief sites of 1381's Peasant Revolt, and continued the tradition of rebellion past 1500. An early, important case in point was Kett's Rebellion of 1549. As in any coalition-fed rebellion, Kett's brought many issues together. But the early incidents in which ordinary people took part centered on throwing down enclosures of common land. "The judicial records," reports Anthony Fletcher, "provide little evidence of eviction in Norfolk in the period 1500-50 but it is clear that gradual encroachment on the common rights of the peasantry was a serious grievance in a number of villages (Fletcher 1968: 69. In the prosperous sheep-corn areas, however, large landlords were exploiting their rights to keep fields open for the pasturage of large flocks of sheep, and thus encouraging a movement for enclosures among smaller farmers: Cornwall 1977: 15-17; Fletcher 1968: 71; MacCulloch 1979: 51-52.).

The issue surfaced in Kett's rebellion. According to Nicholas Sotherton's eyewitness account:

They appoynted a place of assemblye to amonge them in an oken tre in that place, which they bordid to stand on. Uppon which two at ye first did none come but Kett and the rest of the Gouvernours where the people oute of wer admonishid to beware of their robbinge spoylinge and other theyr evil demeanors and what accompte they had to make. But that lyttill prevailid for they cryid out of the Gentlemen as well for what they would not pull downe theyr enclosid growndis, as allsoe understood they by letters found emonge theyr servants how they sowt by all weyes to suppres them, and whatsoever was sayde they would downe with them soe that within a ii or iii wekes they had so pursuyd the Gentlemen from all parts that in noe place durst one Gentleman keepe his house but were faine to spoile themselves of theyr apparrell and lye and keepe in woods and lownde placis where no resorte was: and some fledd owte of the cuntrye and gladd they were in theyr howses for saving of the rest of theyr goods and cattell to provide for them daiely bred mete drinke and all other viande and to carry the same at their charge even home to the rebellis campe, and that for the savinge theyr wyves, and chydren and sarvants (Fletcher 1968: 145).

No doubt the establishment in 1548 of a royal commission to investigate illegal enclosures throughout the kingdom encouraged poor East Anglians to take action against their local exploiters (Thirsk 1967b: 222-224). But other small farmers'

grievances joined the complaints against enclosures: the chief objects of attack were landlords who overgrazed the commons, kept dovecotes and rabbit warrens, charged illegal dues, and otherwise abused their positions. As the rebellion coalesced, it united the poorer rural classes in an indictment of the gentry.

Conflict and Resistance at Village Level

To get an idea of local variation in day-to-day conflict, we may creep out of East Anglia proper, and into adjacent Cambridgeshire. There, we may take advantage of Margaret Spufford's splendid reconstruction of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century village life. Like much of East Anglia, sixteenth-century Cambridgeshire sustained a relatively prosperous commercial agriculture. That meant a few rich yeomen and gentry, plus a great many poor cottagers and landless laborers. Spufford estimates that over half the county population at the tithe survey of 1524-25 depended on wages for survival (Spufford 1974: 36). During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as in East Anglia, Cambridgeshire's grain-growing areas saw a further great concentration of property, and a consequent polarization between rich and poor.

In the course of her examination of the whole county, Spufford singles out three villages for close study: Willingham, Orwell, and Chippenham. Willingham was a fen village whose people devoted themselves increasingly to dairying and stock-raising as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries moved on. There, small holdings and smallholders multiplied through subdivision of family properties and in-migration of outsiders. As a result, population grew rapidly. Willingham's smallholders looked more like peasants than most other people in Cambridgeshire: households used their own land fairly independently, and drew extensively on the fens for pasturage. The work of regulating the commons, Spufford speculates, built up a sense of village autonomy and an exceptional capacity for collective action -- the more so because the nominal lord had long leased the demesne to the villagers. The improving landlord who bought the estate in 1601 had only vague information about the

demesne's extent and location.

