SOCIAL ORIGINS
OF DICTATORSHIP
AND DEMOCRACY

Lord and Peasant in the
Making of the Modern World

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With a new Foreword by
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CHAPTER ONE

England and the Contributions of Violence to Gradualism

1. Aristocratic Impulses behind the Transition to Capitalism in the Countryside

As one begins the story of the transition from the preindustrial to the modern world by examining the history of the first country to make the leap, one question comes to mind almost automatically. Why did the process of industrialization in England culminate in the establishment of a relatively free society? That contemporary England has been such for a long time, perhaps even considerably more liberal than the United States in the crucial areas of freedom of speech and the tolerance of organized political opposition, seems plain enough. The aristocratic component in this toleration by the dominant classes is equally apparent. To suggest all the important reasons why this situation came about is a larger task than ours need be, even if it is necessary to keep in mind possible causes other than those pursued here in order to maintain a proper perspective. The focus in this chapter will be on the particular and very significant part that the classes in the countryside played in the transformation to industrialism.

If the emphasis on the fate of nobles and peasants — and the numerous gradations in between that were a distinctive feature of English society — comes from the general plan of this book and the questions with which it started, another axis of inquiry emerges from examining the evidence. It is not necessary to read English history for very long, or to be more skeptical than the degree pre-
scribed in standard texts on scientific method, in order to realize that there is an element of myth in common notions about the peculiar British capacity to settle their political and economic differences through peaceful, fair, and democratic processes. Such notions are a partial truth rather than a myth. Simple debunking will not clear up matters. The conventions of historical writing which begin the story of English industrialization at some point after 1750 help to perpetrate this partial truth by highlighting peaceful domestic history, very peaceful in contrast to France, during the eighteen and nineteenth centuries and by leaving in the shadow the era of the Puritan Revolution or Civil War. Merely to notice this fact is to confront the question of what has been the connection between violence and peaceful reform: first of all in modern democracy and more generally in the whole transformation from societies based on agriculture to those based on modern industrial technologies.

The social struggles that erupted in the English Civil War of the seventeenth century have their origins in a complicated process of change that began several centuries earlier. Just when it began is impossible to say, just as it is impossible to prove that it had to take the form of a civil war. Still the character of the process itself is reasonably clear. A modern and secular society was slowly pushing its way up through the vigorous and long-ranged overgrowth of the feudal and ecclesiastical order. More specifically, from the fourteenth century onward there are several signs pointing toward the increasing importance of commerce in both the countryside and the towns, the dismounting of feudalism and its replacement by

1 Schweinitz, Industrialization, 6, remarks: “The political reforms which, starting with the Reform Bill of 1832, brought full democracy to Great Britain took place in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But these measures were successful largely because of the gradual evolution of constitutional and parliamentary institutions in the centuries prior to 1832.” (Emphasis added) Elsewhere (pp. 10–11) the author argues rather cautiously that it is impossible to repeat the capitalist and democratic solutions to the problems of modernization, a thesis with which I agree.

2 Feudalism means something different to the social, economic, legal, and constitutional historians, and the different aspects changed at different rates. See the helpful discussion in Cann, “Decline and Fall,” 116.

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England’s relatively weak version of royal absolutism, both carried on within the framework of an increasingly bitter religious struggle that was partly reflection and partly cause of the anxieties and bitterness that necessarily accompany the decline of one kind of civilization and the rise of a new one.

Though the wool trade had long been known in England, by the late Middle Ages that country had become the largest and most important source of fine wool. The reverberations of the wool trade were felt not only in the towns but in the countryside as well, possibly even more there, and certainly in politics. Since English markets for wool were on the continent, particularly in Italy and the Low Countries, it is to the growth of trading towns there that one would have to turn in order to find the beginnings of the strong commercial impulse that was eventually to rule English society. To analyze these would take us too far afield; it is only necessary to accept this decisive influence as a raw datum for our purposes. Other important factors were at work too. The Black Death in 1348–1349 cut a deep swath in England’s population and reduced the supply of labor. In Lollardy not long afterward there appeared the first ominous rumblings of religious revolt, to be followed in 1381 by a serious peasant rebellion. Later there will be occasion to examine these stirrings among the lower classes and their meaning.

For the present we shall concentrate mainly upon the upper classes. During the latter part of the fourteenth century and much of the fifteenth, important changes in their position were working themselves out. The land and tenurial relations based on it had largely ceased to be the cement binding together lord and man.

Though other aspects of feudalism remained powerful, the king had for a long time been attempting with varied success to turn these arrangements to his own purposes, working within them to strengthen his own power. Cut off from its roots in the soil, feudalism became parasitic, deriving its strength from the maneuvers of powerful magnates and the counter-moves of the monarch.

The Wars of the Roses (1455–1485) were for the landed aristocracy a social rather than a natural catastrophe, a bloodletting

*Power, Wool Trade, 16.
*Cann, “Decline and Fall,” 218, 225, 232.
that severely weakened them and enabled the Tudor dynasty which emerged from the struggle to resume with greater success the process of consolidating royal power. Under Henry VIII, political and religious considerations may have had the consequence of giving another push toward commercial agriculture. A Marxist historian has suggested that Henry VIII's confiscation of the monasteries in 1536 and 1539 may have helped to promote new and commercially minded landowners at the expense of the older aristocracy and its centrifugal traditions. It seems more likely, however, that the main significance of Henry VIII's rule was to damage one of the pillars of the old order, the church, and to set an example on this score that his successors were to regret. Deeper stirrings were already at work that needed no prompting from the crown, which more and more set its face against them as a menace to good order.

Combined with the continuing stimulus of the wool trade, the Tudor peace generated a powerful stimulus to the growth of a commercial and even capitalist outlook in the countryside. Along with other works, R.H. Tawney's unsurpassed study of the economic life of England before the Civil War shows how these forces ripped apart the feudal framework long before the war:

In the turbulent days of the fifteenth century land had still a military and social significance apart from its economic value; lords had ridden out at the head of their retainers to conquer a bad neighbour with bows and bills; and a numerous infantry had been more important than a high pecuniary return from the soil. The Tudor discipline, with its stern prohibition of livery and maintenance, its administrative jurisdictions and tireless bureaucracy, had put down private warfare with a heavy hand, and, by drawing the teeth of feudalism, had made the command of money more important than the command of men. . . . [This change . . .] marks the transition from the medieval conception of land as the basis of political functions and obligations to the modern view of it as an income-yielding investment. Landholding trends, in short, to become commercialised.  

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Royal peace and wool had to combine in a specific way to set up one of the significant forces propelling England toward both capitalism and a revolution that would make capitalism eventually democratic. In other states, notably Russia and China, strong rulers made their writ to run over far-flung territories. Indeed in England the fact that the rulers' success was very limited contributed heavily to the eventual triumph of parliamentary democracy. Nor is there any necessary connection between the wool trade as such and democracy. In Spain during the same period, the effect of sheep growing was if anything the reverse, since the migratory herds and their owners became one of the instruments used by the centralizing monarch in opposition to local and particularist tendencies and thus contributed to the growth of a stifling royal absolutism.  

The key to the English situation is that commercial life in both town and countryside during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries grew up mainly though not entirely in opposition to the crown, for reasons that will appear in due course.

overemphasis on economic factors. A brief modern review of the ground Tawney covers is Thirsk, Tudor Enclosures. Emphasizing the variety of geographical and social conditions behind enclosures, the author comes to the same general conclusions (see 19-21). Tawney too was careful to draw such distinctions. The main difference is that Thirsk holds natural increase in population to be one of the more significant factors (9). Kerridge, "Depopulation," 112-114, gives good grounds for distrusting statistics on enclosures. His main point is that many of those accused of enclosing were later acquitted and that the statistics are exaggerated. Given the preponderant political influence, even under the Tudors, of those who were doing the enclosing, this fact is not surprising. Though the actual figures are not to be taken seriously, there is no doubt that the problem was serious in important parts of England. Neither Tawney nor Kerridge is cited in the brief review of the literature given at the end of Thirsk, Tudor Enclosures.

A half century after Tawney, modern investigators still stress the connection between the wool trade and agrarian changes. By the mid-sixteenth century, however, the impulse to switch from grain to wool was weakening, land becoming scarcer, labor more abundant, while grain prices rose sharply. Though the character of the wool trade changed, the movement of wool prices was steeply upward, with occasional sharp fluctuations from 1540 to 1650. See Bowden, Wool Trade, xviii, 6, and table on 119-120.

Thus concludes Klein, The Meets, 331-332.
Under the pressure of circumstances, the medieval notion of judging economic actions according to their contribution to the health of the social organism began to collapse. Men ceased to see the agrarian problem as a question of finding the best method of supporting people on the land and began to perceive it as the best way of investing capital in the land. They began to treat land more and more as something that could be bought and sold, used and abused, in a word like modern capitalist private property. Under feudalism too there had been, of course, private property in land. But in all parts of the world where feudalism grew up, the ownership of land was always burdened and hedged with a great variety of obligations to other persons. The way in which these obligations disappeared, and who was to win or lose by the change, became crucial political issues in every country that knew feudalism. In England the issues came to the surface early. There, long before Adam Smith, scattered groups of Englishmen living in the countryside began to accept self-interest and economic freedom as the natural basis of human society. In view of the widespread notion that economic individualism arose chiefly among the bourgeoisie, it is worthwhile noticing that the enclosing landlords prior to the Civil War already provided at least as important a breeding ground for these subversive doctrines.

One of the most striking signs of the changed outlook was a boom in the land market that began around 1580 and lasted for about half a century. Annual rentals climbed to a third of what estates had sold for a few decades earlier. Such a boom would be most unlikely without far-reaching structural changes in the conduct of agriculture itself and may be interpreted as a consequence of these changes.

The most important of these were the enclosures. The word itself has a variety of meanings describing quite different things, all of which were happening at the time and whose relative importance is not absolutely clear. During the sixteenth century the most significant were "encroachments made by lords of manors or their farmers upon the land over which the manorial population had common rights or which lay in the open arable fields." Propelled by the prospect of profits to be made either in selling wool or by leasing their lands to those who did and thereby increasing their rents, the lords of the manors found a variety of legal and semilegal methods to deprive the peasants of their rights of cultivation in the open fields and also their rights to use the common for pasture of their cattle, the collection of wood for fuel, and the like. While the actual area affected by such enclosures appears to have been small — less than one-twentieth of the total area in the counties most heavily subject to enclosure — yet this fact, if it is indeed a fact, does not mean that the situation in those sections was not serious. One might as well argue, as Tawney points out, that urban overcrowding is of no importance in England because the total area of the country divided by the population yields a quotient of about an acre and a half for every human being. "The drifting away of one tenant from

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8 Lipson, *Economic History*, II, ixiv-ixvii. Hexter, *Reappraisals*, 94-95, vulgizes and misrepresents Tawney's analysis of this trend by asserting that Tawney tries to squeeze the Puritan Revolution into a predetermined doctrinaire conception of an inevitable bourgeois revolution by weaving the "legend that the arrival of the townsmen in the country broke the old patriarchal rural economy and replaced it with a hard ruthless bourgeois commercialism." This is simply untrue. Tawney's whole analysis stresses the more or less spontaneous adaptation of the landed upper classes to a new situation created by the increasing importance of commerce, whose main focus of development he sees in the towns. (See *Agrarian Problem*, 408.) That is a very different matter from the simple migration of townsmen with new ideas to the countryside. In support of his strictures Hexter cites, with a flourishing *passim*, *Agrarian Problem*, 177-100, and Tawney's essay "Rise of the Gentry." For Tawney's real point, see "Rise of the Gentry," 184-186. On the very first page of Hexter's first citation (*Agrarian Problem*, 177) Tawney has written one of the best eloquent warnings against doctrinaire determinist history that has ever come to my attention. There may be isolated sentences in these long passages that mention the purchase of estates by townsmen and their farming on commercial lines; that is not the main thrust of Tawney's argument.

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10 Tawney, *Agrarian Problem*, 130. In English usage "farmer" usually means tenant-farmer or one who rents and cultivates a holding, with or without hired labor, depending on the amount of capital he has. More rarely does "farmer" refer to an owner. See The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, i.e., "farmer."
each of fifty manors, and the eviction of fifty tenants from one
manor, yield precisely the same statistical results"—and very dif-
ferent social ones. Finally, the political and social turmoil of
the time must have had a real basis. "Governments do not go out of
their way to offend powerful classes out of mere light-heartedness,
nor do large bodies of men revolt because they have mistaken a
ploughed field for a sheep pasture."

Clearly a substantial amount of land formerly subject to cus-
tomary rules prescribing the methods of cultivation was becom-
ing land to be used at the discretion of the individual. Simultaneously
the commercialization of agriculture meant a change from the feu-
dal seigneur who was at worst a lawless tyrant and at best a despotic
parent to an overlord who was closer to an acute man of business
exploiting the material resources of the estate with an eye to profit
and efficiency. The habits were not entirely new in the sixteenth
century. Nor were they as extensive as they were to become fol-
lowing the Civil War and during the eighteenth and early
nineteenth centuries. Nor were they confined to the landed upper
classes. They were widespread in the upper ranks of the peasantry
as well.

These were the yeomen, a class whose boundaries shadowed off
into the smaller gentry at the top and the less prosperous peasants at
the bottom. Though by no means all of them were freeholders or
enjoyed modern rights of private property in land, they were rap-
idly thrusting forward in this direction and sloughing off the
remaining feudal obligations. Economically they were a "group of
ambitious, aggressive, small capitalists, aware that they had not
enough surplus to take great risks, mindful that the gain is often as
much in the saving as in the spending, but determined to take ad-
vantage of every opportunity, whatever its origin, for increasing
their profits." Their estates may have run from twenty-five to
two hundred acres in arable areas and up to as much as five or six

11 Tawney, Agrarian Problem, 164–165, 214.
13 Campbell, English Yeoman, 23–17.
14 Campbell, English Yeoman, chap IV.
15 Campbell, English Yeoman, 104.

hundred in grazing territories. Though the big sheep farmers could,
of course, operate at lower unit costs and market their wool more
profitably, sheep farming was widely engaged in by yeomen and
even less prosperous peasants. Growing marketable grain was also
a major source of income for the yeomanry. Those close to London
or to the growing towns, as well as those who had access to trans-
portation by water, must have had enormous advantages over the
others.

The yeomen were the chief force behind peasant enclosures.
Directed toward land for tillage, these enclosures were quite differ-
ent from those of the lordly sheep farmers. They were mainly a
form of nibbling away at wastes, commons, and very frequently at
the fields of neighbors, including landlords who did not keep a
sharp lookout to defend their rights. At other times peasant enclo-
sures were mutual agreements to consolidate plots and abandon the
system of strips in the open field. Within the limits of their situ-
ation, the yeomen too were eager to break away from traditional
agricultural routines and try new techniques in the hope of profit.

From the comparative standpoint, sixteenth-century yeomen
look rather like the kulaks of the late nineteenth-century and even
of postrevolutionary Russia, though living in an environment much
more favorable to individual enterprise than their Russian counter-
parts. Yeomen are generally the heroes of English history, kulaks:
the villains of Russian history for both conservatives and socialists,
a contrast in attitudes that reveals much about the different societies
and their respective paths into the modern world.

Those who promoted the wave of agrarian capitalism, the chief
victors in the struggle against the old order, came from the yeo-
manry and even more from the landed upper classes. The main vic-
tims of progress were as usual the ordinary peasants. This happened
not because the English peasants were peculiarly stubborn and con-
servative or clung to precapitalist and preindustrialist habits out of

16 Campbell, English Yeoman, 102, 197–203; Bowden, Wool Trade,
15.
17 Campbell, English Yeoman, 179, 184, 192.
18 Campbell, English Yeoman, 87–91, 170, 173. See also Tawney,
Agrarian Problem, 161–166.
sheer ignorance and stupidity, much as this seemed to be the case to contemporaries. Persistence of old habits no doubt played a part; but in this instance, as in many others to be encountered in the course of this study, it is necessary to ask why the old habits persisted. The reason is fairly easy to perceive. The medieval system of agriculture in England, as in many other parts of the world, was one where each peasant's holdings took the form of a series of narrow strips scattered hither-thither amidst those of his fellows in unfenced or open fields. Since cattle grazed on these fields after harvesting, the harvest had to come in about the same time for all concerned, and the operations of the agricultural cycle had to be more or less coordinated. Within these arrangements, there was some leeway for individual variation,\(^{19}\) but mainly there was strong need for cooperative organization that could easily harden into custom as the easiest way to settle matters. To rearrange the use of the strips each season, though this did happen, would obviously be quite an undertaking. The peasants' interest in the common as a source of extra pasture and fuel is obvious. More generally, since the English peasants had won for themselves a relatively enviable position under the protection of the usages of the manor, it is no wonder that they looked to the protection of custom and tradition as the dikes that might defend them against the invading capitalist flood from which they were scarcely in a position to profit.\(^{20}\)

Despite some help, now and then, from the monarchy, the dikes began to crumble. In the language of the day, sheep are men. The peasants were driven off the land; ploughed strips and commons alike were turned into pastures. A single shepherd could control flocks grazing over land that once had fed many humans.\(^{21}\) To measure these changes accurately is probably impossible, though there is no doubt that they were substantial. Yet, as Tawney himself is careful to point out, the waters that broke through in the sixteenth century were but a trickle compared to the rush that came after the Civil War had destroyed the dikes.


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Thus in England the chief carriers of what was eventually to be a modern and secular society were at this time fundamentally men of commerce in both the countryside and the towns. In sharp contrast with what happened in France, these men pushed forward mainly on their own instead of under the umbrella of paternalist royal patronage. At times of course some were happy to cooperate with the crown, since there were rich pickings to be had. But, especially as the Civil War approached, the wealthier townsfolk turned against royal monopolies, if not as fetters on production, at least as barriers to their own ambitions.\(^{22}\) The crown under Elizabeth and the first two Stuarts made some effort to mitigate the effects of these trends on both the peasants and the poorer classes in the towns. Large numbers of the peasants, cast adrift, were becoming a menace to good order, to the point where intermittent revolts occurred.\(^{23}\) One careful historian calls royal policy one of spasmodic benevolence. During the Eleven Years' Tyranny, when Charles I ruled through Strafford and Laud without a Parliament, the attempt to apply benevolence may have been more vigorous. Such royal courts as the Star Chamber and the Court of Requests gave the peasant what protection he did obtain against eviction through enclosures.\(^{24}\)

\(^{22}\) For the contrast with France, see Nel, *Industry and Government*. For the attack on chartered companies see also Lipson, *Economic History*, II, iviii–lix.

\(^{23}\) Peasant revolts have apparently received scant attention. Tawney perhaps exaggerates their connection with enclosures. The best material I could find was in Semenov, *Ogorodnikov*, especially 149, 173, 184, 187–191, 200–204, 297, 309, 311, 314, 322. The burden of this material, limited to the sixteenth century, is the following. There were three main upheavals in which peasants took part: 1) The Pilgrimage of Grace, 1536–1537, mainly a feudal and antiroyal movement in which peasants rose with their lords; 2) Devonshire and Cornwall in 1549, an economically backward area; and 3) the area of Norfolk in the same year where there is evidence of a connection with enclosures. Trevor-Roper, "Gentry," 40, refers to the revolt of the Midland peasants in 1607 as "the last purely peasant rebellion in England," where the terms Levellers and Diggers appear. This is too was clearly directed against enclosures.

At the same time the crown was not above lining its own poachers by fines in the attempt to enforce these policies. A vigorous enforcement was in any case beyond its reach. Unlike the French monarchy, the English crown had not been able to build up an effective administrative and legal machinery of its own that could force its will upon the countryside. Those who kept order in the countryside were generally members of the gentry, the very ones against whom the crown’s protective policies were directed. Thus the chief consequence of the crown’s policy was to antagonize those who upheld the right to do what one liked — and thought socially beneficial — with one’s own property. Royal policy tended to weld commercially minded elements in town and countryside, united by many other bonds as well, into a coherent opposition to the crown. In the agrarian sector, Stuart agrarian policy was definitely a failure and helped to precipitate the Civil War, a conflict “between individual rights and royal authority, conceived of as resisting in the last resort, on a religious sanction.” By this point it should be reasonably clear whose individual rights were at stake and that they were certainly not those of the mass of the peasantry, still the overwhelming bulk of England’s population.

2. Agrarian Aspects of the Civil War

In the light of this general background there would seem to be little reason to question the thesis that commercially minded elements among the landed upper classes, and to a lesser extent among the yeomen, were among the main forces opposing the King and royal attempts to preserve the old order, and therefore an important cause, though not the only one, that produced the Civil War. The growth of commerce in the towns during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had created in the English countryside a market for agricultural products, thereby setting in motion a process leading toward commercial and capitalist agriculture in the countryside itself. The intrusion of commercial influences created more and more extensively a new situation to which different groups

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27 Tawney, “Rise of the Gentry,” 181. On this point see the very thorough study, which appeared while this book was in press, Stone, Crisis of the Aristocracy, chap IV, esp. 163. The author concludes that the peers’ share in the rapidly growing wealth of England had declined sharply and that this change in their relative financial position, not their absolute one, was what mattered.


