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The Radicalism of Tradition: Community Strength or Venerable Disguise and Borrowed Language?¹

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An equation has often been made, especially but not exclusively by Marxists, between radicalism and the rational understanding of objective interests. I argue that, on the contrary, commitments to traditional cultural values and immediate communal relations are crucial to many radical movements, (a) because these commitments provide populations with the extent of internal social organization necessary to concerted, radical collective action, and (b) because the largely defensive goals of these movements must be radically incompatible with the introduction of modern capitalist-dominated social formations. Reformism is the characteristic stance of the modern working class, for both social and cultural reasons.

That revolutions are risky undertakings poses a problem for theorists of popular insurrections. Why, it has often been asked, would reasonable people place their lives and even their loved ones in jeopardy in pursuit of a highly uncertain goal? Neither the success of uprisings nor the desirability of postrevolutionary regimes has appeared likely enough to outweigh the probability of privation and physical harm. A conservative view, as old as Plato but more recently argued by LeBon (1909), Smelser (1962), and others, concludes simply that revolutionaries must not be very reasonable people. Revolutionaries and their defenders have, of course, disagreed. Most famous among them, Marx offered an important argument for the rationality of revolution. This argument combined a notion of necessary historical progress with the assertion that revolution would be in the rational interest of the class of workers created by industrial capitalism. It turned in part on the expectation that progressive immiseration of the proletariat would eliminate other possibilities for self-improvement and

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leave the workers of the world with “nothing to lose but their chains.” Conservatives have sometimes been sympathetic, suggesting that desperation might make revolt understandable if not quite reasonable. Long arguments have pursued the question whether the position of workers deteriorated during the industrial revolution (on England, cf. Taylor 1975; Inglis 1971; Seldon 1974; Thompson [1963] 1968; among many). A more recent line of historical research has shown that, whether or not overall standards of living improved, the people in the forefront of European revolutionary mobilizations, while often workers, were seldom either the most miserable or the members of the modern proletariat (Price 1972; Tilly and Lees 1975; Moss 1976; Moore 1978; Traugott 1980; Calhoun 1982). The most radical workers were usually artisans, sometimes peasants, and almost always those with at least some prosperity and often many privileges to defend. Their identities and aspirations were largely traditional; they drew much of the social strength of their mobilizations from communal bonds, a good deal less from membership in the new “working class.”

Marx himself recognized the ambiguity of the ideological orientation of 19th-century revolutionaries; he correctly saw early radicals to be ambivalent about visions of a better past to which they wished to return and visions of an emancipatory future which they wished to create. But Marx wrongly took the popular appeals to tradition to be mere epiphenomena which would have to be swept away before the truly great historical accomplishments of revolutions could occur. As he wrote of the 1848 revolution in France ([1852] 1973, p. 146):

Men make their own history, but not of their own free will; not under circumstances they themselves have chosen but under the given and inherited circumstances with which they are directly confronted. The tradition of the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the minds of the living. And, just when they appear to be engaged in the revolutionary transformation of themselves and their material surroundings, in the creation of something which does not yet exist, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they timidly conjure up the spirits of the past to help them; they borrow their names, slogans and costumes so as to stage the new world-historical scene in this venerable disguise and borrowed language.

Marx's insights in this passage are profound, and yet, like many heirs of the Enlightenment, he cannot accept the intrusion of seemingly irrelevant tradition into the rationality of the future. He does not grasp the changing significance of tradition as it enters into different practices in different historical contexts. Unlike the revolutionary workers recently analyzed by Sewell (1980), Marx does not recognize any valid continuity between the corporatism of the past and the socialist future. For him the fullness of

revolution can be only radical novelty: completely new thoughts and acts in dialectical opposition to old. "In the same way, the beginner who has learned a new language always retranslates it into his mother tongue: he can only be said to have appropriated the spirit of the new language and to be able to express himself in it freely when he can manipulate it without reference to the old, and when he forgets his original language while using the new one" ([1852] 1973, p. 147).

Generations of analysts of revolutions and radical mobilizations have followed Marx's lead. Like him, they have inherited from the Enlightenment a sense of inherent opposition between rationality and tradition. I think this is a false opposition. It is linked to the overly simple equation of tradition and community with order, in contrast to the disorder of revolution. The political right and left have engaged in a common misunderstanding, for both have failed to recognize the paradoxical conservatism in revolution, the radicalism of tradition.

In the present paper I propose to examine this paradox and to argue that "reactionary radicals" have been at the center of most modern revolutions and many other radical mobilizations in which revolutionary outcomes were precluded. I shall argue that traditional communities provide the social foundations for widespread popular mobilizations and that traditional values provide their radicalism. But tradition, I shall suggest, has been misunderstood as Bagehot's "hard cake of culture" or as mere continuity with the past. The foremost contemporary analyst of tradition sees it as anything "handed down from the past" (Shils 1981, esp. pp. 12–21). Shils follows Weber in an analysis of the variable importance of tradition in social action, emphasizing that we must go beyond Weber's opposition of traditionalism and rationalism ([1922] 1968, pp. 24–26) to see the importance of tradition in rationalism itself and in all societies (Shils 1981, p. 9). I shall ask that we go still further beyond the Enlightenment's historicist opposition of tradition to modernity and see tradition as grounded less in the historical past than in everyday social practice. This fully sociological concept of tradition I see as inextricably linked to communal social relations. In the following pages, then, I shall comment briefly on Marx's theory of proletarian collective action and identify the reactionary radicals, focusing on early 19th-century France and England. I shall then develop my concepts of tradition and community and show how "conservative" attachments to tradition and community may be crucial bases for quite rational participation in the most radical of mobilizations, sometimes culminating in revolutions. Last, I shall offer a few suggestions as to why the modern working class has not shown the propensity for radicalism that artisans showed during the period of European industrialization and why reformism rather than revolution is its "natural" form of action.

MARX

Marx argued a case in the mid-19th century for the imminence of social revolutions in which the new, factory-based proletariat which was growing up within industrial capitalism would be the protagonist. Past revolutions, he suggested, had been primarily the products of the bourgeoisie struggling to free itself from the fetters of feudal restraints on capital accumulation. Such revolutions had mobilized popular support, but only as an adjunct to their bourgeois thrust. The lower classes had grown stronger and more able to recognize that they must act independently of the bourgeoisie at the same time that the socioeconomic structure had shifted to make exploitation by the bourgeoisie rather than oppression by feudal lords their major enemy. This was not just a process of learning, then, but a transformation of the class structure. The new relations of production which created the modern proletariat gave it a radicalism and a potential for social revolution which Marx thought peasants, artisans, and other earlier groups of workers lacked. On the one hand, the proletariat would be radical because of the extreme misery to which it was reduced and the absolute polarization of classes in bourgeois society. On the other hand, the proletariat would be capable of sustained revolutionary mobilization because it was unified with an unprecedented social solidarity.

