

#### 4. Social Causes of the Chinese Revolution

China's basic social conflict was rural. The two opposing sides were the peasant masses and the landed upper class. Alongside the dire poverty and exploitation suffered by immense numbers of peasants, all other problems seemed minor. Nevertheless, urban social problems were never negligible and at times became critical, both for the working class and for the course of Chinese politics.

##### *The Condition of the Urban Classes*

The limited and geographically restricted development of modern industry in twentieth-century China gave rise to a class that lived and worked much as other nascent proletariats had done—150 years earlier in England, a hundred years earlier in France, fifty years earlier in Russia. A long workday, infrequent days of rest (one day a week was exceptional), extensive use of ill-paid female and child labor (especially in the textile industry), a high incidence of crippling accidents and occupational diseases, endemic tuberculosis, arbitrary deductions from wages, harsh rules and regulations, an almost total absence of welfare legislation, an extremely low standard of living, and for many workers chronic indebtedness—all these features of Chinese working-class life are straight out of the social history of nineteenth-century Europe.

To these must be added the special features of China's many precapitalist enterprises:

Some of the match factories and carpet factories, the ceramics and glass works, and the old-style silk and cotton factories could well

have served as an inspiration for even Dante's description of the infernal regions. Pale, sickly creatures move around there in almost total darkness, amidst indescribable filth, and breathing an atmosphere that is insupportable to anyone coming in from outside. At ten o'clock at night, or sometimes even later, they are still at work, and the feeble light of a few oil lamps lends the factories a still more sinister aspect. A few breaks are taken to snatch some food while still at work, or to eat a meal in a courtyard covered with excrement and filth of all kinds. When the time to stop work finally comes, these miserable creatures doss down in any place they can find—the lucky ones on bales of waste material or in the attics if there are any, and the rest on the workshop floor, like chained dogs.<sup>1</sup>

Little by little, however, the workers' lot was improving. Progress was most marked from 1936 to 1946, when real wages rose appreciably, the workday was shortened (though in 1946 it was still about ten hours), child labor almost completely disappeared, and the gap between men's and women's wages diminished.<sup>2</sup> On the eve of the revolution, the problems of the working class had become less acute—and they still affected only 1 per cent of the Chinese population.

The smallness of China's working class did not in itself prevent it from becoming a great, indeed *the* great, revolutionary force, the more so since it was concentrated in a small number of industrial centers that were also among the country's leading political centers. (In similar circumstances the workers of Petrograd and Moscow played a more decisive role in 1917 than Russia's tens of millions of muzhiks.) After such promising beginnings as the Hong Kong strike of 1922, the Chinese labor movement grew so rapidly and spectacularly that it became a major force in the revolutionary upsurge of 1925-27.<sup>3</sup> Yet the proletariat played a negligible role in the last and decisive phase of the revolution. Neither major strikes nor urban uprisings paved

<sup>1</sup> Cited in Jean Chesneau, *The Chinese Labor Movement, 1919-1927* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1968), p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> The average workday in Shanghai was nine hours, 56 minutes, according to a report prepared for the city's Social Affairs Bureau. Cited in A. Doak Barnett, *China on the Eve of Communist Takeover* (New York: Praeger, 1963), p. 79.

<sup>3</sup> See pp. 55-56 above and Chesneau, *The Chinese Labor Movement*.

the way for the Red Army as they had twenty years earlier for Chiang Kai-shek in Shanghai. There were very few workers in the triumphant Red Army; it was composed essentially of peasants and officered by other peasants and intellectuals.

Why did the proletariat default at the decisive moment? No one has offered a satisfactory explanation. One can cite structural causes, notably the weakness of the proletariat's social base, but the proletariat's class enemies were scarcely more numerous and even more heterogeneous.<sup>4</sup> To confine ourselves to direct causes, the main reasons for the noninvolvement of the working class seem to be simply political—the repression of 1927–28 and the organization of semiofficial unions.<sup>5</sup> In the year following the formation of the Nanking government, union leaders and active union members were systematically killed off. The crippled and decimated labor movement was supplanted by a syndicalist system that was sponsored and controlled by the government.<sup>6</sup> For two decades the unions established under this system carried out only one progressive function, the only one they were

<sup>4</sup> The Chinese proletariat was not only small in size, but inexperienced and close to its peasant origins (many workers were seasonal migrants who returned to their village at harvest time). As a class, Chinese workers were more strongly influenced by regional and guild traditions than the *dévorants* and *gavots* of France under Charles X. [The *dévorants* and *gavots* were two of a number of competing mutual-aid societies of a type that originated with a medieval carpenters' association and gradually spread to other professions. These associations generally were limited to a specific occupation, carried on elaborate rituals, and by negotiation or violence acquired a monopoly in a given town. Under the Restoration they filled the vacuum left by the suppression of the guilds and were responsible for many short-lived, uncoordinated strikes.—Trans.]

<sup>5</sup> It remains, of course, to go beyond the direct causes. Why did the coordinated policy of repression and government syndicalism succeed? Did its success show the strength of the Chinese bourgeoisie, as represented by Chiang and the Nationalist regime? Probably not. In any case, given the dearth of research on the Kuomintang, any such hypothesis must be purely speculative. Equally hazardous (or at least premature) is any effort to attribute working-class passivity in 1946–49 to deteriorating economic conditions. From the little we know about economic conditions in those years, we can just as well argue the opposite case; it is a fact, for example, that the rare instances in which the proletariat seemed to throw off its lethargy (notably in early 1947 and early 1948 in Shanghai) coincided with periods of severe economic crisis.

<sup>6</sup> Union officials had to be members of the Kuomintang, and in some cases were directly appointed by the party. In big factories, membership in the government unions was obligatory. Since union funds came not from dues paid by the workers but from a special tax paid by the employer, financial dependence was a further guarantee of docility.

permitted: negotiating specific improvements for the workers. The results obtained by their pragmatic opportunism were necessarily won at the price of accepting the political and economic status quo.