29 Tawney, “Rise of the Gentry,” 186. Tawney’s achievement is in recognizing and drawing attention to the structural changes in English society, though the statistical underpinning of his argument is probably its weakest part. He may have exaggerated the number of titled nobles who were making heavy weather of the new situation and the number of gentry who were profiting from it. For a criticism of Tawney’s statistical procedures, see Cooper, “Counting of Manors,” 177 – 199, and the Appendix on interpretations of statistical data.
commercial or official nature. These “growlers and grumblers” may have supplied a portion of the radical element behind Cromwell and the Puritan Revolution, though this impetus had its main origins further down the social scale.\(^{30}\) Thus, under the impact of commerce and some industry, English society was breaking apart from the top downward in a way that allowed pockets of radical discontent produced by the same forces to burst temporarily in the limelight. As we shall see in due course, a similar sequence of developments is roughly characteristic of the other major modern revolutions as well, the French, the Russian, and the Chinese. In this process, as the old order breaks up, sections of society that had been losing out due to long-run economic trends come to the surface and do much of the violent “dirty work” of destroying the ancien régime, thus clearing the road for a new set of institutions.

In England the main dirty work of this type was the symbolic act of beheading Charles I. The chief demand for justice against the king came from the army. Here popular influences were quite strong. They stemmed from strata below the gentry, very likely urban journeymen and peasants.\(^{31}\) By the time of the execution, Cromwell and his officers had already succeeded in curbing them. The execution itself had to be rammed through Parliament practicably at the point of a musket. Even then a substantial number (49) refused to judge the king; 59 signed the death warrant. There are indications of a preponderance of poorer gentry among the regicides and of wealthier gentry among those who refused to judge the king. But the two groups overlapped considerably; mechanical sociological analysis will not accurately sift the political sentiments of the day.\(^{32}\) Conceivably constitutional monarchy could have come about in another way. But Charles I’s fate was a grisly reminder for the future. No subsequent English king tried to take royal absolutism seriously again. Cromwell’s attempt to establish dictatorship seems merely a desperate and unsuccessful attempt to patch things together afterward and is not really comparable to the semidictatorial phase in the French Revolution, where there was still much destruction of the ancien régime. Nor did the peasants and urban plebs, those who did the dirty work of the other revolutions, come to the surface during the English Civil War, except in certain very important brief symbolic acts.

There were many ties that held modernizers and traditionalists together in the same social strata, including common fears of the lower orders, the “measier sort.” Such bonds help to explain why class alignments were far from clear in this revolution. Charles I did his best to court the gentry. There is evidence that he succeeded on a very wide scale.\(^{33}\) Despite Stuart opposition to enclosures, the support of many wealthy gentry for the royal cause is scarcely surprising. One would scarcely expect men of substance to have an easy conscience about kicking over two of the main props, king and church, that supported the social order. Eventually they were to welcome them back in a changed form more suited to their requirements. The same ambiguous attitude toward those aspects of the old order that supported property rights came to the surface in the three great revolutions elsewhere that succeeded the Puritan Revolution, as well as in the American Civil War. On the other hand, the policy of the leaders of the rebellion was clear and straightforward. They opposed interference with the landlord’s property rights on the part of the king and on the part of radicals from the lower orders. In July 1641, the Long Parliament abolished the Star Chamber, the main royal weapon against enclosing landlords, as well as the general symbol of arbitrary royal power. Radical threats from within the army, from the Levellers and the Diggers, Cromwell and his associates fended off with firmness and skill.\(^{34}\)

Other factors too account for the fact that the Puritan Revo-

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While his case is not watertight, Trevor-Roper has presented a good deal of evidence pointing to substantial influence by “mure gentry” in Cromwell’s armies. For modifications of Trevor-Roper’s position see Yule, Independents, 48–50, 51, 56, 61, 65, 79, 81, and esp 80, where Yule agrees that the lesser gentry made up the Army officer Independents. Inclusive criticism of Trevor-Roper’s thesis appears in Zagonin, “Social Interpretation,” 381, 383, 385, 387.

31 Firth, Cromwell’s Army, 346–360.

32 See Yule, Independents, 115 for table.

33 Zagonin, “Social Interpretation,” 390, collects the relevant evidence.

See also Harscye, Royalists, 5–6.

34 See James, Social Policy, 117–118.
ution did not develop at any point into a clear-cut struggle between the upper and lower strata. The struggle involved a combination of economic, religious, and constitutional issues. There is not enough evidence yet to show conclusively the extent to which these issues coincided: the social basis of Puritanism awaits analysis. But the indications are that opinion crystallized on these issues at different times. Hence as the dramatic events of the Revolution unfolded and men were confronted by events they could not control and whose implications they could not foresee—in short, as the process of revolutionary polarization advanced and receded, many high and low felt themselves in terrible predicaments and could reach a decision only with the greatest difficulty. Personal loyalties might pull in a direction opposite to principles that the individual only half-realized and vice versa.

In economics the Civil War did not produce any massive transfer of landed property from one group or class to another. (On this score Tawney is almost certainly mistaken.) The effects on land ownership were probably even less than they were in the French Revolution, where modern research has sustained de Tocqueville's contention that the growth of a class of property-owning peasants preceded the Revolution and was not the consequence of the sale of émigré properties. In England the Parliamentary side was chronically short of money and financed the war partly by taking over the operation of Royalist estates and partly through outright confiscation. In the meantime Royalist agents managed to repurchase estates, thereby making their contribution to the finances of their enemies. Many more estates were recovered afterward. One study of these transactions in southeastern England, which the author holds to have wider applications, shows that more than three-quarters of the properties sold under the Commonwealth can be traced back to their owners by the Restoration. Just short of a quarter were recovered before 1660. Purchasers of crown and church lands do not seem to have been able to retain their holdings after the Restoration, though the author provides no statistics on this point.35

It will not do, however, to cite this evidence in support of the thesis that the Puritan Revolution was no revolution at all. Its revolu-


36 James, Social Policy, 118, 120, 122, 124.
37 James, Social Policy, 243
To perceive the magnitude of the Civil War's accomplishments it is necessary to step back from the details and glance forward and backward. The proclaimed principle of capitalist society is that the unrestricted use of private property for personal enrichment necessarily produces through the mechanism of the market steadily increasing wealth and welfare for society as a whole. In England this spirit eventually triumphed by "legal" and "peaceful" methods, which, however, may have caused more real violence and suffering than the Civil War itself, during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries on the land as much as in the towns. While the original impulse toward capitalism may have come from the towns far back in the Middle Ages, it proceeded on the land as strongly as in the cities, receiving a perpetual draft from the towns that caused the flames devouring the old order to spread through the countryside. Both the capitalist principle and that of parliamentary democracy are directly antithetical to the ones they superseded and in large measure overcame during the Civil War: divinely supported authority in politics, and production for use rather than for individual profit in economics. Without the triumph of these principles in the seventeenth century it is hard to imagine how English society could have modernized peacefully — to the extent that it actually was peaceful — during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

3. Enclosures and the Destruction of the Peasantry

Revolutionary violence may contribute as much as peaceful reform to the establishment of a relatively free society and indeed was in England the prelude to a more peaceful transformation. But not all historically significant violence takes the form of revolution. A great deal may occur within the framework of legality, even a legality that is well along the road to Western constitutional democracy. Such were the enclosures that followed the Civil War and continued through the early Victorian era.

A half century ago many scholars saw the enclosures of the eighteenth century as the main device by which a nearly omnipotent landed aristocracy destroyed the independent peasantry of

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England. Subsequent scholarship has slowly and patiently chipped away at this thesis. Few professional historians, except perhaps some Marxists, would accept it today. Unquestionably the older interpretation is wrong in details and dubious in some points crucial to the central argument. Yet the earlier writers grasped firmly one point that often disappears in modern discussions: the enclosures were the final blow that destroyed the whole structure of English peasant society embodied in the traditional village.

As we have just seen, peasant society had come under attack well before the outbreak of the Civil War. The war itself eliminated the king as the last protection of the peasantry against the encroachments of the landed upper classes. Though the Tudor and Stuart bureaucracy had not been very effective, on occasion it had at least endeavored to stem the tide. After the Restoration and the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the last rumblings of the earthquake, England settled down in the eighteenth century to government by Parliament. While the king was by no means a mere figurehead, he did not attempt to interfere with the advance of enclosures. Parliament was more than a committee of landlords; urban commercial interests had at least some indirect representation through the system of rotten boroughs. Local government, with which the peasants came directly in contact, was even more firmly in the hands of the gentry and titled aristocracy than it had been before. As the eighteenth century advanced, the transaction of public business in the parishes, some 15,000 of which formed the cells of the English body politic, came to be conducted more and more behind closed doors, losing whatever vestiges of a popular and democratic character that it may have had during the Middle Ages.

Furthermore it was Parliament that ultimately controlled the process of enclosure. Formally the procedures by which a landlord put through an enclosure by act of Parliament were public and democratic. Actually the big property owners dominated the

30 See, for example, the classic monograph by the Hammonds, Village Labourer. Cf Johnson, Disappearance.
proceedings from start to finish. Thus the consent of "three-fourths to four-fifths" was required on the spot before Parliament would approve a proposal to enclose. But consent of what? The answer turns out to be property, not people. Suffrages were not counted, but weighed. One large proprietor could swamp an entire community of smaller proprietors and cottagers.42

The political and economic supremacy of the larger landlords during the eighteenth century was partly the result of trends that long antedate the Civil War, chiefly the authority of local notables and the absence of a strong bureaucratic apparatus to check this authority, even under the Tudors and the Stuarts. The outcome of the Civil War itself, in sharp contrast to that of the French Revolution, was to strengthen greatly the position of the landed upper classes. There has already been occasion to notice some evidence indicating relatively little change in the distribution of landed property during the Puritan Revolution.43 With only two exceptions, all the great families that were in Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire in 1640 were still there a century later.44

Adapting early to the world of commerce and even taking the

42 Hammond and Hammond, Village Labourer, 49-50. A subsequent study attacked the Hammonds for overdoing the element of corruption and bias in Parliament's handling of enclosures. See Tate, "Members of Parliament," 74, 75. The author studied every occasion of which he could find record in which members of Parliament gathered to consider petitions for enclosure in one area, the county of Nottinghamshire. He found that in 71 percent of the 365 occasions examined, "There seems no reason to suppose that injustice was done on account of the private self-interest of the members concerned, except so far as injustice must necessarily occur to some extent when, in a class society, members of one class legislate concerning the livelihoods and properties of those occupying a very different position in the social order." (Emphasis added.) When the author remarks further on, "Probably a parliament of landlords was almost as biased in considering the case for the preservation of a landed peasantry as would be a parliament of coal owners deliberating as to the necessity for the continued existence of coal-owners," the reader may conclude that he has destroyed his own case.

43 See the studies of Thirsk cited above.

44 Habakkuk, "English Landownershship," 4.

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lead in the march into the new era, the landed aristocracy of England was not swept away by the convulsions that accompanied the change. Although the interlocking between the bourgeoisie and the landed aristocracy was less in the eighteenth century than under Elizabeth and the early Stuarts, the connection between the two remained very close.45 As Sir Lewis Namier has observed, the English ruling classes in the eighteenth century were not "agrarians" like their contemporaries in Germany, while the civilization they created was neither urban nor rural. They lived neither in fortified castles nor in manor houses, nor in town palaces (as in Italy), but in mansions planted on their estates.46

There is widespread agreement among historians that the period from about 1688 to the end of the Napoleonic Wars was the golden age of the great landed estate. In important parts of the country, the estates spread out over the land, sometimes at the expense of the smaller gentry, and more significantly at the expense of the peasants. No one has yet arisen to deny the general importance of the enclosures or that innumerable peasants lost their rights on the common lands of the villages as the great landlords absorbed these lands. This was an age of improvement in agricultural techniques, such as the increased use of fertilizer, new crops, and crop rotation. New methods could not be applied at all in fields subject to the rules of common cultivation; their expense made them harder for the farmer of small and even middling means. Undoubtedly a large part of the increase in the size of farms came from the higher profits and lower costs of the larger unit.47

Contemporaries were enthusiastically, perhaps too enthusiastically, aware of these advantages. Like his counterpart in the towns, and indeed like all modern revolutionaries, the rural capitalist justified the misery he caused by appealing to the benefits he created for society at the same time that he made immense personal gains. Without these ideas of benefic to society and the substantial ele-

45 Habakkuk, "English Landownership," 17.

46 Namier, England, 16, see also 13; also Goodwin, ed., European Nobility, chap 1 on England by Habakkuk.

ments of truth they contained, it would be impossible to und

The span of time when these changes were most rapidly and thoroughly taking place is not absolutely clear. It seems most likely, however, that the enclosure movement had gathered considerable force by about 1760. It may have surged forward at its greatest speed during the Napoleonic Wars, to die out after 1832, by which time it had helped to change the English countryside beyond recognition. Rising food prices and probably also difficulties in obtaining labor appear to have been the main factors both tempting and compelling landlords to enlarge their holdings and rationalize their cultivation.

Thus over substantial parts of England, as the large estate became larger and was operated more and more on commercial principles, it finally destroyed the medieval peasant community. It is rather likely, though not absolutely certain, that the wave of parliamentary enclosures during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries merely gave legal sanction to a process of eroding peasant property that had been going on for some time. We know from

and getting their hands into public funds. The impulse toward improved methods of cultivation came from “publicists, country gentlemen, owners-occupiers, and large tenant farmers.” See Mingay, Landed Society, chap III and 105, 171. Enclosure, he agrees (179), was the landlord’s principal contribution to economic progress.

See Ashton, Economic History, 49, and the table of wheat prices for 1704-1800 on 239; Deane and Cole, British Economic Growth, 94, for a table showing the annual number of parliamentary enclosure bills 1719-1835 (not in itself more than a very rough indication about the number of peasants and the amount of land affected); Gonner, Common Land, 187; Levy, Large and Small Holdings, 14, 16, 18, 20. For a different point of view see Johnson, Disappearance, 87-93. Note also the remark in Chambers, “Enclosure and Labour Supply,” 325, note 3. An older view that placed the disappearance of the small landowner prior to 1760 was based partly on the study of land tax records (as in Johnson cited above). But see objections to reliance on such data by Mingay, “Land Tax Assessments,” 381-388.

53 See Mingay, Landed Society, 99, 180-181, 184, 186. If this conclusion is correct, the main fault of the Hammonds would have been overemphasis on parliamentary enclosures as such. In contrast to my views, Mingay minimizes the hardship and extent of enclosures. See his Landed Society, 56-99, 179-180, 188-169.
the experience of other countries that the intrusion of commerce into a peasant community generally sets in motion a tendency toward the concentration of land in fewer hands. This tendency had been noticeable in England at least as early as the sixteenth century. In the heart of an area heavily hit by enclosure, seventy percent of the land in one village had been withdrawn from the peasant economy before the village was enclosed by act of Parliament. By 1765 only three families in ten occupied land in this area of advancing industry. The rest were laborers, knitters, small tradesmen. Seventy small peasants out of less than a hundred owned less than a fifth of all the land, while a dozen select families at the top owned three-fifths. A similar situation probably prevailed over much of the area that was heavily subject to enclosure after the middle of the eighteenth century. If, in order to discover the area affected, one looks at a map of England shaded according to the total areas of counties in which the enclosure of common fields took place, one will notice that rather more than half the country had been subject to such enclosure. Perhaps half of this area in turn, mainly in the Midlands but with a broad tongue extending northwards, experienced the heaviest impact, running from just under a third to a half and more of these areas.

As is usually the case in such social upheavals, the fate of those who lost out by the change is very difficult to discern. Those who had property rights to defend in the course of enclosure proceedings tended by and large to make better weather of the storm than those who did not. Even at that many small owners had heavy costs to bear connected with enclosure proceedings, as well as capital charges for hedging and ditching, that made their situation precarious. The ones whose property rights were ramous to nonexistent fail to appear in the historical record because they lacked

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property rights to defend. “These landless or semi-landless workers, together with the small tenants who disappeared through consolidation, represent the real victims of enclosure, and unless they are kept constantly in mind, they may also become the victims of statistical method.” Within these bottom layers, before enclosure, there had been some variety of economic and legal position. Most poor families - tenant cottagers, for example - had a small dwelling and the right to cultivate a few strips of land as well as to keep perhaps a cow, a few geese, or a pig or so. Men and beasts had generally scratched out an existence in which the rights of common played a large part. For cottagers and certainly for the landless laborers who had only customary but not legal usage of the common, the loss of this right or privilege meant disaster. “The appropriation to their own exclusive use of practically the whole of the common waste by the legal owners meant that the tenant which separated the growing army of laborers from utter proletarianization was torn down. It was, no doubt, a thin and squalid curtain... but it was real, and to deprive them of it without providing a substitute implied the exclusion of the laborers from the benefits which their intensified labour alone made possible.” The little men at the bottom of the rural heap were thus swept aside, either to swell the new army of rural laborers, needed for some time to put in enclosure hedges, ditches, roads or to carry out new agricultural practices not yet possible to execute by labor-saving machinery or to join the wretched workers in the disease-ridden towns. Modern scholars tend to believe that the dispossessed cottagers and landless laborers generally stayed on the soil, while the remaining “unabsorbed surplus” laborers and cottagers became industrial workers. But generally only the young, the unmarried, or the village craftsmen were willing to leave home - and only such individuals were wanted by the new industrial employers. Mature men with families were not as trainable nor could they as easily tear themselves com-

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45 See map on enclosures of common fields in the 18th - 19th centuries, facing p. 10 in Clapham, *Economic History*, I. The map is based on Gonner, *Common Land*, which appeared in 1912 and made use of earlier studies whose statistics may well be open to criticism. 

59 See, for example, Chambers, “Enclosure and Labour Supply,” 322 - 333, 356.
pletely out of the fabric of rural life. Remaining on the soil, they had recourse to their "last right" — the right of poor relief. In one village in Leicestershire, "as in thousands of other parishes in the Midlands and the South," the enclosures of common fields, together with the loss of commons and the requirements of a money economy, had resulted in a steady rise of poor rates in order to support by 1832 "nearly one half the families in the village in regular receipt of poor relief and many more receiving intermittent relief." In the previous century these families had been self-supporting small farmers or not too badly off cottagers, able to obtain the necessaries of life in an open-field economy. Where the open-field system worked at all well in terms of supplying enough of what was needed, it had been the basis of a rough degree of economic equality in the village. It had also served to bolster up the network of social relationships based on the division of labor that, in effect, was the society of the village. When, in the past, village society had been strong, the peasants had fought vigorously with some success to defend their rights. In the eighteenth century, with the final blow of enclosures and commercial influences, these small farmers generally failed to resist or to fight back. Thus it seems quite clear that when the common fields disappeared and a new economic system began to win out in the countryside, the old peasant community finally gave way and disintegrated.

Looking back over the enclosure movement as a whole and taking account of the results of modern research, it still seems plain enough that, together with the rise of industry, the enclosures greatly strengthened the larger landlords and broke the back of the English peasantry, eliminating them as a factor from British political life. From the standpoint of the issues discussed here, that is,

82 Ashton, *Economic History*, 36, asserts that "... if large numbers had been evicted they would hardly have gone quietly. But there are no records of agrarian risings or even local battles of any consequence at this time. The process was one of attrition." For the last agrarian revolt, in 1830, see Hammond and Hammond, *Village Labour*, chaps XI, XII.

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after all, the decisive point. Furthermore, for the "surplus" peasant it made little difference whether the pull from the towns or factories was more important than the push out of his rural world. In either case he was caught in the end between alternatives that meant degradation and suffering, compared with the traditional life of the village community. That the violence and coercion which produced these results took place over a long space of time, that it took place mainly within a framework of law and order and helped ultimately to establish democracy on a firmer footing, must not blind us to the fact that it was massive violence exercised by the upper classes against the lower.

4. Aristocratic Rule for Triumphant Capitalism

The nineteenth century itself was the age of peaceful transformation when parliamentary democracy established itself firmly and broadened down from precedent to precedent. Before examining what part agrarian changes played in this process, it is well to pause briefly and consider in what ways the violence of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries — the first open and revolutionary, the second more concealed and legal but nonetheless violent for that — prepared the way for peaceful transition in the nineteenth. To break the connection between the two is to falsify history. To assert that the connection was somehow necessary and inevitable is to justify the present by the past with an argument that is impossible to prove. All that the social historian can do is point to a contingent connection among changes in the structure of society.

