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a Political Struggle

On May 2, 1905, peasants in the province of Kiev withheld their labor from the large estate on which they had been working. Three years later, a correspondent of the semi-official Russian Imperial Free Economic Society, conducting a survey of the recent rural disorders, reported on the Kiev events:

The earliest appearance of the movement occurred the second of May on the sugar plantation of A. Tereshchenko in Voitsovtsy [Skvir district]. According to the indictment, workers had received twenty-five kopecks a day since the early spring. In response to peasant demands, the wage was raised to forty kopecks. However, on the first of May, the administrators of the estate again lowered the wage to thirty kopecks. The peasants then demanded fifty to seventy kopecks and quit work on May 2. To replace them, peasants were invited from the neighboring villages of Verbovoi, Gorodishch, and Kharlievka. On May 10, a crowd of peasants from Voitsovtsy appeared on Tereshchenko's plantation with sticks and whips in their hands. They demanded that the peasants from the other villages cease work immediately. "Leave the fields," they said, "They didn't give us these kinds of wages. We don't need you here." When the outside workers did not stop, the peasants of Voitsovtsy threw themselves on the strikebreakers and, shouting loudly, drove them off. . . . Then the peasants headed for Tereshchenko's stables and
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barns and pulled those working there off the job, threatening to "break their heads." The stablehands were warned not to return until the lord raised the daily wage. However, according to witnesses, the stablehands voluntarily stopped work and agreed not to come back until another ten kopecks a day had been "torn from the lord."  

Fifty-three years before the peasants of Voitsovtsy went on strike, Karl Marx sought to explain the politically conservative behavior of the French peasantry during the recent revolution and counterrevolution. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire* and *The Class Struggles in France*, Marx established the negative attitudes that urban-oriented socialists would bring to the analysis of the countryside. Rural votes had just swept Louis Napoleon into office. In the eyes of the left, peasants were individualistic, greedy, and ignorant, hardly the appropriate social base for revolution.

Long before 1852, Russian thinkers had been struggling to comprehend the character of their own peasantry. The celebrated debates between Slavophile and Westernizer intellectuals had been couched in moral and religious terms, but at their core, these arguments centered on the nature of what some outsiders chose to see as simple folk. Were peasants like other people, or was there something special and fundamentally different about their lives? The next question followed logically. Was Russia subject to the same laws of development as other nations, or was it exceptional?  

Slavophiles rhapsodized over the purity and nobility of the only Russians untainted by foreign influence. These conservative intellectuals pictured harmonious and cohesive communities of mutually respectful village dwellers practicing traditional customs in peace and dignity. Liberal and radical Westernizers, on the other hand, felt the Russian countryside was a sea of ignorance, poverty, and exploitation. For them, peasants were as capable of selfishness

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1. *Agrarnoe dvizhenie v Rossi v 1905–1906 gg. (Trudy imperatorskago vol’nago ekonomicheskago obschestva, 1908, nos. 3, 4–5), 2 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1908), 2:173* (hereafter *AD*). (Translations are my own unless otherwise noted.)

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and brutality as anyone else. This debate was, in the most fundamental sense, about understanding the peasant world. Yet it was also a political struggle about the future of Russian development. Would Russia follow the historical path of the West, a path that doomed the peasantry to extinction, or could that fate somehow be avoided? These issues were not resolved in the 1840s and 1850s. They have continued to reemerge throughout Russian and Soviet history and have left an extremely ambiguous legacy even today.

In the 1880s and 1890s, populist and Marxist revolutionaries asked precisely the same questions in the course of their extended polemic about the socialist potential of the traditional repartitional commune (mir) which periodically redivided the land among its households. Was there, they asked, true equality in the mir? Russian Marxists doubted that such a state of affairs had ever existed, but more important, they thought the commune, even if it had functioned at one time, was now dying. As Russia’s industrial base and cities began to grow, a market emerged for an agrarian surplus produced by the countryside. The subsistence economies of the villages had permitted peasants to lead relatively hermetic existences. Their self-sufficiency was now undermined. As capitalism came to the land, Marxists argued that the peasant could no longer be considered exceptional. The same principles and categories that explained the behavior of those in the towns could now be applied to those living in rural Russia. The homogeneous traditional peasantry was to be replaced by rural counterparts of those classes found in the cities. In response, populists denied the profundity of these changes and maintained that Russia did not have to pass through the modes of production that Marxists thought all societies passed through. They thought it possible to avoid the horrors of capitalism by passing directly from a traditional to a socialist society. In this process, a crucial example was to be provided by the long-standing cooperative practices of the commune. Populists did not deny the demonstrable evidence of inequality in the countryside. Rather, they understood its sources and consequences differently than Marxists.³ As in the 1850s, the argument centered

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on the usefulness of certain universal schema for understanding life in the Russian countryside. Again, the stakes in the debate were not simply theoretical but also political. Both groups were seeking to overthrow tsarism, and their arguments concerned the fitness of the peasantry as the social basis of a possible revolution.

Before and after 1917, the populist Socialist Revolutionary party continued these arguments with the Marxist Social Democrats. Among Social Democrats, the Bolshevik and Menshevik wings of the party continually differed on the role of rural cultivators in the socialist movement. Mensheviks tended to ignore the countryside, while Lenin and some of his colleagues had positive views about the peasantry's revolutionary potential. After the revolution, the question of understanding rural society was at the center of the great theoretical and political struggles of the 1920s. Among agricultural specialists, Alexander V. Chaianov and his Organization and Production school were attacked as “neo-populists” by their opponents, L. N. Kritsman and the Agrarian Marxist group, who offered an analytical approach closer to that advanced before the revolution by Lenin. Debates between the left and right wings of the Bolshevik party also centered, in large measure, around the “peasant question.” This extremely rich and continuing tradition contributed much theory to the study of peasants not only in Russia but throughout the world. Neither camp could claim to have vanquished the other intellectually. Both sides had able representatives capable of making strong cases. It was only with Stalin’s forced collectivization that many of these issues were rendered moot.

In the 1930s and 1940s, the once-raging controversy seemed meaningless, given Stalin’s unilateral termination and resolution of the debate. The success of the Chinese, Vietnamese, and Cuban revolutions, however, revived interest in peasant politics and changed many attitudes about the revolutionary potential of rural cultivators. The preponderance of peasants among the population of the Third World gave the old arguments new immediacy. The poor of the countryside were no longer considered politically retro-

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grade. Marx's characterization of the mid-nineteenth-century
French peasantry as politically conservative was challenged by
peasant participation in modern revolutions in the developing
countries. To explain these unexpected phenomena, new attention
was focused on the "moral economy" of village life. Cultural con­
siderations, rather than economic decision making, were invoked
to explain patterns of behavior that seemed otherwise irrational.
To understand the peasant world, one had to view it on its own
terms, not the terms of the city. This new approach was strikingly
similar to the old Slavophile concept of peasant uniqueness. The
universal assumptions of classical economics, shared by Marxists
and non-Marxists alike, were now thought to be inappropriate to
the rural world. Peasants were not seen as petty entrepreneurs
concerned with maximizing profits. Their first priority was simply
survival. A new emphasis was placed on the internal workings of
the village itself. The retention of custom was no longer dismissed
as mere superstition. In response, other writers reemphasized the
political economy of the peasant world and noted the rationality of
peasant decision making. A wide variety of Marxist writers, having
abandoned many older orthodoxies, rejoined the debate as well,
stressing the relationships of the village to such external forces as
markets, landlords, and governments.