Alongside these sham unions, which had more in common with the corporations of fascist Italy than with real labor unions, a free labor movement survived; but it was persecuted and weak, had no real hold on the working masses, and signaled its existence only in sporadic and quickly suppressed explosions. Outside CCP-controlled areas, there was no unofficial labor movement worth the name. Consider, for example, the great port and industrial center of Tientsin, which had one of the country's largest working-class populations. In the spring of 1948, during the Sixth Congress of the "Pan-Chinese" (pro-Communist) General Union, which claimed to represent 2,660,000 blue- and white-collar workers in both the "White areas" and the Liberated Areas, Tientsin was in the throes of an economic slump;<sup>7</sup> a number of factories had closed, and unemployment was widespread. Yet despite the fact that this slump was known to have been caused by deliberate government policy,<sup>8</sup> and the fact that Communist armies were only thirty to forty miles to the north, west, and south, no sign of strikes or subversive activity disturbed the calm on Tientsin's labor front. The Chinese Communists were wise to build up the military power of their peasant armies rather than count on the revolutionary ardor of the urban proletariat.

China's bourgeoisie, for its part, was for a time won over to revolution by its nationalist sentiments, as the bourgeoisies of other colonial and semicolonial countries had been. But for this class to rise in protest against China's political and social sys-

<sup>7</sup> In Communist terminology, the Liberated Areas were the areas that had fallen under Communist control during the war. The term later was applied to all the territory over which the CCP gained control between 1945 and 1949.

<sup>8</sup> Twenty-one of the city's 54 soap factories and 36 oil refineries were shut down in January 1948, after the government issued a decree limiting imports entering the port of Tientsin to 7.8 per cent of the country's total imports (as opposed to an average of 18 to 20 per cent before the Second World War). This quota was fixed as part of a general policy of discriminating against North China, which was in imminent danger of falling to the Communists. A. Doak Barnett, *China on the Eve*, pp. 57–58.

tem, it would have had to be impatient to throw off the yoke of the traditional ruling class,<sup>9</sup> like the French bourgeoisie under the Old Regime; and it was not. One might even suggest that the Chinese bourgeoisie was starting to transform itself peacefully into China's new privileged class.<sup>10</sup> And yet despite its rising fortunes, in comparison with its French counterpart it was lacking not so much in motivation as in strength. This ascendant class was still extremely small and rather marginal to the Chinese world; it was not a class to lead or inspire a revolution.<sup>11</sup>

One small segment of the bourgeoisie, if the term is conceived broadly and not limited to its economic connotations, did play a crucial role throughout the Chinese Revolution—the intelligentsia. But like the capitalists who sided with the revolution, the “modern” intellectuals did not consider social questions as such to be decisive, at least not directly or exclusively. For the most part, China's left-wing intellectuals came from the upper social strata.<sup>12</sup> They had their economic problems, to be sure: unemployment struck many young university graduates in the early 1930's, and inflation had even more serious effects during and after the Second World War.<sup>13</sup> Yet it was not their difficult material situation that made intellectuals into revolutionaries, but ideological commitment and a feeling of malaise. Social factors contributed to this malaise, tellingly in many cases, but most intellectuals regarded social ills as but one element in “the Chinese crisis,” which they saw chiefly in nationalist terms. The mi-

<sup>9</sup> In the Chinese case, the landed upper class, whose influence was declining.

<sup>10</sup> The entrepreneurial class, which on the whole prospered from 1911 to 1927, continued to flourish under the Kuomintang, but at the price of trimming its sails and becoming to some extent a party to the regime. In some ways its relations with the government recall the *kuan-tu shang-pan* system of the last decades of the Manchu dynasty (“Direction by officials, management by merchants”). The “Great Families” of trade, industry, and banking were given extraordinary privileges by the government bureaucracy as a result of their close ties, and in some cases identity, with the ruling political class.

<sup>11</sup> It ended up joining the revolution when inflation and maladroit administration (see pp. 196–97) had driven it to desperation.

<sup>12</sup> Their families belonged either to the landed upper class or to the commercial bourgeoisie.

<sup>13</sup> A seeming paradox is that engineering undergraduates were particularly hard-hit by unemployment. As in many other underdeveloped countries, and for the same reasons, the two main careers open to returned students were politics and teaching.

nority who gave social questions top priority were moved much more by the situation of the masses than by their own problems. Their concern was first with the urban poor, and then, increasingly, with the rural masses.

### *The Misery of Peasant Life*

The peasants up and down the valley [in West China, on the borders of Szechwan and Shensi] lived and died in their special fashion. . . . The father of one family died. Since his wife had been failing and the family was very poor, they decided not to bury him right away. Perhaps the old woman would die, too, before really warm weather came and the old man began to smell. Then they could save by burying both with one funeral. The old lady agreed, so they stored the coffin in their darkest, coldest room, the old woman's sickroom, and piled stones on its lid to keep the dogs out.<sup>14</sup>

A historian's job is not to report cases of individual hardship, and certainly not to gratify a taste for the sordid and horrifying. It is not even primarily to recapture the life of the past; a poor historian it would be who forsook the world of ideas and the search for effects and causes. Nevertheless, I shall here cite other vignettes gleaned from the press and from memoirs and eyewitness accounts, vignettes that I think bring us closer to the heart of our subject (how the Chinese Revolution was born) than discussions of the interpretation and application of Marxism in China. The source of the revolution, the real strength of the CCP, must be sought in the living conditions that prevailed from one end of rural China to the other, where poverty, abuse, and early death were the only prospects for nearly half a billion people.

Dire poverty is evident in the passage quoted above, along with the kind of brutalization it led to. Moreover, for the Chinese sensibility, permeated by the importance of ancestor worship, the bitterest aspect of this situation is not the fate of the widow but that of the unfortunate dead man, who is condemned to wander, a prey to evil spirits, until he has been prop-

<sup>14</sup> This passage comes from Graham Peck's fine book *Two Kinds of Time*, rev. ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967), p. 208.

erly buried. The last sentence in the passage alludes to the dogs who devoured corpses, a not uncommon sight in the Chinese countryside; in periods of famine, they attacked not only the dead, but also people who were still alive but too weak to defend themselves. And in mountainous regions, if one can take Lu Hsün's word for it,<sup>15</sup> wolves made quick work of babies that overworked mothers left unattended for an instant.

The second document I shall quote, consisting of excerpts from the correspondence of an American missionary couple, takes us to the other end of China, to a hospital in northern Kiangsi whose patients suffered from strange complaints:

Another desperate case that we treated for nothing [was] that of a young man who looked like a skeleton. One would have said there was nothing but skin on his bones. . . . His family was so poor that they had been obliged to sell him. . . . He was accordingly sent . . . to a family that had no sons. When, six years later, a son was finally born, his new family simply threw him out. And the poverty is so great in the region that one month spent begging and homeless brought him to death's door.