Perhaps the most important legacy of a violent past was the strengthening of Parliament at the expense of the king. The fact that Parliament existed meant that there was a flexible institution which constituted both an arena into which new social elements could be drawn as their demands arose and an institutional mechanism for settling peacefully conflicts of interest among these groups. If Parliament emerged from the Civil War mainly as an instrument of a commercially minded, landed upper class, it was not just that and, as experience was to show, it could become a great deal more. The fact that this class had developed an economic base which had brought it into violent opposition to the crown before the Civil
War had a great deal to do with the strengthening of Parliament, a point that will stand out more clearly when we can see the course of English developments against other cases where this did not happen. The strong commercial tone in the life of the landed upper classes, both gentry and titled nobility, also meant that there was no very solid phalanx of aristocratic opposition to the advance of industry itself. Despite a good many expressions of contrary sentiment from their own members, it is fair to say that the most influential sector of the landed upper classes acted as a political advance guard for commercial and industrial capitalism. This they continued to do in new ways during the nineteenth century.

The other main consequence was the destruction of the peasantry. Brutal and heartless though the conclusion appears, there are strong grounds for holding that this contribution to peaceful democratic change may have been just as important as the strengthening of Parliament. It meant that modernization could proceed in England without the huge reservoir of conservative and reactionary forces that existed at certain points in Germany and Japan, not to mention India. And it also of course meant that the possibility of peasant revolutions in the Russian and Chinese manner were taken off the historical agenda.

At the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth there was certainly nothing inevitable about the victory of parliamentary democracy. Indeed it is unlikely that more than a very few people had any but the haziest notions as to what the words could mean or what kind of a society might lie over the horizon. During the eighteenth century commerce had made considerable progress. There were now beginning to appear signs of conflict between the landed interests and those connected with commerce. Influential elements in the latter sought to promote an aggressive foreign policy in pursuit of raw materials and markets, while many gentry hung back for fear of higher taxes in an age when the land tax was the main source of revenue. In the meantime radical voices about the need to overhaul England's antiquated social structure, especially her corrupt Parliament, began to make themselves heard. The cliché that eighteenth-century politics was a battle of cliques without issues is simply false. There were the same issues between new and old forms of society and civilization as in the seventeenth century, transposed to a new era, though it is perhaps too much to claim that after the loss of the American colonies England was on the verge of revolutionary action.64

The outbreak of the French Revolution put an end to all hope of reform. More specifically, as soon as the Revolution passed beyond its liberal phase, when Louis XVI's flight to Varennes and re-capture "tore the veil of illusions" from liberal prospects and the Revolution began to enter a radical phase, those in England who sympathized with it found their position more and more awkward. Pitt the Younger stopped all talk of reform. England began to enter a phase of repression that lasted until after the Napoleonic Wars. Its fundamental feature was that the upper classes, in both the town and the countryside, closed ranks around patriotic and conservative slogans against the menace of radicalism and tyranny in France and against the remotest threat to their privileges.65 If the menace of revolution and military dictatorship had not ended at the Battle of Waterloo, it is highly unlikely that England would have resumed in the nineteenth century those slow and halting steps toward political and social reform that she had given up at the end of the eighteenth. Acceptable regimes in Europe, the absence of a threat from that quarter, was one of the prerequisites for peaceful democratic evolution in England.

To understand why the reactionary phase was relatively brief and why the movement toward a freer society commenced anew during the nineteenth century, it is necessary to look beyond the

64 Plumb, England, 152. This excellent survey brings out very clearly the conflict between landed and commercial interests. See also Mingay, Landed Society, 160 - 162, 165, for conflicts of interest between large proprietors and the small gentry, farmers, and urban middle class, whose dissatisfaction he asserts, mounted to a peak during the American war.

65 Much of what took place resembles American reactions to communist expansion after 1945. There is the same ambiguity about the character of the revolutionary enemy, the same exploitation of this ambiguity by the dominant elements in society, the same disillusionment and dismay among its original supporters as the revolution abroad deceived their hopes. In a later chapter and in connection with other types of reactionary movements, I shall try to discuss this phase more fully.
landed classes. They had reached the zenith of their combined economic and political power before the turn of the century; the
subsequent story is one of defense and concessions rendered easier
by the fact that the process of erosion was slow, and their economic
base remained firm. Commonplace mechanical metaphors are mis-
leading here. Though the capitalist elements in the towns "rose";
the landed upper classes did not "fall"—at least not for a very
long time. By the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the more modern
capitalists in the towns had already achieved considerable strength
on the basis of their economic achievements, which, as modern his-
torians now stress, had a long history behind them. Under the lead-
ership of the landed classes, much of the road had been smoothed
for them. The English capitalists in the nineteenth century did not
have to rely on a Prussia and its Junkers to achieve national unity,
tear down the internal barriers to trade, establish a uniform legal
system, modern currency, and other prerequisites of industrializa-
tion. The political order had been rationalized and a modern state
created long before. With a minimum of help from that state they
could, as the first fully capitalist bourgeoisie, convert a large part
of the entire globe into their trading area. Temporarily dammed up
during the Napoleonic Wars, English industrial capitalism could
spread out, mainly through peaceful means, to draw on foreign
resources and make England the workshop of the world during the
nineteenth century. Other capitalist tasks, such as the further dis-
claiming of the labor force, English industrial leaders could carry
out on their own with a minimum of help from the state or the
landed aristocracy. They had to do so because the repressive ap-
paratus of the English state was relatively weak, a consequence of
the Civil War, the previous evolution of the monarchy, and of
reliance on the navy rather than on the army. In turn the absence
of a strong monarchy resting on an army and a bureaucracy, as in
Prussia, made easier the development of parliamentary democracy.

In the meantime the landed gentry and those above it in the
social scale retained a firm hold on the levers of political power.
They filled the Cabinet, monopolized the representation of the
rural areas, and sat in Parliament as representatives of the towns as
well. At the local level, their influence remained very strong. As

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one recent historian has pointed out, the old governing class was
still in firm control in the middle of the nineteenth century. "The
political system was still to a remarkable extent the plaything of the
nobility and gentry, and in particular of the hereditary owners of the
great estates." The nucleus of this system contained perhaps no
more than 1,200 persons.66

On the other hand, they worked these levers within the con-
text of strong challenges from other classes. To concentrate on the
strength of their position in the formal and even the informal ap-
paratus of politics would give a misleading impression of the power
of the gentry and the nobility.67 Even if the Reform Bill of 1832,
which gave the industrial capitalists the vote, disappointed the
hopes of its more ardent advocates and belied the fears of its more
ardent opponents, its passage meant that the bourgeoisie had shown
its teeth.68 The same can be said about the striking down of the
Corn Laws in 1846. The landed upper classes suffered no disaster,
but they learned the limits of their power.

In the face of Chartist agitation too, during the decade 1838–
1848, no very strong diehard policy of reaction emerged. It is true

67 Thompson, Landed Society, 273–280, recognizes this fact and pro-
vides detailed evidence on the character of this relationship after 1830.

68 The leadership behind the passage of the Bill were Whig landed
aristocrats with characteristic family and clique connections among the
"money interest" in the City of London and a good share of the manufac-
turing interest in the industrial provinces. Secure and aristocratic, they were
prepared to accept reform to avoid worse dangers, i.e., a revolutionary out-
break such as happened in France in 1830. Nor were they averse to the use of
force if necessary. Lord Melbourne in the Home Office, who epitomized the
leadership, put down the revolt of the village laborers (1830) ruthlessly:
9 laborers were hanged, 457 transported, nearly as many imprisoned for
varying terms. He refused to consider positive measures to relieve distress.
Thus the Whig leaders made plain their intention to keep England safe for
property. See Briggs, Age of Improvement, chap V, for an analysis of the
forces behind and opposing the Reform, esp 137, 139, 149–150; also the very
readable and instructive biography by Lord Cecil, Melbourne.
that the Conservative government, under proddings from Queen Victoria and the Duke of Wellington, used troops, opened private correspondence in search of information, and prosecuted some of the leaders for conspiracy, though the jury responded leniently. The Conservative government also used the occasion to mount an attack on the radical press of the day. The Whigs, who were in power at the beginning and the end of this period, were much more lenient. Lord John Russell, the Home Secretary, forbade interference with the Great Chartist meetings held in the autumn of 1838. Except for comparatively brief periods, the government paid very little attention to the Chartists. Russell's private papers contain only an occasional reference to the movement. The only bloodshed occurred when twenty-two Chartists were shot dead in a riot, an episode that took place, ironically, some days after the Whig attorney general had boasted of suppressing the movement "without one drop of blood being spilled." 

Since the Chartist movement displayed strong overtones of violence, it constituted a severe test of liberal principles. The comparatively mild treatment that it received at the hands of the ruling classes may be traced to three factors. There was then a strong current of opinion in favor of doing something to alleviate mass distress, as well as marked reluctance to use force. This current of opinion is in turn traceable to England's historical experience, at least as far back as the Puritan Revolution. Russell was a doctrinaire Whig devoted to the ideal of liberty and anxious to avoid encroaching on the free discussion of political issues. Secondly, England in any case lacked a strong repressive apparatus. Thirdly, a combination of legislation to improve the situation of the poor and a favorable turn in the economic situation may have taken the steam out of the movement before it could become a really serious threat.

The situation during the first half of the nineteenth century and even considerably later contrasts very sharply with that found in Germany where at that time (and also later) a much weaker bourgeoisie leaned on the landed aristocracy to protect them against popular discontent and to carry through political and economic

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measures necessary for modernization. In England the landed interest to some extent engaged in a popularity contest with the bourgeoisie for mass support. After 1840 the landowning class found in the support of factory laws a convenient way of answering manufacturers' attacks on the Corn Laws, though it should be noted that there were enlightened supporters of shorter hours among the manufacturers themselves. 

Thus the theme of diehard opposition to the march of democracy is a rare and minor current among the landed aristocracy of England in the nineteenth century. One cannot find in English history the counterpart to those German conservatives whose parliamentary representatives rose in demonstrative applause to the ringing challenge of Herr von Oldenburg auf Januschau: "The King of Prussia and the German Emperor must always be in a position to say to any lieutenant: 'Take ten men and shoot the Reichstag!' "

One of the reasons why such a scene seems incongruous in England of the nineteenth century is that, unlike the Junkers, the gentility and nobility of England had no great need to rely on political levers to prop up a tottering economic position. Even the abolition of the Corn Laws failed to have the dire effects predicted by some. If anything, the condition of agriculture may have been better after 1850 than before. Prices continued to rise. Estate management took on a more and more the attributes of running a capitalist business enterprise as the operators tried to take advantage of the great improvements in agricultural techniques developed in previous decades. Naturally there was considerable variety on this score. At the upper reaches it was fairly common practice to turn over a great deal of responsibility to an agent. In this fashion the owner gained leisure for sport, culture, and politics, while the task of the agent took on many of the qualities of a profession. Still the great landlord made the main decisions or took responsibility for them, leav-

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71 Woodward, *Age of Reform*, 141.
72 What there was of it may be found in Turberville, *House of Lords*, esp. chaps XI--XIII.
73 Schorske, *German Social Democracy*, 168.
ing routine to the agents. Among the gentry the choice was more between careful management on their own or turning the matter over to lawyers in the town, who were often ignorant of rural ways and who became rich, so some gentry thought, through the poverty of the owner. Sharing in the general Victorian advance and having continued to acquire bourgeois and capitalist traits, the landed upper classes had much less reason than their continental counterpart to oppose the advance of either capitalism or democracy.

In the nineteenth century, as in earlier periods, the lines between wealthy nobility, gentry, and the upper reaches of business and the professions were blurred and wavering. In numerous individual cases it is very difficult to decide whether a person belongs in one category or another. This difficulty, the despair of anyone undertaking a statistical analysis of English class structure, constitutes itself one of the most important facts about this structure.

Quantitatively the osmosis between business and the landed aristocracy may not have been very different in nineteenth-century England and Germany. There is even some statistical evidence to suggest that it was, surprisingly enough, larger in Prussia. One investigator claims to have found that the Prussian House of Representatives included among its members in a long series of years prior to 1918 an average of slightly more than 78 percent drawn from the ranks of commoners (Bürgertum) and the new nobility. In diplomacy and administration, on the other hand, the real keys to power in Germany, the proportions of commoners were respectively 38 and 43 percent. For England a study of Parliament for the years 1841-1847 uncovers only 40 percent of the members with business connections, the remaining 60 percent having no ties with

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Clark, Victorian England, 216-217; Thompson, Landed Society, chap VI, brings out the variety of practices.

78 During the late eighteenth century there were signs of sharp antagonism between the older squires and the new industrialists, but these were often peacefully absorbed. On the other hand, the man who owned a small business has remained outside the circle of gentlemen up to the present day.

79 See the interesting appendix on the business interests of the gentry, a study of those who sat in Parliament between 1841 and 1847, by Aylcelot, in Clark, Victorian England, 190-305.

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the world of business at all. There are thorny technical problems in the use of such evidence; for example, are the statistical piles for each country really comparable? Is it appropriate to set alongside one another the 49 percent of the English Parliament with business connections and the 78 percent of the Prussian House of Representatives drawn from the Bürgertum? I am skeptical about doing so, but believe that, even if the technical problems could be solved, we would not have made worthwhile progress.

By itself a quantitative measure of social mobility tells us little about social anatomy and its workings. In nineteenth-century Prussia the members of the bourgeoisie who became connected with the aristocracy generally absorbed the latter's habits and outlook. Rather the opposite relationship held in England. Thus if we did have a technically perfect measure of mobility that gave an identical numerical reading for the amount of fusion in England and Prussia, we would make a disastrous mistake in saying that the two countries were alike on this score. Statistics are misleading traps for the unwary reader when they abstract from the essence of the situation the whole structural context in which social osmosis takes place. As statistics are fashionable now, it is worthwhile stressing this point. Men who hold power do not necessarily exercise it simply in the interests of the class from which they arise, especially in changing situations.

There was some tendency toward the adoption of aristocratic traits by the commercial and industrial elite in England. All accounts of England prior to 1914, and to some extent even beyond that date, give the strong impression that rolling green acres and a country house were indispensable to political and social eminence. But from about the 1870s onward, landed estates became more and more symbols of status rather than the foundations of political power.

Partly because the end of the American Civil War and the rise of the steamship started to make American grain available in Eu-
and the question of the power of the landed aristocracy had receded into the background to give way to new questions, centering on ways to incorporate the industrial worker into the democratic consensus.

As one looks back over the nineteenth century, what factors stand out as responsible for England's progress toward democracy? Those inherited from a violent past have already been mentioned: a relatively strong and independent Parliament, a commercial and industrial interest with its own economic base, no serious peasant problem. Other factors are specific to the nineteenth century itself. Governing in the context of rapidly growing industrial capitalism, the landed upper classes absorbed new elements into their ranks at the same time that they competed with them for popular support—or at the very least avoided serious defeat by well-timed concessions. This policy was necessary in the absence of any strong apparatus of repression. It was possible because the economic position of the governing classes eroded slowly and in a way that allowed them to shift from one economic base to another with only a minimum of difficulty. Finally, policies that were necessary as well as possible became facts because influential leaders saw and handled problems accurately enough and in time. There is no need to deny the historical significance of moderate and intelligent statesmen. But it is necessary to perceive the situation within which they worked, one created in large measure by men who were also intelligent but scarcely moderate.

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Footnotes:

18 Thompson, Landed Society, 308–318, discusses the varied impact of the depression on different sections of the landed interest.

19 See the brilliant article by Gallagher and Robinson, "Imperialism of Free Trade," 1–15.

20 Clark, Victorian England, 147–149.
CHAPTER SEVEN

The Democratic Route to Modern Society

From our present perspective we might now sketch with broad strokes the major features of each of the three routes to the modern world. The earliest one combined capitalism and parliamentary democracy after a series of revolutions: the Puritan Revolution, the French Revolution, and the American Civil War. With reservations discussed later in this chapter, I have called this the route of bourgeois revolution, a route that England, France, and the United States entered at succeeding points in time with profoundly different societies at the starting point. The second path was also a capitalist one, but, in the absence of a strong revolutionary surge, it passed through reactionary political forms to culminate in fascism. It is worth emphasizing that, through a revolution from above, industry did manage to grow and flourish in Germany and Japan. The third route is of course the communist one. In Russia and China, revolutions having their main but not exclusive origins among the peasants made possible the communist variant. Finally, by the middle of the 1960s, India had no more than haltingly entered upon the process of becoming a modern industrial society. That country had experienced neither a bourgeois revolution, nor a conservative revolution from above, nor so far a communist one. Whether India will be able to avoid the appalling costs of these three forms to discover some new variant, as it was trying to do under Nehru, or succumb in some way to the equally appalling costs of stagnation, remains the ghastly problem faced by Nehru’s successors.

To a very limited extent these three types - bourgeois revolu-
tions culminating in the Western form of democracy, conservative revolutions from above ending in fascism, and peasant revolutions leading to communism—may constitute alternative routes and choices. They are much more clearly successive historical stages. As such, they display a limited determinate relation to each other. The methods of modernization chosen in one country change the dimensions of the problem for the next countries who take the step, as Veblen recognized when he coined the now fashionable term, “the advantages of backwardness.” Without the prior democratic modernization of England, the reactionary methods adopted in Germany and Japan would scarcely have been possible. Without both the capitalist and reactionary experiences, the communist method would have been something entirely different, if it had come into existence at all. It is easy enough to perceive, and even with some sympathy, that Indian idiosyncrasy is in good measure a negative critical reaction to all three forms of prior historical experience. Although there have been certain common problems in the construction of industrial societies, the task remains a continually changing one. The historical preconditions of each major political species differ sharply from the others.

Within each major type there are also striking differences, perhaps most striking in the democratic variant, as well as significant similarities. In this chapter we shall try to do justice to both, in analyzing certain agrarian social features that have contributed to the development of Western democracy. It is well to be explicit once more about what this rather sonorous phrase means, even if definitions of democracy have a way of leading away from real issues to trivial quibbling. The author sees the development of a democracy as a long and certainly incomplete struggle to do three closely related things: 1) to check arbitrary rulers, 2) to replace arbitrary rules with just and rational ones, and 3) to obtain a share for the underlying population in the making of rules. The hedging of kings has been the most dramatic and by no means the least important aspect of the first feature. Efforts to establish the rule of law, the power of the legislature, and later to use the state as an engine for social welfare are familiar and famous aspects of the other two.

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Though a detailed consideration of the earlier phases of premodern societies lies outside the scope of this work, it is well to raise at least briefly the question of different starting points. Are there structural differences in agrarian societies that might in some cases favor subsequent development toward parliamentary democracy while other starting points would make this achievement difficult or rule it out altogether? Certainly the starting point does not completely determine the subsequent course of modernization. Fourteenth-century Prussian society exhibited many of the same features that were the ancestors of parliamentary democracy in Western Europe. The decisive changes that fundamentally altered the course of Prussian and eventually German society took place in the next two centuries. Yet even if the starting point is not decisive in itself, some may be much more favorable to democratic developments than others.

A good case can be made, I think, for the thesis that Western feudalism did contain certain institutions that distinguished it from other societies in such a way as to favor democratic possibilities. The German historian Otto Hintze in his discussion of the social orders of feudal society (Stände) has perhaps done the most toward rendering the thesis convincing, though it remains a topic of lively scholarly debate. For our purposes, the most important aspect was the growth of the notion of the immunity of certain groups and persons from the power of the ruler, along with the conception of the right of resistance to unjust authority. Together with the conception of contract as a mutual engagement freely undertaken by free persons, derived from the feudal relation of vassalage, this complex of ideas and practices constitutes a crucial legacy from European medieval society to modern Western conceptions of a free society.

This complex arose only in Western Europe. Only there did that delicate balance occur between too much and too little royal

1 See in Hintze, Staat und Verfassung, 1, “Weigeschichtliche Bedingungen der Repräsentativenverfassung (1933),” 140–185; “Typologie der staatlichen Verfassungen des Abendlandes (1930),” 110–119; and “Wesen und Verbreitung des Feudalismus (1919),” 84–119. For bringing some of the same ideas up to date see Coulborn, ed, Feudalism (1956).
power which gave an important impetus to parliamentary democracy. A wide variety of partial resemblances do occur elsewhere but seem to lack either a crucial ingredient or the crucial proportion among them found in Western Europe. Russian society did develop a system of estates, the sobor. But Ivan the Terrible broke the back of the independent nobility. The attempt to recover their privileges came after the strong hand of Peter the Great had been removed and resulted in obtaining privileges without corresponding obligations or corporate representation in the process of governing. Bureaucratic China generated the conception of the Mandate of Heaven that gave some color of legitimacy to resistance to unjust oppression, but without a strong notion of corporate immunity, something the scholar officials created to a limited extent in practice and against the basic principle of the bureaucratic polity. Feudalism did arise in Japan, but with heavy stress on loyalty to superiors and a divine ruler. It lacked the conception of an engagement among theoretical equals. In the Indian caste system one can perceive strong tendencies toward the conception of immunity and corporate privilege, but again without the theory or practice of free contract.