As in the 1890s and the 1920s, the more recent debates recall
those between the Slavophiles and Westernizers. Could peasants be
understood according to principles that had proved useful in ana­
lyzing the lives of many millions of other people, or is it necessary
to invent a whole new approach that emphasizes the special
qualities of the peasant world? The present debate is perhaps more
theoretical than earlier versions, but, in many ways, it revives the
older political struggles. Many of the same questions posed about
past events are again being asked: How homogeneous was the
village? Was there significant stratification? What kinds of social
and economic choices did the peasants make? Was culture a mean­
ingful force in the countryside? Copious quantities of Russian ink
and blood have been spilled trying to find workable answers to
these questions. Progress has surely been made as others have
joined the debate, but it should be clear that the old arguments still
have meaning.
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Because of its prevailing illiteracy, the peasant world does not reveal itself easily to the historian. When the timeless equilibrium of village life is left to run its own course, one cannot learn all one needs to know. For that reason, moments of instability, disturbances of one sort or another, provide opportunities to break through peasants’ necessarily self-preserving secrecy. When they were forced to confront the forces acting upon them, peasants exposed the internal workings of their communities. Their political activity was, however, not the same as the involvement of the city dweller. Parties and other organizations were few, and their rural networks were tenuous at best. But fires, crop stealing, destruction of property, and agrarian strikes were political acts nonetheless. This book is concerned, first and foremost, with one of these atypical but telling moments of instability. The character of the disturbances speaks to the character of peasant life.

Political activists and scholars have always wanted to know which elements within the village have taken the lead, who has participated, who has stood aside. All these outsiders, whether states or revolutionaries, have looked to the countryside for political support of one sort or another. Their analyses of rural life were, therefore, undertaken with the goal of identifying likely allies.

The various political groups contending for peasant loyalty “waged,” to borrow the phrase of one Russian prime minister, on particular elements within the countryside. The tsarist government went so far as to foster the creation of an authentic rural bourgeoisie. This book seeks to evaluate the success of a different sort of political “bet.” Politicians and historians, both Marxist and non-Marxist, have been affected in fundamental ways by the revolutionary example of propertyless industrial workers in the cities. In following this logic, considerable attention has been paid to landless, wage-earning laborers as a potentially revolutionary force in the countryside. Some have even referred to these men and women as a “rural proletariat” and viewed them as an especially militant force for change in the village. The actions of this segment of the rural population cannot be separated from the actions of others who worked the land, but their special position provides an analytical starting point for an examination of the broader peasant movement. I intend to evaluate the political potential of what were
A Theoretical Debate, a Political Struggle called “agricultural workers,” by looking at their actions in a part of the world in which agrarian wage work was quite common (the Ukrainian provinces of Kiev, Podol’e, and Volynia on the right bank of the Dniepr, the southwestern region of the Russian Empire). I examine their actions at a moment of extreme political agitation and social unrest (the Revolution of 1905–7). This region, where commercial agriculture had made great strides in the late nineteenth century, was engulfed by a wave of strikes and disturbances involving millions of peasants between the spring of 1905 and the summer of 1907.

In an investigation of this sort, it is necessary to devote special attention to the specific forms chosen by rural cultivators to express their resistance. Peasant aims and tactics were not superficial phenomena. Rather, they express deeper truths about the character of all peasant societies and the nature of their politics. In making these choices, were peasants motivated by the forces they confronted outside the village or did they act according to the customs, norms, and traditions of their own communities? Did they respond, as Marxists have argued, to phenomena external to their world, or were their actions rooted, as culturalists claim, in the timeless internal structures of peasant life?

In looking at Russia’s southwest during 1905, I concentrate on these two sets of questions. Events in this distinctive region require both schools of thought to examine their assumptions and expectations concerning peasant behavior at moments of crisis. It is not simply that each of the prevailing explanations is only partly successful in explaining events in these provinces. Rather, an investigation of this sort can suggest ways in which both schools can revise their thinking.

Views of the Rural Proletariat

Russian revolutionaries of the late nineteenth century continually analyzed the social structure of the countryside. In doing this, they hoped to pinpoint those groups that would support the struggle against the tsarist state. The swift industrialization which began in the 1880s threatened the populist belief that the reparti-
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tional commune, with its periodic redivisions of the land, contained the kernel of a future socialist society. Marxist intellectuals believed the growth of Russian capitalism spelled doom for the traditional organizations of the peasantry. V. I. Lenin was but one of several contributors to this controversy. His subsequent political success meant that his works on the subject became the basis of current Soviet historiographical orthodoxy on peasants. Lenin's views on rural Russia still represent a starting point for most subsequent Marxist and much non-Marxist thought on agrarian economics in general and the Russian experience in particular. Along with many in the revolutionary movement and the tsarist government, Lenin argued that the growth of Russian capitalism was extensive and irreversible and that this shift had changed social and economic relations on the land. The cohesion of the commune would now be undermined. Instead of cooperating, Russian peasants were now thought to be competing with each other. The accumulated advantages and disadvantages in this competition led over time to class differentiation in the village. A relatively homogeneous peasantry would now be replaced by a "rural bourgeoisie" of rich peasants and a "rural proletariat" of the poor and landless. The group of traditional peasants, whose level of wealth fell in the middle of these expanding extremes, was thought to be ever diminishing. Under the impact of capitalism, social relations on the land were now supposed to resemble those of the city.5

Russian Marxists had fixed on the urban proletariat as the social force that would lead an eventual socialist revolution. Yet the working class of the cities was still a small fraction of the entire population. To be politically effective, workers had to seek allies. In the countryside, the most logical choice was that group of workers described by Lenin as the rural proletariat.6 It was expected that this group would become the most militant and active revolutionary force on the land. Although he was well aware of the unclear relationship of the rural proletariat to the poorer elements of the peasantry, Lenin maintained a faith throughout his career in

6Ibid., p. 179.
what he often simply called the "rural poor." Accordingly, subsequent Soviet studies have assigned a paramount role to what they have called a rural proletariat. In attributing revolutionary potential, if not socialist consciousness, to this group, Lenin went beyond the pessimistic expectations of Marx and Engels. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire* and elsewhere, Marx was hardly optimistic about the revolutionary potential of the peasantry. Later in his career, in correspondence with early Russian populists, he showed some willingness to see potential in the commune. More generally, Marx held some hope that a segment of the rural population, ruined by the growth of capitalism, might then ally with the industrial working class. Engels, writing after many Prussian peasants had already been rendered landless, harbored a similar belief, despite his essential pessimism about a social group he considered to be doomed by the advance of history:

> The agricultural proletariat . . . is the class which, thanks to universal suffrage, sends into parliament the numerous feudal lords and Junkers; but it is also the class nearest to the industrial workers of the towns, which shares their living conditions and is steeped in misery even more than they. To galvanize and draw into the movement this class, important because split and scattered, is the immediate task of the German labor movement.

