

The Persistence of  
Subsistence Agriculture

*Life Beneath the  
Level of the Marketplace*

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*Chapter Two*

## **Theoretical Overview: Life Beneath the Level of the Marketplace**

Huck was always willing to take a hand in any enterprise that offered entertainment and required no capital, for he had a troublesome superabundance of that sort of time which is not money. (Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*)

What was life below the level of the marketplace like? What is it like to have a super-abundance of the sort of time which is not money? What is happening to the subsistence peasants who live in Tanzania today? And what happened to the peasant of eighteenth century Scotland? This chapter is about the subsistence peasant's world, and why despite their poverty, the peasantry is dispossessed of a great deal during the process of development, even while others are realizing great gains. In sum, what happened to make the world of Huck Finn, in which a superabundance of time, became to be thought of as "troublesome" because it could not be turned into capital?

What is seen is that in the process of establishing a new world economic order, the old one is destroyed as peasants accept and reject the new risks proffered. Society changes from one focused by the risks of drought, flood, famine, crop disease, and epidemic disease, to one in which these threats can be at least shared. But in the process it introduces a new threat of destruction, that of the invisible hand of the marketplace, which just as surely as drought, flood, and famine, can starve, dispossess, kill, and stigmatize.

## Development as a Risky and Productive Process

Development, that is change of a subsistence peasant economy to a modern one, is a risky process for the peasant. It involves exchanging an established and trusted way of life in which the risks are understood, for one in which there are new norms rooted in market exchange. Classical writers, ranging from Karl Marx to Charles Dickens focused on the fetid cities of nineteenth century Europe. They observed, and were well-aware of the risks for peasants who had moved off the land to take jobs in the new and enormously productive factories of the cities. In exchange of course they would receive a simple wage that could not replace what the peasant lost, in terms of the commons of which they peasants were robbed, or the fierce revolution which left empty dwellings dotting the landscape of Europe (Polanyi 1944:35).

But this is not the whole story. The move of subsistence peasants from country-side to city did also involve a very real promise of wealth which Adam Smith and others idealized. People did become rich, as they logically should in a system which was focused so intently on production for its own sake. After all, the system that Smith described would eventually make possible a world in which fewer than 10% of the people would grow enough food for the rest, who in turn could engage in productivity and consumption in a vast world market. In short, the division of labor which is at the heart of modern economy works.

But to understand how a subsistence peasant views development, it is necessary to assess how they view the short-term risks which effect their decision-making. This is difficult to do using the traditional tools of the historian; undifferentiated subsistence peasants living in a world of personalistic relationships and leave few written records to frame how life below the level of the marketplace was organized. Peasants had no interest in leaving the inventories, land sale records, legal records, censuses, wills, stock cards, the planning documents, written legal proceedings, and so forth needed by modern historians to verify their presence, and way of life. And yet they were there; we know that logically subsistence farmers existed before the introduction of differentiated labor markets in the 1700s in England. We also know that 95% of the population in such circumstances fed themselves through subsistence agriculture; nevertheless, by definition, it is only the other 5% who have bequeathed social scientists the specialized paperwork that we do have, and can analyze.<sup>1</sup> Making inferences from the records left by the 5% about the other 95% is to look through an imperfect mirror; the 95% below the level of the market re-created their lives in non-durable words and relationships, not the artifacts analyzed by modern historians and social scientists. But with their enormous numbers, they were fundamental; it was they who supported the bourgeois shopkeepers who would give birth to the new values which are the basis for the modern world.

How did the population of places like North America change from being 95% engaged in agriculture in 1800, to being one in which 2% engage in agriculture in 2000? And what did the 95% think about, how did they view

social relations, what did they fear, and what did they seek? As will become clear below, to understand answers to these questions, it is necessary to focus on how changes in demography, technology, agriculture, transportation, and ideology transformed rural society.

The Great Transformation means that labor, or at least the product of labor like grains and fiber, need to be traded in an open market which includes strangers. This was a revolutionary concept in subsistence societies in which labor and commodity had been extended along lines of fealty, whether to lord or family, irrespective of market value. Transfers were in the form of tribute, gifts, labor corvee, or military service. As a result, the societies were "more directly cued to public esteem, the distribution of honor, and the sanctions of religion" (Douglass 1990:xiv).<sup>2</sup> One worked for the person with whom you had a non-market relationship whether through kinship or the inherited tradition of loyalty to a feudal lord. These relationships were ideally reciprocated with loyalty and protection. What labor was extended to had little to do with learned skills, or the success of the person offering labor in an impersonal marketplace. Such traditions were often formalized in serfdom laws that tied peasant families to a particular piece of land and its lord. Land, labor, and community were tied into a single inseparable web. Such laws, archaic as they seem today, often stipulated elaborate responsibilities that lord had to serf, and vice versa, all outside the logic of the free market in labor, land, commodity, or capital.

## Life Beneath the Level of the Marketplace

Life beneath the level of the marketplace is particularly well-known to anthropologists who study remote societies. In descriptions of such societies, anthropologists implicitly, and often explicitly, emphasize the differences between modern society and traditional subsistence societies in which there is no specialization of labor. Out of their descriptions emerge an ideal type of what a subsistence farming society is, often focused by the anthropologists' traditional emphases on kinship, production, and ideology/mythology. The sociologist Max Weber called this "traditional authority," and emphasized that people embedded in such societies believe that "everyday routine is an inviolable norm of conduct" (1948:296). The implicit contrast Weber is making is with modern bureaucratic society, where there is an assumption that routine can change from day-to-day, as goals of profit is pursued.

### An Ideal Typical Subsistence Society

An "ideal type" is a mental construct designed to represent the logical arrangement of a social institution, be it modern society, subsistence society, a type of business, or even a club. Ideal types are representations of what a particular institution looks like logically under "ideal" conditions, meaning that they are ahistorical in order that they can be presented in a manner systematically, rather than in the flux and change of their actual development

(Weber 1948:394). Ideal types are useful for thinking about institutions, because they describe the logic inherent to a system, without describing any one particular group or society. As such, they are useful for evaluating data from the "real world" which in turn can be used to fine-tune the ideal type. As an ideal type for subsistence agriculture societies, I will describe how such societies operate in the context of 1) demographics, 2) productivity and trade, 3) ecology and settlement, 4) ideology and religion and 5) politics and power. This is not an exhaustive list of what makes an ideal typical subsistence society different from the modern world, market-based agriculture, or a feudal guild. However, it does provide a basis for understanding what is happening around the world as the social order shifts from the socio-demographic regime, which emerged when humans first specialized in agriculture some 10,000 years ago, into a new society focused by a globalized world dominated by marketplace economics.

### *Demography*

In subsistence farming societies, birth rates are typically high, ranging from 5-10 children born per woman. Death rates are also high, although not necessarily at the same time that birth rates are high. In the short-run, there may be a cohort of women who have a great number of surviving children. In the long run though, there will be catastrophic events such as disease, war, and famine which occur when the "carrying capacity" of the land to produce for horticultural peoples is exceeded. The result is that if long periods of population history are examined (e.g. periods of several hundred years), there are swings in population density reflecting first, changes in mortality, followed by years of recovery through higher survival rates for infants.<sup>3</sup> The highest population growth rates (and lowest levels of child death) are found in freshly settled areas, which have an abundance of game, and land for clearing. Population doubling times in such circumstances can be as short as 20 years. This happened in North America between about 1700 and 1850, when European farmers spread across a sparsely populated land.<sup>4</sup>

The sharpest decreases in horticultural populations tend to come in areas where crowding occurs, and as a result they become vulnerable to the diseases epidemics and drought, which in turn stimulate raiding and conquest. This is what happened in the 150 years following the arrival of the Black Death in Europe in 1348, and also in Mexico following the catastrophes brought by the Spanish Conquest in 1520. More commonly, such catastrophes involved localized famine, disease epidemics, or war.

In short, the demography of the subsistence peasant society is one in which women have a large number of children. Populations expand until the growth itself puts the population at risk for catastrophe.

### *Ecology and Settlement*

Households in subsistence societies focused by agriculture are typically extended kinship groups, members of whom feel personal obligations to each other independent of the labor market. In areas of rain-fed agriculture,

housing is often semi-permanent and readily abandoned; indeed it shifts as soils are exhausted, neighbors become hostile, or taxes become too onerous. Homes can be built using local materials in a single season, using skills of the extended kin group, if not quicker. Often new homes can be rebuilt within a few days or weeks. In areas where land is irrigated, and fields are improved through labor intensive means like terracing, settlements are more permanent fields, have higher yields are less likely to be abandoned, and are more likely to be heavily taxed.

There is typically one staple crop in subsistence economies, along with domesticated animals. Hunting and gathering may be important seasonal activities to supplement diets. Sites for settlement are chosen for access to building materials, proximity to kin, and availability of game and water. Defense or avoidance of enemies may also be an important concern.

When the area around a settlement or hamlet is exhausted of such resources as soil fertility, firewood supplies, or building materials, the subsistence peasant leaves, and re-establishes elsewhere. The frequency of such movement varies according to local conditions, often occurring anywhere between five and thirty years. However, such moves become more difficult as population density rises. What occurs is what Clifford Geertz (1963) called an "agricultural involution" in which surplus labor is used to extract diminishing returns from the land by ever-more intensive farming techniques, poverty is exacerbated, and ecological catastrophe invited.

Land tenure in subsistence societies is typically reflected through "usufructuary norms," which are guaranteed without reference to a centralized state, or formalized law. Usufructuary norms are rooted in custom, the continued cultivation of lands, and informal agreements between kin groups. Rarely are there formal land registries and surveys. Land rights as a result cannot be sold in the open market.

Subsistence groups often fear and distrust those beyond the immediate kin-group, who they believe will steal or bewitch them. In sparsely populated areas where there is surplus land, vacant "buffer areas" emerge which are usually uncleared forest. In more densely populated areas, formal boundaries may emerge which are patrolled and defended.

Markets in such subsistence area villages are small, and focus on the exchange of minor manufactures and specialty items rather than bulk food. Often markets are held only at weekly or monthly intervals. Building materials, bulk food, and even clothing are available for the taking from the environment without reference to markets. Markets themselves are also major social events, i.e. fairs. These are organized periodically typically under the auspices of local notables who fix prices, identify times when particular items may be traded, protect guild rights, and regulate who may trade.

In more densely populated areas, there will be loyalties to local leaders, who will organize defense in times of threat, undertake localized redistribution of famine goods in times of drought, and undertake raids on neighbors when opportunity arises. Such local leaders may build forts or castles for

defense purposes by requisitioning labor during slack times in the local agricultural cycle.

### *Productivity and Trade*

Subsistence societies grow, herd, hunt, and gather most of what they eat. Production is focused by the extended family, entrance to which is gained by birth, adoption, and marriage. Most of their production does not enter the marketplace. Production by each family unit is across a wide-range of products, and tasks vary both within the day, and seasonally. The risks that are avoided by diversifying production include those associated with weather, crop and livestock disease, raids, human disease, drought, and so forth.

Small surpluses of subsistence crops and animals are "planned" for first to cover unavoidable tributary tax payments, and second as a "prudent surplus" against potential drought, or other unforeseeable problems. In the event that the prudent surplus is not needed, trade for a mix of minor necessities like salt and hoes, and religious rituals may be conducted. Such trade is typically done with familiar traders who are, as Sellers (1991:15) describes them, "the market's ambassador to the subsistence world."

Much trade is done via barter, rather than with money, which was often rare in remote subsistence farming areas. Informal credit arrangements between farmers, traders, and kin are common, and often reflect the strength of a relationship, rather than market advantage. Otherwise, significant interactions with strangers are avoided, particularly those of the marketplace. The great risk of the specialized modern farmer, market failure, is not typically an issue in areas which, as Adam Smith put it, have no improvement in roads or transport, or the specialization that come with it.

### *Ideology*

The ideology of subsistence peasant society focuses on the centrality of the family unit. Obligations for the exchange of labor and goods are mediated in the context of the family, rather than the marketplace. Thus, work groups are not allocated by skill or specialty, but by normative responsibility to kin and typically reflect roles ascribed by gender and age. Fulfillment of kin responsibilities comes before the individual accumulation of wealth, or for that matter skill in a particular task. This ideology often emphasizes the freedom of the peasant family from the complications of modern life (including the marketplace), and a perception that profits accrued from the trading in the marketplaces are immoral theft. Production is tied to consumption and the distribution of presents and gifts, including those involved in unequal tributary relationships. There is a high regard for the external display of luxury consumption, and even hedonism, which at an extreme can take forms of the destructive potlatches that Kwakiutl from British Columbia once conducted (see Mauss ([1950]1990). Accumulation for its own sake is discouraged, and regarded as selfish. Good fortune whether in the form of crop surpluses or other windfalls, is shared within the kin group. Poor fortune in the

form of crop failure is regarded as a legitimate reason to request informal assistance from more fortunate kin.

Mythology and religion in subsistence societies often emphasize origins of a group or clan in a particular type of subsistence activity (e.g. farming, pastoralism, or hunting)<sup>5</sup> and emphasize that such traditional activities are the prerogative of that group. It is believed that such specialty is inherited and best learned in the context of the family, and is not the result of training, practice, or skill. The most elaborate form of this was in the Hindu caste system of India. Caste systems prescribing inherited occupations are common in horticultural societies.

### *Politics and Power*

Subsistence farmers focused on a kin-based identity and mode of production, try to avoid the taxes and rents of a central state, while seeking the benefits of protection from attack. In more sparsely populated areas, what political leadership there is, is likely to be focused on "big men" who through their kin connections, personality, and fighting prowess, are likely to emerge in times of external threat. These men will either lead a fight, or alternatively, assist with flight to new agricultural lands where the subsistence lifestyle can be re-established. However such men do not have a "monopoly over the use of coercive power" like the police or soldiers in a state might, and their leadership skills have a salience primarily in times of crisis. In "normal" times, big men are likely to simply be leaders of their family and extended clans. They may be able to demand a limited amount of tribute from other groups, but this capacity is limited because when taxes or tribute become too high, subsistence farmers simply move beyond the capacity of the "big man" to enforce collection.

Typically, the strength of the state is proportionate to the population density. States emerge when threats to expropriation emerge from nearby enemies, or for that matter, when there is a need to expropriate land or food from a neighboring territory because famine threatens. In such cases, "big men" may become lords, who do not farm at all, and live off the proceeds of tribute or rents from the lands of loyal peasants. In Europe in particular, this arrangement became formalized in systems of serfdom during the Middle Ages. The system persisted formally in vast areas of European Russia until the nineteenth century and on informal levels until at least the beginning of World War I.

But, missing from modern anthropological ethnography, or from the ideal type above, is the sense that despite the fact that they present subsistence farmers as "never-changing," they in fact did change. In fact, it is out of such subsistence societies, that modern societies emerged.

### **A Productivity Revolution**

"Improvement" was the watchword of the eighteenth century English elite, which looked upon the land and labor in new ways that they called "scientific." Instead of seeing the landscape as the homes of loyal tribute

paying farmers, one as similar to each as the other, they sought differentiation of tasks, and the development of wealth through specialized manufacture, agriculture, and trade. Perelman (2000) calls this the period of "primitive accumulation" in capitalism, when the older rights of peasants are usurped, and their traditional lands and property end up in the possession of people who are able to master the ways and means of the new market economy.

Where the subsistence world had been one of similar homesteads, and a small elite, the Improvers believed that through the practice of scientific agriculture and manufacture, more could be produced. Particularly in the scientific world in which many of them were embedded, they saw ways to specialize production so that a particular piece of land could be used to produce a commodity which promised the greatest financial profits to the new "owner." All that was needed was two things. First, they needed to build transportation networks into the interior where production took place. This was a technical problem which the designers of ports, roads, planned villages, and ultimately railways were to reveal in.

The second thing needed was a new way of looking at the landscape. It needed to be looked at as being part of the marketplace, with a relationship to the commodities it could produce most efficiently. And this production needed to be compared to the market profits from rents that it produced if the land was to remain as land for subsistence peasants. To be efficiently used by the new economy, land and labor must be viewed as creatures of the market, exchangeable in the same medium at what Marx and Engels (1848) would call "the cash nexus."

For this to happen, there needed to be a productivity revolution, in which the means of production—land, labor, and capital—are recast as something independent of the human relationships which were so important in the subsistence economy. To do this, to "commodify" everything, meant that land, labor and capital needed to be shorn of the sentimental value they had possessed in the older subsistence world. Labor, commodity and land would no longer be offered on the basis of tradition and sentiment. Rather they would be exchanged because one buyer—even a previously feared stranger—outbid all others.

