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RURAL COLLECTIVE ACTION IN MODERN EUROPE

Charles Tilly  
The University of Michigan  
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The Center for Research on  
Social Organization  
The University of Michigan  
330 Packard Street #214  
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104

Europe's peasants paid for the expansion of capitalism and the rise of national states. They paid directly by producing or yielding the bulk of the requisite land, labor commodities and capital. They paid indirectly by losing their collective control over the local disposition of land, labor, commodities and capital. In the process, they stopped being peasants. They often fought both against the demands that they pay and against the threats to their peasantry. In the short run, they sometimes won. But in the long run, they always lost.

By now, peasants have almost disappeared from the European landscape; as peasants, they have lost almost all their power. Their successors, the rural proletarians and commercial farmers, have fought on both sides: against the increasing pressure of the state and the market, for a share of control over the state and the market. On the whole, Europe's rural populations have been less intensely involved in large-scale struggles for power than have the people of cities. Yet their involvement has not been negligible. At a local scale, the rural population has often been intensely involved in struggles for power. This essay surveys the forms and loci of that involvement over the last few hundred years.

Let us take peasants to be members of households whose major activity is farming, which produce a major part of the goods and services they consume, which exercise substantial control over the land they farm, and which supply the major part of their labor requirements from their own energies. If we then take "rural" to mean those areas in which agriculture is the predominant activity, Europe's rural population has long included a wide variety of people besides peasants. The woodchopper, the carter, the nun, the smith are stock figures in the rural comedy. Within

agriculture itself, the landlord, the cash-crop specialist, the hired hand, the day-laborer, the servant, the migratory harvest worker, the part-time artisan have all played crucial parts both in production and in politics. Each major class of the rural population has had a characteristically different form of involvement in conflict.

Nevertheless, until recent times Europe was one of the world's major areas of peasant agriculture. The majority of the European population consisted, until recently, of peasants. We can therefore reasonably concentrate on the actions of peasants while trying to distinguish peasants from the rest of the rural population, and trying to relate the peasants to the non-peasants.

Since the meeting for which I intend this paper deals with peasant movements, we should reflect on the meaning of the word. In his useful discussion of the concept "social movement," Paul Wilkinson lays out three criteria:

1. A social movement is a deliberate collective endeavor to promote change in any direction and by any means, not excluding violence, illegality, revolution or withdrawal into "utopian" community. . .
2. A social movement must evince a minimal degree of organization, though this may range from a loose, informal or partial level of organization to the highly institutionalized and bureaucratized movement and the corporate group. . .
3. A social movement's commitment to change and the raison d'être of its organization are founded on the conscious volition, normative commitment to the movement's aims or beliefs,

and active participation on the part of the followers or members . . . (Wilkinson 1971: 27).

The three criteria--orientation to change, organization and normative commitment--have a refreshing simplicity and workability. They contrast nicely with the frequent efforts of theorists to make the unrealism of the group's ends or the illegitimacy of its chosen means set off social movements from other forms of collective action. If we consider collective action to be any application of pooled resources on behalf of common ends, then a social movement is a special kind of sustained collective action: it is collective action in which an organized group of committed people deliberately seek to promote change. A peasant movement, then, is simply such an effort in which the members are (or perhaps claim themselves to be) predominantly peasant.

Although the description and explanation of peasant movements in modern Europe would be a large enough task, I want to broaden the inquiry in two ways. First, I want to look at rural activists in general before closing in on the peasantry. Second, I want to consider a variety of collective actions, some of which have neither the sustained character nor the deliberate orientation to change which would qualify them as social movements. That will place the movements in context.

The aims of this paper, then, are partly descriptive and partly analytical. On the descriptive side, I shall enumerate some of the broad structural changes in the European countryside over the past few centuries, some of the chief means by which rural Europeans have carried on collective action, and some of the main ways in which the predominant forms of collective action have changed. On the analytic side,

I shall suggest some explanations for the changes and variations in predominant forms of collective action. The explanations will have to do mainly with the growth of capitalism, the expansion of national states, and the consequent transformation of rural social structure. Then, only then, will I comment on the conditions under which peasant movements arise and on the conditions in which they achieve their objectives.

In this hasty first draft, I omit almost all the scholarly trimmings which would make my assertions credible and palatable: the detailed citations of sources and previous arguments, the judicious qualifications, the concrete illustrations, the systematic evidence. The paper which follows consists mainly of unadorned assertions summarizing my own reflections and research on the problems at hand. If the paper survives its first round of criticism, there will be time enough for elaboration and defense.

#### What Sort of Peasant?

The real European peasants little resembled their traditional portraits. Demographic historians are beginning to reveal a European peasantry which was fairly mobile on the small geographic scale, which controlled its fertility in a crudely rational way, which responded sensitively to changes in the prices of commodities and of labor. We discover an active market in rural land and a well-developed flow of agricultural products to cities long before the nineteenth century. We discover--as we shall see later--a peasantry abundantly aware of its rights, canny about local political realities and far from blinded by ignorance and superstition. Not that European peasants were somehow heroic and enlightened by the standards of twentieth-century observers; they were self-interested short-run maximizers like other

people. But they were not stupid, stolid, fanatical, servile, fiercely attached to particular plots of land or traditional ways of cultivating them. Except when they had to be. That old portrait of the European peasantry sprang from the brushes of aristocrats and bourgeois who thus explained the resistance of the rural population to having its land, labor and capital subordinated to the needs of international markets and national states.

The situation of European peasants differed in some important regards from that of their counterparts in other major peasant areas such as China, Japan and India. For one thing, from the time the Roman Empire fell apart, they were never subject to the rule of a single large political structure; before the emergence of multiple national states lay a period of even greater political fragmentation among principalities, bishoprics, city-states and other small structures. As a consequence, at any given point in time the European peasantry as a whole was experiencing a wide variety of fiscal policies, demands for military service, legal systems, forms of political control.