The attempts to find a single comprehensive explanation of these differences, stimulated by a few offhand observations by Marx and culminating in Wittfogel’s polemical conception of oriental despotism based on the control of water supplies, have not been very successful. This does not mean that they are misdirected. Water supply is probably much too narrow a notion. Traditional despotisms may arise where a central authority is able to perform a variety of tasks or supervise activities essential to the working of the whole society. In earlier times it was much less possible than it is now for a government to create situations that carry with them their own definition of what task is essential to society as a whole and make the underlying population accept it passively. Hence it is somewhat less risky to pursue this hypothesis about the locus of the performance of essential tasks for preindustrial societies than it would be for modern ones. On the other hand, there also seems to be a rather wider range of choice than was once supposed in the political level at which a society organizes the division of labor and

The maintenance of social cohesion. The peasant village, the feudal fief, or even a crude territorial bureaucracy may constitute the decisive level under generally similar agrarian technologies.

With this brief assessment of variations in the starting point, we may turn to the process of modernization itself. One point stands out quite clearly. The persistence of royal absolutism or more generally of a preindustrial bureaucratic rule into modern times has created conditions unfavorable to democracy of the Western variety. The varied histories of China, Russia, and Germany converge on this point. It is a curious fact, for which I shall not try to offer an explanation, that powerful central governments that we can loosely call royal absolutisms or agrarian bureaucracies established themselves in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in all the major countries examined in connection with this study (except of course the United States), namely, England, France, the Prussian part of Germany, Russia, China, Japan, and India. Whatever the reason may be, the fact, that the form a convenient if partly arbitrary peg upon which to hang the beginnings of modernization. Though their persistence has had unfavorable consequences, strong monarchical institutions have performed an indispensable function at an early point in checking the turbulence of the nobility. Democracy could not grow and flourish under the shadow of prospective plunder and pillage by marauding barons.

In early modern times too, a decisive precondition for modern democracy has been the emergence of a rough balance between the crown and the nobility, in which the royal power predominated but left a substantial degree of independence to the nobility. The pluralist notion that an independent nobility is an essential ingredient in the growth of democracy has a firm basis in historical fact. Comparative support of this thesis is provided by the absence of such an ingredient in Akbar’s India and Manchu China, or perhaps more accurately by the failure to work out an acceptable and legitimate status for the degree of independence that in fact existed. The ways in which this independence has been hammered out are equally important. In England the locus classicus for positive evidence, the Wars of the Roses decimated the landed aristocracy, making considerably easier the establishment of a form of royal
absolutism rather milder than that in France. It is wise to recall that
the achievement of such a balance, so dear to the liberal and plural-
ist tradition, has been the fruit of violent and occasionally revolu-
tionary methods that contemporary liberals generally reject.

At this point one may ask what happens when and if the
landed aristocracy tries to shake free from royal controls in the
absence of a numerous and politically vigorous class of town
dwellers. To put the question in less exact form, what may happen
if the nobility seeks freedom in the absence of a bourgeois revolu-
tion? I think it is safe to say that the outcome is highly unfavorable
to the Western version of democracy. In Russia during the eight-
eighteenth century the service nobility managed to have its obligations
to the tsarist autocracy rescinded, while at the same time it retained
and even increased its land holdings as well as its power over the
serfs. The whole development was highly unfavorable to democ-
acy. German history is in some respects even more revealing.
There the nobility carried on its struggle against the Great Elector
for the most part separately from the towns. Many of the aristoc-
ратic demands of the time resemble those made in England: for a
voice in the government and especially in the government's ways
of raising money. But the outcome was not parliamentary democ-
rac. The weakness of the towns has been a constant feature in
German history subsequent to their efflorescence in southern and
western Germany in the late Middle Ages, after which they went
into a decline.

Without going into the evidence further or discussing the
Asian materials that point in the same direction, we may simply
register strong agreement with the Marxist thesis that a vigorous
and independent class of town dwellers has been an indispensable
element in the growth of parliamentary democracy. No bourgeois,
no democracy. The principal actor would not appear on the stage
if we confined our attention strictly to the agrarian sector. Still
the actors in the countryside have played a sufficiently important part
to deserve careful inquiry. And if one wishes to write history with
heroes and villains, a position the present writer repudiates, the
totalitarian villain sometimes has lived in the country, and the demo-
cratic hero of the towns has had important allies there.

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Such, for example, was the case in England. While absolutism
was growing stronger in France, in a large section of Germany, and
in Russia, it met its first major check on English soil, where to be
sure the attempt to establish it was much feebleer. In very large
measure this was true because the English landed aristocracy at an
early date began to acquire commercial trits. Among the most
decisive determinants influencing the course of subsequent politi-
cal evolution are whether or not a landed aristocracy has turned to
commercial agriculture and, if so, the form that this commercializa-
tion has taken.

Let us try to perceive this transformation in its major contours
and in comparative perspective. The European medieval system
had been one in which the feudal lord had a certain portion of his
land, the demesne, cultivated for him by the peasants in return
for which the lord protected them and administered justice, very
often, to be sure, with a heavy hand favoring his own material in-
terests. The peasants used another section of the lord's land to grow
food for their own support and on which to have their dwellings. A
third part, generally consisting of woods, streams, and pasture, was
known as the commons and served as a source of valuable fuel,
game, and pastureland for both the lord and his peasants. Partly in
order to assure the lord an adequate supply of labor, the peasants
were tied in various ways to the soil. It is true that the market
played an important part in the medieval agrarian economy, more
important even at quite early times than was once realized. Yet, in
contrast to later times the lord together with his peasants to a great
extent constituted a self-sufficient community able to supply a large
part of their needs from local resources and with local skills. With
countless local variations, this system prevailed over large areas of
Europe. It did not exist in China. Feudal Japan showed strong re-
semblances to this arrangement, and analogues can be found in parts
of India.

The advance of commerce in the towns and the demands of
absolutist rulers for taxes had among their many consequences the
result that the overlord needed more and more cash. Three main
responses occurred in different parts of Europe. The English landed
aristocracy turned to a form of commercial farming that involved
setting the peasants free to shift for themselves as best they could. The French landed elite generally left the peasants in de facto possession of the soil. In the areas where they turned toward commerce they did so by compelling the peasants to turn over a share of the produce which the nobles then marketed. In eastern Europe there occurred the third variant, the manorial reaction. East German Junkers reduced formerly free peasants to serfdom in order to grow and export grain, while in Russia a similar process took place due to political, much more than economic, causes. Only by the nineteenth century did grain exports become a major feature in the Russian economic and political landscape.

In England itself, the turn toward commercial farming by the landed aristocracy removed much of what remained of its dependence on the crown and generated a great deal of hostility to feuding Stuart attempts at absolutism. Likewise the form commercial farming took in England, in contrast to eastern Germany, created a considerable community of interest with the towns. Both factors were important causes of the Civil War and the ultimate victory of the parliamentary cause. Its effects continued to be important and to be reinforced by new causes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The consequences appear even more clearly if we set the English experience alongside other varieties. Broadly speaking, there are two other possibilities. The commercial impulse may be quite weak among the landed upper classes. Where that happens, the result will be the survival of a huge peasant mass that is at best a tremendous problem for democracy and at worst the reservoir for a peasant revolution leading to a communist dictatorship. The other possibility is that the landed upper class will use a variety of political and social levers to hold down a labor force on the land and make its transition to commercial farming in this fashion. Combined with a substantial amount of industrial growth, the result is likely to be what we recognize as fascism.

In the next chapter we shall discuss the role played by the landed upper classes in the creation of fascist governments. Here we need only notice 1) that the form of commercial agriculture was just as important as commercialization itself and 2) that the failure of appropriate forms of commercial agriculture to take hold at an early point in time still left open another route to modern democratic institutions. Both features are apparent in French and American history. In parts of France, commercial agriculture left peasant society largely intact but took more out of the peasantry, thereby making a contribution to revolutionary forces. Over most of France the impulse among the nobility toward commercial agriculture was weak compared with England. But the Revolution crippled the aristocracy and opened the way toward parliamentary democracy. In the United States plantation slavery was an important aspect of capitalist growth. On the other hand, to put it mildly, this was an institution unfavorable to democracy. The Civil War overcame this obstacle, though only partially. Generally speaking, plantation slavery is only the most extreme form of repressive adaptations to capitalism. Three factors make it unfavorable to democracy. The landed upper class is likely to need a state with a powerful repressive apparatus and thus one that imposes a whole climate of political and social opinion unfavorable to human freedom. Further, it encourages the preponderance of the countryside over the towns, which are likely to become mere transshipment depots for export to distant markets. Finally, there are the brutalizing consequences of the elite's relationship to its work force, especially severe in those plantation economies where the laborers belong to a different race.

Since the transition to commercial agriculture is obviously a very important step, how is one to explain the ways in which it took place or failed to occur? A modern sociologist would be likely to seek an explanation in cultural terms. In countries where commercial agriculture failed to develop on a wide scale, he might stress the inhibiting character of aristocratic traditions, such as notions of honor and negative attitudes toward pecuniary gain and toward work. At the beginning stages of this research, my own inclination was to search for such explanations. As evidence accumulated, grounds appeared for taking a skeptical attitude toward this line of attack, though the general issues that are raised by its use will require discussion later.

To be convincing, a cultural explanation would have to dem-
onstrate, for example, that among the English landed upper classes military traditions and notions of status and honor were substantially weaker than, let us say, in France. Although the English aristocracy was less of a closed group than its French counterpart and had no formal rule of derogation, it is doubtful that the cultural difference is sufficient to account for the difference in economic behavior. And what is one to make of the East German nobility who turned from colonization and conquest to the pursuit of exporting grain? An even more important consideration is the fact that among landed elites where the commercial impulse seems weak in comparison with England one often finds a substantial minority that has successfully made the attempt to engage in commerce where local conditions were favorable. Thus commercial agriculture for export did develop in parts of Russia.

Such observations lead to a renewed stress on the importance of differences in opportunities to adopt commercial agriculture, such as, above all, the existence of a market in nearby towns and the existence of adequate methods of transportation, mainly by water for bulky goods before the days of the railroad. Though variations in soil and climate are obviously important, the bourgeoisie once again lurks in the wings as the chief actor in the drama. Political considerations have also played a decisive role. Where it has been possible for the landlords to make use of the coercive apparatus of the state in order to sit back and collect rents, a phenomenon found widely in Asia and to some extent in prerevolutionary France and Russia, there is clearly no incentive to turn to less repressive adaptations.

Though the question of commercial agriculture among the peasants has less relevance for democracy, it will be well to say a word about it here. By and large, the elimination of the peasant question through the transformation of the peasantry into some other kind of social formation appears to augur best for democracy. Still, in the smaller client democracies of Scandinavia and Switzerland, the peasants have become part of democratic systems by taking up fairly specialized forms of commercial farming, mainly dairy products, for the town markets. Where peasants seem stubbornly resistant to such changes, as for example in India, it is not difficult to construct an explanation around objective circumstances. A real market opportunity is often lacking. For peasants living close to the margin of physical existence, modernization is clearly too risky, especially if under the prevailing social institutions the profit is likely to go to someone else. Hence an abysmally low standard of living and set of expectations is the only adjustment that makes sense under such circumstances. Finally, where the circumstances are different, one can sometimes find dramatic changes in a short space of time.

So far the discussion has concentrated upon two major variables, the relationships of the landed upper classes with the monarchy and their response to the requirements of production for the market. There is a third major variable that has already crept into the discussion: the relationship of the landed upper classes with the town dwellers, mainly the upper stratum that we may loosely call the bourgeoisie. The coalitions and countercalibrations that have arisen among and across these two groups have constituted and in some parts of the world still constitute the basic framework and environment of political action, forming the series of opportunities, temptations, and impossibilities within which political leaders have had to act. In very broad terms, our problem becomes one therefore of trying to identify those situations in the relationship between the landed upper classes and the town dwellers that have contributed to the development of a relatively free society in modern times.

It is best to begin by recalling certain natural lines of cleavage between town and country and within these two sectors of the population. First, there is the familiar conflict of interest between the urban requirement of cheap food and high prices for the articles it produces and the rural desire for high food prices and cheap products from the artisan's shop and from the factory. This conflict may become increasingly important with the spread of a market economy. Class differences, such as those between landlord and peasant in the country, master and journeyman, factory owner and industrial worker in the city, cut across the rural-urban cleavage. Where the interests of the upper strata in town and country converge against the peasants and workers, the outcome is likely to be
unfavorable to democracy. However, a great deal depends on the historical circumstances within which this alignment arises.

A very important instance of convergent interests between major segments of the landed aristocracy and the upper ranks of the town dwellers occurred in Tudor and Stuart England. There the convergence arose at an early stage in the course of modernization and under circumstances that led both groups to oppose the royal authority. These aspects are of crucial importance in explaining the democratic consequences. In contrast to the situation in France of the same period, where manufacturers were largely engaged in producing arms and luxury goods for the king and court aristocracy, the English bourgeoisie was vigorous and independent with far-flung interests in an export trade.

On the side of the landed nobility and the gentry, there was also a series of favorable factors. The wool trade had affected the countryside during the sixteenth century and before, leading to enclosures for sheep pasturing. The English sheep-raising upper class, a minority but an influential one, needed the towns which exported the wool, a situation quite different from that in eastern Germany where grain growing in Junker hands bypassed the declining towns.

The convergence between the landed and urban upper classes in England before the Civil War in such a way as to favor the cause of freedom was, among the major countries, a unique configuration. Perhaps the larger situation of which it was a part could occur only once in human history: the English bourgeoisie from the seventeenth through much of the nineteenth century had a maximum material stake in human freedom because it was the first bourgeoisie and had not yet brought its foreign and domestic rivals to their full powers. Nevertheless it may be useful to express certain inferences from the English experience in the form of tentative general hypotheses about the conditions under which collaboration between important sections of the upper classes in the towns and the countryside could be favorable to the growth of parliamentary democracy. As already indicated, it is important that the fusion take place in opposition to the royal bureaucracy. A sec-

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ond condition appears to be that the commercial and industrial leaders must be on their way to becoming the dominant element in society. Under these conditions the landed upper classes are able to develop bourgeois economic habits. This takes place not by mere copying, but as a response to general conditions and their own life circumstances. All these things can happen, it seems, only at an early stage in economic development. That they will be repeated anywhere in the twentieth century also seems highly unlikely.

Taking on a bourgeois hue makes it easier for the landed upper classes at a later stage to hold the posts of political command in what is basically a bourgeois society, as England was during the nineteenth century. Three further factors may be suggested as important here. One is the existence of a substantial degree of antagonism between commercial and industrial elements and the older landed classes. The second is that the landed classes maintain a fairly firm economic footing. Both factors prevent the formation of a solid front of upper-class opposition to demands for reform and encourage a certain amount of competition for popular support. Finally I would suggest that the landed chieftains are able to transmit some of its aristocratic outlook to the commercial and industrial classes.

There is more to this transmission than the intermarriage in which an ancient estate may preserve itself by forming an alliance with new money. Many subtle changes in attitude are involved that are at present only very imperfectly understood. We only know the consequence: that bourgeois attitudes have to become stronger, rather than the other way around, as happened in Germany. The mechanisms by which this osmosis takes place are far from clear. No doubt the educational system plays an important part, though by itself it could scarcely be decisive. An exploration of biographical literature, very abundant for England, might yield a rich harvest here, despite the English taboo on frank discussions of social structure, a taboo that sometimes is just as strong as frank discussions of sex. Where the lines of social, economic, religious, and political cleavage do not coincide too closely, conflicts are less likely to be passionate and bitter to the point of excluding demo-
cric. reconciliation. The price of such a system is of course the perpetuation of a large amount of "tolerable" abuse — which is mainly tolerable for those who profit by the system.

A brief glance at the fate of the English peasantry suggests one more condition of democratic growth that may well be decisive in its own right. Though England's "final solution of the peasant question" through the enclosures may not have been as brutal or as thorough as some earlier writers have led us to think, there can be little doubt that the enclosures as part of the industrial revolution eliminated the peasant question from English politics. Hence there was no massive reservoir of peasants to serve the reactionary ends of the landed upper classes, as in Germany and Japan. Nor was there the mass basis for peasant revolutions as in Russia and China. For quite different reasons, the United States too escaped from the political plague of a peasant question. France did not escape, and the instability of French democracy during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is partly due to this fact.

The admitted brutality of the enclosures confronts us with the limitations on the possibility of peaceful transitions to democracy and reminds us of the open and violent conflicts that have preceded its establishment. It is time to restore the dialectic, to remind ourselves of the role of revolutionary violence. A great deal of this violence, perhaps its most important feature, has its origins in the agrarian problems that arose along the road that has led to Western democracy. The English Civil War checked royal absolutism and gave the commercially minded big landlords a free hand to play their part during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in destroying peasant society. The French Revolution broke the power of a landed elite that was still mainly precommercial, though sections of it had begun to go over to new forms requiring repressive mechanisms to maintain its labor force. In this sense, as already noted, the French Revolution constituted an alternative way of creating institutions eventually favorable to democracy. Finally, the American Civil War likewise broke the power of a landed elite that was an obstacle in the way of democratic advance but, in this case, one that had grown up as part of capitalism.

Whether one believes that these three violent upheavals aided or hindered the development of liberal and bourgeois democracy, it remains necessary to recognize that they were an important part of the whole process. In itself this fact provides considerable justification for designating them as bourgeois or, if one prefers, liberal revolutions. Nevertheless there are real difficulties in grouping revolutions or, for that matter, any major historical phenomena. Before proceeding any further, it might be well to discuss this point.

Certain very general considerations make it necessary to adopt broad categories of this variety. It is or should be quite obvious that certain institutional arrangements such as feudalism, absolute monarchy, and capitalism rise, have their day, and pass away. The fact that any specific institutional complex develops first in one country and then in another, as did capitalism in Italy, Holland, England, France, and the United States, is no bar to a generally evolutionary conception of history. No single country goes through all the stages, but merely carries the development a certain distance within the framework of its own situation and institutions. Thus a revolution on behalf of private property in the means of production has a good chance of succeeding in some phases and not in others. It may be hopelessly premature and yet a minor current in the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries and yet be hopelessly anachronistic in the second half of the twentieth. Over and beyond the concrete historical conditions at a given moment in a particular country, there are worldwide conditions, such as the state of the technical arts and the economic and political organization reached in other parts of the world, that influence heavily the prospects of revolution.

These considerations lead to the conclusion that it is necessary to group revolutions by the broad institutional results to which they contribute. Much of the confusion and unwillingness to use larger categories comes from the fact that those who provide the mass support for a revolution, those who lead it, and those who ultimately profit from it are very different sets of people. As long as this distinction remains clear in each case, it makes sense (and is even indispensable for the sake of drawing distinctions as well as perceiving similarities) to regard the English Civil War, the French Revolution and the American Civil War as stages in the development of the bourgeois-democratic revolution.
There are grounds for the reluctance to use this term, and it is worthwhile pointing out the way in which it can be misleading. To some writers the conception of a bourgeois revolution implies a steady increase in the economic power of the commercial and manufacturing classes in the towns up to a point where economic power comes into conflict with political power still in the hands of an old ruling class based mainly on the land. At this point there supposedly occurs a revolutionary explosion in which the commercial and manufacturing classes seize the reins of political power and introduce the main features of modern parliamentary democracy. Such a conception is not altogether false. Even for France, there are some good indications of an increase in the economic power of a section of the bourgeoisie hostile to the fetters imposed by the ancien régime. Nevertheless this meaning of bourgeois revolution is such a simplification as to be a caricature of what took place. To see that it is a caricature we need only recall: 1) the importance of capitalism in the English countryside that enabled the English landed aristocracy to retain control of political machinery right through the nineteenth century; 2) the weakness of any purely bourgeois impulse in France, its close ties with the old order, its dependence on radical allies during the Revolution, the continuation of the peasant economy into modern times; 3) the fact that plantation slavery in the United States grew up as an integral part of industrial capitalism and presented an obstacle to democracy much more than to capitalism.

As pointed out a moment ago, the central difficulty is that such expressions as bourgeois revolution and peasant revolution lump together indiscriminately those who make the revolution and its beneficiaries. Likewise these terms confuse the legal and political results of revolutions with social groups active in them. Twentieth-century peasant revolutions have had their mass support among the peasants, who have then been the principal victims of modernization put through by communist governments. Nevertheless I shall remain candidly and explicitly inconsistent in the use of terms. In discussing peasant revolutions we shall be speaking about the main popular force behind them, well aware that in the twentieth cen-

tury the result was communism. In discussing bourgeois revolutions the justification for the term rests on a series of legal and political consequences. Consistent terminology imposes the invention of new terms that, I fear, would only add to the confusion. The main problem, after all, is what happened and why, not the proper use of labels.

Now it seems just about as clear as such matters ever can be that the Puritan Revolution, the French Revolution, and the American Civil War were quite violent upheavals in a long process of political change leading up to what we recognize as modern Western democracy. This process had economic causes, though they were certainly not the only ones. The freedoms created through this process display a clear relationship to each other. Worked out in connection with the rise of modern capitalism, they display the traits of a specific historical epoch. Key elements in the liberal and bourgeois order of society are the right to vote, representation in a legislature that makes the laws and hence is more than a rubber stamp for the executive, an objective system of law that at least in theory confers no special privileges on account of birth or inherited status, security for the rights of property and the elimination of barriers inherited from the past on its use, religious toleration, freedom of speech, and the right to peaceful assembly. Even if practice falls short of profession, these are widely recognized marks of modern liberal society.