It was clear by the time that Adam Smith published *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776 that specialized workers, doing simple tasks in a factory, were more productive than the Scottish peasant society they were replacing. But it was also apparent that for this to happen workers would need to live close to "some sorts of industry which can be carried on nowhere but in a great town." Factory work requires workers to be in close proximity to each other, each making a tiny contribution to produce vast quantities of a final product. They also need to be near consumers who have something to exchange for their product. But as Smith pointed out, when the market works well, even less obvious examples illustrate the power of the differentiation of tasks. For example, he points out that even the lowly porter works alone in an occupation which is possible only in the crowded environment of a town, where

there are enough people who need bags moved to make this specialized occupation profitable. There are no porters in the sparsely populated rural areas simply because there is an insufficient market for such a service (see Smith 1937:22).

Smith went on to point out that this applied across a broad range of professions. Only as the marketplace for labor grows can an economy support the hyper-specialization that makes one person more efficient at a task because they have repetitively done the same task time after time. Even in 1776, Smith could see that carpentry as a skilled field was diversifying into a range of occupations, such as joiner, nailer, cabinet-maker, builder, and so forth due to the fact that there was enough work for specialization to occur.

Smith contrasted the productivity of the densely populated marketplace, by comparing it with the lot of the Scottish peasants, still living at that time in the remote highlands:

In the lone houses and very small villages which are scattered about in so deserted a country as the Highlands of Scotland . . . we can scarce expect to find even a smith, a carpenter, or a mason, within less than twenty miles of another of the same trade. The scattered families that live at often eight miles distance from the nearest of them, must learn to perform themselves a great number of little pieces of work, for which, in more populous countries, they would call in the assistance of those workmen. . . . It is impossible that there should be such a trade as even that of a nailer in the remote and inland parts of the Highlands of Scotland. Such a workman at the rate of a thousand nails a day, and three hundred working days in the year, will make three hundred thousand nails in the year. But in such a situation it would be impossible to dispose of one thousand, that is, of one days work in the year. (Smith 1776:22-23)

Smith's point is that for a worker to be productive in the marketplace, they need to do the task over and over again and then trade in the broader market for their subsistence. Tasks done irregularly, because the day is occupied with a range of activities, are never likely to be done in the most efficient way possible. Smith's carpentry example anticipates the specialization of the modern construction industry where, for example, one group of carpenters does cabinetry, another makes joists, another makes roofs and another makes walls.<sup>6</sup> No one profession makes an entire house, but together they make many houses more quickly than if they had been working alone. But for this to happen, there must be a way for strangers to cooperate on the basis of skill within the marketplace. It is at this point that the ethos of the subsistence peasant is challenged. Standardization needs to occur for this to happen, and a process Max Weber called "rationalization" begins, as products move out of the individual household, and into an open marketplace which fixes a price on it, and thereby is "seen" as something that can be exchanged even by strangers. This rarely happened for what is produced and consumed on the subsistence farm.

### Box 2.1. Productivity Growth in the United Kingdom

Just how great the change in market activity, as a society shifts from general subsistence activity to intensely specialized market activity, can be seen in the table below. The table reflects productivity in the United Kingdom between 1785 as the Industrial Revolution was just beginning, and 1987, by which time the United Kingdom had become a society in which virtually every worker engaged in a specialized in the labor market.

As Livi-Bacci (1997:150-151) points out, this table illustrates well the principle characteristics of development and social change. During the 200 year period, population expanded rapidly, the amount of productivity per worker increased, and the total number of hours worked per year declined substantially.

Embedded in these statistics are a number of significant social changes. The first is the fact that the total number of hours worked did not decline substantially probably until about one hundred years after the Industrial Revolution began. Also tucked into statistics is the fact that at the beginning of the period, there was a great deal of migration out of both Great Britain and Ireland. The period covered includes the massive migrations towards the Americas during the nineteenth century, as well as the migration from the British and Irish countryside into industrializing cities like Birmingham and London. In effect the long hours of undifferentiated farm labor were being exchanged for equally long hours of differentiated factory work in the 100+ years after 1785. Notably, this period corresponded to the time when London and the other industrializing cities were a particularly vile "population sump," drawing in youth from the comparatively healthful countryside to work in an environment where victimization from crime, industrial accidents, pollution, and of course disease rates were high.

Productivity in these urban work environments did not accelerate until after 1913. Thus, in the 128 year long period between 1785 and 1913, productivity per hour rose four-fold, while in the shorter 74 year period between 1913 and 1987, it rose five fold at a time the total number of hours worked per year dropped substantially.

	GDP in 1970 US\$ (in '000s)	Population (in '000s)	Employed (in '000s)	Hours worked per year	GDP/h in 1970 US\$	Per capita GDP in 1970 US\$
1785	4,959	12,681	4,915	3,000	0.34	391
1820	9,052	19,434	6,884	3,000	0.44	466
1870	29,254	29,365	12,285	2,984	0.80	996
1913	65,591	42,886	18,566	2,624	1.35	1,529
1950	105,471	50,363	22,400	1,958	2.40	2,094
1987	254,872	56,687	24,542	1,511	6.87	4,496

Such statistics are a powerful argument for the long-term benefits of development. However, for the peasant contemplating movement from a 3,000 hour "job" on the farm in 1820, to the 3,000 hour job in the city that same year, the incentives were indeed few.

Principal source: Livi-Bacci (1997:150-151).

The principles that Smith (and Weber) described were to underlie the Industrial Revolution. The Industrial Revolution unleashed forces even on the remote countryside of Smith's Highland Scotland, transforming the way people viewed themselves, the land, and their way of life. Box 1 includes a statistical description of just how wonderful a process occurred over a period of 200 years in the United Kingdom. But again, that was the long-term prospect. In the short-term, the Improvers living in a world where older rules about clan loyalty, mutual assistance, and land usage first developed at the dawn of agriculture, needed to be pushed aside so that the land, labor, and commodities became tradable in, the marketplace. For this to happen, humans would need to be separated from the land that had sustained them, and their work made into a commodity. A "Great Transformation" was needed.

### The Great Transformation of Demography, Production, and Power

"At the heart of the Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth century was a miraculous improvement in the tools of production which was accompanied by a catastrophic dislocation of the lives of the common people" (Polanyi 1944:33). Improvement in the seventeenth and eighteenth century was about the systematic mastery of the tools of production so that as much as possible could be produced for the marketplace in which profits were sought. Making this possible was a new institution, the "self-regulating marketplace" which when permitted to flourish, reallocated the tools of production in a way that made the most wealth for the same market. In particular, it reallocated the land on which people lived, and made it into a commodity. During the next century or so, before western governments could bridle the excesses of the self regulating marketplace through government regulation, the rationalized development of the tools of production was permitted to proceed unfettered.

Polanyi credits the success of nineteenth century's unfettered marketplace for the two great anti-capitalist reactions of the modern twentieth century world: communism and fascism. Both ideologies were explicit appeals to common people suffering from the effects of the unregulated capitalist marketplace, like hyper-inflation and mass unemployment. Both ideologies complained that "bourgeois capitalism" was the cause of the suffering of an otherwise deserving master race (fascism), or proletariat (communism). But this is beyond the story which is to be told here, and will only be returned to in the concluding chapter.

The unfettered marketplace would be only of historical interest, except that the process persists in the countries of the Third World. In the Third World, there are still "catastrophic dislocations" and still people leave subsistence farms to accept the risks of the unfettered self-regulating marketplace. For this reason, it is useful to return to the story of Adam Smith and his successors and review the process by which the marketplace came to dominate social life in Europe and North America in the past.

### Adam Smith and Scientific Development

An assumption behind Adam Smith and the eighteenth century Improvement Movement was the human tendency to pursue self-interest through "truck, trade, and barter" in all human societies. Smith assumed that the division of labor through which productivity increases, arises from this tendency. The trick, according to Smith and his colleagues, was to establish a system where this tendency would develop the different talents of people so that they could pursue their self-interests as aggressively as possible (Smith 1937:18-21).

The key, according to Smith, is the differentiation of labor, which in turn is determined by the extent of the marketplace. The broader the marketplace, the more specialized labor will be and the greater the generation of wealth. This is brought about first by improved transport and second by increasing population density. Foot traffic, and even pack animals are insufficient for trade in bulk goods for practical reasons. The people and animals necessarily consume much of the load they carry during the trip. Even slaves and pack animals who are not paid a wage, eat much of what they carry before reaching a destination; and the further the journey, the more they eat. This is why Smith wrote that markets were most likely to develop along shorelines where water transport was readily available. So the extent of the marketplace was in turn dependent on the costs of transporting goods. In the 1700s when Smith wrote, this meant a mixture of port improvement, since water transport was by far the most efficient at that time, and the construction of roads along which wagons could be pulled by animals. In the nineteenth century the provision of transport improvements would also extend to the provision of the steam engines which would come to be used by both ships and railways. But these improvements were in the future.

However, for the subsistence peasantry, whether in the interior of Europe, or in North America, the provision of new transportation projects had multiple consequences, a number of which were fundamental challenges to their way of life. Most obvious was the demands to finance public works projects (see Sellers 1991). Fortunes built on trade profits and associated duties went a long way toward the initial financing of projects, however it soon became apparent that taxes on products of the interior were also necessary. In Europe, this meant increases in feudal dues, while in the new country of the United States in which land was very cheap, it meant excise taxes on the few items like whiskey, which entered the marketplace. Resentment emerged to such taxes and rents.

The extension of the marketplace into the interior also brought new demands for specialization of production. In areas where previously only pack-horses had had access, suddenly entire ship-holds needed to be filled in order that ship-owners could recoup the cost of their voyage. For this to happen, production along the new transportation routes had to match the demands for goods in distant and unseen cities. The farmers of an area needed to produce

enough tobacco, cotton, timber or other commodity in order that a ship's hold could be filled quickly.

### *The Need for a New Property System, and Primitive Accumulation*

As Karl Polanyi (1944:68-76) pointed out, there was yet another major ideological transition which needed to occur for productivity to "take off," the creation of three new "fictitious" commodities: land, labor, and capital. He wrote:

man under the name of labor, nature under the name of land, were made available for sale; the use of labor power could be universally bought and sold at a price called wages, and the use of land could be negotiated for a price called rent. . . . [The problem was that] leaving the fate of soil and people to the market would be tantamount to annihilating them. (Polanyi 1944:130-131)

This is an odd statement today, especially in places like the United States and Western Europe where everyone exists in a unified property system, and where property is protected by a political system and the sale of labor is the prerogative of all able adults. But it was not an odd statement in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe, or even the twentieth century in the Third World and post-Soviet Eastern Europe where the self-regulating market upset older relations between the subsistence farmer and nature; lord and serf; yeoman farmer and prince; and farm and medieval fair.

Pushing land and labor into a monetized marketplace where it can be exchanged for money is always a disruptive process. The economist Michael Perelman (2000:25) points out that this "primitive accumulation" begins because as Adam Smith wrote, "the accumulation of stock must, in the nature of things, be previous to the division of labour." Land, labor and capital must be turned into a marketable commodity if the division of labor is to generate the productivity Smith attributed to it. In such primitive accumulation, property which has always been present must be converted to capital. In the case of minerals, this can involve simply picking stones lying on the ground and transporting them to market. In the case of farmland though, it involves fixing it into a formalized and centralized property system.<sup>7</sup> In short, for the new system to be unified, humans need to think about themselves, work, and social relations in a new way, in which much activity will be subordinated to market transactions.

### **The Transformation of Ideology**

"Who am I?" and "What shall I do?" are two questions which when answered are dependent on the ideology of the person asked. The subsistence peasant will answer these questions very differently than I will.<sup>8</sup> People embedded in labor and commodity markets like me will often answer with what Weber called the "spirit of capitalism" embedded in their answer. Answers will likely make reference of our role in the labor market and perhaps reflect an ascetic drive to pursue and save wealth for its own sake. Capitalism re-

quires people willing to invest in factories, thereby deferring the use of money for immediate pleasure. On the other hand, the subsistence agriculturalist will refer to an agricultural heritage inherited from the Neolithic Age which began with the invention of agriculture ten thousand years ago. For the subsistence peasant, the word "farmer" is a source of pride, and does not reflect a role in the marketplace, but a relationship to land and nature. Implicit in the answer are relationships, clan groupings, and neighborhoods. Indeed in many languages in tribal areas, formal greetings between strangers answering the question "Who am I?" involve acknowledgement and confirmation of kin relations, not occupational relationships or place in the labor market. They are two essentially different ways of looking at the world and people in it.

Max Weber ([1904-1905]2002) made an early and perhaps the most incisive comparison between the world of the subsistence peasant and what he called "the protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism." In modern capitalism, he pointed out that the "acquisition of money, and more and more money" is the primary goal of people. But he wrote, there is a paradox because at the same time, the hedonistic pleasures and spontaneous enjoyment money can bring should be avoided. In other words, you "keep score" with money, but do not enjoy it. His point was that the general propensity of people to truck, trade, and barter was inadequate as an explanation for the superstructure of capitalism to be built upon. Indeed, for this to actually happen, the answer to the most basic questions of "Who am I?" and "What will I do?" had to change. Too often in the traditional world, the answer to these questions meant that only enough was planted for the family, and labor then stopped in order that the family could enjoy their relationships with each other. But the "just enough" philosophy towards economic productivity is not what capitalism demanded.

In short, Weber's outstanding point was to be that for productivity to exceed basic needs, there must be an "ideology" which justifies the accumulation of capital for its own sake. This is in contrast to older ethics which had emphasized communality, responsibility to the extended kin-group and even hedonism in the consumption of material goods. Most important for capitalism, profits needed to be viewed as not windfalls to be shared and enjoyed, but as an opportunity to invest in further production for the marketplace which created the windfall in the first place. Again, this was a contradiction to the ethic which had been developed since the Neolithic, in which the well-being of the immediate clan and family were paramount.

#### *The Non-Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Subsistence Agriculture*

If the spirit of capitalism is ascetic drive to save wealth for its own sake, the spirit of subsistence agriculture is the celebration of kinship and relationships. As Marcel Mauss emphasized, such enjoyment could often be hedonistic in nature, to the extent of even doing as the Kwakiutl of the British Columbia coast did, and destroy wealth in ritual "potlatches."<sup>10</sup>

But, embedded in the spirit of capitalism is an irony for modern people. That is, the subsistence peasant is far more independent of the broader capitalist system than the industrial worker. The subsistence peasant is less likely to be affected by the vicissitudes of international economy and be more resilient in the face of shifting economic demands. In essence the subsistence peasant is freer than the worker tied to a specialized job in a factory or elsewhere. And herein lay a paradox that Karl Marx, in his comparison of peasants and potatoes, wrestled with. In the freedom of peasant life is embedded a sameness and need to conform to the expectations of the traditional world. And so there is little ambition to specialized occupation so prized in a labor market. Wealth is enjoyed hedonistically and even vicariously. Feasts are held, fairs are times of revelry, palaces are built by the elites able to co-opt the labor of a horticultural people. In the case of the Ancient Egyptians perhaps the greatest hedonistic display of all was undertaken when massive pyramids are constructed by peasants dragooned by powerful Pharaohs during the slow points of the agricultural cycle. In this pre-capitalist world, little of the drive for improvement for its own sake that Adam Smith valued so highly is likely to occur.

The irony of course is that despite the fetters of modernity—what Max Weber called the "iron cage"—in the modern world, the individual becomes far more important. Status is not measured by relations with a kin group, but in individual roles assumed within the middle class bourgeois workforce.

#### *The Ideology of the Marketplace—Thinking like Benjamin Franklin*

One of the most powerful sections of Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is where he describes the nature of that spirit (Weber/Kalberg 2002:13-17). In this section, Weber takes quotations from a man who lived in the eighteenth century who Weber felt reflected the spirit of the new town-bred middle class he observed in the early twentieth century. He regarded these quotations as being representative of the common sense taken-for-granted views—in other words an ideology—of the American middle class he observed in 1903. He also saw in the quotes an ideology fundamentally opposed to what had been found in the world up to that time. Here are some of the quotes:

Remember that time is money. The man that can earn ten shillings a day by his labor, and goes abroad, or sits idle, one half of that day, though he spends but sixpence during his diversion or idleness, ought not to reckon that the only expense; he has really spent, or rather thrown away, five shillings besides.

Remember that credit is money. If a man lets his money lie in my hands after it is due, he gives me the interest, or so much as I can make of it during that time. This amounts to a considerable sum where a man has good and large credit, and makes good use of it.

Remember that money is of the prolific, generating nature. Money can beget money, and its offspring can beget more and so on. . . . He that kills a breeding sow, destroys all her offspring to the thousandth generation. He that

murders a crown, destroys all that it might have produced, even scores of pounds.