Again, corporate structures were relatively weak among European peasants. Although there was some tendency for agglomeration into large, complex households and for the emergence of solidary lineages toward the South and the East, in general European peasants settled for weakly patrilineal systems of inheritance, traced kinship through shifting and loosely-bounded bilateral kindreds, and built their households of nuclear or stem families, temporarily augmented or depleted as a function of the nuclear family's current labor supply.

If the European peasantry lived with weak corporate structures, it compensated to some degree by building exceptionally strong communities.

By strength I do not mean harmony or solidarity, but two other things: first, the extent to which the local population as such exerted collective control over local land, labor and capital; second, the extent to which the local population acted as an entity in pursuit of its members' common interests. The interaction with expanding states probably gave a temporary boost to the peasant community's capacity for collective action outside its own ambit; its employment as an instrument of tax collection, for example, probably added to the community's extractive powers and also, paradoxically, to its short-run capacity to resist unjust taxation.

The exceptional control of European peasant communities over local land, labor and capital showed up in such arrangements as communal regulation of planting, harvesting, gleaning, pasturage and disposition of crops. It also took the form of collective regulation of marriage, settlement, religious practice and exchange of labor among households, although these controls were weaker and more variable than those directly touching the use of the community's land. Very likely the earlier importance of the manor as the unit of settlement, the prevalence of concentrated villages instead of hamlets or isolated farms the predominant organization of religious practice within well-defined parishes all contributed to the relative strength of European peasant communities.

The European peasantry was relatively homogeneous, as compared with peasantries in most of the world. Only China had so little linguistic variation over so large a population and area. Kinship patterns, legal practices, religious forms, agricultural routines, annual cycles, folklore; perhaps even life plans were relatively uniform over a whole

continent, by contrast with their variability in India, Southeast Asia or South America. As in China and Japan, the extension of a single empire over the entire region played a major part in the homogenization of peasant culture; the difference is that in Europe the empire disappeared for good, but the cultural forms associated with it survived.

This homogeneity was not so much a feature of the European peasantry as of the European population as a whole. The same is true of the final condition we must consider: the existence of a large-scale system of trade, markets and economic interdependence incorporating almost the entire territory of the continent. By the sixteenth century, for example, a well-defined division of labor was emerging between the grain-exporting regions of eastern Europe and the grain-importing, manufacturing areas of the Low Countries and southern England. The division of labor appeared on the commercial map, among other ways, in the role of Danzig as the outlet for wheat from the plains of Russia, Poland and eastern Germany, in the role of Copenhagen as a point of transshipment and customs collection, in the role of Amsterdam as the great grain port of the west. Immanuel Wallerstein argues that the sixteenth century brought the emergence of a "European world-economy" in which England and Holland rapidly became the dominants, and which later extended its control to the entire world.

These, then, were the distinctive conditions in which the European peasantry acted through most of the period after 1500: political fragmentation, weak corporate structures, strong communities, cultural homogeneity, involvement in a large-scale system of economic interdependence and control. No one of these conditions sets off Europe from all



other world areas of peasant predominance. But together they define a special situation. It is a situation in which landlords are relatively powerful vis à vis the political authorities, indeed often are the political authorities on a local or regional scale. It is a situation in which a political or economic invention--a form of taxation, a kind of military service, a reorganization of production--which works one place is likely to be rapidly and cheaply transferable to other settings.

It is a situation in which peasant communities (rather than kin groups, religious sodalities, secret societies or the labor forces of particular productive organizations such as plantations or latifundia) are likely to be the principal vehicles of peasant collective action. It is a situation, finally, in which shifts in market relations to distant producers or consumers produce important changes in the welfare and interpersonal relations of the local peasant population.

#### Who Else Was There?

Let us stick with the idea of the "rural" population as the people living in settlements whose predominant activity is agriculture. Let us note for the record that several elements of the definition are problematic from a theoretical and from a practical point of view: 1) Who "lives in" a given place? How many transients, seasonal workers, individuals based here but working elsewhere shall we count? 2) What are the boundaries of a "settlement"? Shall we include the weavers' hamlet or the commercial center of a farming community? What of the village on its way to absorption into the suburbs of Zurich or Manchester? 3) How do we recognize a "predominant activity"? If three quarters of the local population works on farms but three-fifths of the marketed output comes from textiles, what then?

We can easily invent working definitions to meet these difficulties. The point is that the choice of working definitions will determine our estimates of the rural population's composition. The more we confine the rural population to the people durably located in clusters of dwellings the majority of whose occupants spend the majority of their time in agriculture, the higher we will raise our estimates of the proportion of the European rural population peasant, and the slower we will make the measured changes in the composition of the rural population. But the more we do so, the more we will also create "non-rural" populations living on farms or in small settlements in the midst of farms.

We will learn more, I think, by including everyone who spends a significant part of the year in a given place, by taking the lowest-level units in the political and/or marketing hierarchies as our settlements, and by letting the proportion of the community's total available time devoted to agriculture determine agriculture's predominance. The result of such criteria is to include a great many non-peasants in the rural population, and to observe great, rapid fluctuations in both its size and its composition.

No occupational categories are independent of the social structures within which they operate. As a result, any set of general categories for the whole rural population will do violence to almost every particular rural area. With that warning, we may group Europe's rural population into the following rough categories:

1. landlords and managers
2. commercial farmers
3. peasants

4. land-poor and landless agricultural laborers
5. land-poor and landless industrial workers
6. service workers, including professionals

The actual application of these categories to the sorting of rural population will require the extensive use of statements beginning "To the extent that. . ."; e.g., to the extent that peasants specialize in cash crops but retain their control over the land, they become commercial farmers; to the extent that commercial farmers substitute labor hired from outside the household for labor within the household, they become landlords or managers.