By 1900, many educated Russians (inside and outside the government) shared the belief that an inevitable advance toward capitalism had already begun. Later historical accounts contributed

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to a strange but not altogether surprising consensus among Marxist revolutionaries, tsarist officials, and Western scholars, most of whom shared assumptions concerning the "rationality" of the peasant as the market economy came to the countryside. Most scholars held the view that various forms of capitalism were widespread features of rural life right up to the moment of forced collectivization in 1930 and 1931. As competitive production for the market replaced the traditional peasant goal of subsistence, clearly defined social classes with antagonistic interests were supposed to emerge. It was also believed (by Leninists in particular) that people in the countryside could readily perceive those social divisions and that they acted politically according to a precise understanding of class tensions in the village. The emergence of clearly defined social classes necessarily led to the growth of a true class struggle on the land.

Since the 1960s, these older views have been challenged by a number of writers from several disciplines. Today one would be hard pressed (even in the Soviet Union) to find a thoroughgoing defense of the orthodox Leninist position on the rural proletariat. The idea that landless wage earners played a universally vanguard role in agrarian disturbances is not widely accepted. Divisions among Western students of peasantries now center on two questions: first, whether landless laborers may be included at all among those who play crucial roles in rural disorders and, second, whether landholding peasants, under certain circumstances, may behave much like urban workers.

In comparative works, which made extensive reference to the

Russian case, Eric Wolf and Hamza Alavi were among the first to argue that the so-called middle peasant (the group least affected by rural capitalism) was the most active supporter of rebellion.\(^\text{12}\) Wolf went so far as to exclude landless laborers from his definition of peasant because the landless could not make “autonomous” decisions concerning the process of cultivation and because they did not possess the tactical mobility of the middle peasant who could revert to subsistence farming in times of trouble. Landless laborers were dependent on their wage for survival, and without it, they were literally left with nothing.\(^\text{13}\) Instead of militance, rural proletarians exhibited political paralysis. Teodor Shanin also defined the landless laborer as “analytically marginal,” but rather than focusing on a particular element of peasant society as a special repository of militance, he described the entire village as a politically, socially, and culturally cohesive unit acting in opposition to all outsiders be they landlords, bureaucrats, priests, commissars, or merchants.\(^\text{14}\) Shanin had less, if anything, to say about peasant attitudes toward their counterparts in other villages.

Writing at roughly the same time, Barrington Moore agreed that assigning a leading role to the rural proletariat was not possible. He refused to rule out this group as a significant participant in agrarian unrest, however.\(^\text{15}\) Henry Landsberger saw strong similarities between rural protests and labor agitations, the differences being less of kind than of degree. He refused to exclude the landless from the category of peasant and insisted that this group could be active in a broad variety of disturbances. The specific role assumed by these kinds of workers was to be determined by empirical research on specific historical situations.\(^\text{16}\) Sidney Mintz, however, noted that studies of this sort could not always identify and isolate


\(^{13}\)Wolf, 1969, p. 290.

\(^{14}\)Shanin, 1972, pp. 203–18.


landless wage earners with the precision one might desire. Rural proletarians were not the same as urban proletarians, and their presence could be concealed by many of the structures and practices of the communities of which they may have been a part.17

Empirical studies, conducted since these differing views were published, have demonstrated the difficulty of arriving at a clear picture even when they have confirmed the participation of landless laborers in agrarian unrest. Recent work on modern Europe has shown that those fitting a strict definition of rural proletarian were far from invisible at moments of turmoil. It should come as no surprise that so orthodox a Marxist as Albert Soboul found evidence of militance on the part of the landless in nineteenth-century France.18 Maurice Agulhon and Ted Margadant have described similar phenomena.19 J. A. Perkins and Robert Moeller have offered documentation for a rural proletarian presence in eastern Germany.20 Not one of these writers has tried to demonstrate a vanguard role for this segment of the rural population, however.

The debate about the most militant segment of the village population raises many broader questions. It was and is a conflict about the nature of the countryside in moments of stability as well as instability. Differences about the role of a rural proletariat are tied to larger arguments about how best to understand rural society and politics in general. As such, a discussion of Lenin's specific concern for the landless raises definitional problems which require an examination of the varying opinions on the peasant and rural life.

The challenge to what was once the prevailing consensus on the peasantry came both from those concerned with Russian and Soviet history and from those who adopted a more comparative and conceptual approach. A crucial element of these new interpretations has been the attempt to reestablish the analytical usefulness of the concept of "peasant." This project touched off renewed debate, and in the course of the discussion, it became possible to arrive at more specific understandings of the concepts of "peasant" and "rural proletarian."

In a sense these two terms for rural cultivators may seem incompatible with each other. Each term is rooted in a different political and scholarly tradition, and each reflects an emphasis on different factors as central to understanding social and political relations on the land. Marxists have long denied that the term "peasant" possesses any particular analytical meaning. They have argued that it is too broad and therefore useless for distinguishing the wide variety of groups one confronts on the land. 21 Wolf, Shanin, and others contended that there was such a thing as a universal peasant type and that peasant societies were homogeneous and cohesive. 22 In their view, not all those on the land could be called peasants; although the majority of agrarian working people could be placed in this broad category.

Social and cultural homogeneity explained political cohesion. The idea of the village as a working unit was inspired by such anthropological pioneers as Robert Redfield and A. L. Kroeber. 23 As a result, it became common for opponents of this new school to brand its representatives as "culturalists." I will also be using this

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term primarily because it is brief enough and broad enough to encompass what is by no means a monolithic approach. Cultural considerations were also central to the views of Alexander Chaianov, who offered the most influential explanation of the economy of the peasant household and community. Chaianov, a Soviet agricultural economist, published both before and after the Revolution. He argued for the specificity of peasant production, and his views have influenced Shanin and many others.  

Shanin's own definition of a peasant owes much to Chaianov. He highlights four elements: (1) a family farm; (2) land husbandry; (3) a specific traditional culture; (4) multidirectional subjection to powerful outsiders.