The thrust of Marx's argument is focused on the rational reasons the members of the proletariat have for uniting in revolutionary collective action. He moves rather casually from the identification of "objective interests" to collective action in pursuit of those interests. Such a move is problematic. First, it is only an extremely positivistic theory of knowledge which allows Marx to presume rational action on the basis of objective interests.² Thus, "It is not a question of what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat at the moment regards as its aim. It is a question of *what the proletariat is*, and what, in accordance with this being, it will historically be compelled to do" ([1845] 1975, p. 37). Marx's attention is focused completely on the rational link between objective circumstances and determined actions; the particularities

² See, among many instances, Marx's appropriation of Hegel's assertion of the identity of the rational and the actual (Marx [1927] 1975, p. 63; Hegel [1821] 1967, p. 10) and his contrast of Feuerbachian materialism to the rest of German philosophy (Marx [1932] 1976, pp. 36-37). Of course, Marx's materialism stressed, not the externality of material phenomena, but their incorporation into human life through practical activity, of which conscious control and awareness are always a part (Marx [1845] 1976, p. 4). Similarly, Marx rejects the abstract, ahistorical conception of human nature common to many rationalists, such as Bentham (Marx [1867] 1976, p. 571; [1932] 1976, p. 36). The 1844 manuscripts insist on the social and historical embeddedness of all "real" examples of humankind. Marx thus appreciated the rootedness of action which I shall stress, but in his specific arguments concerning the revolutionary potential of the working class he focused on an account of rational interests which even his own sociological observations (e.g., [1850] 1973, [1852] 1973) suggest is inadequate.

of different concrete historical actors with their idiosyncrasies do not concern him. In the long run, people are rational and outcomes definite. In the short run, therefore, people must be in error; Marx, like "scientific Marxists" after him, introduces the notion of "false consciousness" as the complement to that of "true interests." At the same time, Marx's easy move from interests to action is based on a neglect of problems of collective action. In the passage just quoted, he hypostatizes the entity "proletariat"; elsewhere he offers rather more of an argument for treating the class as a unified actor. At no point, however, does he develop a satisfactory account of how the class of proletarians becomes the subjective actor the proletariat. In short, he asserts but does not demonstrate the transition from "class in itself" to "class for itself" ([1847] 1976, p. 211).³

Marx, together with Engels, argued that the concentration of workers in factories and large towns and the increasing organization of the workplace itself would help to mold the workers together and provide the social basis for their activity (Marx [1847] 1976, p. 211; [1867] 1976, chap. 14; Engels [1880] 1978, sec. 2). The leveling effect of industrial capitalism would give all workers the same poor standard of living and the same desperate wants (Marx and Engels [1848] 1976; Marx [1867] 1976, chaps. 23, 32). Through their everyday interactions based on their common interests, and especially through their continuous political activity in opposition to their exploiters, the workers would develop a class consciousness (Marx [1850] 1973, [1852] 1973). It was this class consciousness that would provide accurate understanding of external circumstances and therefore rational reasons for unification in revolutionary collective action.

Marx is thus not without a sociological argument as to the sources of proletarian solidarity. It is an inadequate argument, though, as both logical and empirical counterarguments suggest. Logically, Mancur Olson (1965, pp. 2, 51, 134) has shown that some structure of selective inducements is necessary to make it rational for an individual to participate in collective action even when the collective good sought is in his interest. This is particularly so the larger and more "latent" the group and the more costly and widely dispersed the good sought. The reason is that individuals may choose to expend their limited resources in the pursuit of other, perhaps lesser, goods in ventures the success of which they can better control. At the same time, they may try to be "free riders," allowing others to pursue a good from which they will benefit but toward which they do not contribute (Olson 1965, pp. 105-10). Marx, neglecting such considerations, assumes that the very large class of workers will unite to seek a very un-

³ I suggest we should take Marx's terms to refer to a distinction between a passive sum of individual existences and an active single collective existence, much like Rousseau's distinction of the will of all from the general will.

certain collective good in a highly risky mobilization, without much control over each other. To improve Marx's argument we need a sociological source for selective inducements to collective action. Olsen suggests that we may find this in social pressure within certain kinds of preexisting organizations. I concur, and the present paper expands upon this argument.⁴

Empirically, Marx's argument runs up against the relatively low rate of participation of members of the modern proletariat in revolutionary mobilization and the relatively high rate of such participation among artisans and other preindustrial workers. Whereas Marx is emphatic in holding that proletarian unity arises out of new conditions of social existence, I suggest that preexisting communal bonds are at issue. Further, the new proletariat, generally speaking, has had less of this preexisting social organization on which to draw than have groups of workers challenged by industrialization. This helps to explain why craftsmen and peasants, rather than factory workers, form the majority of the revolutionary crowds of early 19th-century Europe. From the point of view of objective interests, Marx finds the proletariat to be bound by "universal chains" ([1927] 1975, p. 186). Radical mobilizations, in fact, have come more often from very particular chains.

In the famous last pages of *The Poverty of Philosophy* ([1847] 1976, pp. 209–12), Marx sums up his argument. He indicates that the rise of capitalist domination created the class of workers as a mass of individuals. "Large-scale industry concentrated in one place a crowd of people unknown to one another" ([1847] 1976, p. 210). Under such circumstances, the competition created among the workers by capitalists "divides the interests" of members of this class (more precisely, Marx should have said that *similar* interests within the competitive job market divide the workers). Despite advice from all quarters to the contrary, the workers act, not on the interests which divide them, but increasingly on those they share. Implicitly, Marx holds that they do so because the shared interests are greater. Shared interests (such as maintaining high wages) lead the workers to form combinations against their employers; such combinations grow in direct proportion to the growth of industry. By uniting to compete against the capitalists, workers are able to secure a collective good apparently more valuable to each than the private goods to be secured by some through competition with others. The initial basis

⁴ Others (e.g., Moe 1980) have stressed preexisting organization even more. Olson (1965, p. 63) argues that large "organizations that use selective *social* incentives to mobilize a latent group interested in a collective good must be federations of smaller groups" (emphasis added). I have developed this idea elsewhere (Calhoun 1980b); here I would argue that while a class is nearly always a large, latent group, communities within it may provide strong social incentives to mobilization and therefore members of a class may best be mobilized through such intermediate associations as pre-existing communities.

of this combination, thus, is “a common situation, common [i.e., shared, not just similar] interests” ([1847] 1976, p. 211). This is why it is so important that workers are drawn from rural isolation into urban concentration. The working class enters increasingly into struggle with the capitalists (who already constitute a class for itself) and takes on an existence of its own. As a class for itself, “the interests it defends become class interests” ([1847] 1976, p. 211); simultaneously, it becomes a political actor, because “political power is precisely the official expression of antagonism in civil society” ([1847] 1976, p. 212). The unclear point in the argument is the nature of the social relations which turn the class in itself into the class for itself, which make the proletariat the *class* of associated producers, not simply the aggregated producers.

