PEASANTS, STATES AND THE CAPITALIST WORLD SYSTEM: A REVIEW

by

Risto Alapuro
University of Michigan
University of Helsinki
June, 1974

CRSO Working Paper #103

Copies Available Through:

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

A Review of:

<u>The Modern World-System. Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century</u>. By Immanuel Wallerstein. New York: Academic Press, 1974.

<u>The Formation of National States in Western Europe</u>. Edited by Charles Tilly. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974.

<u>The Mafia of a Sicilian Village, 1860-1960. A Study of Violent Peasant Entrepreneurs</u>. By Anton Blok. New York: Harper & Row, 1974.

<u>Rural Protest: Peasant Movements and Social Change</u>. Edited by Henry A. Landsberger. London: Macmillan, 1974.

<u>Communism, Revolution and the Asian Peasant</u>. Edited by John Wilson Lewis. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974.

Immanuel Wallerstein tells in the magnificent opening volume of his projected work on the development of the capitalist world system, that during its formative period in the sixteenth century some areas in Europe and elsewhere became (not: remained) "traditional" because (not: despite the fact that) certain neighbouring areas "modernized."*

What does this mean? Clearly the idea is analogous to André Gunder Frank's and others' thesis about development as the other side of the underdevelopment. But unlike the theorists of imperialism and underdevelopment in the present-day world, Wallerstein's focus is, significantly, on Europe and on the sixteenth century. What has happened is that from the study of underdevelopment in twentieth century Africa, which is Wallerstein's earlier focus of interest, he has turned to its origins. One might also say that for a Western scholar of underdeveloped countries this means a turning inwards, to a new sort of self-examination.

What also is important in Wallerstein's analysis is, naturally enough, the strong emphasis on relationships and interdependencies --development and underdevelopment being understood only in terms of interdependence between different areas and groups, or different parts of a single world system.

Both of these traits, i.e. the critical orientation in the European experience and a relational approach, characterize most

*I wish to thank Bruce Fireman, Ben Kobashigawa, Allan Levett, and Mark Tannenbaum for their helpful comments and criticisms in preparing this review.

of the volumes under review, all of which deal in one way or another with peasants. The latter trait refers to an important matter in the recent research on the peasants. From the late 1960s peasants have increasingly been viewed in terms of forces impinging on them from the outside; that is, in relation to the larger society. The penetration of capitalist exchange relations into peasant communities and societies is a basic theme in this sort of research. Eric Wolf's Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century is a case in point, even though for him this general emphasis on the "outside factors" in studying peasant communities goes back to the 1950s. It is no surprise that, in addition to the new anthropological interest, peasants--or more exactly, the rural classes--have received much attention from the social scientists and historians who especially were concerned with the problem of underdevelopment from the late 1960s. In the study of peasants there seems to exist a meeting ground for anthropological study of communities affected by outside factors and the study of underdevelopment, which focuses on the exchange relations on the national, and ultimately, the international level. That this meeting ground can also be found in Europe is an important element in Tilly's and Blok's contributions.

Furthermore, a significant point of contact between anthropological and underdevelopment interests in peasants lies in a heightened sensitivity to peasants' problems and their reactions. Instead of a concern for "modernization" there is an increasing sensitivity to the people who have experienced "modernization", i.e. the peasants. Therefore, much of the research on the peasants

functions as critique of modernization theories, without explicit criticism. Indeed, it seems that these theories are increasingly superseded not so much by argument against them but simply by ignoring them in empirical research. Wallerstein's and Blok's studies are indications of this trend. Dean C. Tipps, in his recent review and assessment of the modernization theories, has drawn attention, among other things, to the "attempt by modernization theorists to universalize historically specific values and institutions deriving from Western societies," and, on the other hand, to "the widespread failure of modernization theorists to apply their perspective to the study of their own societies."[1] It is because of this situation that a critical interest in the European experience, aside from illuminating much of the already existing ideological critique, can also effectively undermine the empirical basis of the modernization theories. In other words, focusing on Europe may help scholars dissociate from European ethnocentrism.