Another patient:

\* A young conscript was not yet familiar with the demands of military life and did not answer the sentinel's challenge fast enough: he paid for it with a bullet in the lung.

Still another:

A man who was attacked by a panther in the Kuling mountains, ten miles from here [the hospital was in Kiukiang, on the southern bank of the Yangtze]. This is the fourth such case that I have treated. This one I was able to cure; the last one did not survive the panther bites.<sup>16</sup>

Once again, in these simple medical notes, we read the familiar message of poverty and brutalization. Even extreme poverty

<sup>15</sup> In *Benediction*, which I consider one of his finest tales.

<sup>16</sup> Letters from Georgina and Edward Perkins, dated February 25 and August 22, 1931; in the archives of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Interchurch Center, New York.

rarely led to the selling of a son, as in the first case reported here, though the sale of daughters was common. As for brutalization, after a boy spends six years living with a family as their adopted son, the birth of a baby makes him superfluous and he is sent packing. His adopted family could not afford the luxury of being pitying, or, in rich men's language, humane. The doctor's notes show the brutality, too, of military life; the army treated its recruits, almost all of whom were peasants, with the same contempt, cruelty, and disregard for human life that characterized its relations with peasant civilians, who were constantly subjected to forced labor and arbitrary taxation, constantly brutalized and plundered. The last case, of the man wounded by a panther, reminds us of other factors making rural life precarious. The insecurity of the Chinese countryside in the twentieth century (an insecurity to which both wild animals and bandits contributed) was comparable to that of settled clearings in early medieval Europe, with their surrounding forests full of wolves and outlaws. In China, danger began with the first stretch of uncultivated high ground. It lay in wait, too, along roads, rivers, and even railroads; many a passenger in wagons, boats, and trains was attacked, robbed, or held for ransom, and more than a few were killed.

A final vignette, the last to be quoted here:

Everywhere one sees people beseeching the gods, praying for rainfall, putting up altars, burning incense, and staging processions in honor of the Dragon King. The most tragic of all are the peasants who offer themselves as sacrifices to make the rain come . . . ; in Ningpo, ten peasants hurled themselves into the Dragon's Pond in hopes of appeasing the monster.<sup>17</sup>

This passage evokes an enemy that periodically assailed the Chinese peasant—drought. But above all it again evokes the mental universe of the early medieval West. Peasants led by tragic superstitions to drown themselves in the hope that the dragon

<sup>17</sup> Excerpt from an article in *Ta-kung-pao*, one of the country's leading daily newspapers, published on July 14, 1934. The area referred to is a hundred miles south of the mouth of the Yangtze, in Chekiang province.

who dispensed rain would at least spare their families—it is indeed our medieval ancestors that these contemporaries, these future soldiers of the Red Army, call to mind. The similarity in outlook reflects their equal helplessness before the forces of nature, the equal precariousness of human life, a precariousness heightened in the Chinese case by semifeudal oppression.<sup>18</sup>

The word oppression immediately leads us to ask whether the Chinese peasant's wretchedness was due primarily to injustice and exploitation, or to such objective factors as the backwardness of the economy and the relationship between available wealth and the number of mouths to be fed. Was the maldistribution of wealth to blame, or was there too little wealth to distribute? Chinese Communist historians naturally stress human responsibilities and relentlessly denounce the landowners' exploitation of the peasantry. This denunciation, though manifestly called for, is to my mind inadequate. I believe that objective conditions, i.e. economic and demographic conditions, were in themselves sufficient to make the distress of the vast majority inevitable.<sup>19</sup> But because human actions arouse more indignation, they are more useful in inciting peasant revolt; the excess comfort of a privileged few, their arbitrary and oppressive conduct, seem less bearable than a general scarcity of resources. That is why, in discussing the social causes of the Chinese Revolution, I have chosen to give relatively more extensive treatment to the exploitation of man by man than to the objective givens of the Chinese situation, which have defied and will long continue to defy the policies and programs of the People's Republic.

### *Demography and Economy*

One of the most remarkable facts of world demographic history, a fact whose full consequences are still to be felt, is the extraordinary growth of the Chinese population in the last few

<sup>18</sup> "Semi" should be emphasized; modern Chinese society, as we shall see, was very different from feudal Europe.

<sup>19</sup> Needless to say, it is only for analytical purposes that we distinguish between natural and man-made causes of peasant suffering. Obviously this suffering resulted from a total situation, in which political and social organization and the heritage of a long history weighed heavily.

centuries. If the official figures can be believed, shortly after the People's Republic was founded its population was ten times that of the last dynasty, the Ch'ing, three centuries earlier; mainland China had 580 million people in 1953, as opposed to ten million households or 50–60 million people in 1651. The Chinese population today is reasonably estimated at 750–800 million. The contemporary population growth is not particularly astonishing; similar increases have occurred in most underdeveloped countries and can be convincingly accounted for by demographers. What is harder to explain is the earlier growth of the Chinese population, and particularly its rate. There were 432 million Chinese by 1851, according to official estimates. If we make only the most rudimentary corrections in these estimates—the one for 1851 may be a bit high, whereas the one for 1651 is probably no more than half the true figure—we must still conclude that China's already vast population tripled in 200 years, from 120–140 million in 1651 to 350–430 million in 1851. In the eighteenth century the population seems to have more than doubled in less than a hundred years, from some 150 million in 1700 to 313 million in 1794. And all this growth came *before* any real contact with the West, *before* the beginning of industrialization.

Whatever the causes of this phenomenon, which belies the classical view of population growth in premodern societies, its effect in our time is clear.<sup>20</sup> On the eve of the revolution, the

<sup>20</sup> In the last two centuries China may have been paying the price of the extraordinary successes of earlier centuries. For nearly a thousand years, according to Ho Ping-ti's classic demographic history, China's food situation was appreciably better than Europe's. A series of advances, some of them revolutionary, made possible increase after increase in the acreage under cultivation and in per-acre yield, and every increase helped to feed an expanding population. Some advances, such as the introduction of early-maturing strains of rice, dated from the Sung dynasty (960–1279). Another advance, the southward spread of grains grown in northern China (wheat, barley, millet, and kaoliang), had been favored by the Sung emperors but did not have its full effect until centuries later; the introduction of new food crops from America (potatoes, maize, and sweet potatoes) had an even greater delayed impact. With these native and imported crops it became possible to cultivate soil too dry or too light for rice, and thus to achieve a new equilibrium between food supply and population; in the eighteenth century, settlement of the highlands of Central China went hand in hand with population growth. See Ho Ping-ti, *Studies on the Population of China, 1358–1953*, Chapter Eight. (The estimates given in the previous paragraph are also taken from Ho's work, pp. 270, 281, and *passim*.)

