Misreading, then rereading, nineteenth-century social change

Charles Tilly

Leitmotifs

The discipline of sociology grew from the encounter between worried bourgeois and the massive changes of the European nineteenth century. For the most part, both the bourgeois and the sociologists constructed faulty pictures of those changes. Examining a world that had long been mobile, interdependent, heavily involved in manufacturing, strongly oriented to cities, and full of conflict, what did they see? They imagined a past world that was immobile, fragmented, agrarian, rural, homogeneous, and integrated. Surrounded by a world in which whole regions were deindustrializing, work was proletarianizing, capital was concentrating, power was nationalizing, the scale of formal organization was expanding, and capitalists were seizing control of the entire productive process, how did they theorize? They created models of social change that ignored most of these monumental processes. A Tönnies or a Durkheim could represent the basic changes as a rapid shift from an integrated past to a disintegrated present and could portray crime, conflict, and personal malaise as consequences of the individual disorientation and weakened social control produced by rapid change. Customary small-scale social life, went the tale, dissolved in the rising waters of urbanization, industrialization, and secularization.

The view of social change as the dissolution of customary small-scale social life is familiar. It became the dominant bourgeois analysis of the nineteenth century. It knits nicely with the notion that wealth, mobility, and urban experience corrupt virtuous peasants. It fits just as well, paradoxically, with the call for a civilizing mission on the part of schools, local government, and military service. The former is the conservative, nostalgic version, the latter the liberal, progressive version, of the same theory.

The bourgeois analysis gave rise to the great nineteenth-century dichotomy: Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, status and contract, mechanical and organic solidarity. It also helped form the presumptuous social sciences, whose objects were to document, to explain, and perhaps to guide the transition from one side of the dichotomy to the other.

Nor did the ideas die with the nineteenth century. On the contrary. They became the basis of standard twentieth-century conceptions, both academic and popular, of large-scale social change. Although the particular variants of the modernization theory rose and fell in the quarter-century after World War II, the general idea of modernization as dissolution and integration has survived from the nineteenth century to our own time. In one form or another, it appears widely in North American analyses of Europe, including those of such widely read authors as Black (1966), Gillis (1970), Shorter (1975), and Stearns (1975). Recently, it has surfaced in Weber's widely acclaimed Peasants into Frenchmen (1976), a book that portrays France before about 1870 as a congeries of isolated, autonomous, traditionalist, and miserable societies that only the stirred-up communication of the late nineteenth century drew into national life. The difference between Weber and his colleagues does not lie in the novelty of his basic argument. It lies in his insistence on the period from 1870 to 1914 and, more important, in his extraordinary use of ethnographic detail to present the argument.

Familiarity is not truth. Is it true that the dominant social changes in nineteenth-century Europe comprised (or resulted from) the displacement of traditional, localized, immobile cultures by industrialism, urbanism, and expanding communications? That is doubtful. It is doubtful on two rather different grounds: (1) because many of the most important concrete changes in the social life of nineteenth-century Europe did not follow the paths required by theories of modernization; (2) because the massive industrialization, urbanization, and communications shifts—which did, indeed, occur—grew from the interaction of two deeper and wider processes: the growth of national states and the expansion of capitalism.

My discussion dwells on the first point: the failure of important processes to follow the courses charted by theories of modernization. That is the easier of the two points to establish. It also leads naturally to consideration of the reasons for the failure of the theories, then to reflection on alternative general accounts of social change in nineteenth-century Europe. Those alternatives will easily take us back to capitalism and state making.

The issues matter in their own right: We are asking, after all, how the world changes and how the world we know came into being. The issues also matter in another way: theories of modernization underlie many accounts of nineteenth-century conflict, consciousness, and collective action. Conservative modernization models nest neatly with interpretations of protest, conflict, and collective action as irrational responses to the stresses and strains of rapid change. Progressive modernization models, on the other
hand, articulate plausibly with a vision of awakening consciousness, of increasing integration into cosmopolitan worldviews that guide collective action on a large scale. If the underlying models prove incorrect, we shall have to consider another alternative more seriously: that most of the time ordinary people have an idea, more or less clear, of their short-run interests, but vary enormously in their capacity and opportunity to act on those interests. If that is the case — as, obviously, I think it is — the proper substitute for the study of modernization is likely to be the study of the ways in which large social changes alter the interests, capacities, and opportunities of ordinary people.

Notions of modernization

Whether theories of modernization are worthless or merely cumbersome depends, however, on how much we ask of them. In an undemanding version, the notion of modernization is simply a name for general features of contemporary life: intense communications, big organization, mass production, and so on. If our program is simply to inquire whether those features of social life were already visible in the nineteenth century and to search for their origins, then the analysis of modernization is no more misleading than most other retrospective schemes.

In a somewhat more demanding guise, modernization becomes a label for dominant patterns of change. Lepsius (1977:24–9), for instance, breaks modernization into these elements:

1. differentiation
2. mobilization
3. participation
4. institutionalization of conflict.

The fit between these terms and the main trends in nineteenth-century Europe depends on their specification: which units are supposed to be differentiating, who is supposed to be mobilizing with respect to what end, and so on. It also depends on our vantage point. From the perspective of the national state and the national elite, differentiation, mobilization, participation and institutionalization summarize many of the changes going on in nineteenth-century Europe. From the perspective of the local community, many of the same changes involved de differentiation, demobilization, perhaps even deinstitutionalization: Rights, rituals, and rounds of life that had previously prevailed now lost their strength. Nevertheless, any model of social change requires us to take some vantage point, and the center is as permissible a vantage point as any other. Thus, we can make it a question of fact whether differentiation, mobilization, participation, and institutionalization do, indeed, describe the main trends in nineteenth-century Europe, as seen from its central locations.

