DO COMMUNITIES ACT?

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Eclipse of Community?

        We westerners are inclined to consider the community a normal

base for solidarity, a natural unit of collective action. Kinship

groups, associations, firms, churches and a number of other groups in

which we pass our lives all seem less natural, or less likely, or

both. It isn't hard to find plausible justifications. The European

social life within which today's fundamental western institutions

grew up accented the community. A kinship system which singles out

the nuclear family as its residential unit and builds relationships

within a kindred (whose own boundaries shift from person to person),

for example, seems an unreliable basis for solidarity or collective

action. A matrilineage, one imagines, would do better. More impor-

tant, the relatively homogeneous and predominantly peasant population

of Europe did, indeed, organize a lot of its social life around

village institutions.

        Yet today's communities appear to lack solidarity. They act to-

together rarely, if at all. Sociologists have often dealt with this

contrast between a presumably solidary past and a presumably unsolidary

present by postulating a decay in the strength of communities. The

decay is supposed to result from the rising scale, complexity and

mobility of social life. The dominance of the city caps all these

trends. The results of scale, complexity and mobility count as <u>decay</u>

because solidarity is, of course, the natural, healthy state of man-

kind. So, at least, goes the doctrine.

        When Maurice Stein wrote a general essay on the evolution of

American communities during the twentieth century, he called it <u>The</u>

<u>Eclipse</u> <u>of</u> <u>Community.</u> Few people, so far as I know, found the title

strange. Yet the actual evidence and argument in the book don't show us a process of decline. The book portrays American communities as experiencing urbanization, industrialization and bureaucratization, and consequently being drawn more and more decisively into national networks of power and communication. The closest it comes to displaying an _eclipse_ is in suggesting that communities are becoming less autonomous than they used to be. That is a far cry from decay, decline and disintegration. An organization can easily become more active and influential in its own sphere as it loses autonomy. Industrial firms, for example, often go through that very cycle when they merge into conglomerates and cartels. A philosophy which values organizational autonomy for its own sake will treat that change as a loss. But the language of withering, of decay, is misleading when applied to a shift in the external relations of a group, if the group continues to function on its own ground.

Ferdinand Tönnies gave an early and influential form to the idea of decay. In his contrast of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft:

> Both village and town retain many characteristics of the
> family; the village retains more, the town less. Only
> when the town develops into the city are these charac-
> teristics almost entirely lost. Individuals or fam-
> ilies are separate identities, and their common locale
> is only an accidental or deliberately chosen place in
> which to live. But as the town lives on within the
> city, elements of life in the Gemeinschaft, as the only
> real form of life, persist within the Gesellschaft, al-
> though lingering and decaying (Tönnies 1963: 227).

Gemeinschaft, he tells us, is solidary, total, natural. Gesellschaft is solitary, partial, contrived.

Robert Ezra Park proposed a similar distinction: on the one hand, the simple, natural interdependence of homogeneous rural communities and of some social worlds within the city; on the other hand, the created, complex, specialized interdependence of true urbanites. He was more precise than Tönnies about the mechanisms involved:

> In a great city, where the population is unstable, where
> parents and children are employed out of the house and
> often in distant parts of the city, where thousands of
> people live side by side for years without so much as a
> bowing acquaintance, these intimate relationships of the
> primary group are weakened and the moral order which
> rested upon them is gradually dissolved (Park 1952: 33).

Park did not, to be sure, share Tönnies' distaste for Gesellschaft. He found adventure in the flux and diversity of the city. Yet his fundamental theory fell into the same line as Tönnies'.

If that seemed dubious, we would only have to look at the mirror image of the theory produced by Park's son-in-law, Robert Redfield. The anthropologist's models of folk and urban communities are more manageable than Tönnies' models. But they have a similar tone. He summed them up in a book dedicated to Park, The Folk Culture of Yucatan. Redfield conceived of a continuum from the isolated, homogeneous folk community to the mobile, heterogeneous urban community; movement along that continuum produced disorganization, secularization and individualization. The ideal folk community was therefore small, personal, sacred, homogeneous, isolated, organized. The ideal urban

community was large, impersonal, secular, heterogeneous, widely con-
nected, disorganized. The contact with cities and with the rest of
the world which transforms a community from one to the other, in Red-
field's analysis, is essentially a process of disruption, disintegra-
tion and decay.

In our own day, the retrospective quest for community continues.
Critics of the last decade have delighted in lambasting Park, Redfield
and Louis Wirth. The usual weapon is the demonstration that people in
big, dense settlements lead active social lives, have a lot to do with
their kinsmen or neighbors, and so on. (For reviews, see Wellman and
Whitaker 1971, C. Tilly 1973b: ch. 2). Left at that point, the
demonstration resembles the attack on Marx which consists of pointing
out that highly industrial countries, contrary to Marx' expectation,
had few revolutions in the twentieth century. In fact, either Marx
or Park could have the basic process right and yet make erroneous
forecasts. The demonstration leaves the main question moot: did
the growth of large cities reduce the richness and intensity of every-
day social relations? Does it now?

Nevertheless, one intriguing notion has grown out of the last
decade's work on the question. It is that urbanites substitute non-
spatial communities for spatial communities; people lived pre-metro-
politan life, the argument says, in small-scale territorial groupings;
metropolitan residents build viable sets of social relations which
are dispersed in space.

Melvin Webber's "non-place urban realm," despite its ugly label,
provides us with a fine example of that line of argument. As
Webber says:

The idea of community . . . has been tied to the idea of
place. Although other conditions are associated with the
community—including "sense of belonging," a body of
shared values, a system of social organization, and in-
terdependency—spatial proximity continues to be con-
sidered a <u>necessary</u> condition.

But it is now becoming apparent that it is the accessi-
bility rather than the propinquity aspect of "place" that
is the necessary condition. As accessibility becomes
further freed from propinquity, cohabitation of a terri-
torial place—whether it be a neighborhood, a suburb, a
metropolis, a region, or a nation—is becoming less im-
portant to the maintenance of social communities

(Webber 1964: 108-109).

If Webber is right, a simple, strong critique of the classic formula-
tion follows. Those who saw decay, eclipse and disintegration of
community life with the growth of cities were probably concentrating
too hard on <u>territorial</u> communities, and failing to notice the non-
territorial forms which replaced them.

A neat escape, if it works. The trouble is that even in big
cities people continue to act collectively at times on the basis of
common territory: the people of a neighborhood resist urban renewal,
white homeowners band together to resist black newcomers, disputes
over the operation of schools bring geographical groupings clearly
into view. Perhaps we can dispose of these cases as exceptions, or as
residues of the past. Still, their very existence identifies the
need for a better understanding of the conditions under which

collective action on a territorial basis occurs. The rest of this
paper explores those conditions.

The Questions, and Some Tentative Answers

Do communities act? We'd better be sure which of the many uses
of "communities" and "act" we have in mind. Suppose we treat as a
community any durable local population most of whose members belong
to households based in the locality. We leave the extent and charac-
ter of bonds among them an open question. That means taking the other
horn of the dilemma from the one chosen by Webber; he chooses to make
solidarity define communities and to leave the extent of territorial-
ity problematic; we choose to make territoriality define communities
and to leave the extent of solidarity problematic.

Suppose we consider collective action to be any application of
pooled resources on behalf of the population as a whole. It is then
no trick to distinguish degrees of collective action. They depend on
the extent and immediacy of a) the pooling of resources and b) the in-
volvement of members of the community in the application of the pooled
resources. A city administrator's expenditure of tax revenues on a
new water cooler in the name of the citizenry would fall near the
zero end of the scale; the massing of every man, woman and child in
front of the city hall (the "resources" now being the time and energy
of the citizens) would score near 100.

If these are to be our definitions, then our starting question
isn't a very useful one. Of course communities act. At least some
communities act some of the time. The worthwhile questions lie further
along the way:

a) Among all kinds of social groups, what determines the degree of collective action in any particular period and place?

b) Given a certain degree of collective action, what affects the likelihood that <u>communities</u>, rather than other kinds of social groups, will be the actors?

c) Did the urbanization of the world transform these relationships? Is it transforming them now?

These are among sociology's grandest and oldest questions . . . and no easier to answer for having often been asked.

My reflections on the grand old questions mix conceptualization, common sense and empirical generalizations drawn from observation of urbanization, migration and collective action over the last few hundred years in Europe and North America. To orient the discussion, let me propose three general answers:

1) The extent of a group's collective action in any particular period and place is mainly a function of a) the current extent of its mobilization; b) its current power with respect to other groups; c) the lightness of the repression ordinarily applied to its actions; d) the current uncertainty that the claims it is making on other groups will be honored.

2) In general these conditions are more likely to apply to <u>communities</u> when a) communities are homogeneous with respect to the main divisions of power at a regional or national level, b) the cost of communication rises rapidly as a function of distance, and c) control over land (as compared with the other factors of production) is valuable but unstable.