The most trifling action that affect a man's credit are to be regarded. The sound of your hammer at five in the morning or eight at night, heard by a creditor, makes him easy six months longer; but if he sees you at a billiard-table, or hears your voice at a tavern, when you should be at work, he sends for his money the next day. . . .

For six pounds a year you may have the use of one hundred pounds, if you are a man of known prudence and honesty.

He that spends a groat a day idly, spends idly above six pounds a year, which is the price of using one hundred pounds.

He that wastes idly a groat's worth of his time per day, one day with another, wastes the privilege of using one hundred pounds each year.

He that idly loses five shillings' worth of time, loses five shillings, and might as prudently throw five shillings in the river.

He that loses five shillings not only loses that sum, but all the advantage that might be made by turning it in dealing, which by the time that a young man becomes old, will amount to a comfortable bag of money.

The young American printer Benjamin Franklin is of course the source of the above advice, in his publications *Necessary Hints to Those That Would Be Rich* (1736), and *Advice to a Young Tradesman* (1748).<sup>11</sup> Such sayings make sense to modern readers who deal with credit cards, mortgages, 401(k) retirement accounts, hourly wages, and in which are embedded issues of time, money, and credit. Indeed, it is a common-sensical ideology, as natural as the air we breathe. But, this world of credit, wages, and commodities was not central to Franklin's eighteenth century world, and unlikely to be understood by the masses of subsistence farmers to whom Franklin preached in his writings. Indeed, this is why Weber emphasizes Franklin's writing: he sees it as an effective way to describe for readers the modern ethic he believed underlay modern capitalism.

To describe an alternative view to Franklin's, that of the traditional peasant, Weber (2002:22-23) does not use pithy quotes, rather he relies on an example from the agricultural labor market:

For example, a man has been accustomed to harvesting 2 ½ acres per day and to receiving one German mark for every acre of grain harvested. He thus earns 2 ½ marks every day. If the piece rate is raised to 1 ¼ marks per acre, he needs to harvest only 2 acres per day in order to earn the same amount as before, and this, according to the biblical passage, "allows enough for him." Yet the employer's hope of increasing productivity by increasing the piece rate has been disappointed (if the worker had harvested 3 acres, he should have earned 3 ¾ marks).

The opportunity of earning more appealed to him less than the idea of working less. He did not ask: "If I produce as much as possible how much money will I earn each day?" Rather he formulated the question differently: "How long must I work in order to earn the amount of money—2 ¼ marks—I have earned until now and that has fulfilled my traditional economic needs?" (Weber 2002:22-23)

In sum, in answer to the question "What am I going to do?" the peasant did not have the "acquisitive" sense that Franklin so well provided in his answer. Weber (2002:26) claims that this is because there are in fact "two great principles" according to which economic history has unfolded: the "satisfaction of needs" and "acquisition." Huck Finn did not see his time as money, but as an opportunity for entertainment and enjoyment. Twain of course satirized his own alter-ego Tom Sawyer who believed that the get-rich schemes of the modern world were the basis for status. Huck Finn's view is more important to subsistence farmers, but Tom Sawyer's view is the basis for the modern world.<sup>12</sup>

### Politics and Power

The new marketplace, free though it may be to set prices, does so only in a legal context. What is eligible for sale and trade needs to be conceptually "fixed" in a way that it can take on a life of its own, without destroying the market that created it. This requires definition by an entity who has a "final word" about the fairness of a transaction between strangers. In medieval markets, the king or lord traditionally had this word. In other words for a transaction between two strangers to be possible, there needed to be a "physical or psychical compulsion," that is coercion, underlying what is on the face a transaction undertaken for individual interest rather than mutual interest (see Weber 1948:180). The set of rules requires a state, and the state is effective only when authority is legitimated to the strangers meeting in the marketplace.

The problem is that without limitations on the labor market created by the effective exercise of state power, the logical conclusion of the spirit of capitalism is that "They make tallow for candles out of cattle, and money out of men" (Weber/Kalberg 2002:13-14). A society in which humans are turned into money is not a society to serve people, but one to serve the marketplace. This is why government emerged to control the excesses of the *laissez faire* labor market, control the abuse of child labor, unfair wages and dangerous working environments. In effect, state power is necessary to compel the conditions under which employers may legitimately employ workers, or in short "fix" the context for how labor can be bought and sold, even between strangers. This happens most obviously in the regulated labor market. But in fact it also happens in the market for land, capital, and commodity as well.

In the same vein, Hernando de Soto (2000) has written convincingly about the role that politics, law and power play in "fixing" the nature of assets (particularly real estate) in capitalism. He writes about the power that governments have in fixing real property for the marketplace through the establishment of systems of surveys, property registries and banking, which all play a role in the "fixing" of non-movable property making them a tradable asset in an open market.

This need for regulation of the market can also be seen in the way that modern governments develop meat and grain inspection services, fair trade

commissions, security and exchange commissions, banking regulations, and a host of other institutions which regulate and protect the integrity of the "cash nexus" in the marketplace. Nevertheless, only those items and qualities which are of importance to the anonymous marketplace are "seen" and rationalized by the exercise of such political power. Notably, the traditional sentimental rights of the peasant nourished through the millenia are invisible to the market, and disappear as a consequence. Because of this, the exercise of seemingly monotonous and trivial bureaucratic chores is at the heart of how the new social order ultimately disadvantages those who have traditional ethics with respect to the markets in land, labor and commodity.

In short, in the shift of norms from that of the subsistence peasant, to that of the modern world, the power of government necessarily increases. This in turn provides advantages to those most familiar with the workings of that marketplace—the Benjamin Franklins of the world. But at the same time, it puts at a disadvantage, those who traditionally provided the food and commodities supporting the markets of this world—the subsistence farmer. In the establishment of marketplaces where strangers can trade is about the concentration of power, in which urban centers gain advantages over the subsistence countryside. The cities get to re-write the "rules of the game" from the political center. Given this advantage, it is not surprising that rural peasants resist such changes, and need to be coerced into abandoning old ways, and accepting the new.

#### From Strong Peasant and Weak State to Weak Peasant and Strong State

This is the point where this chapter comes full circle from its argument about the role that demographics and ideology play in the economic development that is Polanyi's Great Transformation, to the concentration of political power. Simply put, in cases where land is readily available for the clearing, the peasants will be strong relative to the state just as Goran Hyden emphasized in his writing about Tanzania. Vast tracts of uncontrollable land play to the strengths of the peasant. Weak states have difficulty collecting taxes in an equitable fashion in such places. Land titles are disorganized, and the enforcement of central laws sporadic, weak, and inconsistent. Legitimacy is also weak in such situations, because government does not deliver services required for the persistence of the population and has difficulty justly enforcing laws it does have. But, population growth rates continue to be high, particularly as medicines from the developed economy become available. In such contexts, subsistence farmers move into unoccupied areas "over the hill," or into "Spanish Territory," which a weak central government often finds even more difficult to control.

From the perspective of a peasant with access to vacant arable land, the new political order is seen to bring only new demands by a distant elite. Consider two basic functions of governments: infrastructure and the administration of justice. In the interest of commodifying land, traditional hunting, fishing and grazing rights disappear; taxes are levied; and ports, roads, and

railways to facilitate trade are built. Such "benefits" are of course only peripheral to the traditional needs of a subsistence peasantry which had little need for bulk trade in grains or urban infrastructure. Law enforcement is applied to situations and feuds previously dealt with locally and the government loses legitimacy when inevitably it favors one side over the other in the application of the laws. Bureaucrats arrive and complain that market production is not enough to meet rationally determined production goals and the children are not going to school where numeracy and literacy are taught. People from the city blame such problems on the fact that the peasant has too many celebrations and fairs, drinks too much, and has too many children. The peasant complains that taxes are paid, and promised results are never seen. They assume that the proceeds are simply "eaten" by the greedy tax collector. This is the situation observed in many areas of Tanzania today, and was the situation seen in the United States where the first rebellion against the central government was by peasant farmers resisting the "whiskey tax."

Inevitably though, the practical limits to such agrarian populations are reached, when a drought, crop disease or other sort of disequilibrium occurs, often sporadically. In societies where the state has begun to intrude into the rural areas, there will be demands for the one traditional responsibility that the peasant could hold the lord to: famine relief. What the modern subsistence peasant does not always recognize is that today's famine stores do not come from a local grain store, but from a broader world market. Irrespective of whether they recognize what is happening, the peasant in the process quietly surrenders traditional rights over trade, relationships and land to people Max Weber described as:

narrow specialists without mind, pleasure-seekers without heart; in its conceit, this nothingness imagines it has climbed to a level of humanity never before attained. (Weber/ [1904-1906]2002:24)

And at least in the provision of relief, the peasant comes closer to the modern government full of its narrow specialists, who manipulate skillfully the distribution of relief goods which are distributed as "charity" because it is done without reference to the broader marketplace. But the hungry peasant accepts this generosity because in traditional terms, the government is fulfilling the role of a good patron. Nevertheless, they still resist the efforts of the marketplace for the "primitive accumulation" which run counter to not only their ethics and sense of justice, but also to their material interests. But, the subsistence peasantry, challenged by the coercive nature of ecological disaster loses its strengths. The provision of "relief goods" from the world marketplace prevent a catastrophic die-off in the population, but does nothing for resolving the underlying ecological paradox of too many subsistence farmers on too little land. And ultimately, high fertility rates are the Achilles heel of the subsistence peasantry. The peasant becomes weaker relative to the state, and the state becomes stronger.

Of course leading the vanguard of the expansion of state power is the "invisible hand" of the price-setting marketplace. The state needs to catalog, tax and rationalize all that is within its boundaries if it is to extend its markets into the countryside. The subsistence peasant does not usually need a strong state to exist. But the devil is in the details, in this case in the term "usually." For what the marketplace offers the peasant inexorably leads to decisions to change behavior, which weakens their position in the rural areas. For the marketplace in the long run, does offer the subsistence farmer something beyond protection from the two traditional enemies: famine, and invasion. The marketplace also offers its enchantments particularly to young men. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, cities which had recently been small trading and governing centers like London, New York and Paris were built by playing to the dreams of young men threatened with dispossession of a rural patrimony, whether through the actions of greedy landlords, the inexorable logic of land shortages induced by rising population. The state of course in assisting the acquisition of land and labor enhances its own power. Land becomes commodified, tax collections are facilitated, and the dispossessed become "labor." In short, modern development occurs.

### Weak Peasants and Strong States: Dis-assembling the Subsistence

#### Peasant

And so, in such a fashion, slowly and patiently, the age-old life of the subsistence peasant is dis-assembled. In the process, they are transformed from being the undifferentiated potatoes which Marx dismissively described, to the soulless middle class that Weber was at times so critical of. Indeed, despite occasional grouching, Weber in a more introspective mood wrote admiringly of the Protestant work ethic:

this-worldly Protestant asceticism fought with fury against the spontaneous enjoyment of possessions and constricted consumption, especially of luxury goods. On the other hand, it had the psychological effect of freeing the acquisition of goods from the constraints of the traditional economic ethic . . . it challenged the irrational use of possessions. That which remained so familiar to feudal sensibilities—a high regard for the external display of luxury consumption—was condemned. . . . God wanted a rational and utilitarian use of wealth on behalf of the basic needs of the person and the community . . . it wanted that wealth to be used for necessary, practical, and useful endeavors. In opposition to the glitter and pretense of feudalism's pomp and display, which rests upon an unstable economic foundation and prefers a tattered elegance to low-key simplicity, the Puritans placed the ideal of the clean and solid comfort of the middle class "home." (Weber [1904-1906]2002:115-116)

Despite his cynicism about the new capitalist spirit, grouchy Weber had little nostalgia for what he termed "traditionalism," and criticized it for its lack of productivity, inattention to skill, focus on sentimental relationships, and protection from destructive competition. Weber did not particularly la-

ment the passing of the Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Roman, Byzantine, Sung, Maya, Tokugawa, Holy Roman, Aztec or the other agricultural Empires which built their fortunes on the surplus crops paid as tribute by peasant farmers, and the surplus peasant sons which staffed armies that sought booty for the Emperor. Irrespective of the pomp and glitter produced by such empires, there is little doubt that such rule is cruel and oppressive.

Weber's point is that the spirit of capitalism that emerged was oppressive and cruel too, albeit in a different way. A rational and utilitarian use of wealth focused on the necessary, practical and useful, took the place of the old agrarian empires and as Weber wrote, the result is the emergence for most of us of the "clean and solid comfort of a middle class 'home.'" Weber himself viewed this consequence in a negative light, and in the short-run, I would agree with him. As Polanyi described, movement from the healthy countryside to the terrible conditions of nineteenth century working class London were a good reason for grouching. But there is another side too, and that is that out of this new world has emerged this mass middle class; hundreds of millions and perhaps a billion now do have the clean and solid comfort of not only a middle class home, but also a car or two in the garage. New problems have emerged with this—notably the potential to despoil the environment. But is this situation any more "soulless" than what was left behind?

### Notes

1. The phrase "beneath the level of the marketplace" is borrowed from Braudel 1992:59-60. Braudel also emphasizes that investigating life below the level of the marketplace is particularly difficult. He suggests using investigations of grain prices as one way to infer what is happening below the level of the marketplace, since "a grain market consists of, on the one hand, the population area dependent upon the market, and on the other hand, the demand of a population whose consumption can be calculated according to previously established norms." This method of using market prices to investigate a non-market phenomenon, while being the best historians can do, is inherently flawed; it is an imperfect mirror. Other methods of investigation including archaeology, folklore, and other forms of oral history are also inherently limited in the development of ideas about the thoughts and reasoning of subsistence agriculturalists.

2. Mauss ([1950]1990) called this a gift cycle, and implicitly presented it as a counterpart to the invisible hand of the marketplace.

3. Steven LeBlanc (2003:23-54) asks whether there ever was an ecological Eden, in which farming populations regulated their population without crisis events. In short, his answer is "no." Every human farming population he examined had at some time experienced a crisis, which reduced population levels (see also Bates 2001). Often this regulation came from catastrophic crisis events which included storms, warfare, drought-induced famine, and disease, which are exacerbated when human populations become dense. Tony McMichael (2001:xi, 123-124) notes that the four horsemen of the Apocalypse from the Book of Revelations in the New Testa-

ment, Famine, Pestilence, War, and Conquest, are good metaphors for understanding how the size of farming populations are regulated.

4. See Chirof 1994:39-43; McMichael 2001:88-151; Livi-Bacci 1997:35-54. Malthus (1799) wrote about the high population growth in the eighteenth century English colonies in North America in part based on data reported to him by Benjamin Franklin.

5. Blacksmiths, potters, priests, soldiers, etc., are among the common castes who are assumed to have special powers in traditional societies. Such powers are typically restricted to people born to the caste. The systematic development of skills such as is found in a modern society which emphasizes meritocracy does not typically trump the accident of birth.

6. As George Ritzer (1996:27-29) noted in his book *The McDonaldization of Society*, this process was perfected by the Levitt family of New York, who began to build "Levittowns" in the 1940s. Between 1947 and 1951, they were able to build 17,477 houses. Levittowns were constructed by construction teams who specialized in doing one task in the construction of homes which were built of inter-changeable parts. This is what made the construction of American suburbs in the late twentieth century efficient and affordable for millions of Americans. The Levitts' innovation was, as Ritzer puts it, to take the techniques of the factory and move them into construction. Instead of a conveyor belt moving the job to each specialized worker, the workers moved from site to site, doing the same thing over and over again.

7. The fixing of property has received attention recently from authors as diverse as Hernando de Soto (2000) and James Scott (1998). Both emphasize that the very definition of modernity is the fixing of land into marketable fractions, the security of which can be guaranteed by a government.

8. This is borrowed from a paper shown me by Nancy Spalding.

9. Karl Polanyi (1944:111-113) believes that the emphasis on the "invisible hand" in Smith's writing has been exaggerated, presumably by later interpreters of his work. He points out that Smith himself believed that the marketplace is only one part of society, and could exist only within a framework in which there is a balance of power, safety and security are guaranteed, and the material welfare of "the great body of people" is observed. The economic interests of the accumulators of capital are not paramount to his argument. Furthermore, Smith's other great work, *The Theory of the Moral Sentiments*, describes the moral understandings implicit to justice in economic and other spheres. See Koenig and R. Waters (2002).

10. African dictators like the extravagant Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire, and Emperor Bokassa of the Central African Empire, both of whom were known for their extravagant displays of wealth, were purveyors of such modern potlatches.

11. Using Franklin's sayings is probably a much more effective way to describe the "spirit of capitalism" than the sarcastic follow up quotation from Kurnberger that Weber (2002:15) uses to describe the emergence of separate labor and capital markets: "They make tallow for candles out of cattle, and money out of men." The latter of course makes a point against capitalist labor markets. But the Franklin quotes illustrate well the attitude necessarily at the core of the capitalist ethic.