Barrington Moore, despite sharp differences with the culturalist approach, offered a strikingly similar definition. It included: (1) legal subordination to a landed class; (2) sharp cultural distinctions (distinct from landlords); (3) de facto possession of land. The ownership or control of land is crucial to both definitions. This consideration has led many to exclude agricultural laborers from the peasantry. According to Mintz, rural proletarians are landless, wage earning, and store buying. They may not be part of the self-sufficient community of peasants, but they may constitute communities on their own. They are, in Eric Hobsbawm's words, part of the "agrarian problem" but not part of the "peasant problem."

The distinction between the landless and the poor who possess some land is often blurred in the analysis of concrete historical situations. A rural proletariat is by no means the same as an urban proletariat. It might be expected that the surplus population in the countryside would be forced to migrate to the towns. If, however, the cities had not yet reached a stage of development sufficient to absorb people with no holdings, then the landless had little choice but to remain in the countryside. In this sense, a rural proletariat

26 Moore, p. 111.
27 Mintz, 1974, p. 236.

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may be considered a transitional phenomenon that emerges during what may be the lengthy period between the first signs of agrarian change and the full maturation of the urban industrial sector.

Nevertheless, the image of the propertyless city worker has profoundly affected subsequent thought (both Soviet and Western) on peasant societies and peasant disturbances. As a result, it may be surprising that Lenin’s own use of the term was consciously ambiguous. He included both the landless (by his own estimate a relatively small group in Russia) and the poor landholding peasantry in the category of rural proletarians. All those within this group were expected to behave in much the same manner. It was no accident Lenin lumped these two groups together. This analytical step reflected his sensitivity to the ambiguous character of Russian agriculture in the immediate prerevolutionary period:

Our literature frequently contains too stereotyped an understanding of the theoretical position that capitalism requires the free, landless worker. This proposition is quite correct in indicating the main trend, but capitalism penetrates into agriculture particularly slowly and in extremely varied forms. The allotment of the rural workers is very often to the interests of the rural employers themselves, and that is why the allotment-holding rural worker is a type to be found in all capitalist countries.

Whether he defined it broadly or narrowly, Lenin expected this group to be the element in the village most eager to take action against landlords and the state.

This less-than-orthodox approach to class categories led Lenin to describe poor peasants with some land as “semi-proletarians.” He included in this sizable group those who could survive only by working for others or by renting their lands. Thus, their situations were mixed. Wage-earning allotment holders exhibited some characteristics ascribed by Mintz to rural proletarians and other patterns ascribed by Shanin to peasants. One could, of course,
argue that Lenin’s use of the term “semi-proletarian” was just an analytically imprecise way to impute proletarian consciousness and revolutionary politics to what were simply peasants. Yet Phillip Huang’s 1985 work on prerevolutionary China has demonstrated that under specific circumstances “semi-proletarian” can be a rigorous category. It may be used, he says: “to characterize a process of social change distinctive of a peasant society and economy under the combined pressures of social differentiation and intense population pressure without the outlet and relief provided by dynamic capitalist development.” As shall be seen in greater detail later, the state of affairs described by Huang pertained to the rural cultivators of Russia’s southwest. These men and women earned wages on large, noble-owned capitalist estates. Landlord success, in turn, closed agrarian modernization as a possibility for the region’s allotment holders. Migration to the cities was possible but still far from free. In this sense, the term “semi-proletarian” accurately describes their situations. If one speaks of peasants throughout the Russian Empire, it is possible to dismiss Lenin’s use of this category as more a political wish than an economic reality. In the right-bank Ukraine, however, the term precisely described the region’s rural cultivators. In this sense, it would not be incorrect to call them “proletarian peasants.”

Culturalist criticism of the Leninist approach has sought to direct attention to two crucial structures of peasant life, the family farm and the commune. This school has stressed the internal elements of the community rather than the external forces impinging on the village. Shanin, in particular, relied heavily on Chaianov and his associates in the Organization and Production school of early Soviet rural economists who sought to integrate Marxist discourse with a respect for the characteristics of peasant life. Since the mid-1960s, Chaianov has become fashionable among historians of the rural world. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie found Chaianov’s *Theory of the Peasant Economy* compatible with the behavior of the thirteenth-century peasants described in *Montaillou.*

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Scholars of the medieval and early modern English peasantry have made extensive use of this theory. Conversely, the Marxist art critic and observer of rural life John Berger has taken pains to stress Chaianov’s emphasis on the peasants’ commitment to survival.

Chaianov centered his analysis of rural society and economy on the peasant family farm. Concentrating on the individual unit of the system, rather than the forces and relations surrounding it, he advanced the concept of an unchanging “peasant mode of production” which was supposed to be as analytically useful and historically meaningful a guide to understanding rural life as the familiar Marxist concepts of the ancient, feudal, and capitalist modes of production, all of which followed one after the other. This peasant mode of production had existed within the larger framework of very different historical epochs. One could even speculate that Chaianov was implicitly rejecting this essential element of the Marxist approach to the course of history. Calling this static peasant way of life a “mode of production” may have been a politically necessary way (in the Soviet Union of the 1920s) of putting a Marxist veneer on a concept that challenged the basic historicity of Marxism. It was no surprise that Chaianov’s opponents attacked him as a “neo-populist.” This claim was not without some basis. His *Land of Peasant Utopia*, published pseudonymously in 1920, was in some ways even neo-Slavophile. Although it was not overtly politically conservative, Chaianov’s book expressed skepticism about the fate of the peasantry at the hands of an essentially urban party.
The peasant farm operated with the labor of the members of the household. They received no wages for their work. For Chaianov, this concept was central. Without monetary wages, costs and profits could not be calculated according to capitalist criteria. The peasant farm was not an enterprise concerned with maximizing profits. Rather, the household’s primary goal was survival. Risk taking was not encouraged. The peasant farm operated according to what Chaianov called a “labor-consumer balance” between the satisfaction of family needs and the drudgery of farm labor. The continued existence of the household, rather than the search for all possible revenues, determined the peasant’s economic choices. By the criteria of classical economics those choices were often irrational, but by the peasants’ own standard they might have been perfectly logical. With wages a minimal factor, the labor force of the Russian household was more or less fixed by family size. The growth of family income depended on the growth of the family. Large families, with many members of working age, were wealthy, while small families were poor. As a result, the demonstrable inequality among peasants had to be interpreted as the result of demographic factors which might vary sharply from generation to generation. Differences of wealth in the eyes of Chaianov and his colleagues were not caused by advantages and disadvantages accumulated over years. Therefore, because they did not regenerate, these were not differences of class, in the Marxist sense. If the various groups on the land could not properly be called social classes, then the Leninist political strategy, based on class struggle in the village, was without meaning. Accordingly, it should be clear that the stakes of this debate about the countryside were far from purely theoretical.