3) In general, urbanization raises and then lowers the power-homogeneity of communities, the value of control over land and the instability of control over land; it also lowers the distance-cost of communications more or less continuously; its short-run effect on community collective action will therefore vary with the relative pace of these diverse changes; but in the long run urbanization shifts the balance away from communities as collective actors.

As stated, these answers are obscure and partly tautological. The plausibility and utility of the arguments are obviously going to depend a good deal on the meanings we assign to words such as mobilization, power, repression and cost. There we need crisp concepts. After a brief interlude for conceptualization, the remainder of this essay will go into explicating, illustrating, elaborating, modifying and--to some extent--defending the three broad answers.

A Garland of Concepts

A group can't exert collective control over resources without both social relations and some minimum of common identity. Not all organized groups exert collective control over resources, however. The process of acquiring collective control over resources is mobilization; the process of losing collective control over resources, demobilization. If a group applies pooled resources to common ends, it is carrying on collective action. By definition, then, an unmobilized group does not act collectively. Do communities act, then? Well, sometimes they do, since communities sometimes acquire collective control over resources, and they or their agents sometimes apply those

resources to common ends; in those cases, they mobilize and they carry
on collective action.

Let's consider the place of solidarity in all this. In the study
of collective action, two alternative ideas of group solidarity are
appealing. First, we might consider solidarity to be the average strength
of existing ties among members of the group, and might take "strength"
to mean the extent of effective claims any pair of individuals have on
one another. (Where the claims are unequal, we could reasonably take
the lesser of the two sets as the measure for the pair of individuals--
thus saying that where everyone owes his life, if requested, to the
kind, but the king owes nothing to any individual, king-subject soli-
darity is low.) Then it is clear that extensive collective action can
occur when solidarity is low. Coercion will do the job. So will the
creation of a specialized organization which stores and disposes of
pooled resources. Either or both of these tends to work well if the
resources in question are liquid and concentrated: money, movable
property, services of specialists. Solidarity, on the other hand, is
likely to be important, or even essential, where the resources in
question are fixed and dispersed. If many individuals in a group
have to take risks, sacrifice friendship or yield land, solidarity
will have to be high. Overall, then, we shouldn't expect to find a
very close connection between the extent of a group's solidarity and
the extent of its collective action.

The alternative conception of solidarity is as the extent to
which individuals are willing to make commitments to other members of
the group on the basis of common membership alone. If I, a Greek,
meet a new Greek, and because he's Greek I prepare to do him favors,

we have some evidence that solidarity among Greeks is high. If this

sort of solidarity is high, the group in question probably has a great

potential capacity for collective action, all other things being equal.

This sort of solidarity may be high in a group whose members are widely

dispersed and have little contact with each other, however. So there

is no reason to expect a close connection between collective action

and solidarity by this definition, either.

How should we conceptualize power? Power is a function describ-

ing the return a group receives when applying varying amounts of re-

sources externally for collective ends. Most groups will receive a

greater return if they apply more resources, but they differ greatly

in the return they receive per additional unit of resources applied.

We might fabricate three power functions as in Figure 1. Group A

receives a low, constant return on resources applied up to a point at

which it no longer makes any difference how large the input is: the

output is always the same; the marginal return is therefore declining.

(So long as it was stuck with that schedule, such a group would ob-

viously do better never to exceed the expenditure P in any particular

burst of collective action.) Group B experiences an accelerating rate

of return up to point Q, but then finds the rate declining to become

slightly negative. Group C gets very little return for small applica-

tions of resources up to point R, a rapidly accelerating return from

R to S, an increasingly negative return from T to U. A is, I expect,

a common circumstance where the groups in question are well-estab-

lished and the means of exchange among them highly formalized. B

looks more like a characteristic political interchange in which a

little gets you nothing but success breeds success--up to a point.

FIGURE 1. THREE HYPOTHETICAL POWER FUNCTIONS
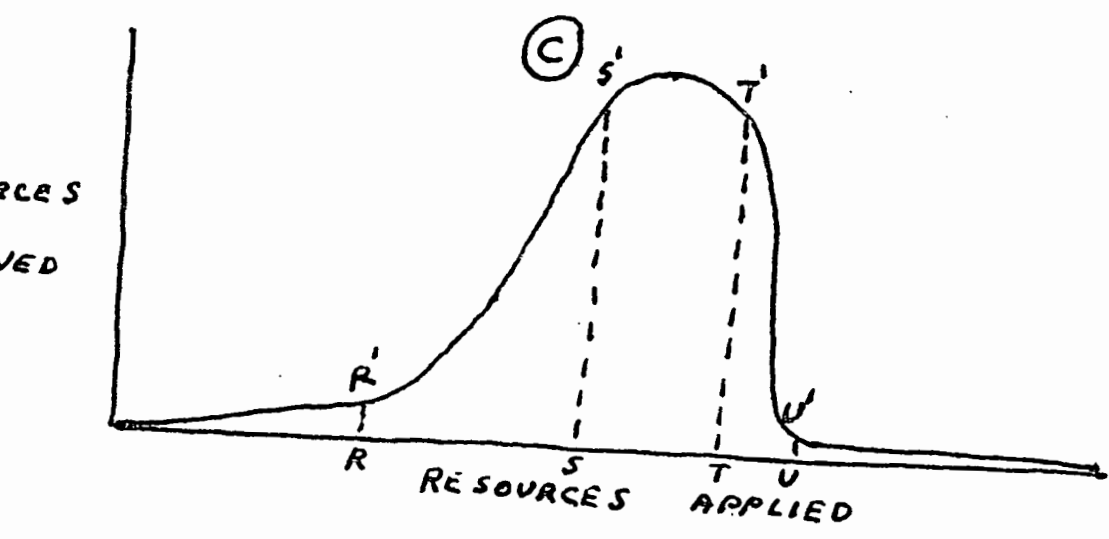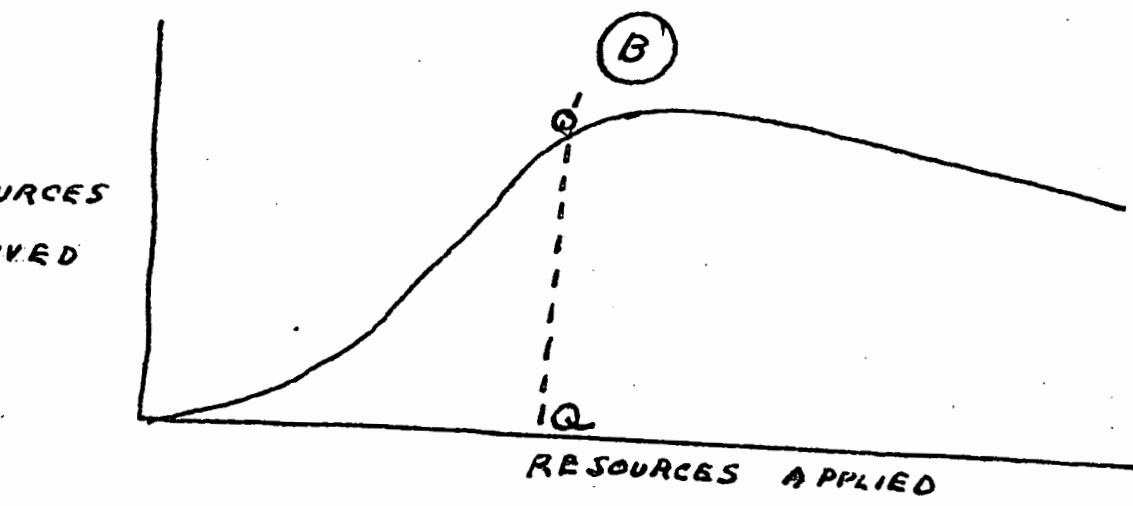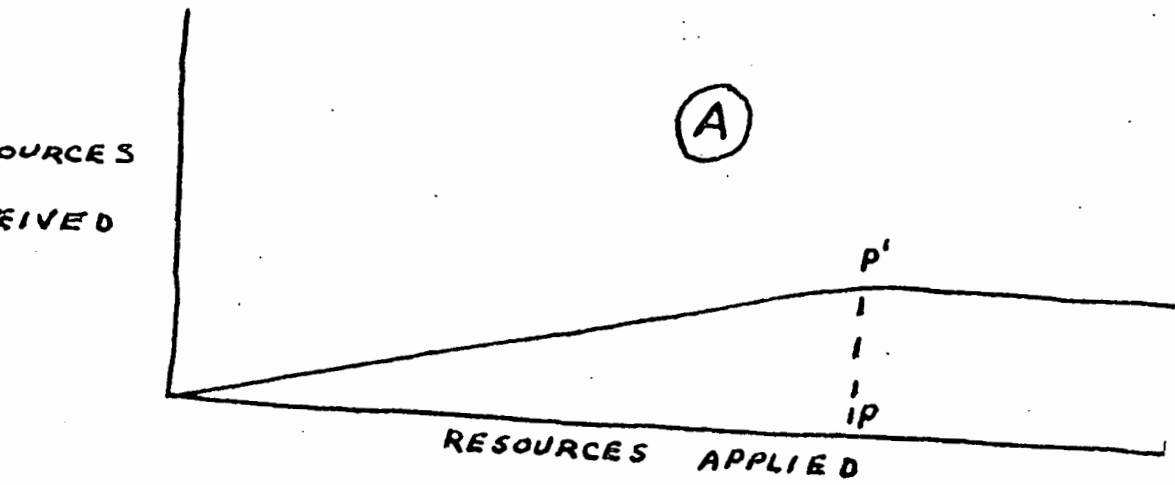
And C could describe a tighter political situation in which a group

has to made a good deal of noise to be heard at all, and is likely

to be crushed if it makes a hullabaloo.