The real difficulties with modernization theories only begin when we move from simple inventories of common themes to the analysis of what sorts of structures changed and why. Did urbanism, industrialism, and expanding communications dissolve previously stable, small, self-contained structures; release people from their control; generate disorder as a consequence; and finally produce a new, complex, large-scale set of connections to replace the old? Such an account, to my mind, has far too little power, interest, and conflict in it. But even if it were sometimes a plausible account of social change, it would be an unlikely model for the European nineteenth century. Its most important weakness as a guide to the nineteenth century is its starting point: a closed, traditional, unconnected, immobile set of social worlds. In the remainder of this chapter, I spend a major part of my effort in demonstrating the openness, connectedness, and mobility of the European world as it faced the nineteenth century. Because the rural world is the one in which modernization models should apply most clearly, I concentrate on changes in Europe’s rural areas.

What will we find in the countryside? We will find a mobile, differentiated population heavily involved in different forms of production for the market and responsive to changes occurring far from home. We will find varying forms of mercantile capitalism penetrating deep into village life. We will find agents of national states intervening actively in local organization in order to extract the men, food, and money required for armies and other expensive governmental activities. We will find a sensitive interplay between economic structure and family life — between the organization of production and of reproduction. We will find few traces of the isolation and autarky that are dear to theorists of modernization.

None of this means that the nineteenth century was a time of stability or of trendless turbulence. Industrial capitalism took shape in important parts of Europe. Capital concentrated and the scale of production rose. The working population, urban and rural, proletarianized. Firms, parties, trade unions, and other specialized associations assumed much more prominent roles in public life. National states continued to gain power by comparison with any other organizations. Capitalism and state making, in short, transformed social life. That includes the social life of the countryside.

We can have no hope of enumerating, much less of analyzing, the full range of nineteenth-century change in one brief chapter. After a look at broad patterns of nineteenth-century change over the continent as a whole, let us close in on the nature of employment in Europe’s rural areas.

Population growth and vital rates

A glance at the elementary statistics of the period gives an immediate sense of the nineteenth-century’s dynamisms. The European population of 1800 stood
Table 12.1. Annual growth rates and vital rates for major world areas, 1960–8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Annual growth rate</th>
<th>Crude birth rate</th>
<th>Crude death rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soviet Union</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


in the vicinity of 190 million, that of 1900 around 500 million. The increase of more than 300 million people implies a growth rate around 1% per year. Such a rate is not sensational by twentieth-century standards: As Table 12.1 indicates, Europe is still growing at about that rate, and all other continents are growing faster. But for a whole continent to grow so fast for so long was an extraordinary event in the history of the world up to that time (Durand, 1967; McKeown, 1976).

The increase occurred, furthermore, despite a probable net loss through migration on the order of 35 million people. For the century as a whole, a reasonable guess is that 45 million Europeans left the continent, and 10 million returned home. Close to half the century’s emigrants left from Britain and Ireland, and three-quarters of the British and Irish went to North America. The vast majority of emigrants from all parts of Europe sailed to the Americas; the transatlantic movement was one of the grandest migrations of all time. In sheer numbers and distances, it was probably unprecedented in human history.

If the estimates of migration are correct, Europe’s excess of births over deaths during the century as a whole totaled close to 350 million. With a plausible crude birth rate of 35 for the whole continent and the whole century, that figure implies a crude death rate in the vicinity of 25. In the world of the later twentieth century, a crude birth rate of 35 and a crude death rate of 25 could only occur in a poor country. For purposes of comparison, Table 12.1 presents continental rates from the 1960s. No continent now approximates the European nineteenth-century situation; all continents now have lower mortality rates, and the poorer parts of the world all have larger gaps between birth rate and death rate; that means, of course, that the rates of natural increase are higher today than they were in nineteenth-century Europe. The closest approximations of Europe’s situation a hundred years ago are contemporary Africa and Asia.

Table 12.2. Vital rates for selected European areas in 1800, 1850, and 1900

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Crude birth rate</th>
<th>Crude death rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>1850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>39.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>35.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>39.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>22.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>33.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>31.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>38.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>49.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>42.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>33.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>31.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England, Wales</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Within Europe, the nineteenth century brought pivotal changes in the character and geography of natural increase. Over the continent as a whole, the trend of nineteenth-century fertility was no doubt a gentle decline, as compared with a significant drop in mortality; the difference between the two rates of decline accounted for the continent’s large national increase. Table 12.2 presents some scattered observations of birth rates and death rates for 1800, 1850, and 1900. In general, the poorer parts of Europe (which were probably also, on the average, areas of higher fertility and mortality throughout the century) lack data for the early years; there was a rough correlation between prosperity and statistical reporting. As of 1900, the range of variation was large: crude birth rates running from 21.3 in France to 49.3 in Russia; crude death rates from 13.8 in Norway to 31.1 in Russia. As Ansley Coale (1969) and his collaborators have shown, a long frontier separated the high-fertility regions of Eastern and Southeastern Europe from the low- to medium-fertility regions of the north and west. In these statistics, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Russia, and Serbia stand well above other countries.

The national units mask further diversity: Fertility and mortality correspond much more closely to economic and cultural regions than to political
boundaries. Although Hungary shows up in these statistics as a high-fertility area, for example, Hungary actually included some of Europe’s lowest-fertility regions. Andorka and his colleagues have done family-reconstitution studies of several villages in the Ormansag and Sarkoz regions of Hungary during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; there they have discovered marital fertility plummeting to remarkably low levels. In those areas an arrangement known as the “one-child family system” prevailed; by 1850 actual completed family sizes were running between 3 and 4 (Andorka, 1977). Plenty of other studies from elsewhere show significant village-to-village variation as a function of economic opportunity and family structure (e.g., Levine, 1977; Gaunt, 1977; Spagnoli, 1977).