In the late 1960s, Chaianov’s analysis was extended by the Polish rural sociologist Boguslaw Galeski, who reemphasized the inappropriateness of considering the peasant farm as a modern business enterprise. He too stressed the survival of the family as the

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39Chaianov, p. 87.
40Ibid., p. 92.
41Boguslaw Galeski, Basic Concepts of Rural Sociology (Manchester, England, 1972), p. 11.
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first goal of the peasant. As the family is not exclusively an economic structure, one must then grant that social and cultural considerations assume decisive importance in the peasant’s life. Shanin combined this approach with Robert Redfield’s understanding of the peasant community as a closely knit network of interpersonal relationships and kinship patterns. For Redfield, the peasant village was a halfway step between the complete isolation of the primitive tribe and what he called “the extensive integration” of the modern industrial city.\(^42\) The continuing vitality of the community was supposed to bind peasants to each other in opposition to the outside forces of landlords, governments, markets, and (one should add) other villages. This last view dominated Shanin’s conception of the political sociology of the peasantry. With its strong emphasis on the centripetal forces in the village, Shanin’s approach left little room for the formation of true social classes in general and a rural proletariat in particular. The dominant struggle on the land then became one of united insiders versus outsiders rather than of rich against poor within the village.

Marxist responses to the culturalist approach have acknowledged the need for some revision of orthodoxy. Hobsbawm agreed with Shanin that, in general, the peasantry is a “class of low class­ness.”\(^43\) Referring specifically to Russia, Mark Harrison accepted both the slowness of capitalist development and the absence of unambiguous class barriers in the village.\(^44\) Instead, Marxist criticism of the culturalist approach has centered on the problem of definition. Judith Enew and her collaborators, along with Harrison, Hobsbawm, Mintz, and others, remain convinced of the the heterogeneity of rural populations.\(^45\) Many recent historical studies have confirmed the presence of a wide variety of groups in the

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\(^42\)Redfield, p. 23.

\(^43\)Hobsbawm, 1973, p. 5.


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countryside. Marxists have continued to emphasize the decisive importance of external forces on the peasant world as the crucial consideration in understanding the process of differentiation. Chaianov was, accordingly, criticized for attempting to base the description of an entire mode of production on the internal characteristics of its individual unit. Even the least orthodox Marxist writers have continued to emphasize the enveloping totality of relations in order to determine the particular mode of production of which the peasant community may be just a part. Culturalists, Eric Wolf in particular, have hardly been blind to this outside world. Nevertheless, they have based their search for explanations on the internal mechanisms of cohesion within the village rather than on the disruptive forces external to it.

Harrison, in particular, criticized Chaianov’s emphasis on the goal of subsistence as an explanation for the apparent timeless equilibrium of peasant society. Harrison argued that Chaianov derived the requirements for subsistence, post facto, from already achieved levels of consumption. This step meant that Chaianov inadvertently accepted a state of affairs that included malnutrition, poverty, disease, and ignorance as unchanging aspects of daily life. All populist and Marxist writers and activists were politically committed to eradicating these conditions. Marxists saw capitalism, despite its enormous human costs, as a force for progress in the countryside. By contrast, the source of change in Chaianov’s system was not clear. The idea of a timeless peasant mode of production was necessarily static and ahistorical. As a result, Marxists, then and now, argued that Chaianov’s approach led to the political acceptance of the centuries-old poverty of the Russian peasant.

The culturalist emphasis on the role of patriarchy and kinship has also been challenged by Marxists. The expectation that each male should have his own household and farm assigned decisive importance to the ways relations among families distributed wom-


47Enew et al., p. 307.

48Harrison, 1974, p. 414.
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en among men. Status and blood ties were significant considerations under such circumstances. The continuing importance of patriarchy in the village necessitated an analysis of kinship patterns in order to determine real power in the village. This, in turn, influenced demographic processes which also worked against the emergence of clear class differences in the village. Harrison, however, contended that the concept of patriarchy could not adequately explain the leveling tendencies of the Russian commune, in particular. Patriarchy had, after all, existed in all times and places. Peasant communes, both Russian and non-Russian, were, on the other hand, historically and geographically limited phenomena. Even if patriarchy was a significant element of village life, and it certainly was, it was necessary to characterize the particular nature of patriarchy in a given situation. The French anthropologist Claude Meillassoux argued that kinship patterns themselves reflected, in imprecise ways, relations of production. Similarly, demographic trends could not be seen as autonomous factors. These too were influenced by the changing character of a mode of production. The population explosion in the Russian countryside after the emancipation of 1861 would seem to be an example of such a pattern. Sidney Mintz contended that the use of culture as an explanation of peasant homogeneity left open important questions about the concept of culture itself. Were the norms and values of peasant societies necessarily autonomous or were they influenced by a variety of factors, some of which might have been economic? Finally, Harrison, in a different context, showed a number of ways in which the increased specialization of agriculture transformed the character of the traditional village without completely destroying it.

In the mid-1970s, several American social scientists gave further

52Harrison, "Resource Allocation," p. 147.
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impetus to the old debates about peasant society. Their research centered on Third World countries that had been colonized, but their theoretical concerns evoked echoes of familiar arguments. Jeffrey Paige offered a number of theories of rural class conflict. As part of a broader approach to agrarian revolution, he specified the kinds of circumstances in which true rural proletarians could play active roles. He also sought to revive the idea that landownership or control of land could make peasants resistant, rather than receptive, to revolutionary movements. In order to explain these phenomena, Paige placed the relations between cultivators and non-cultivators at the center of his analysis.53

At the same time, a culturalist approach to the question of peasant rebellion was offered by James Scott. Peasants were part of a distinctive “moral economy” in which their subsistence ethic was the central motivating force. Disorder would occur when the traditional understandings between cohesive villages and powerful outsiders were broken. New demands could trigger unrest. For this reason peasant aims were seen as restorative, even backward-looking. It was common for peasants to hark back to a mythical earlier time when there were no lords and the land was theirs. For Scott, the relationship between lord and peasant was as much psychic as economic, and it was the breaking of the psychic bonds that was thought to be destabilizing. Culture was central to Scott’s analysis. For him, peasants were concerned with the consumption needs of their families, first and foremost. They made decisions according to criteria that were theirs alone. This emphasis placed Scott squarely, though surely not consciously, in the tradition of the Slavophiles and the populists.54

Scott and other culturalists were criticized by Samuel Popkin who offered a non-Marxist reaffirmation of the importance of classical economics to an understanding of peasant decision making. Arguing that peasants made “rational” economic and political decisions, Popkin criticized the “moral economy” school for “romanticizing” peasant life. Like Scott, he gave his attention to the

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relatively recent history of Vietnam where the colonial market had transformed self-sufficient villages. Popkin demonstrated that individual peasants were capable of risk taking and innovation, that they were able to view the world according to the criteria of capitalism.\(^55\)

Peasant actions that might have seemed backward-looking and even irrational could have had their own logic. Peasants might want to return to a mythical past, but in voicing their demands, they limited themselves to the more appealing aspects of that past. They might ask that certain lands that they had used for centuries be returned to them, but they never expressed much nostalgia for corporal punishment, conscription, or severe taxation. Popkin’s approach, while not Marxist, did place emphasis on many of the same outside forces that Marxists stressed. In this limited sense, his work could be seen as an extension of that old consensus which stressed the usefulness of classical economics for an analysis of rural society. The debate between Popkin and Scott, while basically scholarly, retraced many of the paths outlined earlier by Russian thinkers of the nineteenth century.