To be sure, to turn these speculations into operations we would

have to a) measure inputs and returns with a precision and comprehen-

siveness no political analyst has achieved for any group so far, b)

devise a way of equating different kinds of resources: in this

particular system do 1,000 votes equal 5,000 demonstrations? What is

more, power is easier to describe for a pair of units whose interac-

tion we can observe over a determinate period of time than for a larger

set of groups. But we can ascribe an overall power position to a

group by averaging and weighing its interactions with all other groups.

Repression, in this line of analysis, is closely related to power.

Repression occurs when the effect of another group's action is to

raise the cost of collective action to the group whose behavior we are

analyzing. (Governmental repression is an important special case;

it consists of actions by agents of the government which raise the

cost of collective action to a) some specific group or b) all groups.)

The cost of collective action to a group, finally, is the extent to

which its members forego other available and desired uses of the re-

sources in question as a consequence of the employment of the re-

sources in collective action.

These concepts, by extension, lend themselves easily to the an-

alysis of power struggles, collective violence and revolution. That

is, indeed, where they came from (see Lees and Tilly 1973, Rule and

Tilly 1972, Shorter and Tilly 1973, Snyder and Tilly 1972, C. Tilly

1972a, 1972b, 1973a). We have no need to make that set of connections

here. We have defined a range of conditions a population can meet:
GROUP $\longrightarrow$ MOBILIZING/DEMOBILIZING $\longrightarrow$ COLLECTIVE ACTION $\longrightarrow$ POWER.
We have not taken up the classic sociological question: where do or-
ganized groups come from? We assume their existence. Implicitly, we
have also defined an elementary model of collective action:

$$\text{REPRESSION} \longleftarrow \text{POWER}$$
$$\text{ORGANIZATION} \longrightarrow \text{MOBILIZATION} \longrightarrow \text{COLLECTIVE ACTION}$$
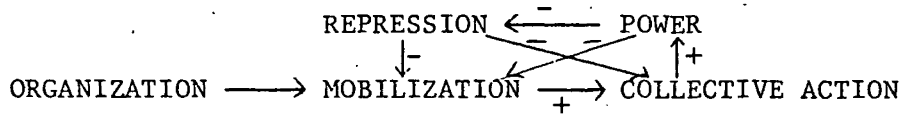
The model represents the mobilization of a group as a function of
its organizational structure and of the type and extent of repression
to which it is subject. In its present form, of course, the model is
not very helpful on that score, since it doesn't specify which sorts of
groups mobilize easily, and so on; later sections of this essay will
take up part of that question. The model further indicates that the
main effect of repression on collective action occurs via the effect on
mobilization. Other groups--and especially governments--act to remove
resources from the collective control of the group in question, and to
raise the cost of putting new resources under collective control.

The model also indicates that continuous collective action tends
to increase the power (i.e. the marginal return from the collective
application of resources) of the group, and that an increase in power
tends to demobilize the group, since it can achieve its desired return
with lesser expenditures of resources. That is a debatable conclusion,
since groups often form new demands in the process of satisfying old
ones. Nevertheless, the overall tendency is probably for the acquisi-
tion of power to demobilize a group: the professional managers begin
to take over, individuals begin to use the acquired connections for
their own ends, and so on.

Likewise, the model neglects several obvious, important complications, such as the probability that the repression-mobilization relationship is curvilinear: a small amount of repression stimulates mobilization, a large amount crushes it. For the most part, this paper ignores those important complications. The model, finally, fails to specify the relationship between organization and mobilization. That is my paper's principal topic.

The Bases of Collective Action

Collective action, then, consists of a group's application of pooled resources to common ends. Most collective action consists of making claims on other groups. There are exceptions. A religious brotherhood which spends its time together in common worship is engaging in collective action. So is a family which strikes off into the wilderness to start a new farm. Few groups, however, can meet their day-to-day requirements for resources without somehow calling on other groups.

Markets routinize these transfers. A market is a specialized device which requires special conditions. It can hardly operate without great concentration of property rights in any particular unit of land, labor, capital, technique or commodity. In seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe (and more so in the rest of the world) the notion that the full range of land, human labor and their products should be for sale at the discretion of a single owner was a revolutionary idea. A great many people who exercised common rights in land and labor resisted the landlords, merchants and officials who acted on such notions. The standard European land occupation, in which villagers tore down fences of recently-enclosed fields and

reasserted their former rights to forage, graze, glean or hunt, expressed this resistance eloquently.

Even where markets prevail, such diffuse, valuable and/or risky resources as personal loyalty, willingness to kill or be killed, advice on major decisions and support in political contests are frequently the subject of claims, but most of those claims are made outside the market. The market is important, yet it is not necessarily the fundamental mediator of claims or the model for all others.

Why do groups ever make claims on other groups? In general, because some or all of their members believe the group a) needs resources currently controlled by another group, in order to pursue an established collective objective, b) has a right to those resources. The basis for that right may range from a general principle (such as freedom to assemble without harassment) to a specific, established usage (such as the villagers' long-established opportunity to glean in a landlord's fields once the harvest is in.) Newly mobilizing groups tend to base a high proportion of their claims on general principles; obviously, they rarely have the opportunity to invoke established usage. These principled claims, moreover, tend to be <u>offensive</u>--marking out rights, guarantees, privileges which other groups have never conceded to them before.

Long-mobilized groups, on the other hand, tend to make the bulk of their claims in terms of time-honored usage. Many such claims are quite routine--the government calls for this year's conscripts, the landlord calls for this month's rent. Long-mobilized groups, however, are also likely to produce <u>defensive</u> claims in response to the unacceptable claims of another group. In the first half of the nineteenth

century, the well-organized tailors of many European cities found them-
selves threatened by the spread of cheap machine-produced goods; they
fought off declining wages and lengthening hours by means of strikes
for maintenance of traditional wages and conditions of work.

When disputes arise, the contrast between new and old produces
an interesting lopsidedness: new mobilizers demand the surrender of
resources on general principle, as old groups resist on much more
specific grounds. Thus in old-regime Europe bourgeois reformers ar-
gued that noble tax exemptions should be removed as a matter of jus-
tice and rationality, as nobles asserted that tax exemption was
their right through services long since rendered.

Current uncertainty that the claims a group is making on other
groups will be honored is, I think, a powerful incentive to collec-
tive action. (That emphatically includes claims on governments.)
Uncertainty can rise in a number of different ways. The stock of
resources available to satisfy outstanding claims can diminish.
Competing claims from other groups--including the current holders
of the resources--can arise. The group's own ability to mount the
requisite form of collective action (e.g. in an electoral system, to
bring out enough votes) can atrophy. And new claims based on general
principles can emerge from the group. All of these reduce certainty
of payoff. In the short run, at least, all of them tend to spur mob-
ilization and collective action.

To repeat then, the extent of a group's collective action in any
particular period and place is mainly a function of a) the current
extent of its mobilization; b) its current power with respect to
other groups; c) the lightness of the repression ordinarily applied to

its actions; d) the current uncertainty that the claims it is making on other groups will be honored.

Communities as Collective Actors

The general conditions ought to apply to communities just as to other groups. The level of a community's collective action is a positive function of its current mobilization and of the current uncertainty that the claims it is making on other groups will be honored. It is a negative function of the extent of repression ordinarily applied to its actions and (via the effect on mobilization) of its current power with respect to other groups. On these grounds we would not expect much collective action from a poor community with patronage in high places: the situation of an "urban village" as described by Herbert Gans. There, mobilization is likely to be low because there are few slack resources uncommitted to daily necessities, uncertainty is likely to be reduced by patronage, while power and repression remain moderate. We would, on the other hand, expect a good deal of collective action from a rich, homogeneous community whose claims to maintenance of its segregation pattern were being threatened by outsiders.

These points are obvious. The question is: under what conditions are communities more likely to be the actors than other sorts of groups? When:

a) communities are homogeneous with respect to the main divisions of power at a regional or national level;

b) the cost of communication rises rapidly as a function of distance; and

c) control over land (as compared with the other factors of
production) is valuable but uncertain.

