

INTRODUCTION

This study attempts to map the historical and intellectual contours of the encounter of Marxism and Black radicalism, two programs for revolutionary change. I have undertaken this effort in the belief that in its way each represents a significant and immanent mode of social resolution, but that each is a particular and critically different realization of a history. The point is that they may be so distinct as to be incommensurable. At issue here is whether this is so. If it is, judgments must be made, choices taken.

The inquiry required that both Marxism and Black radicalism be subjected to interrogations of unusual form: the first, Marxism, because few of its adherents have striven hard enough to recognize its profound but ambiguous indebtedness to Western civilization; the second, Black radicalism, because the very circumstance of its appearance has required that it be misinterpreted and diminished. I have hoped to contribute to the correction of these errors by challenging in both instances the displacement of history by aeriform theory and self-serving legend. Whether I have succeeded is for the reader to judge. But first it may prove useful to outline the construction of the study.

In Western societies for the better part of the past two centuries, the active and intellectual opposition of the Left to class rule has been vitalized by the vision of a socialist order: an arrangement of human relations grounded on the shared responsibility and authority over the means of social production and reproduction. The variations on the vision have been many, but over the years of struggle the hardest tradition has proven to be that identified with the work and writings of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and V. I. Lenin. Obviously here the term "tradition" is used rather loosely since the divergencies of opinion and deed between Marx, Engels, and Lenin have been demonstrated by history to be as significant as their correspondence. Nevertheless, in common as well as in academic parlance, these three activist-intellectuals are taken to be the principal figures of Marxist or Marxist-Leninist socialism. Marxism was founded on the study of the capitalist expropriation and exploitation of labor as first taken up by Engels, then elaborated by Marx's "material theory of history," his recognition of the evolving systems of capitalist production and the inevitability of class struggle, and later augmented by Lenin's conceptions of imperialism, the state, the "dictatorship of the proletariat," and the role of the revolutionary party. It has provided the ideological, historical, and political vocabulary for much of the radical and revolutionary presence

emergent in modern Western societies. Elsewhere, in lands economically parasitized by the capitalist world system, or in those rare instances where its penetration has been quarantined by competing historical formations, some sorts of Marxism have again translated a concern with fundamental social change.

However, it is still fair to say that at base, that is at its epistemological substratum, Marxism is a Western construction—a conceptualization of human affairs and historical development that is emergent from the historical experiences of European peoples mediated, in turn, through their civilization, their social orders, and their cultures. Certainly its philosophical origins are indisputably Western. But the same must be said of its analytical presumptions, its historical perspectives, its points of view. This most natural consequence though has assumed a rather ominous significance since European Marxists have presumed more frequently than not that their project is identical with world-historical development. Confounded it would seem by the cultural zeal that accompanies ascendant civilizations, they have mistaken for universal verities the structures and social dynamics retrieved from their own distant and more immediate pasts. Even more significantly, the deepest structures of “historical materialism,” the foreknowledge for its comprehension of historical movement, have tended to relieve European Marxists from the obligation of investigating the profound effects of culture and historical experience on their science. The ordering ideas that have persisted in Western civilization (and Marx himself as we shall see was driven to admit such phenomena), reappearing in successive “stages” of its development to dominate arenas of social ideology, have little or no *theoretical* justification in Marxism for their existence. One such recurring idea is racialism: the legitimation and corroboration of social organization as natural by reference to the “racial” components of its elements. Though hardly unique to European peoples, its appearance and codification, during the feudal period, into Western conceptions of society was to have important and enduring consequences.

In the first part of this study, I have devoted three chapters to explicating the appearance and formulation of racial sensibility in Western civilization and its social and ideological consequences. Chapter 1 reconstructs the history of the emergence of racial order in feudal Europe and delineates its subsequent impact on the organization of labor under capitalism. Racism, I maintain, was not simply a convention for ordering the relations of European to non-European peoples but has its genesis in the “internal” relations of European peoples. As part of the inventory of Western civilization it would reverberate within and without, transferring its toll from the past to the present. In contradistinction to Marx’s and Engels’s expectations that bourgeois society would rationalize social relations and demystify social consciousness, the obverse occurred. The development, organization, and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial directions, so too did social ideology. As a material force, then, it could be expected that racialism would inevitably permeate the social structures emergent from capitalism. I have used the term “racial capitalism” to refer to this development and to the subsequent structure as a historical agency. The second chapter, as it rehearses the formation of the working classes in England, looks pre-

cisely at this phenomenon. Since the English working classes were the social basis for Engels's conceptualization of the modern proletariat, and conjoined with the *sans-culotte* of the French Revolution to occupy a similar place in Marx's thought, their evolving political and ideological character is of signal importance in reckoning the objective basis for Marxist theory. Of particular interest is the extent to which racialism (and subsequently nationalism) both as ideology and actuality affected the class consciousness of workers in England. In the intensely racial social order of England's industrializing era, the phenomenology of the relations of production bred no objective basis for the extrication of the universality of class from the particularisms of race. Working-class discourse and politics remained marked by the architectonic possibilities previously embedded in the culture.

But the appearance of European socialism and its development into a tradition was, as well, somewhat at odds with socialism's subsequent historiography and orthodoxies. The third chapter pursues among the middle classes the obscured origins of socialism and the contradictions that weakened its political and ideological expressions. It was indeed nationalism, a second "bourgeois" accretion, that most subverted the socialist creation. Nationalism, as a mix of racial sensibility and the economic interests of the national bourgeoisies, was as powerful an ideological impulse as any spawned from these strata. As an acquired temper and as a historical force met on the fields of social and political revolution, nationalism bemused the founders of historical materialism and those who followed them. It was to overtake both the direction of capitalist development and eventually the formative structures of socialist societies as they appeared in the present century. The historical trajectories of those developments, again, were almost entirely unexpected in a theoretical universe from which it had been discerned that ideology and false consciousness were supposedly being expelled. When in its time Black radicalism became manifest within Western society as well as at the other junctures between European and African peoples, one might correctly expect that Western radicalism was no more receptive to it than were the apologists of power.

Part II takes up this other radical tradition, Black radicalism, the conditions of its historical emergence, its forms, and its nature. This exposition begins in chapter 4 with the reinvestigation of the past relations between Europeans and Africans, a past that has been transformed by Europeans and for Europeans into a grotesque parody, a series of legends as monstrously proportioned as Pliny's *Blemmyae* "whose heads / Do grow beneath their shoulders." The obscuring of the Black radical tradition is seated in the West's suppression of Europe's previous knowledge of the African (and its own) past. The denial of history to African peoples took time—several hundreds of years—beginning with the emergence of western Europeans from the shadow of Muslim domination and paternalism. It was also a process that was to transport the image of Africa across separate planes of dehumanization latticed by the emerging modalities of Western culture. In England, at first gripped by a combative and often hysterical Christianity—complements of the crusades, the "reconquests," and the rise of Italian capitalism—medieval English devouts recorded dreams in which the devil appeared

as “a blacke moore,” “an Ethiop.” This was part of the grammar of the church, the almost singular repository of knowledge in Europe. Centuries later the Satanic gave way to the representation of Africans as a different sort of beast: dumb, animal labor, the benighted recipient of the benefits of slavery. Thus the “Negro” was conceived. The Negro—whose precedents could be found in the racial fabrications concealing the Slavs (*the slaves*), the Irish and others—substantially eradicated in Western historical consciousness the necessity of remembering the significance of Nubia for Egypt’s formation, of Egypt in the development of Greek civilization, of Africa for imperial Rome, and more pointedly of Islam’s influence on Europe’s economic, political, and intellectual history. From such a creature not even the suspicion of tradition needed to be entertained. In its stead there was the Black slave, a consequence masqueraded as an anthropology and a history.

The creation of the Negro was obviously at the cost of immense expenditures of psychic and intellectual energies in the West. The exercise was obligatory. It was an effort commensurate with the importance Black labor power possessed for the world economy sculpted and dominated by the ruling and mercantile classes of western Europe. As chapter 5 indicates, the Atlantic slave trade and the slavery of the New World were integral to the modern world economy. Their relationship to capitalism was historical and organic rather than adventitious or synthetic. The Italian financiers and merchants whose capital subsidized Iberian exploration of the Atlantic and Indian oceans were also masters of (largely “European”) slave colonies in the Mediterranean. Certainly slave labor was one of their bases for what Marx termed “primitive accumulation.” But it would be an error to arrest the relationship there, assigning slave labor to some “pre-capitalist” stage of history. For more than 300 years slave labor persisted beyond the beginnings of modern capitalism, complementing wage labor, peonage, serfdom, and other methods of labor coercion. Ultimately, this meant that the interpretation of history in terms of the dialectic of capitalist class struggles would prove inadequate, a mistake ordained by the preoccupation of Marxism with the industrial and manufacturing centers of capitalism; a mistake founded on the presumptions that Europe itself had produced, that the motive and material forces that generated the capitalist system were to be wholly located in what was a fictive historical entity. From its very foundations capitalism had never been—any more than Europe—a “closed system.”

Necessarily then, Marx’s and Engels’s theory of revolution was insufficient in scope: the European proletariat and its social allies did not constitute *the* revolutionary subject of history, nor was working-class consciousness necessarily *the* negation of bourgeois culture. Out of what was in reality a rather more complex capitalist world system (and one to which Marx in his last decade paid closer attention), other revolutionary forces emerged as well. Informed as they were by the ideas and cultures drawn from their own historical experiences, these movements assumed forms only vaguely anticipated in the radical traditions of the West. In the terms of capitalist society they were its negation, but that was hardly the source of their being. And among them was the persistent and continuously evolving resistance of African peo-

ples to oppression. The sixth chapter rehearses the history of this Black radical tradition in the African diaspora and to some extent in the African continent itself. As both this and the seventh chapter attempt to demonstrate, the record of resistance for four centuries or more, from Nueva Espana to Nyasaland, leaves in no doubt the specifically African character of those struggles. Resistances were formed through the meanings that Africans brought to the New World as their cultural possession; meanings sufficiently distinct from the foundations of Western ideas as to be remarked upon over and over by the European witnesses of their manifestations; meanings enduring and powerful enough to survive slavery to become the basis of an opposition to it. With Western society as a condition, that tradition almost naturally assumed a theoretical aspect as well.

The third and final section of this study traces the social and intellectual backgrounds of the processes that led to the theoretical articulation of Black radicalism. The conditions for modern Black theory were present first in the African diaspora. Far from Africa and physically enveloped by hostile communities, Black opposition acquired a penetrative comprehension. But it was a social and political as well as a historical process that nurtured theory. In the pursuit of that process I have identified three seminal Black radical intellectuals: William Edward Burkhardt Du Bois, Cyril Lionel Robert James, and Richard Nathaniel Wright. They have been chosen for detailed treatment not only because they made substantial contributions to the theoretical text, but because their lives and circumstances were prisms of the events impending on and emanating from the Black radical tradition. Their reactions to their confrontation with Black resistance, the very means used for their expression were distinct but related, characterized by circumstance, temperament, and training. Though their lives were very dissimilar—only Wright could be said to have been directly produced by the Black peasant and working classes—they all came to that tradition late (and hesitantly, as I will argue with respect to Du Bois and James). For all three, though, Marxism had been the prior commitment, the first encompassing and conscious experience of organized opposition to racism, exploitation, and domination. As Marxists, their apprenticeships proved to be significant but ultimately unsatisfactory. In time, events and experience drew them toward Black radicalism and the discovery of a collective Black resistance inspired by an enduring cultural complex of historical apprehension. In these concluding chapters I have attempted to demonstrate how and why this was so. Taken together, the efforts of Du Bois, James, and Wright consisted of a first step toward the creation of an intellectual legacy that would complement the historical force of Black struggle. Their destiny, I suggest, was not to create the idea of that struggle so much as to articulate it. Regardless, the Black opposition to domination has continued to acquire new forms. In a very real sense then, the present study follows.