The improver, Sir Miles Sandys, soon found himself at odds with the villagers. The local people tried to buy the manor themselves, withheld information from the purchaser, and sued to block his entering into possession. When Sir Miles enclosed some of the land he thought to be his alone, a large group of crudely-armed men broke into the land, and brought cattle in to graze. The lord's officers drove the herd off, but as they were driving the cattle to the village pound, armed villagers again assembled and:

then and there did assault . . . John Cole [Sandys' bailiff] [and other people with him] . . . and take awaie the saide forty heade of cattel . . . and did also beate wounde and evill intreate the said John Cole that he was thereby in greate perill of deathe and not therewith Contented . . . did then and there use Speeches in disgrace of your subiecte askinge what your subiect was and withall affirminge that they had dealt with a better man than your subject was (Spufford 1974: 124).

The struggle continued. The remarkable thing was that the people of Willingham often won.

At Orwell, ordinary people won less frequently. Orwell lay partly on clay and partly in river valley. Compared to Willingham, its farmers concentrated much more heavily on growing grains -- especially barley and oats. The village had few cattle and little pasture, although that little became, in 1590 and thereafter, the object of dispute between the local tenants and a Mrs. Audley, who leased the demesne arable from the queen, then claimed control of the demesne meadow and pasture as well. A yeoman's son, Thomas Butler, volunteered to lease the meadow and pasture directly from the queen, for use of the village. The tenants then rented the commons from him, and rewarded him with the right to enclose a small piece of common land. "All went well for some years, but then Mrs Audley obtained an order that the tenants should take sub-leases of the meadow and pasture directly from her. Butler unwisely tried to keep his new close, and a band of the more important tenants, enraged at

being mulcted on every side, tore down the hedges and put in the majority of the town herd of cattle" (Spufford 1974: 98). Their victory was only temporary: Butler not only regained his close, but also took over most of the demesne pasture. As compared with Willingham, Orwell saw more victories for engrossers, and fewer for the smallholders.

Chippenham, finally, "was a paradise for the engrosser" (Spufford 1974: 45). There the wealthier farmers followed the East Anglian sheep-corn path: grain on their own fields, large flocks of sheep on the commons. Chippenham probably had a majority of cottagers in 1524-25, and a few very comfortable yeoman. Yet some people remained in between. Over the next two centuries, the middle ground disappeared; the village polarized into rich and poor. The large farmers meant to have all the advantages: to pasture their own sheep on the commons, to exclude the smallholders from those commons, to enclose land for their own use. Attempts to enclose the fen (which supplied fuel, as well as pasturage for cattle) excited the greatest resistance from local people:

The inhabitants of Chippenham thought a great deal of the fen, however. They fought Sir Thomas Rivet's attempt to enclose the common in the sixteenth century, and caused trouble in 1630 when Sir William Russell tried to cut anew river to drain the fen. He eventually petitioned the Privy Council, because not only did 'divers ill-disposed persons in a riotous manner . . . disturb his said workemen by interrupting his proceedings' but also, 'some . . . of them who have beene sett on worke this winter in the making of the New Ryver have . . . indeavoured to full up the said River againe by flinging in the earth which they were paid for to fling out' (Spufford 1974: 64).

As we might expect by now, over the long run the tenants lost their fights against enclosures and for the right to pasture their own cattle on common land. As they lost out, a few increasingly rich families bought up their land. Chippenham ended the seventeenth century a sharply divided village.

More of Cambridgeshire resembled Chippenham, the "engrosser's paradise," than Orwell or, especially, Willingham, where smallholders managed to multiply and to fend off some of the great landlord's demands. The Chippenham pattern, like the

prevailing pattern in East Anglia, led to a series of defensive actions, often covert and individual, sometimes direct, violent and collective, but rarely involving the legal proceedings of court and assemblies. Except in crises of division within the dominant classes, the courts and assemblies served the landlords too well for laborers to risk their luck in them. There were too few middling farmers or genuine peasants to act as counterweights or coalition partners.

Yet some Willinghams existed. Where smallholders had fashioned a framework of collective action on common problems, had acquired strong, interdependent rights in the land, and had adopted a form of production in which the economies of scale were relatively slight, they had a chance to hold their ground. They held by taking advantage of their established position within state-sanctioned courts and assemblies as well as by direct collective action against outsiders.