No doubt there are other conditions. These are the three which
emerge most clearly from the western experience on which I am build-
ing this discussion. Let me take up each in turn before trying to put
them together.

Why should homogeneity with respect to power matter? There are
two complementary reasons. First, a community which is homogeneous
in regard to the main divisions of power at a regional or national
level will generally mobilize at lower cost than one which is hetero-
geneous; the same procedure for drawing resources into the common pool
can be used throughout the population. The analogy with tax collec-
tion, where the heterogeneity of the subject population and of its ac-
tivities greatly increases the difficulties of enforcement, is strong
and illuminating. Second, outside actions are more likely to challenge
or invite claims which have simultaneous support throughout the com-
munity if the community is homogeneous. A threat to one is likely to
be a threat to all. An opportunity for one is likely to be an oppor-
tunity for all. Segregation by power (which may, of course, be a
by-product of segregation by occupation, race, religion or something
else) will promote collective action, all other things being equal.
The nineteenth-century segregation of European industrial cities into
bourgeois and working-class quarters, after an earlier promiscuity of
residence, generally facilitated collective action on both sides.

When the cost of communication rises rapidly as a function of
distance--to take the second general condition for collective action
by communities--a concentrated population has a great advantage.

Lowering the cost of communication over distance reduces the advantages
of proximity.

That much is a commonplace of urban analysis. It is the premise
of Webber's arguments on the emergence of the "non-place urban realm"
in times of communications efficiency. In their analysis of industrial
location in the New York area, Hoover and Vernon made a similar obser-
vation: to oversimplify, such industries as garment manufacturing
and advertising tend to locate at the center, and resist suburbaniza-
tion, because so much of the success or failure of firms in those
trades depends on their fast response to subtle shifts in opportuni-
ties and costs. To be away from Manhattan is to miss the coffee
breaks, chance contacts and quick visits through which so much of the
essential information passes.

If Richard Meier's analysis of the "civic bond" is correct, the
advantage of the concentrated population should become even greater
as the activity carried on is big and complex. Cities exist, accord-
ing to Meier, largely because a) such complicated activities as na-
tional government, the operation of specialized markets and large-scale
manufacturing couldn't happen at all unless numerous information
gatherers, processors, and users were in close, cheap and continuous
contact with each other; b) the maintenance of links among such ac-
tivities requires some minimum of interpersonal solidarity, which will
not develop without some minimum of face-to-face contact.

In all these cases, the steeper the rise in the cost of communi-
cation as a function of distance, the more likely that people will or-
ganize their action--if they act at all--around a common territory.
The reasoning applies easily to collective action. If the prevailing

forms of social organization constrain the forms of mobilization and
the forms and costs of mobilization shape the extent and character
of collective action, then the same conditions which make communities
the major contexts of social life will make them the prime vehicles
for collective action.

In the modern West, the formation of national states reinforced
the likelihood that communities would be major bases of collective
action (see C. Tilly 1963c). Whatever else they do, states extract
resources from the populations they control: money, men, food and
supplies for their armies, land for their highroads, emoluments for
their officials.

Even in the relatively prosperous conditions of sixteenth-century
Europe, the rapid increase in the extractive efforts of growing states
put a large strain on the capacities of the populations under their
control. States were competing for resources which were not only
scarce but also committed to other purposes, individual and collective.
What is more, the costs of communication rose rapidly with distance.

For essentially the same reasons that ordinary citizens could
hardly organize on any other basis than a territorial one, royal of-
ficials found it almost impossible to build their fiscal administra-
tions except by making local units part of the structure. Recent
innovations such as the income tax (although they were proposed from
time to time before the nineteenth century) could not operate until
a) most people received most of their income in the form of regular
cash wages, b) the government could build a system of registration,
verification and collection capable of operating with rough uniformity
at a national scale. Until that time, governmental revenues took

three main forms: 1) rents and fees from users of particular proper-
ties and services; 2) levies on flows and transfers of goods and per-
sons--tolls, customs, excise taxes--collected at some fixed location;
3) locally-administered assessments on land, movable property and
other assets controlled by individuals or groups. All three relied
heavily on local structure, including villages themselves.

In the case of land taxes and similar imposts, the standard
practice was to calculate the revenue needed from the country as a
whole, inflate that figure by the estimated loss to collection costs
(both legitimate and illegitimate), then break it into quotas for
geographic subdivisions of the country based on their reputed ability
to pay, as modified by their known ability to resist or escape. The
subdivisions subdivided, until at last a quota arrived at the indivi-
dual community; its authorities then had the obligation to apportion
the burden among the local households, again weighing reputed ability
to pay against known ability to resist or escape. By the end of such
a process, obviously there were likely to be flagrant inequalities in
the tax burdens of similar communities in different regions, or even
of adjacent farmsteads which fell into different jurisdictions. Tax-
ation was the most prominent single issue in large-scale rebellions
during the European statemaking of the sixteenth to nineteenth centur-
ies. Inequity was one of the major reasons for its prominence. Simi-
lar localized, inequitable systems grew up in the conscription of men
for military service; they aroused similar resentment.

The irony of these extractive arrangements is that they reinforced
the administrative apparatus of local communities, and thereby in-
creased the capacity of communities for resistance. Placide Rambaud

analyzes the experience of an Alpine village, la Maurienne, over the
century or two during which the Piedmontese state was extending its
control over the mountains:

> From a simple association of co-owners, the commune became
> a "political body organized to serve other interests than
> the immediate interests of those who comprised it." From a
> personal and spontaneous grouping, it became a territory
> with precise boundaries, and instrument of a government
> and a cell with definite functions, but functions defined
> from outside the community (Rambaud 1962: 138).

The long-run result of this process was dependence and subordination.
But in the short run, the community acquired the legal capacity to
sue a neighboring community for infringement on its rights, and even
to act against its own members for failure to meet their public obli-
gations. Autonomy declined, but solidarity and the capacity for col-
lective action both rose, in the short run. This meant the bulk of
the community sometimes rose against their own officials, when the
officials were simply doing their duty—as defined from outside—
instead of bending to local needs. That was frequently, for example,
the motif of food riots: the authorities should have assured and reg-
ulated the supply of food, so the citizens stepped in to coerce or
supplant the delinquent officials (see L. Tilly 1971).

More to the point, when the local authorities aligned themselves
with the villagers against outside claims, the same means which they
employed routinely to extract local resources for external purposes
served to hold those resources within the community, defend them
from outsiders, and commit them to local ends. That is the motif of

serious resistance to taxation and conscription: those outsiders have no _right_ to demand this crop, that money, these men; we're not going to let them go. In effect, the administrative reinforcement of the community raised the cost of communication from one community to the next, and increased the likelihood that the community itself would become the unit of collective action.

What of the value and uncertainty of control over land? The chief things members of all sorts of communities have in common is investment in the same territory--in land. The reasoning is simple: to the extent that land is worthless, people who share the same territory are less likely to have interests, or claims in common. By the same token, others are less likely to make claims on them. To the extent that controls over the land are secure, spurs or opportunities for collective action with respect to those fundamental interests are infrequent. Uncertainty is low. Finally, if control over the land is stable, membership in the community tends to change slowly. A stable population has lower mobilization costs than an unstable one, despite the implications of numerous "collective behavior" theories that a shifting, mobile and uprooted population is more inclined to mass action.

In summary, the general conditions for collective action are more likely to apply to communities when a) communities are homogeneous with respect to the main divisions of power at a regional or national level, b) the cost of communication rises rapidly as a function of distance and c) control over land (as compared with the other factors of production) is valuable but uncertain.

The Effects of Urbanization

In keeping with the elementary definition of community employed so far, let us use a stripped-down idea of urbanization. Cities are simply communities which exceed some arbitrary minimum size. Urbanization is the process whereby an increasing share of a given population comes to reside in cities. The process has three components: 1) net migration, 2) natural increase and 3) net reclassification of existing settlements from rural to urban and urban to rural. For urbanization to occur in the population over some segment of time, the rate of change of the sum of these three components for the urban sector of the population must be greater than the corresponding rate of change for the rural sector. When the rates of change are equal, there can be a great deal of urban growth without urbanization. If the rural rate is higher, the population deurbanizes.

Urbanization occurs in a number of different ways. All of them depend to an important degree on the increased involvement of the population in large, complex, coordinated activities which are widely dispersed in space. Trade, manufacturing and political control are the three principal classes of urbanizing activities. To the extent that it is predominant, each produces a characteristically different type of city and pattern of urbanization. Many of the apparent effects of urbanization, then, are actually effects of the expansion of trade, manufacturing and/or political control.