CHAPTER

RACIAL CAPITALISM: THE NONOBJECTIVE CHARACTER OF CAPITALIST DEVELOPMENT



The historical development of world capitalism was influenced in a most fundamental way by the particularistic forces of racism and nationalism. This could only be true if the social, psychological, and cultural origins of racism and nationalism both anticipated capitalism in time and formed a piece with those events that contributed directly to its organization of production and exchange. Feudal society is the key. More particularly, the antagonistic commitments, structures, and ambitions that feudal society encompassed are better conceptualized as those of a developing civilization than as elements of a unified tradition.

The processes through which the world system emerged contained an opposition between the rationalistic thrusts of an economic worldview and the political momenta of collectivist logic. The feudal state, an instrument of signal importance to the bourgeoisie, was to prove to be as consistently antithetical to the commercial integration represented by a world system as it had to the idea of Christendom. Neither the state nor later the nation could slough off the particularistic psychologies and interests that served as contradictions to a global community. A primary consequence of the conflict between those two social tendencies was that capitalists, as the architects of this system, never achieved the coherence of structure and organization that had been the promise of capitalism as an objective system.¹ On the contrary, the history of capitalism has in no way distinguished itself from earlier eras with respect to wars, material crises, and social conflicts. A secondary consequence is that the critique of capitalism, to the extent that its protagonists have based their analyses upon the

presumption of a determinant economic rationality in the development and expansion of capitalism, has been characterized by an incapacity to come to terms with the world system's direction of developments. Marxism, the dominant form that the critique of capitalism has assumed in Western thought, incorporated theoretical and ideological weaknesses that stemmed from the same social forces that provided the bases of capitalist formation.

The creation of capitalism was much more than a matter of the displacement of feudal modes and relations of production by capitalist ones.² Certainly, the transformation of the economic structures of noncapitalist Europe (specifically the Mediterranean and western European market, trade, and production systems) into capitalist forms of production and exchange was a major part of this process. Still, the first appearance of capitalism in the fifteenth century³ involved other dynamics as well. The social, cultural, political, and ideological complexes of European feudalisms contributed more to capitalism than the social "fetters"⁴ that precipitated the bourgeoisie into social and political revolutions. No class was its own creation. Indeed, capitalism was less a catastrophic revolution (negation) of feudalist social orders than the extension of these social relations into the larger tapestry of the modern world's political and economic relations. Historically, the civilization evolving in the western extremities of the Asian/European continent, and whose first signification is medieval Europe,⁵ passed with few disjunctions from feudalism as the dominant mode of production to capitalism as the dominant mode of production. And from its very beginnings, this European civilization, containing racial, tribal, linguistic, and regional particularities, was constructed on antagonistic differences.

Europe's Formation

The social basis of European civilization was "among those whom the Romans called the 'barbarians.'"⁶ Prior to the eleventh or twelfth centuries, the use of the collective sense of the term "barbarian" was primarily a function of exclusion rather than a reflection of any significant consolidation among those peoples. The term signified that the "barbarians" had their historical origins beyond the civilizing reach of Roman law and the old Roman imperial social order. The "Europe" of the ninth century for which the Carolingian family and its minions claimed paternity was rather limited geopolitically⁷ and had a rather short and unhappy existence. Interestingly, for several centuries following the deaths of Charlemagne and his immediate heirs (the last being Arnulf, d.899), both the Emperor and Europe were more the stuff of popular legend and clerical rhetoric than manifestations of social reality.⁸ The idea of Europe, no longer a realistic project, was transferred from one of a terrestrial social order to that of a spiritual kingdom: Christendom.

In fact, those peoples to whom the Greeks and the Romans referred collectively as barbarians were of diverse races with widely differing cultures.⁹ The diversity of their languages is, perhaps, one measure of their differences. But in using this measure, we

must be cautious of the schemes of classification of those languages that reduce the reality of their numbers to simple groupings like the Celtic, the Italic, the Germanic, the Balto-Slavonic, and Albanian languages.¹⁰

Direct and indirect evidence indicates that a more authentic mapping of the languages of the proto-Europeans would be much more complex. For instance, H. Munro Chadwick, as late as 1945, could locate extant descendants of those several languages among the Gaelic, Welsh, and Breton languages of Great Britain and France; the Portuguese, Spanish, Catalan, Provençal, French, Italian, Sardinian, Alpine, and Rumanian languages and dialects of southern and western Europe; the English, Frisian, Dutch, German, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, and Icelandic languages of England, Scotland the Netherlands, Germany, and Scandinavia; the Russian, Bulgarian, Yugoslavian, Slovenian, Slovakian, Czech, Polish, and Lusitanian languages and dialects of central and eastern Europe; and the Latvian and Lithuanian languages of northern Europe.¹¹ But even Chadwick's list was of merely those languages that had survived "the millennium of Europe." The list would lengthen considerably if one were to consider the languages which existed in this area at the beginning of this era and are no longer spoken (for example, Latin, Cornish, and Prusai), along with those languages of peoples who preceded the migrations from the north and east of Rome's barbarians (for example, Basque, Etruscan, Oscan, and Umbrian).¹²

The Ostrogoth, Visigoth, Vandal, Suevi, Burgundi, Alamanni, and Frank peoples—that is the barbarians—whose impact on the fortunes of the Late Roman Empire from the fifth century was quick and dramatic,¹³ were in fact a small minority of thousands among the millions of the decaying state. Henri Pirenne, relying on the estimates of Emile-Felix Gautier and L. Schmidt, reports that the Ostrogoths and Visigoths may have numbered 100,000 each, the Vandals 80,000, and the Burgundi 25,000.¹⁴ Moreover, the warrior strata of each kingdom are consistently estimated at about 20 percent of their populations. On the other hand, the Empire that they invaded contained as many as 50–70 million persons.¹⁵ Pirenne cautiously concludes:

All this is conjecture. Our estimate would doubtless be in excess of the truth if, for the Western provinces beyond the *limes*, we reckoned the Germanic element as constituting 5 percent of the population.¹⁶

More importantly, the vast majority of the barbarians "came not as conquerors, but exactly as, in our own day, North Africans, Italians, Poles cross into Metropolitan France to look for work."¹⁷ In a relatively short time, in the southern-most European lands that were bounded by the Western Roman Empire, these peoples were entirely assimilated by the indigenous peoples as a primarily slave labor force.¹⁸ The pattern was already a familiar one within the dying civilization of the Mediterranean¹⁹ with which they desired and desperately needed to join.²⁰ It is also important to realize that with respect to the emerging European civilization whose beginnings coincide with the arrivals of these same barbarians, slave labor as a critical basis of production would continue without any significant interruption into the twentieth century.²¹

From the *familia rustica* that characterized Roman and even earlier Greek (*doulos*) rural production within vast estates, through the *manucipia* of the *colonicae* and *mansi* land-holdings of Merovingian (481–752) and Carolingian eras, the feudal villains of western medieval Europe and England, and the *sclavi* of the Genoese and Venetian merchants who dominated commercial trade in the Mediterranean from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, slave labor persisted as an aspect of European agrarian production up to the modern era.²² Neither feudal serfdom nor capitalism had as their result the elimination or curtailment of slavery.²³ At the very most (it is argued by some), their organization served to relocate it.²⁴

Despite the “Romanization” of the southern Goths, or seen differently because of it, the Germanic tribes did establish the general administrative boundaries that were to mark the nations of modern western Europe. The kingdoms that they established, mainly under the rules of Roman *hospitalitas* and in accordance with Roman administration,²⁵ were in large measure the predecessors of France, Germany, Spain, and Italy.

Still, we must not forget that in historical reconstruction, a medieval age is to be intervened between these two ages. Medieval Europe, though still agricultural in economy, was a much cruder existence for slave, peasant, farmer, artisan, land-owner, cleric, and nobility alike than had been the circumstance for their predecessors in the Empire. Urban life declined, leaving the old cities in ruins,²⁶ long-distance trade, especially by sea routes, decayed dramatically.²⁷ Latouche summarizes:

The balance-sheet of the Merovingian economy is singularly disappointing. The now fashionable, if unpleasant, word “rot” describes it to perfection. Whether in the sphere of town life, commerce, barter, currency, public works, shipping, we find everywhere the same policy of neglect, the same selfish refusal to initiate reform. From this disastrous, drifting *laissez-faire* which left men and things as they had always been, pursuing unchanged their traditional way of life, there sprang the illusion that the ancient world still lingered on; it was, in fact, no more than a facade.²⁸

The Carolingian Empire did little to repair the “rot” that anticipated the restructuring of Europe in feudal terms. The Muslim conquests of the Mediterranean in the seventh and eighth centuries had deprived the European economies of the urban, commercial, productive, and cultural vitality they required for their reconstruction. Pirenne put it boldly:

The ports and the cities were deserted. The link with the Orient was severed, and there was no communication with the Saracen coasts. There was nothing but death. The Carolingian Empire presented the most striking contrast with the Byzantine. It was purely an inland power, for it had no outlets. The Mediterranean territories, formerly the most active portions of the Empire, which supported the life of the whole, were now the poorest, the most desolate, the most constantly

menaced. For the first time in history the axis of Occidental civilization was displaced toward the North, and for many centuries it remained between the Seine and the Rhine. And the Germanic peoples, which had hitherto played only the negative part of destroyers, were now called upon to play a positive part in the reconstruction of European civilization.²⁹

Latouche, though he differed with Pirenne on many of the particulars of the Carolingian response to the loss of the Mediterranean, finally concurred:

[T]he Empire broke up less than half a century after its creation, and Charlemagne did nothing to prevent, and did not even attempt to delay, the development of feudal institutions, so heavy with menace for the future . . . a world in which there were no great business concerns, no industries, and in which agricultural activity was predominant.³⁰

Urban life, trade, and market systems incorporating the goods of long-distance trade did not return to Europe until the end of the eleventh century at the earliest, and most probably during the twelfth century.³¹ By then, the depth to which the degradation of European life had fallen is perhaps best expressed by the appearance of commercialized cannibalism.³²

The First Bourgeoisie

Into this depressed land where few were free of the authority of an intellectually backward and commercially unimaginative ruling class, where famine and epidemics were the natural order of things, and where the sciences of the Ancient World had long been displaced as the basis of intellectual development by theological fables and demonology,³³ appeared the figure to which European social theorists, Liberal and Marxist, attribute the generation of Western civilization: the bourgeoisie. The merchant was as alien to feudal society as the barbarian invaders had been to the Empire. Unlike the Mediterranean tradesmen,³⁴ the origins of the western European bourgeoisie are obscured. No doubt this is largely due to the fact that historical documentation is inevitably sparse where civilization in the formal sense of urban culture has largely disappeared, and where life is recorded by an elite of land and church largely preoccupied with its own experience while hostile to commerce.³⁵ Nevertheless, it is clear that the western European merchant class—“a class of deracines”³⁶—crystallized within a social order for which it was an extrinsic phenomena.