In the following pages I shall present an argument that preexisting communal relations and attachments to tradition are essential to revolutionary mobilizations. By the last phrase I mean radical movements which, whether they intend to transform society, to topple a government, or to extract a few concessions, pose such fundamental challenges to existing social trends that those in power can make them no meaningful concessions. Obviously revolutionary outcomes have a great deal to do with other structural factors, notably the circumstances of state power, as Skocpol (1979) has recently observed. Nonetheless, revolutions are not simply spontaneous collapses of state power; states are pushed, even when they seem to topple like houses of cards. Movements resisting industrial capitalism may more readily give such a push than movements of workers within industrial capitalism. This is obscured by Marx's stress on the radical novelty of revolution.

REACTIONARY RADICALS

There is no principle, no precedent, no regulations (except as to mere matter of detail), favourable to freedom, which is not to be found in the Laws of England or in the example of our Ancestors. Therefore, I say we may ask for, and we want *nothing new*. We have great constitutional laws and principles, to which we are immovably attached. We want *great alteration*, but we want nothing new. [*Political Register*, November 2, 1816]

William Cobbett, author of the appeal to tradition just quoted, was the most important publicist and one of the most important popular leaders of the rising tide of protest and insurgency which marked the first decades of the 19th century in England. His words are salutary for those who would understand radical popular mobilizations, including those which have produced revolutions, in other times and places as well. Cobbett voiced a critique of the existing social and political structure in the name

of traditional rights and values. He fought against economic trends which were disrupting established ways of life, not in favor of an abstractly conceived future. The content of his arguments was distinctively English; yet, in form and in their more general orientation, Cobbett's claims for tradition have much in common with the ideologies characteristic of most popular struggles against emergent or imposed capitalism. These struggles have been at once radical and reactionary; their radicalism has been based in tradition and in immediate social relations supporting and supported by such tradition.

It is with an unwarranted rationalism that Marxist (and some other) analysts have attempted to assimilate these movements to the category of class. Engels, indeed, did this when he analyzed the 15th- and 16th-century German peasant wars as primitive revolutionary mobilizations based on poorly understood class interests ([1850] 1978). Some modern writers would go further and argue that the analytic framework of class struggle can be applied to such precapitalist movements without having to use qualifiers like "primitive." Others, though, are more cautious and suggest that such mobilizations are neither revolutionary nor class based in the sense in which Marx used those terms to describe modern movements.

For example, in summarizing his argument concerning "primitive rebels," Hobsbawm observes that "the political allegiance and character of such movements is often undetermined, ambiguous or even ostensibly 'conservative.'" Their participants are generally "*pre-political* people who have not yet found, or only begun to find a specific language in which to express their aspirations about the world. Though their movements are thus in many respects blind and groping, by the standards of modern ones, they are neither unimportant nor marginal" (1959, p. 2).

What Hobsbawm means by prepolitical has been fairly clear throughout his work: it refers to the ideologically uncertain and ephemeral, rather than the analytically sound and historically transformative among orientations to collective action. In contrast, it is organized, self-conscious action which makes a collectivity's struggle to achieve control over its own fate political. "The poor," Hobsbawm has written recently, "or indeed any subaltern group, become a subject rather than an object of history only through formalized collectivities, however structured. Everybody always has families, social relations, attitudes toward sexuality, childhood and death, and all the other things that keep social historians usefully employed. But, until the past two centuries, as traditional historiography shows, 'the poor' could be neglected most of the time by their 'betters,' and therefore remained largely invisible to them, precisely because their active impact on events was occasional, scattered, and impermanent" (1978, p. 48).

Hobsbawm's work emphasizes the disjuncture between millenarian

movements, rebellions, and related events in precapitalist societies and the more formally organized and rationally self-conscious activity of the modern working class. And yet, in a preface to the third edition of *Primitive Rebels*, he suggests that, if anything, he underestimated the revolutionary significance of both organized millennial sects and communities and relatively unorganized millennial movements (1971, pp. xi–xii). I think he is right because, when societies are rapidly changing, commitment to tradition can be a radical threat to the distribution of social power. And communities in which interpersonal relations are densely knit, many-faceted, and organized in harmony with traditional values can be potent informal organizations on which to base sustained insurgency.

TRADITIONAL COMMUNITIES

The idea of contrasting modern society to an earlier age of traditional communities has been roundly criticized in recent years. The *gemeinschaft/gesellschaft* opposition, to be sure, was somewhat vague and ill defined, and, in Tönnies's ([1887] 1957) version, was sentimental and full of personal evaluations which are hard to substantiate empirically. Other dichotomous renderings of modern history have fallen on similarly hard times, and for good reason: history is more complex. I think, however, that our rejection of the contrast which shaped sociology's vision of modernity may have become as categorical and simplistic as the original contrast itself. What we need is to conceptualize a cluster of variables measuring traditionality and community.⁵ Not only would such variables get us away from false dichotomization, they would also allow us to treat of variance directly rather than through the often spurious indicator of historical dates. We could see that at any one time different social groups might be organized more or less traditionally, more or less communally, without treating them as more or less advanced. This would avoid the romanticism of the *gemeinschaft* notion. To challenge the relevance of this concept of traditional community would require more than evidence that people are selfish or hostile to each other even in tribes and small villages.

We shall need to see tradition as more than a collection of ideas or artifacts transmitted from generation to generation. Shils (1981, p. 12) has emphasized the basic etymological sense of tradition (*traditum*) as anything "handed down from past to present," but in his book he discusses tradition in a variety of senses which go far beyond this usage. I suggest that, in order to make full sense of tradition, we shall have to

⁵ By convention, let "traditionality" indicate a pattern of social organization rather than the ideological value suggested by "traditionalism."

see the acts of transmission as all social interaction, with the validity of traditional ideas or practices coming not just from their antiquity but from the element of consensus and universality of their use. I shall focus on traditionality as a mode of organizing social action rather than on traditionalism as an abstract ideology venerating the past. This language is Weberian, and I have in mind the Weberian notion of social action as subjectively meaningful behavior taking account of the behavior of others and thereby oriented in its course (Weber [1922] 1968, p. 4), but not the Weberian notion of tradition. Weber saw traditional action as “determined by ingrained habituation” ([1922] 1968, p. 25) and thought it lay very close to the borderline of what could be called meaningfully oriented action. Like most thinkers since the Enlightenment, he opposed traditionalism as mere unconscious reflex or unexamined inheritance to rationality as conscious and sensible action. Traditionalism was, for Weber, “piety for what actually, allegedly, or presumably has always existed” ([1925] 1948, p. 296). Such a conceptualization ties tradition too closely to history. I suggest that we see tradition less in terms of antiquity and communication across generations than in terms of practical, everyday social activity. The traditional construction of social reality takes place as people in manifold interactions produce and reproduce shared understandings of their behavior. As Shils (1981, pp. 166–67) has put it:

A society to exist at all must be incessantly reenacted, its communications must repeatedly be resaid. The reenactments and the resayings are guided by what the individual members remember about what they themselves said and did before, what they perceive and remember of what other persons expect and require of them; they are guided too by what they remember is expected or required of them, what they remember to be claims which they are entitled to exercise by virtue of particular qualifications such as skill, title, appointment, ownership which are engrained in their own memory traces, recorded in writing and in the correspondingly recorded qualifications of others. These particular qualifications change and the responses to the changes are guided by recollections of the rightful claims and rights of the possessors of those qualifications.