Nevertheless, urbanization has some regular accompaniments which are probably effects of urbanization as such. I proposed some generalizations earlier: urbanization raises and then lowers the power-homogeneity of communities, the value and the instability of control

over land; it also lowers the distance-cost of communications more or
less continuously; its short-run effects on community collective action
will therefore vary with the relative pace of these different changes;
but in the long run urbanization shifts the balance away from communi-
ties as collective actors. The general discussion of communities as
actors has already touched on these transformations repeatedly. Our
job now is to sort them out as briefly and neatly as possible.

Urbanization and the Power-Homogeneity of Communities

Remember the Alpine village, la Maurienne, analyzed by Placide
Rambaud. The short-run effect of its incorporation into the expand-
ing Piedmontese state was to homogenize the power positions of the
village's households; the distinction among them made less and less
difference in their efforts to get responses from the state, the
state became an increasingly important repository of the crucial re-
sources outside the community, and interactions with the state had for
the most part to be mediated by the community's own elite. Most of
these changes followed pretty directly from political centralization.
Yet part of the effect was probably due to the fact that the sheer
location of resources, as of people, was shifting to cities faster
than the abilities of villagers to make claims on those resources were
increasing. The resources that mattered accumulated disproportionately
in Chambéry, then the Piedmontese capital. Moreover, in the short run
the direct demand of cities for food, manpower and other resources cur-
rently committed to local ends increased more rapidly than the ability
of villages to supply them. Hence a squeeze on local resources and a
homogenization of the power position of community members.

Over the long run, the general effect of urbanization was probably to differentiate the power positions of different segments of the community. In particular, the division between the mass of the local population and elites who were heavily involved in national politics, national markets and national communications structures produced a fundamental heterogeneity of power, increased the likelihood that the elite would act in concert with similar elites from elsewhere, and decreased the possibility of collective action by the community as a whole.

The case of la Maurienne exemplifies a general process. The process probably flows from the logic of urbanization itself--at least of urbanization which begins in the midst of a peasant population. So long as cities constitute only a small part of the population, the resources necessary for the maintenance of urban activities and populations are likely to be committed to particular local ends, their supply inelastic, their production inefficient from a national point of view. When cities grow faster than the rural population under these conditions, the short-run effect is to create a serious struggle over resources already committed to rural uses: grain, manpower, land. Further urbanization does not occur unless the forces based in the city win out. The short-run consequence is therefore to deprive rural communities of some of the resources with which they would ordinarily carry on their collective life; but it also homogenizes the power positions of their members. Whether it stimulates greater collective action in the short-run therefore depends on whether the depletion of essential resources occurs more slowly than the homogenization of power.

In the longer run, however, rural communities respond to the pressure from outside by moving into the markets for labor, land and commodities; productivity tends to increase, resources are freed, and specialization of producers occurs. An increasing proportion of the total population is in cities whose inhabitants are almost by defini- tion heterogeneous with respect to power. At a more general level, the basic city-building activities--large, complex, coordinated ac- tivities which are widely dispersed in space--involve different seg- ments of each community to different degrees. They cut across com- munities, leaving distinctions between cosmopolitans and locals, elites and masses, cash-crop farmers and true peasants, officials and citi- zens, owners and workers. Some of these cross-cutting strata them- selves become more likely bases for mobilization and collective action. So the long-run consequence of urbanization is to reduce the power- homogeneity of communities. Thus, if my argument is correct, it final- ly tends to reduce the prominence of communities as bases for collec- tive action.

How Urbanization Affects the Value and Stability of Control over Land

The situation of control over land looks quite similar to that of power-homogeneity. Consider the characteristic squeeze on scarce and already committed resources at the start of the urbanization of a predominantly rural population. The increase in the urban demand for the products of the land, for resources (e.g. labor, rents) committed to particular pieces of land, and for the land itself drives up the value of rural land, at least within the immediate hinterlands of the growing cities. The short-run struggle over access to those resources

also tends to decrease the stability of control of the land; haciendas expand, enclosing landlords challenge communal grazing rights, a genuine impersonal market in land opens up. These are the conditions to which we find the European rural population responding by occupying fields, attacking landlords and fighting off the bailiffs. In my analysis, the short-run increase in the value and instability of control over land spurs communal collective action.

Over the long run, however, the general effect of urbanization is no doubt to reduce the value of land relative to the other factors of production. The great city-building activities are, on the whole, labor- or capital-intensive. Over western Europe as a whole, the amount of land under cultivation and the agricultural population reached their maxima some time around 1900. Since then, people have drained out of the countryside, farmers have abandoned their farms, and the amount of agricultural land has dwindled. That same process has been occurring everywhere else in the West, depending on the pace and timing of urbanization, industrialization and increases in agricultural productivity. It is the most obvious manifestation of the long-run shift away from land toward labor and capital. Urban land, of course, continues to increase in value, but not relative to the other factors of production.

Perhaps the same trend applies to the security of control over land. In the early stages of urbanization, an important rise in the insecurity of control over land; later, a long decline toward security. The trend of value itself suggests that conclusion, but the association of urbanization with the creation of an active market for land points in the other direction. What we would have to know is not how

often titles changed hands at various points in the process of urbani-
zation, but how often existing titles were subjected to challenges.
Rapid rise and slow fall remains the more plausible summary. If my
general argument about the conditions for collective action by com-
munities is correct, this should have the effect, all other things
being equal, of first stimulating and then dampening communal collec-
tive action.

Urbanization and the Distance-Cost of Communications

Over the long run, declining distance-cost of communications ob-
viously goes with urbanization. H. A. Innis, his follower Marshall
McLuhan, Richard Meier and Allan Pred have all argued, in their own
ways, that where communications were both costly and crucial to the
enterprises men were carrying on, men have agglomerated in towns and
cities. The agglomeration is a response to high distance-cost. But,
as these authors have usually point out, the relationship is recipro-
cal. The high premium placed on efficient communications stimulates
urbanites to invent new media which will carry large volumes of in-
formation far and fast at low cost. Indeed McLuhan speculates--and
here he rejoins Webber's notions of the non-spatial community--that
the new inventions eventually make agglomeration unnecessary and
place irrelevant. We arrive, in his account, at the Global Village.

That conclusion is not self-evident. The demand for information
could continue to increase more rapidly than the supply, for several
reasons: because people engage in ever more complex and information-
hungry activities, because the maintenance of existing agglomerations
itself absorbs a great deal of information, because the demand for
information is a sort of self-perpetuating addiction: more, more,

more! It isn't exactly clear how much of the increased communications flow is a consequence of urbanization as such, and how much a consequence of the big activities which generate urbanization. Nevertheless the correlations are there. Communications flows rise exponentially with urbanization. The cost per bit transmitted per distance goes down. More important, the cost curve between transmitting information one mile and a hundred flattens. At least some of that change results from the fact of agglomeration itself.

If this were the only effect of urbanization, the relative propensity of communities (as compared with other kinds of groups) for collective action would decline continuously as urbanization proceeded. By my argument, however, relative land values and the power-homogeneity of communities also affect collective action . . . and they don't behave the same way. In the early phases of urbanization, according to the argument, they are changing in a direction which promotes community collective action, while the distance-cost of communications is changing relatively slowly in the other direction. Later all three factors move in the same direction. The argument predicts a short-term rise, then a long-term fall in community collective action. It leaves the extent of the rise and fall a function of the relative rates of change of the three factors. Figure 2 gives one hypothetical presentation of the change over a long span of urbanization.

Implications for Peasant Collective Action

The fate of the agrarian classes under capitalism generally confirms this timetable, and the line of argument behind it. Recent work by Eric Wolf and others on the advance of capitalism into the peasant areas of the West has identified two very different points in the