\* pressure of population on land in China was greater than it had ever been before. According to several inquiries carried out between 1930 and 1935, the average peasant family plot was 3.3 acres. It goes without saying that there were marked variations in average plot size, depending on the region, the climate, and the fertility of the soil. In a village in Yunnan (the province bordering Indochina) studied around 1940 by one of China's great rural sociologists, the average family had the use of slightly less than one acre. A whole village in Yunnan was then roughly equivalent in size to a single family farm in the American Middle West, and the two were also equivalent in production. In the one case the land fed the five or six members of an American family, in the other the five or six hundred inhabitants of a Chinese village.

\* One last point by way of emphasizing demographic pressures on agriculture and peasant life. A plague as common as drought, which was responsible for more deaths than floods, locusts, and outlaws put together, can of course be explained by geography and climate. But demographic pressure is an even better explanation, for it brought to the Great Plain of North China a population density unknown in any other semi-arid region of the world. Rainfall there was, but nowhere near enough to grow food for so dense a population.

In the 1930's Japanese farms were even smaller than Chinese farms, but though the Japanese peasant was far from living a life of ease, he was much better off than his Chinese counterpart. The reason was Japan's relatively advanced science and technology, or, to put it another way, China's relatively backward economy.

\* Chinese agriculture was by no means primitive. The Chinese farmer's refined techniques and infinite painstakingness (the only resource he never stinted on was his own labor) have been compared to the highest form of gardening. But the Chinese farmer's art belonged to a prescientific era, which meant that no matter how untiring and ingenious his efforts, he could never hope for more than a modest yield. As I have suggested, the per acre yield obtained with such great effort in Yunnan should

be compared to that of the large mechanized farm of the American prairie.

The methods of the Chinese farmer were prescientific. His choice of seed was generally left to chance; as readily as not, he might plant an arid slope with a variety of grain that required irrigation, or even the flood conditions of humid bottomlands. Even if the Chinese farmer had had some knowledge of modern agronomy, the crudeness of his equipment would have kept him from applying it. Deep plowing was not possible with the plows used in many provinces. The inadequately tilled and aerated land was subjected to exhausting demands: one or two harvests a year, without fallow periods or crop rotation, for hundreds if not thousands of years. After the harvest, the land was stripped of straw, grass, leaves, and other bits of organic material, which was carefully hoarded for use as fuel.<sup>21</sup> And if much was required of the land, little was given it in return. As much fertilizer as possible was applied, but at most it was far too little. Animal manure was rare in a country where men had to be fed before any thought could be given to raising animals. Chemical fertilizers were out of the question; almost no such fertilizer was produced, and even if there had been more, the peasants would not have had the capital to buy it. They compensated for the soil's deficiency as best they could, not only with human excrement, which they collected systematically and measured out by the spoonful for each plant,<sup>22</sup> but with all the low-quality, low-cost soil-enriching materials that they could find or fabricate—low-cost, that is, provided one disregards time and toil. The laboriousness of some of their methods seems almost insane to one who is not driven by necessity to the same extremes. Some peasants actually removed soil from canals and riverbeds

<sup>21</sup> Wood was lacking because of the deforestation that had occurred earlier, notably during the eighteenth century (*ibid.*, pp. 146-48). This, too, had stemmed from the need to bring new fields under cultivation, and had in turn caused further suffering by aggravating the effects of floods. Coal was also scarce. We know now that China has abundant coal deposits; but the size of these deposits was undreamed of until recently, and those that were known were only sporadically and inefficiently exploited.

<sup>22</sup> The practice had tragic consequences. Among the occupational diseases of the Chinese farmer, the deadliest ones came from working barefooted in plots fertilized with night soil.

as soon as a thin layer of fertilizing alluvium had been deposited on it, and carried it off to apply to their fields.

The peasant's plight was further complicated by all sorts of psychological, social, and cultural patterns and practices, not all of them the consequences of material penury. Among these were a propensity to adhere to established routine, which inhibited the adoption of new techniques and plant varieties; the practice of ancestor worship, which required that space be set aside for graves on plots of land that were already too small; and the absence of hygiene measures, which resulted in numerous plant diseases and killed large numbers of silkworms. Another example was the extreme parcelization of land, the result of a long-standing system of inheritance that did not favor the eldest child. Among other things, parcelization led to wasteful duplication of effort, obstructed both drainage and irrigation, and prevented an effective attack on destructive insects.

The Chinese peasant accepted poverty as his fate. How could he escape when there were so many obstacles, each related to others that were still more unmovable? With apparently equal resignation, he accepted the fact that other men were rich and lived off his misery.

#### *Village Class Structure*

Economic development in this economy of scarcity was further hobbled by the Chinese social structure. Although much of China's arable land was divided into plots too small to be economically viable, the heart of the agrarian problem lay not in parcelization but in the prevalence of tenant farming. To be sure, tenant farming and land rent are by no means the whole story of the exploitation of the peasant by the landed upper class. Before we discuss this question in detail, it should be made clear that on the eve of the Communist revolution, China had very few large landowners; even the richest man in a village rarely owned more than 50 acres.<sup>23</sup> We are dealing, then,

<sup>23</sup> And in some cases only two to five acres. A district in Kwangtung province, for example, was investigated in great detail in 1933. On the average, resident landlords

with a society of poor people in which even the well-to-do had very little property.<sup>24</sup> It should also be pointed out that a little more than half the Chinese peasants owned the land they tilled. (The proportion was much higher in the North, and decidedly lower in Central and South China, particularly near cities, rivers, and ports, where the impact of a money economy and Western influence appears to have favored tenant farming.) Moreover, the majority of tenant farmers were landowners as well; that is, they worked both their own tiny plot, which was too small to support their family, and land belonging to someone else. Only about 20 per cent of Chinese peasants were tenant farmers pure and simple, though the figure rose to 75 per cent or even higher in the South.