The economic organization of demesne production was characterized by Pirenne as a “closed domestic economy one which we might call, with more exactitude, the economy of no markets.”³⁷ In fact, there were markets, local ones, but their function and existence had no part in the development of the markets of long-distance trades that were the basis of the merchant class’s development. The *mercati*, whose existence predates the bourgeoisie, dealt not in trade but foodstuffs at the retail level.³⁸ The one

factor “internal” to the feudal order that did contribute to the rise of the bourgeoisie was the eleventh century’s population growth. This increase had ultimately placed significant strains on feudal production:

It had as a result the detaching from the land an increasingly important number of individuals and committing them to that roving and hazardous existence which, in every agricultural civilization, is the lot of those who no longer find themselves with their roots in the soil. It multiplied the crowd of vagabonds. . . . Energetic characters, tempered by the experience of a life full of the unexpected, must have abounded among them. Many knew foreign languages and were conversant with the customs and needs of diverse lands. Let a lucky chance present itself . . . they were remarkably well equipped to profit thereby. . . . Famines were multiplied throughout Europe, sometimes in one province and sometimes in another, by that inadequate system of communications, and increased still more the opportunities, for those who knew how to make use of them, of getting rich. A few timely sacks of wheat, transported to the right spot, sufficed for the realizing of huge profits. . . . It was certainly not long before nouveaux riches made their appearance in the midst of this miserable crowd of impoverished, bare-foot wanderers in the world.³⁹

In the beginning, before they could properly be described as bourgeoisie, these merchants traveled from region to region, their survival a matter of their mobility and their ability to capitalize on the frequent ruptures and breakdowns of the reproduction of populations sunk into the manorial soil. Their mobility may have also been occasioned by the fact that many of them were not free-born and thus sought respite from their social condition by flight from their lords: “By virtue of the wandering existence they led, they were everywhere regarded as foreigners.”⁴⁰ For security they often traveled in small bands—a habit that would continue into their more sedentary period. It was not long before they began to establish *porti* (storehouses or transfer points for merchandise) outside the *burgs* (the fortresses of the Germanic nobles), bishoprics, and towns that straddled the main routes of war, communications, and later, international trade. It was these *porti*, or merchant colonies, that founded, in the main, the medieval cities of Europe’s hinterland. It was at this point that the merchants of Europe became bourgeoisies (*burgenses*). By the beginnings of the twelfth century, these bourgeoisies had already begun the transformation of European life so necessary for the emergence of capitalism as the dominant organization of European production.

The western European bourgeoisie re-established the urban centers by basing them upon exchange between the Mediterranean, the East, and northern Europe:

[In the tenth century] there appears in Anglo-Saxon texts the word “port,” employed as a synonym for the Latin words *urbs* and *civitas*, and even at the present day the term “ports” is commonly met with in the names of cities of every land of English speech.

Nothing shows more clearly the close connection that existed between the eco-

conomic revival of the Middle Ages and the beginnings of city life. They were so intimately related that the same word which designated a commercial settlement served in one of the great idioms of Europe to designate the town itself.⁴¹

Elsewhere, Pirenne puts it more succinctly: “Europe ‘colonized’ herself, thanks to the increase of her inhabitants.”⁴² Flanders—geographically situated to service the commerce of the northern seas, and economically critical because of the Flemish cloth industry—was the first of the major European merchant centers. Close behind Flanders came Bruges, Ghent, Ypres, Lille, Douai, Arras, Tournai, Cambrai, Valenciennes, Liege, Huy, Dinant, Cologne, Mainz, Rouen, Bordeaux, and Bayonne.⁴³ Cloth, which both Pirenne⁴⁴ and Karl Polanyi⁴⁵ identify as the basis of European trade, originally a rural industry, was transformed by the bourgeoisie in Flanders into an urban manufacture “organized on the capitalistic basis of wage labour.”⁴⁶ The urban concentration of industry was thus initiated:

The increase of the population naturally favored industrial concentration. Numbers of the poor poured into the towns where cloth-making, the activity of which trade grew proportionately with the development of commerce, guaranteed them their daily bread. . . .

The old rural industry very quickly disappeared. It could not compete with that of the town, abundantly supplied with the raw material of commerce, operating at lower prices, and enjoying more advanced methods. . . .

[W]hatever might be the nature of industry in other respects, everywhere it obeyed that law of concentration which was operative at such an early date in Flanders. Everywhere the city groups, thanks to commerce, drew rural industry to them.⁴⁷

It is also true that the bourgeoisie, in so doing, came to free some portions of the serfs⁴⁸ only to re-enslave them through wage labor. For with urban industry came the successful attack on feudal and seigniorial servitude:

Freedom, of old, used to be the monopoly of a privileged class. By means of the cities it again took its place in society as a natural attribute of the citizen. Hereafter it was enough to reside on city soil to acquire it. Every serf who had lived for a year and a day within the city limits had it by definite right: the statute of limitations abolished all rights which his lord exercised over his person and chattels. Birth meant little. Whatever might be the mark with which it had stigmatized the infant in his cradle, it vanished in the atmosphere of the city.⁴⁹

With the flourishing of long-distance trade and the development of urban centers in western Europe came some specializations in rural production. Though open-field agriculture dominated Europe as a whole in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries, specialized grain production could be found in Prussia (corn), Tuscany and Lombardy (cereals), England (wheat), and north Germany (rye). By the late fifteenth century, viticulture had appeared in Italy, Spain, France, and southwest Germany. In

the Baltic and North Seas, fishing and salt made up a significant part of the cargoes of Hanseatic shippers. And in England and Spain, meat production for export had begun to emerge.⁵⁰

In northern Europe, these exports joined wool and woollen cloth as the major bases of international trade. In southern Europe—more precisely the Mediterranean—the long-distance trade in cloth (wool, silk, and later cotton), grains, and wines came to complement a significant trade in luxury goods:

The precious stuffs from the east found their way into every rich household, and so did the specialities of various European regions: amber and furs from the countries bordering on the Baltic; *objets d'art* such as paintings from Flanders, embroidery from England, enamels from Limoges; manuscript books for church, boudoir or library; fine armor and weapons from Milan and glass from Venice.⁵¹

Still, according to Iris Origo, the most precious cargo of the Mediterranean tradesmen was slaves:

European and Levantine traders sold Grecian wines and Ligurian figs, and the linen and woollen stuffs of Champagne and Lombardy, and purchased precious silks from China, carpets from Bokhara and Samarkand, furs from the Ural Mountains, and Indian spices, as well as the produce of the rich black fields and forests of the Crimea. But the most flourishing trade of all was that in slaves—for Caffa was the chief slave-market of the Levant.⁵²

Tartar, Greek, Armenian, Russian, Bulgarian, Turkish, Circassian, Slavonic, Cretan, Arab, African (*Mori*), and occasionally Chinese (Cathay) slaves⁵³—two-thirds of whom were female⁵⁴—were to be found in the households of wealthy and “even relatively modest Catalan and Italian families.”⁵⁵

From the thirteenth century to the beginnings of the fifteenth century, the primary function of these predominantly European slaves in the economics of southern Europe was domestic service.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, in Spain (Catalan and Castile) and in the Italian colonies on Cyprus, Crete, and in Asia Minor (Phocaea) and Palestine, Genoese and Venetian masters used both European and African slaves in agriculture on sugar plantations, in industry, and for work in mines:

This variety of uses to which slaves were put illustrates clearly the degree to which medieval colonial slavery served as a model for Atlantic colonial slavery. Slave manpower had been employed in the Italian colonies in the Mediterranean for all the kinds of work it would be burdened with in the Atlantic colonies. The only important change was that the white victims of slavery were replaced by a much greater number of African Negroes, captured in raids or bought by traders.⁵⁷

In an unexpected way, this trade in slaves would prove to be the salvation of the Mediterranean bourgeoisie. In the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, however, it appeared that the merchants of the European hinterland would inevitably overshadow those of Italy's city-states. They, unlike the Italians, were undeterred, as

Giuliano Procacci points out, by the peninsula's small but densely packed populations; the increasingly unfavorable ratios of townsmen to countrymen (Florence could only survive on the produce of its countryside for five months of the year, Venice and Genoa had to be almost entirely supplied by sea); and the rapid deforestation of the countryside that aggravated the destruction of the autumn and spring floods.⁵⁸

However, it was the fate of this nascent bourgeoisie not to thrive. Indeed, for one historical moment, even the further development of capitalism might be said to have been in question. The events of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries intervened in the processes through which feudalism was ultimately displaced by the several forms of capitalism.⁵⁹ The consequence of those events were to determine the species of the modern world: the identities of the bourgeoisies that transformed capitalism into a world system; the sequences of this development; the relative vitalities of the several European economies; and the sources of labor from which each economy would draw.

The momentous events of which we speak were: the periodic famines that struck Europe in this period, the Black Death of the mid-fourteenth century and subsequent years, the Hundred Years War (1337–1453), and the rebellions of peasants and artisans.⁶⁰ Together they had a devastating impact on western Europe and the Mediterranean—decimating the populations of cities and countryside alike, disrupting trade, collapsing industry and agricultural production—leveling, as it were, the bulk of the most developed regions of western European bourgeois activity. Denys Hay has summed it up quite well:

The result of prolonged scarcity, endemic and pandemic plague, the intermittent but catastrophic invasions of ruthless armies, and the constant threat in many areas from well-organized robber bands, was seen not only in a dwindling population but in roads abandoned to brambles and briars, in arable land out of cultivation and in deserted villages. Contraction in the area of cultivation in its turn made dearth the more likely. There was in every sense a vicious circle. A sober estimate suggests that “in 1470 the number of households was halved in most European villages compared with the start of the fourteenth century”; the reconquest of forest and waste of the arable is “an episode equal in importance to the drama of the earlier clearings.”⁶¹

This general economic decline in Europe of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was marked in a final and visible way by social disorders much more profound than the territorial wars. Such wars, after all, had been in character with feudal society. The appearance of peasant movements was not:

In the boom condition of the thirteenth century there had been in rural areas a degree of over-population which made many peasants—day labourers, poor serfs—very vulnerable. Now the countryside was more sparsely occupied and a better living was possible for those who remained. . . . What was new in the slump

conditions of the fourteenth century was a bitterness in the lord's relations with the villagers.⁶²

As Hay indicates, the most intense of the peasant rebellions occurred in Flanders (1325–28), northern France (the Jacquerie of 1358), and England (1381). But such movements erupted over much of western Europe during the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries. In France, and especially Normandy (precipitated surely by the final savaging of the peasants by the forces of the Hundred Years War), in Catalonia (1409–13 and later), in Jutland (1411), in Finland (1438), and in Germany (1524), peasants arose, seizing land, executing lords, clergy, and even lawyers, demanding an end to manorial dues, petitioning for the establishment of wage-labor, and insisting on the dissolution of restrictions on free buying and selling.⁶³

Within the vortex of these disturbances, long-distance trade declined drastically. In England, the export of wool and cloth, and subsequently their production, fell well below thirteenth-century levels.⁶⁴ In France (Gascony), the export of wine was similarly affected.⁶⁵ Hay remarks that “Florentine bankruptcies in the first half of the fourteenth century are paralleled by similar troubles in Florence at the end of the fifteenth century,”⁶⁶ while P. Ramsey notes the precipitous fall of “the great merchant bankers of southern Germany.”⁶⁷ Further north, the Hansa League disintegrated,⁶⁸ while to the west, the Flemish cloth industry collapsed.⁶⁹ Finally, even the northern Italian city-states found their bourgeoisie in decline. The rise of the Ottoman Empire, at first disruptive to the Italian merchant houses, would dictate new accommodations to Islam and commerce, eventually persuading some of the Italians to relocate as capitalist colonists in the Iberian peninsula.⁷⁰ For the moment, however, the foundations of the European civilization, still figuratively embryonic, appeared to be crumbling.