process which favor rural collective action. Assuming a pre-existing
peasant population (an agricultural population, settled in villages,
with substantial control over the land it works), the first point comes
early in the process. It is the collective resistance of still-
organized peasants to encroachments on their rights to the local land:
Zapata's bold reaction to the expansion of sugar-growing haciendas in
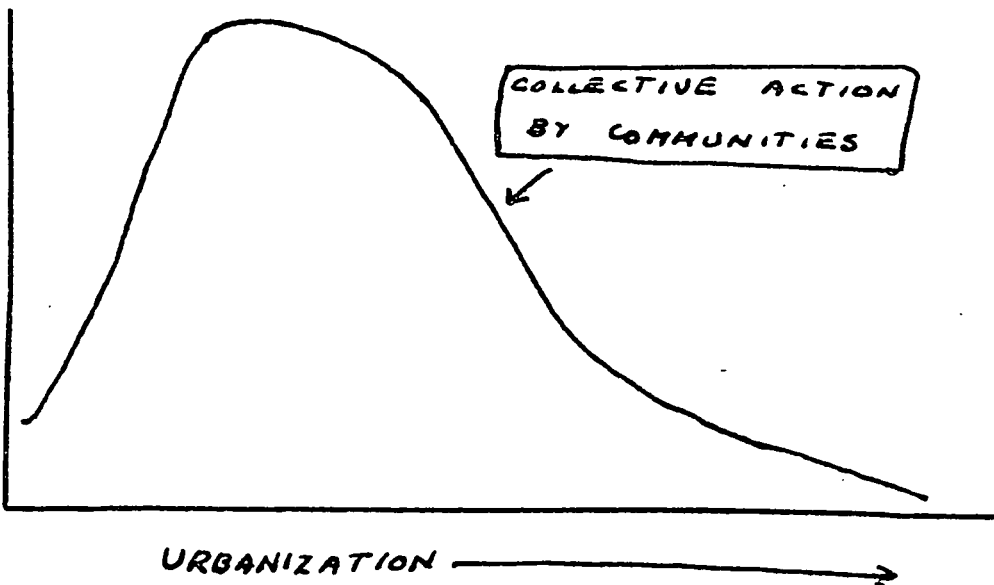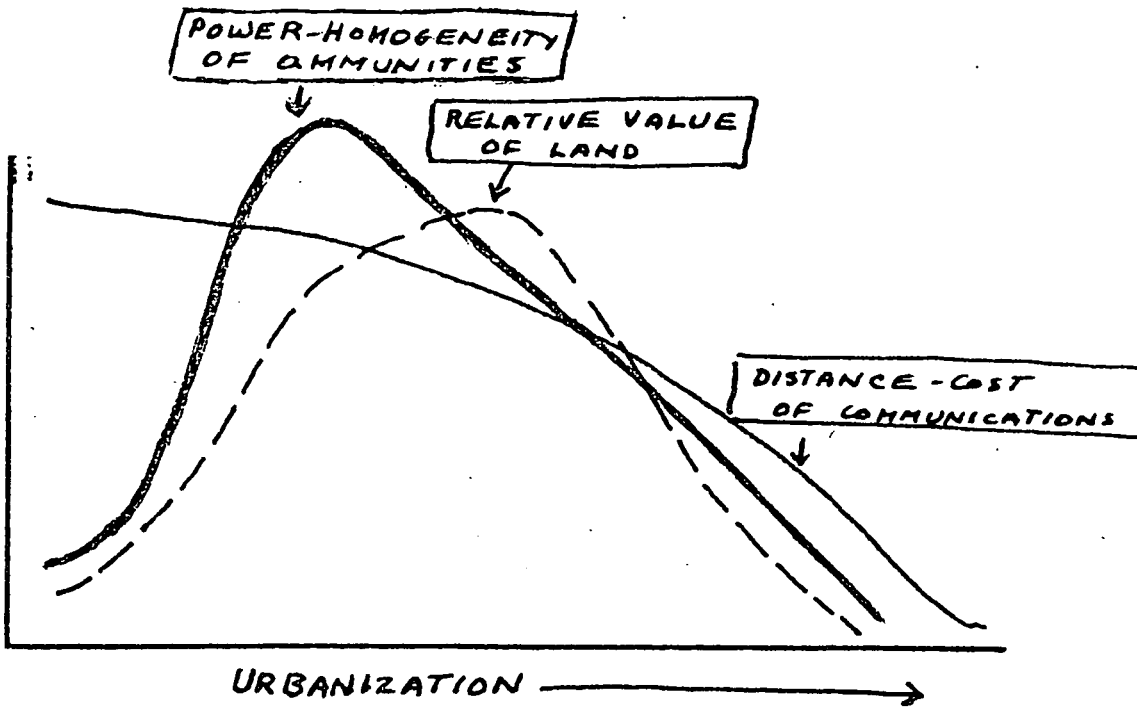southern Mexico stands as an archetype:

> When--at the beginning of the rainy season of 1910--the
>
> neighboring hacienda began to occupy community land al-
>
> ready readied for corn planting, Zapata organized a group
>
> of eighty men to carry through the planting operation in
>
> defiance of the hacienda. Shortly after, Villa de Ayala
>
> and Noyotepec--two other communities--began to contribute
>
> to Zapata's defense fund. Thereupon Zapata proceeded to
>
> take over communal lands occupied by the haciendas, des-
>
> troy the fences erected by them, and distribute land to
>
> the villagers (Wolf 1969 : 28; cf. Womack 1969).

The point in this case, and in all such cases, in not that peasants in
general cling tenaciously to their land. Considering how general one
version or another of capitalist consolidation of control over peasant
land was in the West after 1500, instances of concerted resistance
like that of Zapata were rare. The hacendados of southern Mexico,
however, had cut into the land supply of established Indian villages
without destroying their internal organization. Control over land
became more valuable and less stable as Indian communities homogenized
with respect to the main divisions of power at a regional level.

To sharpen the point: despite an incredibly widespread mythology to the contrary, peasants in the West were not extraordinarily attached to their soil as such; they were attached to the maintenance of conditions which supported the survival of themselves and their households as respected human beings. Those conditions generally included control of enough land to support a household under prevailing conditions of soil, technique, climate and market. But peasants held land under a great variety of leases, traded plots fairly often, often exercised common rights, and sometimes even belonged to systems in which the land was entirely redistributed from time to time. Traditionalism, land hunger and peasant individualism—to take three slogans which have commonly been used in accounting for the resistance of peasants to the introduction of "modern" agriculture—misstate the central features of such ·systems.

Joan Thirsk (1967) has made an acute distinction between the movements toward enclosure in highland and lowland England. The highlands had never supported extensive manors. Settlement was dispersed, communal controls and rights over land unimportant, farming divided between herding for cash and the raising of field crops for subsistence. There, peasants themselves played an important part in enclosure, little resistance occurred, and the fencing of land into private plots was well advanced by the sixteenth century. In the lowlands, broadly speaking, manors had been fundamental, extensive communal controls over the land existed, people tended to live in large villages, and an important part of the grain produced went to the market.

FIGURE 2. HYPOTHETICAL CHANGES IN COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE ACTION AND ITS DETERMINANTS IN THE LONG RUN OF URBANIZATION

POWER-HOMOGENEITY OF COMMUNITIES

RELATIVE VALUE OF LAND

DISTANCE-COST OF COMMUNICATIONS

URBANIZATION ⟶

COLLECTIVE ACTION BY COMMUNITIES

URBANIZATION ⟶

In the lowland situation, the landlords who could assemble a
large contiguous tract of land for grazing stood to make handsome fi-
nancial gains; to do so, however, required abridgment of communal rights
in the land, expulsion of smallholders, and overcoming the furious
resistance those two innovations frequently called up. The peasants
who resisted were in no sense the most traditional, the most individ-
ualistic. They were the peasants whose survival as peasants depended
on communally-enforced access to the land.

The second point in capitalist development which appears to favor
rural collective action comes much later. To the extent that all the
factors of production become responsive to national and international
markets, the peasantry disappears. It has two main destinations, with
many stopping-places in between: 1) the emergence of cash-crop farmers
with considerable capital invested in their enterprises; 2) the crea-
tion of an agricultural proletariat. Where the first becomes the dom-
inant type, hired labor often plays a significant, if subordinate,
role. Where the second prevails, a small class of landlords and mana-
gers inevitably accompanies it. The first was the French destination:
a nation of peasants dissolving into cash-crop farmers; the second was
English: a few landlords and yeomen surviving in the midst of a great
mass of landless laborers.

At either of these destinations, associations of producers or of
workers become significant bases of collective action. In North Amer-
ica we are mainly familiar with the producers' associations: the
Grange, the National Farmers' Alliance, the Cooperative Commonwealth
Federation, and so on. In Europe and Latin America, however, landless
laborers have manned an important part of the agrarian collective

action over the last century or so. Although their movements often look sudden and unfocussed, they invariably rest on extensive, specialized local organization. In southern Spain, for example, the clandestine organization of agrarian workers on big estates--of braceros-- began in the middle of the nineteenth century. (They may have drawn support, and even leadership, from rural artisans who were being squeezed by the de-industrialization of the Spanish countryside.) By the time of the revolution of 1868, braceros of Andalusia and elsewhere in the South had mounted numerous and effective labor organizations, were conducting frequent strikes, and had begun to take on the left-wing programs which characterized them up to the time of Franco.

As the nineteenth century rolled on, the day-to-day demands of landless workers shifted from control or redistribution of the land toward improvement of the conditions and returns of work. Nevertheless, the call for reparto--subdivision of the great estates--remained at the heart of rural revolutionary programs. As Diaz del Moral puts it:

> At that time socialism came to mean for the one and the
> other [the rich and the poor] the division of the pro-
> perty of the first among the second, which is to say a
> new land reform in which many individual landholders
> would substitute for the few who then owned the land
> (Diaz del Moral 1967: 72).

During the Cantonalist rebellions of 1873 the Andalusian rebels commonly proclaimed reparto, and in some places actually began to redistribute the land. During the agrarian general strikes of 1918, the

process began again. With a rapidly increasing population, the value

of control over the land had only risen over the previous half-century.