A Proletarian Eighteenth Century

East Anglia's eighteenth century brought a net shift in rural conflict from defense of poor people's rights in village land toward defense of their claims to a living wage. That meant a net shift toward genuinely proletarian issues. To be sure, where enclosures continued or landlords and large farmers continued to encroach on common right such as gleaning or woodgathering, smallholders and wage-laborers still fought the attacks on their livelihoods as best they could. "Thus in the Norwich riots of October 1766," says Walter Shelton, "a rural mob attacked one yeoman farmer for 'had not the old rogue whipped the gleaners from his fields'(Shelton 1973: 63). But events like our attacks on poorhouses came into prominence during the eighteenth century. There, agricultural rights in particular pieces of land had little to do with the case. Proletarianization, the increased living-out of laborers, and the rise of seasonal unemployment made more and workers vulnerable to drastic declines in income. The question was whether households whose members' normal activity in life was to work for wages had claims on parish revenues when they could earn no wages

in the usual way. If smallholders and artisans sometimes joined the fray, the central question was an essentially proletarian issue.

Most of all, England's eighteenth century became the golden age of food riots. The heroic analyses of George Rudé, E.P. Thompson, and their swarm of successors have destroyed an old conception of the food riot as an impulsive reaction to hunger pangs, clarified the claims on local authorities involved, and provided a clearer picture of the routines by which the various forms of "riot" proceeded. They have had less success in specifying sufficient conditions for food riots and in explaining who got involved, and how. Whoever else took part, however, agricultural laborers certainly had an active hand in all versions of the food riot: the blockage of shipments, the raid on private stores of grain, the forced public sale of food below the current asking price. In all these forms, the collective action asserted the claim that local authorities had an obligation to hold a vital minimum of food in the community when they could, and to make it available to the local poor at a price they could afford. In short, it asserted a claim to a real wage at subsistence or better.

East Anglia figured importantly in eighteenth-century food riots. In the region, the decline of cottage textile production was reducing the incomes of rural workers and making them depend more exclusively on agricultural wages. When food prices rose rapidly as a result of bad harvests or external demand, agricultural wages remained the same or -- via unemployment -- even declined. Result: catastrophic declines in real wages. Reaction: demands that farmers, millers, merchants, bakers, and local authorities give priority to assuring the food supply of the local poor.

In East Anglia, the period during and immediately after the Seven Years War marked the peak -- probably the all-time peak -- of food riots. The 1757 protests against the Militia Act combined a concern about high food prices with a reaction to the threat that wage-earners would have to march away to military service and leave

their families without bread. They produced an unusual coalition of agricultural laborers with farmers; the farmers saw the parish poor rates they paid rising without a compensating decline in rents (Western 1965: 298-300).

1757 brought many straightforward food riots in addition to the actions against conscription. But in East Anglia and in England as a whole 1766 was the annus mirabilis of the food riot. Except for the counties to the immediate south and east of London, all of southern England experienced open conflicts over food. According to Walter Shelton, Norfolk was (with Berkshire, Gloucestershire, and Wiltshire) one of the four most "disturbed" counties of England that year (Shelton 1973: 22-23). East Anglia's most dramatic conflict occurred in its major city, Norwich; Gentleman's Magazine for October 1766 described it in these terms:

At Norwich a general insurrection began on the 27th past, when the proclamation was read in the market-place, where provisions of all sorts were scattered about by the rioters in heaps; the new mill, a spacious building, which supplied the city with water, was attacked and pulled down; the flower, to the number of 150 sacks, thrown, sack after sack, into the river; and the proprietor's books of account, furniture, plate, and money, carried off or destroyed; the bakers shops plundered and shattered; a large malt-house set fire to, and burnt; houses and warehouses pulled down; and the whole city thrown into the greatest consternation. During this scene of confusion, the magistrates issued out summonses to the house-keepers in their respective districts, to assemble with staves to oppose the riotors (sic); the conflict was long and bloody, but in the end, the rioters were overpowered, 30 of the ringleaders secured and committed to prison, who, it is said, will soon be tried by a special commission (Gentleman's Magazine 1766: 493)