Industrialization

One of the factors behind the changing microgeography of fertility in nineteenth-century Europe was the continent’s industrialization. Industrialization has two dimensions: (1) a decrease in the proportion of economic activity devoted to agriculture, forestry, and fishing, and (2) an increase in the scale of producing units. Our twentieth-century prejudice—compounded by a slogansm of the Industrial Revolution and a fixation on the factory as the vehicle of industrial growth—is to think of the two as tightly correlated. In fact, they have often varied quite separately from each other. Many regions of Europe were already relatively industrial with respect to the first dimension by the end of the eighteenth century: Major shares of the rural and small-town population were involved in various forms of manufacturing. But the scale remained very small: The household and the small shop were the typical producing units. The nineteenth century saw both a substantial decline in the share of agriculture, forestry, and fishing and a dramatic rise in the average scale of production.

No one has so far assembled comparable accounts of these nineteenth century changes for all regions of Europe. Some features of the changes, nevertheless, are fairly clear:

1. The areas that experienced major industrialization during the nineteenth century were basically of two kinds:
   a. areas in which small-scale manufacturing had already been important during the eighteenth century—the regions of Manchester, Lille, Milan, Barcelona, Moscow, and so on—and which experienced an urbanization and increase in the scale of that industry during the nineteenth century;
   b. areas in which coal deposits combined with water or rail transportation to facilitate the development of heavy industry: Yorkshire, much of Belgium, Silesia, and so on.

2. As this implosion of industry occurred, large parts of the European countryside deindustrialized, devoting themselves more exclusively to agriculture.

3. In absolute terms, agriculture, forestry, and fishing did not decline. They actually grew, but more slowly than manufacturing and services. In sheer numbers, the agricultural labor force reached its maximum some time around World War I.

4. Wage-laborers—proletarians in both agriculture and industry—increased far more rapidly than the rest of the labor force. One reasonable guess is that proletarians and their families comprised 90 million of Europe’s 190 million people in 1800 and had grown to 300 million of the total of 500 million by the end of the century. After having occurred mainly in villages and small towns for centuries, most of the nineteenth-century increase of the proletarian population took place in cities. Urbanization and proletarianization were interdependent processes.

As a result of these changes, regional disparities in industrial activity, wealth, urban concentration, and population density increased through the nineteenth century. Around 1900 the major countries of Europe distributed themselves as in Table 12.3. The proportions rose, broadly speaking, with increasing distance from the English Channel.

The changing geography of wealth shows up in Bairoch’s (1976) estimates of per capita gross national product. Table 12.4 shows the eight highest-ranking areas in 1850 and 1900.

Real GNP per capita, according to Bairoch’s estimates, rose by about 90 percent over those 70 years. That is slow growth by twentieth-century standards, but extraordinary compared with anything that had happened before. Per capita GNP grew fastest in Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, Germany, and Belgium—especially, that is, in the areas that saw the development of coal-consuming, metal-processing industries.

The map of urban population conformed more and more closely to the map of large-scale industry. Table 12.5 summarizes the changes. In 1800, close to 3% of the European population lived in cities of 100,000 or more. By 1850, the proportion had risen to around 5%, by 1900, 10%. That meant a rise from 5.4 million to 12.7 million to 50.1 million inhabitants of big cities—almost a quadrupling in the last half of the century. The combination of substantial natural increase within cities and massive rural-to-urban migration produced thunderous urban growth: about 0.6% per year from 1800 to 1850, about 2.1% per year from 1850 to 1900.1

The regional disparities were wide in 1800 and widened during the century. In 1800, the presence of giant Constantinople made the European segment of what was to become Turkey the most urban of the continent’s major political units: 13.3% of European Turkey’s entire population lived in that one city of
Table 12.3. Regional disparities in Europe around 1900

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>1800</th>
<th>1850</th>
<th>1900</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>231.9</td>
<td>246.4</td>
<td>260.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>526.7</td>
<td>543.6</td>
<td>582.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>426.3</td>
<td>455.1</td>
<td>485.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>822.8</td>
<td>843.7</td>
<td>868.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>320.5</td>
<td>346.7</td>
<td>372.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>111.5</td>
<td>113.2</td>
<td>115.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>837.2</td>
<td>847.3</td>
<td>857.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>358.4</td>
<td>382.1</td>
<td>406.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>732.1</td>
<td>753.4</td>
<td>774.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>167.5</td>
<td>170.2</td>
<td>173.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>226.2</td>
<td>228.6</td>
<td>231.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>227.6</td>
<td>230.9</td>
<td>234.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>989.8</td>
<td>1005.0</td>
<td>1020.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>910.0</td>
<td>925.0</td>
<td>940.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>452.2</td>
<td>470.3</td>
<td>488.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>130.0</td>
<td>133.0</td>
<td>136.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>881</td>
<td>905</td>
<td>929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>785</td>
<td>810</td>
<td>835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>577</td>
<td>605</td>
<td>633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>432</td>
<td>459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Europe</td>
<td>5009.0</td>
<td>5251.0</td>
<td>5503.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 12.4. Per capita gross national product, Europe, 1830 and 1900 (in 1960 U.S. dollars and prices)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>1830</th>
<th>1900</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>721</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>659</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>604</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>577</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>455</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


600,000. Elsewhere, the range ran downward from the 10–11% for Denmark, England, and Wales to a number of countries with no city of 100,000 or more. By the end of the century, Finland was the only large political unit with no city of 100,000; Helsinki then had about 90,000 residents. But the range ran from less than 5% in Finland, Greece, Hungary, and Romania to more than 30% in Scotland, England, and Wales. The rank orders of urbanization and industrialization had converged.

Either because no one with the heroic statistical capacities of a Paul Bairoch has so far compiled the evidence or because the changes involved did not lend themselves to simple numerical summary, other major changes that were undoubtedly happening are harder to document. Roads, then railroads, proliferated; mail and telegraph communications multiplied; newspapers circulated as schooling and literacy increased; voluntary associations, trade unions, political parties waxed; and so on through the inventory of communications, organizations, and everyday routines.