In a certain sense, the sides in these debates are not that far apart. If one examines both Marxist and culturalist expectations about peasant disturbances, it becomes clear that the two schools have most often talked about very different things. Each side has tended to choose as objects of study situations likely to provide information that supports their views and expectations. Rural cultivators tended to follow Marxist scenarios when they found themselves in situations that could properly be called capitalist. Thus, most Marxists (Hobsbawm and Rodney Hilton are exceptions) have preferred to look at the modern world.\(^56\) By contrast, traditional societies have fostered the kinds of activities predicted by the culturalists as normal peasant behavior. Such observers as Shanin have concentrated on historical situations that were, in his words, “pre-industrial.”\(^57\) When peasants have been integrated into market economies, they have proven capable of making what

\(^{57}\)Shanin, 1972, p. 207.
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Marxists and classical economists would call "rational" economic and political decisions. When their lives have been more hermetic and self-sufficient, their actions often have assumed what might be considered exotic forms. Thus, this long-standing and often-renewed debate does not revolve around the clear-cut universal superiority of either school of thought. Rather, it is concerned with the specific applicability of either of the schema to the particular concrete historical situation being studied. If that situation is basically capitalist, then Marxist, Leninist, or political economy conceptions can, in fact, be useful. If, on the other hand, one is describing a society or community that is more backward, then the culturalist approach may be more fruitful.

Since the late 1970s, the divisions between the two schools have blurred somewhat. Along with John Berger, Durrenberger and Tannenbaum have urged Marxists to take a more sympathetic approach to Chaianov. Other Marxists have talked about the utility of a "household mode of production" for understanding early America. David Goodman and Michael Redclift, writing from what they call a Marxist perspective, have also shown an openness to other schools. On the other hand, Eric Wolf's 1982 book places far greater emphasis on history in general and the surrounding mode of production in particular. In addition, Wolf's own conception of a mode of production fits quite comfortably into the Marxist camp. Not to be outdone, Shanin has invoked Marx in defense of his own views, citing the famous letters to Vera Zasulich (who was a populist in the 1870s at the time the letters were written) as proof of "the master's" own openness to the socialist potential of the commune. Elsewhere, Shanin has

59Mike Merill, "So What's Wrong with the 'Household Mode of Production'?" Radical History Review, no. 22 (Winter 1979), 141-46.
61Eric Wolf, Europe and the People without History (Berkeley, 1982), p. 263.
stressed that the primary task of any analysis is measuring the level of agrarian capitalism in order to determine the particular theories that may be relevant. In doing this, he has suggested criteria that were originally raised by the Soviet agricultural economists of the 1920s.63

Richard Smith's recent survey of scholarship on the medieval and early modern English peasantry confirmed this trend. He found neither Chaianovian nor Leninist models to be universally applicable. Instead, some villages were organized around the concerns of kinship, culture, and demography, whereas other settlements exhibited high levels of stratification and responsiveness to the market. Given this state of affairs, it would seem that the two prevailing theories can aid in identifying the nature of a particular object of study. Yet they cannot make unnecessary the meticulous reconstruction of historical reality.64

This coming together of the two major schools reflects an understanding that the disputants have not always been talking about the same things. One group's "peasants" have often been the other's "rural proletarians." Attempts to advance the theoretical debate have stalled in recent years. Instead, the task has fallen to historians, sociologists, and anthropologists to uncover the peasants' well-hidden world and to describe their lives and actions as precisely as can be done.

Schools of Thought on Russian Peasant Society

Culturalist analyses of rural Russia have devoted much attention to the resurrection of a number of fundamental ideas of the populist movement. They have stressed the absence of politically meaningful stratification in the countryside and have sought to demonstrate the continued vitality of the village commune. In the

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mid-1960s Moshe Lewin demonstrated the ambiguity of the standard class categories of landless (batrak), poor (bedniak), middle (seredniak), and rich (kulak) into which Lenin, and later Soviet analysts, divided the rural working population. It was difficult in the 1920s to find meaningful criteria for assigning peasants to one of these categories, and it proved extremely hard for those actually in the countryside to determine which individual peasants fit into which group. The postrevolutionary Bolshevik aim of entering a village in order to foment class warfare became problematic when one accepted the fact that the character of particular households was difficult to determine with any accuracy.65

Whereas Lewin limited his discussion to the 1920s, Shanin studied the period between 1910 and 1925. His central aim was to explain the failure of modern social classes to appear in the Russian village. Shanin did not deny the existence of different levels of wealth among the peasantry, nor did he claim that the formal repartitional mechanism of the commune was an effective force guaranteeing equality. Instead he noted, as have observers of other peasant societies, a positive correlation between family size and wealth. This meant that the stratification Lenin was able to demonstrate in The Development of Capitalism in Russia was not economic. Rather, it was demographic, or more precisely, biological. Shanin argued that peasant households combined and divided constantly, a process he called “substantive changes.”66 Given the decisive predominance of partible succession, the largest and wealthiest peasants would divide their holdings among several sons in the next generation. Each man had to have, for the strongest of social and cultural reasons, a household and a farm. He was not considered a true man unless he had these things, nor could he participate in the traditional assembly of heads of households in which the crucial decisions of village life were made. At the opposite end of the spectrum, poor families, who might even be

unrelated, found clear economic advantages in combining their households and allotments, given the relationship of family size to wealth. Thus, Shanin argued, although social mobility did exist, changes in peasant social status were cyclical. Households rose and fell from generation to generation, as members entered and left their prime working years. Because neither wealth nor poverty were passed on, true social classes could not emerge. Because each man had to have a wife, kinship patterns, not economic relations, were supposed to be the best guide to an understanding of the social structure of the village.

In very different ways, Lewin and Shanin forced a reappraisal of Russian and Soviet rural history. They were able to show that the peasants themselves did not describe the social structure of the village in the same ways as did Lenin and other Marxists. In the absence of clear peasant awareness of class differences, it was impossible for them to act politically according to Bolshevik scenarios. Before and after the revolution, peasants appear to have spent little time fighting each other. Instead, they displayed considerable political cohesion in combating a variety of outside forces that undermined the traditional equilibrium of what was a relatively self-sufficient way of life.