12. Weber (2002:22-23) in fact claims that logically, when a capitalist labor market confronts a society embedded in an ethic of "satisfaction of needs," rising wage rates leads to less productivity, while lower wage rates can lead to more. This in fact, as Weber notes, is something that early capitalists were well aware of. In fact, as Weber notes, in the context of traditional societies, lowering wage rates had two happy coincidences, at least in the short-term view of the person hiring labor. It meant that workers would perform more work, in order to avoid poverty, and it in-

creased profits. But, it can also mean, as Weber notes, that there is little incentive to improve the techniques of work, and they in fact may decline, as a poorer diet makes the worker less capable of sustained effort. In other words, without an inbred ethic of capitalism, the labor market collapses on its own internal logic; it will not improve productivity.

*Chapter Three*

**Pre-industrial Scotland, or  
How Adam Smith Got Workers  
into His Pin Factory**

To hinder insurrection, by driving away the people, and to govern peaceably, by having no subjects, is an expedient that argues no great profundity of politicks. . . . It has been a question often agitated without solution, why those northern regions are now so thinly peopled, which formerly overwhelmed with their armies the Roman empire. (Dr. Samuel Johnson 1775: Chapter 24)

The petty tenants, and labouring peasants, live in miserable cabins, which afford them little more than shelter from the storms. . . . In the Hebrides, whatever might be their ingenuity, the want of wood leaves them no materials. They are probably content with such accommodations as stones of different forms and size can afford them . . .

Their food is not better than their lodging. They seldom taste the flesh of land animals; for here are no markets. What each man eats is from his own stock. The great effect of money is to break property into small parts. In towns, he hath has a shilling may have a piece of meat; but where there is no commerce, no man can eat mutton but by killing a sheep. (Dr. Samuel Johnson 1775:92)

The landlords have very properly done all they could to substitute a population of sheep for innumerable hordes of human beings, who formerly vegetated upon a soil that seemed barren of everything else. (Robert Chambers 1827, quoted in McPhee 1970:7)

## The Emergence of a New Industrial World

In describing the Great Transformation to capitalism, Karl Polanyi uses England as his main case study. There is some advantage to this, as at the time that Polanyi was writing it was widely acknowledged that England was the first country to undergo the Great Transformation and it was there that the principles for the markets in land, labor, and capital emerged.<sup>1</sup> But, perhaps because it was first, the process was slowest in England, too. The story that Polanyi told stretched over three hundred years from roughly 1500-1834, as the range of laws and customs protecting feudal rights of lords and peasants was slowly and recurrently dissolved in the context of legislative arguments and the sweep of English history which included wars, peasant revolts, epidemics, famines and a political union between England and Scotland. But as Polanyi shows, the underlying logic was such that at the end of the period, the revolt of the rich against the poor was complete. The poor no longer had rights to commons, hunting rights, grazing rights, or farming rights; the common fields of peasant communities were literally fenced by walls to keep the traditional owners out. The rich were in possession of the countryside and factories, while the poor were working as wage laborers in the factories of London, Birmingham, Manchester, and elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

### Western Capitalism as a Scottish Story

This chapter is not a retelling of the story that Polanyi told about England. Rather it is about how this case applies to the Kingdom just to the North of England, Scotland. Retelling the story from a Scottish perspective has several advantages. Most importantly, it is a way of verifying the validity of Polanyi's model. Second, it is a more direct challenge to economic historians, because the story of Western capitalism at its heart is a Scottish story. First, the economist Adam Smith himself hailed from Scotland. In what follows, I make the case that Adam Smith missed a massive transformation that was beginning in his own backyard. The differentiation of labor that he wrote so effectively about, rested squarely on dispossession of the peasants traditional rights in subsistence agriculture, a fact which is missing from *The Wealth of Nations*.

The fact of the matter is that at the time Adam Smith was writing in Edinburgh, not only were there pin factories, more importantly there was also active specialization in the production of factory linens, spun from flax grown specifically for the marketplace. This industry had already subtly shifted the productive activities of the farmers around Edinburgh and Glasgow, who began to grow excess crops not only as the "prudent surplus," of the subsistence peasant, but in anticipation of sales to the marketplace as well.

Sheep were also beginning to graze across wide expanses of the highlands, as factories in urban England, Holland and soon Scotland sought enormous quantities of wool which could be made into clothing by water-powered looms in the eighteenth century, and steam in the nineteenth. In

other words, the specialization that Smith glorified was emerging. Careful data was also beginning to be kept by the bookkeepers. Finally there was a philosophical renaissance in Edinburgh, as people like Smith promoted the values implied in the application of science for the "improvement" of humanity.

### The Improvement Movement and the Rationalization of Scottish Labor and Land

Indeed, a social movement of landed gentry and modernizers that sought to apply the laws of science to agricultural production emerged in Scotland in the late eighteenth century (Adams 1980). The words they used, familiar to modern ears, focused on economic modernization. They wanted to improve production through the applications of long-term planning, science, and markets. The point, the Improvers wrote, was to make the agricultural lands of Scotland productive in the same way that factories in Glasgow and London were, by differentiating use of the land for the production of the most appropriate commodity, and thereby producing the most wealth possible. They pointed to studies indicating that wool production, undertaken by isolated shepherds, was the most economically efficient use of the Highlands. Furthermore, they pointed out that the peasant already living in the Highlands be moved into planned coastal villages or urban settlements where they could be efficiently employed to meet market demands for fishing, kelp production, and cloth manufacture.



Photo 3.1. Shieling huts on the island of Jura, eighteenth century. These were summer houses for peasants who tended cattle during the summer months. (Courtesy of the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland.)

In short, the Improvement movement saw land, labor, and capital as different tools, which if organized well, could bring untold wealth. Adam Smith and others of course were trumpeters of this movement. The fact that *The Wealth of Nations* sold as well as it did over the next two hundred and fifty years illustrates how well Smith effectively tapped into an important new sentiment. But it ran counter to the Scottish peasant ideology which as a leading historian of Scotland T. C. Smout (1986:67) emphasized was different: "Gaelic Highlanders often refused to conform to the model of the Smithian man. They had their own ideology, which was that possession of land—the tenure (not the ownership) of a croft—was the highest good a man could desire."

### The Story of Scotland

Scotland includes the northern third of the island of Great Britain. The southern lowlands of Scotland have come to be dominated by two port cities, Edinburgh and Glasgow, which played an important role in the nineteenth century Industrial Revolution. To the north, and occupying perhaps two-thirds of the land area, are the Highlands, and over two hundred islands, of which over one hundred are still occupied. The northernmost islands of Scotland, the Shetlands, are at the same latitude as southern Norway.

Today's Scottish nationalists are proud of the long history of resistance by their northern country from domination from the South. They point out that Hadrian's Wall was built in Roman times and successfully protected Scotland from conquest. After the Romans retreated from the British Isles, Scotland absorbed a succession of invaders from today's Germany and Scandinavia, while maintaining relations with the English King to the south and the Irish lords to the west.

There was no uniform social system found in pre-modern Scotland. As if to emphasize the diversity of kinship and feudal systems, T. C. Smout once wrote, "Highland society was based on kinship modified by feudalism and Lowland society on feudalism tempered by kinship." Whichever norms were dominant in a particular area, clans and clan groupings, idiosyncratic though they may be, were important at all levels. By the Middle Ages, patriarchal leaders were typically receiving dues in the form of labor or cattle, assigning land rights, settling disputes over the use of commons and protecting rent-paying tenants from invasion and famine. The most common land-tenure system was known as the "run-rig" for lands close to settlements, and the in/out field system for farther away land.<sup>3</sup> In the context of such traditional law, elaborate norms for the use of land by families emerged; these norms reflected different patterns of rotation between crops, pasture, fallow, and availability of draught animals and plows (Dodgshon 1981; Smout 1969:119-126). Any single piece of land may become unused in such a system due to rotation cycles within the year, or of longer fallow periods. As in

such usufructuary systems around the world, the system was not one in which those who used the land could sell use-rights in a free market. Rather it was a system where land rights were dependent on active use of the land, and the normative approval of other potential claimants.

The clan and its leader in turn regulated which family used what land for subsistence purposes or commons and what dues in kind or in cash would be required. Traditional norms emerged specifying which family farmed which areas, the amount of goods to be paid for dues, and military obligations. More norms regulated rights to graze cattle or hunt in the commons. Clans also built fortifications in which to retreat in case of attack, and in which to store grain reserves in case of famine. These traditional norms were customary, meaning that they had little relation to outside law, or for that matter, market advantage. Ideally, a family farmed land and paid dues to a particular lord for generations, without necessarily any consideration of the relative needs of anything more than the local economy. Each clan also had norms for caring for the poor which in an extreme this meant that the feudal lord was required to purchase relief goods from outside the area for free distribution to tenants. Notably, these decisions were made not with reference to how much a person or piece of land produced for the market-place, but to maximize the subsistence of the clan (Dodgshon 1993:700).

Notably, these actions were not undertaken in the context of an open market; land rights could not be bought and sold, but were dependent on relationships. Access to famine relief was also dependent on relationships and not a rationalized "need." When defaults in dues occurred, as they might during bad years, it was not always possible to seek replacement dues, peasants, or soldiers from other sources. Default could lead to eventual forgiveness, and clan leaders could not foreclose on their farmers. So tied together in a bond beneath the level of the marketplace the bond between lord and peasant could do nothing except persist and eventually be renegotiated.

Karl Marx, presumably relying on the nostalgic memories of nineteenth century people he knew, pointed out that "sentiment" was important to the culture and was in effect the glue that held people together in "human" relationships, as opposed to those determined in the marketplace where the "cash nexus" was paramount (see Marx and Engels 1848; Marx 1853). Nevertheless, while Marx had a good point about how such societies functioned, he also missed the violence frequently found in such situations (see Smout 1969:101-105). There was frequent skirmishing between clans which could result in long feuds. In the Scottish Middle Ages (approximately 1000-1300 AD), clans built fortresses—castles—in order to protect themselves from such raiding. Impressive as such fortresses were, they were built without systematic recourse to a cash-based labor market. Rather they were built in the same manner as the Great Pyramids of Egypt, through labor corvée placed on the members of the clan; as in the time of the Pharaohs, families were required to commit labor during idle points in the agricultural cycle. Across periods of tens or hundreds of years, this labor was enough to build impressive stone structures, even in remote Scotland.

Politically, there was a tension between centralization and fragmentation (Smout 1969:222-228). The patriarchs or chiefs ruling the clans at times selected a King who typically reigned from what is now Edinburgh in southern Scotland. The clan patriarch would in turn, pass on a portion of the tribute, soldiers and labor, to projects of the King. In societies in which there was little cash, tribute was typically paid in the same form that the clan received from its clan members: as cattle which could walk, or as high value durable goods like whiskey. Water carriage was limited due to an absence of ports which were vulnerable to raids, particularly during the time of Viking expansion (i.e. 900-1300 AD).

A key duty delegated by the clans in the late Middle Ages to the King was the responsibility to establish times and places for markets. Suspicious of each other, the King was viewed as a powerful but neutral arbiter in the designation of such events, which inherently required exchanges between clans which often had on-going feuds. At markets items such as salt, small luxury goods, and other items which could not be manufactured locally were traded. Sold into the "market" at prices fixed by the lord or King were items like cattle, whiskey, and at times of a good harvest, perhaps grain needed to feed the small cities like Edinburgh which even at the beginning of the eighteenth century had only about thirty-five thousand people. Prices, or rather rates of barter, were set by fiat, based on a combination of tradition and scarcity. Regulated were times and places for barter, the role of kin relations in barter, items that could be bartered, and rates of exchange. Only after these legal requirements had been met were the mechanisms of the price-setting marketplace, now taken for granted, allowed to work.<sup>4</sup>

But even in early-modern Scotland, change occurred, albeit slowly. By the early part of the eighteenth century, the use of cash began to emerge for the payment of dues, as the institutions of central government slowly reached into hinterlands of first the southern lowlands, and even tentatively into the densely-populated northern Highlands. The cities themselves remained small and dependent on the farms in the immediate vicinity of the castle. But compared to other countries, the proportion of urban people was high; it is believed 5-10% of the Scottish population lived in cities by 1700, where they were engaged in trade, government, and minor manufacturing.

But still, in the early eighteenth century, the bulk of economic activity in Scotland still focused on subsistence agriculture, that is on-farm production of wheat and barley (and after about 1730 potatoes from Peru) by a subsistence peasantry producing only small surpluses. Risks included crop failure induced by combinations of drought, disease, and raiding. Up until the late seventeenth century, famines would occur periodically as farmers pushed into agriculturally marginal lands, including the more rocky hillsides and river bottoms which were more likely to experience frequent crop failure due to flooding. The Plague also periodically invaded Scotland, in particular targeting residents of the densely populated burghs (Smout 1976:23).

In sum, before the last killing famine in the early 1690s, the Scottish peasantry lived within the parameters found in most peasant societies be-

neath the level of the marketplace. In good times, population increased rapidly, as births exceeded deaths, which in turn invited disaster as poorer lands would be farmed. Famine or epidemic disease would stall population growth and even cause declines, with the consequence that at least across a period of centuries, a population remained "in balance" with the capacity of the land to produce food. As with much of the British Isles, the Scottish population contracted after 1349 when the Plague arrived. But Scottish population recovered, and by the sixteenth century expanded. But population growth again stopped in the seventeenth century, before resuming a slow but relentless climb during the eighteenth century. This was of course part of the ancient pattern, probably reaching back several thousand years to a time when humans developed settled agriculture and its accompanying high birth rates.

But by the 1700s something new was afoot. This slow population expansion in eighteenth century Scotland correlated with both an agricultural phenomenon, the introduction of the potato as a staple, and a political phenomenon, the political union between England and Scotland in 1707. The potato, as in Ireland, was well suited to provide more carbohydrates per hectare of land than had previous regimes of oats and barley and was to correlate with an expansion in the Scottish population as it recovered from the famines of the 1690s (Smout 1969:267). As for political union with England, this meant that restrictions on long-distance trading were relaxed. In the short run, this meant that Scottish cattle could be sent southwards to English markets.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, minor centers of specialized industry emerged in southern Scotland, where the production of flax and linen began to exceed the needs of the local population and could also be traded southwards to England. This was done in the context of local manufactories, of which there were 106 proposed and/or established, mostly after 1660 (Whatley 1997:12). So, the net result was that in Adam Smith's way of speaking, the extent of the market expanded. This is what was to make the emergence of factories possible, a development noticed by the group of noblemen and businessmen known as the Improvers, a group seeking to develop farmland in a scientific manner, focused on goals of production rather than simply subsistence and feudal dues (see e.g. Parry 1980:17-20).

### Scotland's Eighteenth Century Economic Take-off

Economic historians are fond of identifying when the proper constellation of social, political, demographic, agricultural, legal and economic conditions converge, paving the way for a particular economy to "take off" and begin producing for mass world markets. In the case of Scotland, the establishment of the mass world markets in commodities, labor and capital is typically traced to the eighteenth century. The verb though implies a deceptive quickness; unlike an airplane, an economic takeoff takes decades and is a slow process, "visible" primarily in hindsight. Identifying such points is of course of much value, as investment in a country at the point of "take-off"

can provide great returns, while the same investment a generation too early leads to the loss of investment capital.

Embedded in the economic take-off and the commodification of society was violence and war. Attempts to integrate Scottish and English markets in the eighteenth century resulted in splits between the clan chiefs in the north (with the majority aligning with Prince Charles Stuart a claimant to the Joint Throne of England and Scotland), and the industrializing southern cities where merchants and landlords began to form alliances with the English. This split was a basis for a revolt of the northern clan chiefs in the 1740s under the leadership of Stuart, who became known as "Bonnie Prince Charlie." After invading northern England, Bonnie Prince Charlie was finally exiled from Scotland following his defeat in 1745. Direct rule from London was extended to the far corners of Scotland. Lords who had sided with the British were awarded explicit *personal* title to the lands held by the clans in the past, while the lands of the rebellious "lairds" reverted to the British Crown, and were later awarded to more compliant landlords. The end result was that land which had been owned by one group of people in a chaotic feudal system focused by the runrig, became owned by individuals who had ties to distant London and the market. This process as "primitive accumulation" is the dirty amoral underside of efficient allocation by markets. It always involves the termination of traditional rights, in order that the item, land, or labor can be commodified in the marketplace. Perelman (2000) points out that such accumulation is a pre-condition for capitalist production because it is through such mechanisms that traditional rights to land are terminated and market rights asserted. Accompanying this appropriation of land in Scotland were explicit laws prohibiting the use of Gaelic, the wearing of kilts and other expressions of Highland culture.