Amid the great swirl of transformation, the expansion and reorganization of European states set some of the main currents of change. Perhaps the most dramatic feature of Europe's nineteenth-century state making was the consolidation of the state system into a smaller and smaller set of larger and

Rereading nineteenth-century social change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>1800</th>
<th>1850</th>
<th>1900</th>
<th>Percentage of population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Netherlands</td>
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<td>22.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Prussia/Germany</td>
<td>1.1</td>
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<td>21.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>European Russia</td>
<td>1.3</td>
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<td>Total Europe</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
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*Dash (—) indicates not available.
Source: Tilly, Fonde, and O'Shea (1972).

larger units: about 30 states of various sorts on the eve of the French Revolution; a radical reduction through French conquests to about 25 states in 1810 and about 20 in 1812; a temporary reversion to about 35 states with France’s defeat, followed by a new consolidation process that left 20–25 independent states (depending on how we define “independent” and “state”) at World War I. Although French imperialism cleared the way and nineteenth-century wars took their toll, the chief paths to consolidation passed through semi-autonomous unions, notably those of Germany and Italy. Throughout the process, state structures expanded, centralized, and became the dominant organizations within their own territories. A number of innovations followed: uniformed professional police forces, national elections and referenda, censuses and statistical bureaus, income taxes, technical schools for specialists, civil service careers, and many other pieces of the state apparatus that have prevailed into our own time.
Can we reasonably apply the word "modernization" to this ensemble of changes? That depends on how demanding an idea of modernization we adopt. If all we require is that recognizable features of twentieth-century life emerge, then the urbanization, large-scale industrialization, fertility decline, and other changes portrayed by the statistics easily qualify as modernization. If we demand common paths of change — something like Lepsius’s differentiation, mobilization, participation, and institutionalization of conflict — the question remains moot; observations at a national or European scale simply do not tell us how the changes occurred. And if we want to try a causal model of modernization (one in which, for instance, intensified communications produce new states of consciousness, which in turn make people more open to rational solutions for their problems), the hopelessness of approaching the analysis with hugely aggregated evidence becomes clear. We must look at evidence that comes closer to the experiences of individuals and small groups. Let us consider how work changed in Europe’s rural areas.

Peasants and proletarians

In order to understand changes in the nineteenth-century European countryside, we must exorcise the ghosts in the word “peasantry.” If we mean the peasants, they are poor people who work the soil, then we cannot mean that they were peasants. Usually, however, we have something more precise in mind: something like agriculturalists organized in households that control the land on which they live, draw most of their subsistence from that land, and supply the bulk of their own labor requirements from their own efforts. By that definition, the bulk of the European rural population was already nonpeasant by the start of the nineteenth century. In much of Eastern and Southern Europe, large landlords made the basic agricultural production decisions and used a variety of devices to draw labor from a mass of agricultural workers who controlled little or no land. In much of Northern and Western Europe, a major share of the agricultural labor force consisted of day laborers or of live-in servants and hands. Although the serfs of Eastern Europe and the day laborers of Western Europe often had garden plots or small fields of their own, they depended for survival on the sale of their household labor power. They were, in a classic Marxian sense of the word, proletarians.

Again a little exorcism is in order. Despite Marx’s own clear concentration on changes in the rural labor force, the word “proletarian” has taken on an urban-industrial imagery as in Modern Times with Charlie Chaplin turning bolts on the assembly line. If we confine the proletariat to people working at subdivided tasks in large units under close time discipline, then that industrial proletariat certainly grew during the nineteenth century, but it probably did not approach a fifth of the European labor force in 1900.

If, however, we include all people whose survival depended on the sale of their labor power to holders of capital — which was, after all, Marx’s basic idea of the proletariat — then by the end of the nineteenth century the great majority of the European labor force was proletarian. Agricultural wage laborers were probably the largest category, but industrial and service workers were then competing for the lead. Before the middle of the nineteenth century, most of the large increase in the proletarian population occurred in small towns and rural areas. By a rough computation from the figures presented earlier, perhaps 50 million of the 70 million increase in the European population from 1800 to 1850 occurred in places under 20,000. It is reasonable to suppose that at least 40 of that 50-million increase in smaller places consisted of wagemakers and their families. During the second half of the century, the smaller places may have grown by another 140 million, the great bulk of the increase having been proletarian. By then, however, the cities were beginning to take over: 100 million of the 240-million increase occurred in places of 20,000 or more, and many of the smaller settlements that grew were actually suburbs and satellites of major industrial centers. To be sure, in the present state of the evidence, any such numbers rest on a tissue of suppositions. Yet, the main point is firm: The patterns of urban growth and of total population growth imply a massive proletarianization of the European population in the nineteenth century. Contrary to common impressions, much of that proletarianization took place in smaller towns and rural areas.

The sketchy evidence I have presented leaves open the possibility that the places of fewer than 20,000 inhabitants in question were mainly seats of mines, mills, and other large-scale industrial establishments. Some were; the hinterlands of Manchester and Lille, for example, were full of smaller industrial centers. Even in those two quintessential manufacturing regions, however, agricultural proletarians and rural outworkers multiplied during the nineteenth century. Away from the major poles of industrial growth, much more of the expansion took place in agriculture and in manufacturing on a very small scale.

The earlier European experience provides numerous examples of proletarianization within rural areas. In fact, the rural versions of proletarianization were so visible at the middle of the nineteenth century that Karl Marx considered them the basis of primitive accumulation: “The expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil, is the basis of the whole process” (Marx, n.d., chap. 25). It would be useful, however, to differentiate among types of agricultural regions rather more than Marx did. At a minimum we need to distinguish:

1. areas, such as coastal Flanders, in which peasants specialized in cash-crop production, and nonproducing landlords were unimportant
areas, such as East Prussia, in which large landlords produced grain for the market by means of servile labor, whose subsistence came mainly from small plots assigned to their households.

2. areas, such as southern England, in which large landlords likewise produced grain for the market, but with wage labor.

