Book Reviews

Today's Peasantries

Peasants in the Modern World. PHILIP K. BOCK, Ed. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1969. vi + 174 pp. Cloth, $6; paper, $2.45.

Modernization among Peasants. The Impact of Communication. EVERETT M. ROGERS, in association with Lynne Svenning. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1969. xviii + 430 pp., illus. $6.95.

Modernizing Peasant Societies. A Comparative Study in Asia and Africa. GUY HUNTER. Published for the Institute of Race Relations, London, by Oxford University Press, New York, 1969. xii + 324 pp. Cloth, $6.50; paper, $2.50.

"In A.D. 2000," writes David Burleson (*Peasants in the Modern World*, p. 67), "we are going to have a world population of between six and seven billion people, of which maybe two-thirds will be peasants and proletarians." These are figures to conjure with; some authorities believe that between two-thirds and three-fourths of the earth's population may be classified as peasantries today, and peasantries are characteristically underfed and medically deprived. More, this has been a half-century of peasant revolution—or, at least, a half-century in which peasants have become ever more revolutionary. Between the Russian Revolution and those that followed, however, a significant change was wrought: revolution moved to what has come to be called the Third World—as in the cases of Mexico, China, Algeria, and Viet Nam. The change has excited new interest in the peasantries on the part of social scientists; it has pointed up the need for new definitions, and for certain distinctions previously not drawn. What is shared by those called "peasants"? Is a French agricultural landowner living in a provincial village of the Midi a peasant? And, if so, does he belong in the same category as a rice farmer from Kwangtung, a tobacco grower in Vuelta Abajo, a plantain cultivator in Uganda? Nor is it as if the answers were that easy, even though the questions ought to have been asked long ago.

The Germans speak of *Volkskunde* and *Völkerkunde*, and the distinction was once simple and useful. The first literally meant "folklore"—and hence, more broadly, the folk traditions, or folk cultures, of the European peoples: Ukrainian embroidered tablecloths, Andalusian land-sleds, and the pithy sayings of Finnish villagers. The second had to do with the cultures of *other* peoples (of the sort conventionally called "primitive") and could be translated as "ethnology." However, this usage omitted that vast category of peoples and cultures who were not part of the European past on the one hand, or "primitives" on the other. It paralleled the terminology of other languages in omitting those very peoples who, in today's world, make up its peasantries.

Such folk are rural, agrarian, with some access to land, who produce part of their subsistence as well as something for sale. They are not urban, but stand in contrast to the city, and are in certain important ways involved with the city and the national state, dependent upon these outside forces, subject to them—and aware of it. Study of them by anthropologists, economists, and political scientists is quite a recent development—though of course historians and sociologists studied the peasantries of Europe and those within the ambits of ancient great states (such as China and India) at earlier times. The anthropological preoccupation with primitive peoples passed slowly, and interest in them is still strong (as it should be); even within societies such as Viet Nam, Burma, or India, the anthropologist traditionally preferred to study the Mnong Gar, the Kachin, or the Todas to studying the sedentary agricultural village peoples of those same societies. Only since World War II have anthropologists begun to concede that the massive settled populations of such countries—in these cases, the residues of ancient great (often literate) civilizations—also need to be understood.

The three books under review approach the peasantry in different ways. Bock has edited a collection of seven contributions by anthropologists, of which those by Erasmus (on Latin American land reform and development), Hammel (on the Balkan peasantry), and the Hunts (on the differential use of the courts by Indians and non-Indians in rural Mexico) strike the reviewer as the most useful. There is no unifying theme; this is a series of disjointed papers of varying quality and sharpness, linked together only in that they all deal with peasants, one way or another.

Rogers's book is of a very different kind. Its purported theme is the significance of communication in the processes by which peasantries become (or begin to seek to become) modern. "The respondents whose behavior is analyzed are peasants, especially those living in five Colombian villages in the Andes Mountains" (p. ix), yet data are drawn from projects in India, Kenya, Costa Rica, and elsewhere, and nearly every chapter in the book is a product of collaboration between the senior author and somebody else, often a former student. This is a sociological study, and its author has labored hard and long to quantify and to specify. Yet the conclusions to which he comes, chapter by chapter, sound surprisingly homely, even self-evident; and his overall view of his Colombian informants concludes on a startlingly tentative note, after so many tables and charts. We are told that the subculture of the peasantry—any peasantry?—is typified by mutual distrust in interpersonal relations, a belief that good things are in short supply, fatalism, a lack of ability to defer gratification, and other unmodern or antimodern things (p. 40). But, the author also tells us, "much of the peasant subculture may be valid cross-culturally . . . it may even be valid to describe most types of traditional peoples [*sic*], whether they be peasants or not" (p. 41). Traditional peoples like the Chinese Red Guards, the Dutch Catholic hierarchy, the Peruvian military, and the market women of West Africa?

A concluding appendix (pp. 381–88) gives us a "succinct word picture of the Colombian villages and villagers that provide the main empirical basis of this book." And yet this succinct word picture takes us right back to the subculture of the peasantry, since "it is our intuitive impression that most of the Colombian respondents are typified by the ten elements of the subculture of the peasantry. . . . They are fatal-

istic, limited in time and distance perspectives, lack deferred gratification, and so forth" (p. 383). Note that, after chapter 2 has told us what peasants are like, and chapters 3 through 16 have made clear by middle-range analysis of field data on communication and modernization what Colombian peasants are like, the appendix tells us that—by "intuitive impression"—most of the Colombian peasants studied are like peasants.