This is all true, but we need to complement Shils’s stress on memory with more focus on practical activity, taking place amid specific material needs and social circumstances. It can involve habits, to be sure, but socially conditioned habits. Tradition is the tacit knowledge (Polanyi 1958) which allows participation in social life. As such it is hardly rigid. On the contrary, tradition must often be interpreted and reshaped to fit the exigencies of contemporary situations (as anthropologists have frequently noted: Yalman [1973], p. 139; Colson [1974], p. 76; Bourdieu [1972], chap. 2). Strategic reinterpretations of “that which has always been” (Weber [1922] 1968, p. 36) are common. They are not, however, evidence for either

the insignificance of tradition or the universal predominance of self-interested individualism.

The continual reproduction of tradition necessarily involves many minor and some major revisions of it. These are signs that tradition remains vital and has not become a mere crust of ceremonial lore. But such reinterpretations are not the products of discrete individuals acting quite self-consciously; they are instead collective interpretations produced or acquiesced in by people who take such social constructs as materially real. Drawing on, but modifying, Durkheim (esp. [1915] 1965; see also Evens, in press), I suggest not that society is an ontological entity, a phenomenon *sui generis* in some absolute sense, but that societies vary in the extent to which their members must take them as “naturally” given. Traditional societies are those in which they must do so.

That people should take their social contexts to be as immutably “real” as their physical contexts is the result of the special power which those social contexts have over them. Closely knit into webs of communal relationships, individuals are committed to the long-term view of their activity which is implied by the notion of moral responsibility (Bloch 1973). Choices are still to be made, but they must take social relationships very closely into account. Tradition is the medium in which interactions take place. Like language, it is at once passed from individual to individual through use and given much of its substantive meaning by the particular instances of its use. Changes in social or natural context often require improvisations on the part of actors. But these improvisations, too, are constructed according to the rules of tradition; they take their meaning from their relationships to the rest of the active tradition as well as from practical circumstances, and they are validated by communal acceptance.⁶

Traditions do not reflect the past so much as they reflect present-day social life. Only to the extent that such social life is coherent and consistent across the membership of a given society or subsociety can tradition be very effective in ordering people's actions.⁷ Moreover, it is the

⁶ See Bourdieu's (1972, pp. 78–87) discussion of the “habitus,” the source of regulated cultural improvisation. Compare also social psychological arguments that individuals act to preserve the consistency of their thoughts, feelings, and behavior (Festinger 1962, 1964; Heider 1958). In terms of Heise's (1979) distinction of fundamental and transient elements of individuals' “control systems,” I suggest that (perhaps barring psychopathology) most “fundamentals” are products of traditional culture.

⁷ Thus, although Shils points out that 19th-century liberals were right “to see traditions as limitations on human freedom,” we might accurately see a “chicken and egg” situation. On the one hand, “tradition hems an individual in; it sets the condition of his actions; it determines his resources; it even determines what he himself is” (Shils 1981, p. 197). On the other hand, changing practical circumstances demand innovation within tradition, some social organizations support stable traditions better than others, and individuals vary in the novelty and disruptiveness of their interpretations of tradition.

repeated practical use of traditions in relating to important others that gives the traditions their deep psychological importance. Community is thus a central medium for transmitting tradition and a large part of what tradition is about.

Such a view clearly implies a special definition of community. Essentially, I take community to be the high-end value of a complex variable measuring the extent to which people are knit together as social actors. To speak of "a community" is thus only shorthand for referring to a population characterized by a considerable extent of community. Variations in kind or extent of community are established by differences in (1) kinds of relationships among people, (2) characteristics of networks of those relationships, and (3) extent of autonomous social control. In brief, relationships may be stronger or weaker, networks may be knit more or less densely and systematically together, and a population may be more or less able to run its own affairs without outside intervention (Calhoun 1980a). Community constrains the range of free choice of individuals by committing them to specific, long-term social relationships. Such commitments make it possible for members of communities to act with considerable certainty as to what their fellows will do. Relatedly, because their activity is kept largely within the grounds of established relationships, members of communities are able constantly to reproduce a traditional culture without introducing wide variation in interpretation. Traditional communities, thus, are closely knit, largely autonomous collectivities which share a vital common culture.

Traditional communities are important bases of radical mobilization. Community constitutes the preexisting organization capable of securing the participation of individuals in collective action. Communities provide a social organizational foundation for mobilization, as networks of kinship, friendship, shared crafts, or recreations offer lines of communication and allegiance. People who live in well-integrated communities do not need elaborate formal organization in order to mount a protest. They know, moreover, whom to trust and whom not to. Communal relations are themselves important resources to be "mobilized" for any insurgency (though they are frequently neglected by "resource mobilization" analyses). This is part of the reason why peasant, craft, and other popular revolts are generally much stronger at the local level than at the national. Indeed, such movements generally fall apart or else are taken over by special interest groups when they extend much beyond the range of direct, person-to-person communal ties. When speaking, for example, of rebellious peasants in revolutionary France (in either the First or Second Republic), we may describe a class similar in external characteristics, but we would do well to avoid the conclusion that peasants *acted* as a class. They acted on the basis of numerous local communities, with consequent variations in

local strategies, demands, and strengths (see Agulhon 1970, pp. 305–406; Price 1972, esp. p. 121). They may have been a class *in* itself but they were only communities *for* themselves.⁸

Traditional communities give people the “interests” for which they will risk their lives—families, friends, customary crafts, and ways of life. Popular revolts take place either when (1) external pressures on a still-coherent way of life are threatening to destroy it or (2) new opportunities appear to put old goals within reach. Thus tradition is not in itself insurrectionary. On the contrary, it is a conservative force. Much the same can be said for community. In ordinary times, the deep-rootedness of traditional understandings and communal relationships makes them conservative and provides for the reproduction of culture and social relations. But in times of rapid change, this very conservatism may make traditional communities politically radical, even revolutionary.⁹ In reaction to the incursions of capitalist industry, for example, handloom weavers and other craftsmen in England and France attempted to defend their traditional crafts and communities against disruption. It did not matter that handloom weaving, especially in England, had drawn thousands of new practitioners during the early years of industrialization, degrading the craft. Industrialization continually expanded or created handcrafts at bottlenecks in the production process, only to destroy them later (Samuel 1977). While these handworkers were relatively weak, compared with many better-paid and better-organized artisanal groups, their weakness does not alter the centrality of the fact that they frequently lived, worked, and revolted in traditional communities (see Calhoun 1982, pp. 43–48, 78–83, 195–98). As I have argued, it is not antiquity which defines such a mode of social and cultural organization. Weavers were thus like more privileged artisans in that they fought to defend what they already had. As Sewell (1980) has shown, the language of artisans’ defense included new ideas among the traditional elements as it developed from the Old Regime to 1848. Traditional corporatism remained, however, a central organizing theme. New, more recognizably socialist ideas either developed out of corporatism or were incorporated to the extent that they could be fitted into the traditional structure of thought and action. Much of the change was not in the traditions themselves but in their context. What had been conservative in the 18th century became radical with the introduction of

⁸ This understanding of the peasantry is implicit in Marx’s ([1852] 1973, p. 239) description of peasants as resembling potatoes in a sack. Marx grasped the importance of social foundations for collective action (e.g., [1847] 1976, p. 211) even though he failed accurately to identify the implications of different social foundations.