Many more distinctions are possible, sometimes essential; in much of western Europe, for example, it would confuse many issues to lump together domestic servants, hired hands, day-laborers and seasonal workers within the land-poor and landless. Nevertheless, the crude categorization catches the two fundamental distinctions in rural Europe: the directness of the individual's (or household's) involvement in exploitation of land, and the extent to which the individual (or household) depends for survival on the sale of labor power. A decline in the first is a large part of what we mean by industrialization. A rise in the second is the essence of what we mean by proletarianization.

Europe experienced great change along both dimensions during the five centuries after 1500. For the continent as a whole, the proportion of the rural population directly involved in the exploitation of land declined irregularly through the eighteenth century, then began to rise rapidly some time in the nineteenth. The dependence of the rural population on the sale of labor power rose significantly from 1500

until some time in the nineteenth century, then began a slow decline as all but the peasants and commercial farmers started to leave, but began to rise again in the twentieth century as capital-intensive agriculture squeezed out its small competitors. The earlier proletarianization occurred not only because landlords and managers consolidated their control over the land and squeezed peasants into wage labor, but also because rural manufacturing multiplied. There is another poorly-understood origin of the proletariat: a natural increase in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which greatly exceeded the expansion of opportunities to work the land on one's own account. My own view is that the natural increase was initially a consequence of proletarianization, as individuals whose lives did not depend on peasant arrangements for inheritance and succession married younger and had more children. But there is little question that once the process got started two other things happened: a) declining mortality also contributed importantly to the natural increase, b) the multiplication of the rural proletarian population accelerated the proletarianization of the remainder of the rural population.

#### The Big Changes Behind

Behind the shifts in the rural population's composition lay massive changes in the organization of European social life. For present purposes, we need to keep our eyes on four interdependent transformations: statemaking, urbanization, industrialization and commercialization. Let us consider statemaking first. In 1500, Europe had a great many formally autonomous governments--about 500, by one count. They varied considerably in size and character: principalities,

bishoprics, city-states, federations, empires and a few entities already recognizable as weak national states. In the centuries that followed, the number of formally autonomous governments shrank dramatically; most contemporary maps of Europe outline about thirty-five separate entities, including such ministates as Monaco and San Marino. That great consolidation of governmental power occurred through military struggle and dynastic manipulation. The efforts to build the organization and assemble the resources for the struggle created large, centralized state apparatuses. In the process, the managers of the state apparatus subordinated or absorbed the rival authorities within their subject territories, created routine ways of extracting resources from the population and extended the range of activities the state apparatus monitored and controlled. As this happened, national states became the dominant organizations in all of Europe. The dominance was well established by the middle of the eighteenth century, but the power of states relative to other organizations continued to grow long after that--at least until the emergence of mass parties and big corporations in the early twentieth century, perhaps until our own time.

Statemaking mattered to rural collective action in more ways than one. First, the statemakers drew a large portion of the required resources directly from the countryside. That is most obvious with the rise of taxation and the expansion of military conscription. For Europe as a whole, the great bulk of tax revenues before the twentieth centuries came either from direct assessments of rural land or from levies on commodities regularly consumed by the rural population. When a rapid increase or an invention of a new tax came along, it was usually

in the one category or the other. As Gabriel Ardant has pointed out, when this insistent demand reached populations which were mainly engaged in subsistence agriculture, it put great pressure on them to market commodities which had previously been produced for local consumption only, or treated as part of the household capital: the cow, dairy products, garden crops, a piece of land. As Ardant does not point out, in predominantly peasant communities someone is likely to have a well-founded claim on any of the factors of production and any commodity or service produced locally; hence a new or expanded demand from the state ordinarily conflicts with someone's established right to the resources in question. The same is true of military conscription, which withdraws labor from the household and the community--the labor of young men, which is often crucial to the continuity of household or community. As we shall see, a great deal of rural collective action centered on taxation and conscription.

Statemaking also impinged on the countryside through the extension of routine administrative control into the village. The pace, timing and effectiveness of administrative penetration varied widely from one part of Europe to another, but everywhere rural communities acquired governmental structures which were sanctioned, subsidized, monitored, reformed and employed by higher authorities who were in turn directly or indirectly responsible to the state. A significant part of statemaking therefore consisted of the imposition of local governmental structures, the support of those who staffed them, and the implanting, supplanting or absorbing of local authorities. This process, too, generated plenty of collective action in the countryside.

Finally, where states did not lay direct claims on resources, they became heavily involved in regulating the use and transfer of resources. The best-documented case is the involvement of states in the production, consumption and (especially) distribution of food. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, all European states created extensive apparatuses for the surveillance and assurance of the food supply of their cities, armies and governmental personnel. To some degree, they all promoted the creation of national markets in food. By the nineteenth century, states began to relax their direct controls over the distribution of food as rising agricultural productivity and improved shipping reduced the vulnerability of the non-agricultural population to starvation. From that point on, however, state involvement in production tended to increase; price supports, acreage allotments, marketing orders and governmental certification of sensitive products became standard features of state policy. On balance, the involvement of states in food supply has increased steadily since the seventeenth century. Less visibly and less completely, the same trend holds for state regulation of the use of rural land, of rural labor, of rural capital.

#### Urbanization

The urbanization of Europe helped transform the countryside by augmenting the demand for rural products, providing an outlet for rural labor, aiding the development of large organizations which imposed further controls over the countryside, and elaborating a system of communication linking rural areas with the rest of the world. By definition, it also shifted the relative bulk of the rural population. If by "urban" population we mean simply the population settled in predominantly non-agricultural places of a substantial size, Europe only began a strong,

continuous drive to urbanization late in the eighteenth century. Before then, there was plenty of urban growth, but at times the rural population grew faster than the urban population.