The taming of the agrarian sector has been a decisive feature of the whole historical process that produced such a society. It was just as important as the better-known disciplining of the working class and of course closely related to it. Indeed the English experience tempers one to say that getting rid of agriculture as a major social activity is one prerequisite for successful democracy. The political hegemony of the landed upper class had to be broken or transformed. The peasant had to be turned into a farmer producing for the market instead of for his own consumption and that of the overlord. In this process the landed upper classes either became an important part of the capitalist and democratic tide, as in England, or, if they came to oppose it, they were swept aside in the convul-
sions of revolution or civil war. In a word, the landed upper classes either helped to make the bourgeois revolution or were destroyed by it.

In closing this discussion it may be useful to set down the main conditions that have apparently been most important for the development of democracy and, as a rough test of these conclusions, set them alongside the Indian experience. It turns out that the presence of some of these conditions has a demonstrable connection with the more successful aspects of parliamentary democracy in India or the historical origins of these aspects and, on the other hand, that the absence of other conditions displays a connection with the difficulties and obstacles to democracy in India, we may have greater confidence in these conclusions.

The first condition of democratic development that our analysis encountered was the development of a balance to avoid too strong a crown or too independent a landed aristocracy. In Mogul India at its zenith the power of the crown was overwhelming in relation to the upper classes. Lacking any secure property rights, the noble was, in Moreland's well-known phrase, either a servant or an enemy of the ruling power. The decay of the Mogul system freed the upper classes by tipping the balance in the opposite direction toward a policy of fighting local kinglets. Nevertheless the subsequent British effort in the eighteenth century to create on Indian soil a class of vigorous progressive squires similar to their domestic variety was a complete failure. Indian society has also failed to meet the second major prerequisite: a turn toward an appropriate form of commercial agriculture either on the part of the landed aristocracy or the peasantry. Instead, the protective umbrella of British law and order allowed population to increase and a class of parasitic landlords to skim off, together with the moneylenders, much of what the peasants did not eat themselves. In turn these conditions greatly inhibited capital accumulation and industrial growth. When Independence came, it arrived partly under the impetus of peasant yearning for a return to an idealized village past, which further limited and even dangerously delayed real modernization in the countryside. That these circumstances have been among the major obstacles to the establishment and working of a firmly based democracy needs no laboring here.

On the other hand, the departure of the British greatly weakened the political predominance of the landed elite. There are many who would claim that post-Independence reforms have even destroyed that power. To this limited extent, the development of democratic institutions has followed the Western pattern. Even more important, the British occupation, by resting its power on the landed elite and by favoring commercial interests in England, drove a substantial section of the urban commercial and trading classes into opposition, preventing the fateful coalition of a strong landed elite and weak bourgeoisie that, as we shall see in more detail in the next chapter, has been the social origin of rightist authoritarian regimes and movements in Europe and Asia. Thus two conditions have been met: the weakening of the landed aristocracy and the prevention of an aristocratic-bourgeois coalition against the peasants and workers.

India indeed constitutes an important instance where at least the formal structure of democracy and a significant portion of its substance, such as the existence of legal opposition and channels for protest and criticism, have arisen without a phase of revolutionary violence. (The Sepoy Mutiny was mainly a backward-looking affair.) Yet the absence of a fifth condition, a revolutionary break with the past and of any strong movement in this direction up to the present moment, are among the reasons for India's prolonged backwardness and the extraordinary difficulties that liberal democracy faces there. Some students of Indian affairs have expressed surprise that India's small Western-educated elite has remained faithful to the democratic ideal when they could so easily overthrow it. But why would they wish to overthrow it? Does not democracy provide a rationalization for refusing to overhaul on any massive scale a social structure that maintains their privileges? To be fair one must add that the task is a sufficiently formidable one to make any but the most doctrinaire radical quail at the thought of taking responsibility for it.

Though it would be tempting to discuss this point further,
Indian politics are relevant here only insofar as they serve to test a theory of democracy. The achievements and shortcomings of democracy in India, the obstacles and uncertainties it still faces, all find a reasonable explanation in terms of the five conditions derived here from the experience of other countries. That is not proof by any means. But I think it is fair to hold that these five conditions not only illuminate significant aspects of Indian history, they derive strong support from this history.

Chapter Eight

Revolution from Above and Fascism

The second main route to the world of modern industry we have called the capitalist and reactionary one, exemplified most clearly by Germany and Japan. There capitalism took hold quite firmly in both agriculture and industry and turned them into industrial countries. But it did so without a popular revolutionary upheaval. What tendencies there were in this direction were weak, far weaker in Japan than in Germany, and in both were diverted and crushed. Though not the only cause, agrarian conditions and the specific types of capitalist transformation that took place in the countryside contributed very heavily to these defeats and the feebleness behind any impulse toward Western-democratic forms.

There are certain forms of capitalist transformation in the countryside that may succeed economically, in the sense of yielding good profits, but which are for fairly obvious reasons unfavorable to the growth of free institutions of the nineteenth-century Western variety. Though these forms shade into each other, it is easy to distinguish two general types. A landed upper class may, as in Japan, maintain intact the preexisting peasant society, introducing just enough changes in rural society to ensure that the peasants generate a sufficient surplus that it can appropriate and market at a profit. Or a landed upper class may devise wholly new social arrangements along the lines of plantation slavery. Straightforward slavery in modern times is likely to be the creation of a class of colonizing intruders into tropical areas. In parts of eastern Europe, however, indigenous nobilities were able to re-inroduce serfdom, which reattached the peasants to the soil in ways that produced
somewhat similar results. This was a halfway form between the two others.

Both the system of maintaining peasant society intact but squeezing more out of it and the use of servile or semiservice labor on large units of cultivation require strong political methods to extract the surplus, keep the labor force in its place, and in general make the system work. Not all of these methods are of course political in the narrow sense. Particularly where the peasant society is preserved, there are all sorts of attempts to use traditional relationships and attitudes as the basis of the landlords' position. Since these political methods have important consequences, it will be helpful to give them a name. Economists distinguish between labor-intensive and capital-intensive types of agriculture, depending on whether the system uses large amounts of labor or capital. It may also be helpful to speak of labor-repressive systems, of which slavery is but an extreme type. The difficulty with such a notion is that one may legitimately ask precisely what type has not been labor-repressive. The distinction I am trying to suggest is one between the use of political mechanisms (using the term "political" broadly as just indicated) on the one hand and reliance on the labor market, on the other hand, to ensure an adequate labor force for working the soil and the creation of an agricultural surplus for consumption by other classes. Those at the bottom suffer severely in both cases.

To make the conception of a labor-repressive agricultural system useful, it would be well to stipulate that large numbers of people are kept at work in this fashion. It is also advisable to state explicitly what it does not include, for example, the American family farm of the nineteenth century. There may have been exploitation of the labor of family members in this case, but it was done apparently mainly by the head of the household himself with minimal assistance from the outside. Again, a system of hired agricultural laborers where the workers had considerable real freedom to refuse jobs and move about, a condition rarely met in actual practice, would not fall under this rubric. Finally, precommercial and preindustrial agrarian systems are not necessarily labor-repressive if there is a rough balance between the overlord's contribution to justice and security and the cultivator's contribution in the form of crops. Whether this balance can be pinned down in any objective sense is a moot point best discussed in the following chapter when the issue arises in connection with the causes of peasant revolutions. Here we need only remark that the establishment of labor-repressive agrarian systems in the course of modernization does not necessarily produce greater suffering among the peasants than other forms. Japanese peasants had an easier time of it than did English ones. Our problem here is in any case a different one: how and why labor-repressive agrarian systems provide an unfavorable soil for the growth of democracy and an important part of the institutional complex leading to fascism.

In discussing the rural origins of parliamentary democracy, we noticed that a limited degree of independence from the monarchy constituted one of the favorable conditions, though one that did not occur everywhere. While a system of labor-repressive agriculture may be started in opposition to the central authority, it is likely to fuse with the monarchy at a later point in search of political support. This situation can also lead to the preservation of a military ethic among the nobility in a manner unfavorable to the growth of democratic institutions. The evolution of the Prussian state constitutes the clearest example. Since we have referred to these developments at several points in this work, it will be appropriate to sketch them very briefly here.

In northeastern Germany the manorial reaction of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, about which we shall have still more to say in quite another context, broke off the development toward the liberation of the peasantry from feudal obligations and the closely connected development of town life that in England and France eventually culminated in Western democracy. A fundamental cause was the growth of grain exports, though it was not the sole one. The Prussian nobility expanded its holdings at the expense of the peasantry which, under the Teutonic Order, had been close to freedom, and reduced them to servitude. As part of the same process, the nobility reduced the towns to dependence by short-circuiting them with their exports. Afterward, the Hohenzollern rulers managed to destroy the independence of the nobility and crush the Estates, playing nobles and townsmen off against one another,
thereby checking the aristocratic component in the move toward parliamentary government. The result in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was the "Sparta of the North," a militarized fusion of royal bureaucracy and landed aristocracy.1

From the side of the landed aristocracy came the conceptions of inherent superiority in the ruling class and a sensitivity to matters of status, prominent traits well into the twentieth century. Fed by new sources, these conceptions could later be vulgarized and made appealing to the German population as a whole in doctrines of racial superiority. The royal bureaucracy introduced, against considerable aristocratic resistance, the ideal of complete and unquestioning obedience to an institution over and above class and individual—prior to the nineteenth century it would be anachronistic to speak of the nation. Prussian discipline, obedience, and admiration for the hard qualities of the soldier come mainly from the Hohenzollern efforts to create a centralized monarchy.

All this does not, of course, mean that some inexorable fate drove Germany toward fascism from the sixteenth century onward, that the process never could have been reversed. Other factors had to intervene, some very important ones, as industrialization began to gather momentum during the nineteenth century. About these it will be necessary to speak in a moment. There are also significant variants and substitutions within the general pattern that has led to fascism, subalternatives one might say if one wished to be very precise and technical, within the major alternative of conservative modernization through revolution from above. In Japan the notion of total commitment to authority apparently came out of the feudal, rather than the monarchical, side of the equation.2 Again in Italy, where fascism was inverted, there was no powerful national monarchy. Mussolini had to go all the way back to ancient Rome for the corresponding symbolism.

At a later stage in the course of modernization, a new and crucial factor is likely to appear in the form of a rough working coalition between influential sectors of the landed upper class and the emerging commercial and manufacturing interests. By and large,

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this was a nineteenth-century political configuration, though it continued on into the twentieth. Marx and Engels in their discussion of the abortive 1848 revolution in Germany, wrong though they were on other major features, put their finger on this decisive ingredient: a commercial and industrial class which is too weak and dependent to take power and rule in its own right and which therefore throws itself into the arms of the landed aristocracy and the royal bureaucracy, exchanging the right to rule for the right to make money.3 It is necessary to add that, even if the commercial and industrial element is weak, it must be strong enough (or soon become strong enough) to be a worthwhile political ally. Otherwise a peasant revolution leading to communism may intervene. This happened in both Russia and China after unsuccessful efforts to establish such a coalition. There also appears to be another ingredient that enters the situation somewhat later than the formation of this coalition: sooner or later systems of labor-repressive agriculture are liable to run into difficulties produced by competition from more technically advanced ones in other countries. The competition of American wheat exports created difficulties in many parts of Europe after the end of our Civil War. In the context of a reactionary coalition, such competition intensifies authoritarian and reactionary trends among a landed upper class that finds its economic basis sinking and therefore turns to political levers to preserve its rule.

Where the coalition succeeds in establishing itself, there has followed a prolonged period of conservative and even authoritarian government, which, however, falls far short of fascism. The historical boundaries of such systems are often somewhat blurred. At a rather generous estimate, one might hold that to this species belong the period from the Stein-Hardenberg reforms in Germany to the end of the First World War and, in Japan, from the fall of the Tokugawa Shogunate to 1918. These authoritarian governments acquired some democratic features: notably a parliament with limited powers. Their history may be punctuated with attempts to extend democracy which, toward the end, succeeded in

1 See Rosenberg, Bureaucracy; Carsten, Origins of Prussia.
2 Sansom, History of Japan, I, 368.
3 See Marx, Selected Works, II, "Germany: Revolution and Counter-Revolution," written mainly by Engels.
establishing unstable democracies (the Weimar Republic, Japan in the twenties, Italy under Giolitti). Eventually the door to fascist regimes was opened by the failure of these democracies to cope with the severe problems of the day and reluctance or inability to bring about fundamental structural changes. One factor, but only one, in the social anatomy of these governments has been the retention of a very substantial share in political power by the landed élite, due to the absence of a revolutionary breakthrough by the peasants in combination with urban strata.

Some of the semiparliamentary governments that arose on this basis carried out a more or less peaceful economic and political revolution from above that took them a long distance toward becoming modern industrial countries. Germany travelled the furthest in this direction, Japan only somewhat less so, Italy a great deal less, Spain very little. Now, in the course of modernization by a revolution from above, such a government has to carry out many of the same tasks performed elsewhere with the help of a revolution from below. The notion that a violent popular revolution is somehow necessary in order to sweep away “feudal” obstacles to industrialization is pure nonsense, as the course of German and Japanese history demonstrates. On the other hand, the political consequences from dismounting the old order from above are decidedly different. As they proceeded with conservative modernization, these semiparliamentary governments tried to preserve as much of the original social structure as they could, fitting large sections into the new building wherever possible. The results had some resemblance to present-day Victorian houses with modern electrical kitchens but insufficient bathrooms and leaky pipes hidden decorously behind newly plastered walls. Ultimately the makeshifts collapsed.

One very important series of measures was the rationalization of the political order. This meant the breakup of traditional and long established territorial divisions, such as the feudal han in Japan

4 Poland, Hungary, Romania, Spain, and even Greece went through approximately this sequence. On the basis of admittedly inadequate knowledge, I would hazard the suggestion that much of Latin America remains in the era of authoritarian semiparliamentary government.

Revolution from Above and Fascism or independent states and principalities in Germany and Italy. Except in Japan, the breakup was not complete. But in the course of time a central government did establish strong authority and a uniform administrative system, and a more or less uniform law code and system of courts appeared. Again, in varying degrees, the state managed to create a sufficiently powerful military machine to be able to make the wishes of its rulers felt in the arena of international politics. Economically the establishment of a strong central government and the elimination of internal barriers to trade meant an increase in the size of the effective economic unit. Without such an increase in size, the division of labor necessary for an industrial society could not exist, unless all countries were willing to trade peacefully with one another. As the first country to industrialize, England had been able to draw on most of the accessible world for material and markets, a situation that gradually deteriorated during the nineteenth century when others caught up and sought to use the state to guarantee their markets and sources of supply.

Still another aspect of the rationalization of the political order has to do with the making of citizens in a new type of society. Literacy and rudimentary technical skills are necessary for the masses. Setting up a national system of education is very likely to bring on a conflict with religious authorities. Loyalty to a new abstraction, the state, must also replace religious loyalties if they transcend national boundaries or compete with one another so vigorously as to destroy internal peace. Japan had less of a problem here than Germany, Italy, or Spain. Yet even in Japan, as the somewhat artificial revival of Shinto indicates, there were substantial difficulties. In overcoming such difficulties, the existence of a foreign enemy can be quite useful. Then patriotic and conservative appeals to the military traditions of the landed aristocracy can overcome localist tendencies among this important group and push into the background any too insistent demands of the lower strata for an unwarranted share in the benefits of the new order.5 In carrying out the task of rationalizing and extending the political order, these

5 Possibly one of the reasons the conservative Cavour had such difficulties with the relatively radical Garibaldi was the weakness of military traditions among the Italian landed aristocracy.
nineteenth-century governments were doing work that royal absolutism had already accomplished in other countries.

One striking fact about the course of conservative modernization is the appearance of a galaxy of distinguished political leaders: Cavour in Italy, in Germany, Stein, Hardenberg, and Bismarck, the most famous of them all; in Japan, the statesmen of the Meiji era. Though the reasons are obscure, it seems unlikely that the appearance of a similar leadership in similar circumstances could be pure coincidence. All were conservatives in the political spectrum of their time and country, devoted to the monarchy, willing and able to use it as an instrument of reform, modernization, and national unification. Though all were aristocrats, they were dissidents or outsiders of a sort in relation to the old order. To the extent that their aristocratic background contributed habits of command and a flair for politics, one may perhaps detect a contribution of the agrarian ancien régime to the construction of a new society. But there were strong contrary pulls here too. To the extent that these men were aliens within the aristocracy, one may see the incapacity of this stratum to meet the challenge of the modern world merely with its own intellectual and political resources.

The most successful of the conservative regimes accomplished a great deal, not only in tearing down the old order but in establishing a new one. The state aided industrial construction in several important ways. It served as an engine of primary capitalist accumulation, gathering resources and directing them toward the building of an industrial plant. In the taming of the labor force it again played an important role, by no means entirely a repressive one. Armaments served as an important stimulus for industry. So did protectionist tariff policies. All of these measures at some point involved taking resources or people out of agriculture. Therefore they imposed from time to time a serious strain on the coalition between those sectors of the upper strata in business and agriculture that was the main feature of the political system. Without the threat of foreign dangers, sometimes real, sometimes perhaps imaginary, sometimes as in the case of Bismarck deliberately manufactured for domestic purposes, the landed interests might well have balked, to the point of endangering the whole process. The foreign threat alone, however, need not bear the whole weight of explaining this behavior. Material and other rewards — the "payoff" in the language of gangsters and game theory — were quite substantial for both partners as long as they succeeded in keeping the peasants and industrial labor in place. Where there was substantial economic progress, the industrial workers were able to make significant gains, as in Germany, where Sozialpolitik was invented. It was in those countries that remained more backward, Italy to some extent, probably Spain to a greater extent, that there was more of a tendency to cannibalize the indigenous population.

Certain conditions seem to have been necessary for the successes of conservative modernization. First, it takes very able leadership to drag along the less perceptive reactionary elements, concentrated among, though not necessarily confined to, the landed upper classes. In the beginning, Japan had to suppress a real rebellion, the Satsuma revolt, to control these elements. Reactionaries can always advance the plausible argument that modernizing leaders are making changes and concessions that will merely arouse the appetites of the lower classes and bring on a revolution. Similarly, the leadership must have at hand or be able to construct a sufficiently powerful bureaucratic apparatus, including the agencies of repression, the military and the police (compare the German saying Gegen Demokraten helfen nur Soldaten), in order to free itself from the influence of both extreme reactionary and popular or radical pressures in the society. The government has to become separate from society, something that can happen rather more easily than simplified versions of Marxism would allow us to believe.

In the short run, a strong conservative government has distinct advantages. It can both encourage and control economic growth.

6 For a brilliant analysis of the situation in Germany toward the end of the nineteenth century see Kehr, Schloßföttenbau. Weber, "Entwicklungsstendenzen in der Lage der Ostelbischen Landarbeiter," in Gesammelte Aufsätze, esp 471–476, brings out very clearly the position of the Junkers.

7 Such arguments were also very prominent in England as part of the reaction to the French Revolution. Many have been collected in Turbeville, House of Lords. Tory reform could work in nineteenth-century England, however, at least partly because it was a sham battle anyway: the bourgeoisie had won, and only the more obdurate could fail to see their power.
It can be seen that the lower classes who pay the costs under all forms of modernization do not make too much trouble. But Germany and, even more, Japan were trying to solve a problem that was inherently insoluble, to modernize without changing their social structures. The only way out of this dilemma was militarism, which united the upper classes. Militarism intensified a climate of international conflict, which in turn made industrial advance all the more imperative, even if in Germany Bismarck could for a time hold the situation in check, partly because militarism had not yet become a mass phenomenon. To carry out thoroughgoing structural reforms, i.e., to make the transition to a paying commercial agriculture without the repression of those who worked the soil and to do the same in industry, in a word, to use modern technology rationally for human welfare was beyond the political vision of these governments. Ultimately these systems crashed in an attempt at foreign expansion, but not until they had tried to make reaction popular in the form of fascism.

Before discussing this final phase, it may be instructive to glance at unsuccessful reactionary trends in other countries. As mentioned above, this reactionary syndrome can be found at some point in all the cases I have examined. To see why it has failed in other countries may sharpen awareness of the reasons behind its successes. A brief look at these trends in such widely differing countries as England, Russia, and India may serve to bring out important underlying similarities concealed beneath a variety of historical experiences.