⁹ Moore (1978) describes in detail the role of traditional communities in producing tolerance for injustice and also suggests the importance of conservatism in popular mobilization during the German revolution of 1848 (chap. 5, esp. pp. 126–33, 158).

new technologies and patterns of capitalist economic organization. And it was largely these new patterns of capitalism which turned some workers from the defense of the rights of particular groups against other workers to an increasing focus on the similar situation of all who labor.

Not all who labored were equally interested in this radical reaction to capitalism. Some workers were directly benefiting. Accordingly, in the revolution of 1848 in France, employees of factories and modern capitalist establishments were relatively uninvolved (Price 1972; Tilly and Lees 1975; Traugott 1980). Younger workers, excluded from the artisan corporations, were often among the first to enlist in the *garde mobile*, in which they played a leading role in the repression of the workers' rising of June 1848 (Zeldin 1979, p. 125; see also Agulhon 1970; Merriman 1978; Forstenzer 1981).

Peasants were also somewhat different in orientation from urban artisans. On the one hand, most famously, it was peasants who gave the Bonapartist regime its strongest popular backing. Conservative in outlook, they backed the party of order and authority. But even the Bonapartist regime was still, initially, a version of republicanism; peasants were not hostile to all change. On the contrary, when the February revolution demonstrated the weakness of government repression, peasants immediately acted to seek redress for traditional grievances and to realize traditional goals. As Zeldin puts it: "In the first days after the revolution, they were aware only that the government had gone. Their first reactions were not political. They invaded the commons and forests, claiming back the traditional rights they had lost to the rich: they sacked the houses of those who resisted them; they drove tax collectors and policemen into hiding; they refused to pay taxes and tolls" (1979, p. 127). Zeldin goes on to describe this collective action of peasants as similar to that which took place in towns, "where textile handloom weavers destroyed machines which were threatening their livelihoods and where carriage drivers and boatmen burnt railway stations and tore up the track of the new invention that was ruining them" (1979, p. 127).

But there was some important difference between the peasants and the urban workers, as well as much similarity. The peasants were not just Luddites, acting defensively. New taxes and mortgages were on their minds; they were the bearers of ancient grudges; yet they acted also with ancient ambitions. They sought the material benefits of access to more land and the social benefits of independence within their communities and especially from outsiders. They sought a new realization of traditional values. They were thus open to new political ideas which fitted with their existing culture and communities, and the Red Republicans made impressive gains among the peasants. Though the latter are more famous

for voting for Louis Napoleon in 1848, a large number turned to Ledru-Rollin and the socialists in 1849.¹⁰

There is no contradiction between the two sorts of radicalism I have argued to be based on traditional communities. It is important to recognize both the defense of traditional practices and the demand for the practical implementation of traditional goals long unrealized. Noting the latter helps to explain the disproportionate radical involvement Wolf (1969, p. 292) finds in the 20th century among relatively prosperous "middle" peasants. Such peasants get involved in potentially revolutionary struggles, not because they have completely new ideas about how the world should be run, but because they have old ideas about how their own lives should be run.¹¹ Peasants, like both urban and rural craftsmen, are a potent radical force because (a) they have the resources with which to engage in struggle; (b) they have a sense that, during periods of upheaval and weakness of the state apparatus, goals for which their ancestors had struggled for centuries are all but within their reach; and (c) they have much more to lose if they do not succeed in controlling their own destinies than do those already poverty-stricken or forced out of traditional communities and into the less solidary populations of early industrial wage laborers.

Traditional communities, I have suggested, give their members the social strength with which to wage protracted battles, the "selective inducements" with which to ensure full collective participation, and a sense of what to fight for that is at once shared and radical. This sets traditional communities apart from the modern working class. The solidarity of such traditional communities may also give their members a better ability to recognize collective enemies. The very closed nature of such communities, their resistance to outsiders, may appear "backward" to us and yet be part of the basis of their occasional reactionary radicalism. Communal organization provides for a considerable degree of self-regulation. Where small localities and specialized crafts are involved—as in most of Old Regime Europe and much of the Third World today—the boundaries of a community are fairly clear, and inside them social relationships are largely autonomous and self-regulating. Borrowing White's (unpublished) notion of a "CATNET," Tilly (1978, pp. 62–64) has suggested the importance of being both categorically distinct from outsiders and strongly knit to-

¹⁰ Margadant (1979) has shown that the politics of peasant communities varied by region, with the Southwest accounting for most of the peasant involvement in the 1851 insurrection.

¹¹ Perhaps the most important description of these ideas is the notion of a "moral economy" which Thompson (esp. 1971) has brought into prominence. See also Scott (1976) for an application of the concept to recent Asian peasant movements. The long tradition of *taxation populaire* reveals similar concerns in France.

gether internally in a social network. Such groups, he argues, find mobilization easier.

In four important ways this is characteristic of traditional communities and helps to explain their ability to mobilize directly, instead of through the formal organizations so important to the modern working class. First, the members of such a community will find it relatively easy to identify collective enemies. If, as happened during the processes of industrialization and central state formation in much of the world, elites choose to cut themselves off from local communities, they become outsiders and potentially set apart as enemies. Conversely, the integration of elites into local communities decreases the likelihood of action against those elites. Second, a largely self-regulating system may be upset by any sort of intrusion. Thus, even well-intentioned efforts to improve the lives of the poor can threaten the communal lives of artisans, peasants, and others. If permitted to continue, such efforts displace communal autonomy by offering a new source of resources. Quite often, however, communities rebel against all disruption, including that of “do-gooders.” Third, to the extent that a community is self-regulating, it has good reason to visualize a society in which it and other communities like it are entirely autonomous and free from elite interference and exploitation. Thus, traditional artisanal and peasant control of the labor process is matched by communal control over social life—in contrast to the experience of members of the modern working class, who are subjected to the constant intervention of formally trained “experts” in both work and personal life (cf. Palm 1977; Lasch 1981). Fourth, the autonomy of communities gives them a strong foundation for mobilization outside the purview of the intended targets of collective action, a free “social space.” The need to work through formal, noncommunal organizations means that modern workers’ movements must always be exposed to ideological counterattacks.