With these stipulations in mind, let us look at the approximate division of landownership in China proper at the end of the Second World War:

<i>Social class</i>	<i>Percentage of rural families</i>	<i>Percentage of landholdings</i>
Upper class	3%	26%
Rich peasants	7	27
Middle peasants	22	25
Poor peasants	68	22

Our table shows that 10 per cent of the rural families owned slightly more than half the land.<sup>25</sup> This disproportion was least marked in the North and greatest in the South, where close to half the land belonged to large landowners and tenant farming was much more prevalent.

It is not patently absurd to compare the Russian aristocracy in the waning years of the Empire with the French nobility of

owned 16.7 mou or just over two and a half acres (a mou is .1518 acres). Absentee landlords, who were fewer in number, were slightly better off.

<sup>24</sup> Sun Yat-sen once quipped that Chinese society was composed of only two classes: the very poor and the less poor.

<sup>25</sup> Taken from Ch'en Han-seng, *The Chinese Peasant*, Oxford Pamphlets on Indian Affairs, No. 33 (London: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. 13. Excluded from the tabulation are the Northeast (Manchuria), which was recently settled and therefore atypical, and the Northwest (Tibet, Sinkiang, Outer Mongolia), which had a more archaic social structure than China proper.

the Old Regime, different though the dramatis personae of Chekhov and Beaumarchais may be. But we must immediately discard any notion that the class against whom the Chinese Revolution was made resembled the old guards of 1789 and 1917. Still less was it like the hereditary nobility of the medieval West.<sup>26</sup> China's landed upper class was *sui generis*. In some respects it must be ranked higher, in some respects lower, than its closest European counterparts. It did not have anything like their wealth; hence the term gentry would adequately convey its economic position. But to its limited economic power—which was not all that limited in a Chinese village, where it made possible the inordinate privilege of leisure and sometimes even a superfluity of possessions—were added intellectual prestige, as prized in China as noble blood was elsewhere, and political power, a monopoly of the educated elite. For centuries these privileges had enabled the large landowners to dominate and govern Chinese society. The upheavals of the early twentieth century had begun to undermine the landlords' dominant position, but though they lacked the vitality as a class to adapt to the twentieth century, they were still strong enough to defend their threatened privileges.

What role did the upper class play in rural economic life in the twentieth century? As landowners they received land rent from their tenants.<sup>27</sup> As the holders of all sorts of local administrative responsibilities, they received various fees and gratuities. As grain merchants (for land rent was often paid in kind and led to marketable surpluses), they were almost automatically speculators under the market conditions then prevailing. Finally, they were of necessity the local moneylenders, for they alone, or almost alone, had money to spare in a land where borrowers were legion and interest rates high. Rarely did the same person fulfill all these functions. The moneylender might be the brother

<sup>26</sup> In China there were neither ties of personal dependence nor hereditary membership in a closed caste. As for the tastes and values of the professional warrior, the very idea would have horrified the Chinese scholar-official.

<sup>27</sup> Although land rent was far from negligible, it was not so great as is sometimes thought. In Szechwan in 1940, for example, land rent less taxes yielded a return on capital of 8 per cent. Other estimates range from 10 to 11 per cent.

or uncle of the local landowner, the grain merchant the steward of the great absentee landlord. It was the upper class as a whole that dominated all four sectors of the rural economy.<sup>28</sup>

The large landowners were almost the only villagers who did not till the soil. With few exceptions, all the other classes participated in productive work of one sort or another.<sup>29</sup> One of these classes, the rural proletariat, does not appear as such in the table on p. 95 for the simple reason that it owned no land.<sup>30</sup> This marginal class, composed of paid farm workers, temporary or itinerant hired hands, peddlers, and vagabonds, had certain characteristics that in less deprived societies define the subproletariat. From its ranks were to come some of China's most dedicated revolutionaries.

By definition much larger in size than this marginal class were the social classes that were a more integral part of village society: the peasants properly speaking. No single criterion satisfactorily distinguishes the rich peasants from the poor and middle peasants;<sup>31</sup> at the very least, both the land owned or worked and the work force employed on it must be taken into account.<sup>32</sup> Let us designate as middle peasants those peasants who could make ends meet in a normal year without either hiring anyone else or working for anyone else. Those who continuously employed paid workmen from outside their family during the busy season and had under cultivation an amount of land greater than the average middle peasant holding in the same village were the rich peasants. Either one of these two criteria may suffice to define the rich peasant—for example, if his landholdings were at

<sup>28</sup> Sometimes they had competition from rich peasants. When Mao Tse-tung's father became a rich peasant, he also became a grain merchant.

<sup>29</sup> In some cases a substantial proportion of the small landowners (30 per cent in the village of Lutsun, in Yunnan province, according to Fei Hsiao-tung) did no work at all. In an economy with no real capacity for expansion, to work hard at getting rich was regarded as taking the bread out of someone else's mouth. Fei Hsiao-tung and Chang Chih-i, *Earthbound China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945), p. 84.

<sup>30</sup> Actually, the rural proletariat is counted in with the poor peasants there.

<sup>31</sup> As we have seen, even tenant farming was less a matter of social class than of geography.

<sup>32</sup> Twenty mou of rented land may be taken as roughly equal to eleven or twelve mou of land a peasant owned himself. The ratio differs from region to region, and even from district to district, with variations in land rent rates.

least twice those of the middle peasant. Poor peasant families, by contrast, were those who depended on the wages of one or more members for their subsistence, who had less land of their own than the middle peasants, or both. This classification established, it would be wise to use as a control—and a corrective—such criteria as indebtedness, which was chronic among the poor peasants, generally seasonal among the middle peasants, and rare and temporary among the rich peasants.<sup>33</sup>

These distinctions are tedious but fundamental. They are the very ones used by the Communists from the Kiangsi period on,<sup>34</sup> the basis of their agrarian revolution—and of the Chinese Revolution itself. As difficult to define as they are to distinguish, these social categories correspond not only to real divisions in the village class structure but to the self-perception of the people in question, who saw themselves spontaneously as rich, middle, or poor peasants. Between these categories there was no unbridgeable chasm: a rise in status was always within the realm of possibility,<sup>35</sup> and falls were common. Nonetheless, there were at times marked inequalities. In one district on the Kwangtung coast, for example, the average rich peasant family owned two-thirds as much land as the average member of the upper class (who, to be sure, had other sources of income) and something like ten times as much as the average poor peasant!<sup>36</sup> It is no surprise that rich and poor peasants were not equally receptive to the speeches and suggestions of professional revolutionaries. The class that listened to the revolutionaries, the class they cultivated, the back-

<sup>33</sup> Adapted from Ch'en Han-seng, *Landlord and Peasant in China: A Study of the Agrarian Crisis in South China* (New York: International Publishers, 1936), p. 8.