The new land tenure arrangements, political union, improvements in water and steam power and new demands for industrial products at the end of the eighteenth century, provided key prerequisites for an economic take-off in Scotland. This was particularly true in the lowlands of southern Scotland, which easily fell within the orbits of Edinburgh and Glasgow. Wool for the looms, flax for linen manufacture, and labor for the new factories in Edinburgh and Glasgow all became available. Capital was provided from the profits emerging both in Scotland and across the old border with England, where profits from a new trade with North America expanded fortunes. In particular, Scotland became the site where Virginia tobacco was received and processed for re-distribution across Europe. This happened at the same time as the subsistence population to the north was again expanding demographically following the catastrophe of the war and English occupation. Once again the risk of famine was created.

But, for the first time the increase in rural population density did not simply result in the intensification of traditional agricultural techniques, followed by famine or other catastrophe. Desperate Scottish peasants had another alternative at the benches of the new factories. Areas around the new industrial areas of Edinburgh and Glasgow began to re-orient themselves to

market production, not only of the manufactories, but also in the countryside where wage labor was becoming more common. One of the new farms, Fentonborough, was described as being the apogee of capitalist farming by a visitor in the heyday of "high farming." It was a world which Max Weber would have recognized as being imbued with "the spirit of capitalism."

This great farm almost reached the sublime. It went like clockwork. Its fields, of from 20 to 30 acres, were all rectangular. There were no odd corners, no thickets, no hedgerow trees, no ragged, any-shaped pastures. The quickset hedges were clipped low and narrow like those of a garden. No wild rose or old man's beard ramblled on them, no may or blackthorn blossom lit them up, neither did the violet of the primrose find a lodging beneath their shade. There were no open ditches, and the plough ran right up to the roots of the fence. The land was as clean as a well-kept garden. (quoted in Smout 1986:15)

It is estimated that by the end of the eighteenth century in the lowlands around the two growing cities, 1/3 of production was for the marketplace. By default, the other 2/3 of production would have been for subsistence. More importantly, though, for the first time, some sensitivity to the messages that market prices sent about supply and demand effected cropping decisions. Glasgow in particular began to grow at the end of the eighteenth century, and established factories which, in the context of trade, realized economies of scale. Thus in a peculiar fashion, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the new world marketplace offered Scotland a way out of the impending ecological catastrophe. In effect, a trade would be implicitly offered. People would be moved out of the lands they had occupied since time immemorial, and into new occupations, whether on the coast, in the cities, or overseas. Cities would grow, and the lands vacated by peasant farmers would be given over to specialized production, which could fill the demands of the new factories. Wool, flax, and other crops which were most appropriate for the maximization of profits in the new economy would come to be preferred.

The intensification of activity had the effect on innovation that Smith had predicted. In developing this description of the areas around Glasgow and Edinburgh in the 1840s, Smout (1986:14-18, 61) goes on to write about the efficiencies that were generated in the production of an acre of barley: one study indicated that in 1840 twenty-two labor days were required for production. In 1914, one acre of production took twelve labor days, and in 1958 took only three labor days were required. The reason productivity improved, of course is that mechanization meant that each unit of labor was used more efficiently. Each unit of labor was also presumably more skilled, and narrowly specialized. The efficiencies implied by such increases in labor productivity are indeed great, for it meant that labor was released to produce other goods in the rapidly expanding economy. But the relationship between labor, the land, and its product, was also altered. The mystical connection between the farmer and his product was broken. The farmer was no longer a

self-sufficient peasant, but a laborer tied to the market. More generally Smout wrote about the farms which developed in this tradition:

These modern-sounding ecological deserts, "factories for making corn and meat," William Cobbett had described them on his Scottish tour of 1830, were cultivated by squads of agricultural workers or hands, who formed not a peasantry but a genuine landless proletariat, in the sense that there was no expectation that at any time in their life would they become tenants of land, or be anything other than simple farm laborers. (Smout 1986:15)

In this bargain were devilish details. Because for peasants to become farm laborers, the old ways would need to be eliminated, as new ways of life were invented. This would happen in a recurrent fashion, as some experiments worked and others failed and economic trends matured and dissipated. Most vulnerable of course were the newly landless peasants who were thrust into an unregulated wage labor market.

Scotland's handloom industry provides an example of the risks. Handloom weavers who numbered 45,000 in 1790, reached a peak of 84,500 by 1840. Handloom weavers were the highly skilled craftspeople who produced cloth on traditional looms in their homes or small cottages, and were paid for their production by peddlers who traveled in the more accessible parts of the countryside. But the handloom was displaced by the more efficient power loom which needed a factory, beginning in the 1840s. The number of handloom weavers fell to 25,000 in 1850, and to four thousand in 1880. The profession itself was stimulated by the division of labor in the early nineteenth century, but ultimately destroyed by the energy of a capitalist market which again improved on productivity by inventing the power loom (Smout 1986:23).

More market irony was generated when the last Scottish famine threatened, as a result of the potato blight in 1846-1848. The British government responded with famine relief programs in places where the traditional lairds failed to bring relief goods. In the coastal ports, there were grain riots which took place when the relief agencies bought up the flour. Market-savvy southerners were concerned that purchase of the flour for relief supplies to the starving Highlanders would drive up prices in their own localities (Smout 1986:13; and 1976:21-31).

But if crowding in the nineteenth century countryside was bad, conditions in the city were not better for the masses. In the cities success meant wealth for a very few, a new middle class status for a few more, and abominable conditions for the new proletariat. Urban failure might mean death from tuberculosis, cholera, typhoid, or crippling from rickets or the other diseases which thrived in the crowded urban environments of places like Glasgow, where factory labor dominated. Indeed, between 1801 and 1839, cholera made Glasgow Great Britain's most lethal city. Equally disastrous for the new proletariat, it could mean declining wages, lay-offs, strikes, and rebellion. The newly proletarianized peasantry of course suffered the costs of the failures; while the immediate profits of the successes, particularly during

the nineteenth century, were to end up in the pockets and castles of a new elite.

But the rationalization of the peasantry did not only occur in the city. In the countryside a new profession, the surveyor, emerged, which would fix boundaries in a manner which could be used to triumphantly turn farms into profitable sheep runs. These sheep runs were suitable for the new breed of Cheviot black-tailed sheep which were known for their heavy wool coats, but lacked the hardiness and versatility of the older, but less shaggy, Highland sheep.

In a little over a century Scottish land surveyors produced over 50,000 plans. The importance of this output extended far beyond the cartography itself, for they were in the business of planning a new landscape. In what was an open and largely incoherent farming scene, half moorland with a few trees, they created an ordered, geometrical, fenced and wood landscape. . . . (Adams 1980:168-170)

With the surveys, rights in a run-rig, grazing rights, and hunting rights disappeared; and all that was left was the simplified product created by the surveyors for the landlords who lived in the world of banks and investment. While this may have been a triumph for the landlords, and the industrializing city, for the peasants it meant that as John McPhee later wrote:

The glens were empty, and it was possible in countless places to stand on high ground and look out over an area where, say, ten thousand people had lived and where the only inhabitants now were thirty or forty shepherds. . . . To the new lairds it was clear enough that their lands were more profitable under sheep than under people, and so the people had to go. . . . Their factors—general agents, business managers, collectors of rent—went around to the [stone] black houses and gave the people notice of their evictions and at the appointed times the walls of the houses were pulled down and the thatch and the wooden beams were destroyed by flame. Families sat on hillsides, often in snow or rain, and watched their homes burn out. For seven hundred years, torches had called the clans together in time of need, and now torches cleared the glens. The people leaving sometimes had to drain blood from their cattle and drink it in order to survive. (McPhee 1970:6-7)

Writers like McPhee present this as a dramatic story, which at times it was. But in many ways, drama is deceptive; most of all, it was a slow and gradual process. But more importantly, it took place across decades as it changed from locality to locality. A look at the local history of three places, that of the Sutherlands in the northern part of Scotland, the remote island of St. Kilda, and the Isle of Skye describes the different forms this transformation—or depopulation—took in rural Scotland. The result in all three places was the same, or as McPhee put it: "It was possible in countless places to stand on high ground and look out over an area where, say, ten thousand people had lived and where the only inhabitants now were thirty or forty

shepherds . . ." Fire and starvation were a means on occasion for insuring this happened, as it still is in Tanzania today, or for that matter along the Spanish frontier of the United States in 1789. But by itself, it was not enough; after all peasants could have easily returned, and repaired the damage as they had in the past. Other factors induced this massive migration out of the countryside and into cities around the world as well. Most importantly, there was a change in consciousness and ideology, as the children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Scottish peasants came to see themselves and their world in terms of a labor, land and capital markets. It was a different yardstick than would have been used by their subsistence-focused ancestors.

### The Depopulation of Scotland's Highlands, 1755-1931

Between 1755 and 1931, all of Scotland, even the most remote islands, underwent an economic Revolution. At the beginning of the period, the glens were dominated by the tenants of the clan chiefs. They produced for themselves and their chiefs and the land sustained a population of about one million of these self-sufficient farmers, many of whom lived in the remote Highlands of the North. Far fewer than one hundred thousand people lived in the urban centers, of which Edinburgh and Glasgow were by far the largest.

But, by 1931, the balance had shifted; there were far more people living in the cities. There were 1.2 million people in Glasgow alone. At the same time the remote Highlands and hundreds of glens and islands had been abandoned by the self-sufficient farmers. Indeed, by the end of the nineteenth century even Scotland's massive Cheviot breed sheep herd, introduced in the eighteenth century, had left as well, pushed out by the same market forces which had cleared the land of the peasantry because greener pastures (in the economic sense) meant that wool could be produced more profitably in places like Australia and New Zealand. Nevertheless, for a time—much of the nineteenth century—Scotland had one of the world's great herds of sheep, which in turn clothed Europe's rapidly expanding population with warm woolens. But in testimony to the power of the world's new markets, in the end, both farmers and sheep were gone. Oddly enough, the land was permitted to revert to what it had been before the populations of humans and sheep had expanded. In the twentieth century, forest reserves, which marketed recreational opportunities for a remote middle class, and hunting opportunities for the rich came to dominate the land once held by humans and later sheep. Scotland in the late twentieth century itself was by and large a modern urban society.

Statistics documenting change are sparse, and qualitative accounts typically focus on the dramatic events such as the violent clearances of some areas of the Highlands.<sup>6</sup> The statistics available though demonstrate not only that Scotland underwent a capitalist transformation, but also clearly indicate

Table 3.1—Population of Scotland and Its Major Cities, 1600-2001

Year	Population of Scotland	Birthrate per 1000 persons	Glasgow	Edinburgh
1600	800,00		7,000	
1707	1,000,000			
1755	1,265,000			57,195
1801	1,608,420		66,000 (1791)	81,865 (1791)
1811	1,805,864			103,143
1821	2,091,521			162,403
1831	2,364,386		202,426	
1841	2,620,000		280,000 (1846)	
1851	2,888,642			191,303
1861	3,062,294	34.1		
1871	3,360,018	35.0	494,824 (1872)	
1881	3,735,573	33.3	658,073	277,387
1891	4,025,647	30.5		269,407
1901	4,472,103	29.2	761,712	
1911	4,760,904	25.4	800,000 (1912)	
1921	4,882,497	23.0	1,034,174	
1931	4,842,554	18.2		
1939	5,006,700	17.6	1,172,820 (1938)	
1951	5,096,000	17.9	1,089,555	
1961	5,179,000	19.7	1,055,017	
1971	5,229,000	14.4	897,485	
1981	5,130,735	12.9	774,068	
1991	4,962,152	12.5	668,000	439,660
2001	5,064,000			449,020

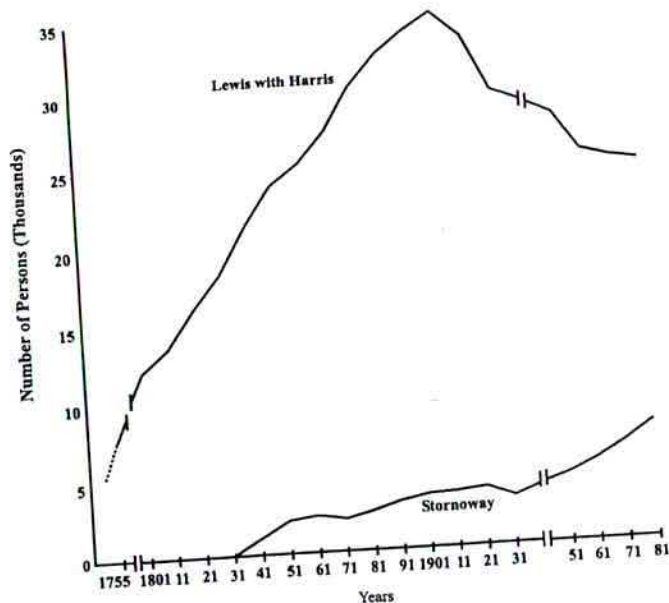
Various sources, including UK and Ireland Genealogy ([www.genuki.org.uk](http://www.genuki.org.uk)), General Register for Scotland, Glasgow City Guide.

**Table 3.2—Scottish Island Population Trends, 1871-1971.** This table indicates that over a one hundred year period, almost half of the Scottish islands were abandoned, and the island population declined substantially.

Island Group	Inhabited Islands			Population (in thousands)		
	1871	1921	1971	1871	1921	1971
Shetland	30	24	9	32.5	25.5	17.3
Orkney	30	30	23	31.6	24.4	17.0
Western Isles	37	32	18	39.5	44.2	30.0
Skye	21	22	18	18.9	12.3	7.5
Argyll and Bute	58	49	31	40.2	45.8	21.4
Others	11	16	1	0.3	0.4	0.5
Scotland (Total)	186	173	105	162.9	152.1	93.7

Source: Turnock 1982:265

Population of Lewis and Harris



**Figure 3.1. Population of Lewis and Harris and its main city Stornoway, 1755-1981.** Source: Thompson 1987.

that between the two dates, the population of Scotland quadrupled from 1.2 million to over 5 million (Table 3.1). They also demonstrate that it was the new cities that absorbed the growth. More to the point, in the short period between about 1755 and 1831, Glasgow grew over twelve-fold. By 1841 only ten years later, it had added another one-third. These people by and large came from the rural areas of Scotland. They came first from the nearby lands of the southern Lowlands, and later from the Highlands and more distant islands (Smout 1969 and Smout 1983:8).

And that is not the whole story. Besides the abandonment of the glens, over one hundred islands were completely deserted during this period (Table 3.2). Island societies which had supported human populations for thousands of years were abandoned, and reverted back to the birds. On other islands, populations peaked sometime in the nineteenth century and then underwent a decline, as islanders left for the cities (Figure 3.1). In some ways perhaps, Scotland was fortunate: unlike Ireland across the sea in the nineteenth century, Scotland as a whole never suffered the killing famine which led to the catastrophic population decline caused by the potato blight; the relief commodities provided to Scottish peasants threatened with starvation probably averted demographic catastrophe. Whether the impetus was that of violent expulsion, hunger, or a new modern consciousness moved them, the Highlands were abandoned, populations of islands and districts have declined, and land which once supported settled human populations became vacant.

While the end results of the decline of subsistence agriculture in Scotland was relatively uniform across the 200 years, how it happened varied between regions and islands. At an extreme were the Sutherland clearances. These were the most notorious, occurring between about 1800 and 1820 as the hereditary Countess of Sutherland systematically terminated the "leases" of the tens of thousands of tenants living on "her" land. They were replaced by a small number of English shepherd families, who tended the flocks of sheep which financed her country estate at Dunrobin Castle. At another extreme, though, is the remote island of St. Kilda, which was voluntarily evacuated by the declining population in 1930. Meanwhile, on the island of Skye, the hereditary lairds, the MacLeod of MacLeod and Lord MacDonald, went bankrupt in the 1830s, losing their holdings to creditors because they had purchased famine relief goods to sustain the impoverished tenants.

Whatever the means though, by the twentieth century, the peasant population of Scotland had undergone a transformation. Whether through the rough appropriation by primitive accumulation needed to turn peasant farms and lives into a commodity traded in a marketplace, the misery of a congested population, or the more gentle allure cast by the bright city lights, the lands occupied for centuries of subsistence peasants, lie empty today. The range of ways these lands were cleared will inform understanding of how the Great Transformation occurred in Scotland, and can occur elsewhere, even in modern Tanzania, where the subsistence peasantry still persists.