The volume edited by Lewis and also most of the volume edited by Landsberger differ from the other studies in many regards. Comparing some of their contributions to the other studies may throw some light on what points appear to differentiate them in dealing with peasants. But first it seems advisable to review Wallerstein's, Tilly's and Blok's volumes, in this order: they focus, respectively, on international, national and community level in analyzing peasants.

---

[1]Dean C. Tipps, "Modernization Theory and the Comparative Study of Societies: A Critical Perspective," Comparative Studies in Society and History, 15 (1973): 206, 207.

I

Wallerstein's point of departure in his work on the political economy of the sixteenth century Europe is the formation of the capitalist world system. It comprised, according to Wallerstein, northwest Europe which became the core of the system during this period, eastern Europe (but not Russia) along with Iberian America becoming its periphery, and the Christian Mediterranean area, which had been a core area, being transformed in the course of the sixteenth century to what Wallerstein calls a semi-periphery. The ultimate importance of sixteenth-century Europe in Wallerstein's framework is for understanding the workings of this system today, having expanded from its European base to the whole world. The same basic dynamics which prevail in the present relationship between the developed and underdeveloped countries, i.e. between core and periphery, is to be found in sixteenth century Europe in its pristine form. (And Wallerstein plans to elaborate this historical development in the later volumes of his project.)

In discussing the uneven distribution of resources, which has been characteristic of the capitalist world system from its beginning, Wallerstein talks about "complementary divergence." Initially, "the slight edge" western Europe held over eastern Europe in terms of factors such as the comparative strength of their towns and the lesser degree of vacancy of land. This initial advantage they converted into a much larger disparity which widened the advantage even after the particular conjuncture of events had passed. Given the great expansion of the geographic and demographic

scope of commerce and industry, "some areas of Europe could amass the profits of this expansion all the more if they could specialize in the activities essential to reaping this profit." (p. 98) One crucial consideration was the landowner's alternatives.

> Where was he to draw the largest and most immediate profit? On the one hand, he could turn his land over to other uses (pasture land at a higher rate of profit or lease for money to small farmers--both of which meant dispensing with the feudal labor-service requirements) and using the new profit for investment in trade and industry and/or in aristocratic luxury. On the other hand, he could seek to obtain larger profits by intensifying production of staple cash-crops (especially grain) and then investing the new profits in trade (but not industry and/or aristocratic luxury). . . .The former alternative was more plausible in northwest Europe, the latter in eastern Europe, largely because the slight differential already established in production specialties meant that profit maximization was achieved, or at least thought to be achieved, by doing more extensively and more efficiently what one already did best. (Pp. 111-112)

The outcome in the sixteenth century was, says Wallerstein, that the core areas became the location of a considerable variety of economic activities, particularly textile and shipbuilding industries, and international and local commerce were in the hands of an indigeneous bourgeoisie. Agriculture was relatively advanced and complex consisting mainly of pastoralism and a high-productivity form of tillage with a high component of medium-sized, yeoman-owned land. The periphery, on the other hand, became monocultural with cash crops produced on large estates by coerced labor. Poland, which is more extensively dealt with by Wallerstein than other areas in eastern Europe, had gotten into this situation after the market for Polish grain had rapidly expanded due to the population expansion in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The peasants, exploited more intensely because of the lure of profit, were rigidly tied to the land in order to prevent them from running

away--from colonizing new lands, or going to the towns. The grain trade to the west was organized through non-Polish merchants. Consequently, by the end of the sixteenth century Poland was a producer of primary cash-crops which it exchanged for the manufactured goods of other countries. The local land-owning classes, the capitalist farmers, were linked economically to the core areas of international capitalism, and the indigeneous bourgeoisie was weak. Before long, Poland had many qualities now familiar in connection with neo-colonial states.