Exactly how did the urbanization of Europe happen? Any process of urbanization breaks down into three components:

1. net migration between rural and urban areas, the difference between total flows in one direction and total flows in the other;
2. differences in natural increase between rural and urban areas, which break down further into the balance between births and deaths in each set of areas;
3. the net transformation of existing settlements from urban to rural and rural to urban.

In Europe as a whole, the natural increase of cities did not play a major part in urbanization until late in the nineteenth century. Indeed, the population in larger European cities probably suffered a natural decrease because of high mortality until some time after 1800. The transformation of existing rural settlements into urban ones (e.g. through a shift to predominantly non-agricultural production, or through incorporation of outlying agricultural villages into expanding cities) bulked larger throughout the period after 1500. But the major city-builder by far was migration out of rural areas. Between 1500 and 1900 (a period in which the population of Europe rose from 50-odd million to 400 million), net migration to cities from rural areas was on the order of 100 or 200 million people. Thus the countryside participated directly in European urbanization; it supplied not only the food and the capital, but also the very people involved.

Table 1 presents estimates of the European population in very large places--cities of 100,000 or more--at fifty-year intervals from



1500 on. (It is reasonable to assume a gross relationship between fluctuations in the largest cities and fluctuations in the other cities of the system.) The figures indicate a tripling of the big-city population during the sixteenth century, a very small increase during the seventeenth century, a doubling during the eighteenth century (especially after 1750), a nearly tenfold increase during the nineteenth century, and another brisk pace of increase during the twentieth.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The rural and small-town populations also grew, however. The proportion of the European population in very large places therefore increased much more slowly. In fact, it is possible that Europe de-urbanized during the seventeenth century, as the rural population grew faster than the urban. That could happen through de-urbanization of existing settlements or through net migration from urban to rural areas, but in this case the logical candidate would be a rate of natural increase greater in the country than in the city. Whether the de-urbanization actually occurred we cannot tell without comprehensive data concerning settlements smaller than 100,000. If it turns out to be true, it will fit with two big facts about the seventeenth century: 1) the widespread rebellions against centralizing powers which temporarily checked their extractive capacities, and thus their maintenance of courts, administrators, armies and service industries in their capitals, 2) the spread of industry into the countryside, in search of cheap, unorganized, unregulated labor. Although the seventeenth century saw plenty of urban

TABLE 1  
 European Population in Cities of 100,000 and More,  
 1500-1950

<u>Date</u>	<u>Total Population of Europe (Millions)</u>	<u>Number of Cities of 100,000 +</u>	<u>Population in Cities of 100,000 + (millions)</u>	<u>Percent of total population in cities of 100,000 +</u>
1500	50-60	4	.75 - .85	1.2 - 1.7
1550	65-75	7-10	1.10 - 1.65	1.5 - 2.5
1600	80-90	13-14	1.85 - 2.85	2.1 - 3.6
1650	95-105	11-12	2.35 - 2.50	2.2 - 2.6
1700	115-125	14	2.65 - 3.10	2.1 - 2.7
1750	135-145	13-15	3.35 - 3.75	2.3 - 2.8
1800	187	23	5.40	2.9
1850	226	43	12.66	4.8
1900	401	143	49.14	12.3
1950	548	374	119.19	21.8

Source: Charles Tilly, Karen Fonde and Ann V. O'Shea "Statistics on the Urbanization of Europe, 1500-1950," unpublished compilation circulated by the Center for Western European Studies, The University of Michigan, 1972. Compiled from a wide variety of published sources.

rebellions and had its share of revolts consisting mainly of aristocrats and their retainers, it was very likely western Europe's high point of peasant involvement in armed insurrection. Whatever demands and complaints the seventeenth-century insurrections eventually articulated, they generally began with resistance to some new form of taxation imposed by a prince or parliament to meet the rising costs of military activity. The peasants dug in when the taxes touched land, crops and livestock. Given the frequency and sometime success of the seventeenth-century insurrections, it is possible that the tax gatherers had temporarily overreached themselves. They may have been forced to retrench their ambitions and demands, and thus have applied a short-run check to the city-building expansion of courts, administrations and markets.

This first link, between a possible seventeenth-century de-urbanization of Europe and the extractive efforts of expanding states, is quite hypothetical. The link between de-urbanization (or at least a slowing of urbanization) and the growth of rural industry during the seventeenth century is somewhat firmer. A large portion of that century's industrial growth resulted from an entrepreneur's linking of an underemployed rural labor force to urban markets via such mechanisms as the putting-out system. Although the mercantile nodes built up in cities and towns, the labor force involved in industry grew disproportionately in the countryside. Contrary to our twentieth-century prejudices, a kind of industrialization may well have promoted de-urbanization. In any case, the decisive shift of the European population to cities did not begin until the spectacular growth of large, centralized, urban, job-providing organizations got underway after 1750.

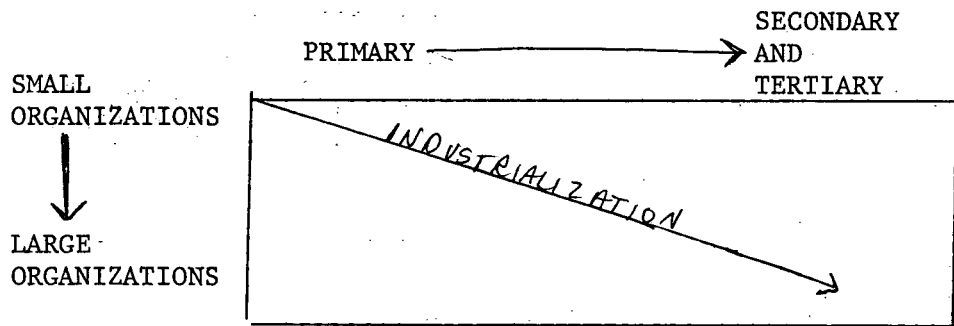
In absolute terms, the rural population did not peak until long after that. Over Europe as a whole, there were probably more people living in predominantly agricultural settlements in 1850 than ever before; that absolute number did not begin to decline significantly until late in the century. The population directly engaged in agriculture (as opposed to the population living in predominantly agricultural settlements) appears to have reached its peak around 1900, and only to have begun a significant decline in the 1930s. (The difference in timing between the decline of the rural population and the decline of the agricultural population is due, of course, to the fact that rural crafts, industries, services and commerce declined before agriculture itself declined or became less labor-intensive).