Beginning in the latter years of the French Revolution and lasting until about 1822, English society passed through a reactionary phase that recalls both the cases just discussed and contemporary problems of American democracy. During most of these years England was fighting against a revolutionary regime and its heirs, sometimes, it may have seemed, for national survival itself. As in our own time, the advocates of domestic reform were identified with a foreign enemy represented as the incarnation of all that was evil. Again, as in our own time, the violence, repressions, and betrayals of the revolutionary movement in France sickened and discouraged its English supporters, making easier and more plausible the work of reactionaries eager to stamp out the sparks that floated across the channel. Writing in the 1920s the great French historian Elie Halévy, certainly not a man given to dramatic exaggeration, asserted, "A reign of terror was established throughout England by the nobility and middle class—a terror more formidable, though more silent, than the noisy demonstrations of the radicals." The events of the four decades and more that have passed since Halévy wrote these lines have dulled our senses and lowered our standards. No one writing now would be likely to refer to this phase as a reign of terror. The number of direct victims of repression was small. In the "massacre" of Peterloo (1819)—a derisive reference to Wellington's more famous victory of Waterloo—only eleven persons were killed. Nevertheless the gathering movement to reform Parliament was placed outside the law, the press muzzled, associations that smacked of radicalism forbidden, a rash of treason trials initiated, spies and agents provocateurs let loose among the people, the Habeas Corpus suspended after the war with Napoleon had ended. Repression and suffering were real and widespread, only partly mitigated by some continued articulate opposition: an aristocrat such as Charles James Fox (d. 1806) who spoke up courageously in Parliament, here and there a judge or a jury that refused to convict on treason or other charges.

8 Halévy, History of the English People, II, 10.

9 An excellent and detailed description of what life was like for the lower classes in England during this period may be found in Thompson, Making of Working Class. The main government measures and some of their effects can be traced through Cole and Postgate, British People, 132-134, 148-149, 157-159, 190-191. For some valuable additional details see Halévy, History of the English People, II, 23-25. Aristocratic opposition
Why was this reactionary upsurge no more than a passing phase in England? Why did not England continue along this road to become another Germany? Anglo-Saxon liberties, Magna Charta, Parliament and such rhetoric will not do for an answer. Parliament voted repressive measures by huge majorities.

An important part of the answer may be found in the fact that, a century before, certain extremist Englishmen had chopped off the head of their monarch to shatter the magic of royal absolutism in England. At a deeper level of causation, England's whole previous history, her reliance on a navy instead of an army, on unpaid justices of the peace instead of royal officials, had put in the hands of the central government a repressive apparatus weaker than that possessed by the strong continental monarchies. Thus the materials with which to construct a German system were missing or but feebly developed. Still, by now we have seen enough great social and political changes out of unpromising beginnings to suspect that the institutions could have been created if circumstances had been more favorable. But fortunately for human liberties they were not. The push toward industrialism had begun much earlier in England and was to render unnecessary for the English bourgeoisie any great dependence on the crown and the landed aristocracy. Finally, the landed upper classes themselves did not need to repress the peasants. Mainly they wanted to get them out of the way in order to go over to commercial farming, by and large, economic measures would be enough to provide the labor force they needed. Succeeding economically in this particular fashion, they had little need to resort to repressive political measures to continue their leadership. Therefore in England manufacturing and agrarian interests competed with one another for popular favor during the rest of the nineteenth century, gradually extending the suffrage while jealously opposing and knocking down each other's more selfish measures (Reform Bill of 1832, abolition of the Corn Laws in 1846, gentry support for factory legislation, etc).

In the English phase of reaction there were hints of fascist possibilities, particularly in some of the antiradical riots. But these were no more than hints. The time was still too early. Fascist symptoms we can see very much more clearly in another part of the world at a later point in time, during a brief phase of extremism in Russia after 1905. This was extreme enough by Russian standards of the day; one could make a strong case for the thesis that Russian reactionaries invented fascism. Thus this phase of Russian history is especially illuminating because it shows that the fascist syndrome 4) can appear in response to the strains of advancing industrialism independently of a specific social and cultural background, 2) that it may have many roots in agrarian life, 3) that it appears partly in response to a weak push toward parliamentary democracy; 4) but cannot flourish without industrialism or in an overwhelmingly agrarian background. Points, to be sure, all suggested by the recent histories of China and Japan too, though it is illuminating to find stronger confirmation in Russian history.

Shortly before the Revolution of 1905 the tiny Russian commercial and industrial class showed some signs of discontent with the repressive tsarist autocracy and a willingness to flirt with liberal constitutional notions. Workers' strikes, however, and the promise contained in the Imperial Manifesto of October 17, 1905, to meet some of the demands of the strikers, brought the industrialists safely back within the tsarist camp. Against this background appeared the Black Hundreds movement. Drawing partly on American experience, they made “lynch” into a Russian word and asked for the application of zakon lyncha, lynch law. They resorted to violence in storm-trooper style to suppress “treason” and “sedition.” If Russia could destroy the “kikes” and foreigners, their propaganda asserted, everyone could live happily in a return to “true Russian” ways. This anti-Semitic nativism had considerable appeal to backward, precapitalist, petty bourgeois elements in the cities and among the smaller nobility. However, in still backward peasant Russia of the early twentieth century, this form of rightist extremism was unable to find a firm popular basis. Among the peasants it succeeded mainly in areas of mixed nationality, where the explana-

tion of all evil as being due to Jews and foreigners made some sense in terms of peasant experience. As everyone knows, to the extent that they were politically active, the Russian peasants were revolutionary and eventually the major force in exploding the old regime.

In India, which is equally if not more backward, similar movements have likewise failed to obtain a firm basis among the masses. To be sure, Subhas Chandra Bose, who died in 1945, expressed dictatorial sentiments, worked for the Axis, and had a very large popular following. Though his fascist sympathies were consistent with other aspects of his public record and do not seem to be the outcome of momentary enthusiasm or opportunism, Subhas Chandra Bose has gone down in Indian tradition mainly as an extreme and perhaps misguided anti-British patriot. There has also been a scattering of nativist Hindu political organizations, some of which developed the autocratic discipline of the European totalitarian party. They have reached the peak of their influence so far in the chaos and riots surrounding Partition, during which they helped to promote anti-Muslim riots and served as defense organs for Hindu communities against Muslim attacks, led, presumably, by similar organizations on the Muslim side. Their programs lack economic content and appear to be mainly a form of militant, xenophobic Hinduism, seeking to combat the stereotype that Hindus are pacific, divided by caste, and weak. So far their electoral appeal has been very small.

One possible reason for the weakness of the Hindu variant of fascism to date may be the fragmentation of the Hindu world along caste, class, and ethnic lines. Thus a characteristically fascist appeal addressed to one segment would antagonize others, while a more general appeal, by taking on some color of universal panhumanism, begins to lose its fascist qualities. In this connection it is worth noticing that nearly all the extremist Hindu groups have opposed un-

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ouchability and other social disabilities of caste. The main reason, however, is probably the simple fact that Gandhi had already preempted the antiforeign and anticapitalist sentiment of huge masses of the population: peasants and artisans in the cottage industries. Under the conditions created by the British occupation, he was able to tie these sentiments to the interests of a large section of the business class. On the other hand, the landed élite generally stood aloof. Thus reactionary trends have been strong in India and have helped to delay economic progress since Independence. But as a mass phenomenon the larger movements belong to an historical species distinct from fascism.

Though it might be equally profitable to undertake a parallel consideration of democratic failures that preceded fascism in Germany, Japan, and Italy, it is enough for present purposes to notice that fascism is inconceivable without democracy or what is sometimes more turgidly called the entrance of the masses onto the historical stage. Fascism was an attempt to make reaction and conservatism popular and plebeian, through which conservatism, of course, lost the substantial connection it did have with freedom, some aspects of which were discussed in the preceding chapter.

The conception of objective law vanished under fascism. Among its most significant features was a violent rejection of humanitarian ideals, including any notion of potential human equality. The fascist outlook stressed not only the inevitability of hierarchy, discipline, and obedience, but also posited that they were values in their own right. Romantic conceptions of comradeship qualify this outlook but slightly; it is comradeship in submission. Another feature was the stress on violence. This stress goes far beyond any cold, rational appreciation of the factual importance of violence in politics to a mystical worship of “hardness” for its own sake. Blood and death often acquire overtones of erotic attraction, though in its less exalted moments fascism was thoroughly “healthy” and “normal,” promising return to a cozy bourgeois, and even prebourgeois, peasant, womb.

16 To say that fascism was atavistic does not distinguish it sufficiently.
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rural response was National Socialism. Rural support for the Nazis came to an average of 37.4 percent, practically identical with that in the country as a whole in the last relatively free election of July 31, 1932.18

If one looks at a map of Germany showing the distribution of the Nazi vote in the rural areas and compares this map with others showing the distribution of land values, types of cultivation,19 or of the areas of small, medium, and large farms,20 the first impression will be that Nazism in the countryside shows no consistent relationship with any of these. However, as one studies the maps more closely, one can discern substantial evidence to the effect that the Nazis succeeded most in their appeal to the peasant whose holding was relatively small and unprofitable for the particular area in which it existed.21

To the small peasant, suffering under the advance of capitalism with its problems of prices and mortgages that seemed to be controlled by hostile city middlemen and bankers, Nazi propaganda

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So are revolutionary movements, as I have tried to show in some detail in the next chapter.

17 Bread and Democracy, 53, 55.

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18 For the rural vote see the map of Germany showing the distribution of Nazi voting for rural areas, July 1932, with Stadtkreise removed, in Loomis and Beegle, “Spread of German Nazism,” 716. For the percentage of the Nazi vote in Germany as a whole, consult the election statistics from 1919 to 1933 assembled in Dittmann, Das politische Deutschland.

19 Compare Loomis-Beegle map above with map inserts VIII, VIII, and I, in Sering, ed, Deutsche Landwirtschaft.

20 Printed as appendices in Statistik des Deutschen Reichs and in less detail but on a single page as map insert IV in Sering, ed, Deutsche Landwirtschaft.

21 Special studies too provide evidence for the view that the “little fellow” who was having a hard time of it under capitalist conditions was the one most receptive to the Nazi appeal. In Schleswig-Holstein the village communities where the Nazis won 80 to 100 percent of the vote were in what is known as the Geest, an area of small farms on poor soil, heavily dependent on sensitive markets for young cattle and hogs. On this, see Heberle, Social Movements, 212, 218. Parts of Hannover show the same combination. Near Nuremberg, too, the Nazi vote ranged from 71 to 83 percent in an area of relatively low land values, middle-sized family farms, and generally marginal agriculture dependent on the urban market. See Loomis and Beegle, “Spread of German Nazism,” 716, 717. Further evidence pointing in the same direction is summarized and cited in Bracher, et al, Machtergreifung, 389–390.
presented the romantic image of an idealized peasant, "the free man on free land." The peasant became the key figure in the ideology of the radical right as elaborated by the Nazis. The Nazis were fond of stressing the point that, for the peasant, land is more than a means with which to earn a living; it has all the sentimental overtones of Heimat, to which the peasant feels himself far more closely connected than the white collar worker with his office or the industrial worker with his shop. Physiocratic and liberal notions found themselves jumbled together in these doctrines of the radical right.22

"A firm stock of small and middle peasants," said Hitler in Mein Kampf, "has still been at all times the best protection against social evils as we have them now." Such a peasantry constitutes the only way through which a nation can secure its daily bread. He goes on, "Industry and commerce retreat from their unhealthy leading position and fit into the general framework of a national economy based on need and equality. Both are no longer the basis for feeding the nation, but only a help in this."23

For our purposes there is nothing to be gained by examining the fate of these notions after the Nazis came to power. While a few starts were made here and there, most of them were junked because they contradicted the requirements of a powerful war economy, necessarily based on industry. The notion of a retreat from industry was only the most obviously absurd feature.24

In Japan, as in Germany, pseudoradical anticapitalism gained a considerable foothold among the Japanese peasantry. There too the original impulse came from the landed upper classes. On the other hand, its more extreme forms, such as the assassins' bands among junior military officers, though they claimed to speak for the peasants, do not seem to have had a strong following among them. Extremism was in any case absorbed into the more general framework of "respectable" Japanese conservatism and military aggression, for which the peasantry provided a mass basis. Since the Japanese case

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has been discussed in detail in an earlier chapter, there is no need to examine it further here.

Italian fascism displays the same pseudoradical and peasanot features found in Germany and Japan. In Italy, on the other hand, these notions were more of an opportunistic growth, a cynical decoration put on to take advantage of circumstances. Cynical opportunism was present in Germany and Japan too, of course, but seems to have been much more blatant in Italy.

Immediately after the 1914 war, there was a bitter struggle in the north Italian countryside between Socialist and Christian-Democratic trade unions on the one hand and the big landowners on the other. At this point, i.e., 1919–1920, Mussolini, according to Ignazio Silone, paid no attention to the countryside, did not believe in a fascist conquest of the land, and thought fascism would always be an urban movement.25 But the struggle between the landowners and the unions, representing the interests of hired labor and tenants, gave fascism an unexpected opportunity to fish in troubled waters. Presenting themselves as the saviors of civilization against Bolshevism, fasci—bands of idealists, demobilized army officers, and just plain toughs—broke up rural union headquarters, often with the connivance of the police, and during 1921 destroyed the leftist movement in the countryside. Among those who streamed into fascist ranks were peasants who had climbed into the middle ranks of landowners, and even tenants who hated the monopolistic practices of the unions.26 During the summer of this year Mussolini made his famous observation that "if Fascism does not wish to die or, worse still, to commit suicide, it must now provide itself with a doctrine. . . . I do wish that during the two months which are still to elapse before our National Assembly meets, the philosophy of Fascism could be created."27

Only later did Italian fascist leaders begin to declare that fascism was "ruralizing" Italy, championing the cause of the peasants, or that it was primarily a "rural phenomenon." These claims were

23 Mein Kampf, 154 – 155. For the main factual aspects of Nazi policy see also Schweitzer, "Nazification," in Third Reich, 576 – 594.
24 For the fate of the agrarian program, consult Wunderlich, Farm Labor, pt III, "The Period of National Socialism.
25 Silone, Fascism, 107.
26 Schmidt, Plough and Sword, 34 – 38, Silone, Fascism, 109, Salvemini, Fascist Dictatorship, 67, 73.
27 Quoted by Schmidt, Plough and Sword, 39 – 40.
nonsense. The number of owner operators dropped by 400,000 between 1921 and 1931; that of cash-and-share tenants rose by about 400,000. Essentially fascism protected big agriculture and big industry at the expense of the agricultural laborer, small peasantry, and consumer.28

As we look back at fascism and its antecedents, we can see that the glorification of the peasantry appears as a reactionary symptom in both Western and Asiatic civilization at a time when the peasant economy is facing severe difficulties. In part of the Epilogue I shall try to indicate some of the recurring forms this glorification has taken in its more virulent stages. To say that such ideas are merely foisted on the peasants by the upper classes is not true. Because the ideas find an echo in peasant experience, they may win widespread acceptance, the wider, it seems, the more industrialized and modern the country is.

As evidence against the evaluation that such glorification constitutes a reactionary symptom, one might be tempted to cite Jefferson’s praise of the small farmer and John Stuart Mill’s defense of peasant farming. Both thinkers, however, in the characteristic fashion of early liberal capitalism, were defending not so much peasants as small independent property owners. There is in their thought none of the militant chauvinism and glorification of hierarchy and submission found in the later versions, though there are occasional overtones of a romantic attitude toward rural life. Even so, their attitude toward agrarian problems and rural society does indicate the limits that liberal thinkers had reached at their respective points in time. For such ideas to serve reactionary purposes in the twentieth century, they have had to take on a new coloring and appear in a new context, the defense of hard work and small property in the twentieth century has an entirely different political meaning from what it had in the middle of the nineteenth or the latter part of the eighteenth centuries.

28 For figures and details see Schmidt, Plough and Sword, 7, 111. 66 – 67, 71, 114.

CHAPTER NINE

The Peasants and Revolution

The process of modernization begins with peasant revolutions that fail. It culminates during the twentieth century with peasant revolutions that succeed. No longer is it possible to take seriously the view that the peasant is an “object of history,” a form of social life over which historical changes pass but which contributes nothing to the impetus of these changes. For those who savor historical irony it is indeed curious that the peasant in the modern era has been as much an agent of revolution as the machine, that he has come into his own as an effective historical actor along with the conquests of the machine. Nevertheless the revolutionary contribution has been very uneven; decisive in China and Russia, quite important in France, very minor in Japan, insignificant in India to date, trivial in Germany and England after initial explosions had been defeated. In this concluding chapter our task will be to relate these facts to each other systematically in the hope of discovering what kinds of social structures and historical situations produce peasant revolutions and which ones inhibit or prevent them.

The undertaking is not an easy one. The traditional general explanations run into important exceptions within the range of materials examined here. No theory emphasizing a single factor appears to be satisfactory. Since negative findings have their uses, I will begin with a brief summary of theories it has been necessary to discard.

The first one that a modern investigator might choose is a simple economic interpretation in terms of deterioration in the peasants’ situation under the impact of commerce and industry.
Where such deterioration has occurred on a marked scale, it seems plausible to expect revolutionary outbreaks. Once again the case of India provides a useful check, especially when set alongside that of China. There is no indication that the deterioration in the economic position of the Indian peasantry has been worse than that of the Chinese during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Admittedly the evidence is far from perfect in both cases. Local and ineffective peasant upheavals there were in India. Still it is highly unlikely that whatever difference there may be is adequate to account for the contrast in the political behavior of Chinese and Indian peasants during the past century and a half. Since these differences also extend backward in time for centuries, it becomes obvious that no simple economic explanation will do.

One might object that this form of the economic explanation is too simple. Could it be that not merely a decline in the peasants' material situation but a massive threat to their entire mode of life, to the very foundations of peasant existence - property, family, and religion - brings about a revolutionary situation? Once more the evidence is clearly negative. It was not the English peasants turned adrift by enclosures who rose in massive revolt but the French ones who were merely threatened by them. Russian peasant society in 1917 was mainly intact. Again, as I shall have occasion to point out in more detail later in this chapter, it was not the peasants of eastern Germany rolled under by the manorial reaction and the reintroduction of serfdom who turned to bloody revolt in the sixteenth century but those of the south and west, who by and large retained and even extended their old way of life. Indeed the very opposite hypothesis comes closer to the truth, as we shall see in due course.

From the romantic and conservative tradition of the nineteenth century comes another familiar thesis that where the noble aristocrat lives in the countryside among his peasants there is less likelihood of acute peasant outbreaks than where he becomes a lusfer of luxury, living in the capital. Contrasts between the fate of the French and English aristocracy during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries seem to be the origin of this notion. However, the Russian landlord of the nineteenth century often lived a large part of his life on his estate, a fact that 

ing manors and finally driving the dvorianstvo from the historical stage. Even for France itself, the thesis is doubtful. Modern research has shown that by no means all the nobility were hangers-on at the court; many lived morally exemplary lives in the countryside.

The notion that a large rural proletariat of landless labor is a potential source of insurrection and revolution may be somewhat closer to the truth. The huge size and appalling misery of India's rural proletariat might seem to refute the thesis. Many of these are, on the other hand, tied to the prevailing system through possession of a tiny plot of land and by the caste system. Where such bonds have been snapped or never existed at all, as in plantation economies operated with very cheap hired labor of a different race or by slaves, the possibilities of insurrection are much greater. Though slave owners in the American South seem to have had exaggerated fears, there has been reason enough elsewhere to fear insurrection: in ancient Rome, Haiti and other parts of the Caribbean during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, parts of Spain in modern times, and quite recently on the sugar plantations of Cuba. But, even if the hypothesis should turn out on more careful inquiry to be correct, it would not account for the historically significant cases. No rural proletariat of this type was important in the Russian Revolutions of 1905 or 1917. Though the Chinese case is less well documented, and bands of wandering peasants driven from their land by a variety of causes have been important there, the revolutionary upsurges of 1917 and 1949 were certainly not those of a rural proletariat working huge landed estates. Nor was it the case in the revolutionary outbreaks of the nineteenth century. As a general explanation, this conception simply will not do.

Driven back from material explanations one might turn naturally to hypotheses about the role of religion. At first glance this seems a promising tack. Hinduism might go a long way toward explaining the passivity of the Indian peasantry. More generally an organic cosmology that conferred legitimacy on the role of the ruling classes, couched in some theory of the harmony of the universe that stressed resignation and the acceptance of individual fate, might conceivably serve as a strong bar to insurrection and rebel-

1 Robinson, Rural Russia, 106, is explicit on this point.
lion if the peasants accepted its norms. Here at once a difficulty appears. Such religions are the product of urban and priestly classes. The extent of their acceptance among peasants is problematic. In general the existence of an undercurrent of belief distinct from that of the educated strata, often in direct opposition to it, characterizes peasant societies. Passed along by word of mouth from generation to generation, only fragments of this underground tradition are likely to find their way into the historical record, and then very likely in a distorted form.

