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Explaining Peasant Conservatism: The Western European Case

MICHAEL S. LEWIS-BECK*

What is the political role of the peasantry? Is it a source of revolution or reaction? For the Third World nations, where this is an issue of special importance, the answer is by no means clear.¹ In the advanced capitalist countries, however, the political impact of peasants has become less ambiguous. Although Lipset² once argued that radical consciousness in the United States had shown itself primarily through agrarian struggles, farmers have now evolved into perhaps the most conservative occupational group in America.³ Barrington Moore, considering the historical place of peasants in the modernization of France, England and Germany, details their revolutionary contribution.⁴ But, concerning more recent times, Huggett indicates that, in general, the peasants of Western Europe have expressed themselves politically through the parties of the Right.⁵ The contemporary evidence presented here demonstrates that these strong right-wing sentiments on the part of the peasantry persist.

The data come from the 1970 European Communities Study, directed by Ronald Inglehart and Jacques-René Rabier. In these surveys, probability samples of the adult populations of France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, and the Netherlands were asked to respond to a wide range of social and political items.⁶ Inglehart's provocative

* Department of Political Science, University of Iowa. I would especially like to acknowledge Kai Hildebrandt, Gerhard Loewenberg, and Samuel C. Patterson for their useful comments on an earlier draft. Also, a particular thanks is owed Ronald Inglehart, not only for his intellectual contributions to the manuscript, but as well for his extreme helpfulness on specific questions concerning the data set. Finally, I wish to recognize the excellent computer assistance of Richard Hardy.

¹ See Gerrit Huizer, *Peasant Rebellion in Latin America* (Harmondsworth, Middx.: Penguin Books, 1973); Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1968); R. Stavenhagen, *Agrarian Problems and Peasant Movements in Latin America* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1970); Eric R. Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).

² Seymour M. Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 17.

³ Michael S. Lewis-Beck, 'Agrarian Political Behavior in the 1972 Election' (mimeo, Department of Political Science, University of Iowa, 1976), pp. 31-8.

⁴ Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1967), pp. 453-83.

⁵ Frank E. Huggett, *The Land Question and European Society since 1650* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1975), p. 141.

⁶ In this paper, evidence is drawn from the 1970 surveys, because they provide a more comprehensive treatment of the questions of concern here. However, the pattern of peasant conservatism is not unique to 1970; rather, it is repeated in the 1971 and 1973 data sets. As noted, the present analysis utilizes those respondents who have a head of household actively

analyses of these responses have focused on the political implications of changing value priorities among Western European publics.⁷ In the following examination, the central theme is the politics of the peasantry, as contrasted to that of the other broad occupational categories, the middle and working classes. Occupation is based on that of the head of household. 'Middle class' refers to those with a non-manual occupation, i.e. business managers, executives, engineers, civil servants, professionals, clerks. 'Working class' applies to those with a manual occupation, i.e. workers at all skill levels. 'Peasant' refers to those who said they were actively engaged in farming. While the occupational coding scheme of the data set does not permit the peasant category to be more finely divided, it is apparent from the educational and economic data reported below that the category is composed chiefly of small farmers.

The specific purpose of this paper is to explain peasant conservatism, using these data. The explanation will be organized in terms of three sets of variables – social class, traditional forces, and values. Following consideration of these groups of variables, a causal model summarizing the links between the peasantry and the Right will be offered. Before trying to account for the phenomenon of peasant conservatism, however, it is necessary to document its presence.

PEASANT CONSERVATISM

Conservatism is a diffuse concept, encompassing numerous attitudes and behaviors. Peasant conservatism has assumed quite virulent forms, as indicated by the intense support of the German peasantry for the National Socialists and their program of 'blood and soil'.⁸ Such reactionary nationalism, impelled by a deep commitment to traditional values, represents peasant conservatism at its most extreme. In contemporary western Europe, however, the conservative political behavior of the peasants is less dramatic, manifesting itself primarily in the act of voting. The ensuing analysis aims to explain the peasant tendency to vote for parties on the Right, gradually incorporating into this explanation key attitudinal components of conservatism.

involved in the work force, i.e. peasant, worker, or middle class. This criterion yields the following sample size for each country: France = 1,571; West Germany = 1,628; Italy = 1,354; Belgium = 1,024; Netherlands = 1,174. The peasant sample for each is France = 224; West Germany = 179; Italy = 240; Belgium = 70; Netherlands = 75. The interviews were carried out in the respective countries in February and March of 1970 by *Institut für Demoskopie* (Allensbach); International Research Associates (Brussels), *Institut français d'opinion publique* (Paris), *Instituto per le Ricerche Statistiche e l'Analisi dell'Opinione Pubblica* (Milan), and *Nederlands Instituut voor de Publieke Opinie* (Amsterdam). The European Communities Studies data are available from the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, Box 1248, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 48106.