Soviet specialists who work on the prerevolutionary period have not sought to contradict this view. They have ascribed the absence of class tension in the village to overriding enmity for the landlords in particular and to the still-traditional character of rural life in general. If peasants acted in precapitalist ways, then it was because they lived under precapitalist conditions. To understand peasant behavior, it was necessary to determine how extensive was, to borrow a phrase from an obvious source, the development of capitalism in Russia. For decades such orthodox historians as S. M. Dubrovskii and P. N. Pershin stressed a fairly high level of rural capitalism but maintained an awareness of “semi-feudal” forms.

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67Ibid., pp. 76-80.
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More recently, A. M. Anfimov argued for a view of the countryside that emphasized its backwardness. In the 1970s and 1980s, I. D. Kovalchenko led a team of computer-equipped quantifiers in an attempt to specify the level of capitalist development in the various regions of the empire. Their research has led Anfimov to revise some of his views and accept the existence of a higher level of agrarian capitalism than he had earlier thought.

Kovalchenko and his collaborators have placed regional differences at the heart of their discussion. For too long, both Western and Soviet scholars have suffered from a kind of analytical centralism that forced them to offer conclusions which were supposed to apply to all of Russia. In particular, this led to a distorting emphasis on conditions in central Russia. Although one may question the usefulness of the kinds of criteria employed by Kovalchenko and his team, it is at least clear that they are in the process of providing answers to the kinds of questions that must be asked before one can gain any understanding of what Soviet historians call “the peasant movement.”

Schools of Thought on Russian Peasant Politics

In recent discussions of the Russian peasantry, political issues have been of secondary concern. Yet, here too, the utility of either of the two main schools is largely a function of the concrete situation that must be explained. Shanin, as noted, has described the political attitudes of peasants as “pre-industrial.” Accordingly, he has preferred to cite the activities of rural cultivators in regions relatively untouched by the market economy. Those attitudes and activities bear a striking resemblance to the disorganized, spontaneous, backward-looking, violent, and even millenarian behavior of English medieval peasants described by Hilton, early modern

70I. D. Kovalchenko, N. B. Selunskaya, B. M. Litvakov, Sotsial’no-ekonomicheskii stroi pomeshchich’ego khoziaistva evropeiskoi Rossii v epokhu kapitalizma (Moscow, 1982).
French peasants discussed by Le Roy Ladurie, and eighteenth-century Russian peasants studied by Michael Confino. Shanin, Alavi, and to a lesser extent Wolf, have written about groups that were relatively unaffected by the growth of commercial agriculture and wage labor. Their situations were precapitalist, and we can describe the forms assumed by their actions as "traditional." Random violence, arson, pillage, crop stealing, and murder were the ways peasants expressed their discontent in those times and places. Their goals were rarely achievable, and their actions often seemed injurious to their short-term interests. For these reasons, many outsiders characterized peasant rebellion as irrational. More properly, traditional peasants had their own logic, and the tactical conditions were appropriate to the conditions they confronted. Yet that logic was not a capitalist logic.

By contrast, both orthodox and newer Marxists have chosen to concentrate on those segments of the rural population whose lives were significantly altered by phenomena that could properly be called agrarian capitalism. Marxists had expected the city, not the countryside, to be the center of revolutionary activity. Urban proletarians, in Europe and elsewhere, had not manifested their discontent in the atavistic and expressive ways of the peasant. Instead, city workers primarily used the strike weapon. They made a variety of explicit political and economic demands, some of which had to be winnable. When they engaged in violence, their actions were usually defensive, directed at strikebreakers, police, or soldiers. For Marxists, this "proletarian" form of struggle was instrumental and rational. If "backward" peasants manifested one approach to rebellion while "advanced" proletarians demonstrated another, it would then follow that the forms of struggle adopted by those who were "semi-proletarian" would likely be similarly mixed. This turned out to be the case in Russia's southwest during 1905.

Since the revolution, Soviet scholars have produced extensive and detailed studies of what they call "the peasant movement." They have not ignored the largely spontaneous and poorly orga-
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nized character of most rural disorders, but they have always
stressed a leading role for the poor and the landless, the proletariat
and the semi-proletariat.72 Despite their necessarily Leninist em­
phasis, Soviet historians have been able to integrate a variety of
phenomena into their approach. A flood of studies on the peasant
movement were published in the mid-1950s during the fiftieth
anniversary of the Revolution of 1905. Most of these works ac­
cepted a dominant role for what they called the “middle peasan­
try” and what Shanin would call simply “the peasantry.”73 On the
other hand, the leading Ukrainian specialist M. N. Leshchenko,
writing at the same time, kept the familiar emphasis on the agrar­
ian proletariat as the most militant segment of the rural popula­
tion, at least, in his particular part of the empire.74

More recently, M. S. Simonova summarized the Soviet literature
on 1905 and reasserted the special “avidity” of those without
land.75 Soviet views on peasant politics are, therefore, not mono­
lithic. Differences of opinion exist. Though the emphasis on the
rural proletariat has not been discarded, this has not prevented
Soviet scholars from describing events with considerable accuracy.

72N. Mirza-Avakiants, Selianskii rozrukhi na Ukraini 1905-1907 roku
(Kharkov, 1925). E. A. Morokhovets, Krestianskoe dvizhenie i sotsial’-demok­
ratiiia v epokhu pervoi russkoi revoliutsii (Moscow-Leningrad, 1926). A Shesta­
kov, Borba sel’skich rabochikh v revoliutsii 1905-1907 gg. (Moscow-Leningrad,
1930).

73Dubrovskii, Krestianskoe dvizhenie v revoliutsii 1905-1907 (Moscow, 1956).
A. Shestakov, Krestianskaia revoliutsiia 1905-1907 gg. v Rossii (Moscow, 1926).
I. U. Kharitonova and D. Shcherbako, Krestianskoe dvizhenie v Kaluzhskoi guber­
nii 1861-1917 gg. (Kaluga, 1961). K. I. Shabunia, Agrarnyi vopros i krestianskoe
dvizhenie v Belorusii v revoliutsii 1905-1907 gg. (Minsk, 1962). V. I. Popov,
“Krestianskoe dvizhenie v Riazanskoi gubernii v revoliutsii 1905-1907 gg.,” Istori­
chieskie zapiski 49 (1954), 136-64. A. G. Mikhailiuk, “Krestianskoe dvizhenie
na levoberezhnoi Ukrainie v 1905-1907 gg.,” Istoricheskie zapiski 49 (1954),
165-201. V. M. Gokhlerner, “Krestianskoe dvizhenie v Saratovskoi gubernii v
gody pervoi russkoi revoliutsii,” Istoricheskie zapiski 52 (1955), 186-234. P. N.
Abramov, “Iz istorii krestianskogo dvizhenia 1905-1906 gg. v tsentral’no-cher­
nozemnykh guberniakh,” Istoricheskie zapiski 57 (1956), 293-311.