The (in this case literal) sacking of mills and other premises of the grain trade was exceptional in East Anglia. The action had less in common with standard food riots than with an eighteenth-century routine of moral retribution; that routine consisted of assembling outside the house of an offender, reviling him or her and, in extreme cases, wrecking the building and its contents. One way or another, most of the action in the usual food riot involved forcing food into the market at a lower price than it holders were asking. Most of the region's food riots, furthermore, occurred in smaller market towns. "Ipswich," remarks Walter Shelton,

the scene of a number of attacks on the new houses of industry earlier in the year as well as in 1765, continued to be the centre of insurrection in October. Success in their attacks on poor-law institutions in East Anglia had encouraged the rioters to attempt to lower food prices too. On 20 October they seized butter and sold it at lower prices than the farmers asked and threatened to burn the town (Shelton 1973: 41).

If Shelton's impressions are correct, both industrial workers and agricultural laborers participated actively in East Anglia's food riots. On either side of the line, workers whose relatively fixed wages shrank tragically when food prices soared. On either side of the line, proletarians.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the chief class divisions of rural East Anglia separated landowners, substantial tenant farmers, and agricultural wage-laborers; the largest gap separated the wage-laborers from the rest. Until the 1830s, East Anglia's agricultural laborers resisted the control of tenant farmers and (less often) of landowners in small ways and large. The concerted moments of resistance typically came in times of rising prices and low wages, such as 1795, 1799-1801, 1816, 1822, and 1830. 1795 and 1800 brought efforts of laborers in Norfolk and Essex, respectively, to coordinate wage demands (Wells 1979: 127). During those same years, arson and the sending of threatening letters became common in East Anglia (Wells 1979: 129).

In the events of 1816, as A.J. Peacock sums them up:

The train of events that ended in a specially staged trial of the rioters at Ely and Littleport began in 1815. As conditions worsened, the incidents increased in number. They also altered in character. At first there were attacks on property (usually farm implements) in remote villages. Later, when a really serious rise in the price of bread started, there were attacks on both property and persons in the few large towns in the area -- Bury St. Edmunds first, then Brandon, Norwich and Downham Market. Last of all the labourers of Littleport broke out in rebellion on 21st May. The following day they marched to Ely, where they enlisted the aid of the locals and terrorised the millers and magistrates, forcing the latter to capitulate and agree to their demands. Later they took part in an unequal pitched battle with the military in which a life was lost. Five more of their number were eventually executed, dozens of them were transported, and the area was pacified for the next twenty or thirty years (Peacock 1965: 11).

During their marching, the laborers had not only broken threshing machines, demanded higher wages, and called for "Bread or Blood," but also levied contributions on "shopkeepers, publicans, and farmers" (Rude 1978: 114).

The bloody repression of 1816 held down the collective action of workers in the areas most directly involved in the attacks and marches for decades to come; they turned to covert and small-scale resistance. Somewhat to the south, however, 1822 brought a similar series of actions " . . . which appear to have started at Shimpling, near Diss in February, to have built up through fires and threatening letters to a climax in early March in the same region, and to have continued with scattered but widespread incendiarism and manifestations of discontent (especially machine breaking) in various parts of Suffolk all through April" (Carter 1980: 15). The conflicts of 1816 and 1822 begin to show us a standard repertoire of actions: threatening letters, arson, machine-breaking, group demands for wages, forced donations of food and drink.

In all these regards, they anticipated the East Anglian portion of 1830's Swing Rebellion. The "rebellion" as a whole ran from August 1830 to the beginning of 1831, accelerating in October and November only to slow visibly thereafter. During the conflict, agricultural laborers made wage demands on the farmers for whom they worked, broke up threshing machines and other agricultural machinery, and sometimes leagued with farmers to ask for reductions in rents or the tithe. These open, collective actions occurred in the company of widespread burning of haystacks and farm buildings, and the sending of threatening letters. Action concentrated in London's agricultural hinterland, with Kent and Sussex the most important sites. East Anglia, however, became heavily involved late in the year. In Norfolk, for example, the largest cluster of events began in the previously quiet northeast corner of the county on 19 November and continued through a chain of neighboring parishes until 9 December. There, attacks on agricultural machinery became the chief activity.