It is not so easy to trace the absolute numbers of peasants. That is partly because governments and researchers have not collected their population statistics with the distinction between peasant and non-peasant in mind, but mainly because the distinction itself refers to a location on a continuum rather than a neatly-bounded category. My guesses are that a) in absolute numbers, peasants reached their European high point some time around 1800 only to decline rapidly thereafter and b) Europe had far greater disparities in the pace and timing of the growth-decline of peasants than it did in fluctuations of rural population or population in agriculture. In much of eastern Europe, in southern England, in southern Spain and perhaps in southern Italy as well, true peasants were already giving way in the seventeenth century, as large landlords consolidated their holdings, displaced peasant smallholdings in favor of pasturage or large grain fields, and tilted the agricultural

labor force toward landless and land-poor laborers. In France, northern Spain, much of Italy, the Alps, western and southern Germany, the Low countries, Scandinavia and the rest of the British isles, on the other hand, peasants survived--sometimes even prospered--into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In those areas (to simplify unconscionably) the peasantry eventually disappeared along two rather different paths: into landless wage labor, into cash-crop farming.

Industrialization, Commercialization and Capitalism

We can conveniently conceptualize industrialization as a two-dimensional shift of productive activity: out of primary industry into secondary and tertiary production; into larger and larger organizations:



Before the French Revolution, Europe's industrial growth occurred mainly along the primary/secondary/tertiary dimension. Despite the development of the joint-stock company and other devices for pooling capital or labor, the average scale of the actual units of production may have declined as cottage industry and its equivalents flourished. The nineteenth-century growth of the factory, the corporation, the bureaucracy and the twentieth-century emergence of large organizations in services, retail trade, construction and agriculture shifted the axis of change, without stopping the movement into secondary and tertiary industry.

These changes took place mainly in cities, but they had large impacts on the countryside. They generated unparalleled demands for capital, labor, agricultural products and, eventually, land; a significant share of all of these came from rural stocks. In most countries, they also reduced the political weight of the countryside much more rapidly than the sheer decline of rural numbers would have led anyone to expect; the political advantage went to those who controlled large organizations.

The commercialization of European production preceded the dramatic growth in scale, and accompanied the shift toward secondary and tertiary industry. By commercialization I mean the increasing subjection of the factors of production and of the goods and services produced to market control. The process is again two-dimensional: markets increase in scale, the range of resources subject to their control expands. Both changes were transforming the European countryside throughout the period we have been considering. But the pace and timing of commercialization varied enormously by region and resource. By the end of the eighteenth century, for example, northeastern France, the Low Countries, northwestern Germany and southern England had already built a large-scale market in grains, while the surrounding areas marketed much less of their grain, and at a smaller scale. The same commercialization of the grain market had occurred in the immediate hinterlands of major mercantile, industrial and administrative centers elsewhere: Milan, Barcelona, Moscow and so on. In a different way, but almost to the same degree, the grain-producing areas of Hungary, Poland, eastern Prussia and other sections of eastern Europe began a significant commercialization of their

production in the sixteenth century. On the other hand, the areas of thoroughgoing peasant production were--almost by definition--the areas in which commercialization proceeded slowly and late.

As defined here, commercialization and industrialization together produce capitalism in the classic Marxist sense of the term.

E. J. Hobsbawm puts it this way:

For Marx the conjunction of three phenomena is necessary to account for the development of capitalism out of feudalism: first. . . a rural social structure which allows the peasantry to be "set free" at a certain point; second, the urban craft development which produces specialized, independent, non-agricultural commodity production in the form of the crafts; and third, accumulations of monetary wealth derived from trade and usury.

(Hobsbawm 1964: 46).

Out of these conditions, according to Marx, emerged a system of production for exchange-value (instead of use) performed mainly by wage-workers under the direction of persons who controlled means of production requiring substantial capital investments: capitalism. Capitalist industry and capitalist agriculture were both, by these standards, well launched in the seventeenth century, but only under full sail in the nineteenth and twentieth. Without acute discomfort, we can describe the entire process from the seventeenth century onward as the penetration of capitalism into the European countryside.

#### How Statemaking, Urbanization and the Growth of Capitalism Affected Rural Collective Action

Collective action, broadly conceived, consists of the application of pooled resources to common ends. Collective action runs the whole

range from continuous, highly coordinated actions (such as a professional association's initiation of a letter-writing campaign) to discontinuous, uncoordinated actions (such as a crowd's attack on the symbols of an unpopular regime). Here I want to concentrate on the discontinuous end of the range, and on the actions of ordinary rural people rather than of elites or governments.

At this end of the range, it is useful to distinguish between three big classes of collective action: competitive, reactive and proactive. The distinctions depend on the claims the collective actors are asserting in their action. Competitive actions lay claim to resources also claimed by other groups which the actor defines as rivals, competitors, or at least as participants in the same contest. For example, Elina Haavio-Mannila has studied the institutionalized village fights which were prevalent in rural Finland up to the end of the nineteenth century. The combatants usually consisted of two previously-organized fighting gangs, each representing a specific locality. The fighting reinforced the claims of the victors to control of the marriageable females within their villages, to dominance in their own territories, and to a kind of deference from the rest of the population. Some version of the village fight was a commonplace almost everywhere in Europe.