Even in religion-soaked India there are numerous indications of widespread hostility to the Brahman. Possibly Indian and other peasants believe in the effectiveness of magic and ritual as such, while at the same time they resent the human agent who performs the rituals and the price that he exacts for their performance. Movements to do away with the priest, to attain direct access to the deity and the source of magic, have simmered underground in both Europe and Asia for long periods, to burst forth from time to time in heretical and rebellious movements. In this connection, too, we would want to know what circumstances make peasants receptive to these movements at some times and not at others. Nor are they a universal accompaniment of the more important peasant upheavals. There is little indication of any religious component in the peasant disturbances that preceded and accompanied the French Revolution. In the Russian Revolution it is highly unlikely that revolutionary notions from the towns, either religious or secular, were of any importance. G.T. Robinson in his study of Russian peasant life before 1917 points out that the religious and other intellectual currents impinging on the peasants from the outside were wholly on the side of conservatism and strongly discounts the role of revolutionary ideas from the towns. Conceivably further research may reveal the role of underground traditions indigenous to the peasantry and couched in religious terms. Nevertheless, to be meaningful, such an explanation in the case of Russia, or of any society, requires information about the way in which ideas were related to concrete social circumstances. Religion by itself clearly provides no key.

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The shortcoming of all these hypotheses is that they focus too much attention on the peasantry. A moment's reflection on the course of any specific preindustrial rebellion reveals that one cannot understand it without reference to the actions of the upper classes that in large measure provoked it. Another noticeable feature of rebellions in agrarian societies is their tendency to take on the character of the society against which they rebel. In modern times this tendency is obscured because successful rebellion has been the prelude to thorough and violent overhaul of the entire society. In earlier peasant rebellions, it is much more obvious. The insurgents battle for the restoration of the "old law," as in the Bauernkrieg, for the "real Tsar" or the "good Tsar" in Russian peasant upheavals. In traditional China the outcome has often been the replacement of a decaying dynasty by a new and vigorous one, that is, a restoration of essentially the same social structure. Before looking at the peasantry, it is necessary to look at the whole society.

With these considerations in mind we may raise the question whether certain types of agrarian and premodern societies are more subject to peasant insurrection and rebellion than others and what structural features may help to explain the differences. The contrast between India and China is sufficient to show that the differences exist and have prolonged political consequences. Likewise the existence of even one substantiated attempt at peasant revolt in India, that of Hyderabad in 1948, even leaving aside other smaller upheavals, strongly suggests that no social structure can be totally immune to revolutionary tendencies set up in the course of modernization. On the other hand, some societies are obviously much more vulnerable than others. For the moment we may set aside all problems that arise during the course of modernization and concentrate specifically on structural differences in premodern societies.3

3 As the expressions "immune" and "vulnerable" show, English usage imposes a conservative bias on the analysis of revolutions: the implicit assumption is that a "healthy" society is immune to revolution. Hence it becomes necessary to make explicit the author's rejection of this assumption. The analysis of why revolutions do and do not occur carries no logical implication of approval or disapproval, even if no investigator is free of such preferences. Without trying to develop the argument here, I suspect that a
The contrast between India and China suggests an hypothesis perhaps more tenable than those just discussed. Indian society, as many scholars have remarked, resembles some huge yet very simple invertebrate organism. A central coordinating authority, a monarch, or to continue the biological analogy, a brain, was not necessary to its continued operation. Through much of Indian history down to modern times, there was no central authority imposing its will on the whole subcontinent. Indian society reminds one of the starfish whom fishermen used to shred angrily into bits, after which each fragment would grow into a new starfish. But the analogy is inexact. Indian society was even simpler and yet more differentiated. Climate, agricultural practices, taxation systems, religious beliefs, and many other social and culture features differed markedly from one part of the country to another. Caste, on the other hand, was common to them all and provided the framework around which all of life was everywhere organized. It made possible these differences and a society where a territorial segment could be cut off from the rest without damage, or at least without fatal damage, to itself or the rest of the society. Far more important, from the standpoint of our immediate problem, is the reverse of this feature. Any attempt at innovation, any local variation, simply became the basis of another caste. This has not been merely a matter of new religious beliefs. Since the distinction between sacred and profane is very dubious for Indian society, and since religiously tinged caste codes cover practically the whole range of human activities, any innovation or attempted innovation in premodern times was likely to become the basis for another caste. Thus opposition to society and preying on society became a part of society in the form of bandit castes or castes in the form of religious sects. In China, too, hereditary bandits were known. In the Chinese context, their significance was quite different, aside from the fact that the absence of caste made recruitment easier. In China the landlord needed a strong central authority as part of the arrangement for extracting the surplus from the peasants. Until quite recent times, caste made this arrange-

4 Hsiao, Rural China, 461.

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ment unnecessary in India. Chinese society for this reason required something resembling a brain, a more than rudimentary coordinating authority at the center. Bandits were a threat in China and could grow into peasant uprisings.

The general hypothesis that emerges from this brief recapitulation, hedged with that familiar ritual phrase ceteris paribus used by scholars to avoid thorny issues, might be put in the following way: A highly segmented society that depends on diffuse sanctions for its coherence and for extracting the surplus from the underlying peasantry is nearly immune to peasant rebellion because opposition is likely to take the form of creating another segment. On the other hand, an agrarian bureaucracy, or a society that depends on a central authority for extracting the surplus, is a type most vulnerable to such outbreaks. Feudal systems, where real power is diffused into several centers under the nominal authority of a weak monarch, belong somewhere in between. This hypothesis at least fits the main facts in this study. Peasant rebellion was a severe problem in traditional China and tsarist Russia; was somewhat less severe but frequently beneath the surface in medieval Europe; was quite noticeable in Japan from the fifteenth century onwards; and finds almost no mention in histories of India.

Turning to the process of modernization itself, we notice once again that the success or failure of the upper class in taking up commercial agriculture has a tremendous influence on the political outcome. Where the landed upper class has turned to production for the market in a way that enables commercial influences to permeate rural life, peasant revolutions have been weak affairs. There are several very different ways in which this antirevolutionary transition has been able to take place. In early Meiji Japan, a landed upper class that was being rapidly renewed preserved much of the traditional peasant society as the mechanism for extracting a surplus. In other key cases, peasant society was destroyed, either by breaking

5 Japanese revolts show some of the signs characteristic of the early phase of modernization in Europe, a fact compatible with Japan's more centralized feudalism, which resembled European efforts under absolute monarchies to preserve privilege and the status quo. See Sansom, History of Japan, II, 208–110.
the connection with the land as in England or by intensifying the connection as in the reintroduction of serfdom in Prussia. Conversely the evidence indicates that a revolutionary movement is much more likely to develop and become a serious threat where the landed aristocracy fails to develop a really powerful commercial impulse within its own ranks. Then it may leave beneath it a peasant society damaged but intact, with which it has few connecting links. Meanwhile it is likely to try to maintain its style of life in a changing world by extracting a larger surplus out of the peasantry. By and large this was the case in eighteenth-century France and in Russia and China during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.  

The great German peasant war, the Bauernkrieg of 1524–1525, illustrates these relationships in a striking fashion, especially if one compares the areas in which it broke out violently with those parts of Germany where it was not more than a minor episode. Since it was the most important peasant revolution of early modern times in Europe, it will be well to discuss it briefly here. Once again its meaning becomes clearest through contrast with changes in English society. An influential sector of the landed upper classes in England wanted, not men, but land for sheep raising. The German Junkers, on the other hand, wanted men, more specifically men attached to the land, in order to grow the grain which they exported. Much of the subsequent history of the two countries goes back to this homely difference.

In Prussia the coming of grain exports brought about a sharp reversal of earlier trends that had been similar to those in Western Europe, where parliamentary democracy eventually triumphed. By the middle of the fourteenth century, Prussia still resembled West-

erm Europe, even if it had reached this stage by a different route. Then it was a land of prosperous and relatively free peasants. As in the rest of what later became northeastern Germany, the necessity to grant favorable conditions to immigrating German colonists had, along with the development of a strong central authority in the form of the Teutonic Order and a vigorous town life, been the main cause of this freedom. German peasants had the right to sell and bequeath their lands, as well as to market their produce in the nearby towns. Their dues to the overlord in both money and labor were small, the authority of the lord in village affairs was strictly limited, mainly to “higher justice,” i.e., the more serious crimes. For the rest, villagers managed their own affairs.  

The villages throughout the colonized area were settled by the locator, often employed by the noble landholders, who procured the settlers, led them from their place of origin, allocated to them their holdings, measured the village fields, and in return became the hereditary mayor with larger holdings than the rest. In a sense, therefore, the villages of northeastern Germany were artificial communities that received their rights in the form of charters (Handfeste) from above. Their situation on this score differed from that of southern German-speaking villages, which won their rights in the course of a prolonged struggle with the overlord. This difference may be partly responsible for the lack of resistance to later subjugation in the northeast, though other factors were probably more significant. Another difference from the south was the ethnically mixed character of the population, as Germans settled in Slavic territories. However, German villages were usually settled on unoccupied land, and the Slavic peasants soon gained the same favorable legal status as the Germans.  

Toward the end of the fourteenth century, certain changes began that later led to the enserfment of the peasants. The towns declined; the central authority weakened. But most important of all,

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6 India may seem an exception to this generalization about the survival of peasant society as a cause of modern revolution. It is partly explicable in terms of the impediments to rebellion and revolution inherent in India’s premodern social structure, partly the way modernization has proceeded up to now. Most important of all, modernization has but rarely been in the Indian countryside. Such are the main grounds for holding that it is not really an exception. Perhaps it will become one. Historical generalizations are not immutable laws like those of physics: the course of history reflects mainly an effort to escape the bounds imposed by previous conditions expressed in such generalizations.


there appeared the beginnings of an export market for grain. Together these forces altered the political balance in the countryside. Other parts of Germany and Europe were also hit by a debasement of the currency as part of a weakening of royal authority and by an agrarian crisis that led the nobility to press hard on the peasants, events that helped to produce the Peasants' War. But only in the northeast did an important export trade in grain put in an appearance.

The consequences for the peasants were disastrous. The lords ceased to be interested in money dues from the peasants and turned instead to cultivating and increasing the desmesne. For this the labor of the peasants was necessary. Labor services were extended; the peasants tied to the soil. Their rights to sell and bequeath their property were all but abolished, and they were no longer allowed to marry off the estate. Most of these changes took place during the sixteenth century, an era of booming grain prices. It is worth noticing that in this situation the scarcity of labor did not aid the peasants but led to severe discipline in order to prevent flight and that a numerous though rather poor nobility was able to establish a labor-repressive system without the assistance of a powerful central government. In fact the formal end of the Teutonic Order in 1525 was one of the more important political events that led to the results just mentioned.11

During the period of colonization, peasant villages had often been physically separate from the noble's estate and had been largely independent organisms. In the second half of the fifteenth century, this situation ceased,12 as the lords penetrated the villages, economically by taking over peasant property, especially the larger holdings of the mayor, and politically by establishing a monopoly of justice. Without this capture of the village community and the destruction of its autonomy, it is difficult to understand how a mass of scattered nobles could have imposed their will.

10 Carsten, Origins of Prussia, 115.
12 Aubin, Geschichte des gutsherrlich-bäuerlichen Verhältnisses, 155 – 156.
13 Stein, Agrarverfassung, I, 417 – 419.

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By the end of the seventeenth century, most of the nobles had become petty despots in the area of their estates, checked by no formal authority from above or below. The "capitalist" revolution of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Junker was almost entirely a social and political one. There is no indication in the literature of any important technical changes in agriculture that accompanied the Junker's rise to supremacy. The three-field system was still almost universal up until about the time of the Seven Years' War, and, by the eighteenth century, agricultural practices, especially on the big Junker estates, were far behind those in Germany's western provinces.14

The peasants did offer limited resistance. The only revolt of importance broke out in the vicinity of Königsberg in 1525, shortly after the abolition of the Teutonic Order. It is not surprising that the impetus came partly from the town itself and from those who had most to lose — the more prosperous free peasants. Its rapid suppression was due to weak support from the towns, where, in contrast to the Bauernkrieg area, guild life was relatively feeble.15

The situation that led to the Bauernkrieg of 1524 – 1525 was in its most important aspects almost the opposite of that in northeastern Germany and calls to mind some of the features that more than two centuries later produced the French Revolution. Since the Bauernkrieg and the numerous upheavals that led up to it were spread over a wide area, from what is now western Austria, through

15 Carsten, "Bauernkrieg," 407. The weak resistance in Germany to the establishment of serfdom presents a sharp contrast with the peasant unrest and revolts that accompanied and followed its establishment during the same time period in Russia. The main reason for the difference is probably a fact to which attention has been drawn before: serfdom in Russia arose in response to a political situation. As part of the process by which absolutism established itself, Russian serfdom provided a method of working the lands granted to support the tsar's officials. Also serfdom in Russia seems to have damaged the peasant village far less than in Prussia. Though it lost much of its autonomy, the Russian village commune (mir, or more accurately sel'skoe obschestvo) remained very much a going concern. For an excellent treatment of the changes during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Russia, see Blum, Lord and Peasant, chaps 8 – 14; on peasant unrest, 258, 267 – 268; on the mir, 510 – 512.
nearly all of Switzerland, parts of southwestern Germany, and a large area of the upper Rhine Valley, there was naturally considerable variation in local conditions, a variation that has added to the difficulty in determining its causes and kept alive a vigorous controversy over them up to the present time.16

Nevertheless there is widespread agreement among a variety of scholars along the following lines. The territorial princes in this part of Germany were getting stronger, not weaker as in the northeast, and taking some of the early steps toward controlling their own nobility and setting up a modern uniform administration. This form of absolutism was, however, a petty, fragmented variety, as the Emperor had dissipated German energies in a vain struggle with the papacy. Town life flourished in this part of Germany; the late Middle Ages were the golden age of the German Bürger.

Thus the peasants could at times draw on the urban plebs for support. But to generalize about what social strata the allied themselves with and which ones they opposed is very risky. At different times and places they were in opposition to nearly every conceivable group and in alliance with some other: in the Rhineland with the nobles against the monastic holdings,17 against the nobility at others, with the nobility at still others, yet again in opposition to the bourgeoisie and the territorial prince.18 All that one can say with confidence is that the conflict began chiefly with the moderate demands of well-to-do peasants and became more radical as it developed, turning later into the apocalyptic visions of Thomas Munzer. Partly this progressive radicalization was due to the refusal of early moderate demands,19 partly to the tendency of peasants to turn to new religious notions emanating from the Reformation in justification of their economic, political, and social grievances.20

The connection with the towns probably contributed to this radi-

15 See the three maps at the end of Franz, Bauernkrieg.


17 Franz, Bauernkrieg, 84, 85, 26.

18 The thesis of Waas, in Grosse Wendung.


21 It may also have derived from the complaints of lower strata among the peasantry, who were dividing into rich and poor much as in France of the late eighteenth century, though I have not found any explicit statement of this connection.

22 What the nobles did not do, except here and there on a small scale, was to undertake farming for the market. Here lies the crucial difference between the area of the Bauernkrieg and Junker Germany.

23 As for the peasants themselves, the economic and social position of a large sector had been improving for some time. As one scholar observed more than twenty years ago, the evidence of prosperity among the peasants and Bürger in this part of Germany at the end of the Middle Ages has become so abundant that it is no longer possible to believe that general economic deterioration caused the revolt.23 This fact is of course quite consistent with the view that hard pressed nobles tried to put the screw on the peasants in whatever way they could.24 For centuries a see-saw struggle had been taking place between the peasant community and the overlords over their respective rights, a struggle that did not exclude shared interests on many issues. Periodically the outcome crystallized in a

21 E.g., in the piper of Niklashausen. See Franz, Bauernkrieg, 45–52.

22 Franz, Bauernkrieg, 41–40.

23 Waas, Grosse Wendung, 40–41.

24 Evidence on this score is presented by a Soviet scholar Smirin, Ocherki istorii politicheskoi bor’by v Germanii, chap II. Smirin does everything he can to prove the existence of a “seigniory reaction” and at times strains the evidence to the point of being silly; as when he cites (p. 60) labor dues of three days a year as an indication of their importance. But he is probably correct in his assertion (p. 85) that the peasants were upset by the uncertainty and variation in their obligations.
written record known as a Weisstum, the codification of customary law (Rechtsgewohnheiten) which was written down from answers to questioning under oath of the experienced older men of the community. The surviving records show a big increase in the number of Weisstunder after 1300 with the largest number falling between 1500 and 1600, after which they fall off rapidly. What these documents and other similar evidence reveal is a tightly knit village community, albeit one with increasing property differentials, existing in a slowly changing situation of antagonistic cooperation with the overlord. Labor dues and the cultivation of the demesne appear to have been declining in importance and money dues increasing, the reverse of the situation in the northeast. A good many peasants had come close to attaining de facto property rights, having shaken off most of the stigmata of feudal tenure, though there were many pockets where the latter remained.

In the early stages of the revolt, peasant demands often repeated themes taken from older Weisstum. This fact is one more strong indication that the revolt began with the “legitimate” grievances of respected and substantial members of the village community.

The Bauernkrieg was a failure and bloodily suppressed. Both its radical and conservative manifestations were driven underground. Partly because of the aristocratic victory, which as we have seen took place in the northeast for different reasons and against little resistance, the prospects for the emergence of liberal democracy in Germany were cut off for centuries. Not until the nineteenth century did Germany again take halting and, as it turned out, unsuccessful steps in this direction.

26 Weissner, Sachinhalt und Wirtschaftliche Bedeutung der Weisstumer, 26-29.
27 Weissner, “Geschichte des Dorfes,” 43-45, 60, 65, 70-71. Though the account is limited to Austria, it is highly likely that the same type of differences was appearing elsewhere.
29 Waas, Grosse Wendung, 34-35.
30 Cf Franz, Bauernkrieg, 1-40.

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The respective victories of the English squire and the German Junker constitute almost exactly opposite forms in which a landed upper class might make a successful transition to commercial agriculture. They also constitute exactly opposite ways of destroying the basis of political action by the peasantry. Even if defeated, this action was vigorous in the Bauernkrieg areas where the upper classes did not make an economic onslaught on peasant society but apparently tried to increase the amount of money it took from the peasants.

This excursion into a concrete case is sufficient, I hope, to indicate the main ways in which the response of the landed upper classes to the challenge of commercial agriculture creates situations that are favorable or unfavorable to revolts by the peasantry. The main areas where peasant revolutions have in modern times had the greatest importance, China and Russia, were alike in the fact that the landed upper classes by and large did not make a successful transition to the world of commerce and industry and did not destroy the prevailing social organization among the peasants.

Now we may leave the actions of the aristocracy aside to undertake a more analytic discussion of factors at work among the peasantry itself. Just what does modernization mean for the peasantry beyond the simple and brutal fact that sooner or later they are its victims? On general grounds, it seems obvious that the different types of social organization found in various peasant societies, together with the timing and character of the modernization process itself, can be expected to have considerable influence on whether or not the response will be a revolutionary or a passive one. But just what is the connection among these variables? Let us see first what general changes take place in this complex process.

In agriculture economic modernization means the extension of market relationships over a much wider area than before, and the replacement of subsistence farming more and more by production for the market. Secondly, in politics successful modernization
involve the establishment of peace and order over a wide area, the creation of a strong central government. There is no universal connection between the two processes: Rome and China both established powerful and far-flung governments for their time without generating any significant impetus toward a modern society. It is the combination of the two, nevertheless, that has yielded modernization in various parts of the world since the fifteenth century. The spread of the state's authority and the intrusion of the market, which may occur at quite different times, affect the bonds of the peasant to the overlord, the division of labor within the village, the system of authority, class groupings within the peasantry, tenure and property rights. At some point the influence of these external forces may produce changes in the technology and level of productivity in agriculture. To my limited knowledge, there is no instance of a major technical revolution in agriculture arising among the peasantry, though moderately important ones are reported for Japan, as we have seen, toward the end of the Tokugawa era. Technological changes so far have been far more important in the West; in the rice economies of Asia, added productivity has come mainly through intensified human labor.

In this complex of related changes three aspects are especially important politically: the character of the link between the peasant community and the overlord, property and class divisions within the peasantry, and the degree of solidarity or cohesiveness displayed by the peasant community. Because these three aspects are so closely related to each other, it is impossible to avoid some overlap and repetition in an effort to trace out characteristic patterns of modernization in each of them.

To return to the starting point of the process, one finds that there are certain very broad similarities among peasant communities or villages and their relationships to the outside world in many agrarian civilizations. It will be helpful to begin by sketching the general ground plan of these communities in very general terms, realizing that there are numerous politically significant departures from this plan. Indeed it is easier to perceive the meaning of these departures if we first grasp the general model. I shall limit the discussion to villages, conceived as compact settlements surrounded by cultivated fields. Though the system of scattered individual settlements also occurs quite widely, it was not the predominant form anywhere except perhaps in parts of the United States in colonial and frontier times. In itself this is one of the grounds for refusing the designation peasant to American farmers.

Either directly or indirectly the immediate overlord played a vital part in the life of the village. In feudal societies he was the seigneur; in bureaucratic China he was the landlord dependent on the Imperial bureaucracy; in parts of India the zamindar, a figure roughly halfway between the bureaucratic official and the feudal seigneur. The general task of the secular overlord was to provide security against the external enemies. Often, but not universally, he rendered justice and settled disputes among the inhabitants of the village. Alongside the secular overlord, there has often been the priest. His task has been to help give legitimacy to the prevailing social order and to provide a way of both explaining and coping with those misfortunes and disasters for which the individual peasant's traditional economic and social techniques were inadequate. In return for the performance of these functions, the overlord with the priest extracted an economic surplus from the peasants in the form of labor, agricultural products, or even money, though this was generally less important in precommercial times. How these obligations were distributed among the peasants varied considerably. The peasants' right to cultivate the soil and keep a portion of the products for their own use generally depended on fulfilling the above obligations.

