At the outset of this book, I raised the two standard questions that must be posed in any examination of rural disturbances. Which factors determined peasant behavior at moments of disorder? Which elements of the peasantry participated in movements of resistance? Each of these questions is, in turn, linked to the other issues that have engaged activists and scholars for the last century and a half. In the course of the first Russian revolution, rural cultivators in the southwest acted in ways that confirmed some of the expectations of both major conceptions of life in the countryside. Conversely, if both sides (neither of which is monolithic) can point to phenomena that affirm their approach, they must also account for situations that do not fit expected patterns.

The events described here present a mixed picture. This, by itself, should be obvious. It is difficult to imagine any concrete historical situation that would not present varied and even contradictory phenomena. My primary concern, however, has been to describe the precise way peasants in the southwest followed multiple patterns of behavior, because this specific structure of combinations suggests ways both schools of thought can rework basic ideas. If Marxists, in the light of this experience, would do well to revise important analytical categories, culturalists should now re-
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consider the explanatory power of the timeless structures they have
described and emphasized.

During the revolutionary years between 1905 and 1907, right-
bank peasants acted in ways that confirmed several important cul-
turalist expectations. First, they demonstrated political cohesion in
their struggle with the landed gentry; class struggle within the
village was not extensive. Second, landless laborers, who were not
members of the communes where they worked, were tentative and
secondary participants in the strikes and disturbances. Third, the
traditional assembly of heads of households continued to play a
role at moments of stress. Fourth, disorders were largely localized,
with peasants confronting, first and foremost, their own landlords.
Fifth, although the movement was widespread, it did not ultimate-
ly lead to the creation of ongoing, national political groups that
could mobilize and organize the peasantry.

On the other hand, rural cultivators in this region chose tactics
(the organized strike) and made demands (higher wages and better
working conditions) that were precisely appropriate to the condi-
tions they confronted outside their communities. External forces
and structures determined peasants’ choices in their battles with
the landlords. Rural cultivators were fully able to make reasoned
decisions and alter their approach when conditions shifted. They
did not cling blindly to custom and superstition, nor did they
ignore the changes occurring around them. They had ceased har-
boring the vision of a long-past and mythical “golden age” when
the land belonged to them alone. If anything, right-bank peasants
were far from utopian in their aims. Their use of force was judi-
cious, limited, defensive, and almost never random. Finally, peas-
ants in Kiev, Podol’e, and Volynia engaged in formal political
activity only episodically, but when they did, they showed greater
receptivity to Social Democratic rather than Socialist Revolu-
tionary appeals. The peculiar economic, social, and cultural conditions
of the southwest had given rise to a distinctive movement. In these
specific ways, the residents of this region affirmed many Marxist
and Leninist claims about peasant behavior.

This divided picture is the direct result of the particular form
capitalism assumed in the southwest. Landlords, rather than peas-
ants, had been the source of agrarian innovation. The right bank
was a clear case of the “Prussian path” to capitalism. Peasant
The Consequences of the Prussian Path

agriculture, meanwhile, remained traditional and primitive. Village dwellers still practiced the three-field system and continued to raise crops that were part of a natural or subsistence economy. Yet, given the special smallness of peasant allotments, subsistence was not easily achieved. Households had to supplement their incomes, and in the southwest, this need was fulfilled through wage work on capitalist estates. This phenomenon was so widespread that it was practiced by families from all but the very wealthiest strata of the village. Therefore, most peasants occupied a similar position vis-à-vis the landlords. This shared dependence on the estate owners was the central fact of peasant life in the southwest. So great was the poverty of all rural cultivators in the right bank that differences of wealth within the village seemed insignificant when compared to the huge chasm between lords and peasants.

The generalized peasant dependence on the large landholders made differences within the village seem comparatively insignificant. In 1905, this fact overwhelmed all others, as peasants acted cohesively against both the proprietors and renters of large estates. For peasants to have been divided against each other, their own agriculture would have had to have been more advanced. For true social classes to have emerged, the right bank would have had to have been the site not of the "Prussian" but of the "American" path to capitalism. If peasants themselves had been part of the market economy, then significant differences of wealth would have emerged in the villages, and those distinctions could have developed into politically and socially meaningful class antagonisms. Because capitalist agriculture in the southwest was exclusively a landlord enterprise, peasants spent little time, during 1905, fighting each other. Soviet scholars have explained this cohesion by describing it as a manifestation of the first of the two "social wars" in the countryside. The first "social war" was a struggle between landlords and the entire peasantry. This clash was to be followed by a second war in which the poor and middle peasants faced the landlords and kulaks. For some Soviet historians, the second war came in 1917. Culturalists, of course, doubt that it ever took place. Regardless of later events, it is possible to see 1905 as an early stage of revolution in which one could scarcely expect class struggle within the village to be particularly significant.