Demands for better wages, complaints against the tithe, and incendiarism occurred, but less often and in a more scattered fashion (Carter 1980: 18-20).

During November and December 1830, Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, and Cambridgeshire contributed more than twenty significant events: collective attacks on threshing machines, group demands for higher wages, attacks on the collectors of the tithe, and others. If we include the arson, threatening letters, and other small-scale events enumerated by E.J. Hobsbawm and George Rudé in their Captain Swing, the total would soar to 125. (One of those events, incidentally, was the burning of five farmers' houses and other agricultural property at Willingham, Cambridgeshire: Hobsbawm & Rude 1969: 133, 188.) Table 2 gives the calendar of Swing events in Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, and Cambridgeshire. They present a familiar mixture of actions: demands for wages and employment, attacks on machines, marches on the tithe-collectors, destruction of poorhouses, and so on -- agricultural laborers' standard forms of resistance, but wondrously multiplied. Except for a campaign of arson in the mid-1840s, 1830 marked the last time the agricultural workers of East Anglia got together for sustained attacks and demands on their oppressors. As the schedule of events suggests, not all the targets of 1830 were agrarian, and not all the participants were agricultural workers. Nevertheless, the labor policies of farmers and the problems of farm laborers formed the pivot of that last great rebellion, in East Anglia as elsewhere.

Both before and after 1830, East Anglian farm laborers were much more involved in small, furtive, but sometimes effective forms of resistance than they were in big rebellions. A.J. Peacock puts it this way:

. . . until the appearance of efficient police forces halfway through the century, the labourer had, as the town dweller did not have, ample means of squaring his scores with his employer. The labourer was adept at slacking in the most effective and undetectable ways. More serious, he could steal his employer's fruit, corn or game almost with impunity. Stacks could be fired, farm buildings lit, animals maimed, fences destroyed, banks breached . . . The usually immovable, completely cowed, soporific Hodge is a figment of

Table 2.

Contentious Gatherings Forming Part of the Swing Rebellion
in Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, and Essex, during
November and December 1830

16 November(?)	PASTON, NORFOLK: Nearly 150 men destroyed a farmer's threshing machine.
19 November	NORTH WALSHAM, NORFOLK: A body of 70 men marched into the magistrates' meeting and demanded they resolve that no threshing machines be used in the parish.
22 November	GREAT COGGESHALL, ESSEX: A crowd broke the windows of the Overseer of the Poor.
22 November	BRISTON AND MELTON-CONSTABLE, NORFOLK: A group of about 250 broke threshing machines, and special constables arrested seven or eight. The next day, a crowd gathered to rescue the prisoners and fight the special constables, only to incur eight more arrests.
25 November(?)	HEMPNALL, NORFOLK: A group interrupted a tithe dinner.
26 November	TAVERHAM AND LYNG, NORFOLK: 300 people destroyed the machinery of several paper mills.
29 November	LANGHAM, NORFOLK: Laborers pressed men, including the son of a large farmer, but the pressed men in his father's employment rescued him. The group went about demanding higher wages. The next day they again prevented local laborers from working. A magistrate came to mediate, and the farmers agreed to raise their wages. The laborers were given beer, and the next day work resumed.
29 November	WYMONDHAM, NORFOLK: A crowd pulled down part of the outer jail (i.e. gaol) wall in an attempt to rescue prisoners, but was dispersed by a party of dragoons.
29 November(?)	REDENHALL, NORFOLK: More than 200 laborers assembled to demand higher wages.
30 November	SAXLINGHAM, NORFOLK: Rioters harassed the parson and demanded reduction of the tithe, only to be dispersed by troops.