The Modern World Bourgeoisie

Henri Pirenne, however, provided a key to one of the mysteries of the emergence of the modern era in the sixteenth century from the chaos and desperation of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries: the “survival” of the bourgeoisie. Pirenne also anticipated the somewhat rhetorical question put by K. G. Davies in the heat of the debate revolving around the historical authenticity of the phrase: the rise of the middle class. Davies queried:

What, after all, is wrong with the suggestion that the *bourgeoisie*, not steadily but by fits and starts, improved its status over many centuries, a process that began with the appearance of towns and has not yet been finally consummated?⁷¹

Forty years earlier, Pirenne had already replied:

I believe that, for each period into which our economic history may be divided, there is a distinct and separate class of capitalists. In other words, the group of capitalists of a given epoch does not spring from the capitalist group of the preceding epoch. At every change in economic organization we find a breach of con-

tinuity. It is as if the capitalists who have up to then been active recognize that they are incapable of adapting themselves to conditions which are evoked by needs hitherto unknown and which call for methods hitherto unemployed.⁷²

Both Pirenne and Davies understood that the biological metaphor of a bourgeoisie emerging out of the Middle Ages, nurturing itself on the “mercantilisms” and administrations of the Absolute Monarchies of the traditional period between feudalism and capitalism, and on the lands and titles of impoverished nobilities, then finally achieving political and economic maturity and thus constituting industrial capitalism, is largely unsupported by historical evidence. Rather it is a historical *impression*, a phantom representation largely constructed from the late eighteenth century to the present by the notional activity of a bourgeoisie as a dominant class. This history of “the rise of the middle class” is an amalgam of bourgeois political and economic power, the self-serving ideology of the bourgeoisie as the ruling class and thus an intellectual and political preoccupation—mediated through the constructs of evolutionary theory:

From Darwin has descended the language of error, a language that has locked up historical thinking and imposed slovenly and imprecise conclusions even upon scholarly and sensible researchers. Words like “growth,” “decline,” “development,” “evolution,” “decay,” may have started as servants but they have ended as masters: they have brought us to the edge of historical inevitability.⁷³

Hegel’s dialectic of *Aufhebung*, Marx’s dialectic of class struggle and the contradictions between the mode and relations of production, Darwin’s evolution of the species and Spencer’s survival of the fittest are all forged from the same metaphysical conventions. The declining European bourgeoisies of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were not, for the most part, the lineal antecedents of those that appeared in the sixteenth century. The universality of capitalism is less a historical reality than a construct of this “language of error.”⁷⁴ These “distant and separate class[es] of capitalists” were less the representatives of an immanent, rational, commercial order than extensions of particular historical dynamics and cultures. They were not the “germ” of a new order dialectically posited in an increasingly confining host—feudalism—but an opportunistic strata, willfully adaptive to the new conditions and possibilities offered by the times. Not only did different western European bourgeoisies appear in the sixteenth century, but these new bourgeoisie were implicated in structures, institutions, and organizations that were substantively undeveloped in the Middle Ages.

For one, the focus of long-distance trade in Europe gravitated from the Mediterranean and Scania areas to the Atlantic. The most familiar forms of this extension of trade to the south and west of the European peninsula were merchant voyages and colonization. Second, “expanded bureaucratic state structures”⁷⁵ became the major conduits of capitalist expansion: determining the direction of investment, establishing political security for such investments, encouraging certain commercial networks and relations while discouraging others:

In these conditions, in fact, may be seen the matrix of modern capitalism: like nationalism, less the creator than the creation of the modern state. It had many antecedents, but its full emergence required a conjunction of political and moral as well as strictly economic factors. This emergence could take place within the intricate framework of one type of western state then evolving; it may be doubted whether it could have done so under any other circumstances that we know of in history; at any rate it never did.⁷⁶

The city, the point of departure for the earlier bourgeoisies and their networks of long-distance trade and productive organization, proved to be incapable of sustaining the economic recovery of those bourgeoisies situated where the merchant town had reached its highest development: northern Italy, western Germany, the Netherlands, and the Baltic.⁷⁷ The Absolutist State, under the hegemony of western European aristocracies, brought forth a new bourgeoisie. The territories of Castile (Spain), the Ile de France, the Home Counties and London (England), the expansionist and colonial ambitions and policies of their administrations, and the structures of their political economies organized for repression and exploitation, these constituted the basis of this bourgeois' formation.

The bourgeoisies of the sixteenth century accumulated in the interstices of the state. And as the state acquired the machinery of rule—bureaucracies of administrative, regulatory, and extractive concerns, and armies of wars of colonial pacification, international competition, and domestic repression⁷⁸—those who would soon constitute a class, settled into the proliferating roles of political, economic, and juridical agents for the state. And as the state necessarily expanded its fiscal and economic activities,⁷⁹ a new merchant and banking class parasitized its host: State loans, state monopolies, state business became the vital centers of its construction.

So while the territorial states and empires acquired lands in plenty, they were unable to exploit unaided the resultant huge economic units. This incapacity again opened the door to the towns and the merchants. It was they, who, behind the facade of subordination were making their fortunes. And even where the states could most easily become masters, in their own territory with their own subjects, they were often obliged to make shifts and compromises.⁸⁰

It is still debatable whether this was a result of what Adam Smith and Eli Heckscher after him termed the “system” of *mercantilism*,⁸¹ or the consequence of what other historians describe as the ideology of *statism*.⁸² Nevertheless, it is clear that by the seventeenth century, the new bourgeoisies were identified with political attitudes and a trend in economic thought that was pure mercantilism:

[I]mplicit in the “tragedy of mercantilism” was the belief that what was one man’s or country’s gain was another’s loss. . . . It was, after all, a world in which population remained remarkably static; in which trade and production usually grew only very gradually; in which the limits of the known world were expanded slowly and with great difficulty; in which economic horizons were narrowly limited; and in

which man approximated more closely than today to Hobbes' vision of his natural state: for most men most of the time, life was "poor, nasty, brutish and short."⁸³

The parochialism of the town, which had so much characterized the perspective of the bourgeoisie of the Middle Ages, was matched in this second era of Western civilization by a parochialism of the state. Heckscher commented that:

The collective entity to [peoples of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries] was not a nation unified by common race, speech, and customs: the only decisive factor for them was *the state*. . . . Mercantilism was the exponent of the prevailing conception of the relationship between the state and nation in the period before the advent of romanticism. It was the state and not the nation which absorbed its attention.⁸⁴

Again, the particularistic character of the formations of these bourgeoisies⁸⁵ withheld, from what would be called capitalism, a systemic structure. The class that is so consistently identified with the appearance of industrial capitalism was inextricably associated with specific "rational" structures—a relationship that profoundly influenced bourgeois imaginations and realizations. Political economies,⁸⁶ that is national economies, enclosed them, and thus the bourgeoisie perceived what later analysis argues in retrospect is the beginnings of a world system as something quite different: an international system.⁸⁷ The bourgeoisies of early modern capitalism were attempting to destroy or dominate each other.

The Lower Orders

Just as the western European middle classes were suspended in webs of state parochialisms, so too was that vast majority of European peoples: the lower orders. The class that ruled, the nobility, by its orchestration of the instrumentalities of the state, imprinted its character on the whole of European society. And since much of that character had to do with violence,⁸⁸ the lower orders were woven into the tapestry of a violent social order. By the nature of hierarchical societies, the integration of the lower classes—wage laborers, peasants, serfs, slaves, vagabonds, and beggars—into the social, political, and economic orders of the Absolute State was on the terms of the clients of the latter. The function of the laboring classes was to provide the state and its privileged classes with the material and human resources needed for their maintenance and further accumulations of power and wealth. This was not, however, a simple question of the dominance of a ruling class over the masses.

The masses did not exist as such. As earlier, Greek and Roman thinkers had created the totalizing construct of the barbarians, the feudal nobilities of western Europe had inspired and authored a similar myth. Friedrich Hertz has reported that:

In the Middle Ages and later, the nobility, as a rule, considered themselves of better blood than the common people, whom they utterly despised. The peasants were supposed to be descended from Ham, who, for lack of filial piety, was known to have been condemned by Noah to slavery. The knightly classes of many lands, on

the other hand, believed themselves to be the descendants of the Trojan heroes, who after the fall of Troy were said to have settled in England, France and Germany. This theory was seriously maintained not only in numerous songs and tales of knightly deeds, but also in many scholarly works.⁸⁹

It was a form of this notion that Count Gobineau revived in the mid-nineteenth century, extending its conceptualization of superiority so as to include elements of the bourgeoisie.⁹⁰ The nobilities of the sixteenth century, however, proved to be more circumspect about “the masses” than their genealogical legends might imply. They did not become victims of their own mythic creations. When it came to the structures of the state, their knowledge of the social, cultural, and historical compositions of the masses was exquisitely refined. Perhaps this is no more clearly demonstrated than in one of the most critical areas of state activity: the monopolization of force.

The Absolutist State was a cause and effect of war. Its economy was a war economy, its foreign trade was combative,⁹¹ its bureaucracy administered the preparations and prosecutions of war.⁹² Such a state required standing armies (and, eventually, navies). But for certainly political and sometimes economic reasons, soldiers could not be recruited easily from, in V. G. Kiernan’s phrase, “the mass of ordinary peasants and burghers.” Kiernan puts the situation most simply for France, though it was the same all over Europe: “Frenchmen were seldom eager to serve their king, and their king was not eager to employ Frenchmen.”⁹³ Loyalty to the state of the monarchy from the exploited ranks of the lower classes was rare. In any case, not one state of the sixteenth or seventeenth century was reliant on such an identification between the masses and their rulers. The soldiers of the armies of France, Spain, England, Holland, Prussia, Poland, Sweden, and at first Russia were either alien to the states for which they fought and policed or very marginal to them:

European governments . . . relied very largely on foreign mercenaries. One of the employments for which they were particularly well suited was the suppression of rebellious subjects, and in the sixteenth century, that age of endemic revolution, they were often called upon for this purpose. . . . Governments . . . had to look either to backward areas for honest, simple-minded fellows untainted by political ideas . . . or to foreigners.⁹⁴

Depending then on changing fortunes, the “identities” of the combatants, the geopolitics of wars, and the mission, mercenaries were drawn from among the Swiss, the Scots, Picardians, Bretons, Flemings, Welsh, Basques, Mavarrese, Gallowayians, Dalmatians, Corsicans, Burgundians, Gueldrians, the Irish, Czechs, Croatians, Magyars, and from Gascony, Allgaeu, Norway, and Albania. Since one function and result of the work of these mercenaries was the suppression of subject peoples, the degree of their success is directly indicated by their own absence, for the most part, from the political geography of modern Europe. The Absolute State (or its direct successors), the instrument that propelled them into prominence in the sixteenth and seventeenth

centuries (for France, into the late eighteenth century), ultimately absorbed the autonomous sectors from which the mercenaries originated.

In the armies of the sixteenth century, native recruits distributed among the foreign mercenaries were also chosen with an eye to minimizing the political and social risks of the monarchy and its allied nobility. In France, the army “drew its volunteers from the least ‘national,’ most nondescript types, the dregs of the poorest classes,” Kiernan informs us.⁹⁵ In Spain, the hills of Aragon and the Basque provinces served a similar function. In Britain, until the mid-eighteenth century, the Scottish Highlands were the most frequent sites of recruitment; and the Welsh soldier’s skills became legendary.⁹⁶

Important as the formation of these armies was for the construction of the states that dominated Europe for more than 200 years, we must not be diverted from their more historical importance by the romantic richness of the social and political drama to which they contributed. Louis XI’s innovation in 1474, of organizing a “French infantry without Frenchmen”⁹⁷ was revolutionary in scale, not in character.⁹⁸ The tactic of composing armies from mercenaries and from marginal peoples and social strata extended back into the Middle Ages and earlier. Imperial armies, republican armies, bandit armies, invading armies and defending armies, the armies of rebellious slaves, of nobles, and even of the chauvinist medieval cities, all laid claim to, or incorporated to some extent, souls for whom they had at best few considerations in less intense times.⁹⁹ More significantly, in reviewing this phenomenon for the sixteenth and later centuries, the point is not that mercenaries were recruited from the outside and from among those least secure internally; this is simply the best documented form of a more generalized pattern of structural formation and social integration.