⁷ Ronald Inglehart, 'The Silent Generation in Europe: Intergenerational Change in Post-Industrial Societies', *American Political Science Review*, LXV (1971), 991–1017; Ronald Inglehart, 'Industrial, Pre-Industrial, and Post-Industrial Political Cleavages in Western Europe and the United States', paper delivered at the 1973 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, and appearing as Chap. 7 and 8 of Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles among Western Publics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977).

⁸ Huggett, *The Land Question and European Society Since 1650*, pp. 141–3.

TABLE I *Left-Right Political Party Distribution*

	Left				Right			
France	Communist	Unified Socialist	Socialist	Radical	Gaullist	Indep. Republican	—	—
West Germany	—	—	—	Social Democrat	Christian Democrat	—	—	—
Italy	Communist	Proletarian Socialist	Socialist	Social Democrat	Christian Democrat	Liberal	Monarchist	Neo-Fascist
Belgium	—	—	—	Socialist	Social Christian	—	—	—
The Netherlands	Communist	Pacifist Socialist	Democrats, 1966	Socialist	Catholic	Liberal	Christian Historical	Anti-Revolutionary

In the five national surveys, respondents were asked, 'If there were a general election tomorrow, for which party would you be most likely to vote?'⁹ The parties mentioned were classified Left or Right (see Table 1) according to the scheme followed by Inglehart, who provides a detailed explanation of its development and utility.¹⁰ Basically, the scheme groups parties in terms of whether they are change-oriented (Left) or favor the *status quo* (Right). Such classification can be quite straightforward, as in the West German case where, excluding the minor third parties, the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats easily fill the Left and Right categories respectively. For multi-party systems, however, this dichotomization may appear rather ruthless. Center parties, for example, may not be readily assignable. In a few instances, such as the French Centrists of 1970, the party was excluded.¹¹

While there could be some disagreement over the placement of a specific party, the grouping does not seem generally controversial. Further, adoption of the ordering is not meant to imply that the parties differentiate themselves only along this Left-Right dimension. Obviously, the parties could be ordered on other dimensions, e.g. system supportiveness, territoriality, clericalism or ethnicity. The last dimension is especially important in Belgium, where forces of ethnic nationalism have been strong. Only the two largest Belgian parties – the Socialists and the Social Christians – seem to fit

TABLE 2 *Occupation and Support for Parties on the Right**

	France	West Germany	Italy	Belgium	Netherlands
	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)
Middle class	52 (371)	44 (419)	63 (286)	69 (157)	49 (428)
Working class	40 (492)	39 (647)	50 (433)	59 (274)	40 (456)
Peasants	68 (137)	64 (110)	66 (158)	88 (42)	67 (54)
† P/W Index	+28	+25	+16	+29	+27
† P/M Index	+16	+20	+3	+19	+18
† Alford Index	+12	+5	+13	+10	+9

* Per cent vote support for parties on the Right.

† The P/W index is the per cent difference between peasants and workers in their support for parties on the Right. The P/M index is the per cent difference between peasants and the middle class in their support for parties on the Right. The Alford index is the per cent difference between middle-class and working-class support for parties on the Right.

⁹ What follows is the percentage of respondents in each country who were excluded from analysis of this item because their response to this question ('for which party would you vote?') was (1) don't know, (2) no answer, (3) none, or (4) a party not included in the Left-Right dichotomy of Table 1: France = 37 per cent; West Germany = 28 per cent; Italy = 35 per cent; Belgium = 53 per cent; The Netherlands = 20 per cent.

¹⁰ Inglehart, 'Industrial, Pre-Industrial . . .', pp. 14-25.

¹¹ Inglehart, 'Industrial, Pre-Industrial . . .', p. 22.

comfortably into the Left-Right dichotomy. However, exclusion of the Flemish and Wallon parties is not detrimental to the limited purpose here, for Belgian farmers, perhaps contrary to expectations, were found not to be particularly responsive to them.

Accepting the simple Left-Right categorization as a meaningful, though by no means exhaustive, grouping of the political parties of western Europe allows the cross-cultural comparison of voter choice. If the ordering is indeed tapping a liberal-conservative ideological dimension, then the hypothesis is that peasants would distinguish themselves from other occupations by their strong vote support for parties on the Right. Table 2 shows this to be the case, for everywhere peasant support of the Right is high (from 64 per cent in West Germany to 88 per cent in Belgium), clearly exceeding that of the middle and working classes. In seeking an explanation for this propensity to vote for parties to the Right, the occupational data of Table 2 suggest that the effects of social class are worth exploring.

THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL CLASS

Discussions about social class and the peasantry are invariably problematic, in part because the concept of class was generated by the cleavages of industrial society. But the difficulty is still more fundamental. Marx himself has summarized well the dilemma of whether the peasants form a class:

In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests and their culture from those of the other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class. In so far as there is merely a local interconnexion among these small-holding peasants, and the identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond and no political organization among them, they do not form a class.¹²

The indefinite class status of the farm population has frequently led modern analysts of class to exclude it from consideration.¹³ Such exclusion is perhaps a bit hasty, for peasants appear to fulfill at least some of the conditions for a class that Marx outlines here. Not only do they sharply separate themselves from others socioeconomically (as will be seen below), but their distinctively conservative political sentiments might be interpreted as setting them in 'hostile opposition' to other classes.

The political antagonisms of the middle and working classes, which have absorbed so much of the analysis of modern European politics, are minor when compared to the political differences between the peasant and other classes. Applying a version of Alford's¹⁴ widely used index of class voting (here the per cent difference between

¹² Karl Marx, 'The Class Struggles in France 1848-1850', and 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', excerpts in T. Shanin, ed., *Peasants and Peasant Societies* (Harmondsworth, Middx.: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 230.

¹³ For a recent example, see M. R. Jackman and R. W. Jackman, 'An Interpretation of the Relation Between Objective and Subjective Social Status', *American Sociological Review*, xxxviii (1973), 569-82.

¹⁴ Robert Alford, *Party and Society: The Anglo-American Democracies* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1963).

middle-class and working-class vote for the Right), one observes that, while the middle class clearly separates itself from the working class, the index never goes over +13 (see Table 2). By way of contrast, suppose similar indices, P/W and P/M, are constructed to determine the Rightist distance of the peasants from the working class and the middle class respectively. A comparison of these various measures shows rather dramatically that the peasants generally stand much farther from *either* class than the middle class does from the working class. By this criterion of contrary political behavior, then, peasants certainly compose a distinctive class.

But even deciding that the peasants *do* constitute a class does not solve the Marxist quandary, for the question still remains, 'Which class?' Are they bourgeoisie or proletariat, owners or workers, exploiters or exploited? This is not merely a problem for the theorist. Rather, it is an issue that constantly arises when worker-oriented parties begin to organize and seek political allies. A classic example comes from Socialist party activity in the United States during the early 1900s. Agrarian radicalism was perhaps at its peak, and many farmers were attracted to the party. The difficulty

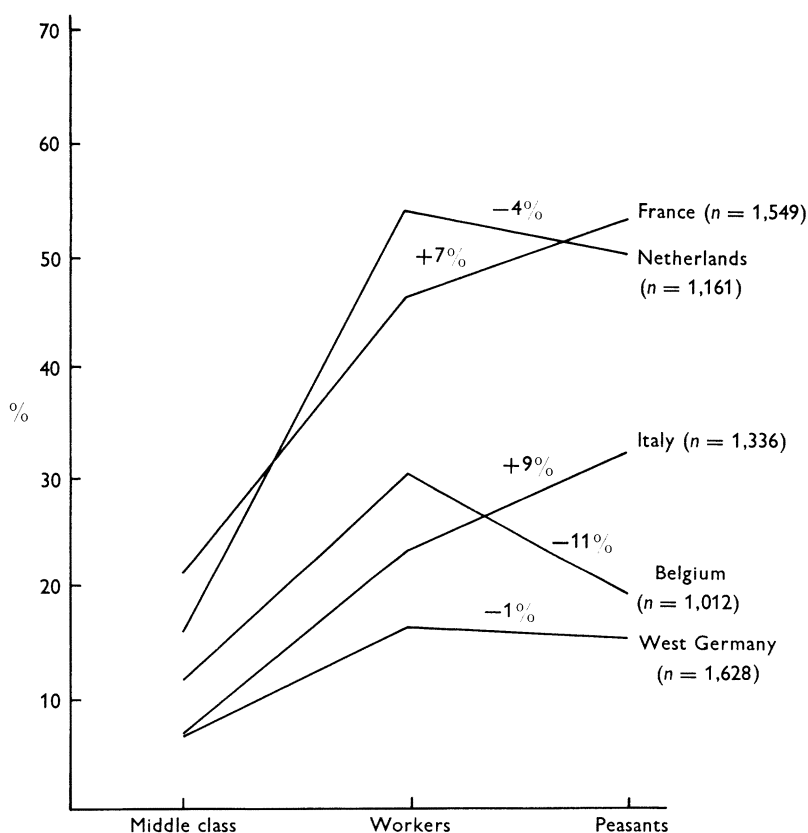


Fig. 1. Occupation and economic circumstance. (Note: percentage who describe families as living in 'somewhat reduced means' or below.)