Table 2. (continued)

- 30 November(?) TOFT-MONKS, NORFOLK: A party of laborers destroyed the building where the tithe audit was to be held, and terrorized the parson.
- 30 November(?) FORNCETT, NORFOLK: A group ransacked the parson's house; since he had left earlier, they proceeded to the poorhouse and pulled it down.
- 4 December(?) ISLE OF ELY, CAMBRIDGE: A gang destroyed threshing machines and other agricultural property.
- 6 December GREAT HOLLAND, ESSEX: Laborers destroyed a threshing machine.
- 6 December RUSHMERE HEATH, SUFFOLK: About 175 laborers went to employers to ask for an advance in wages. About 40 proceeded toward Ipswich, but met a magistrate who asked them to disperse. They did.
- 7 December(?) ST. MICHAEL, ESSEX: Laborers went around pressing men and demanding that farmers sign a paper agreeing to higher wages. They met a group of horsemen, including a magistrate, who promised to consider their problem. They disbanded.
- 7 December WALPOLE, SUFFOLK: The magistrate summoned people to come for swearing in as special constables. Farm laborers began to gather, to a number of about 1,000. Some tradesmen were sworn in. A general refusal to take the oath led to agitation in which one man was arrested. Members of the crowd cried for lowering of tithes, taxes, and rents.
- 8 December WALTON-LE-SOKEN, ESSEX: A group went around to houses and destroyed a threshing machine.
- 8 December RAMSEY, ESSEX: About 100 people came to a farm and destroyed machines.
- 10 December HADLEIGH, SUFFOLK: A group of workers assembled to demand higher wages, and threatened to enforce their demands. The next day cavalry arrived and prevented further action.

Table 2. (continued)

- 13 December HOXNE, SUFFOLK: Laborers attacked the place of the tithe audit, and broke windows.
- 22 December(?) FOULMIRE, CAMBRIDGE: For two days the laborers struck for an increase in wages. When they still had not quit on the third day, a mounted group of constables and a magistrate fought them, capturing five laborers.
- 23 December(?) HAVERHILL, SUFFOLK: Laborers pressed men and demanded higher wages.

(SOURCES: Compilations of Great Britain Study, University of Michigan, from seven national periodicals. NOTES: A "contentious gathering" is an occasion on which ten or more people assemble in a publicly-accessible place and make claims which would, if realized, affect the interests of some person(s) outside the group. We call a contentious gathering a "Swing event" if it a) occurred from August through December 1830, b) involved claims of rural laborers, responses to those claims, or violent activity which our sources indicate grew out of the Swing agitation. "(?)" means the date is approximate.)

imagination -- at least in East Anglia. He protested all the time, and most of the time very effectively indeed (Peacock 1974: 27).

At times these normally small-scale actions spread quite widely. Large-scale arson was "something of an East Anglian specialty, at least in the 1840s and 1850s", and concentrated in low-wage areas; its geography coincided with that of protests against poverty, unemployment, and the Poor Law (Dunbabin 1974: 62). Likewise, gang poaching took on the air of collective defiance in nineteenth-century Norfolk (Carter 1980: 48ff.). Stealing, arson, maiming, poaching, fence-breaking and ditch-destroying were ambiguous forms of protest. They mixed vengeance, pressure, personal advantage, and the sheer joy of destruction in varying quantities. But two things about these small-scale forms of resistance are clear: first, they persisted through the entire history of English agricultural labor; second, sometimes they clustered into regular campaigns against exploitative employers and landlords.

During the 1870s and later, East Anglia's laborers began to adopt new forms of action. The region became one of England's chief bases for agricultural unions, one of her chief sites for confrontations between farmers and organized farm laborers. The farmers struck back by forming their own employers' associations; in the 1870s, they succeeded in beating down the unions. East Anglia remained an area of low wages, high tithes, high rents, wealthy landlords, and powerful farmers. But now the forms and terms of the conflict looked increasingly like those of industrial capitalism.