3. areas, such as western France, in which landlords lived from rents and peasants lived from various combinations of owned, rented, and sharecropped land.

Within category 1, proletarianization tended to occur as a consequence of differentiation within the peasantry: Extra children and households losing in the local competition moved into wage labor for other peasants. In Category 2, the redistribution of land that commonly accompanied nineteenth-century emancipations produced a temporary movement away from the proletariat, but the substitution of cash payments for access to subsistence plots created a far larger movement toward wage labor. Category 3 began with an essentially proletarian agricultural labor force and grew by adding more wage laborers. Category 4 sometimes transformed itself into Category 1 by means of the increasing involvement of peasants in cash-crop production, sometimes transformed itself into Category 3 as the landlords consolidated their control over production, but rarely created proletarians within the agricultural sector. (Category 4 was not, however, a bulwark against proletarianization; it was an especially favorable environment for cottage industry.) The European agrarian structure, then, provided multiple paths out of the peasantry and multiple paths into the agricultural proletariat. Over the nineteenth century, the net shift from one to the other was very large.

In Europe as a whole, the proletarianization of agricultural labor had begun well before the nineteenth century. Great Britain was one sort of extreme; except for some portions of its Celtic fringes, Britain had essentially eliminated its peasantry by the start of the nineteenth century. By the time of the 1831 census, the breakdown of agricultural families in Britain ran as in Table 12.6.

Table 12.7 presents the occupations of males 20 and over for 1831. Both the breakdown for families and the breakdown for adult males show about 21% of Great Britain’s agricultural labor force to be essentially landless laborers.

For England alone, the figure was 76%. Although the division between owners and wagemakers within the category "retail trade or handicraft" (in which the letter P, for example, includes paper maker; pastry cook, confectioner; pottmaker; pawnbroker; printer; printseller; publican, hotel or innkeeper, retailer of beer) is hard to guess, the figures suggest that in 1831 Britain’s agricultural labor force was more proletarian than the rest. By 1851, laborers amounted to some 85 percent of all agricultural workers (Deane and Cole, 1967: 143–4). That was the peak; thereafter, hired labor began to desert British agriculture for industry, and machines began to replace or displace labor as never before (Jones, 1964: 329–44).

Although Britain was extreme, it was not unique. Much of Eastern Europe began the nineteenth century with the bulk of its agricultural population proletarians of a different kind from their English cousins: as servile landless laborers on large estates (Blum, 1978: 38–44). Although nineteenth-century emancipations eventually gave some of them title to land, the main trend ran toward the creation of a vast agricultural proletariat. Peasant property may have increased in absolute terms, but the rural population grew much faster. A common interpretation of those trends (Blum, 1978: 435–6) is that an exogenously generated population increase overran the supply of land; my own view is that proletarianization helped create the population increases. Whichever argument is correct, however, the correlation between pro-
letarianization and rural population growth is clear. In such southern European areas as Sicily, the dispossession of feudal landlords likewise made property owners of some former tenants; but its main effect was to accelerate the expropriation of the land by large farmers and bourgeois, and thus to hasten the proletarianization of the remainder of the agricultural workers (Romano, 1963; Schneider and Schneider, 1976: 116–18). Again, a rapid population increase aggravated the process of proletarianization, and again the causal connections between proletarianization and population increase are debatable.

The cases of Eastern and Southern Europe are well known. Less known until recently was the extensive proletarianization of the Scandinavian rural population. Winberg (1978: 170) sums up the Swedish experience:

Between 1750 and 1850 the population of Sweden doubled. The increase in population was particularly rapid after 1810. Throughout this period about 90 percent of the national population lived in rural areas. The increase was very unequally distributed among the different social groups of the rural population. The number of bonder (peasants) rose by c. 10 percent, while the number of landless — i.e. torpare (crofters), inbrygghjon (borders), statare (farm workers partly paid in kind) etc. — more than quadrupled.

Winberg attributes the rural proletarianization to two main processes: a capitalistic reorganization of large estates that squeezed out the tenants in favor of wage laborers, and an increasing integration of the peasantry into the national market economy, which in turn produced increased differentiation between landed and landless. If that is the case, Sweden combined the paths of Category 1 and Category 2 and ended with a combination of a small number of capitalist landlords, a larger number of cash-crop farmers, and a very large number of agricultural wageworkers.

Protoindustry and proletarianization

Sweden was unusual in one important regard: Unless we count mining and forestry, very few of Sweden’s rural workers went into industry. Over Europe as a whole, manufacturing played a large part in the transformation of the nineteenth-century countryside. Economic historians have recently begun to speak of protoindustrialization: the growth of manufacturing through the multiplication of small producing units rather than through the concentration of capital and labor. Economic historian Franklin Mendels (1972) introduced the term into the literature in order to cope with the way that sections of rural Flanders made large shifts from agriculture to manufacturing without the development of factories, without important changes in production techniques, without large accumulations of capital, without substantial urbanization of the working class.

Older economic historians, back to Marx, knew about cottage industry and allied forms of production long ago. The advantage of the new term is to draw attention to the variety of ways in which European entrepreneurs of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries organized networks of households to produce large volumes of cheap goods for national and international markets. In the process, they made manufacturing not a mere by-employment for farmers, but the dominant economic activity in important parts of the European countryside. Industrialisierung vor der Industrialisierung, by Kriedte, Medick, and Schlumbohm (1977), surveys the growing literature on the subject. The book emphasizes the ways in which protoindustrialization transformed the rest of the rural economy, established its own peculiar patterns of family structure, and cleared the way for large-scale industrialization. It makes clear the utter inadequacy of any portrayal of the nineteenth-century rural world as a territory essentially populated by peasants and fundamentally devoted to agriculture.