What has been stressed so far is the economic interdependence of the different parts of the system. In Wallerstein's framework, the core, periphery and semi-periphery came to be dependent on each other for their specialized roles. The profitability of specific economic activities became a function of the working of the system as a whole. But, in addition to the stress on economic unity, Wallerstein argues that equally important is the multiplicity in the political sphere. "Capitalism has been able to flourish precisely because the world-economy has had within its bounds not one but a multiplicity of political systems." (P. 348) It is in this context that the state becomes important in Wallerstein's analysis. In the core areas there arose, so his argument goes, relatively strong state systems, the state-machineries were strengthened to meet the needs of capitalist landowners and their merchant allies--which does not mean for Wallerstein that these state-machineries lacked all autonomy. The critical feature of the periphery, in contrast, was the absence of a strong state. In eastern Europe, for example,

the kings gradually lost all effective power to the aristocrats turned capitalist farmers. In other words, the emerging world-system developed a pattern wherein state-structures were relatively strong in the core areas and relatively weak in the periphery.

From this summary it may be seen that what is distinctive in Wallerstein's interpretation of the rise of capitalism in the sixteenth century (which as such is of course no news), are its extremely wide implications as to the comparative research. Its importance does not lie in any totally unexpected novelty but precisely in the fact that there has been work in different fields (in economics, anthropology, history, sociology) hinting more or less in the direction where Wallerstein now has taken the whole step.

One point relevant here, is the radical rejection of national states as basic units in analyzing large-scale transformations. This is significant because the centrality of these modernization theories is more or less explicitly based on the European experience. According to Wallerstein, the national states are not autonomous entities in the sense that major changes within them could be explained only or even mainly in terms of processes going on within their boundaries. In addition, it is clear that starting from the outcome--national states--is inappropriate if one wants to understand how and why these structures came into being and later developed.

This is different from Barrington Moore's framework in Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy, which because of many similarities in general approach presents itself as a natural comparison to Wallerstein's work. To be sure, the nature of this difference

is not simple and straightforward and can be easily exaggerated. One should remember that Moore's focus is explicitly on the biggest and most powerful countries exactly because they are the most autonomous in respect to the locus of major economic and political decisions. His primary interest is, after all, in certain twentieth-century outcomes--in the main division of types of political systems as they existed before World War II. But at least this much can be asserted--that Moore's view of, say, India and England as two cases in the same analysis is problematic in the light of Wallerstein's approach.

Maybe the most important point in the present context is that Wallerstein's study clarifies the close connection between Europe and the underdeveloped world and, simultaneously, sharpens the qualitative difference between them. The distinctiveness of Europe, of course, stems from the fact that it (and its extension, North America), by and large, was able to profit from the capitalist world system and to make others pay the costs. On the other hand, the structure of Europe was a prototype or miniature of what was to prevail in the whole world three or four centuries later. As to the peasants, this framework stresses not only the fact that the initial conditions, such as the structure of agriculture, kinship systems, etc., were different in the Third World from what they had been in pre-capitalist Europe. It also emphasizes the fact that the manifestations of capitalism were different though comparable in different cases. Capitalism originated in Europe whereas it was imposed on the Third World and what happened in Europe in statemaking, occurred

rapidly and in qualitatively different ways in many parts of the Third World, etc.

I certainly do not think that this latter point is a totally new one, but it seems to me that Wallerstein's transposition of the dependency and imperialism theories to Europe clarifies and leads the way to new comparisons on this and related points. It can be linked, for example, to Charles Tilly's discussion in the Lewis volume, where he contrasts the European experience with its largely "reactive" rural rebellions (peasants seeking to maintain their existing resources) to the Asian experience with its much more frequent "proactive" rebellions (peasants laying claim to new resources.) This is of course a re-formulation of the problem of the "conservatism" or "reactionism" of European peasants versus the "revolutionism" of Asian peasants.

II

This latter problem--the problem of rural rebellions in Europe and their relation to statemaking and the rise of capitalism--is in the foreground in some of the contributions to The Formation of National States in Western Europe: in what way did the peasants, who were the bulk of the population, come to bear the main costs of building states particularly in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe? The level of analysis lies somewhere between Wallerstein and Blok's case study on the Sicilian mafia, or in another sense, on the meeting ground of the questions inspired by theories of international interdependence, and those concerned with the linkage of the local community to the larger society. Its most important essays

contribute to the refutation of misconceptions of the earlier ideas of European "political development."