The important meaning is that this form of enlisting human reserves was not peculiar to military apparatus but extended throughout Europe to domestic service, handicrafts, industrial labor, the ship- and dock-workers of merchant capitalism, and the field laborers of agrarian capitalism. There has never been a moment in modern European history (if before) that migratory and/or immigrant labor was not a significant aspect of European economies.¹⁰⁰ That this is not more widely understood seems to be a consequence of conceptualization and analysis: the mistaken use of the *nation* as a social, historical, and economic category; a resultant and persistent reference to national labor “pools” (e.g., “the English working class”); and a subsequent failure of historical investigation. Wallerstein, in his otherwise quite detailed study of the origins of the capitalist world system, can devote a mere page to this phenomenon, including a single paragraph on the ethnic divisions of sixteenth-century immigrant labor. And though compelled to acknowledge that “not much research seems to have been done on the ethnic distribution of the urban working class of early modern Europe,” he goes on to speculate that Kazimiery Tymimecki’s description of systematic ethnic distinctions of rank within the working class “in the towns of sixteenth-century East Elba . . . [is] typical of the whole of the world economy.”¹⁰¹ Despite the paucity of studies there are historical records that tend to confirm this view. We

discover in them Flemish cloth workers in early sixteenth-century London; and later in the sixteenth and in the seventeenth centuries, Huguenot refugees (40,000–80,000 of them), many of them handloom weavers, fleeing France and settling in Spitalfields in London's East End and thus, establishing England's silk industry.¹⁰² In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Irish workers “formed the core of the floating armies of labourers who built canals, the docks, the railways and transformed the face of England.”¹⁰³ And again on the European Continent, as German farm workers and peasants were drawn to urban and industrial sectors of central and western Germany, Polish labor was used to fill the vacuum in eastern Germany.¹⁰⁴ France and Switzerland also recruited heavily from Poland, Italy, and Spain.¹⁰⁵ And, of course, the formation of industrial cores in the United States before the Civil War located immigrant workers from northern Italy, Germany, Scotland, and Ireland; and after the Civil War from southern Italy, and the lands of eastern, northern, and central Europe: Russia, Finland, Poland, Greece, and the Balkans.¹⁰⁶ (Perhaps the only unique aspect of north American industrial recruitment was the appearance of Asian workers beginning in the late nineteenth century, from China, Japan, and the Philippines.)¹⁰⁷

We begin to perceive that the nation is not a unit of analysis for the social history of Europe. The state is a bureaucratic structure, and the nation for which it administers is more a convenient construct than the historical, racial, cultural, and linguistic entity that the term “nation” signifies.¹⁰⁸ The truer character of European history resides beneath the phenomenology of nation and state. With respect to the construction of modern capitalism, one must not forget the particular identities, the particular social movements and societal structures that have persisted and/or have profoundly influenced European life:

Altogether western Europe had acquired a greater richness of forms, of corporate life, a greater crystallization of habits into institutions, than any known elsewhere. It had a remarkable ability to forge societal ties, more tenacious than almost any others apart from those of the family and its extensions, clan or caste; ties that could survive from one epoch to another, and be built into more elaborate combinations. But along with fixity of particular relationships went a no less radical instability of the system as a whole.¹⁰⁹

European civilization is not the product of capitalism. On the contrary, the character of capitalism can only be understood in the social and historical context of its appearance.

The Effects of Western Civilization on Capitalism

The development of capitalism can thus be seen as having been determined in form by the social and ideological composition of a civilization that had assumed its fundamental perspectives during feudalism. The patterns of recruitment for slave and

mercenary we have reviewed held true for bourgeoisies and proletariats. According to Robert Lopez, in the Carolingian Empire long-distance trade was dominated by Jews and Italians.¹¹⁰ In medieval Europe, Lopez and Irving Raymond have documented the importance of Mediterranean traders at international fairs, and the development of foreign merchant houses in the towns of the hinterland.¹¹¹ Fernand Braudel amplifies:

[M]any financial centres, *piazze*, sprang up in Europe in towns that were of recent origin. But if we look more closely at these sudden, and quite considerable developments, we shall find that they were in fact ramifications of Italian banking that had by then become traditional. In the days of the fairs of Champagne it was already the bankers from Sienna, Lucca, Florence, or Genoa who held the moneychanger's scales; it was they who made the fortune of Geneva in the fifteenth century and later those of Antwerp, Lyons, and Medina del Campo. . . .

In short, throughout Europe a small group of well-informed men, kept in touch by an active correspondence, controlled the entire network of exchanges in bills or specie, thus dominating the field of commercial speculation. So we should not be too taken in by the apparent spread of "finance."¹¹²

For Spain under Charles V (1516–56) and Philip II (1556–98), the German Fuggers, the Genoese, and other "international merchant firms" organized the state revenues, exploited mines, and administered many of the most important estates.¹¹³ And in Constantinople, Genoese, Venetian, and Ragusan bankers and merchants shepherded the trade and financial relations between Europe and the Ottoman Empire.¹¹⁴ For the Mediterranean towns of the sixteenth century, Braudel has observed the functions of the "indispensable immigrant." To Salonica, Constantinople and Valona, Italian and Spanish Jews, as merchants and artisans, brought new trades to further broaden an already multicultural bourgeoisie.

There were other valuable immigrants, itinerant artists for instance attracted by expanding towns which were extending their public buildings; or merchants, particularly the Italian merchants and bankers, who activated and indeed created such cities as Lisbon, Seville, Medina del Campo, Lyons and Antwerp.¹¹⁵

And in Venice:

A long report by the *Cinque Savii*, in January, 1607, indicates that all "capitalist" activity, as we should call it, was in the hands of the Florentines, who owned houses in the city, and the Genoese, who provided silver, between them controlling all exchanges.¹¹⁶

Just as Nuremberg had ravaged Bohemia, Saxony, and Silesia, Braudel asserts, it was the Genoese who "blocked the development of Spanish capitalism."¹¹⁷ It was, too, the "indispensable immigrant" who complemented the urban proletariat incapable of maintaining itself "let alone increas[ing] without the help of continuous immigration."¹¹⁸ In Ragusa it was the *Morlachi*; in Marseilles, the Corsicans; in Seville, the

Moriscos of Andalusia; in Algiers, the Aragonese and the Berbers; in Lisbon, Black slaves; and in Venice, the immigrant proletariat was augmented by *Romagnoli, Marchiani*, Greeks, Persians, Armenians and Portuguese Jews.¹¹⁹

The bourgeoisie that led the development of capitalism were drawn from particular ethnic and cultural groups; the European proletariats and the mercenaries of the leading states from others; its peasants from still other cultures; and its slaves from entirely different worlds. The tendency of European civilization through capitalism was thus not to homogenize but to differentiate—to exaggerate regional, subcultural, and dialectical differences into “racial” ones. As the Slavs became the natural slaves, the racially inferior stock for domination and exploitation during the early Middle Ages, as the Tartars came to occupy a similar position in the Italian cities of the late Middle Ages, so at the systemic interlocking of capitalism in the sixteenth century, the peoples of the Third World began to fill this expanding category of a civilization reproduced by capitalism.¹²⁰

As a civilization of free and equal beings, Europe was as much a fiction in the nineteenth century (and later) as its very unity had been during the Merovingian and Carolingian eras. Both the church and the more powerful nobilities of the Holy Roman Empire and its predecessor had been the source of the illusion in those earlier periods. From the twelfth century forward, it was the bourgeoisie and the administrators of state power who initiated and nurtured myths of egalitarianism while seizing every occasion to divide peoples for the purpose of their domination.¹²¹ The carnage of wars and revolutions precipitated by the bourgeoisies of Europe to sanctify their masques was enormous.

Eventually, however, the old instruments gave way to newer ones, not because they were old but because the ending of feudalism and the expansion of capitalism and its world system—that is the increasingly uneven character of development among European peoples themselves and between Europeans and the world beyond—precipitated new oppositions while providing new opportunities and demanding new “historical” agents. The Reformations in western Europe and then England that destroyed the last practical vestiges of a transcendent, unified Christendom, were one manifestation of this process of disequilibrium.

In England, as an instance, representatives of the great landowners, and agrarian capitalism, in pursuit of their own social and financial destinies disciplined first the church and then the monarchy and finally “the masses” through enclosures, the Poor Laws, debtors’ prisons, “transportation” (forced emigration), and the like.¹²² The contrasts of wealth and power between labor, capital, and the middle classes had become too stark to sustain the continued maintenance of privileged classes at home and the support of the engines of capitalist domination abroad. New mystifications, more appropriate to the times, were required, authorized by new lights. The delusions of medieval citizenship, which had been expanded into shared patrimony and had persisted for five centuries in western Europe as the single great leveling principle, were to be supplanted by race and (to use the German phrase) *Herrenvolk*, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹²³ The functions of these latter ideological

constructions were related but different. Race became largely the rationalization for the domination, exploitation, and/or extermination of non-“Europeans” (including Slavs and Jews). And we shall have occasion in Part II to explore its applications beyond Europe and particularly to African peoples more closely. But while we remain on European soil, it is *Herrenvolk* that matters. In eighteenth-century England, Reginald Horsman sees its beginnings in the “mythical” Anglo-Saxonism that was flown as an ideological pennant by the Whig intelligentsia.¹²⁴ In France (for example, Paul de Rapin-Thoyras and Montesquieu, and before them François Hotman and Count Henri de Boulainvilliers), in Germany (Herder, Fichte, Schleiermacher, and Hegel), in north America (John Adams and Thomas Jefferson), “bourgeois” ideologists displayed the idea of the heroic Germanic race.¹²⁵ And the idea swept through nineteenth-century Europe, gathering momentum and artifice through such effects as Sir Walter Scott’s historical novels and Friedrich von Schlegel’s philological fables. Inevitably, of course, the idea was dressed in the accoutrement of nineteenth-century European science. *Herrenvolk* explained the inevitability and the naturalness of the domination of some Europeans by other Europeans. Though he reconstructed the pieces back to front, Louis Snyder, for one, recognized the effect.

Racialists, not satisfied with merely proclaiming the superiority of the white over the coloured race, also felt it necessary to erect a hierarchy within the white race itself. To meet this need they developed the myth of the Aryan, or Nordic, superiority. The Aryan myth in turn became the source of other secondary myths such as Teutonism (Germany), Anglo-Saxonism (England and the United States), and Celticism (France).¹²⁶

Then, in the nineteenth century, modern nationalism appeared.

The emergence of nationalism¹²⁷ was again neither accidental nor unrelated to the character that European capitalism had assumed historically. Again, the bourgeoisie of particular cultures and political structures refused to acknowledge their logical and systemic identity as a class. Instead, international capitalism persisted in competitive anarchy—each national bourgeoisie opposing the others as “natural” enemies. But as powerful as the bourgeoisie and its allies in the aristocracy and bureaucracy might be in some ways, they still required the co-optation of their “rational” proletariat in order to destroy their competitors. Nationalism mobilized the armed might they required to either destroy the productive capacities of those whom they opposed or to secure new markets, new labor, and productive resources.¹²⁸ Ultimately, the uneven developments of national capitalisms would have horrifying consequences for both Europe and the peoples under European dominations.