There is considerable evidence to support the thesis that, where the links arising out of this relationship between overlord and peasant community are strong, the tendency toward peasant rebellion (and later revolution) is feeble. In both China and Russia, the links were tenuous and peasant upheavals endemic to these states, even though the structure of the peasant communities themselves were about as different as could be imagined. In Japan, where peasant revolution was kept under control, the linkage was very
effective. There are some puzzles and contradictions in the evidence. In India, strictly political power did not reach into the village except in certain areas in pre-British times. But there was a strong linkage to authority through the priesthood.

Two conditions are probably essential for the link to be an effective agent of social stability. One is that there should not be severe competition for land or other resources between the peasants and the overlord. This is not simply a matter of how much land is available. Social institutions are just as important as the amount of land in determining whether or not peasants become land hungry. Thus, a second and closely related condition, I would suggest, is the following: political stability requires the inclusion of the overlord and/or the priest as members of the village community who perform services necessary for the agricultural cycle and the social cohesion of the village for which they receive roughly commensurate privileges and material rewards. This point requires more extensive discussion since it raises general issues that are a matter of lively dispute.

The difficulty arises from the notion of rewards and privileges commensurate with the services rendered by the upper class. In a feudal society just how many hens and eggs at stated times in the year, how many days of work on the lord's fields, would be a "fair" repayment for the lord's protection and justice? Is the matter not wholly arbitrary, one that can only be decided by a test of strength? More generally, is not the concept of "exploitation" a purely subjective one, no more than a political epithet, that cannot receive any objective pinning down or measurement? Very likely a majority of social scientists today would answer these questions with an affirmative. If one takes this position, the proposition just suggested becomes a trivial tautology. It means that peasants do not revolt as long as they accept the privileges of the aristocracy and their own obligations to them as legitimate. Why the peasants accept them remains as much of a problem as ever. Within the framework of this position, force and deception can be the only possible answers to this question because one set of rewards is just as arbitrary as any other. It seems to me that at this point the whole subjective interpretation of exploitation breaks down and becomes flagrantly self-contradictory. How can nine-tenths of the peasants' crop be no more and no less arbitrary an extraction than a third?

The opposite point of view, that exploitation is in principle an objective notion, I submit, makes better sense generally and at least provides the possibility of an explanation. The point at issue is whether or not one can make an objective assessment of the contributions of qualitatively different activities, such as fighting and tilling the soil, to the continued existence of a specific society. (Economists used to tell us that this was possible, at least through a competitive market, but would, I take it, be reluctant to go that far now.) It seems to me that this is possible for a detached observer and that he does so by asking the traditional questions 1) Is this activity necessary to the society? What would happen if it stopped or changed? 2) What resources are necessary in order to enable people to carry out this activity effectively? Though the answers to such questions must always have a substantial margin of uncertainty, they also have a common objective core.

Within limits broad enough for society to work, the objective character of exploitation seems so dreadfully obvious as to lead to the suspicion that the denial of objectivity is what requires explanation. It is not hard to tell when a peasant community gets real protection from its overlord and when the overlord is either unable to keep enemies out or is in league with them. An overlord who does not keep the peace, who takes away most of the peasants' food, seizes his women - as happened over wide areas of China in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries - is clearly exploitative. In between this situation and objective justice are all sorts of gradations where the ratio between services rendered and the surplus taken from the peasants is open to dispute. Such disputes may intrigue philosophers. They are not likely to rip society apart. The thesis put forward here merely holds that the contributions of those who fight, rule, and pray must be obvious to the peasant, and that the peasants' return payments must not be grossly out of proportion to the services received. Folk conceptions of justice, to put the argument in still another way, do have a rational and realistic basis; and arrangements that depart from this basis are likely to need deception and force the more they do depart.

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Certain forms of modernization are especially likely to upset any form of equilibrium that may establish itself in the relationship between the peasant community and the landed upper classes and to put new strains on the mechanisms linking them together. Where the royal authority has increased and intensified the burden on the peasantry in order to meet the costs of an expanding military establishment and administrative bureaucracy, as well as an expensive policy of courtly magnificence, the growth of royal absolutism may contribute heavily to peasant explosions. The Bourbon kings and the Russian tsars each in their very different ways used this combination of devices to tame their respective nobilities at the cost of substantial suffering among the peasants. The reaction was intermittent eruptions, much more severe in Russia than in France. The Tudors and Stuarts in England faced an entirely different situation, and lost a royal head, partly because they attempted to protect the peasants against the “antisocial” behavior of a commercializing nobility. In Japan the Tokugawa Shōgun resolutely turned their backs on the outside world and therefore did not have to create as expensive a military and administrative establishment as did absolute monarchs in Europe. Peasant disturbances did not become important until the latter part of the era.

Generally the creation of centralized monarchy has meant that the peasants’ immediate overlord lost his protective functions to the state. In both France and Russia this change took place in such a way as to leave still in large measure intact the rights of the lord to a series of obligations from the peasants. These lordly rights were backed up by the new power of the state because the royal authority could not afford to alienate the nobility altogether. In turn, gradual infiltration into the countryside of goods made in the towns that the lord needed or thought he needed, together with the requirements of conspicuous consumption at court, increased the lord’s need to squeeze more out of the peasantry. The failure of commercial farming to take hold on any very wide scale made the situation worse, since it meant that there was scarcely any alternative to squeezing the peasant. As we have seen, what trends there

were toward commercial agriculture were labor-repressive. In France, Russia, and other parts of eastern Europe, the small lord became the most reactionary figure, perhaps because all alternatives were closed to him, such as the court, a good marriage, or an attempt at commercial farming. There is no need to labor the connection between these trends and peasant discontent, which have been pointed out by numerous historians.

Where the peasants have revolted, there are indications that new and capitalist methods of pumping the economic surplus out of the peasantry had been added while the traditional ones lingered on or were even intensified. This was true in eighteenth-century France, where the peasant movement that helped to bring down the ancien régime had strong anticapitalist as well as strong antifeudal features. In Russia the tsar’s action in dismounting serfdom from above failed to satisfy the peasants. The redemption payments were too high and the grants of land too small, as the subsequent accumulation of arrears soon showed. In the absence of any thoroughgoing modernization of the countryside, the redemption payments merely became new ways of taking a surplus from the peasant while keeping him from getting the land that was “rightfully” his. Again, in China the peasant showed by his behavior that he resented the combination of the old tax-collecting official and commercial landlord embodied in the Kuomintang regime.

These facts do not imply that the total burden on the peasantry necessarily increased under these circumstances. Indeed it is an historical commonplace that improvement in the economic situation of the peasantry may be a prelude to revolt. The fact seems

32 Such improvement would seem to contradict the thesis that objective exploitation is a cause of revolt. This is not necessarily so. The relationship between the overlord and the peasant community can become more exploitative without the peasants becoming any poorer, indeed even if their material situation improves. This would happen wherever the lord’s exactions increased and his contribution to the welfare of security of the village declined. A decline in the lord’s contribution, along with general economic improvement and efforts by the lord to increase his “take” could be expected to generate tremendous resentment. To test this conception of objective exploitation carefully against several cases would be a very difficult but rewarding undertaking. I have not done this; the notion came to me in
moderately well established for the English countryside prior to the upheaval of 1381, for the Bauernkrieg in sixteenth-century Germany, and for the French peasantry prior to 1789. In other cases, the most important ones, Russia and China, the burden on the peasants very likely increased.

In any event, one of the greatest dangers for an ancien régime during the earlier phases of transition to the world of commerce and industry is to lose the support of the upper crust of the peasantry. One common explanation is a psychological one, to the effect that limited improvement in the economic position of this stratum leads to greater and greater demands and eventually to a revolutionary outbreak. This notion of a “revolution of rising expectations” may have some explanatory power. It will not do as a general explanation. For both Russia and China, even in the twentieth century, it strains the evidence beyond recognition. There are several different ways in which the richer peasants may turn upon the old order, depending on specific historical circumstances and the impact of these on different forms of peasant society.

The timing of changes in the life of the peasantry, including the number of people simultaneously affected, are crucial factors in their own right. I suspect that they are more important than the material changes in food, shelter, clothing, except for very sudden and big ones. Economic deterioration by slow degrees can become accepted by its victims as part of the normal situation. Especially where no alternative is clearly visible, more and more privation can gradually find acceptance in the peasants’ standards of what is right and proper. What infuriates peasants (and not just peasants) is a new and sudden imposition or demand that strikes many people at once and that is a break with accepted rules and customs. Even the traditionally docile Indian peasants struck en masse and raised the specter of agrarian revolt over much of Bengal in the 1860s when English overlords tried to force them to grow indigo at starvation prices for the suddenly booming textile market. Revolutionary measures against the priests in the Vendée had a very similar effect. To multiply instances is hardly necessary. The significant point is that under these conditions individual grievances in a flash become apparent as collective ones. If the impact is of the right kind (sudden, widespread, yet not so severe as to make collective resistance seem hopeless from the start), it can ignite the solidarity of rebellion or revolution in any kind of a peasant society. No type, as far as I can perceive, is immune. Nevertheless there are variations in the explosive potential that can be connected with types of peasant society.

In the course of this study we have noticed a substantial range of differences in the degree of cooperation and the associated division of labor in peasant communities. At one extreme one might place the peasants of the Vendée with their isolated farmsteads, rather atypical for peasants in civilized societies. At the other extreme might be the highly integrated Japanese village, an integration that has persisted through modern times. On general grounds, it seems obvious that the degree of solidarity displayed by peasants, since it is an expression of the entire network of social relationships within which the individual lives out his life, would have an important bearing on political tendencies. Nevertheless, because this factor is intertwined with so many others, the assessment of its importance presents difficulties. As I read the evidence, the absence of solidarity (or more precisely a state of weak solidarity, since some cooperation always exists) puts severe difficulties in the way of any political action. Hence its consequence is conservative, though the type of sudden shock just discussed can override this conservative tendency and arouse the peasants to violent action. Where solidarity is on the other hand strong, it is possible to distinguish between conservative forms and those favoring rebellion or revolution.

In a rebellious and revolutionary form of solidarity, institutional arrangements are such as to spread grievances through the peasant community and turn it into a solidarity group hostile to the overlords. There are strong indications that this was happening in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Russian villages. One of the main consequences of the periodic redi—

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38 An instructive account from a radical standpoint in Natarajan, Peasant Uprisings, chap IV.
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that may well have happened in premodern times as well, and hence the radical potential. Japanese and Indian villages, on the other hand, provided a legitimate if lowly status for those with little or no property both in premodern and later times.

The type of weak solidarity that inhibits political action of any variety is mainly a modern phenomenon. After the establishment of a capitalist legal framework and after commerce and industry have made a substantial impact, peasant society may reach a new form of conservative stability. This happened in much of France, parts of western Germany, and elsewhere in western Europe during the first half of the nineteenth century. Marx caught the essence of the situation when he compared French villages made up of small peasant holdings to sacks of potatoes. The key feature is the absence of a network of cooperative relationships. This makes the modern peasant village the opposite of a medieval one. A recent study of a village of this type in southern Italy shows how the competition among the family units that make up the village inhibits any form of effective political action. The origin of "amoral familism" — a caricature of capitalism — is rooted in the specific history of this village, an extreme development that contrasts with more cooperative relationships in other parts of Italy. More important and more general factors may be the disappearance of common rights and of the performance in common of certain tasks during the agricultural cycle; the overwhelming importance of the small plot worked by family labor; and the competitive relationships introduced by capitalism. At a more advanced stage of industrial development, this type of atomised small peasant village may, as we have seen in parts of Germany, become the seedbed of reactionary anticapitalist sentiment in the countryside.

To sum up, the most important causes of peasant revolutions have been the absence of a commercial revolution in agriculture led by the landed upper classes and the concomitant survival of peasant social institutions into the modern era when they are subject to new stresses and strains. Where the peasant community survives, as in

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34 Robinson, Rural Russia, 153, points out that among the twenty guberniias where landlords suffered heaviest losses during the peasant upheavals of 1905, sixteen showed a predominance of repartitional tenure over hereditary holdings by individual peasant households. On the government's fear of solidarity among the peasants, see ibid, 154.

35 For a humble illustration compare what happens when a large family has to arrange a complicated picnic on a beach, where one child gathers firewood, another builds the fire, etc., with what happens during the morning rush for the bathroom.
Japan, it must remain closely linked to the dominant class in the countryside if revolution is to be avoided. Hence an important contributing cause of peasant revolution has been the weakness of the institutional links binding peasant society to the upper classes, together with the exploitative character of this relationship. Part of the general syndrome has been the regime’s loss of the support of an upper class of wealthy peasants because these have begun to go over to more capitalist modes of cultivation and to establish their independence against an aristocracy seeking to maintain its position through the intensification of traditional obligations, as in eighteenth-century France. Where these conditions have been absent or reversed, peasant revolts have failed to break out or have been easily suppressed.

The great agrarian bureaucracies of royal absolutism, including China, have been especially liable to the combination of factors favoring peasant revolution. Their very strength enables them to inhibit the growth of an independent commercial and manufacturing class. At most, they are likely to encourage one that is fragmented and tied to royal apronstrings for the sake of magnificence and war as in seventeenth-century France. By raising the bourgeoisie, the crown reduces the impetus toward further modernization in the form of a bourgeois revolutionary breakthrough. This effect was very noticeable even in France. Russia and China, in escaping bourgeois revolution, became more vulnerable to peasant revolts. Furthermore, an agrarian bureaucracy, through its heavy demands for taxes, risks driving the peasants into alliance with local élites in the towns, a particularly dangerous situation as it separates royal officialdom from the mass of the population.38

Finally, to the extent that it takes over the protective and judicial functions of the locally residing overlord, royal absolutism weak-

38 This is especially clear in the disturbances preceding and accompanying the Fronde. See Porchnev, Soulèvements populaires, 118–131, 392–406. The author has demonstrated beyond any possible doubt that the Fronde was much more than a piece of aristocratic mischief. For reasons that need no repetition here as they are part of the entire argument I have tried to present, I reject his effort and that of other Marxist writers to identify royal absolutism with feudalism.

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cens the crucial link that binds the peasants to the upper classes. Or if it takes over these functions only partly and haphazardly it is likely to find itself in competition with local élites in extracting resources from the peasants. In such circumstances there is a temptation for the local notables to side with the peasants.

Variations in the types of solidarity arrangements among the peasants, to continue with general factors, are important mainly insofar as they constitute focal points for the creation of a distinct peasant society in opposition to the dominant class and as the basis for popular conceptions of justice and injustice that clash with those of the rulers. Conservative or radical consequences depend on the specific forms of the institutions promoting peasant cohesion. Solidarity among the peasants could help the dominant classes or be a weapon against them, sometimes changing from one to the other. In some premodern societies one may also find, as seems to have been the case in China, a division of labor that creates much less cohesion. Hence, the revolutionary potential under the impact of modernization varies greatly from one agrarian society to another. On the other hand, the more extreme forms of atomization that severely inhibit any effective political action and that have powerful conservative results seem to occur at a somewhat later stage of capitalism. Such a culture of selfish poverty may be only a transitional stage in backwaters not yet reached by advanced industrialism.

The preceding factors may explain how a revolutionary potential arises among the peasantry. Whether or not this potential becomes politically effective depends on the possibility of a fusion between peasant grievances and those of other strata. By themselves the peasants have never been able to accomplish a revolution. On this point the Marxists are absolutely correct, wide of the mark though they are on other crucial aspects. The peasants have to have leaders from other classes. But leadership alone is not enough. Medieval and late medieval peasant revolts were led by aristocrats or townsfolk and still were crushed. This point should serve as a salutary reminder to those modern determinists, by no means all Marxists, who feel that once the peasants have become stirred up, big changes are necessarily on the way. Actually peasant revolts
have been repressed far more often than they have succeeded. For them to succeed requires a somewhat unusual combination of circumstances that has occurred only in modern times. Success itself has been of a strictly negative sort. The peasants have provided the dynamite to bring down the old building. To the subsequent work of reconstruction they have brought nothing; instead they have been — even in France — its first victims. The upper classes have to display a substantial degree of blindness, mainly the product of specific historical circumstances and to which there have always been some important individual exceptions, before a revolutionary breakthrough becomes feasible.

Naturally the peasant movement will not find its allies among the élite, though it may draw upon a section of it, especially a handful of discontented intellectuals in modern times, for its leaders. The intellectuals as such can do little politically unless they attach themselves to a massive form of discontent. The discontented intellectual with his soul searches has attracted attention wholly out of proportion to his political importance, partly because these searching leave behind them written records and also because those who write history are themselves intellectuals. It is a particularly misleading trick to deny that a revolution stems from peasant grievances because its leaders happen to be professional men or intellectuals.

The allies that peasant discontent can find depends upon the stage of economic development that a country has reached and more specific historical circumstances; these factors also determine the point at which the allies turn on the peasant movement to draw its teeth or suppress it. German peasants in the Bauernkrieg got some help from the towns as well as from dissident landed aristocrats but accomplished nothing; the collective power that the landed élite could bring to bear was still overwhelming. In France the peasant movement fused with bourgeois demands, mainly because the preceding feudal reaction had antagonized the well-to-do peasants. The connection seems to me to have been precarious and might have gone the other way, since many bourgeois had property in the countryside and were disturbed by peasant disorders. Another major revolutionary ally was the urban crowd in Paris, though the term ally should not be taken to mean that their policies were coordinated or that either stratum, for that matter, had a really coherent policy. The sans-culottes were mainly smaller artisans and journeymen, who have generally played a much more important revolutionary role than Marxist theory might lead us to believe.

In Russia of 1917 the commercial and industrial classes were not a suitable ally for the angry peasants. The Russian bourgeoisie was much smaller and weaker in the country as a whole than had been the case in France, despite a higher level of technology where trade and industry did exist. Though there had been flirtations with Western constitutional notions, the Russian bourgeoisie was tied by many strings to the tsarist government, which had encouraged, largely for military reasons, a certain amount of hothouse capitalist development. Perhaps most important of all, no significant segment of the Russian peasantry was interested in securing property rights against the remnants of feudalism, as had been the case in France. The demands of the Russian peasant were brutally simple: to get rid of the landlord, divide up the land, and of course stop the war. The Constitutional Democrats, the main party with a bourgeois flavor, had earlier considered giving in to peasant demands. But the peasants' frontal attack on property was too much for its stomach when the issue had to be faced squarely. On the other hand, there was nothing in the notion of dividing up the land to disturb the industrial workers, at least not for the moment. Stopping the war appealed to the peasants who were the main victims of the slaughter and had little interest in defending a government that refused concessions. Among the peasants, the Bolsheviks had no real following. But as the only party without ties to the existing order they could afford to give in temporarily to their demands for the sake of seizing power. This they did on taking over the government and again after the chaos of the Civil War. Subsequently of course the Bolsheviks found it necessary to turn on those who had brought them to power and to drive the peasants into collectives in order to make them the main basis and victims of the socialist version of primary capitalist accumulation.
In China we see still another combination of circumstances, above which less is known, partly because the events are still too recent to have been the subject of extensive historical investigation. It is difficult to point to any clear-cut stratum as an ally of the peasants, on whose backs the Communists finally rode to victory, even though, or perhaps partly because, disaffection with the Kuomin-tang had spread through all classes. As a contemporary scholar has convincingly demonstrated, the Communists made little headway as long as they clung to Marxist notions about the importance of the proletariat as the vanguard of the revolutionary and anti-imperialist struggle. In time they did get massive peasant support. Still, without urban leaders, it is unlikely that the peasants could have organized the Red Army and carried on the partisan warfare that distinguished this revolution from its predecessors and has set a model for subsequent attempts. The effect on their opponents has been curious; some of the Western enthusiasm for learning the “lessons” of guerrilla warfare recalls nineteenth-century Japanese notions about democracy: the belief that it is a simple technique one can borrow that will bring in its train all the other advantages that the opponent enjoys.

In both Russia and China, the chances of halting the process of decay at some point short of peasant revolution were very slim, mainly due to the lack of any strong basis for either liberal or reactionary capitalism in the trading and manufacturing classes. Whether the same will be true of India is a question to which only the future will give a firm answer. To jump to conclusions about India on the basis of China is foolish, since their agrarian social structures are in major respects exactly opposite to one another. If the agrarian program of the present Indian government fails to solve India’s food problem, and there is substantial evidence for a pessimistic evaluation, a political upheaval of some sort will become highly likely. But it will not necessarily take the form of a communist-led peasant revolution. A turn to the right or fragmentation along regional lines, or some combination of these two, seems much more probable in the light of India’s social structure. The situation

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39 See Schwartz, Chinese Communism.