The problem is explicitly posed in Charles Tilly's long essay on "Food Supply and Public Order in Modern Europe" and also in his introductory chapter on statemaking. Tilly has also written a post-script in which he reflects on the significance of European state-making for the theories of political transformations. The remaining chapters focus on different aspects of the formation of the state apparatus--on military forces, taxation and socio-political structure, police, administrative and technical personnel. In addition to Tilly, Ardant also directs his attention to the relation between the largely peasant population and the extractive capabilities of emerging state-structures in his essay on financial policy and economic infrastructure. Other papers, except Rokkan's elaboration of his earlier nation-building model, are not directly relevant here; some of them analyze state-formation more in terms of state-structures themselves than in terms of the relationship of their formation to the base from which they were built.

Food riots, analyzed by Tilly, were the most frequent form of collective violence setting ordinary people against governmental authorities in most of Europe for at least a century. In the essay, one of his points of departure is that "the examination of food supply draws our attention to the critical connections among the expansion of national states, the growth of diverse forms of agrarian capitalism, and the creation of industrial nations from a peasant base in Europe." With a predominantly peasant base, for Europe the

great bulk of resources for governmental use, including the huge requirements of standing armies, had to be extracted out of agriculture from the fiercely resistant peasantry. One of the conscious objectives of statemakers was the building of an urban, mercantile and manufacturing population, which required the creation of an agricultural surplus as well as means of capturing it for urban consumption. According to Tilly, all the European statemakers allied themselves, in one way or another, with the promoters of a commercialized, capitalist economy, and the timing and content of these alliances deeply affected the subsequent agrarian and industrial histories of these countries. "[T]hose who sought to feed cities, government staffs and landless labor were engaged. . .in the reshaping of rural social structure. In the long run, their work meant the destruction of the peasantry and the subordination of agricultural production to the international market."

Tilly's approach bears similarities with that of Wallerstein. For example, variations in statemaking are linked to the various ways agricultural surplus was extracted from peasants in different parts of Europe. He is, however, much more interested in large demographic and other processes accompanying these transformations.

Characteristic of the approach, evident in Tilly's but also in Ardant's contribution, is the emphasis on "naturalistic" questions of statemaking. It places emphasis on factors like the availability of extractible resources, success in war, strong coalitions of the central authority with major segments of the landed elite, etc. It is no incidental feature that the term here is "<u>state</u>making," not

"nationbuilding." Reflections on nation-building have typically emphasized integration, common value systems, and other cultural factors. As a rule, their basic theme has been the development of consensus, in which cultural integration (including acceptance of common rules of the political game) is the essential process. Clearly the choice of the state as the central unit of analysis and the stress on more or less material questions reflects here the heightened sensitivity and skepticism toward often complicated schemes of modernization with their implicit Western ethnocentrism. Here is an example of the increased sensitivity for the lot of people who have been "modernized," very often through immense suffering, in place of attention to "modernization" alone.

Another important feature, in addition to the focus on the state, is the deliberate prospective approach in contrast to the retrospective approach. In the study of "modernization" and political development "the modern ideal is set forth, and then everything which is not modern is labeled traditional," as Dean C. Tipps puts it in the article mentioned before.[2] This is of course a simplification, but the point is that in the retrospective approach the analysis begins with a particular historical condition and searches back for its causes. A prospective analysis, as Tilly says, "begins with a particular historical condition and searches forward to the alternative outcomes of that condition, with a specification of the paths leading to each of the outcomes." One of the implications, ideally at least, is the avoidance of ethnocentrism and the bias of unilinear development in the study of large-scale transformations.

---

[2] Tipps, Modernization Theory, p. 212.

It is ironical that in the only paper devoted purely to synthesis in this volume, Stein Rokkan's paper on the dimensions of state formation and nation-building, there is very little, if anything, of this orientation. Rokkan presents a complicated developmental nation-building scheme, fitted most closely on those nation-states which arose in the core area of the emerging capitalist world-system, where there developed relatively strong state-structures, to use Wallerstein's terminology. For elsewhere in Europe and the rest of the world, the application of Rokkan's phase-model will face many and, on the face of it, insurmountable difficulties. While it is true that Rokkan purports to deal mainly with variations within Europe, his reflections on the other parts of the world remain in this same framework whose origin is, at best, a rather limited European experience. In this sense, Rokkan moves in opposite direction to Wallerstein who started from theories on the Third World and brought them home to Europe.