This is unfair to the book, however. Its bulk demonstrates statistical correlations among different modernizing variables. Thus, for instance, in modern villages "the innovative leadership dimension appears to be a legitimizing facilitator of the thrust to modernization" and "age seems to lead to a very striking difference in life outlook between generations" (pp. 338–39). Such assertions, however, rooted as they are in an underlying postulate that communication is crucial to modernization, somehow end up proving themselves, rather than much else. More serious, perhaps, the studied statistical exercises serve better to show correlations than to make clear whom the correlations are about. Though the author claims that "the notion of a peasant subculture . . . has not been synthesized in terms of its central elements," that is precisely what Wolf (among others) has done—and some years ago, in a book called *Peasants*.

Of this trio, Guy Hunter's book is to be taken most seriously. Hunter is interested in development, particularly economic development, and in how to bring it about, especially in the less developed countries of Africa and South Asia. He believes that it may be possible to increase the productivity of peasant societies sufficiently to make their survival likely, if not assured; but he also recognizes how chancy such an optimistic enterprise may be. The data are drawn from South Asia (especially India) and Africa (especially East Africa), but the author hopes to contribute to our understanding of a whole class or category of societies—again, those of peasants. His emphasis is upon agricultural development, and he quite properly raises relativistic questions about particular development goals, too often foisted upon poor societies by their most assimilated and westernized planners. A good one-third of the book is taken up with problems of development in agriculture, and Hunter defends well his view that such development is inevitably linked to questions of political organization, values, and attitudes, and much else not conventionally considered "agricultural." Few anthropologists will find fault with him in this.

But while Rogers has difficulties proving that the peasants he is talking about are the peasants he studied, Hunter has trouble generalizing from the peasants he has worked with to the peasants he is talking about. Having traveled and worked in both Asia and Africa, and anxious to put together what he could of his divided experiences, Hunter calls all the societies in which he worked (among them India, Pakistan, Thailand, Fiji, and many African countries) "peasant societies," even while admitting (p. x) that "the use of the words 'peasant society,' in the title and constantly in the book itself, is particularly vulnerable to attack, especially in Africa." Hunter has apparently missed Fallers's thoughtful article "Are African cultivators to be called 'peasants'?" and, like Rogers, he seems never to have heard of Wolf's *Peasants*.

The difficulties posed by treating Africa and Asia together are made especially clear in chapter 3 of Hunter's book, which deals with the distribution and use of power and authority in villages (pp. 55–78). The reader of this chapter will find that the first 17 pages are concerned almost exclusively with India; whereupon the author tells us that "much of what has been said of India, except as to caste, would apply to Pakistan and indeed to the majority cultures of Southeast Asia: Muslim in the Malay Peninsula and most of Indonesia, Buddhist on the mainland (Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam)" (p. 71). The discussion of village politics in Africa begins on the same page: "The pattern . . . is significantly different, though many of the same elements are to be found. It is, in essence, simpler. . . ." That simplicity Hunter does not adequately describe or confirm, though he perceives that the complex state-structures of West Africa made them sociopolitically different from many other African societies. Yet even in the concluding pages of this chapter (pp. 71–8), most of what we learn is in contrast to India; Africa will not be generalized about, and comparisons to Asia seem to highlight differences rather than underlying similarities. The same problem crops up throughout the book. Hunter has seen just enough detail to make him uneasy when he sweepingly generalizes; Rogers has accepted just enough sweeping generalities to make him unsure when he tries to specify.

Yet Hunter's book, for all of its author's disarming uncertainties, struck this reader as the best of the three. In setting forth a developmental view, Hunter offers a quasievolutionary perspective: "growth takes place as a long chain of small, related sequences, each of which determines the possibilities for the next" (p. 293). At each point, many different aspects of a society (its "religious basis . . . tools and techniques . . . political history and system" and so on) may change; change in any one will affect all others. Three stages (no better but hardly worse than anybody else's "stages") are posited, leading from "traditional society" through the tension of partial modernization to the third stage, when "commitment to new rewards and risks has taken place" (p. 293). Satisfactory development will take into account not only existing values and attitudes, but also the significant internal differentiation—geographical, ecological, social, economic—that typifies less developed countries, such that each region or province will be studied and treated on its own terms. European models will not do; and "each 'stage' may well need structures and institutions tailored to its needs" (p. 295). Hunter asks a great deal of his experts; but it's time someone did.

All three of these books are distinguished, among other things, it seems to the reviewer, for their restraint in avoiding the difficult issue of development other than through various social-democratic political frameworks—one finds one mention of Cuba and one of China, neither of any consequence, in the three works. They are also distinguished for their apparent lack of concern with the historical background of backwardness. If it is true that the now-developed countries were once backward, what are the differences between today's backward countries and yesterday's? Surely one difference may be that yesterday's backward countries had colonies—most of which are today's backward countries. Is it because all of these authors know this so well that they refer to it so little?

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