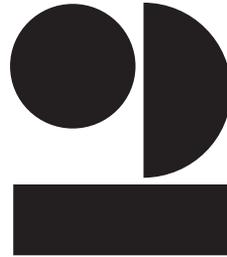
In Germany and Italy, where national bourgeoisies were relatively late in their formation, the marshaling of national social forces (peasants, farmers, workers, clerics, professional classes, the aristocracy, and the state) was accomplished by the ideological phantasmagoria of race, *Herrenvolk*, and nationalism. This compost of violence, in its time, became known under the name of fascism.¹²⁹ With the creation of fascism, the bourgeoisie retained the full range of its social, political, and economic preroga-

tives. It had the cake of the total control of its national society, an efficient instrument for expanding its domination and expropriation to the Third World, and the ultimate means for redressing the injuries and humiliations of the past. Again, not unexpectedly, slavery as a form of labor would reappear in Europe.¹³⁰

But this goes far beyond our immediate purposes. What concerns us is that we understand that racialism and its permutations persisted, rooted not in a particular era but in the civilization itself. And though our era might seem a particularly fitting one for depositing the origins of racism, that judgment merely reflects how resistant the idea is to examination and how powerful and natural its specifications have become. Our confusions, however, are not unique. As an enduring principle of European social order, the effects of racialism were bound to appear in the social expression of every strata of every European society no matter the structures upon which they were formed. None was immune. And as we shall observe in the next two chapters, this proved to be true for the rebellious proletariat as well as the radical intelligentsias. It was again, a quite natural occurrence in both instances. But to the latter—the radical intelligentsias—it was also an unacceptable one, one subsequently denied. Nevertheless, it insinuated itself into their thought and their theories. And thus, in the quest for a radical social force, an active historical subject, it compelled certain blindnesses, bemusements that in turn systematically subverted their analytical constructions and their revolutionary project. But this is still to be shown. To that end we will now turn to the history of the English working classes. Since these workers were one of the centerpieces for the development by radical intelligentsias of the notion of the proletariat as a revolutionary class, an inquiry into the effects of racialism on their consciousness forms the next step in the demonstration of the limits of European radicalism.

CHAPTER

THE ENGLISH WORKING CLASS AS THE MIRROR OF PRODUCTION



Until quite recently much of what was generally known about the appearance of the industrial working classes in England and presumed about the development of class consciousness among them was enveloped by ideological mists and historical simplifications. This may be because the creators of heroic sagas of tragedy and triumph—whether of the liberal or radical sort—frequently find close attention to history confining. Historical inquiry, however, does have its rewards, often unexpected ones. Nevertheless, no small amount of historical consideration had been given to the English working classes. From these abundant materials we will attempt a comprehension of the material and social factors that impinged on the development of working-class consciousness—the mirror of production—and the forms it assumed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. We shall be guided, hopefully, less by what we have been led in the abstract to expect *should* have occurred than by what *did*. Expropriation, impoverishment, alienation, and the formations of class consciousness and expression will be treated not as abstractions or the residual effects of a system of production but as living categories. We are concerned with how real men and women (and children) experienced dislocation, poverty, and the exploitation of their labor and reacted to them; how they employed the intellectual and emotional inventories available to them to come to terms with their experience. For that purpose I shall endeavor to keep this inquiry to the framing declarations about the English working class made by E. P. Thompson twenty years ago: “[T]he working class made itself as much as it was made.” Further, he summarized:

Class consciousness is the way in which the experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas and institutional forms. If the experience appears as determined, class consciousness does not. . . . [C]lass is defined by men as they live their own history, and, in the end, this is its only definition.¹

And since I have argued that among these “cultural terms” was racialism, I shall hold Thompson to his word.² But first it is important to lay aside certain beliefs about the circumstances in which the English industrial working classes made their appearance.

When one reviews the appearance of socialism in the nineteenth century, we are repeatedly informed by its historians that the movement and its ideologies began with the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution.³ However, the ease by which so many students of socialism have arrived at this association between a multifaceted ideal and the twinned catalysts of modernity is somewhat dissipated by a closer look at the more concrete realities that lay behind these abstractions of sudden, irreversible change. The Industrial Revolution, for one, was never quite the phenomenon it has become in the hands of some of its historians and in the popular mind. Much has been questioned since the popularization of the phrase in Arnold Toynbee’s *Industrial Revolution* (1884). Still the legend lingers.

One might begin by noting that the large-scale [technical] economic and social changes of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries,⁴ which are now most frequently referred to as the Industrial Revolution, affected the whole of Britain’s Empire as well as parts of western Europe. This suggests that to comprehend the scale on which this “revolution” operated requires a sense that it involved more than the introduction of new techniques of production. The recruitment, training, and disciplining of labor, the transportation of goods and raw materials, the political and legal structures of regulation and trade, the physical and commercial apparatus of markets, the organization and instrumentation of communication, the techniques of banking and finance, these too would have already had to be of a character that could accommodate increased commodity production. Their appearance was hardly instantaneous. On the contrary, their formation was organically determined by the economic developments of previous centuries. Moreover, it is probable, as A. E. Musson has argued, that the appearance of industrial production was neither revolutionary (in the sense of a sudden, catastrophic change) nor uniquely British:

From a technological point of view . . . it may be said that the eighteenth century witnessed little that was really revolutionary, and that the early Industrial Revolution was, in fact, based largely on . . . previous advances; even the steam engine was a product of sixteenth and seventeenth century scientific theory and experiment, while in other fields older techniques, such as water-powered machinery, were developed and extended.

The majority of these technological developments from the late Middle Ages onwards appear to have been introduced into England from the Continent.⁵

Musson's interpretation is not generally shared, nor are the facts⁶ he marshals to support his argument generally known. This is in large part a consequence of the tendency of most historians and analysts of the processes of industrialization to proceed along national (and much less frequently, subcontinental, i.e., western European) lines. Indeed, it is by no means rare for the reader to encounter in otherwise very careful studies, the statement—in some form—that *the* Industrial Revolution occurred in England: a popular proposition, which appears to stem from the confusion of the points of origin of technical rationalization for the sake of production with practical mechanical invention; and a further confusion of a national economy with the ultimate impact of practical invention on an economic system already extensively characterized by international production (e.g., English cotton, sugar). Regardless, the systematic and detailed study of the technical and social consequences of industrial production is still largely located in the historiography of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain (though one should note that E. J. Hobsbawm is certainly correct that it would be more accurate to envision several industrial revolutions occurring subsequent to the initial period of the Industrial Age).⁷

Poverty and Industrial Capitalism

For the working classes in Great Britain, the immediate and terrible consequences of the Industrial Age are generally, if not precisely, known.⁸ In purely economic terms, there is the direct evidence of the workhouses that began in the eighteenth century but achieved their more permanent character in the two decades following Rev. Robert Lowe's experiment in deterrent welfare in 1818 at Bingham.⁹ Though pauperism (which Hobsbawm defines as "the permanent core of poverty"¹⁰) as we have suggested earlier was by no means a new phenomenon in England or western Europe before the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in England, at least, the numbers of paupers increased somewhat rapidly during this latter period. This seems to have been the direct result of both the interruption of rural life by the adoption of reaping and threshing machines, and by the policy of land enclosures inspired by agricultural capitalism that, between 1760 and 1810, included five million acres of common fields.¹¹ Elsewhere, in the industrial cores, unemployment accompanied the severe business cycles of the period.¹² The workhouse, whose truest function was to act as asylums of last resort for the poor, was one response of the ruling classes. Characteristically, this response was the rationalization of an almost total misperception of the basis of pauperism: the presumption that the dispossessed and unemployed lacked work discipline.¹³

The recurring cycles of unemployment in the first half of the nineteenth century were of a scale to give any observer pause. Hobsbawm's comments on the slump of 1826, and Henry Mayhew's observations of the rise of unemployment that would persist from 1847 to 1851 are instructive. Hobsbawm found the figures

so startling that they can bear a good deal of deflation. They suggest that in the hard-hit areas of Lancashire between 30 and 75 per cent of the total population might have been destitute in the course of this slump; in the woollen areas of Yorkshire, between 25 per cent and 100 per cent; in the textile areas of Scotland, between 25 per cent and 75 per cent. In Salford, for instance, half the population was wholly or partly out of work, in Bolton about one third, in Burnley at least 40 per cent.¹⁴

Yet what Hobsbawm as a historian found difficult to accept, Mayhew as a contemporary observer (described by E. P. Thompson as “incomparably the greatest social investigator in the mid-century”)¹⁵ found matters of fact:

[E]stimating the working classes as being between four and five million in number, I think we may safely assert—considering . . . particular times, seasons, fashions, and accidents, and the vast quantity of over-work and scamp-work . . . the number of women and children . . . continually drafted into the different handicrafts . . . there is barely sufficient work for the *regular* employment of half of our labourers, so that only 1,500,000 are fully and constantly employed, while 1,500,000 more are employed only half their time, and the remaining 1,500,000 wholly unemployed, obtaining a day’s work *occasionally* by the displacement of some of the others.¹⁶

Moreover, when we are informed by Hobsbawm that paupers housed in the purposely punitive workhouses of the nineteenth century, though themselves victims of the applied disgust of their social and economic superiors, probably ate substantially better than significant proportions of farm-laborers and urban workers,¹⁷ we are chastened from the too easily presumed distinctions between employed and unemployed labor and pauperism. All three constituted an underclass that extended into the ranks of skilled workers.¹⁸

Further evidence for the Industrial Age’s impact on the British working class and the poor is to be found in the studies of housing (the term would presumably apply to conditions of survival ranging from the makeshift night shelters in the doorways, alleys, cellars, and streets of the towns and in the open fields beside village roads, the parish and union workhouses themselves and the worker cottages—structures quite different concretely and subjectively from the benign pastoralism now associated with the term),¹⁹ morbidity, mortality, child-labor, the physical conditions of labor, and food consumption.²⁰ In general, the more reliable the data, the more firm is the impression of a progressively depressed population during the period under discussion. Still, all these figures are in some sense superficial to (though helpful for sensing) the real issue that is the *experience* of the men, women, and children who made up the English poor and working classes. Just what did they make of their lives?

Much of what can be measured is merely the conditions of their lives and not their social, moral, and ideological contents. The objective conditions, rhythms, and patterns of the proletarianization of English labor frame that experience, but do not determine it, thus the social eruptions of that class have persistently resisted a mono-

tonic correlation.²¹ In 1930, J. L. Hammond, who along with his colleague Barbara Hammond contributed so much to the history of British labor, put this point well enough to be repeated:

[I]f we are considering the kind of social life that was created by the Industrial Revolution, we find that in one sense no class of work-people escaped the Industrial Revolution. For all workers alike there was the same want of beauty, the same want of playing fields or parks, the same want of pageants or festivals, the same speeding up of industry, the same absence of anything calculated to create what Sophocles called “the temper that buildeth a city’s wall” . . . the ugliness of the new life, with its growing slums, its lack of beautiful buildings, its destruction of nature and its disregard of man’s deeper needs, affected not this or that class of workers only, but the entire working-class population.²²

In terms of the “happiness and unhappiness of men and women,” Hammond would write elsewhere, “if you look at the life of the age of the Industrial Revolution . . . you are struck at once by its extraordinary poverty.”²³

The Reaction of English Labor

Hammond’s view of the sort of concerns that focused the minds of the laboring classes as they came face-to-face with the dislocations of the industrial world is in part substantiated by the political and social movements among the underclass that so distressed the upper and middle classes of the earliest moments of this period. (In 1831, James Mill had written to an associate, “Nothing can be conceived more mischievous than the doctrines which have been preached to the common people.”)²⁴ One quite obvious expression of working-class anger toward the impoverishment of their social lives and, as Hammond called it, “Imagination,” is the movement to which Hobsbawm refers as the “machine breakers.”²⁵ Distinguishing between those movements where attacks on private property and machinery were tactics designed to force concessions from employers, and those movements energized by workers “concerned, not with technical progress in the abstract, but with the practical twin problems of preventing unemployment and maintaining the customary standard of life, which included nonmonetary factors such as freedom and dignity,”²⁶ Hobsbawm linked the revolts that echoed the ideals initially recorded among the Spitalfields weavers in 1675. Hobsbawm tells us of successive generations of weavers at Spitalfields rioting in 1719 (“against wearers of printed calicoes”), in 1736, and again, in the 1760s, against machines; in 1778–80, machine-breakers appeared in Lancashire. Luddism, proper, appeared in 1802, peaked in the 1811–13 period (spinning jennys), before largely disappearing after the suppression of the farm labor machine-breakers in 1830 in the southern counties, in East Anglia, and the Midlands.²⁷ More interestingly, these Luddite movements not only reflected a resistance to the machine as a tool of capitalist production on the part of workers, but also served to reveal the existence of a broader social hostility to capitalist industry:

The fully developed capitalist entrepreneurs formed a small minority. . . . The small shop-keeper or local master did not want an economy of limitless expansion, accumulation and technical revolution. . . . His ideal was the secular dream of all “little men,” which has found periodic expression in Leveller, Jeffersonian or Jacobin radicalism, a small-scale society of modest property-owners and comfortably-off wage-earners, without great distinctions of wealth or power. . . . It was an unrealizable ideal, never more so than in the most rapidly evolving societies. Let us remember, however, that those to whom it appealed in early nineteenth-century Europe made up the majority of the population, and outside such industries as cotton, of the employing class.²⁸

A more critical confirmation of Hammond’s thesis on the significance that must be attached to the subversion of the social and cultural integument of feudal society in Britain by the imposition of industrial production, is suggested elsewhere. It would appear that the ideological and social response of the English working classes to the immanent domination by a new social order was not restricted to class-specific or economistic behaviors. The class consciousness of English workers did not strictly adhere to the logic of working-class formation premised on capitalist exploitation and modeled by Marx from the histories of the French and English bourgeoisies.²⁹ Indeed, the more profound reaction to an industrial capitalist order found among English “producers” in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, largely deterred those political and social consequences of proletarianization that had already become the dogma of English radical thought and expectation in the years immediately following the Great Revolution in France. The development of Anglo-Saxon chauvinism, the earliest form of English nationalism, and the appearance of rather extreme forms of racism among the English working class determined the form and characteristics that English working-class consciousness assumed. The parochialisms of ethnocentrism and race hostility constituted a response that was both a native of and a consequence to the loss of precapitalist social integrations. Of the first, Anglo-Saxon chauvinism, George Rude would note:

[O]ne of the most remarkably persistent beliefs of all was that perfect “Liberties” had existed under the Saxon Kings and that these had been filched, together with their lands, from “freeborn” Englishmen by the invading Norman knights under William the Bastard in 1066. This myth of the “Norman Yoke” persisted until Chartist times [1840s] and was handed down by generations of Levellers, Whigs reared on “revolution principles,” London eighteenth-century radicals and democrats nurtured on the more recent doctrines of “popular sovereignty” and the “rights of man.”³⁰

The existence of this “constantly recurring theme in popular ideology” in English social history eventually took the form of nationalism, but more particularly as a nationalism incorporating a virulent xenophobia. The processes behind the appearance of a racially conscious working-class nationalism require some rather close

attention, if for no other reason than that they have been obscured in radical English histories written appropriately as responses to works less sympathetic to and less comprehensive of the conditions and struggles of the English industrial working classes.³¹

English society was the first to have developed an industrial proletariat among its working classes.³² Yet well before the peaks of Luddite and Chartist protests and during the heyday of the earlier Owenite socialism, the supranationalist class identity that Thompson has noted among English workers and in the “heroic culture” they produced between the French Revolution and the defeat of Chartism (while demonstrating its erratic course) had begun its retreat before protonationalism.³³ This was one aspect of the “lost vision” of the English working classes in the 1830s, and one that Thompson was forced to reluctantly recognize:

It is easy enough to say that this culture was backward-looking or conservative. True enough, one direction of the great agitations of the artisans and outworkers, continued over 50 years, was to *resist* being turned into a proletariat. When they knew that this cause was lost, yet they reached out again, in the Thirties and Forties, and sought to achieve new and only imagined forms of social control.³⁴

It would reappear in the mid-1860s, but by then what would become the general labor union movement (replacing an earlier and explicit consciousness of a class struggle for political power) had so progressed as to be so much under the sway of labor bureaucrats that not even the direct intervention of Marx was sufficient to more than briefly deflect English working-class consciousness from nationalism.³⁵ Despite the evidence that in 1864, the year of the founding of the International Working Men’s Association (the I.W.M.A., or First International), spokesmen for British labor addressed themselves publicly to what Royden Harrison characterizes as the “national liberation and unification movements in America, Italy and Poland,” by 1871 the more persistent thrust of trade unionism was once more dominant:

In 1871 Marx was opposed to an attempt at a proletarian revolution in Paris. But when it was made, his loyalty to the working class and his own past record left him no choice but to give it his unflinching support. By identifying the International with the Commune, Marx occasioned the break with the majority of English labour leaders and sealed the fate of the I.W.M.A., a course of action from which there was no honourable release. . . . Marx and the English trade union leaders disowned each other.³⁶

The formulation of an explanation for the revival and dominance of trade-union consciousness among the English working classes is not a simple task. For one, it must take account of what Thompson terms the “counter-revolution” of the dominant classes that struck such decisive blows to working-class radicalism in 1834, 1835, and 1848;³⁷ it must also encompass the historical processes by which industrial forms of production were established in England, including the patterns of labor recruitment from the villages and countryside of England (and the subsequent forms of work dis-

cipline established to proletarianize the recruits), and the divisions of labor that characterized the international structure of British capitalism.³⁸ But perhaps most important to the understanding of the evolution of working-class nationalism in Britain, and more to the issue here, is the role another nationalism—Irish nationalism—played in the formative period of English working-class development and its concomitant construction of English working-class culture. Moreover, the part played by Irish workers in the revolts of English labor in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries being the social and historical expression of Irish nationalism must also be noted.

The Colonization of Ireland

As far as the English ruling classes might have been concerned, the nineteenth century was inaugurated by the Irish Rebellion of 1798.³⁹ Having already survived the American and French Revolutions, the “immovable object,” Ireland and what the English termed “the Irish Question,” became “the biggest issue in late-Victorian politics, as perhaps it had been for most of the century.”⁴⁰ In any case, their response to what they perceived as a particularly pernicious manifestation of Jacobin conspiracy and French interference was to dissolve what had passed for an Irish parliament and to declare in 1800 an Act of Union between Ireland and the United Kingdom.⁴¹ In effect, the English state was setting aside the ineffective structures and instrument of indirect rule for those of a more direct and familiar domination.⁴² This substitution of one set of institutions for another, in the long view, proved to be indifferent for the purposes of the English state though it logically followed the evident interests of English capital and Anglo-Saxonist ideology.⁴³ The Irish Question became much more a part of the nineteenth century than it had been for the eighteenth. It would appear, however, that its character had been fixed long before.

James Anthony Froude, in his history of *The English in Ireland*, provides his reader with what is both a detailed political history and a demonstration of the extent and sort of images of the Irish that had become fixed in the minds of Englishmen. Froude began by informing his reader that when the “military aristocracy” of the Normans invaded Ireland in the twelfth century, “the Irish . . . were, with the exception of the clergy, scarcely better than a mob of armed savages.”⁴⁴ Having defeated the defenders of the island, Froude continues, the Normans had three courses of action toward the conquered peoples: extermination, armed occupation, or armed colonization.⁴⁵ The Normans, Froude laments, chose an entirely different path:

The Normans in occupying both England and Ireland were but fulfilling the work for which they were specially qualified and gifted. . . . They did not destroy the Irish people; they took the government of them merely, as the English have done in India, dispossessing the chiefs, changing the loose order of inheritance into an orderly succession, giving security to life and property, and enabling those who cared to be industrious to reap the fruits of their labours without fear of outrage

and plunder. Their right to govern lay in their capability of governing and in the need of the Irish to be governed.⁴⁶

The end result was an unfortunate one for the civilizing mission of the Normans. Instead of extending “English” civilization to the inhabitants of the island, the conquered people absorbed their Norman rulers racially, culturally, and politically.⁴⁷ By the second half of the fourteenth century, England having undergone the disasters detailed above, judicial, and political attempts at ensuring a specifically Anglo-Norman presence in the four counties of the English Pale (Dublin, Meath, Kildare, and Louth) were in actuality indications of the futility of the designs that had followed the conquest. Indeed, the term “conquest” was a conceit of English political history. With respect to their political relations with England, Ireland, and more precisely the Pale, staggered between indirect rule and home rule, depending on the resources of the English state, the preoccupations of English feudal society, and the capacities and proclivities of various feudal lords in Ireland to command national or English loyalties. In brief, such was the situation until the sixteenth century. In economic, and often in political terms, feudal Ireland was almost entirely independent from England.

This mode of English sovereignty in Ireland was to be initially pierced during the reign of Henry VII (1485–1509), and finally reshaped altogether during that of Henry VIII (1509–47). Between these first two kings of the Tudor Dynasty (1485–1603), English policy toward Ireland managed to produce a bizarre series of results: an administrative unification of Ireland under the Earl of Kildare (a Celticized Norman family); the fomenting of a rebellion led by Kildare as the champion of Catholicism following the rupture of the English state with the Papacy; and with the suppression of rebellion and the execution of some of its leaders, a new subjugation of Ireland and its most powerful families. The stabilization of the English feudal monarchy had brought with it the possibility of transforming Ireland into an English colony.⁴⁸

Once Elizabeth I (1533–1603) was established on the English throne—following the brief and chaotic reigns of her siblings, Edward VI (1547–53) and Mary I (1553–58)—English policy toward Ireland, not for the first or last time, changed dramatically:

The English set upon the plan of putting Ireland to plantation as the best means to subdue the island. The most extensive of these plantations was to be that in Londonderry, established in 1608, and roughly contemporaneous to the Virginia Plantation. Englishmen and lowland Scotsmen were lured to Ireland by the promise of free land. Their job was to drive the Irish into the woods and fortify their own villages.⁴⁹

The suppression of the rebellions that followed (the major rebellions were led by Shane O’Neill in 1559, the Fitzgeralds of Desmond between the years 1568–83, and by O’Neill, the former earl of Tyrone, and O’Donnell from 1594–1603),⁵⁰ required such extensive expenditures that at least one historian, R. D. Edwards, surmises that “the poverty of the crown, which was a serious factor in the seventeenth-century conflict

with parliament, was at least in part due to commitments over Ireland.⁵¹ Whether this was the case or not, a more lasting pacification of Ireland was not achieved until the final years of Elizabeth's reign, despite the persistence of legends which put it otherwise:

The reputation of the Elizabethan settlers, won for the most part in other fields, remains; but their Irish enterprise, lacking all sustained sense of purpose, proved deservedly transient. And so in succeeding centuries the sombre tale of Plantation, of rebellion, of Cromwellian violence, of civil and religious war, of the Penal Code, mocked the illusion of a final Elizabethan settlement.⁵²

Though it was Elizabeth's administration that had initiated the policy, it was under James I (1603–25) that the colonization of Ireland by planters and farmers from Scotland and the western counties of England assumed significant proportions (first in Ulster, and then proceeding to the alienation of Irish lands in north Wexford, Longford, and Leitrim). By 1641, that is in the midst of the reign of James's successor, Charles I (1625–49), William Petty, the seventeenth-century English economist and statistician, would estimate that there were 260,000 Undertakers (as the Protestant colonists were called) among the one and a half million people living in Ireland.⁵³ It was also in this year that the Irish rebelled again, mounting the most serious and lethal effort to reject English rule since the Conquest. In English historiography, this rebellion became known as the massacre of 1641. This rebellion was to last for eleven years, a fire that ultimately had to be attended to by Cromwell himself. What followed was what Froude, with inadvertent irony, would have us know as the Penal Era (1652–1704).⁵⁴ It would be during this latter period that Ireland assumed the characteristics that typified the Irish experience until the early twentieth century:⁵⁵ colonized, absentee land ownership; Catholic persecution and Protestant privilege; the land alienation of its laboring classes; and the corrupt and punitive administrations and official terror. It was again during this Penal Era that much of the restrictive legislation written by the English parliament would appear to complete the derationalization of the Irish economy:⁵⁶ acts against the marketing of Irish cattle in England, 1681; against Irish woollens and colored linens, 1699; and against glass, 1746. Once these policies had accomplished their purpose, free trade could be re-established:

By 1801, free trade between Great Britain and Ireland was a reality; however, Irish industry, with one exception—linen, could not withstand English competition. After the Union, Ireland, therefore, became more rural, more agricultural, more economically specialized than it had been previously.⁵⁷

Ireland had been transformed into a dependent sector of the English economy. Such were the historical experiences that informed Irish nationalism in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. The psychic and intellectual characters of the Irish workers who emigrated to England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to complement the labor of the emergent English proletariat were determined

to a large extent by these same events. Certainly, the social and political relations of the immigrant Irish workers with their English counterparts were severely constrained by a past consisting of almost unmitigated hostility between the interests that had come to be identified with their respective national entities.