III

Anton Blok's study on rural <u>mafia</u> is a book concerned with a community in relation to the larger society. Blok's approach is, broadly speaking, complementary to the approaches reviewed here. Both the advent of the market and, more overtly, the impact of the State are crucial in his analysis, which basically claims that <u>mafia</u> was born of and maintained by the tensions between the central government and local landowners on the one hand and between the latter and peasants on the other. It emerges, in Blok's analysis, as an indication of the failure in the imposition of State authority on large areas of Sicily. Although the State sought to modify the traditional

pattern of land tenure in various periods after the unification of Italy in order to link a growing peasantry into its framework, the large estate preserved itself up to the mid-twentieth century. _Mafiosi_, the "violent peasant entrepreneurs" of the subtitle, were leaseholders of the absentee landowners, living in the interstices of the claims of the formal political framework and the demands of the quasi-feudal locality. They maintained the system for the landowners' and their own benefit by controlling the economic and political positions linking the village to the outside. In doing this, _mafiosi_ lived in a symbiosis with the formal office-holders. They were able simultaneously to disregard formal law, withstanding the impact of the legal and governmental apparatus, and to maintain covert and pragmatic relationships with those who held formal office. In this pattern of conflict and accomodation, "_mafiosi_ were recruited from the ranks of the peasantry to provide the large estate owners with armed staffs to confront both the impact of the State and the restive peasants." Although _mafiosi_ heightened class tensions through their control of the land, they also checked open rebellion and revolt by using force, by keeping a hold on outside influence, by opening avenues for upwardly mobile peasants, and by turning outlaws and bandits into allies.

The violence of _mafia_ is a central theme of the book. In fact, Blok defines _mafia_ in terms of "the private use of violence as a means of control." "_Mafia_ is a form of unlicensed violence," which, however, operates in the public realm. What emerges very clearly in Blok's excellent and painstaking reconstruction of this violence and its relations to the social conditions people live in is the importance

of the national framework: the role of violence in the maintenance of the existing structures. Blok emphasizes that it would be a fundamental error to view violence as a symptom of disintegration: "we must resist the temptation to describe homicide in terms of social disorder, as has so often been done." Very characteristically, "persons who had a reputation for violence and who eschewed recourse to public authorities commanded respect. They were quite literally the most respected, the most honorable, the most powerful, and very often the most wealthy men of the community. Others less skilled in the realm of violence turned to them for mediation and protection."

This point--which is founded in Blok's basic approach--illustrates a similarity between his study and what has been said above concerning the work of Tilly as well as Wallerstein. Blok sees people's relationship to violence as a basically rational one. It comes from their conditions, and how this is so is one of the main concerns of his book. Blok is suspicious of explanations which deal with violence in terms of culture only. His study suggests that the conditions of Sicilian peasants living in a situation essentially neo-colonialist cannot adequately be analyzed without anchoring the analysis very concretely in their daily life. This criticism is a common one towards analyses dealing with underdeveloped countries and their often overt violence and oppression but Blok's study shows that a close look at European experience suggests its strong relevance there also. If one would speak of a turning inwards in a critical vein, as was suggested in the beginning of this paper, it could be found in the admission that not only is the European framework

inappropriate elsewhere but also what is appropriate in analyzing other parts of the world, finds, in broad outlines, relevance in Europe.

IV

The bulk of the articles in Rural Protest: Peasant Movements and Social Change deals with European movements from the Middle Ages to the post-War period. Rodney H. Hilton writes on peasant society, peasant movements and feudalism in medieval Europe, and Betty H. and Henry A. Landsberger on the great peasant revolt of 1381 in England. E. J. Hobsbawm's chapter on social banditry summarizes his earlier account on the subject. Rural anarchism in Spain is dealt with by Miklós Molnár and Juan Pekmez, and the Pugachev revolt by Philip Longworth. Two chapters have been devoted to Eastern Europe in this century--George D. Jackson's general essay on Eastern Europe and Dyzma Galaj's article on Poland. The only papers focusing on areas outside of Europe are Yu. G. Alexandrov on post-War peasant movements in Asia and North Africa, and Gerrit Huizer and Rodolfo Stavenhagen on developments linked to land reforms in Mexico and Bolivia.