<sup>34</sup> With the qualification that the CCP's basic criteria, though they have varied with shifts in the party's agrarian policy, have been stricter for each class than the ones proposed here, and in my judgment have suffered from excessive rigidity and narrowness. See, among other discussions of the subject, Mao Tse-tung, "How to Differentiate the Classes in the Rural Areas" (1933), *Selected Works*, I, 137-39.

<sup>35</sup> Even, though the odds against it were enormous, from the peasantry to the upper class, since literati status was traditionally defined by the passing of government examinations.

<sup>36</sup> According to my source (Ch'en Han-seng, *Landlord and Peasant*, Table 11, p. 127), which unfortunately fails to distinguish between poor peasants and the relatively small rural proletariat, the average family holding of the two classes combined was one-thirteenth that of the rich peasants (.87 mou as opposed to 11.33 mou). Here and elsewhere the word "district" is a translation of *hsien* (often translated "county"), an administrative unit that usually had a population of several hundred thousand people.

bone and flesh of the Chinese Revolution, was the poor peasant class, which is to say the backbone and flesh of China herself.

### *Land Rent, Land Taxes, Usury*

The only social categories that can be defined with precision cross-cut others: e.g. the prosperous tenant farmer,<sup>37</sup> the small landowner who worked his own land and was on the brink of destitution. The categories do, however, enable us to see more clearly the victims of the ills that struck the peasant masses, of which the two leading ones were land rent and land taxes.

It is hard to say just how much land rent amounted to, the more so since it varied considerably from one place to another and payment took many different forms.<sup>38</sup> On the eve of the Second World War, land rent probably averaged around 45 per cent of the total harvest. Although this figure is somewhat lower than the ones given in most books on China, it still represents an enormous burden on the tenant farmer. What was left after he paid the rent was scarcely enough to keep his family alive in a year when no extraordinary natural or man-made disaster upset the precarious balance. Refusal to pay land rent was an increasingly common occurrence, as was the practice of dodging the landlord's collection agent when he made his customary rounds. But it was difficult, and dangerous to boot, to try to evade the rent collector. Not only was the legal arm of the government always at the landlord's disposal (recalcitrant tenant farmers were promptly clapped into prison), but the landlord could also take back his land and rent it to a more docile tenant.<sup>39</sup>

### *Omnipresent land hunger and the resulting competition among*

<sup>37</sup> Such cases were of course most common in the South. In the coastal Kwangtung district mentioned earlier, one rich peasant in six owned no land whatever.

<sup>38</sup> Rent was most often paid in kind, less often in money, and on rare occasion in work. Sometimes the rent was a fixed amount, but sharecropping arrangements were more common. In some cases the sharecropper paid the owner a percentage of all the crops harvested, in others a percentage of the main crop only; the variations were legion.

<sup>39</sup> This was not true at all times and in all places. In some places the tenants had tenancy rights (the so-called surface rights) and the landlord only ownership rights (subsoil rights), which meant that he could not force the tenant off the land. Elsewhere the tenant's rights to the land were fixed not by law but by practice; the owner could not evict the tenant except for cause. As in medieval and early modern France, practice varied from province to province and sometimes from district to district, which makes generalizing difficult and all generalizations partly false.

tenant farmers reinforced the landlord's position,<sup>40</sup> just as the plethora of would-be factory hands on the outskirts of London and Manchester favored the manufacturer in the early nineteenth century.

Certain widespread practices of more or less recent origin further aggravated the tenant farmer's plight.<sup>41</sup> Among them were the practice of exacting advance payments on land rent, and that of requiring a deposit (ranging from 10 to 200 per cent of the total rent!) on conclusion of the rental agreement.<sup>42</sup> Tenants who could not pay the deposit frequently borrowed part or all of it, at interest, from the landlord himself. Another relatively new practice, which was particularly prevalent in the fertile river deposits (*sha-t'ien* or sand fields) of the Sikiang delta in South China, was the subleasing of land. Land-renting companies leased clan holdings of several thousand acres and divided them into a great many plots; the tenant farmer on each plot paid a rent twice the amount paid to the clan. Some exceptional customs, most commonly found in the western provinces, recall the forced labor and services of feudal Europe. When the master's family sought refuge in the mountains from the summer heat, the tenant farmer was sometimes transformed for a week or two into an unpaid coolie who helped the family with the move. It does not follow that tenant farmers were in any sense subjects of the landlord. Outside Tibet and a few other areas, the tenant farmer was unquestionably a free peasant who was not subject to any sort of legal servitude. His servitude was economic.

Land taxes were the second great torment of rural life. The land tax was by no means comparable in amount to land rent; indeed, it was relatively moderate. But the peasant had no idea what the legal tax rate was, and no collector was held to it.

<sup>40</sup> There were even cases, notably on clan holdings, of tenants bribing the official in charge of land rentals in hopes of getting a slightly larger plot.

<sup>41</sup> Nor did the costly customs of earlier times die out altogether. Many a tenant in the 1930's was still constrained to supply certain obligatory meals to his landlord and various gifts—e.g. chicken, wood, straw sandals, and fish—to his landlord's agent.

<sup>42</sup> In two districts in Kiangsu province, the percentage of farms rented with an advance deposit rose between 1905 and 1924 from 73 to 88 per cent in one case, and from 25.5 to 62 per cent in the other.

Often the theoretical amount of the tax was doubled by so-called surtaxes, and sometimes it was increased tenfold.<sup>43</sup> Originally a given surtax was imposed for a specific purpose—to pay for a new canal, school, or road, for the taking of a census, for an anti-bandit campaign. But the local administration rarely renounced a source of additional revenue once the original purpose was accomplished. From the administrator's point of view, the repeal or reduction of a tax was justified only when popular protests promised to make it inordinately difficult to collect.