### The Sutherland Clearances

Since the age of the Industrial Revolution the Highland county of Sutherland has experienced a continuous decline of population. This has reflected the great change in the character of economic activity in the region that occurred roughly between 1780 and 1830. A labour-intensive, communal economy gave way to a land-intensive, individualistic framework. . . . The consequences of the change, however, ran counter to those in the national economy. Sutherland failed to generate forces of cumulative expansion which were at all comparable to those associated with the industrialization of much of Britain. In common with the rest of the Highlands there was a diminution of economic activity and a loss of population. (Richards 1973:63)

The most notorious of the Highland clearances was undertaken in the northern District of Sutherland, by the Countess of Sutherland. For nineteenth century radicals like Karl Marx, the Sutherland clearances are pointed to as being the cruelest example of the clearance policies sweeping through the Scottish Highlands between 1785 and 1854. During the Sutherland clearances, tens of thousands of rural peasants were evicted and replaced by sheep pasture and the improved Cheviot sheep. Conveniently, the story comes with a pair of villains, the Duchess herself, and her manager Patrick Sellar.

The Duchess was the hereditary ruler of the Sutherland clan, which occupied a substantial portion of northern Scotland. Her family had sided with the British during the 1740s rebellion of Bonnie Prince Charlie. In a number of legal moves following the British victory the family had by 1811 surveyed the traditional clan lands and registered them as their own personal property.<sup>7</sup> At 1.25 million acres, it was the largest estate in Great Britain. For the maintenance of this huge estate, there were several problems. First most of the rents—that is the production of the estate—were paid in labor service and cattle. Both “products” were transportable on the underdeveloped road system, but neither were easily negotiable in the emerging world marketplace. Second, population was expanding rapidly on land of which only 1% was arable. Famine conditions exacerbated by a high peasant birth rate, emerged multiple times in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, necessitating the provision of relief supplies by the Duchess and her husband, the Duke of Stafford (see Richards 1973:63-64).

In this context the Duchess hired a manager, Patrick Sellar, who had studied carefully the principles of “planned economic development.”<sup>8</sup> In 1807 they proposed a plan which was to remove the peasants to the periphery of Sutherland, freeing up the Highlands for sheep. After careful study, it was concluded that the peasantry could be provided the means to develop their own industry on the coastline. Large sums were invested by the Duchess in the infrastructure to make the land and new villages profitable (see also Smout 1969:353-356). Roads and port facilities would be built to make the interior areas accessible, and peasants were permitted to buy their own

three acres to support themselves in the newly diversifying economy. The plan the Duchess’ advisors developed would have appealed to Adam Smith: Quoting the Duchess’ advisors, historian T. C. Smout (1969:53-56) writes:

“The country it is true may not produce gold or silver or oil, but if it produced industry all these things will be added unto it.” By settling the people into villages by introducing a “few mechanics and manufacturers,” especially in flax, cotton, and woolen manufacture, “the present enchantment which keeps them down will be broken, and Sutherland may enjoy as many comforts and pays as fair rents as any of her neighbours.” By 1811 the experiment in planning had begun—both in new industrial enterprise and in intensive land reclamation, and one of the planners was able to remark: “By these Sutherland concerns we must give bread to a great many people.”<sup>9</sup>

The solutions that the Sutherlands arrived at are familiar to modern ears. Peasants who were the progeny of hunters, warriors, farmers, and pastoralists were relocated onto the coasts, where the Sutherland family contributed to the construction of fishing ports, curing sheds, and harbors (Johnson 1991: 220-221). In support of the Sutherlands, the British Crown built roads and port facilities using the public purse.

The Duchess’ business plan itself imagined a sparsely populated interior in which sheep would be raised and the coastline densely populated by an industrialized workforce. The workforce would engage in manufacturing, kelp farming, and fishing. But the incentives offered in the business plan were not enough to persuade tenants with age-old rights to leave; the tenants were not infected with what Weber would later call “the spirit of capitalism.” Sellar though thought that the peasantry could be “pinched enough” to produce for the new order, if their conditions were made Spartan enough. Implicitly, the ideology of capitalism was part of the description when Patrick Sellar wrote to the Duchess of Sutherland, and her husband the Duke of Stafford:

Lord and Lady Stafford were pleased humanely to order the new arrangement of this country. That the interior should be possessed by Cheviot shepherds, and the people brought down to the coast and placed in lots of less than three acres, sufficient for the maintenance of an industrious family, pinched enough to cause them to turn their attention to the fishing [of herring]. A most benevolent action, to put these barbarous Highlanders into a position where they could better associate together, apply themselves to industry, educate their children, and advance in civilization. (Source: <http://members.aol.com/Skyewrites/clear3.html>)

Sellar’s paternalistic language is often used by the economically well-off to describe development plans for the poor, whether in the Third World today, or in the urban cities of modern countries like the United States. When the subjects of such schemes are unable or refuse to cooperate with such well-laid development plans, the planners often seek explanations in the perceived limitations of the people for whom the projects are designed,

rather than poor planning, or the limitations of the program. Their strategy typically is to create needs in a fashion which assumes that industriousness or what Smith called the natural impulse to truck, trade and barter will be a "natural" response. But it is not the only response: desperation, flight, revolt or crime also can result from "pinched circumstances."<sup>10</sup>

When benevolence did not work, Sellars resorted to the new centralized legal system focused by surveys, land registries, and central enforcement then emerging in Scotland. It was in this context that Sellars arranged for armed men, dogs, and fire to be used to forcefully evict tenants resistant to leaving their customary homes (Johnson 1991:220).<sup>11</sup>

Villagers described his eviction from their perspective, which focused on the excesses of the Countess' agents. Said Roderick MacLeod:

I saw the townships set on fire. Grummore with 16 houses and Archmilidh with four. All the houses were burnt with the exception of one. A barn. Few if any of the families knew where to turn their heads or from whom to get their next meal. It was sad, the driving away of these people. The terrible remembrance of the "Burnings" of Strathnaver will live as long as a root of the people remains in this country.  
(Source: <http://members.aol.com/Skyewrites/clear4.html>)

The morality of the Duchess' means of eviction may be a source of ongoing debate in modern economics. But, irrespective of the good or ill of her intentions, it soon became apparent that her well-laid business plan brought new threats to not only the peasants, but also the profitability of her enterprises. The Sutherlands did not anticipate the inter-connectedness with the new marketplace which, for the first time, was globe-straddling in its scope. High prices for the herring, sheep's wool and cattle that the estate produced, did indeed, mean that portions of the investment could be paid off by 1820. Herring was a particularly successful industry, and by the "miracle year" of 1819, several thousand men and women were employed in new coastal communities in the catching and processing of herring for export to the Mediterranean (Richards 1973:71-72). Other new industries which emerged on the Sutherland Estate during the 1810s were coal mining, kelp processing, brick works, and salt pans.

However, with the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, Scotland's new industries soon found themselves in competition with resuscitated production of similar products throughout the modern world. Distant events affected the well-being of Scotland too. By the 1820s, herring prices fell due to entry of the Irish into the herring industry and a decline of demand from the Baltic and West Indies. The wool produced on the vast sheep estates also proved to be subject to world price fluctuations, and demand for Sutherland wool fell in the 1820s. By the 1830s, the Sutherlands were losing money on their investments and held onto the family lands only in the context of subsidies from businesses they owned in England to the south.

As a result, the 1830s was a time of great emigration from Sutherland, with many former tenants and fishermen moving to North America. The de-

cline in the Sutherlands' economy reached a nadir in 1836, only to be confronted with food shortage again in 1847. This time though, the threatened famine was not due to weather, or the push of fertile independent peasant farmers into marginal lands, but the collapse in the markets for the products Sutherland produced, and the devastation brought by the potato blight (Richards 1973:72). A new type of rural poverty was beginning to emerge.

### The Evacuation of St. Kilda

Accounts of the Sutherland clearances emphasize the violence. But in many ways this is a deceptive starting point for looking at why peasant populations abandon the subsistence world and become enmeshed in a new world economy. For many, if not most, the move from the subsistence world and engagement with the world economy is coercive in a much more subtle and enchanting fashion. Exposure to the allures of the market economy led to capture of its labor, land, and capital markets as surely as the dramatic and violent evictions of the Duchess of Sutherland and her managers. But at an opposite extreme is the evacuation of places like the small but remote island of St. Kilda, 45 miles from Harris, the nearest of the Outer Hebrides. Here, there were no dogs, fires, policemen, surveyors, lawyers or others to hurry along the evacuation. For St. Kilda never did tempt any incipient capitalist with dreams of wealth or primitive accumulation. Nevertheless, in 1931, the very last of St. Kilda's occupants asked the Royal Navy to remove them from their ancestral homeland. This the Royal Navy did, even permitting them to bring their sheep to market on the Scottish mainland. The Scottish Ministry paid the bill, and the St. Kildans quietly took up jobs with the Scottish Forest Service and other specialized occupations.

St. Kilda is a tiny island occupied for at least 2000 years before being voluntarily abandoned in 1931. If the Sutherland clearance represented the violent extreme of rural depopulation, St. Kilda illustrates an opposite. For the evacuation of St. Kilda was undertaken voluntarily, after a decision by the last 32 islanders that life in the cities was preferable to that on remote St. Kilda, where ships even in the 1930s landed only during the summer months. And in understanding the nature of this evacuation lies the paradox of the modern world; for it is not only overt force and coercion that depopulate and lay waste to formerly productive lands. At the same time the charms and bright lights seductively beckon the subsistence world to abandon the ways of life known for thousands of years.

For hundreds of years, St. Kilda was occupied by up to 180 people, who subsisted on seabird flesh, birds' eggs, a few cattle, and what little they could grow on the wind-swept island. Once per year, they would make a tributary payment to the MacLeod clan of Harris of oil and feathers, and receive a few goods like salt, sugar and tea from the "mainland" in return. Otherwise they were left alone.

Nineteenth century visitors claimed that St. Kildans were living in a socialist economy—they used a phrase from the modern world to describe an idealized egalitarian way of organizing subsistence. Each morning, the men

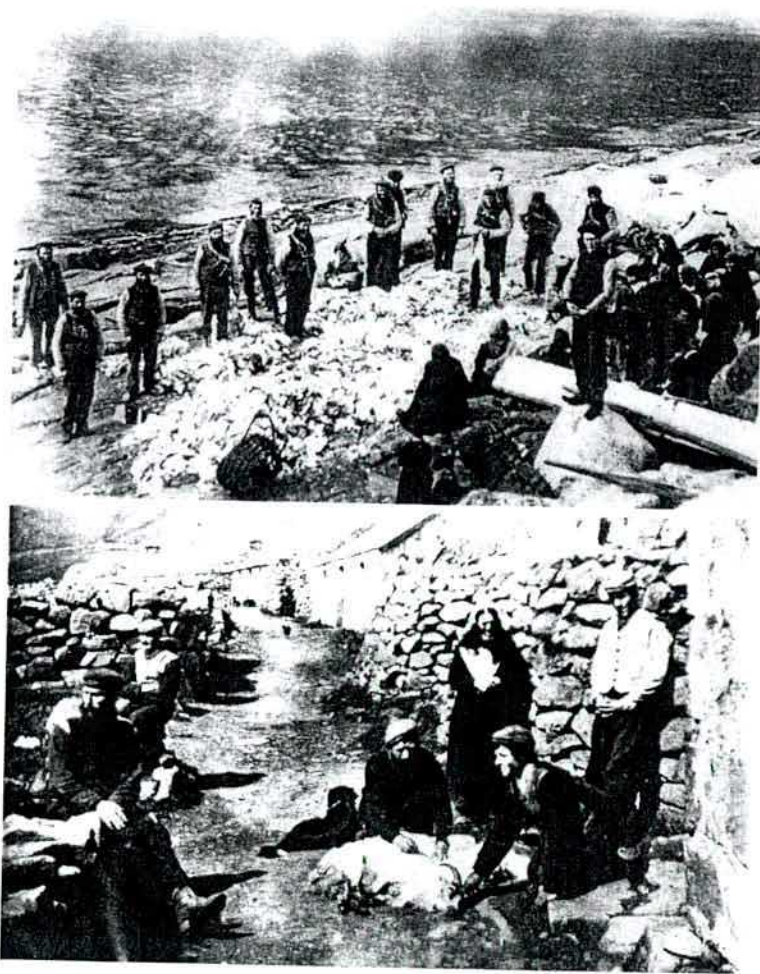
of the island would gather, and decide what to do that day—they might tend livestock and fields, collect sea bird eggs, fish, or catch birds. Women were involved with child care, tending the peat fire and gardens, cheesemaking, spinning wool, sewing and other domestic tasks. Men during the winter would weave at the wooden beam looms that each household possessed (Thompson 1970:38-39, 70-79). Neil Gillies, one of the last inhabitants describes the annual routine of the men in the early twentieth century in the following fashion:

They started the first sheep shearing in June, and went to Boreray, and were for a week in Boreray sheep shearing, and came back and started fishing with the long line for herring . . . and after that, they started to kill the fulmar on the 12 August, and took a week there, and after that, they started to cut the grass and dry it, and put into the "cleits" [small stone houses] and after that they started to spin and weave. . . . They started to weave and was weaving like that till about April, and they started to wash that tweed and work it, and dry it, and roll it up . . . They used to be about 32 yards in each roll, and some had half a dozen, some had eight, some had only four . . . they got about three shillings a yard for it. (Kay 1996:28)

Many of the tasks undertaken are left out of this account, but the point is that the islanders, even in the early twentieth century, were doing everything by hand. This was enough to feed, house and clothe the community, as well as participate in a minor way in the cash market. And yet the sum collected for the hand-woven tweed was paltry—far less than one thousand shillings per year, even for the most industrious family.

As for the daily tasks, apportionment of the "means of production" was decided on an *ad hoc* fashion, in a manner which was regarded as normative by the islanders. Boats, fowling gear, and climbing ropes were held in common. There was no President of the morning meeting which outsiders romantically called the "Parliament," and the production of the day's labor would be shared among each family in a manner determined by custom. The puffin and fulmar harvest was divided up at the end of each day's harvest between families, including a share for the poor. Different rules, but with a similar communal bent, applied to the apportionment of grazing land for sheep, fishing takes, and the use of what little farmland there was (Thompson 1970:41-45).

The island also shared its annual debt to the MacLeod of Harris, who sent a boat to St. Kilda at each Midsummer bearing "gifts." In exchange the feudal lord of Harris received tribute from the St. Kildan islanders. In monetary terms, the "rent" that was levied against the islanders was eleven pounds in 1758, had gone up to ninety-five pounds in 1883, and down to sixty pounds in 1887. Between 1915 and 1928, the new owner of the island, MacLeod of MacLeod, waived the payment of rents altogether.



**Photo 3.2. Scenes from St. Kilda, Scotland, in the early twentieth century.** The top picture is of the fulmar harvest. The birds were snared using long poles, and the harvest used for meat, oil, and feathers. The bottom picture is of sheep shearing. The stone walls, and houses built using local materials are in the background. (Courtesy of the National Museum of Scotland.)

In short, there was a yearly rhythm to the subsistence tasks; not only the growing season varied, but the different seabirds harvests had a seasonality. In short, it was a subsistence economy, in which production was focused by local needs, with little reference to a wider world marketplace.

Unusually for the North Sea, St. Kilda was always too poor and remote to attract the attention of raiders. But as in other subsistence societies, St. Kilda was subject to fluctuations in population as births replaced the frequent deaths. For example, smallpox made its way to the remote island in 1730, and all but thirty of the approximately 180 people died; surviving were only 4 adults, and twenty-six orphaned children (Thompson 1970:66). In the case of remote St. Kildans, death was frequent from other causes as well. Birth rates were high, but infant mortality was also high. *Tetanus infantus* apparently killed two in three infants in the nineteenth century due to a tradition of cleaning the umbilicus of the new-born with a mixture of fulmar oil and dung (Thompson 1970:68-69). Boating accidents and falls from cliffs also frequently killed men. In short, in a small manner they experienced the demographic regime of a high birth rate, and catastrophic death rate found elsewhere in subsistence societies.

But in the nineteenth century, regular visits from the mainland also began. The contact meant that the islanders became aware of the broader world, and within a few years—actually about two generations—the islands discovered that they were “isolated” from the wider world, and that isolation became the excuse for abandoning their home. Abandonment accelerated in 1852, when large-scale emigration to Australia began. In that year 36 people, about 18% of the island’s population, left.

The contact between St. Kilda and the outside world intensified in the late nineteenth century, when tourist ships began to arrive at the “most remote island” in the British Isles. From the 1870s until 1930, boats brought tourists eager to see and understand what “traditional and unspoilt” life in the Scottish Isles was like, and to buy souvenirs produced by people living this lifestyle. In exchange the islanders received modest payments; one calculation estimated that the islanders derived a profit of five shillings each in exchange for the display of their traditions (Thompson 1987: 187-191).