There is also Henry A. Landsberger's introduction giving a framework for stuyding peasant movements. The aim of this introduction is to provide a common framework for other writers. More precisely, this was the initial aim, as Landsberger admits, because the framework has by no means guided all of the contributions. In any case, Landsberger's introduction gives relevance to the present discussion.

Landsberger defines both the phenomenon of the peasant and the movement dimensionally. The peasant--or "low status rural cultivator," a term preferred by Landsberger--is defined on the basis of

"economic status" and "political status." According to Landsberger one must recognize a series of important dimensions along which the position peasants occupy in a society can be measured, and these dimensions are continuous. Both economic status and political status can be converted into three dimensions, which are the possession of critical "resource inputs," participation in control over "transformation processes," and participation in "output." By this definition the peasant can be described in terms of how high or low he is in each dimension. Peasants are described and identified on the basis of how the goods or resources have been divided between them and others.

This approach emphasizes regularities in the distribution of goods or resources. It deals essentially with the positions people have in stratification, and differs in interesting ways from Wallerstein's, Tilly's, and Blok's view (and the latter are not, incidentally, the same in all regards.) An example can be taken from Tilly. His analysis of the food riots is congruent with Eric Wolf's definition of the peasant community as consisting of "rural cultivators whose surpluses serve both to underwrite its own standard of living and to distribute the remainder to groups in society that do not farm but must be fed for their specific goods and services in turn." In this formulation the peasant is defined not on the basis of the positions they hold (as in Landsberger's case), but on the basis of relations between groups of people. This distinction[3] is still more striking

---

[3]This is done in an article by Wlodzimierz Wesolowski and Kazimierz Slomczynski, "Social Stratification in Polish Cities," in Social Stratification, edited by J. A. Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 176-177.

in the case of _mafia_ in Blok's analysis. The basic point in Blok's study is that _mafia_ is an expression of a certain relationship between the local and national community. The description of the _mafiosi_, a kind of peasant entrepreneurs, in terms of a dimensional approach would obscure Blok's analysis even though this kind of description no doubt could be made. I am not suggesting that analyzing problems in terms of the distribution of goods or resources should be rejected. But if social conflicts are at issue as they are in analyses of peasant movements, or in statemaking for that matter, I doubt the fruitfulness of this approach. On Landsberger's side there is another problem. Landsberger connects the dimensional definition of the peasant to the analysis of discontent in terms of status inconsistency and relative deprivation. Besides the essentially social-psychological nature and weak explanatory power of this framework (in empirical studies to date) it is very difficult to apply it to most peasant movements in an empirically strict sense. If used loosely, on the other hand, it is a heuristic device which can be applied almost anywhere.

V

Donald S. Zagoria, in his contribution to _Communism, Revolution and the Asian Peasant_, ponders the question, "why, in the modern world, it has been the Asian Communist parties which have so often played the role of midwife to the revolution of the landless and land poor." He puts the problem in a more general form: "In this article, I want to focus on one particular aspect of rural instability in the modern world--the pervasive rural instability in the Far East and the

use made of that instability by Asian Communist parties for their own revolutionary purposes."

I think that this formulation of the problem reveals the prime characteristic of the major portion of the volume in two basic regards. First, the problem is conceptualized as one of "instability," or the conditions which make for grievances among the peasants. Thus, Zagoria, for example, discusses a combination of factors which have contributed to peasant grievances in the monsoon areas of Asia: a very heavy "pressure on the land" (due to high agrarian density and low per capita output), an unusually heavy concentration of landless and land poor, an increasing tendency toward "pauperization" of the peasantry (largely due to the mounting population pressures), and a high degree of parasitic landlordism (this, too, basically due to population pressure which raises land values.) In addition, he refers to such social-psychological factors among peasants as the relative ease of communication in densely settled areas, and the sheer difficulty of their work.