The simultaneous appearance of traditional peasant social cohe-
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sion and modern proletarian political behavior is, therefore, one of the consequences of the Prussian route to capitalism. Yet in one important way the experience of the right-bank landlord differed from that of his or her Junker counterpart. The noble landlords of East Prussia faced a constant labor shortage throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. Germany’s swiftly expanding industrial sector created a demand for labor, and workers on Junker estates often found it attractive to leave for the cities. By contrast, Russian industry in 1905 was less extensive. Peasants in Kiev, Podol’e, and Volynia did not have all the options of their counterparts in the the German Empire. As a result, there was a huge surplus of labor in the southwest. Landlords were able to keep wages low and avoid improvements in working conditions. This combination of circumstances, as we have seen, made the southwest especially prone to disorder, far more so in this period than East Prussia.

By itself, the relative supply and demand of working hands only partially explains why one place remained passive while the other exploded. Outside political events were obviously very different in Russia and Germany. Crucial for our understanding of peasant behavior here is the fact that the Prussian road to capitalism does not require a complete transformation of the lives of the peasantry. It allows for the simultaneous existence of both primitive and advanced agriculture, even on the same estate. For this reason, the actions of right-bank peasants in 1905 confirm parts of both dominant explanations and deny others. I noted in the introduction that the debate was less about the universal applicability of either approach than it was about the appropriateness of each school to explain the specific situation being analyzed. Leninists and other Marxists have made better sense of capitalist agriculture, whereas culturalists have been best at explaining traditional agriculture. In the right bank, peasants continued primitive practices on their own land, while they participated in a modern labor market when dealing with landlords. Given this set of circumstances, one would expect that the picture would be mixed in this particular way.

The persistence of precapitalist peasant agriculture provides an explanation for the retention of traditional institutions in the villages. The most important of these was the assembly of heads of
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households. In dividing insiders from outsiders, the skhod prevented landless laborers from playing a decisive role and diminished peasant awareness of the divisions in their own midst. The skhod did this with no great precision or clarity, however. The assemblies did not operate according to clearly understood legal procedures. They had no rules of order, nor did they have officially designated meeting places. They were more oligarchical than democratic, excluding, in most instances, women and the village youth. In the southwest, these omissions were especially significant, as women and young peasants were militant participants in the movement.

Right-bank peasants were quick to call meetings of the assemblies during the revolution. Yet it is clear that they did not do so out of blind commitment to the ancient ways of the village. The peasant structures that culturalists have considered to be timeless and central changed their meaning in the course of the strike movement. The tactical advantages of peasants’ giving their gatherings the title of skhody were clear and obvious. It was eminently logical and rational for peasants to seek to imbue their strike planning with some kind of official aura. This step served a protective function, and, initially, made the authorities reluctant to intervene. Eventually, the police recognized these meetings for what they were and sought to break them up. Peasants called any gathering an “assembly of heads of household (skhod).” The police called them “illegal public gatherings (nezakonnye publichnye skopishche).” What had been a traditional institution now became a strike committee. What at first glance seems to have been the persistence of an old structure, turns out to have been something rather different. As outside political conditions changed dramatically in 1905, so did the internal mechanisms of the village.

By 1906, peasants themselves came to recognize this change. It became more common to hold secret meetings in the woods and to elect formal strike committees. This shift was not universal. Yet it was extremely important. The traditional skhod was no longer the only appropriate vehicle for bringing together the movement’s participants in this region. Women and young men took active roles in the many strikes—yet they were not supposed to participate in the traditional assembly. Clearly the functions, character, and compe-
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tence of this institution had to change, and they did so in the course of the revolutionary years. If peasants still called meetings of the assembly in moments of disorder, those meetings now assumed very different meanings.

As Mark Harrison and other Marxist writers have noticed, the structures of peasant life may persist, but their character and meaning can change drastically under the influence of outside forces. Under these circumstances the phenomenon of peasant cohesion in 1905 is self-evident. It does not, by itself, explain the experience of rural Russia in 1917, 1930, or, for that matter, 1830. The conditions that made cohesion possible in 1905 may not have existed at other moments. Similarly, the persistence of peasant reliance on the traditional assemblies does not indicate a timeless truth about their lives. The experience of the southwest clearly shows that these structures can wither in their power, adapt to new situations, and change their roles and meanings as times change.

If culturalists have sought to assume the point of view of the peasant, Marxist activists and analysts of rural life have been be-deviled by their roles as outsiders. The Social Democratic movement in both Europe and Russia placed its hopes on the urban proletariat. Marx’s analysis derived from the growth of industry in the city. The peasantry, on the other hand, was supposed to be historically doomed. In attempting to make sense of events in the countryside, Marxists have imposed the familiar and comfortable analytical categories of the urban world. The willingness to use a powerful explanatory framework in inappropriate situations was so great that Marx, as well as Lenin, often succumbed to the temptation.