But by the late 1920s, life on St. Kilda had changed. The small fields were no longer cultivated and the cash of the world’s economy had found its way to the islanders. Islanders found that they could ask for money, coal, fish, and other gifts from the outside world. Minor government health and agricultural services funded from the British Treasury arrived. In this context, the St. Kildans asked to be evacuated. In 1930, the Scottish government contracted with the Royal Navy to evacuate the St. Kildans, most of whom had requested resettlement in the cities (Thompson 1970:115-120). A number of the St. Kildans, natives of a treeless island, were given jobs with the Forestry Department in Scotland tending trees.

So it was not clearance, or legal compulsion that depopulated St. Kilda. Simple exposure to the broader world was to prove fateful for the very type of life it claimed to celebrate.

### The MacLeod of MacLeod and Lord MacDonald of Skye

Until 1972 Lord Macdonald held the territorial barony of MacDonald in Skye, and was seated at Armadale Castle, but he then sold a substantial portion of the lands together with the barony to [the merchant banker] Sir Iain Noble of Ardinglas [Baronet] Sir Iain is now offering the barony for sale with an asking price of one million pounds.  
(Source: www.barony.co.uk October 7, 2003)

Whether in Sutherland, St. Kilda, or elsewhere, the Great Transformation was slow. While it is true that dramatic events punctuated the change, the Transformation itself occurred across decades in which small local societies sought to protect themselves, habits and traditions, while embracing parts of the new world. The story of how the lords of Skye facilitated this transition illustrates well the move from a traditional to market economy. Sometimes together and at other times separately, the clans of MacLeod and MacDonald sought to preserve old relationships in the new economy. And yet ultimately, they were unsuccessful, and just as in Sutherland and St. Kilda, the land was cleared of people and today, both subsistence agriculture and feudal responsibility has been replaced with the marketplace as a way of life. On Skye, this trend reached an extreme in 2003 when the honored title of the Baron MacDonald, Laird of Skye, was offered on the internet for a price of 1 million English pounds.

Table 3.3—Population Estimates for the Isle of Skye, 1755-1971

Year	Estimated Population
1755	11,250
1801	15,800
1841	23,000
1883	17,000
1971	7,372

(Source: Seylar and Meylar 1973:101, 111)

The Isle of Skye is located in the Inner Hebrides of Scotland’s north; archaeologists tell us that the island has been continuously occupied for millennia. The peak population in 1841 was twenty-three thousand; today there are seven thousand people (see Table 3.3). Skye provides an example of how a transition occurred from a faction-riven feudal society, to a cog in the world economy demanding among other things, seaweed for soap-making,

soldiers, cattle, and of course wool. Despite powerful individuals who were to become successful in the new world order—modern island historians boast of the number of generals and politicians born on Skye—the population on the island itself has declined; apparently in the new world order, it is more fashionable to claim ancestry on Skye than it is to actually live there.

As with most of the Scottish Highlands, the was farmed traditionally under a run-rig system, in which planting and field rotation were shared. Cattle and sheep moved between the lowland and highland pastures in summer and winter and shepherds who tended them moved with them. Before 1730 when the potato was introduced, diet consisted of oatmeal, gruel, herring, milk and occasionally the meat from a domestic animal. By the 1830s, the subsistence diet had changed, and was dominated by the potato.

Before 1746, there were four main clans on Skye, and a number of smaller ones, with the MacLeods and MacDonalds being the most prominent (see Sillar and Meyler 1973:114-115). The sixteenth century was particularly violent, with struggles occurring between the chiefs, as well as with the King. Most notorious was a 1577 incident where it is said the MacLeod clan killed with smoke and fire 395 MacDonalds who had hidden in a cave on the small island of Eigg. The feuding between the clans continued until 1601 (Sillar and Meyler 1973:95-96).

As in the rest of Scotland, during the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the clan system began to merge with more modern systems of rule through law and courts. In this context, land tenure accrued personally to the chiefs themselves, who like the Duchess of Sutherland, also developed an interest in the economic Improvement movement. On the Isle of Skye, this meant that there was a gradual exposure to the modern world. Dr. Samuel Johnson who visited the island with Thomas Boswell in 1775 described a remote society which was only vaguely aware of the power that the money of the lands to the south held:

It need not, I suppose, be mentioned, that in countries so little frequented as [Skye], there are no houses where travelers are entertained for money. He that wanders about these wilds, either procures recommendations to those whose habitations lie near his way, or, when night and weariness come upon him, takes the chance of general hospitality. If he finds only a cottage, he can expect little more than shelter; for the cottagers have little more for themselves: but if his good fortune brings him to the residence of a gentleman, he will be glad of a storm to prolong his stay. There is, however, one inn by the sea-side at Sconsor, in Skye, where the post-office is kept. (Johnson and Boswell 1775)

Ever the optimist with respect to economic development, Johnson continued to philosophize in a manner similar to his contemporary Adam Smith with respect to the importance of cash emerging as a medium for exchange:

That their poverty is gradually abated, cannot be mentioned among the unpleasing consequences of subjection. They are now acquainted with money,

and the possibility of gain will by degrees make them industrious. Such is the effect of the late regulations, that a longer journey than to the Highlands must be taken by him whose curiosity pants for savage virtues and barbarous grandeur. (Johnson and Boswell 1775)

But Johnson spoke too soon, for the type of poverty Johnson equated with lack of money in 1775 soon would reemerge from older threats inherited from the ancient farmers of the Neolithic: that of too many farmers on too little land. British rule since 1746 actually controlled the violence in Skye society, and in this context, the agricultural population began to grow again. In particular, the introduction of the potato made the production of more food per acre possible. Smallpox even came under control in the early nineteenth century when the Jenner vaccine was introduced (Sillar and Meyler 1973:102-104). Smout (1986:11-12), using data from British government studies, described a diet which emerged by the nineteenth century, which permitted the population of Skye to expand even further: the diet was of herring, and 4.5-6.0 pounds of potatoes per day, at least on the poorer islands near Skye. Housing remained in "black houses" which were "a home of rough stone and turf, its heather thatch pegged to a few roof timbers, without ceiling or paved floor, and without windows or chimney." Still, well outside the world market system for tax purposes, the black houses on Skye were valued at a paltry five pence in 1842-1843. Cows and perhaps a pony might share the dwelling in an adjacent room, humans and animals taking advantage of the mutual warmth (see Smout 1986:11).

### The World Market Arrives in Skye

Compared to Sutherland, Skye was fortunate. The initial moves across the subsistence threshold were in fact comparatively gentle for the Skye islanders. In the early 1800s, the world marketplace came to Skye in a demand for kelp, which could be burned to obtain alkali for soap-making, when the barilla plant could not be imported due to the Napoleonic Wars (Meyler and Sillar 1973:101). The British military also offered a labor opportunity apparently attractive to islanders; four thousand out of a "crop" of 10,000 males were to enter the armed forces to staff Highland regiments between 1793 and 1805. Lord MacDonald and the other clan chiefs also made a point of organizing industries which were in their own ways labor intensive, and thereby able to take advantage of the burgeoning population. Indeed in an effort to increase the number of workers, they even encouraged clansmen to marry early, in the belief that labor shortages would be eliminated, and profits increased.



**Photo 3.3. Peasant Couple on Skye in the 1880s.** This couple of Skye is standing in front of their home of stone, and processing grain using the tedious methods of on-farm production traditional in peasant societies throughout the world. (University of Aberdeen photo collection)



**Photo 3.4. Scottish Peasant with Hand Plow.** This man is demonstrating a hand plow on Skye in the 1880s. A "black house" of stone and thatch is in the background. (University of Aberdeen photo collection)

But the short-term demands of modern labor markets are poor criteria for a family planning policy, even if new industries are labor intensive. By the late 1820s, the price of kelp dropped from over twenty pounds per ton to less than three pounds per ton when the British in 1825 removed tariffs on the sale of barilla. With a crowded island, a high birthrate and few opportunities in the marketplace, the criteria for famine were met; the catastrophes

of the Great Transformation finally began to visit Skye. The 1830s and 1840s were catastrophic for the population and the lairds were confronted with famine once again. Without income from kelp or rents, they dipped into family fortunes to finance the traditional relief responsibilities which tradition required. Mass death was averted, but at a cost. The clan leader, the MacLeod of MacLeod, proved unable to provide enough relief goods, bankrupted himself in the late 1830s and left the island. Trustees rooted in the market ethic took over his land, and finally began to evict the tenants and replace them with sheep.

What was left of Skye was sheep pasturage. The traditional husbandmen of Skye, just like people of Sutherland, were evicted from the farms. This was quickly followed in the 1840s by the potato blight which touched Skye but devastated Ireland. Pushed by dispossession of traditional land rights, the islanders sought a way out. The most common destination for the islanders were the military— islanders were to staff a number of Highland Regiments—and Canada, which received thousands during the nineteenth century.

The 1840s were also to be the last years of the privately financed feudal relief programs. When the lairds' relief programs failed as they did across Scotland, the central government stepped in, directing tax money northward (Smout 1986:65-66). On Skye, there were five thousand people on relief during the 1850s. A man would receive in exchange for eight hours work, one and a half pound of meal for himself, three-quarters pound for his wife, and half pound for each child. The 1850s saw more evictions as land was cleared of tenants for sheep runs; there was an estimated 6,940 families (i.e. about thirty-five thousand people) evicted between 1840 and 1883. In 1883, in one of the final evictions, there was an actual "battle" between tenants and police, in which the Royal Navy was called for support. With one last whimper, the type of social organization that had been practiced on Skye for thousands of years disappeared (Meyler and Sillar 1973:109-114).

By 1886 the mass evictions on Skye had ended, in part because there was little land left to clear of farmers, but also because the twinges of modern conscience asked whether the unconditional support of property rights over the traditional rights of tenants was just. Parliament passed a "Crofter's Act" in 1886 which for the first time recognized that families which farmed land had traditional rights, and could not be evicted arbitrarily. Nevertheless peasants continued to leave, even without the push of evictors, for it was too late for the old style of life. Scholars debate whether the traditional Scottish subsistence farms disappeared before or after World War I. But it was clear that by the 1950s, the life of subsistence farming, known in Scotland for thousands of years, had disappeared, as children sought not to farm the land, but to seize the opportunities in far off cities of Great Britain, North America, and Europe. A style of life which had persisted in Skye for thousands of years disappeared in less than one hundred years, to be replaced by the labor and commodity markets of the modern world.

## The Paradox of Scotland and Rural Depopulation

Karl Polanyi's observation that the "transformation" implied by development is an inherently violent process in which peasants and the old way of life are victim, is rooted in examples like the Sutherland Clearances. And indeed, irrespective of the Countess of Sutherland's intent, the clearances were violent, and spurred by the fears raised by the use of fire, dogs, and guns in the eviction of tenants by the self-described "Improvers." However, the example of St. Kilda, and to a lesser extent Skye, raises the question of whether the depopulation of subsistence society that swept Scotland would have come with or without the violence.

The subsistence peasantry in Scotland disappeared from the land between 1750 and the twentieth century. In retrospect of course, it is an easy process to observe. In 1740, there was a very different life in Scotland, in which subsistence farmers maintained their lifestyle, as their forebearers had done since the agricultural transition began eight thousand years earlier. But by the twentieth century, all of Scotland was dependent on the globalized world marketplace for a livelihood. By the end of that century, even what agricultural activity remained was focused on sales to the market, not storage of a crops on-farm so that a family would survive the coming winter, satisfy feudal obligations, or defend honor.

Subsistence farming has passed from Scotland, as it has in the developed world in general. But how much of what was rural depopulation was coercive? How much was dependent on the violence of rapacious landlords, and how much was undertaken at the initiative of the peasants themselves? Such questions are inherently embedded in the ethics and norms of modern society, which put at a premium the individual agency, and free will assumed by a world of free markets. It also assumes that a decision to leave is dependent on a particular event like fire, famine, crop failures or employment opportunities. But assuming that the Great Transformation took place as the result of a multitude of individual decisions obstructs our view of the grand social and demographic process.

The movement out of Scotland was slow and recurrent. Across two centuries, the accumulation of demographic pressure, breakdowns of the older normative systems, the violence of the new market-dominated world, and technical innovation conspired to cajole the Scottish peasantry out of their glens and islands and into the city. Was this to their long or short term rational advantage? Perhaps so. But again, this is the wrong question. Explanation certainly needs to take account of the remembered tales of violence and coercion. But more so it needs to start with the stark observation that a way of life thousands of years old was abandoned for the high-risk urban environment of Great Britain, North America, and even Australia. Only then can inferences be made about how this process occurred in Scotland.

There is really no technical reason that some of the abandoned islands like St. Kilda, could not be reclaimed by anyone truly interested in pursuing a subsistence lifestyle. The land, sea and seabirds that supported large popu-

lations for thousands of years are still there; only the people are missing. Meanwhile, wool production, the industry within the world economy that Scotland briefly had a comparative advantage in during the past, disappeared with declining wool prices. Today, rural Scotland is of little value in the world marketplace. Indeed, vast areas of northern Scotland which once fed tens of thousand people, have now become wildlife preserves, used by their urban descendants seeking to feed their nostalgia for a lost Eden.

But if the abandoned islands are not of interest to the world economy, they are also not of particular interest to the descendants of the people from Sutherland, Skye, or St. Kilda, people who today vote with their feet by pursuing middle class lives in the global economy around the world. There is no reason the grandchildren of the people evacuated from St. Kilda could not return there or another similarly abandoned island to resume a life of subsistence egg collecting, and farming. But in fact, there is no rush by the grandchildren of those evacuated to return. Irrespective of the nostalgia the members of the MacLeod and MacDonald clans of Skye express through membership in societies, wearing of kilts, and tourism at the castle on Skye, none are prepared to rebuild the cottage of stone that their ancestors lived in, grow oats, barley, and potatoes, cut peat and sit through a long Scottish winter in a stone-built "black house." For the people of St. Kilda, Skye, and elsewhere in Scotland have crossed a subsistence threshold, and cannot return. Despite the nostalgia for the abandoned subsistence life, they are unwilling to resume a life without the benefits of the modern differentiated world.

### Box 3.1—"The Duchess of Sutherland and Slavery" by Karl Marx

#### The Duchess of Sutherland and Slavery

by Karl Marx

Published in: *The People's Paper*, No. 45, March 12, 1853

**London, Friday, January 21, 1853** — During the present momentary slackness in political affairs, the address of the Stafford House Assembly of Ladies to their sisters in America upon the subject of Negro-Slavery, and the "affectionate and Christian address of many thousands of the women of the United States of America to their sisters, the women of England," upon white slavery, have proved a god-send to the press. Not one of the British papers was ever struck by the circumstance that the Stafford House Assembly took place at the palace under the Presidency of the Duchess of Sutherland, and yet the names of Stafford and Sutherland should have been sufficient to class the philanthropy of the British Aristocracy — a philanthropy which chooses its objects as far distant from home as possible, and rather on that than on this side of the ocean.

The history of the wealth of the Sutherland family is the history of the ruin and of the expropriation of the Scotch-Gaelic population from its native soil. As far back as the tenth century, the Danes had landed in Scotland, conquered the plains of Caithness, and driven back the aborigines into the mountains. Mhoir-Fhear-Chattaibh, as he was called in Gaelic, or the "Great Man of Sutherland," had always found his companions-in-arms ready to defend him at risk of their lives against all his enemies, Danes or Scots, foreigners or natives. After the revolution which drove the Stuarts from Britain, private feuds among the petty chieftains of Scotland became less and less frequent, and the British Kings, in order to keep up at least a semblance of dominion in these remote districts, encouraged the levying of family regiments among the chieftains, a system by which these *lairds* were enabled to combine modern military establishments with the ancient *clan* system in such a manner as to support one by the other.

Now, in order to distinctly appreciate the usurpation subsequently carried out, we must first properly understand what the clan meant. The clan belonged to a form of social existence which, in the scale of historical development, stands a full degree below the feudal state; viz., the *patriarchal* state of society. "Klaen," in Gaelic, means children. Every one of the usages and traditions of the Scottish Gaels reposes upon the supposition that the members of the clan belong to one and the same family. The "great man," the chieftain of the clan, is on the one hand quite as arbitrary, on the other quite as confined in his power, by consanguinity, &c., as every father of a family. To the clan, to the family, belonged the district where it had established itself, exactly as in Russia, the land occupied by a community of peasants belongs, not to the individual peasants, but to the community. Thus the district was the common property of the family. There could be no more question, under this system, of private property, in the modern sense of the word, than there could be of comparing the social existence of the members of the clan to that of individuals living in the midst of our modern society. The division and subdivision of the land corres-

ponded to the military functions of the single members of the clan. According to their military abilities, the chieftain entrusted to them the several allotments, cancelled or enlarged according to his pleasure the tenures of the individual officers, and these officers again distributed to their vassals and under-vassals every separate plot of land. But the district at large always remained the property of the clan, and, however the claims of individuals might vary, the tenure remained the same; nor were the contributions for the common defence, or the tribute for the Laird, who at once was leader in battle and chief magistrate in peace, ever increased. Upon the whole, every plot of land was cultivated by the same family, from generation to generation, under fixed imposts. These imposts were insignificant, more a tribute by which the supremacy of the "great man" and of his officers was acknowledged, than a rent of land in a modern sense, or a source of revenue. The officers directly subordinate to the "great man" were called "Taksmen," and the district entrusted to their care, "Tak." Under them were placed inferior officers, at the head of every hamlet, and under these stood the peasantry.