Such events as the village fight appear inconsequential in retrospect. But people took them seriously, and plenty of people died in them. In general form, they were similar to the common struggles of rival groups of artisans to seize control of each other's symbols or to disrupt each other's public ceremonies, as well as to the brawls which recurrently set soldiers and civilians, people from different linguistic or religious groups, or competing groups of students against each other. Such actions



were generally short-lived and small in scale. In times of crisis, however, they could become long, large and lethal.

Reactive collective actions consist of group efforts to reassert established claims when someone challenges or violates them. In a standard European scenario, a group of villagers who had long pastured their cattle, gathered firewood and gleaned in common fields found a landlord or local officials--or, more likely, the two in collaboration--fencing the fields by newly-acquired or newly-declared right of property; the villagers commonly warned against the fencing; if the warning went unheeded, they attacked the fences and the fencers. They acted in the name of rights they still considered valid. The same basic outline applies to the bulk of European food riots, tax rebellions, local actions against military conscription and machine-breaking. Reactive actions usually remained quite local in scope. But occasionally--as in England's "Swing" riots of 1830 or the French "Flour War" of 1775--they covered whole regions and stirred up whole countries.

Proactive collective actions assert group claims which have not previously been exercised. We are familiar with the demonstration: in its pure form, a named group appears in a public place, displays its identity and its grievances, affiliations or demands via symbols, placards and banners, voices them in speeches, chants, shouts or songs, and identifies the person or group to whom the message is addressed by means of physical location, symbolic action or explicit statement. Although it had important predecessors, the demonstration came into its own as a way of doing public business with the mass electoral politics of the nineteenth century. The strike, the sponsored public meeting, the seizure

of premises by an insurrectionary committee, the petition drive are other common proactive forms.

In rural Europe, the competitive forms of collective action have been around for a long time. At least at the discontinuous end of the scale we are considering here, they have dwindled away since 1800. Reactive forms, by contrast, became more and more common in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, and remained important into the nineteenth. Tax rebellions, food riots, anti-conscription movements, invasions of land and attacks on machines were the dominant discontinuous forms of collective action in the European countryside from about 1600 to 1850. They disappeared in different parts of Europe roughly as function of the commercialization, urbanization and industrialization: early in England and the Netherlands, late in Spain, Greece and Russia, and so on.

The proactive forms of collective action became predominant (in terms of numbers of people involved and in terms of political significance) in something like the same rhythm. However, the illusion that one immediately replaced the other is due to the fact that proactive forms of collective action were building up in European urban areas in the nineteenth century as the reactive forms declined in rural areas. If we consider the countryside alone, we discover a rather different situation: 1) in general, a long lull of inactivity appeared in rural areas between the last surges of reactive collective action and the first extensive proactive stirring; 2) in most of rural Europe, the scope and intensity of proactive movements never came close to the scope and intensity of their reactive predecessors.

Why the shift from competitive to reactive to proactive? Broadly speaking, the reactive forms began to predominate in the European countryside

after 1600 because of statemaking, urbanization and the growth of capitalism. Each of these processes impinged on the rural population as a series of claims on resources--land, labor, capital, commodities--which were already committed to local ends by well-established rights and routines. Country people fought back. They tried to withhold young men from military service, money, crops or livestock from the tax collector, land from the enclosing landlord. They did so in the name of established rights.

Of course, other conditions made a collective response more likely than passive resistance, individual bargaining or capitulation: the strength of local organization, the availability of allies, the weakness of the authorities, the weight of the prior claims on the resources in question, the acuteness of the current need for them. Food riots came with food shortages, all right; the point is that in times of shortage they only occurred where and when the users of a local market had a well-established prior right to grain produced or stored locally, and that right seemed threatened by the failure of the local authorities to act against hoarders, speculators, gougers or exporting merchants. As the demand for marketed grain stepped up in the cities and the armies, more and more local authorities found themselves caught between the desire of merchants to export and the insistence of the local population that their rights came first. In similar ways, the other reactive forms of collective action became prevalent as the demands of city, state, and national market impinged on the countryside.

Why, then, did the reactive forms ever disappear? Mainly, I think, for two reasons: 1) because the repressive power of European governments in the countryside increased during the nineteenth century; 2) because

the local organization on which the collective action was based disintegrated as capitalism transformed the countryside. In western Europe, at least, state-backed policing of rural areas via such specialized forces as gendarmerie, constabulary and carabinieri greatly expanded during the nineteenth century. Prior to that expansion, local authorities had to rely on militias and on detachments of the regular army when they wanted to check collective action by force; they had a great deal of discretion as to taking any action at all. The professionalization of policing meant that a force which was experienced in crowd control and responsive to directives from outside the local community patrolled the countryside regularly. Combined with the technical assistance of the telegraph, the railroad and the expanded governmental bureaucracy, the growth of rural policing multiplied the state's involvement, and the state's effectiveness, in checking rural collective action.

The other side is the disintegration of the local organization on which the reactive claims were based. As rural crafts lost ground, so did the structures which united the craftsmen. As migrants streamed out of the countryside, their home communities lost the young people who would previously have stood in the front ranks. As the rural poor grew poorer, they committed their remaining energies and resources to survival. As peasants stopped being peasants, the specific commitment of each day of household labor, of each garden patch, of each bushel of rye to some segment of the common enterprise declined. As a consequence, the rural population's capacity and propensity for collective action diminished.

Eventually, however, proactive movements arose in some parts of the European countryside. In the Po Valley, the landless laborers

on big farms were already making wage demands and organizing strikes in the 1870s. At the same time, smallholders and rural craftsmen of Andalusia were forming into syndicates, affiliating with the anarchist movement, and making demands for a say in prices, wages and working conditions. Thirty years later, winegrowers of Champagne marched through the streets of Reims demanding a fair price for their products. Specialized associations--cooperatives, fasci, unions and others--generally lay behind these actions. The associations drew disproportionately on relatively skilled rural workers and farmers whose entire welfare depended on the market price of labor or of the commodities they produced; they were not the doing of peasants, of the very poor, of the floating population. The associations were commonly homogeneous in class composition and often established alliances with other associations (not necessarily of the same class composition) elsewhere. They contended over national policies, national markets and national structures of power to a degree unheard of in the earlier reactive waves of collective action. How they came into being is one of the major themes in this paper's final sections.