English Working-Class Consciousness and the Irish Worker

The Irish immigrant was an important element in the industrial English working class (by 1841, 400,000 Irish-born immigrants were living in Great Britain).⁵⁸ He was, as Thompson describes the Irish worker of the early nineteenth century, “the cheapest labour in Western Europe.”⁵⁹ Irish workers were recruited and used to fill

the heavy manual occupations at the base of industrial society [which] required a spendthrift expense of sheer physical energy—an alternation of intensive labour and boisterous relaxation which belongs to preindustrial labour-rhythms, and for which the English artisan or weaver was unsuited both by reason of his weakened physique and his Puritan temperament.⁶⁰

Still Thompson’s explanation for the need to complement the English working classes was not the rationale that prevailed at the time. Engels was much closer to the English manufacturing class, and perhaps more accurate in his assessment of their motives when he observed that “the Irish have . . . discovered the minimum of the necessities of life, and are now making the English workers acquainted with it.”⁶¹ For whatever it is worth, it would have been inconsistent with the tenets of Anglo-Saxonism to detach the English worker from a racial hierarchy that was quite adequate in locating the deficiencies of the Irish “race.”⁶² The Irish worker having descended from an inferior race, so his English employers believed, the cheap market value of his labor was but its most rational form.

Setting aside for the moment popular prejudices, the English working classes, especially those at the industrial cores of English industry, had more occasion than their superiors to form very different attitudes toward their Irish counterparts. Indeed, in the early nineteenth century, the opportunities for the formation of successful social movements built on Irish and English workers were frequent and seemed promising. Irish labor leaders took prominent roles in working-class agitation in England (in the Chartist movement, for example)⁶³ and it is a widely held belief that working-class movements and organizations in England in general were modeled from Irish organizational methods.⁶⁴ The extent to which the direction of a unified and radical working-class movement had been realized and subsequently so easily dispatched in the early nineteenth century, has troubled at least one historian of the period so deeply that it has occasioned uncharacteristic speculation. E. P. Thompson, reviewing the observations that Engels had made on the positive (revolutionary) effects consequent to the mixture of the two “races” in the working class (“the more

facile, excitable, fiery Irish temperament with the stable, reasoning, persevering English”),⁶⁵ himself paused to reflect on the political possibilities that English capitalist production had inevitably produced:

It was an advantage to the employers, at a time when precision engineering coexisted with tunnelling by means of shovel and pick, to be able to call upon both types of labour. But the price which had to be paid was the confluence of sophisticated political Radicalism with a more primitive and excitable revolutionism. This confluence came in the Chartist movement. . . . Once before, in the 1790s . . . it seemed possible that English Jacobinism and Irish nationalism would engage in a common revolutionary strategy. If O'Connor had been able to carry Ireland with him as he carried the north of England, then the Chartist and “Young Ireland” movements might have come to a common insurrectionary flash-point.⁶⁶

Chartism, however, proved to be the high point of cooperation between the Irish and English elements of the working classes in England.⁶⁷ This movement, organized behind a People's Charter, the platform of universal suffrage, annual parliaments, and parliamentary salaries; and represented by demonstrations, petitions, riots, and rebellions, though neither politically nor ideologically homogeneous, had once held the promise of an enduring organization. Instead, it collapsed totally, from within and without. After the late 1840s, the tentative efforts that might have resulted in a politically significant class solidarity were frustrated by events of both political and economic character.

In England itself, the defeat of the Chartist protests came with the extent and kind of reaction of the English ruling classes aptly recounted by Thompson:

[I]t was the organ of middle-class Radicalism, *The Times*, which led the outcry for examples of severity. The advice was followed: “On the 9th of January [1831], judgment of death was recorded against twenty-three prisoners, for the destruction of a paper machine in Buckingham; in Dorset, on the 11th, against three, for extorting money, and two for robbery; at Norwich, fifty-five prisoners were convicted of machine-breaking and rioting; at Ipswich, three, for extorting money; at Petworth, twenty-six for machine-breaking and rioting; at Gloucester, upwards of thirty; at Oxford, twenty-nine; and at Winchester, out of upwards of forty convicted, six were left for execution. . . . At Salisbury, forty-four prisoners were convicted.”

And it was a Whig Ministry again that sanctioned, three years later, the transportation of the laborers of Tolpuddle in Dorsetshire, who had had the insolence to form a trade union.⁶⁸

Following this era of overt class warfare and its accompanying persecution, the English working class, as we have seen, turned toward trade unionism as its primary form of activity. In part, this was also a reflection of the social consequences concomitant to the growth of English trade and production. The English worker in the second

half of the nineteenth century began to enjoy certain of the perquisites of a labor aristocracy in a world system.⁶⁹

In Ireland, the late 1840s was the time of the great harvest disasters that came to be known as the Potato Famine or the Great Hunger. Its immediate consequences were both the momentous emigration from Ireland to the United States and the precipitation of an even more extreme nationalism among Irishmen both home and abroad.⁷⁰

Together, these political and economic setbacks—on the one hand to English and Irish industrial workers, and on the other to Irish farmers, peasants, and industrial workers in Ireland—resulted in both an ideological and physical drifting apart of the two “races.” From the mid-nineteenth century on, among English workers, the ideology of English nationalism gained ascendancy over the counterideology of international class solidarity and socialist hopes. This was a part of a conservative reaction (trade unionism) to political defeat and economic growth, but it also had to do with the radical directions the Irish working classes (and the nationalist Irish middle class) had taken.⁷¹ As Marx had often stated in one fashion or another: “The English working class will *never accomplish anything* before it has got rid of Ireland.”⁷² Early on, of course, it had been the presence of the Irish immigrant as a distorting and depressive element in the labor market that had produced markedly anti-Irish sentiment among English workers. This hostility had merely confirmed and complemented the racial feeling extant among England’s ruling classes, the historical bases of which we traced above. Later, from the 1850s onward, the development of sympathy among English workers toward Irish nationalism became even more remote with the appearances of Irish Radical (middle-class) nationalism—the Home Rule movement—and the more radical peasant and working-class nationalist movement that assumed the form of a revolutionary agrarian movement.⁷³ By the end of the nineteenth century, the English people were at one with respect to the Irish Question. Wherever exceptions existed, they were associated with political weakness and inconsequentiality.

The Proletariat and the English Working Class

The terms “English” and “Irish” have been used in the preceding discussion for convenience. It would have been most difficult to be both precise while treating the subject at an appropriate length. One hopes, however, that such conveniences have not escaped the reader’s attention, given the consistent emphases here on ethnic and cultural conservatism and their importance. Though Ireland is but a small island, the integration of the Irish peoples was by no means an accomplished fact by the time of the Great Famine and the major emigrations from Ireland in the nineteenth century. Indeed, some students of the emigrations are quite specific as to the regions, local cultures, dialect groups, and occupations from which successive emigrants were drawn and how these particularities influenced historical movements.⁷⁴ The Irish peoples had been in the process of achieving a national identity and a national culture

since the Norman-led conquest. They had not done so when the time came for the mass relocation that has marked their collective history for the past 200 years. Theirs is, then, a national identity deeply marked by the Irish dispersion.

But even more to the point, we have seen that the generic terms “the English working class” or “the English proletariat” mask the social and historical realities that accompanied the introduction of industrial capitalism in England and its Empire. Social divisions and habits of life and attitude that predated capitalist production continued into the modern era and extended to the working classes located in Britain specific social sensibilities and consciousness. The English working class was never the singular social and historical entity suggested by the phrase. An even closer study of its elements—for we have merely reviewed the more extreme case with the Irish—would reveal other social divisions, some ethnic (Welsh, Scottish, and more recently West Indian and Asian),⁷⁵ some regional, and others essentially industrial and occupational. The negations resultant from capitalist modes of production, relations of production, and ideology did not manifest themselves as an eradication of oppositions among the working classes. Instead, the dialectic of proletarianization disciplined the working classes to the importance of distinctions: between ethnics and nationalities; between skilled and unskilled workers; and, as we shall see later in even more dramatic terms, between races. The persistence and creation of such oppositions within the working classes were a critical aspect of the triumph of capitalism in the nineteenth century.

Neither Marx nor Engels were unaware of the proletariat’s failure to become a universal class.⁷⁶ Both studied the Irish Question closely, were active in the attempt to resolve its destructive impact on the historical processes of English working-class formation, and commented on its import for future proletarian organization.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, the impact of their *experience* with the English proletariat on their *theory* of the proletariat’s historical role appears to have been slight. Shlomo Avineri observes that:

The universalistic nature of the proletariat does not disappear in Marx’s later writings, when his discussion concentrates mainly on the historical causes of the emergence of the proletariat. What was at the outset a philosophical hypothesis is verified by historical experience and observation: the universalistic nature of the proletariat is a corollary of the conditions of production in a capitalist society, which must strive for universality on the geographical level as well.⁷⁸

This would appear to confirm one of Engels’s more famous estimations of their work:

Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that the younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it. We had to emphasize the main principle *vis-à-vis* our adversaries, who denied it, and we had not always the time, the place or the opportunity to allow the other elements involved in the interaction to come into their rights. But when it was a case of

presenting a section of history, that is, of a practical application, it was a different matter and there no error was possible.⁷⁹

Engels was absolutely correct, though the instance to which he was immediately responding might deceive.

The distinction that Engels was making here between history⁸⁰ and theory can, at one level, be read as an attempt to differentiate between the functions of the publicist and the scientific philosopher. Such an interpretation would in fact trivialize Engels's intent. Like Marx, Engels understood that their attempt to construct a total system of "the materialist conception of history" would bear the imprint of their historical moment.⁸¹ Not only ideology and philosophy but all human activity was of such a nature:

We make our history ourselves, but, in the first place, under very definite assumptions and conditions. Among these the economic ones are ultimately decisive. But the political ones, etc., and indeed even the traditions which haunt human minds also play a part, although not the decisive one.⁸²

What history demonstrated to Marx and Engels was that dialectical change was never a total negation of the conditions from which it generated, but a transformation of the meaning, intent, and directionality of the elements and forces of the preexisting whole. This meant that their work, itself the critique of "bourgeois society" and industrial capitalism, would some day—when the material forces of society had progressed beyond their stage of development in the nineteenth century—be subject to criticism (negation). That which was ideological ("partial consciousness") in their study of history would be transcended by a *necessarily* higher form of social thought corresponding to its historical moment.

Perhaps the most obvious of the ideological constructs that appear in the work of Marx and Engels (and most of the Marxists who have followed them) are the notions of the proletariat as the revolutionary subject, and the class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. They persist in Marxian thought in precisely the terms suggested by Isaiah Berlin:

[T]he Marxist doctrine of movement in dialectical collisions is not a hypothesis liable to be made less or more probable by the evidence of facts, but a pattern, uncovered by a non-empirical historical method, the validity of which is not questioned.⁸³

To comprehend this "haunting" of radical European thought, and its Eurocentrism, it becomes appropriate to review the socialist tradition from which Marx and Engels emerged and that had for its historical setting the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century. Here we will discover the groundings of the pattern that thrust European Marxism into an era for which it was not prepared: the modern world.