Thus you see, the clan is nothing but a family organized in a military manner, quite as little defined by laws, just as closely hemmed in by traditions, as any family. But the land is the *property of the family*, in the midst of which differences of rank, in spite of consanguinity, do prevail as well as in all the ancient Asiatic family communities.

The first usurpation took place, after the expulsion of the Stuarts, by the establishment of the family Regiments. From that moment, *pay* became the principal source of revenue of the Great Man, the Mhoir-Fhear-Chattaibh. Entangled in the dissipation of the Court of London, he tried to squeeze as much money as possible out of his officers, and they applied the same system of their inferiors. The ancient tribute was transformed into fixed money contracts. In one respect these contracts constituted a progress, by fixing the traditional imposts; in another respect they were a usurpation, inasmuch as the "great man" now took the position of landlord toward the "taksmen" who again took toward the peasantry that of farmers. And as the "great men" now required money no less than the "taksmen," a production not only for direct consumption but for export and exchange also became necessary; the system of national production had to be changed, the hands superseded by this change had to be got rid of. Population, therefore, decreased. But that it as yet was kept up in a certain manner, and that man, in the eighteenth century, was not yet openly sacrificed to net-revenue, we see from a passage in Steuart, a Scotch political economist, whose work was published 10 years before Adam Smith's, where it says (Vol. I, Chap. 16):

The rent of these lands is very trifling compared to their extent, but compared to the number of mouths which a farm maintains, it will perhaps be found that a plot of land in the highlands of Scotland feeds ten times more people than a farm of the same extent in the richest provinces.

That even in the beginnings of the nineteenth century the rental imposts were very small, is shown by the work of Mr Loch (1820), the steward of the Countess of Sutherland, who directed the improvements on her estates. He gives for instance the rental of the Kintradawell estate for 1811, from which it appears that up to then, every family was obliged to pay a yearly impost of a few shillings in money, a few fowls, and some days' work, at the highest.

It was only after 1811 that the ultimate and real usurpation was enacted, the forcible transformation of *clan-property* into the *private property*, in the modern sense, of the

*Chief*. The person who stood at the head of this economical revolution was a female Mehemet Ali, who had well digested her Malthus — the Countess of Sutherland, alias Marchioness of Stafford.

Let us first state that the ancestors of the Marchioness of Stafford were the "great men" of the most northern part of Scotland, of very near three-quarters of Sutherlandshire. This country is more extensive than many French Departments or small German Principalities. When the Countess of Sutherland inherited these estates, which she afterward brought to her husband, the Marquis of Stafford, afterward Duke of Sutherland, the population of them was already reduced to 15,000. My lady Countess resolved upon a radical economical reform, and determined upon transforming the whole tract of country into sheep-walks. From 1814 to 1820, these 15,000 inhabitants, about 3,000 families, were systematically expelled and exterminated. All their villages were demolished and burned down, and all their fields converted into pasturage. British soldiers were commended for this execution, and came to blows with the natives. An old woman refusing to quit her hut was burned in the flames of it. Thus my lady Countess appropriated to herself 794,000 acres of land, which from time immemorial had belonged to the clan. In the exuberance of her generosity she allotted to the expelled natives about 6,000 acres — two acres per family. These 6,000 acres had been lying waste until then, and brought no revenue to the proprietors. The Countess was generous enough to sell the acre at 2s 6d on an average, to the clanmen who for centuries past had shed their blood for her family. The whole of the unrightfully appropriated clan-land she divided into 29 large sheep farms, each of them inhabited by one single family, mostly English farm-laborers; and in 1821 the 15,000 Gaels had already been superseded by 131,000 sheep.

A portion of the aborigines had been thrown upon the sea-shore, and attempted to live by fishing. They became amphibious, and, as an English author says, lived half on land and half on water, and after all did not live upon both.

Sismondi, in his *Etudes Sociales*, observes with regard to this expropriation of the Gaels from Sutherlandshire — an example, which, by-the-by, was imitated by other "great men" of Scotland:

The large extent of seignorial domains is not a circumstance peculiar to Britain. In the whole Empire of Charlemagne, in the whole Occident, entire provinces were usurped by the warlike chiefs, who had them cultivated for their own account by the vanquished, and sometimes by their own companions-in-arms. During the ninth and tenth centuries the Counties of Maine, Anjou, Poitou were for the Counts of these provinces rather three large estates than principalities. Switzerland, which in so many respects resembles Scotland, was at that time divided among a small number of Seigneurs. If the Counts of Kyburg, of Lenzburg, of Habsburg, of Gruyeres had been protected by British laws, they would have been in the same position as the Earls of Sutherland; some of them would perhaps have had the same taste for improvement as the Marchioness of Stafford, and more than one republic might have disappeared from the Alps in order to make room for flocks of sheep. Not the most despotic monarch in Germany would be allowed to attempt anything of the sort.

Mr Loch, in his defense of the Countess of Sutherland (1820), replies to the above as follows:

"Why should there be made an exception to the rule adopted in every other case, just for this particular case? Why should the absolute authority of the landlord over his land be sacrificed to the public interest and to motives which concern the public only?"

And why, then, should the slave-holders in the Southern States of North America sacrifice their private interest to the philanthropic grimaces of her Grace, the Duchess of Sutherland?

The British aristocracy, who have everywhere superseded man by bullocks and sheep, will, in a future not very distant, be superseded, in turn, by these useful animals.

The process of *clearing estates*, which, in Scotland, we have just now described, was carried out in England in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. Thomas Morus already complains of it in the beginning of the sixteenth century. It was performed in Scotland in the beginning of the nineteenth, and in Ireland it is now in full progress. The noble Viscount Palmerston, too, some years ago cleared of men his property in Ireland, exactly in the manner described above.

If of any property it ever was true that it was *robbery*, it is literally true of the property of the British aristocracy. Robbery of Church property, robbery of commons, fraudulent transformation, accompanied by murder, of feudal and patriarchal property into private property — these are the titles of British aristocrats to their possessions. And what services in this latter process were performed by a servile class of lawyers, you may see from an English lawyer of the last century, Dalrymple, who, in his *History of Feudal Property*, very naively proves that every law or deed concerning property was interpreted by the lawyers, in England, when the middle class rose in wealth in favor of the *middle class* — in Scotland, where the nobility enriched themselves, in favor of the *nobility* — in either case it was interpreted in a sense hostile to the *people*.

The above Turkish reform by the Countess of Sutherland was justifiable, at least, from a Malthusian point of view. Other Scottish noblemen went further. Having superseded human beings by sheep, they superseded sheep by game, and the pasture grounds by forests. At the head of these was the Duke of Atholl.

After the conquest, the Norman Kings afforested large portions of the soil of England, in much the same way as the landlords here are now doing with the Highlands. (R. Somers, Letters on the Highlands, 1848)

As for a large number of the human beings expelled to make room for the game of the Duke of Atholl, and the sheep of the Countess of Sutherland, where did they fly to, where did they find a home?

In the United States of America.

The enemy of British Wage-Slavery has a right to condemn Negro-Slavery; a Duchess of Sutherland, a Duke of Atholl, a Manchester Cotton-lord — never!

## Notes

1. Eric Jones in *Growth Recurring* ([1989]2001) points out that the Sung Empire in China began a "great transformation" in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. As he pointed out in this book, growth did not recur in China, nor the transformation to full-blown capitalism, which would have been a logical conclusion if what began there had continued.

2. See Polanyi (1944:33-129) for a legal history of how labor became an item on the marketplace in England. Braudel (1992) has a similar social history of how markets in land, labor, and capital emerged. For almost three hundred years the peasantry of rural England held on, even expanding demographically. According to Polanyi (1944:70, 86-88), the "commodification" of labor was possible only when the mercantile system of labor organization (which applied to farming as well), developed a series of laws dismantling the obligations between peasants and feudal lords. This began in 1536 during the reign of Henry VIII. These laws included the Statute of Artificers, which designated obligations of workers to their employers, and the Poor Laws, which specified what responsibilities parishes and the aristocracy had to support the peasantry of their estate. Together these laws were the English "Code of Labor" until about 1800 (see also Somers and Block 2005). Specific laws specified that "ownership" of land was an "entailed" honor, which could not be divided among heirs or sold in the open market. In other words, the economic and the political were intertwined. Land could not be sold to a successful peasant, but Henry's Poor Laws were also a promise to the poor of England that any peasants who could not work would receive relief by returning to their natal parish. The natal parish had an enduring responsibility to provide payments to them which would be adequate to survive. The problem, of course, was that in such a context the peasants could shirk work in urban factories; labor, which was guaranteed sustenance in the countryside, might not labor in factories at all. Because peasants would be provided for in the parishes, there was no incentive to work in the low-paying and onerous jobs that the factory owners offered. The only way to eliminate this problem was, as Polanyi writes, to repeal this guarantee. This happened in England in the nineteenth century, as bit by bit feudal promises used to protect land and labor from the self-regulating market were dismantled.

3. Smout (1969:127) writes of the Scottish farm of the pre-1750 era, "The traditional farming that was regulated and controlled in these ways appears bizarre and inefficient to modern eyes: it is not easy to describe in a short space, because regional variations undermined almost every generalization we make." In short, the land was not rationalized in terms of economic efficiency, as it would be today.

4. Harsh weather, and the steep terrain of both the mainland part of Scotland and the many islands, meant that trade routes were limited. Tribute was typically paid in the form of cattle which could walk, or whiskey. Some bulk grain was shipped from the northern islands (Shetlands and Orkneys) to Norway, but by and large bulky goods were consumed on the estate (Whatley 1997). Coastal people occasionally supplemented their diet with fish, but despite the proximity to the coast, fishing was a stigmatized occupation. See also Flinn 1977.

5. As for the local marketplaces themselves, they had expanded in the seventeenth century, as the King gradually increased the number of baronies to local nobles, who, nominally at least, controlled trade within their fief.

6. By definition, population counts are a product of modern society. Self-sufficient peasants who pay few taxes are of little interest to the state. Typically such

peasants are reluctant to be counted as well, as the only reason to submit is to be enumerated for taxation and military purposes.

7. Perelman (2000:142) notes that both Benjamin Franklin and Samuel Johnson cited an issue of an Edinburgh newspaper which described the emigration of 1,500 people from Sutherlandshire in 1773. It is not clear that this was the result of a specific clearance policy. But it is notable that such a number of people were leaving at such an early date.

8. See also Lockhart 1980 and Adams 1980.

9. However, Karl Marx, writing in 1853 for a New York newspaper, took a jaundiced view of how the Duchess acquired her massive estates and dispossessed the peasantry of their traditional means of subsistence:

Thus my lady Countess appropriated to herself 794,000 acres of land, which from time immemorial had belonged to the clan. In the exuberance of her generosity she allotted to the expelled natives about 6,000 acres — two acres per family. These 6,000 acres had been lying waste until then, and brought no revenue to the proprietors. The Countess was generous enough to sell the acre at 2s 6d on an average, to the clan-men who for centuries past had shed their blood for her family. The whole of the unrightfully appropriated clan-land she divided into 29 large sheep farms, each of them inhabited by one single family, mostly English farm-laborers; and in 1821 the 15,000 Gaels had already been superseded by 131,000 sheep. (Marx 1853)

10. When his programs failed to realize their highest expectations, a frustrated Sellars responded by comparing the Highlanders of Sutherland to the Native Americans, who by that time had also been cleared from much of the eastern United States:

Both live in turf cabins in common with the brutes; both are singular for patience, courage, cunning and address. Both are most virtuous where least in contact with men in a civilized State, and both are fast sinking under the baneful effects of ardent spirits. (quoted in Smout 1986:65)

11. Particularly notorious was Sellars' own arrest and trial in 1814 for burning the houses of evicted tenants. Sellars was acquitted of the charge. However, as Smout (1969:353-354) has pointed out, "The verdict in Sellar's favour has been reversed, not in law, but in popular opinion. This was brought about partly by the power of the Highlanders to enshrine ancient wrong in oral traditions, which was revived at the hearing of the Napier Commission of 1884, and partly by the literary skill of Donald MacLeod, the Stratnaver stonemason who emigrated to Canada and kept up a searing polemic against the Sutherland family thirty or forty years after the event."

## *Part Two*

### **The Persistence of the Subsistence Peasant from the Eighteenth to the Twenty-first Century**

## Introduction: The Persistence of the Subsistence Peasant

"There's no but about it!" Mother said. "Oh it's bad enough to see [our son] Royal come down to being nothing but a storekeeper! Maybe he'll make money, but he'll never be the man [a farmer is]. Truckling to other people for his living, all his days—He'll never be able to call his soul his own. . . . I won't have [our next son] Almanzo going the same way!" Mother cried. "I won't have it, you hear me?" . . .

A farmer depends on himself, and the land and the weather. If you're a farmer, you raise what you eat, you raise what you wear, and you keep warm with wood out of your own timber. You work hard, but you work as you please. You'll be free and independent son on a farm. (Wilder 1935:367, 370)

The traditional boundaries of history typically start with today's political borders. Thus, there is a history of England and Scotland. This tradition was respected in the last chapter where it was described how the land of rural Scotland was depopulated. Across 200 years, there was a population shift from rural areas of Scotland to the cities as peasants died, were enclosed, birth rates declined. Many survivors left for jobs in the newly differentiated economics controlled from squalid nineteenth century cities like Glasgow, London, New York and Sydney. But in framing the story from a Scottish perspective, only the story of rural to urban migration is told. Related to the broader story of what has happened in the Great Transformation whether from Scotland or elsewhere, is the story of how frontiers are being pushed back into the twenty-first century by farmers seeking to preserve their tested way of subsistence life by growing, hunting, or raising what they eat and certainly without truckling to the marketplace.

In eighteenth and nineteenth century Scotland, the limits to rural life were reached when populations living in a world of high fertility unchecked by demographic catastrophe pushed up against the practical limitations of land, weather and landlords. As Malthus wrote in 1799, without a check on the "passions" of male and female, subsistence peasants who have inherited the agricultural techniques and fertility habits of the subsistence farmer will instead be confronted by the checks of disease, war, and famine. And when this doesn't happen, the aggressiveness of the powerful seeking a place in world markets hurries the process along.

The two cases of the Great Transformation discussed below, that of the United States in the seventeenth to twentieth century, and Tanzania from the nineteenth to twenty-first century, fill out the story of why "development" is a risky process for subsistence peasants, no matter what the ecological circumstances they may find themselves in. Unlike in Scotland, in both circumstances there has been a nearby frontier, where land can be had for the clearing; it was not necessary to seek a ship to distant lands to reproduce the old subsistence way of life. As a result, peasants in both places flirt with the recurrent pulls and temptations of differentiated marketplaces, while at the

same time preserving an option to flee further from the practical consequences of their large families. But the patterns are still the same; the perils of the Great Transformation were negotiated, or in the case of Tanzania are being negotiated, with profound consequences for demographic change, the dominance of market over society, new patterns of ecology and settlement, a new ideology rooted in market-based materialism, individualism and a centralization of politics and power.

Recurrently the markets of the modern urban world conspire to deprive peasants of their livelihood often in abrupt and rough fashion. Under names like villagization, railroad rights-of-way, trans-migration, and the establishment of nature reserves, the clearance of peasant populations were continuing issues in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in North America. They are still issues in the twenty-first century in places like rural Tanzania, and even the islands of Indonesia, where rural peasants from overcrowded Java have moved to under-populated Borneo or Irian Jaya to establish new subsistence farms.

Everywhere this has happened, a combination of raw coercive power, coupled with the enchantment of the market's bright lights tempted peasants away from the subsistence life that had been theirs since time immemorial. Replacing it were new ideologies justifying the power and productivity of the capitalist market. In Scotland it was called "improvement." As will be seeing, in the United States in the nineteenth century it was called "Boosterism." In the Third World today it is called, among other things, "development." Such ideologies are pushing the last of the subsistence peasants to the limits of their ways of life. Today the push is called development.