As Kriedte sums up the importance of protoindustrialization:

Protoindustry stands between two worlds, the narrow world of the village and the boundary-breaking world of trade, between the agrarian economy and merchant capitalism. The agrarian sector produces a labor supply, a supply of merchant-entrepreneur knowledge and capital, supplies of products and markets. Merchant capital opens foreign markets to rural crafts, whose personnel thus become aware of the opportunity for expansion if they enter into protoindustrialization... The unified symbiosis of merchant capital and peasant society thereby marks a decisive step on the way to industrial capitalism. (Kriedte et al., 1977: 88)

The general line of argument, in terms of “vent-for-surplus,” goes back to Adam Smith (Caves, 1965, 1971). But Kriedte and his collaborators go on to point out the irreversible effects of the new symbiosis: commercialization of the entire rural economy, dependence on adjacent agricultural areas for subsistence, transformation of households into suppliers (and breeders) of wage labor, detachment of marriage and reproduction from the inheritance of land, acceleration of population growth, rising rural densities, the growth of an industrial proletariat in the countryside.

Kriedte et al. brush against, but do not quite state, a fundamental advantage of protoindustrial production over urban shops and factories: In a time of small-scale agricultural production with high costs for the transportation and storage of food, protoindustry kept the bulk of the labor force close
to the food sources, and made industrial labor available, in odd moments and peak seasons, for food production. Up to a point, the individual merchant could assume that the workers would feed themselves. The logic of the system was, in short, a cheap, elastic, compliant labor force for merchants who are short on capital and technical expertise but long on knowledge of opportunities and connections.

Protoindustrial production and producers multiplied beginning well before 1800 and did not start to contract visibly until well into the nineteenth century. A labor force consisting largely of dispersed, part-time and seasonal workers resists enumeration; we are unlikely ever to have precise counts of the rise and fall of protoindustrial workers. Nevertheless, we have enough evidence to be sure that protoindustrialization was not simply one of several known patterns of change. Before the middle of the nineteenth century, when manufacturing increased significantly in some part of Europe, it normally increased through the multiplication of households and other small, dispersed producing units linked to national and international markets by webs of entrepreneurs and merchants. It increased, that is, not through the concentration of capital, labor, and the scale of production, but through protoindustrialization.

That is notably true of textile production. As Milward and Saul (1973: 93–4) put it:

It is impossible not to be struck by the extraordinary growth of spinning and weaving in the countryside of many European areas. In some areas the manufacture of iron products, toys or watches developed in the same way, but textiles, whether of linen, wool or the newfangled cotton were the typical rural product. The technological transformations which initiated the Industrial Revolution in Britain were heavily concentrated in these rural textile industries and their development on the continent may therefore be seen as the true precursor of the Industrial Revolution there rather than the older “manufacturers.” But setting on one side the developments of the Industrial Revolution itself and looking at the matter simply from the point of view of employment in industrial activities whether those industries were “revolutionized” or not it would still be true to say that the most industrial landscapes in late eighteenth century Europe, for all their lack of chimneys, were the country areas around Lille, Rouen, Barcelona, Zurich, Basel, Geneva.

The rise of coal-burning and metalworking industries during the nineteenth century eventually changed the picture. But it took a long time. The expansion of manufacturing continued to take a protoindustrial form well past 1800.

Because of Braun’s (1960) rich, intensive analyses of the Zurich region, the Zuricher Oberland has become the locus classicus for students of protoindustrialization. In the Zuricher Oberland, the poor subsistence farming areas far from the city had been thinly settled exporters of domestic servants and mercenaries until the eighteenth century. Then the growth of an export-oriented cotton industry based in Zurich but drawing the bulk of its labor from the countryside transformed the uplands: Farm workers took to spinning and weaving, emigration slowed, population densities rose, and an essentially industrial way of life took over the villages and hamlets of the mountains. A rural proletariat took shape.

During the nineteenth century, as the scale of production in Zurich and its immediate vicinity rose, the process reversed. The hinterland deindustrialized, and migrants flowed toward Zurich. The Zurich region moved from (1) urban manufacturing fed by a largely agricultural countryside to (2) rural protoindustrialization coupled with expanded mercantile activity in the central city to (3) concentration of industry near the center, bringing hardship to rural producers, to (4) deindustrialization of the countryside. The Zurich sequence provides a paradigm for the regional history of protoindustry throughout Europe. The chief variables are when the sequence occurred, how extensive each stage was, and whether a significant industrial nucleus survived the final period of urban implosion and rural contraction.

Urbanization of industry, deindustrialization of the country

Properly generalized, Zurich’s experience has significant implications for Europe’s nineteenth-century experience as a whole. Protoindustry did finally give way to its urban competitors throughout the continent. If so, the rural workers involved disappeared. But only in the artificial world of statistics can workers simply vanish. In real life, Europe’s protoindustrial workers either hung on unemployed, moved into other employment in the countryside, or followed industry to the city. They did all three, although in what proportions we do not know so far. In the region of Lyon, at midcentury, rural workers miles from the city lived in its long shadow. “For if we observe,” comments Yves Lequin (1977: I, 43),

the concentration of workers in urban centers which were seizing, to their advantage, declining rural industries, the latter held on to a considerable share; in some places, indeed, the spreading of work into the countryside had found its second wind and was promoting the expansion of other more dynamic branches of industry. The large shares of the districts of Saint-Etienne and Lyon should not mislead us: cities without
boundaries, they attracted people, to be sure, but even more so they projected their energy into distant villages: rather than men coming to industry, it was work that went to men.

The balance shifted in the next half-century. Despite a decline in the old handicraft manufacture of silk, despite a distinct suburbanization of Lyon’s manufacturing, and despite some tendency for mills with power looms to head for the waterpower of the Alpine slopes, the industrial capital swelled. Lyon grew from 235,000 to 456,000 inhabitants between 1851 and 1906. The depression of the 1870s and 1880s first struck at the manufacturing population of the countryside and temporarily augmented the agricultural labor force. But the depression marked the end of a long expansion for the hinterland. The villages began to leak women and men to the cities.