A second part of the conceptualization is the ability of certain groups (i.e. Communists) to utilize these conditions. Their organizational structures, cemented by ideology, are superimposed on those conditions which promote "instability." This compartmentalization and the interplay of the two parts is exemplified in Zagoria's statement that the Communists in Asia "have been unusually successful in exploiting peasant grievances," or in Se Hee Yoo's assertion that increase in tenancy disputes "formed conditions favorable to peasant susceptibility to Communist influence."

It is obvious that the leadership of a revolutionary, or any other party or group, calculates the reactions of the population and

modifies its program within some range while seeking to keep its original goal in mind. But I am wary of this image consisting, on the one hand, of the conditions contributing to instability and grievances, and of the revolutionaries that mobilize a dissatisfied population, on the other.

A deceptive feature of this image is the rationality implied whereas its main feature after all seems to be its irrationality. It assumes that the "leaders" act on principles of rationality and calculation. Obversely, peasants are seen as something whose manipulation is at issue. This is what Tilly in his paper on food riots calls the "hydraulic" image: "hardship increases, pressure builds up, the vessel bursts." And, one may add, it is the revolutionaries who exploit the outburst and/or accelerate it. Tilly criticizes this approach in his contribution to Lewis' volume where he deals with the relationship of town and country in revolution, saying that there is little point in searching for correlations between radical attitudes and revolutionary actions and that also the search for active grievances misses the point. His argument is that in a number of Asian rural rebellions many "reactive" elements are easily discernible. The point, which also is central in Eric Wolf's book on peasant wars, is that it is the configuration of different groups or classes in the whole society that counts, not grievances and their ideological complexion as such.

More generally of course the general approach in Lewis' book is reminiscent of what E. P. Thompson calls the temptation to suppose that a class is "a thing." Here the peasantry, basically, is reduced to a thing, and "it" is exploited by the revolutionaries, whereas, it

seems to me, the peasants should be seen as a relationship "embodied in real people and in a real context."[4] Here is the natural point of departure for the analysis of the articulation of identity and opposition of interests among different groups.

VI

It was argued in the beginning of this paper that Immanuel Wallerstein's study on the sixteenth century Europe can be seen as an indication of a turning inwards. In his book what occurred in Europe is not viewed as a model for the development of the underdeveloped countries but, on the contrary, as a point of departure for understanding their underdevelopment. This carries a step further the dependency and underdevelopment theories in that it not only admits the inadequacy of the conventional European model of economic and political development to the underdeveloped world but also emphatically questions its relevance for the European experience itself.

Some of the books reviewed here reveal an obvious heightened sensitivity to peasants and their problems. It is safe to say that the trend is discernible in many other studies. This new response has a connection with Wallerstein's view: for both there is, instead of concern for "modernization," a sensitivity towards the people, who have experienced "modernization," those who paid the bulk of the costs.

Some of the reasons underlying this new emphasis seem fairly obvious, or at least frequent references are made to them. The reverses experienced by neo-colonialism and the difficulties of the United States, notably in Vietnam, are a common denominator by many accounts.

---

[4] E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (New York: Pantheon Books, 1963), pp. 9-10.

This linkage is not a straightforward one, but Wallerstein, for example, discards many older notions about the role of the European development in the world. This new interpretation can be put into a perspective on the basis of the challenge which has been presented by the underdeveloped countries to Western dominance. And there is realized in this process a sympathy for peasants.

An element which is distinctive in this sensitivity is that it is not just sympathetic, in the sense of an identification with the "underdogs," or of an idealization of peasants. There is a concomitant attitude of skepticism and disillusionment, connected to the understanding of the harsh reality of the peasant experience in Europe and the rejection of the Eurocentrism.

But it seems clear that this kind of underlying pessimism can be found also in much other research focusing on peasants. Anton Blok's study could be cited as an example. It is not clear how much of this tone could be explained for these by reference to the adversities experienced by the "core areas." Certainly the possibility is not ruled out. Perhaps it is appropriate to recall that disillusionment, together with a kind of clarity of vision, is often attributed to social decline.[5]

---

[5] This is, incidentally, an observation which Morris Janowitz gives in discussing Barrington Moore's latest book (American Journal of Sociology 79 (1974), 1322).