In Russia, urban workers had responded to Social Democratic appeals. Lenin, thinking landless laborers had nothing to lose but their chains, called this group a rural proletariat and ascribed to it the militance of the urban working class. He also included the landless with the allotment-holding poor peasantry in one politically unified group which he called simply “the rural poor.” By any rigorous Marxist standard, Lenin’s use of this category was decidedly unorthodox. Propertyless rural cultivators and peasants who owned even small amounts of land had a different relationship to the means of production. By this standard, one would not expect
them to behave politically in a unified way, and in 1905, they did not, even in the right bank. The narrowly defined rural proletariat, in fact, played the role of an urban lumpenproletariat.

If this meant that Lenin’s concept of the rural poor was theoretically imprecise, it, nevertheless, made eminent political sense to include the poor peasantry in a category to which one ascribed some form of militance. Lenin called this group either “semi-proletarian” or “proletarianized.” At first glance, this choice of words could be seen as an attempt to ascribe a form of urban, working-class behavior to what were, in fact, simply peasants. Yet the experience of the right bank demonstrates that, under certain circumstances, the concept of “semi-proletarian” accurately describes the actions of particular classes of rural cultivators.1 During 1905, the allotment-holding peasantry of the southwest did not act like peasants elsewhere in the world. They were neither atavistic, millenarian, nor randomly violent. Their actions were straightforward and thoroughly rational, fully consistent with their immediate interests as wage workers on large, capitalistically organized estates. Lenin’s “semi-proletarians” played the role usually assigned in the cities to the industrial working class.

Urban workers were brought together on the factory floor and in their neighborhoods. Through these processes, they established the social relations that gave them solidarity and militance. A lumpenproletariat of drifters, petty criminals, and the occasionally employed did not experience these lessons. Instead of joining socialist movements, these elements proved susceptible to various fascist and proto-fascist appeals. In the cities, these people were strikebreakers.

In the countryside, the peasantry was the only segment of the population to experience social relations that supported political militance. Agricultural workers did not take part in the life of the village, nor did their work bring them together as it did urban workers. Plantation fields are not factory floors. Organizing a rural proletariat, strictly defined, has never been an easy process.

The very poorest segment of the rural population did not turn out to be the most militant. This finding is consistent with the

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conclusions reached by recent students of the Russian labor move­
ment. The revolution found its staunchest supporters among the
most educated and skilled elements of the working class.² Before
World War I and again in 1917, hereditary proletarians, not recent
arrivals to the city, led the strike movement and participated in
revolutionary politics. A worker's level of wealth did not turn out
to be the crucial consideration. Instead, their political attitudes
were the product of their place in the complex social and economic
relations of the factory, neighborhood, trade union, and workers'
council. The same can be said for the countryside, where only
allotment-holding peasants were fully able to participate in pro­
cesses that generated solidarity and political militance.

The divergent roles of landless laborers and semi-proletarians
does, ironically, support Marxist contentions about the hetero­
genity of rural cultivators. If landless agrarian workers did not
demonstrate the militance Lenin ascribed to them, the wage-earn­
ing poor peasantry acted very much in the “proletarianized” man­
nner he expected. The experience of right-bank peasants in 1905,
therefore, suggests an adjustment, rather than abandonment, of
familiar Marxist and Leninist categories. If urban terms have in­
correctly been imposed on rural situations, it is still possible to find
meaningful correspondences between events in the cities and the
countryside. If one focuses on political role and place in the rela­
tions of production as the basis for one's categories, rural social
classes in the southwest translate in the following way into urban
groups:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>landless proletarians</td>
<td>lumpenproletariat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>semi-proletarians</td>
<td>industrial workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kulaks</td>
<td>petty bourgeoisie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>landed gentry</td>
<td>grand bourgeoisie</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Certainly, disagreements may arise about the size of the various
subgroups. It also need scarcely be said that the kulak has been the

of Rebellion (Berkeley, 1983). Diane Koenker, Moscow Workers and the 1917

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subject of the most intense debate over the decades. Yet it should be stressed that the basis for these correspondences is not ownership or nonownership of property. Relations rather than forces of production are central to this process of translating urban categories in order to comprehend rural situations. When modified in these ways, Marxist approaches, including those faithful to Lenin, can make sense of peasant behavior, not only in special places like the right-bank Ukraine, but elsewhere as well. The Prussian example may seem an especially appropriate case in which Marxist approaches are likely to be especially fruitful. A wide variety of situations can be comprehended, if one understands the ways different categories can have similar meanings in differing situations.

Landless laborers did not control the peasant movement in the southwest during 1905. As often as not, they were strikebreakers. Instead, wage-earning peasants led the strikes and disorders. They acted as would any employees in large, capitalist enterprises. Without leaving the land or abandoning all their traditions, peasants in the southwest transformed the ways they confronted the estate owners. Despite all the ambiguities of the phrase, the women and men who worked the fields of Kiev, Podol’e, and Volynia can properly be called proletarian peasants.