74M. N. Leshchenko, Selianskii rukh na pravoberezhnii Ukraini v period revo­

75M. S. Simonova, “Krestianskoe dvizhenie 1905-1907 gg. v sovetskoi isto­
riografii,” Istoricheskie zapiski 95 (1975), 204-53. For a more recent but similar
view, see L. T. Senchakova, RSDRP i krestianstvo v revoliutsii 1905-1907 gg.
(Moscow, 1984).
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Recent Western research on peasant politics has been comparatively limited. Much social history has been written about Russian peasants, but political issues have, with few exceptions, been avoided in favor of economic, social, and institutional questions. Shanin's specific discussion of peasant political behavior imputed more than it demonstrated, and the majority of his examples were drawn from the postrevolutionary period when the decisive power of the landlords was no longer a factor. His 1985 book on the 1905 revolution throughout Russia affirmed the international consensus on the dominant role of the middle peasant. Nevertheless, Shanin's approach has been corroborated by some modern Western scholarship. Graeme Gill's book on the provisional government in 1917 and Eugene Vinogradoff's essay on the elections of 1912 both confirm, for central Russia, strong patterns of political cohesion, relative indifference to the outside world, and still-vital traditional practices and attitudes. Marc Ferro and John Keep have favored similar approaches in their discussions of peasant activity in 1917.

The most suggestive research on peasant politics has been carried out by Maureen Perrie, who studied the massive disturbances throughout the countryside during the Revolution of 1905–7. Perrie's approach was more cautious than that of other writers, but, by and large, her work confirmed the contentions of Wolf, Alavi, and Shanin that the leading role in 1905 was played by the middle peasantry. Perrie, however, gave special emphasis to the forms assumed by peasant struggles in order to draw conclusions about

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political practices and attitudes. Here, she was able to demonstrate that the character of the economy of a particular region strongly affected the specific kinds of actions taken by peasants. Behavior that other scholars have described as traditional was most prevalent in those parts of the empire where agriculture was most traditional. In more advanced regions, peasants acted differently.

There is now a broad consensus, Soviet and Western, culturalist and Marxist, that the middle peasant, not the rural proletariat, was the most active force in the Russian countryside between 1905 and 1907. Despite their special attention to tensions within the peasantry, Soviet scholars have accepted the fact that peasants acted cohesively in 1905. To explain this, they have advanced the idea of two “social wars,” the first pitting the entire peasantry against the landlords and the second pitting the poor peasantry against the rich. The events of 1905–7 represent a case of the first type of social war. Historians in the Soviet Union differ, as do their colleagues in the West, on whether the second phase of the struggle ever began. It should, however, be clear that they have not sought to make an extended case for sharp intravillage tensions during 1905.

Nevertheless, the international consensus on 1905 cannot, as Perrie has noted, be sustained for all parts of the empire. Regional variations allow one to raise, in a different way, the possible roles played by landless laborers, narrowly defined rural proletarians. Cohesion characterized the movement in the provinces of central Russia, especially the famous Central Black Earth region (the provinces of Kursk, Orel, Tula, Riazan, Tambov, and Voronezh). There, agriculture was still practiced in primitive and traditional ways. The three-field system predominated, and the repartitional commune continued to function. The kinds of “preindustrial” behavior noted by Shanin, Wolf, Gill, and Vinogradoff are consistent with and supported by the traditional economic and social structures that were still vital in central Russia in 1905. Class differentiation among the peasantry of central Russia was not of such an order as to foster sharp struggles within the village. Instead, peasants united to face the outside world.

79Dubrovskii, 1962, p. 17.
Finally, as Perrie demonstrated, the forms of peasant agitation in these provinces during 1905 were disorganized, spontaneous, violent, and in most cases backward-looking in their aims. They followed patterns that have often been called "irrational," whether or not they had their own internal logic. The universal cause of the disorders of 1905 was simply lack of land, and the peasants' characteristic solution to the crisis was the immediate confiscation of all gentry, state, and church land, without compensation. At the time, this goal seemed completely utopian. Yet it should not be forgotten that what seemed impossible in 1905 would, in fact, be realized in 1917. Between the two revolutions, conditions changed drastically. The destruction of the autocracy meant the collapse of all authority in the countryside. During 1905, the state's loss of control was only partial and temporary. The first Russian revolution, in this sense, was no "dress rehearsal." In 1905, peasants throughout the empire were expressing their rage. Twelve years later, they were able to settle age-old scores.

The Southwest as a Test Case

The relationship between the manifestation of peasant solidarity and the persistence of traditional practices was close. Accordingly, it would be important to learn whether the forms of the movement manifested in central Russia were duplicated in areas where agrarian capitalism was well advanced. Shanin's claim for the universality of his approach is not fully proven, and, as Perrie has suggested, further research on specific regions could reveal important variations. If it could be demonstrated that the kinds of political behavior described by culturalists were also encountered in advanced regions, then this school would have greatly strengthened its case in terms of the Russian experience. If, on the other hand, one could identify a true rural proletariat (landless wage earners) in these capitalist regions and demonstrate its important role in rural protest, then one would have to conclude that certain Leninist and Marxist approaches could still be considered applicable to parts of the empire.

The validity of the two approaches can be tested by selecting a
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region of extensive agrarian capitalism and studying the peasant movement there during a moment of extreme agitation. The Revolution of 1905–7 was just such a time. The thousands of disturbances of those years were a decisive turning point in the history of Russia. The autocracy’s faith in the basic conservatism and loyalty of the peasantry was shattered, and the state then added its weight to the forces seeking to destroy the village commune.

Several agriculturally advanced regions suggest themselves for comparison with central Russia, but the southwestern provinces of Kiev, Podol’e, and Volynia in the right-bank Ukraine provide several useful analytical possibilities. Noble landlords in this region practiced profit-oriented agriculture on their plantations and employed many thousands of wage workers. At the same time, the communal institutions of the village were still alive although they did not practice repartitional tenure. Instead, allotments throughout the Ukraine and in much of western Russia were held hereditarily. As a result, the right bank was different from central Russia. Yet it was not so thoroughly different as to make comparisons meaningless. The provinces of Kiev, Podol’e, and Volynia take on added importance for the historian of the peasant movement in the light of two other crucial facts:

1. The “per capita” incidence of disturbances in the right bank between 1905 and 1907 was higher than in any other region.
2. This agitation was sharply different in form from similar events in central Russia. Peasants in the right bank demonstrated the ability to organize themselves coherently and make appropriate tactical choices for the attainment of realizable goals.

The exceptional character of the right bank allows one to test the validity of certain universal rules. Accordingly, any investigation of events in this part of the world leads immediately back to the same questions scholars and political activists have been asking for more than a century. How best to comprehend the peasantry?