What part did communities, as such, play in all this collective

action? Only in the first phase were the actions based mainly on com-

munities: Zapata si, Andalusia no. Where there was a still-organized

peasantry defending existing claims on common land against capitalist

encroachment, communities were the ordinary units of action. In the

later phase, the action was larger in scale, based on associations with

urban links and cutting across communities which were divided by power

and interest.

How It Worked in Sicily

The transformation of rural collective action I have sketched

occurred throughout the West. It probably occurs everywhere that cap-

italism spreads. The main variations are in its timing and in the de-

gree to which the second phase--rural collective action based on as-

sociations transcending particular communities--occurs at all; many

parts of the rural West drifted off into silent despair as their

peasantries disappeared. We can see the full cycle, nevertheless, in

numerous sections of Europe: the Po vally, the hinterland of Moscow,

Midland England, and elsewhere. One of the more intriguing cases is

Sicily.

Since early in the nineteenth century, and perhaps before, Sicily

has acted like an analog computer--a computer designed to represent

revolutionary processes. There were major insurrections in Palermo

and its region in 1820, 1848, 1860, and 1866. Another large rebellion

swept eastern Sicily in 1837. The revolutions of 1848 and 1860 directly

involved much of the island. In 1893-94 the movement of the Sicilian Fasci drew national attention, and massive repression.

These were only the high points of collective action. With relatively small changes in basic social structure or day-to-day life, the same island has produced a stunning variety of political performances: rebellion, revolution, banditry, mafia, petty tyranny, and passivity in the face of gross injustice. To an important degree, the same people, areas and social situations have produced these incompatible forms of action and inaction. They have even produced them in close succession. It is enough to make us doubt the evidence . . . or to shrug our shoulders and speak, with Salvatore Massimo Ganci (1954: 839) of "a peculiar cultural world in which elements of Christian mysticism and of fatalistic Mohammedanism coexist with residues of the pagan world."

Yet Sicily, for all the exotic nonsense that has been written about the place, is not a realm apart. Nor is it a mere leftover of a past, primitive world. In its time (which means before 1800), Sicily had been a center of civilization, one of the Mediterranean's prime granaries, a maritime emporium, a political prize. In the nineteenth century, it was one of the crucial arenas of popular action toward the unification of Italy. Garibaldi's largest contribution to that unification, after all, came with his 1860 landing in Sicily. The popular insurrection which coincided with the landing made possible Garibaldi's conquest of the South from the Bourbons.

Sicily, in short, was never a separate political world. Nor do Sicily's politics really follow separate rules. The processes which

set man against man in modern Sicily have their counterparts in semi-rural areas through much of the modern world.

What elements go into this particular computer? First, there is a set of social classes, all dependent on the land in one way or another. At a minimum, we must distinguish 1) a large mass of landless or land-poor agricultural laborers, the residues of a peasantry, most of them working dispersed plots of land on short-term contracts or at a daily wage; 2) a small but crucial group of managers running from the gabelloto or estate manager to the paid thugs who kept the agricultural workers in line; 3) the few rentiers, once well divided into nobles and bourgeois, but with the nineteenth century increasingly consolidated into a single landowning class.

The second element is a simple set of power relationships among the classes. The managers extract an income for the rentiers from the agricultural workers, and receive several things from the rentiers in exchange: a share of the proceeds, a relatively free hand in controlling the local population, and protection from outsiders. In such a system the agricultural workers tend to be exploited and defenseless, the managers tend to expand their capital and their power by extending the range of their exactions, and the rentiers tend to remain economically inert and parasitic.

The third element is a simple but changeable relationship to outside centers of power, especially the state. Most of the time the relationship between the rentiers and the state remains parallel to that between the managers and the rentiers: so long as the region remains docile, lends itself to exploitation and yields its regular tribute, the state gives the rentiers a fairly free hand; it keeps its armed

force available as a guarantee of the established order. But several agents can upset this relationship to the state: the managers and their henchmen can begin acting autonomously, and threaten the income of the _rentiers_; the guarantees of the state can weaken because of a diversion or paralysis of its armed force; potential allies of the agricultural workers can arrive on the scene and make a new coalition possible; agricultural workers can organize and move into collective action; or, more likely, several of these can happen at once.

The fourth and final element of our analog computer is a bit of a surprise. It is the expansion of capitalist property relations. The system I have described has such a "feudal" tone, and has so often been treated as a "feudal" remnant, that its increasingly capitalistic character is hard to see. Under strong pressure from the British occupying forces, the Sicilians rid themselves of most of the juridical apparatus of feudalism between 1806 and 1812. More important, landlords and managers (and, from time to time, the state) collaborated thereafter in the consolidation of property rights: dismembering commons, restricting rights to glean, graze and gather, seizing and selling church property, and so on. The net effect was to reduce the number of competing claims on the same piece of land, to build a market in land, and to accentuate the proletarian position--the sheer dependence on sale of their labor--of those who actually worked the land. It helped convert a population of peasants into a population of agricultural laborers. That process was well along by 1848.

The circumstances of nineteenth-century Sicily, then, broadly resembled those of Andalusia and Mexico. Sicily experienced the fundamental transition from reactive, local, peasant-based, community

collective action to a larger-scale associational action during the nineteenth century. The class structure, the power relations, the unstable connection between inside and outside and the general expansion of capitalist property relations interacted to produce both the short-term oscillations and the long-term transformations of rural collective action. Mafia, for example, is essentially an outgrowth of the private governments the landlords built, in collaboration with their managers, as they seqeezed out the claims of peasants on the land (Blok 1973, Romano 1963). The enforcers acquired autonomy and retained protection. Whenever the ability of the landlords and managers to call up the armed force of the state declined, on the other hand, agricultural workers reasserted their claims to control of the land--most often by occupying usurped land directly and en masse. Likewise, when an important ally (e.g. the bourgeois in 1848, Garibaldi in 1860, labor organizers from the North in the early 1890s) became available, the agricultural workers began to act together against their exploiters.

The Sicilian revolution of 1848 epitomizes the interaction of the four factors. It was, as it happens, the first of the many European revolutions of 1848. On the 12th of January crowds of workers in Palermo demonstrated around the Italian tricolor, fought with the troops and police sent to disperse them, and set up barricades which gave them control of one of the city's poorer districts. An informal committee of bourgeois and liberal nobles allied themselves with the crowds, and provided them with some of their leadership.

Almost as soon as the insurrection began in Palermo, the countryside stirred. As Denis Mack Smith (1968: 416) describes it:

. .. . the news from Palermo on 12 January was a signal

for all who had a grievance to rise and remedy it, and

this gave the revolt an immense and unexpected force.

In the villages and towns there were bread riots and

attacks on the 'clubs' where the galantuomini used to

meet. Whole flocks of sheep were killed, crops and hay

ricks burnt. Over the next weeks an enormous destruc-

tion took place in many of the surviving woodlands, as

land was seized and cleared for cultivation. Often the

Town Hall was attacked and there was a bonfire of the

title deeds to property which symbolized centuries of

social persecution. Government ceased as officials

fled for their lives. The tribal morality of a subject

population was evidenced in a general assassination of

policemen and suspected informers, sometimes with un-

believable cruelty.

He adds that men involved in the activities which would eventually be

called mafia took advantage of an open situation to consolidate their

positions. Mack Smith's interpretation is essentially that in the

weakening of public authority every violent impulse--noble or ignoble--

had its chance.

There is something to that interpretation: the neutralization of

royal control did permit ordinary Sicilians to undertake collective

actions which would have been very risky when the police, troops and

mafia were about their usual business. Yet their actions, for the

most part, redressed specific and long-standing grievances. The deeds

to property did not symbolize so much "centuries of persecution" as

two or three decades in which the landlords and managers had been

squeezing the agricultural workers out of their previously-established

common rights in the land. The woodlands were precisely the property

over which landlords and managers had consolidated their control. The

agricultural workers knew what they wanted; it was neither blind ven-

geance nor a liberal constitution, but reestablishment of their rights.

In combination with the rather different actions of the other Sicilian

classes, however, the net effect of the movement of agricultural work-

ers was to reinforce the drive for an autonomous Sicily with a liberal

constitution.

In Sicily, the revolutionary committees of Palermo rapidly became

the revolutionary government of the entire island. At this point, the

urban bourgeois were already close to their limited objectives: a

liberal system representation, autonomy for Sicily. They had allies

who wanted much more--most importantly, a redistribution of the land.

To some extent, they had to struggle with the radicals in their own

midst. But the big problem was the workers of the city and country-

side, who had organized and armed themselves during the opening moments

of the revolution. They succeeded both in checking the squadre, the

armed bands of rural and urban workers, which had done an important

part of the revolutionary work, and in eliminating workers and small-

holders from the National Guard, the revolutionary regime's basic

military force.