RADICALISM OR REFORMISM? A QUESTION OF SOCIAL FOUNDATIONS

The fact that the working class of advanced capitalist countries has tended to pursue reforms of many kinds but not to organize “spontaneously” for revolutionary overthrow of capitalism has long been noted.¹² This phe-

¹² The debates over “revisionism,” “left deviationism,” “opportunism,” and the like in the turn-of-the-century Second International provide the *locus classicus* for this observation. Bernstein ([1899] 1961, p. 221) held that the conditions in which workers lived precluded an immediate demand for socialism and necessitated reformism. Lenin ([1902] 1975, p. 24; [1920] 1975, p. 609) agreed that workers could not spontaneously go beyond reformist “trade union consciousness” but insisted that a vanguard party could introduce class consciousness itself. Luxemburg ([1906], esp. pp. 15–16, 63) denied the proposition that the workers could not directly produce revolution; immediate mass collective action would, she thought, school the workers in revolutionary class

nomenon, of course, contradicts one of Marx's expectations. The real question, though, is how one is theoretically to accommodate the evidence. The fact that revolution has not yet occurred in a major industrial country does not, of course, prove that it will not occur; as a rebuttal to Marxism the postponement of the revolution lacks theoretical force, however practically relevant it may be. What one wants to know are the causal factors which need to be discarded from Marx's theory as invalid, or those which must be added as intervening or basic variables. This paper has so far considered the previously neglected importance of tradition and community in providing for radical movements. I wish now only to suggest a few social characteristics of the modern working class which are thrown into relief by contrast to reactionary radicals of various kinds. In particular, problems have arisen from a confusion of revolutionary zeal, revolutionary interests, and revolutionary capacity.

Enthusiasm for revolution has been much more widespread among intellectuals and other groups generally cut off from the main body of workers than it has been among the working class. In revolutions that have occurred, such groups have been crucial—especially as the agents of state building and central organization *after* the destruction of old-regime authority. Such intellectuals have seldom been the prime movers in creating the revolutionary movements, even when they have given them their major ideological orientations. A central question raised by this observation is whether revolutionary intentions are good predictors of revolutionary activity. This issue has two components. First, many revolutionary ideas are incorporated into the ideology of groups that do not seek revolution—indeed, many authoritarian states claim to be revolutionary. Second, key actors in revolutionary insurrections have often sought simple redress of wrongs or reforms; it has been the objective inability of elites to mitigate their grievances that has led to both increasing radicalization of the insurgents and the revolutionary impact of their claims. More generally, it needs to be questioned whether the intention to engage in revolution or even to be particularly radical is necessary to producing a radical mobilization. Traditionalist, anticapitalist claims may be presented in the most moderate and reformist manner and still confront elites with demands to which they can make no meaningful concessions.

In dealing with the moderation of demands by workers in advanced capitalism and with the preponderance of precapitalist classes in actual revolutions, Marxists have introduced various arguments. Lenin stressed

consciousness even without the interventions of a vanguard party. Anarchists were, at the same time, arguing that revolution need not depend on the workers at all; they have a modern-day echo in some "Third World Marxisms." Populist pessimists like Piven and Cloward (1978) also reject the reformist workers in favor of "the poor," though they are not so sanguine about the prospects for revolutionary transformation.

the limits of spontaneous working-class consciousness and action and the need for intellectual leadership from outside to go beyond mere trade unionism (1902, p. 24). More recently, an important body of literature has addressed problems in the definition of the potentially revolutionary proletariat. Such writers on class structure have been concerned (*a*) to indicate those workers and members of the petty bourgeoisie whose interests may be contradictory within modern capitalism and (*b*) to show the potential importance to proletarian struggles of workers (e.g., in sales and clerical occupations) who do not, strictly speaking, produce surplus value (see, e.g., Mallet 1963; Gorz 1967; Poulantzas 1974; Wright 1978). A central assumption in this line of analysis is that workers (like others) respond rationally to their objective interests. Class interests are emphatically distinguished from the empirical concerns of particular members of the proletariat or even the whole proletariat (as per Marx [1845] 1975, p. 37). Though this approach has been effective in showing the complexity of the modern capitalist class structure and the applicability of Marxist categories in studying it, to draw revolutionary political conclusions from this analysis implies a combination of wishful thinking and willful resistance to empirical evidence. Its proponents have taken a very rationalistic position which ignores both the concrete ideological orientations of real workers and the organizational difficulties of collective action.

Faced with the failure of workers to seek their “objectively” defined interests, these writers have been obliged to fall back on the notion of false consciousness. In such an argument, both the conditions of immediate existence and the active ideological efforts of elites are held to impede recognition of true class interests. “Class interests in capitalist society are those potential objectives which become actual objectives of struggle in the absence of the mystifications and distortions of capitalist relations. Class interests, therefore, are in a sense hypotheses: they are hypotheses about the objectives of struggle which would occur if the actors in the struggle had a scientifically correct understanding of their situations” (Wright 1978, p. 89).

The notion of true as opposed to false class interests is problematic in itself.¹³ Most often noticed is the arbitrariness by which external analysis of objective interests is granted priority over the subjective awareness actors have of their own interests.¹⁴ “Marxists who have employed the

¹³ It is fashionable among non-Leninist Marxists to use Gramsci’s notion of hegemony rather than that of false consciousness to explain the diversion of workers’ attention from “ultimately rational” ends. In this context the difference is fairly slight.

¹⁴ Defense of such “empiricist” concerns as what real members of the working class may think or have thought has been central to Marxist social history in opposition to at least the structuralist variant of Marxist theory. It is an important part of the basis for Thompson’s (1979) polemic against Althusser. Thompson’s willingness to consider the concerns of real workers has led him to recognize some of the reformist

notion of class interest have encountered great difficulty in giving it a precise empirical meaning. . . . In a theory of rational action, 'interest' may be assigned an exact meaning as part of a definite game, applying to a number of clearly demarcated social situations, on the market and elsewhere. But when used in more complex contexts to denote 'long-term', 'objective' or 'true' interests—that is to say, something other than factual preferences—the notion seems to provide a spurious objectivity to essentially ideological evaluations" (Therborn 1978, p. 146). The notion of interests employed by Wright in his equation of revolutionary class consciousness and recognition of true interests is based on extremely rigorous and unrealistic assumptions. In particular, he assumes that there are no conflicts among true interests for members of the proletariat, though he recognizes that some people are in contradictory class positions (1978, pp. 61–87). Moreover, counter to the theory of collective action (e.g., Olson 1965; Moe 1980), he assumes that rational recognition of interests directly implies the rationality of action in pursuit of those interests.

When Marx proposed that revolution was the only rational course of proletarian action, he was simultaneously maintaining that workers had nothing to lose but their chains. In other words, revolution was rational in Marx's account because there were no more moderate, less risky ways for workers to improve their situations. This condition must be maintained for the rationality of revolution to be successfully argued. It is not enough to hold that a socialist society which could only be achieved through revolution would be better than the capitalist society which will remain in the absence of revolution. Such quantitative difference in possible benefits cannot outweigh the qualitative difference in costs and risks. In order to argue the case for a rationalist theory of interests as the basis for revolutionary action, one must maintain in some fashion either that no alternatives are available to members of the potentially revolutionary class or that the available alternatives are irrelevant. In this connection Marx described in some detail the conditions he thought would so polarize capitalist society and immiserate workers that they would have no reasonable alternative. Confronting the same issue, Wright simply maintains that class interests cannot be reduced to individual interests (1978, pp.

implications of the existence of numerous competing interests and the "imbrication of working-class organizations in the *status quo*": "We need not necessarily agree with Wright Mills [1963, p. 256] that this indicates that the working class can be a revolutionary class only in its formative years; but we must, I think, recognize that once a certain climactic moment is passed, the opportunity for a certain *kind* of revolutionary movement passes irrevocably—not so much because of "exhaustion" but because more limited, reformist pressures, from secure organizational bases, bring evident returns" (1965, p. 281). Though I agree with Thompson's argument about modern politics, I argue here in contrast to Thompson (1963) that this is due to a profound *discontinuity* in workers' history. See also Calhoun (1982).