After surtaxes, the most striking abuse was collection of the land tax long before it theoretically fell due, a practice begun under the Empire. Sometimes local administrators, but more often military potentates, would collect taxes due years or even decades later so as to pay the back wages they owed their mercenaries or to finance an expedition against a neighboring warlord. The record is held by Szechwan, which was fought over by rival warlords in the 1930's: in one district the taxes due in 1971 were assessed in January 1933, and in another those due in 1974 were assessed in April 1933. Elsewhere, eleven years' land taxes were collected in a year and a half (October 1931 to March 1933).

The last abuse—the last one to be mentioned here, that is, for the subject is inexhaustible—was the monopoly on tax collection sometimes held by a hereditary caste, which kept its account books closed even to the district magistrate. In a district near Nanking, monopolistic tax collectors are believed to have turned in less than a third of the sum they actually collected in 1932. The profits of the farmers-general under the Old Regime in France pale by comparison.

Finally, precisely as in France under the Old Regime, inequities of all sorts were accompanied by numerous inconsistencies and irregularities. A piece of land might be subject to double taxation because it had been counted twice in the last census; elsewhere, no land survey had been made and some families

<sup>43</sup> In Chekiang province in the early 1930's the various surtaxes amounted on the average to one and a half times the land tax, but there were districts in neighboring Kiangsi province where surtaxes were twenty times the nominal tax, and even fifty times (in 1933)!

paid no taxes at all. The tax rate varied from one district to another, as did the timing and frequency of collections. The peasant, never knowing when the next payment would be due, tended to think of the land tax as an arbitrary exaction, something he had to pay because he was in no position to argue with the revenue officials. The tax-collecting agency was a powerful one; it could not only arrest delinquent taxpayers but also punish them, and frequently did so. The overlapping powers of tax collectors, the many abuses of those powers, and the general muddle had an effect that went beyond the purely fiscal (here again one thinks of 1788). All these difficulties were evidence of an ineffectual and arbitrary judicial system that did not fall with equal weight on all.

The peasant often had to take out a loan to pay his taxes. In rural China, as in every society of small producers, the problem of credit was a constant, unremitting torment. To pay land rent and land taxes, and to buy the necessary minimum of equipment and essential items that the family could not produce itself (perhaps a quarter of its total consumption), the peasant's main and sometimes only source of income was his small marketable surplus. Marketing conditions were highly unfavorable to the small producer. His lack of capital and his primitive means of transport, not to mention numerous tolls and local taxes, generally kept him from selling his produce in distant markets; add to this the absence of a unified national market and a general ignorance of prices paid elsewhere, and it is clear that everything conspired to put the peasant farmer at the mercy of the grain merchant, the man who could stock up, acquire information, and wait.

Having sold his surplus produce (and sometimes a little more) right after the harvest, when prices were at their lowest, the peasant could earn no more until the next harvest. If he had no other way to subsist, he begged a loan from the village moneylender or from one in the neighboring town.<sup>44</sup> Alternatively, he

<sup>44</sup> According to a 1933 investigation of twenty-two provinces by the official Committee for Agricultural Research, nearly 90 per cent of all loans to peasants came from traditional moneylenders, either individual lenders (large landowners, 24 per cent;

could go to the pawnbroker, whose rates were also extremely high (provided he had something to pawn, which was not always the case), sometimes to a neighbor who was a little less hard up than he, or to his landlord. It was not unheard of for a landlord to lend money at moderate interest or even to advance small sums at no interest. The professional moneylender's rates varied considerably, depending on the season, on whether the loan was in money or in grain (grain was much more costly), on whether the harvest had been poor or abundant, etc. For a cash loan, annual interest of 20 to 30 per cent, deducted in advance, was common, but annual interest was known to reach 100 per cent or more. In hard times, interest rates rose to incredible heights. Combined with the concurrent rise in grain prices in such times, a food loan stripped many a family of its land. Borrowing was the classic road to dispossession, to the point where many peasants were resigned to selling their children rather than mortgage their land. Nonetheless, investigations in 1929, 1934, and 1935 revealed that almost half of all peasant families (44 per cent)—poor, middle, and "rich"—were in debt.

Although I have not exhausted the list of serious, even tragic rural problems, it is perhaps worth mentioning again a plague that was almost as serious as usury, namely chronic insecurity. The extortions of soldiers and bandits<sup>45</sup> are political problems, to be sure, but their relation to socioeconomic conditions is obvious. The condottieri recruited their mercenaries from a starving peasantry. Banditry arose from the kind of conditions depicted in a dispatch from the American consul at Foochow describing the impact of famine on two districts in Fukien province and estimating the number of deaths from starvation and suicide. He sums up the survivors' fate as follows: "The strong have become bandits and the weak beggars."<sup>46</sup>

merchants, 25 per cent; rich peasants, 18 per cent) or businesses that lent money at interest (village shops, 13 per cent; pawnshops, 9 per cent). Modern banks accounted for only 2.4 per cent of peasant loans.

<sup>45</sup> The line between soldiers and bandits was not always easy to draw; some men switched from one category to the other depending on whether or not their wages were paid on time.

<sup>46</sup> United States, Department of State, 893.00 PR Foochow/68 (dispatch of Sept. 2, 1933).

*Was the Peasant's Condition Deteriorating?*

At this point the reader may object that the picture given here of the extreme poverty and exploitation of the peasant masses is essentially timeless. How is it that comparable albeit different social conditions persisted for generations and even centuries without apparently compromising a political stability that is traditionally presented as unique in world history?

This objection raises two orders of questions, the first concerned with changes in the peasant's condition, the second with the peasantry's capacity for revolution. On the first point, we know that even apart from the disruptions caused by imperialist penetration, the peasant's standard of living declined during the modern era simply as a result of population growth; a Chinese peasant's existence in the early twentieth century was more precarious than his eighteenth-century ancestor's.<sup>47</sup> It is possible that things got still worse in the decades immediately preceding the Second World War, but we cannot be certain.<sup>48</sup> One can easily construct a systematic "proof" to this effect, citing such evidence as increases in land rent, concentration of landownership, a drop in agricultural prices, and an increase in female agricultural laborers, which last is an indication that more and more men were leaving the land to seek a living in cities or foreign countries.<sup>49</sup> But there is almost equally impressive evidence tending to prove the opposite. Before any overall hypothesis can be

<sup>47</sup> Ho Ping-ti, *Studies on the Population of China*.