That accomplished, the new regime managed to enact an agrarian

reform law of its own stamp: seizing the property of the Church,

selling it off in large blacks, authorizing the purchasers to expel

the tenants. As S. F. Romano (1952: 100) sums it up:

The law aimed in substance to give the bourgeoisie

which had formed in the island through the accumu-

lation of money the possibility of consolidating

its position, becoming a landed bourgeoisie allied

with the property holders of feudal origin at the

expense of the weakest of the privileged classes

of that time: the ecclesiastical class.

The law succeeded. The redistribution of church properties to the ad-

vantage of the island's bourgeoisie which had already occurred sur-

vived the end of the revolution in 1849; the dismemberment and sale

began again with the revolution of 1860. That redistribution gave a

great push to the proletarianization of the rural population.

Although their outcomes were different, the structures of the

Sicilian insurrections of 1860 and 1866 had much in common with the

revolution of 1848. The next great movement after them, by contrast,

illustrates the powerful effect that organization of the working class

could have on the entire configuration. The movement of the Fasci

attracted national attention in 1893 and 1894, and ended with the na-

tional government's use of massive military force to destroy the move-

ment.

The first Sicilian organization with the title Fascio ("bundle"

or "grouping", with none of the word's later right-wing overtones) was

that of Messina, founded in March, 1889. Its chairman was promptly

arrested and convicted. He was only released in March, 1892, when the

group resumed activity. In the meantime, a less exclusively working-

class Fascio appeared in Catania; it had middle-class sponsors. The

main impetus of the movement, which spread through the cities of the

island in 1892, however, came from the Palermo Fascio; that group had connections with the Socialists of northern Italy.

The artisans of the cities quickly accepted the new organizations. In many cases, they were not enormously different from the old corporations and gilds; in other cases, they resembled the nascent unions and resistance leagues of the North. Native Sicilian bourgeois reformers and working-class activists carried the form of organization to rural areas at the end of 1892. The new form had the advantages of being technically legal and of having the support of political figures whose position was already established.

In January 1893, troops attacked some hundreds of agricultural workers who had begun to hoe the fields of formerly communal land which they had occupied at Caltavuturo. Eleven died on the spot. Although there was no Fascio in Caltavuturo, there was a group in the community which had announced the aim of establishing a consumer cooperative. The massacre gave a big impetus to urban socialists and Fascianti in their mission to the countryside. The fascio looked like a form of organization well suited to carry the grievances of workers, peasants and miners into the political arena. What is more, it appealed to the people themselves; the number of organized Fasci went from 35 in March of 1893 to almost 200 in December (Del Carria 1966: I, 221).

The immediate program of most Fasci was simple and concrete: reduction of consumption taxes, better wages, more favorable contracts for sharecroppers and tenant farmers. The idea of repossessing the lost land remained in the background. The program of taxes, wages, and contracts made a good deal of sense in Sicily of the 1890s. Local consumption taxes (collected both as tolls and as sales taxes) had

been rising rapidly in the previous decade, and cutting seriously into the income of a population which was increasingly dependent on wage-labor (hence on the purchase of goods in the market) for survival. An important part of the agricultural labor force consisted of landless men who got work by the day or the week at the morning shapeup in the local piazza. And Sicily was already famous for the unfavorable terms of its leases and sharecropping agreements. So each of the Fasci programs had a ready-made constituency.

Through the late spring and summer of 1893, strikes and demonstrations proliferated in the agricultural areas around Palermo, Corleone and Caltanisetta. The landlords and managers frequently called in the police to break them up. From October 1893 through the beginning of 1894, communal and tax offices were attacked, records and buildings sacked, in dozens of Sicilian municipalities. Comandini's day-by-day history of nineteenth-century Italy mentions ten Sicilian tax rebellions in this period which involved at least fifty persons and some damage to persons or property. No one has yet sorted out the history of all these conflicts, but it appears they bore an ambivalent relationship to the Fasci: they were unlikely to occur unless a Fascio had begun to organize the local workers and focus their grievances; yet where the firmest political organization had emerged the Fascio was unlikely to foment, or even to tolerate, attacks on public property.

By the end of 1893, the vigilance and brutality of the authorities had increased significantly. Troops and police were quick to intervene. By the end of the year, 92 demonstrators had been killed and hundreds injured. In 1894, the new Crispi government crushed the movement. Crispi declared a state of siege, sent the fleet and

30,000 troops, and clapped numerous left-wing leaders in jail. The

most prominent target of the repression was the socialist deputy and

mayor of Catania, de Felice. Although he was in no sense the general

leader of the movement, his arrest underscores the nature of the rev-

olutionary threat the government detected in Sicily: an alliance of

the urban bourgeois with the workers of city and country against the

landholding classes. As Romano analyses it: "For the moment the

spectre of the socialist revolution, or rather of the social, popular

and Jacobin revolution, which was at bottom what the republicans

feared, produced a closing of ranks among the previously divided

dominant political groups; they united to defend and conserve the

established order against the threat of the political ascent of radi-

cals and socialists on a mounting wave of popular action: (Romano

1959: 507-508).

In the course of the nineteenth century, communities lost their

prominence as bases of collective action. In 1848, the Sicilian

peasantry was already half-destroyed, but it was still making claims

for the restoration of its rights. By 1893, the actors were not peas-

ants, but rural proletarians who harbored few hopes of establishing

durable individual control over the land. And they acted as members

of associations, Fasci, which cut across--and sharply divided--communi-

ty after community. Up to the revolutions of 1848 and 1860, the dis-

tance-cost of communications remained high, the uncertainty of control

over land rose, the relative value of land (at least with respect to

labor) moved up, and the power-homogeneity of communities probably

didn't decline very much. As the century wore on, land passed defini-

tively into bourgeois hands, external communications proliferated,

communities became increasingly divided with respect to power, and new forms of rural collective action took over. The contrast does not prove my general case. It is at least consistent with the argument.

Conclusion

Perhaps the old theories of urbanization and collective action are partly right, after all. If the arguments of this paper are sound, the urbanization of the world really has produced a decline in the relative importance of communities as bases of collective action. If the arguments are sound, it will continue to do so. Where the masters failed, I think, was in explaining how and why the decline occurred. Moral decay and decreasing solidarity are inappropriate explanations. They are nearly impossible to define and measure reliably. And where we come close to defining and measuring them, they don't work as they are supposed to.

Collective action depends to some degree on solidarity, to be sure. But the degree is small and the relationship contingent. It is not clear, in any case, that urbanization does sap the solidarity of communities, if we mean by "solidarity" the extent to which people have strong personal ties to others within the same localities. The decline in that regard is probably relative rather than absolute: local ties have diminished little or not at all, extralocal ties have increased. One can notice the rising proportion of extralocal contacts, and regret it. One can compare present conditions of solidarity with an ideal integrated folk community and find the present wanting. But on the basis of present evidence one cannot claim that urbanization produced an absolute decline in community solidarity.

The _relative_ decline in communities as bases of collective action,
if I have analyzed it correctly, has resulted from changes in the
structure of power inside and outside communities, from shifts in the
relative efficiency of concentrated and dispersed groups in mobilizing
resources, and from stabilization of the claims made by communities
on other groups. Urbanization played a part in these transformations.
So did other changes which have been generally associated with urban-
ization in the western experience, but are by no means intrinsic to
urbanization: the formation of national states, the growth of inter-
national markets, industrial concentration. Any serious effort to
check my assertions against the historical record will have to include
some means of separating the effects of urbanization as such from the
effects of other massive changes. Anyone who wishes to generalize,
however tentatively, from the western experience to that of today's
urbanizing world will have to make the same separation. Today state-
making, industrial concentration and the extension of markets are all
taking different courses from those they followed in the European
heyday; their correlations with urbanization differ as well.

My analysis indicates that deliberate "community organization"
as a tactic for engineering change is only likely to work under an
unusual set of conditions. Community organization consists essentially
of lowering mobilization costs by creating leadership, establishing
communications lines and feeding in information. Generally speaking,
the tactic should work better when the community in question is al-
ready partly mobilized, when it is relatively powerful, when it is
relatively invulnerable to repression, and where claims which the
group is already making are being challenged by other groups. In

those circumstances a strategy which lends power, facilitates mobili-
zation and provides protection against repression through coalition
with important outsiders looks like an effective complement to com-
munity organization tactics.

A territorial community should be a more favorable vehicle for
collective action than other kinds of groups where the community is
homogeneous with respect to power, where there are important barriers
to long-distance communication, and control over land is valuable and
unstable. In the contemporary North American urban scene, a wealthy,
segregated ethnic group in an area of changing population and land
use comes to mind as a prime candidate. But for the most part a legal
association based not on proximity but on class, occupation or other
common interest seems a much more likely vehicle for collective ac-
tion in the world's metropolises. Whether it is also a more effective
vehicle for accomplishing common ends is, of course, a question this
paper has not addressed at all.

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