#### Rural Violence in Italy, Germany and France

My collaborators and I have done painstaking enumerations of violent events above a certain scale in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Italy, Germany and France; we are currently undertaking the same sorts of enumerations for Great Britain, but they are not far enough along to report here. Collective actions which lead to violence are not, of course, representative of all forms of collective action. But the use of violence as a sort of marker for the events we want to trace

increases the likelihood that both published sources and archives will contain detailed information concerning the events. That is both because damage of persons or objects (which is what I mean by violence) attracts the attentions of authorities and reports, and because the violence is commonly a direct consequence of the intervention of authorities in what otherwise would have been a nonviolent collective action; by and large, the involvement of officials of large organizations, including states, in any event greatly increases the volume of documentation the event leaves behind. Furthermore, the violent events typically appear as members of strings of events which are quite similar, but mainly nonviolent; strikes, meetings, demonstrations, angry gatherings, and so on. The occurrence of the violence in one member of the string tends to make the entire string visible. Thus an enumeration procedure which searches for violent events singles out relatively well-documented instances of collective action, but still has a fair chance of providing a first approximation of the general character of the discontinuous collective action going on in different places and periods.

In Italy, the larger-scale collective violence between the departure of Napoleon and the Revolution of 1848 was mainly urban; the most notable events were scattered attempts by small groups of liberal conspirators to take over one capital or another. The first widespread rural conflicts came with Lombardy's food riots of 1846. They consisted mainly of blockages--attempts to keep grain from moving out of a community on its way to market. The Lombardy food riots coincided with similar events in France, Germany, Spain and other parts of western Europe, all hit with poor harvests and high prices.

The Revolutions of 1848 brought more food riots, numerous attacks on tax collectors, and a spate of land invasions. The land invasions of both North and South saw the rural population repossessing commons and former peasant lands which bourgeois landlords had bought up. Although another round of food riots arrived in 1853, the next large-scale rural conflicts began with Garibaldi's drive up from the South in 1860. The land invasions, attacks on mills, brigandage and tax rebellions which occurred in Sicily, Apulia, Basilicata and elsewhere were marvelously ambivalent: apparently pro-Unification before the unifiers had cemented their power, apparently anti-Unification afterward. The change, of course, occurred less in the objectives the rural population itself was seeking than in the allies and enemies it acquired by seeking them. In the areas of weakest central control--notably Sicily--the conflicts continued through the 1860s.

In 1868 and 1869, the passage of a national milling tax, the macinato, excited movements against mills, municipalities and tax collectors in the major areas of rural wage-labor; the tax survived, and the attacks recurred into the 1890s. But in the 1870s a rather different kind of action spread: the strike of agricultural workers such as the ricegrowers of the Po Valley. From then until the Fascists consolidated their power, the laborers' strike was the predominant form of large-scale rural collective action in Italy. In Sicily from 1891 to 1894, however, the organizations called Fasci ("bundles" in the sense of groupings giving solidarity and strength) multiplied, and engaged in repeated local efforts to insure better contracts for sharecroppers and tenant farmers, to get higher wages for agricultural laborers and to reduce consumption taxes. The movement disintegrated in the bloody repression of 1894.

From that point on, the predominant forms of collective action in rural Italy did not change significantly for some time. There were recurrent "food riots," but now they were less often old-fashioned blockages or efforts to seize temporary control of the local market than demonstrations in which food prices figured as major grievances. There were land invasions in the South when the central power weakened, as in 1919-20. The actions which brought the Fascists to power were chiefly urban (in fact, they consisted especially of Fascist attacks on the headquarters and personnel of organized labor). That generalization, however, requires two significant qualifications: 1) the first targets of the city-based Fascist squads were the organized agricultural workers of the Po Valley. 2) rural workers did take part in the abortive general strikes against the Fascist takeover. Autonomous rural collective action on any scale disappeared under the Fascists. After World War II, it reappeared in its classic forms: agricultural strikes, land occupations, demonstrations about taxes and prices.

In Germany as well as Italy the large-scale collective action of the early nineteenth century was strongly concentrated in cities. 1830-31 and 1845-47 brought their rounds of rural food riots, the famous weavers' revolt of 1844 involved many rural workers, and the recurrent actions of the 1830s and 1840s against enclosing landlords and purchasers of village commons certainly drew in country people. Yet they were exceptions. Germany's only substantial break in governmental continuity came with the revolutions of 1848, which brought the expected anti-tax movements, food riots and actions against enclosing landlords, plus more peculiarly German religious conflicts including attacks on Jews. After



that point, the paths of Germany and Italy went in quite different directions. Except for the special case of mining regions, rural areas figured only slightly on the map of collective violence, and probably of collective action in general. Religious conflicts recurred into the twentieth century, rights to forests formerly held in common continued to generate conflict up to World War I, and food riots persisted past 1848, but Germany experienced nothing like the massive movements of Italian agricultural workers. Like the Fascists, the Nazis concentrated their destructive work in the cities where socialists, communists and organized workers clustered. And as in Italy once the authoritarian party had seized power autonomous rural collective action simply disappeared.

France provides a third experience for scrutiny. The rural collective violence of the earlier nineteenth century has many points in common with that of Germany and Italy: a prevalence of food riots, anti-tax movements, invasions of former common lands. In the French revolutions of 1830 and 1848 we can see an interesting pattern: a first stage strongly concentrated in the major cities, as the insurgents seize the instruments of national government; a second stage more widely dispersed over the country, as the new regime attempts to reestablish effective central control and encounters unexpected resistance. The resistance (most dramatically in rebellions against new taxes) did not necessarily mean that the countryside had remained or become counter-revolutionary, but that the agenda of the city-based revolutionaries differed from the agendas of their rural counterparts. A sort of extrapolation and transformation of the pattern occurred in 1851, when large segments of the French rural population rose against the coup de'état of Louis Napoleon.