<sup>48</sup> Most writers on the subject conclude that the peasant's condition was continuing to worsen, but the evidence even of such serious scholars among them as Fei Hsiao-tung, R. H. Tawney, and Ch'en Han-seng is not conclusive. Their writings either express an *a priori* conviction, or use continued deterioration as a working hypothesis, or offer generalizations too broad to be supported by their investigation of one sector of peasant activity or a single geographic region. It may well be that the men writing in the thirties mistook for symptoms of steady rural disintegration what were in fact temporary, though undeniably acute, reflections in China of the worldwide depression. (I am indebted to Mme. Marie-Claire Bergère for suggesting this last idea to me.)

<sup>49</sup> For example, it can be argued that the increasing concentration of landownership was turning more peasants into rural proletarians, causing widespread unemployment that led to a drop in agricultural wages, etc. Other economic factors can be added in making such an argument: for example, that the appearance of a capitalist sector in the Chinese economy led to the concentration of landownership; that international economic competition undermined two supplementary sources of peasant income, silk-worm breeding and rural handicrafts; that the worldwide economic crisis caused a

proved or disproved, new monographs (for which there are abundant materials) will have to be written. Not everything in the arguments presented in note 49 is wrong, yet only one thing is certain: developments were neither so simple nor so uniform as these arguments suggest.

Nevertheless, we must not let the conflicting facts distort our perspective. Whether or not rural misery was increasing during the twenties and thirties, it was surely in ample enough supply to fuel a revolution. Whatever the overall picture, there were many instances of increasing distress. By way of conclusion, it is worth mentioning two new developments of the revolutionary period that are symptoms—or perhaps causes—of difficulties unknown to previous eras. The first was demographic: the settlement of the Northeast, thanks to which the population of Manchuria tripled in thirty years.<sup>50</sup> This remarkable result seemingly reproduces on a Chinese scale the success of Norway, which also undertook to populate its northern frontier regions at the beginning of the twentieth century. But in Norway the impetus to settlement was bolstered by positive advantages, not the least of which was the parcel of land given each new settler; and though the Norwegian venture was much less risky than crossing the Gulf of Chihli or the Great Wall, it had all the glamour of a pioneer expedition. When a peasant left for Manchuria, by contrast, he was impelled, or more precisely compelled, to leave by purely negative factors, if only the simple inability to survive in his native place. The name given these settlers is eloquent testimony to this: *nan-min*, literally "refugees" or "disaster victims." The settlement of Manchuria, then, was much more of an exodus than a pioneering movement; its purpose was not so much to develop Manchuria's virgin lands as to escape the blighted areas of Shantung and other Yellow River provinces.

The other new feature of the prerevolutionary period lay in

fall both in land prices (from 30 to 80 per cent in various places between 1929 and 1933) and in grain prices; that a continuous rise in land rent forced the tenant farmer to exhaust the soil by double-cropping in order to survive; and finally that social disintegration made for a decline in production (by causing people to abandon land that had once been cultivated, etc.).

<sup>50</sup> Kungtu C. Sun, *The Economic Development of Manchuria in the First Half of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 21.

the domain of social relations, specifically relations between members of the landed upper class and their tenants. Under the Empire, in part because of Confucianism, these relations were what might be called paternalistic.<sup>51</sup> In the twentieth century they became more distant, less human. Absentee ownership increased, and once in the city the landlord acquired new values that tended to undercut his feelings of obligation to his tenants. More and more landlords left the management of their lands to a steward, and this new class of professional intermediaries was much harder on the tenant farmer than the traditional landowner had been.<sup>52</sup> The contract binding the owner and the man who actually worked the soil became increasingly impersonal, to the point where some tenants no longer knew who their master was. In several districts of the lower Yangtze Valley, for example, land rights became the object of routine transactions worked out in town rather than on the site itself; a company sold land rights and took the responsibility for rent-collecting. In these circumstances it is not surprising that the landlords' traditional prestige was on the wane. Though it remains an open question whether or not material conditions were steadily deteriorating, and if so to what extent, it is clear that supporting social arrangements had begun to change.

This statement brings us back to the second question raised earlier, that of the peasantry's capacity for revolution. Our answer this time is briefer, but much more immediately relevant to the subject of this book. Peasant insurrections had occurred throughout Chinese history, but even the successful ones resulted only in a change of dynasty. One of the great new facts of the contemporary era was the existence of an organized revolutionary movement, a movement that knew where it was going and was ready to exploit, channel, and transform discontent arising from social problems. We saw the movement at work in the previous chapter; we shall encounter it again. To say that it

<sup>51</sup> In hard times, for example, land rent was waived or deferred and grain was distributed to the starving. Confucianism also stressed *kan-ch'ing*, the feeling of mutual respect and trust among men, which acted as a check on exploitation.

<sup>52</sup> Also, this meant there was one more class living off the land without contributing to production.

played an indispensable role in the dynamics of the revolution is to suggest that the revolution was not made by social ills alone.

In political consciousness and coherence of action, the Chinese peasantry did not constitute a revolutionary force commensurate with the seriousness of its problems. To the extent that the non-Communist peasant movements I have studied can be characterized in general terms, they seem to me diffuse, sporadic, and lacking in coordination and firm leadership. Above all they seem defensive: peasants may arouse themselves to protest an assault on the status quo, but they almost never attack the deeper causes of their exploitation and misery.<sup>53</sup> The peasants who made the Chinese Revolution were not ready to make it on the eve of the Second World War. One is struck by the contrast—which is in no way peculiar to China<sup>54</sup>—between the seriousness of the peasant problem and the weakness of the movement to which it gave rise. Thirty-five years ago, the few serious observers of the Chinese scene would all have agreed that the peasant problem required speedy resolution, and that it would not be resolved without upheavals. But upheavals were one thing; revolution was another. What did the peasant masses contribute to the Chinese Revolution? They supplied the pool of forces from which Communism drew its sustenance. Discontent and the bankruptcy of rural society created an inexhaustible supply of potential revolutionaries, but it was the Chinese Communist Party that gave this blind force purpose and direction.

<sup>53</sup> Peasants might rebel because the exactions of local army troops exceeded current (one might say "normal") standards, or because a new surtax was levied the same year that locusts ruined the harvest. But it was highly unusual, for example, for a united and concerted peasant movement to challenge the very principle of land rent. See Lucien Bianco, "Les Paysans et la révolution," *Politique Etrangère*, No. 2-3 (1968), pp. 117-41.

<sup>54</sup> Otherwise the peasants of northeastern Brazil, for example, would long since have risen in revolt.