Especially to Lyon. The changing relationship between Lyon and its hinterland had a paradoxical effect: the geographical range from which the city recruited its working population narrowed during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Instead of arriving from Switzerland, from Italy, from industrial centers elsewhere in France, they arrived increasingly from Lyon’s own surrounding region. Within the region, however, Lyon and the other industrial cities did not simply attract a cross section of the rural population; they drew disproportionately from the old centers of rural industry (Lequin 1977: l, 239–46). The incomplete evidence suggests that they also drew disproportionately on the people of the hinterland who were already involved in their industrial networks.

The other side of this process was a wholesale deindustrialization of the countryside. Rural areas became more exclusively agricultural than they had been for centuries. Area by area, the homogenization of rural life was even greater, for the specialization in one cash crop or another tended to convert whole regions into vineyards, or wheat fields, or dairy farms. So we arrive at a set of unexpected consequences: an industrialization that recruited, not peasants, but experienced industrial workers from the countryside; a “ruralization” of that same countryside as a consequence of the increasing importance of the city; and an increasingly great contrast between the economic activities of city and country.

Rural exodus

In absolute terms, Europe’s rural population kept growing until some time in the twentieth century. Its proportion declined only because the urban population grew faster than the rural. Nevertheless, the cloud of numbers through which we have made our way implies a huge nineteenth-century exodus from the European countryside. Let us take a very conservative assumption: that rates of natural increase were just as high in places above

20,000 inhabitants as in smaller places. Even on that assumption, the figures imply that the smaller places lost about 25 million people to net migration in the first half of the century, and about 90 million in the second half. A substantial number of those migrants went overseas, but the net movement to larger places within Europe must have been on the order of 80 or 90 million migrants.

Who left? That depended on the pattern of opportunities in country, city, and overseas area. Those patterns varied with time and place. As a working hypothesis, I suggest the following rough rank order for departures from the nineteenth-century European countryside:

1. rural industrial workers
2. agricultural wageworkers
3. tenants and sharecroppers
4. landowning farmers.

I suggest, but with greater hesitation, that their school-leaving children emigrated in roughly the same order: children of rural industrial workers first, and so on. The logic of hypothesis is simple: Having transferable skills promotes migration, but having a stake in the land impedes it. The same logic suggests that in the case of migration to farms elsewhere (as in much of the Scandinavian migration to the American Midwest), agricultural workers headed the list. But that was a secondary stream; most people who fled Europe’s rural areas entered urban employment.

The consequence of such an order of departure would be first to deindustrialize the countryside, then to strip it of its remaining proletarians. At the logical end of such a process, family farms would predominate. For Europe as a whole, rural natural increase may well have exceeded out-migration – thus producing continued slow growth in the total rural population – until the end of the century. In the precocious case of rural France, however, large regions were losing population before 1900. In those regions, by and large, the remaining population was becoming more nearly peasant than it had been for centuries. There and elsewhere, deindustrialization and rural exodus had the ironic consequence of creating an agrarian world that resembled the traditional countryside postulated by simple models of modernization.

At first view, the rural exodus itself seems to fit one part of the modernization model: The presumed rise of mobility and of urban contacts breaks down rural isolation and opens the countryside to civilization. A closer look at nineteenth-century mobility patterns, however, gives a very different idea of what was going on. In the early nineteenth century and before, local markets for wage labor were very active, generally involved more than a single village, and commonly promoted widespread seasonal, annual, and lifetime migration from village to village. In areas of wage labor, mobility rates comparable to those prevailing in the contemporary United
States—a fifth of the population changing residence in an average
year—seem to have been common (Eriksson and Rogers, 1978: 177–239).
Temporary migration, over short distances and long, permitted millions of
European workers to supplement the inadequate incomes available at their
homes by meeting the seasonal demand for labor elsewhere (Châtelain, 1976).
Some rural regions (upland Switzerland is a famous example) built their
economic survival on the exportation of domestic servants and mercenaries,
and the importation of remittances from the servants and mercenaries, until
the expansion of cottage industry permitted excess hands to remain on the
land (Perrenoud, 1971). Growing cities generated huge migration flows
because cities both (1) recruited many of their workers as temporary
migrants who moved on or returned home and (2) were death traps,
especially for the migrants themselves. Both factors meant that the total
numbers of migrants were far, far greater than net increases through
migration (Sharlin, 1978).

All these features were true of European mobility patterns before the
nineteenth century and continued well into the century. Yet, the nineteenth
century did not simply bring more of the same. Overseas migration, as we
have already seen, played an incomparably greater role than it had in
previous centuries. The net flows of migrants to cities from rural areas rose
far above earlier levels. The average distances people moved undoubtedly
increased. The definitiveness of long-distance moves probably increased as
well: fewer people spending their lifetimes in repeated migration from one
distant location to another. Short-distance migration probably declined, at
least relatively, as people began to substitute daily commutation by rail or
bicycle for longer-term changes of residence. (For a general survey of these
trends, see Tilly, 1978.) With one crucial exception—the influence of
governments, wars, and political crises on international migration was to
become preponderant during the twentieth century—the mobility patterns
with which Europeans are familiar today were taking shape. The mistake is
to think that those contemporary mobility patterns emerged from a
previously immobile world.

Summed up, the nineteenth-century changes in work, mobility, and
population distribution have another important implication. The locus of
proletarianization was shifting radically. For a long time, most individuals
and families who passed into the proletariat had made the fateful transition in
villages and small towns. During the nineteenth century, the balance shifted
toward cities. Within the city, and in the move to the city, people passed from
having some control over their means of production to depending on the sale
of their labor power to others. Those others were mostly capitalists of one
variety or another. The work they offered consisted increasingly of
disciplined wage labor in relatively large organizations: offices, stores,
factories, railroads, hospitals, and so on.