87–90; Levine and Wright 1980, pp. 56–58), thus holding that the existence of alternatives for individuals is irrelevant. False consciousness becomes largely the primacy of individual consciousness over class consciousness, but it is hard to see how Wright can escape hypostatizing the class.

If one refuses to grant the absolute irreducibility of class interests, their existence quite separate from any interests or expressed preferences of the individuals composing the class, then one must confront Olson's proposed problems in the logic of collective action. Olson presumes both complete rationality and perfect information, so mystification is not his explanation for failure to act collectively. On the contrary, he suggests that "unless the number of individuals in a group is quite small, or unless there is coercion or some other special device to make individuals act in their common interest, *rational self-interested individuals will not act to achieve their common or group interests*" (1965, p. 2). The reason for this finding, surprising when first offered, was simple. Olson held that individuals were not totally subsumed into collectivities but had numerous interests, sharing only a few. The rational course of action was to pursue individual interests whether or not they were shared, because in the absence of coercion one could not depend on one's fellows, and in large groups, without a high rate of participation, one's share in the proceeds of action would not be matched by the costs of one's own contributions. Moe (1980) has recently suggested that Olson's theory underestimates the importance of direct political inducements; in other words, people are more interested in political values relative to economic values than Olson had thought. But Moe's analysis does not remove the problem of getting from individual interests to collective action; instead, it introduces a broader treatment of individual interests, one which better fits the goals of interest group politics. Marxist analyses based on rational recognition of objective interests offer no substantial argument for the radical precedence of class over individual interests which they assert. This is as true of historicist versions (e.g., Lukács [1924] 1971) as it is of scientific versions (e.g., Wright 1978).

I suggest that the problems posed by Olson can be met in large part by my analysis of traditional communities. Not only does the sharing of tradition predispose individuals to similar analyses of their situations, but embeddedness in communal relations also produces an interdependence of interests among individuals. In a village of handloom weavers, for example, most of the handful of nonweavers—greengrocer, publican, shopkeeper—were likely to be as dependent on weaving for their prosperity as were the weavers themselves. A network of debts may be as important as one of sentiments; between the two it seems quite understandable that each should identify his interests with all.

There are certainly limits to the role which this kind of social organization can play in producing bases for collective action. Larger groups not only obscure the contributions (or lack thereof) from particular individuals and spread the proceeds of action over a larger pool of beneficiaries, they also make it less likely that communal relations of great density will be formed. Perhaps it is also the case that the more complex the strategy needed to realize a set of shared interests, the less likely a mobilization based on traditional communities will be to succeed. Nonetheless, traditional communities offer definite advantages. To cite only one area, both Olson and Moe find that the decision to join an interest group in the first place requires explanation within their theories. But both, especially Moe, are concerned primarily with formal organizations, self-consciously created and joined by their members. Traditional communities preexist any particular mobilization over any particular set of interests. Instead of incurring a cost by creating an organization, members of traditional communities are presented with a major resource in the shape of precisely that social organization and shared set of values they are seeking to protect.

Traditional communities thus provide for the existence of shared interests and the capacity to act on them. It remains to suggest two reasons why they should be radical and why "modern" workers should not be. The first reason is that the sorts of goals sought by reactionary radicals are fundamentally incompatible with such existing trends as the rise of industrial capitalism. They are radical not in themselves, in the abstract, but, rather, in relation to what goals other people are pursuing and what concessions governments or privileged groups are prepared to make. Thus the radicals of late 18th-century Europe sought what Thompson (1971) calls "the moral economy," the right to sell their products rather than their labor (Reddy 1979), a "just price" in markets, especially for food (Tilly 1975), the right to raise their own children and support their wives, to labor at home or in small workshops instead of in factories, to continue producing by hand and with craft skills rather than be replaced by machines or forced to produce "cut-rate" goods, to petition their "betters" for redress of wrongs, to use common lands for grazing or gathering firewood, to be paid in specie instead of paper money.

This was hardly a Marxist rationalist's list of class interests, and indeed there were several more rationalistic contemporary partisans of the working class or the common people who despaired of popular traditionalism. John Wade complained, for example, "One thing is certain, that these ancient laws have been a real stumbling block in the way of the Reformers; they have been the subject of endless unmeaning altercation; they have filled the heads of the people with nonsense, and covered their advocates with contempt and ridicule. That our leaders should continue to stick

to these follies, is both provoking and astonishing. Can they bring nothing to bear against the old rotten borough-mongering system but the musty parchment, black letter and Latin quotations?" (*The Gorgon*, June 20, 1818, p. 35).

Despite this traditionalism, despite an ideology which seldom got beyond a vague populism, the demands of the members of traditional communities were indeed radical. Handloom weavers could not be granted their continued peaceful existence without stopping the advance of technological innovation and capital accumulation. When Parisian artisans resisted the division of labor, they were attacking the industrial revolution itself. Capitalist industrialization did not mean just a lower standard of living for these workers, it meant the eradication of the communities in which and the traditions by which they lived and worked. In other words, it meant the destruction of these people as collectivities. There was little that capitalism could offer in return. No ameliorative reforms, no welfare system would speak to the fundamental complaints of these insurgents. Such concessions would have been nice (and the rich and powerful did precious little to soften the hard lot of the poor), but they would have left untouched the radical incompatibility of the economic and social basis of the populists' lives—traditional crafts and communities—with the new order.

So, however mild and peaceable their intentions, the reactionary radicals presented a very serious challenge to public order and nascent capitalism. Already in the early 19th century their cousins in modern industrial work could organize unions and pursue their interests without posing such a challenge. They were born of capitalism and could compete within it for various distributive gains without fundamentally threatening the new order.