That was the last large-scale collective action of the countryside for many years.

In the 1890s, smallholders and agricultural laborers--especially winegrowers--appeared on the national scene. They organized, demonstrated and struck with increasing frequency into the twentieth century. Their movement receded after 1907, and only reappeared on a large scale in the 1930s. Then the winegrowers found themselves in the company of dairy farmers and other producers; they joined national agrarian parties and political movements to a larger degree than they had before World War I. In the 1950s and 1960s, producers' actions again dominated the rural scene: coordinated withholding of crops, ceremonious dumping of milk or potatoes in public places, roadblocks, demonstrations demanding price supports. By this time, well-organized national pressure groups were speaking in the name of (if not always with the support of) "the peasantry" of France.

In Italy, Germany and France alike a significant shift from reactive to proactive forms of collective action occurred in the countryside between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In all three countries, the movement of common land into private hands, the granting of priority to the national market and the imposition of consumption taxes fueled conflict after conflict in rural areas. In the three of them, the major transfers of power at the national level produced parallel struggles on a smaller scale in the countryside. Yet there are important differences among France, Italy and Germany. Most notably, agricultural laborers organized and sustained a high level of collective action over a long period in Italy, played a lesser but still detectable part in French

agrarian movements, and figures little in German collective action at any time past the revolutions of 1848.

Peasants, in the strict sense of the word, contributed rather less to the collective actions we have reviewed than did other members of the rural population. In the nineteenth century, rural industrial workers and agricultural laborers were volatile. In the twentieth, the rural industrial workers had practically disappeared, but agricultural laborers continued their action for a while, and cash-crop producers became increasingly active. This summary holds best for France. Still, in none of the three countries were peasants the major rural actors.

Yet my enumeration of events is misleading in one regard. It suggests that two main types of people--commercial farmers and proletarians--organized and acted. Such a summary slights the importance of peasants who were undergoing proletarianization. Remember the main paths out of the peasantry: 1) into rural wage-labor (either agricultural or manufacturing), 2) into urban wage-labor (typically service industries), 3) into commercial farming. In Europe, peasants who found themselves on the path into rural wage-labor, but still had some claims on the land, seem to have had a special propensity to struggle. Their determination made a difference at two different points in the process of proletarianization. The first was the earlier round of struggles over enclosures, subdivision of common lands, farming out of forests, and other transfers of what had been public property into private ownership. The people who fought hardest, so far as I can tell, were those who were surviving as peasants by means of those supplementary rights of grazing, gleaning, wood-gathering and so on. The invaders of fields and forests were commonly landholders of a sort, but holders of too

little land to support a family without supplementary access to common resources. No doubt a substantial part of these people were already selling some of their household labor to survive; the suppression of common rights accelerated their proletarianization. So did the insistence that they find the cash to pay consumption taxes, and the increasing reluctance of local officials to subsidize the price of food and regulate its distribution in times of shortage and high prices. They reacted.

At a later stage in the process of proletarianization, we find peasants (or semi-peasants) who have managed to survive the first round of capitalist transformation by shifting to cash-crop production. Some of them are on their way out of the peasantry into viable commercial farming. But many of them find their specialized skills undercut by competition from big producers. The best-documented examples I know about are in winegrowing. In the village of Cruzy (Hérault), Harvey Smith shows us the shift of agriculture toward winegrowing as the railroads expand the available markets after 1850, the rise of a class of specialists in winegrowing who typically made a living from their own small land holdings in addition to (or after) hiring out their labor to others, the disintegration of their position as the larger landholders reoriented production toward cheaper wines and work routines requiring less skill. They fought, too: by organizing syndicates, by setting up cooperatives, by joining national protests. But the most interesting feature of their activity was their coalition with the relatively unskilled laborers who were, in a sense, destroying them. These "agricultural artisans," as Smith calls them, provided the organizational nucleus of the laborers' movement. Likewise, Temma Kaplan shows us the sherry-producing smallholders, threatened with proletarianization,

at the center of the ostensibly proletarian anarchist movement of Jerez de la Frontera. In fact, this combination of a nucleus of skilled but threatened workers with a larger mass of unskilled workers in closely related employment seems to have been the best guarantee of large-scale militancy in nineteenth-century Europe--whether in agriculture or in manufacturing.

#### Peasant Movements?

Think back to the three criteria for a social movement: orientation to change, organization and normative commitment. The whole tone of the definition is proactive, rather than competitive or reactive. If we are to remain faithful to the definition, and hold on to a strict rendering of the word "peasant," then the message of the previous analysis is that a peasant movement is nearly a contradiction in terms. European peasants have often engaged in collective action, but almost always in the competitive or reactive modes. The rural population of Europe has mounted a substantial amount of proactive collective action, but the actors have typically been non-peasants. The major exception appears to be peasants who are undergoing proletarianization. Not only do they resist in a sustained and organized fashion, but they sometimes transform themselves from defensive to offensive actors.

Here we rejoin the insights of Eric Wolf's Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century. Wolf portrays a peasantry beset by capitalism which first acts to defend itself against encroachments on its land, its labor, its commodities, its capital. In doing so Wolf's peasantry sometimes moves over into a direct attack on its exploiters, real or imagined. It sometimes forms alliances with urban revolutionaries, and thus helps

achieve a national transfer of power. Wolf's peasantry is a tragic figure, likely to withdraw from active involvement in the alliance once the threat to its own resources has been overcome, yet likely to be destroyed by the success of the revolution it has helped accomplish. For the world as a whole remains capitalist, and the logic of a capitalist world is to transform peasants into proletarians.

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