Capitalists, managers, and large organizations took over the task of
creating a compliant proletariat. Whereas the small entrepreneurs who
preceded them had relied on cash payments, personal patronage, and
community pressure to secure compliance, the nineteenth-century capitalist
boldly undertook the creation of new kinds of people: tidy, disciplined, sober,
reliable, and uncomplaining. That they did not succeed is a tribute to the
staying power of the European working class.

The nineteenth century that played itself out in the process had plenty of
 drama, but departed radically from the script conventionally assigned to it.
Instead of master craftsmen who invent or adopt new production techniques
and thereby create the means for expanding their firms, building factories,
drawing more and more peasants into new industrial work, and thus
constructing an “industrial revolution,” we find something quite different:
capitalists who begin the nineteenth century knowing how to sell all sorts of
goods, but not how to make them, and who spend much of the century
struggling to seize control of the labor process from workers who do know
how to produce, but have less and less ability to sell products to their own
advantage.

In place of increasing mobility, we see a growing subordination of mobility
to markets for wage labor. Where analysts have seen accelerating technological
innovation as the stimulus to economic change, we discover capital
accumulation and control of labor power as the motor. In cases where
observers have talked about industrialization, we see extensive deindus-
trialization, at least in the countryside. As alternatives to a supposed
modernization, we face very different processes, much less continuous and
much more filled with conflict and power: capitalization, proletarianization,
state making.

In that context, the struggles during the nineteenth century between
powerholders and ordinary citizens also changed shape. The analysis of
nineteenth-century change as modernization driven by technical innovation
leads easily to an interpretation of conflict as a destructive response to the
strains of rapid, uneven social change. The alternative I have sketched, in
contrast, makes it more plausible that those who struggled were coherent
actors pursuing well-defined interests. The great prominence of artisans and
skilled workers—rather than newly minted proletarians—in nineteenth-
century labor movements makes sense in the light of the effort of employers to
transform artisans and skilled workers into obedient proletarians.

The same perspective reduces the paradox involved in saying that
nineteenth-century workers developed class consciousness, while noting the
large backward-looking components in nineteenth-century working-class
ideologies. The alternative perspective, finally, helps us understand how the
specific forms of popular collective action—the food riots, Rough Music,
machine breaking, strikes, demonstrations, public meetings, and so
Did the cake of custom break?

Much more changed, to be sure, in nineteenth-century Europe. In order to build a comprehensive analysis of nineteenth-century social change, we would have to follow the expansion and elaboration of capitalism much farther. We would have to deal seriously with the concentration of power in national states. We would have to examine the changes in organization, productive technique, communications, and everyday experience that developed from the interaction of capitalism and state making. We would have to take account of the interdependent but distinct trajectories of center and periphery, of North, South, East, and West. The thin slice we have taken from the century is far from a cross section.

Nevertheless, the evidence we have reviewed is broad enough to make clear what did not happen. A congeries of isolated, immobile agrarian societies did not give way under the impact of industrialization, urbanization, and expanding communications. The isolated, immobile societies did not give way during the nineteenth century because they did not exist at the beginning of the century. The European world bequeathed to the nineteenth century by the eighteenth was actually connected and mobile. In its way, it was even industrial. There was no solid cake of custom to break.

What did change, then? The scale of producing organizations increased greatly. The average range of geographic mobility expanded. National states, national politics, and national markets became increasingly dominant. The population of Europe urbanized and proletarianized. The long transition from a high-fertility and high-mortality world began. Inanimate sources of energy started to play an indispensable role in everyday production and consumption. Capitalism matured. The European way of life we now know took shape.

So is there anything wrong with summing up those changes as the “modernization” of Europe? No, if the name is nothing but a convenient name. The errors only begin with the elevation of the idea of modernization into a model of change—especially as a model in which expanded contact with the outside world alters people’s mentalities, and altered mentalities produce a break with traditional forms of behavior. That magic modernism is not only wrong, but unnecessary. The analysis of capitalism and of state making offers a far more adequate basis for the understanding of change in nineteenth-century Europe.

NOTE

1. In Table 12.5, many states, e.g., Greece and Finland, did not exist for some or all of the nineteenth century; in those cases, the figures refer to the boundaries at the time of independence. Others, e.g., Prussia/Germany, changed boundaries radically; in those cases, the figures refer to the boundaries at the date shown. The population estimates in Chandler and Fox (1974) yield slightly higher totals and slightly higher percentages, but the pattern is essentially the same as in my compilations.

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Rereading nineteenth-century social change


Structural location and ideological divergence: Jewish Marxist intellectuals in turn-of-the-century Russia

Robert J. Brym

The sociological problem of the intellectuals

The central tenet of the sociology of knowledge is that ideologies are formulated and accepted in accordance with the existential basis of the ideologist. People, it is held, do not think ideologically as individual atoms, but as members of structurally defined groups.

Since Marx's time, classes have deservedly received the greatest attention in the analysis of ideologies: The beliefs, symbols, and values that help direct political action are often viewed as "embodiments of particular class-relations and class-interests" (Marx, n.d.: vol. 1, 21). The trouble is that this argument is apparently confounded by a whole range of cases. One of the most important of these has to do with the participation of middle-class intellectuals in left-wing social movements. After all, if ideologies are class-based, why should members of the middle class align themselves with, and even articulate the ideologies of, wage laborers? If, as Merton (1968: 517–18) says:

we cannot derive ideas from the objective class position of their exponents, this leaves a wide margin of indeterminacy. It then becomes a further problem to discover why some identify themselves with the characteristic class stratum in which they objectively find themselves whereas others adopt the presuppositions of a class stratum other than their own.

True, a partial resolution of Merton's dilemma may be found even in the corpus of Marx's writings. In The Manifesto of the Communist Party, he and Engels assert that men of letters may come to be associated with the socialist movement because the polarization of classes that accompanies capitalist development causes them to be "precipitated into the proletariat" (Marx and Engels, 1972: 343).

Elite theorists endorse a variant of this interpretation. Michels (1922) comments on how periods of heightened intellectual unrest have often been