We should not, however, imagine the 1870s as a sharp, unique transition from "traditional" to "modern" forms of struggle. For one thing, agricultural laborers continued to use the familiar forms of defiance and retaliation when they seemed feasible; a case in point is the burning, in 1914, of haystacks built by blackleg labor in northern Essex (Dunbabin 1974: 70). For another, the shift of the 1870s was by no means the first. If we look back to the eighteenth century, we find forms of conflict in the English countryside which became much less common after the

Napoleonic Wars: the destruction of toll gates, food riots, faction fights, Rough Music, group poaching, collective invasion of enclosed fields, and the concerted attacks on poorhouses with which we began. Artisans, industrial workers, and even property-holding farmers took part in some of these eighteenth-century activities, but poor agricultural workers were prominent in all of them. With respect to collective resistance, and very likely individual resistance as well, we witness a significant constriction and decline in the activity of agricultural workers from the 1760s to the era of Swing.

Whom, What, How, and Why?

How does the experience of East Anglia bear on our taxonomy of resistance, and vice versa? Do the events line up in neat order from offensive to competitive or from individual to collective, then divide nicely into capital concentration and statemaking? Let me repeat a warning sounded all too hastily earlier: no one should take these scattered instances as a representative history of rural resistance in East Anglia, much less in England or Europe as a whole. The method employed in assembling the few instances resembles skimming a large stewpot with a slippery ladle: it yields only an uneven sample of what has floated to the surface. We may taste the content to arrive at an informed guess as to what waits below, but only on condition of eventually dipping deep to check the guess.

With respect to the division among offensive, defensive, and competitive forms of action, the weight lies overwhelmingly on defensive action. The absence of competitive action most likely results in part from the nature of the sources: by virtue of their very legitimacy, competitive events are less likely to attract the attention of problem-solving historians. The lack of offensive action, on the other hand, probably corresponds to the reality. From the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, the ordinary rural people of East Anglia remained almost entirely on the defensive, fighting off new claims from other people and struggling to hold on to

rights they had previously enjoyed.

With respect to individual vs. collective action, the sources can tell us little. Collective action -- especially when abrupt, visible, and aggressive -- leaves larger traces in the record than individual action. The sources I have consulted, furthermore, generally result from the author's direct concern with collective action in one of its guises. Nevertheless, these sources oriented to collective conflicts convey a plausible, important impression about individual action: that each rebellion or riot grew up in the context of hundreds of individual actions concerning the same issues: enclosures, wage-cuts, rackrenting, care of the poor. No discontinuity there.

As for capitalism and statemaking, the apparent results come as a refreshing surprise to anyone who has been used to examining rural conflict in France or Germany. Whereas in those continental countries a good deal of rural action involved direct resistance to agents of the state who were demanding taxes, conscripts, and other concessions from rural people, in East Anglia the events in question emphasize economic divisions to the virtual exclusion of confrontations with the state. To be more precise, magistrates, troops, and others who carry state certification do appear in the events of East Anglia, but rarely as the agents of claims initiated by the national government. The surprise is refreshing because it corresponds to the suppositions that before the nineteenth century the English state penetrated less deeply than its continental counterparts into the daily affairs of its subjects, that the national state relied more heavily on indirect rule via commissioned notables such as the Justices of the Peace, and that the notables used their delegated power to forward their own class interests, as well as those of their class allies.

Thus the program of identifying regularities and variations in rural collective action throughout the last few centuries remains formidable, but takes on a familiar air. We find ourselves tracing real interests, not generalized sentiments. We locate those real interests in the organization of production. We follow collective action

-- defensive, offensive, or competitive -- as a function both of those interests and of the organization of the affected parties. We attend to the great transforming processes, especially those which turned a largely peasant world into a world of wage-earners. The frames for comparative analysis of rural collective action become modes of production, forms of state, and moments in the historical development of capitalism. In a Europe which remained predominantly rural until very recently, the study of whom, what, how, and why rural people resisted merges with the general history of a continent.

NOTE. This is a revised, expanded version of a lecture given at Yale University in January 1982, the first in a series on "Peasantry: Domination and Resistance". I am grateful to Jim Scott and Vivian Shue for the opportunity to think these problems through, to a lively audience for searching questions, to Dawn Hendricks for research assistance, and to the National Science Foundation for financial support. I have pilfered one passage, with only slight alterations, from my "Peasants Against Capitalism and the State," Agricultural History 52 (1978), 407-416.

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