The second way in which the members of traditional communities were radical, which also sets them apart from the modern workers, lies in their capacity for action. The workers of early 19th-century France and England were defeated, of course.¹⁵ But they had more in common with those who in other times and places have participated in successful revolutions (whether or not they have liked the resulting states) than do the workers of modern capitalism. Skocpol (1979, pp. 148–49) has noted the existence of stronger and more autonomous communities in France and Russia as key reasons for the more rapid progress of their agrarian revolutions than China's. She and Tilly, Tilly, and Tilly (1975) have rightly stressed both the importance of weaknesses in state power to revolutionary success and the long-term trend of strengthening state apparatuses. This increasing power, with its improved capacity for government repression of revolu-

¹⁵ The stories are told well by Thompson (1963) and Prothero (1979) for England (though see also Calhoun [1982]), and by Price (1972) and Sewell (1980) for France.

tion, certainly helps to explain the predominance of reformist movements in recent Western history. But another finding of Tilly et al. suggests a change in the strength of the mobilizations themselves. They found that violent protests became larger and more "proactive" between 1830 and 1930 as urban proletarians replaced artisanal and rural communities as the protagonists. But these protests also became shorter, less sustained and concerted efforts. I suggest that the change in social foundations from traditional communities to formal organizations of individual workers is the reason.¹⁶ When traditional communities were mobilized, they were able to stay mobilized over long periods of time in the face of considerable privations. Like the "true believers" found at the core of millenarian movements by Festinger, Riecken, and Schachter (1956), the reactionary radicals were integrated into a social organization which kept their beliefs and ambitions alive. As already noted, they did not have to pay high costs for maintaining a special purpose organization. They also had few other directions in which to turn for improvement of circumstances.¹⁷

Where communities do not already link potential insurgents to each other, formal organization becomes more important. This in itself exerts a pressure against truly radical popular actions. Strictly maintained formal organization may be central to Leninist theory and practice, but it is precisely a substitute for mass revolutionary mobilization (though it arguably never succeeds without the latter). As Piven and Cloward (1978) among others have noted, the existence of formal organizations often contributes to a sense that someone else is carrying the burden of protest, and one need not sacrifice one's own resources. Formal organizations, moreover, are prone to the problems of oligarchical control, noted early on by Michels (1949). The larger the organization (or population to be organized), the more acute this problem becomes (Mayhew and Levinger 1976). Such oligarchy both gives the leaders of the organizations an interest in preserving the organization itself rather than serving the needs of their constituents and cuts the leadership off from the larger population, minimizing the likelihood of widespread participation. Even for those outside an organization's elite, investment in the organization gives members an interest in preserving it rather than risking it in revolutionary action.¹⁸

¹⁶ This argument is consonant with Tilly et al. (1975) though it is not posed in their analysis; Tilly does suggest something similar (1979, p. 38).

¹⁷ Migration, especially to the United States, was probably the main alternative; it was immense among the generation of 1848 in continental Europe; see Whitridge (1949, pp. 238-326).

¹⁸ Thompson (1965, p. 281) has commented on "the truly astronomic sum of human capital which has been invested in the strategy of piece-meal reform." Hirschman (1970) offers the leading general attempt to describe the options open to members of organizations who have made such commitments.

Finally, the need to work through formal organizations creates the possibility for competition among organizations. To be sure, communal ties can also create competition among subgroups, and examples abound of residential communities split in contests between kin groupings and single crafts rent by struggles between competing organizations (e.g., the various trade corporations of Old Regime France; see Sewell [1980]). Such cases do not, however, produce quite the same likelihood of fractious “splitting” among ideologically defined groups as formalization can produce. And 18th-century *compagnonnages* were in any case formal organizations overlapping with informal craft communities. Their very formal structure was part of the reason for their decline, as it remained rigid in the face of socioeconomic change and gave masters insupportable, largely hereditary privileges at the expense of the growing numbers of journeymen. It **was**, for the most part, the traditions of mutuality and the value of labor, and the crafts-based communities, which carried forward into the nascent socialism of the Second Republic, not the formal organization.

Though organization building is not antithetical to radical action, and indeed is necessary to securing enduring gains, formal organizations do militate against the sorts of radical movements that have provided most frequently the initial revolutionary destruction of old regimes. Workers in the major capitalist nations of the West lack the sociocultural foundations for radicalism which traditional communities gave the artisans of the early 19th century. This is not to say that modern workers are conservative; on the contrary, it is to suggest that they are not so conservative as to be forced into radical opposition to social change. They may be extremely left-wing, but a reformist strategy will nearly always be rational for them.

Although a number of social scientists have stressed that working-class community has not completely dissolved into mass society, even their work shows some important differences in the nature and extent of community. Kornblum (1974), for example, shows blue-collar workers focusing a great deal of attention on community politics and working through primary groups and local unions. His study of South Chicago shows a cluster of diverse ethnic enclaves but finds processes through which competing groups are also establishing some integration at the level of “community.” Yet they are doing so largely through formal organizations, including many over which they have far less than complete control, and some—such as the Democratic party machine—the specific aim of which is to secure a share of resources disbursed elsewhere. The steel mills in which they work are owned by distant corporations; collective action to confront such employers requires organization far beyond the level of face-to-face relationships. The degree of craft control such workers have over their jobs is generally slight, and the extent of political self-

regulation they can achieve is limited by their greater integration into the larger society and indeed the international economy.

This is not to deny the existence of community; I would even suggest that urban ethnic groups should be at least as important as rural villages in our images of community. But even though primary ties still exist and are important to individuals, in many places they are no longer able to organize much of public life. The communities of early industrial Europe were in transition; they are thus not the extreme of traditionality—perhaps tribal kinship-governed societies are. But the traditional communities of early 19th-century France and England—and of Russia in 1917 and China in 1949—were different from South Chicago. They were smaller, more densely knit, more autonomous, more able to produce and reproduce the cultural medium of their social solidarity through their everyday interactions. They learned of their common past and developed their dreams for the future, not in schools or from television, but in families and from each other.

Centralization and individualism—Tocqueville's ([1844] 1961) twins—the greater scale and lesser organization of much of everyday life in modern capitalist societies, make formal organizations necessary. Acting through such organizations makes reformism more likely. The working class as it now exists lacks the unifying social basis for collective action which community structure provided (and in some cases continues to provide) to those who would resist the extension of capitalist relations of production and social forms. The necessity of acting through formal organizations both produces problems of motivation and militates against extremely radical—especially democratic—actions. Perhaps most important, the modern working class is potentially able to secure ameliorative reforms within capitalist society. This does not alter any interests workers might have in socialism, or even in a socialist revolution, but it implies that revolutionary or other radical action is not *necessary*, but only one option. One does not even have to hold that it is easier for the state to repress insurgency, though it undoubtedly is; or that it is easier for capitalism's opponents to split the ranks of workers or mystify them with ideology, though that may be true as well. Even if these things were not true, the sociocultural foundations on which modern workers act do not make really radical mobilization as rational or as effective as traditional communities made it for artisans and peasants during the transition to capitalism.

CONCLUSION

Marx thought that revolution would be no risk, but rather the result of desperation, when workers had nothing to lose but their chains. I have

argued that, on the contrary, revolutionary and other radical mobilizations take place when people who do have something to defend, and do have some social strength, confront social transformations which *threaten* to take all that from them and thus leave them nothing to lose. I have held that traditional communities are the crucial source of such radical mobilizations. I have not maintained that traditional communities are always radical or even remarkably forward looking in ideology. On the contrary, under most conditions they are bulwarks of the existing order, the social foundations of deference and quiescence. During times when the existing order seems deeply threatened, including especially such great periods of transition as the industrial revolution, such communities may find that they can be traditional only by being radical. Whether their radical mobilizations lead to revolutions depends on much else—on the strength of the states which they confront, for example, and on whether or not educated elites and formal organizations stand ready to turn insurrection into real social transformation and new state power. Reactionary radicals have seldom, if ever, been able to gain supremacy in revolutions. But at the same time, revolutions worthy of the name have never been made without them.

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