the leadership faced was whether to encourage, or even allow, farm membership. At the first party convention, in 1900, leader Job Harrison succinctly expressed the dominant view: 'We are building in this convention a working-class platform; the farmers do not belong to the working class, because the farmers own the farms.'¹⁵ Later this position was modified somewhat, and the Socialists began entering into tentative, fretful relationships with radical farm groups such as the Non-Partisan League.¹⁶

The ambivalence of the Socialist leadership toward alliances with farm people is well founded, upon inspection of these European data. On the one hand, peasant politics is markedly conservative but, on the other hand, the standard class indicators of economic and educational background argue that peasants 'should' ally themselves with workers. Respondents were asked to evaluate their economic situation along a seven-point scale ranging from 'poor' to 'rich'. Figure 1 reports the percentage of those in the different occupational categories who said that theirs was a family of 'somewhat reduced means' or less. As can be seen, peasants and workers perceive themselves about equally disadvantaged financially, in comparison with the middle class. Turning to the objective variable of years of schooling, peasant and workers again share a very underprivileged status in comparison with the middle class. On average, 61 per cent of the western European workers interviewed had received no more than a primary school education, compared to 22 per cent of the middle class in this category. Peasants fared even worse, with fully 69 per cent, on average, not having gone beyond the primary grades.¹⁷

Despite the similarity of workers and peasants on these basic economic and educational variables, which together make up a contemporary measure of social class, a common political perspective does not ensue. Instead, Table 2 has shown that peasants are much more conservative than workers. In every country save one, the percentage difference between peasant and worker support for the Right is 25 per cent or more. Only in the case of Italy is it less, with a still substantial difference of 16 per cent. (The Italian case is addressed more specifically in the concluding section.)

Their predominant status as owners, though only smallholders (as recently as 1960, over half of the farms in these countries were under twelve and a half acres) appears to have instilled in peasants the affinity for the bourgeoisie that Marx distrusted. But even this possible bourgeois attachment does not serve, by itself, to explain satisfactorily peasant conservatism, for in every country studied peasant support for parties on the Right surpasses that of the middle class. In the most extreme cases, of West Germany and Belgium, these support differences reach fully +20 per cent

¹⁵ N. Fine, *Labor and Farmer Parties in the United States* (New York: Rand School of Social Science, 1928), p. 210, as quoted in Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism*, p. 27.

¹⁶ Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism*, pp. 26–32.

¹⁷ The percentages of those who have completed no more than primary school, for each country, are as follows (*P* = Peasant, *W* = Worker, *MC* = Middle Class): France, *P* = 64 per cent, *W* = 59 per cent, *MC* = 22 per cent; West Germany, *P* = 80 per cent, *W* = 80 per cent, *MC* = 38 per cent; Italy, *P* = 81 per cent, *W* = 61 per cent, *MC* = 16 per cent; Belgium, *P* = 62 per cent, *W* = 54 per cent, *MC* = 17 per cent; Netherlands, *P* = 58 per cent, *W* = 52 per cent, *MC* = 17 per cent.

and +19 per cent respectively (see Table 2). Obviously, an adequate accounting for peasant conservatism cannot base itself solely on some form of class analysis. Rather, one must move from it to an investigation of the powerful influence of traditional forces.

THE INFLUENCE OF TRADITIONAL FORCES

'Traditional forces' refers to inherited, or ascribed, characteristics. Somewhat surprisingly, these variables actually appear to provide a better explanation of voting behavior than the much-studied social-class variables.¹⁸ An examination of three variables – parents' party identification, religion and region – indicates the conservative role of tradition in peasant politics. The influence of parents, which is perhaps the most traditional force of all, will be considered first.

TABLE 3 *Occupation and Parents' Support for Parties on the Right**

Occupation of respondents	France	West Germany	Italy	Belgium	Netherlands
	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)
Middle class	57 (254)	59 (188)	74 (191)	75 (141)	64 (330)
Workers	34 (255)	49 (278)	58 (249)	65 (195)	65 (285)
Peasants	76 (68)	79 (43)	72 (86)	92 (24)	74 (31)

* Percentage whose parents support parties on the Right.

Research in the United States and western Europe has repeatedly confirmed the powerful linkage between the political preferences of parent and child.¹⁹ Table 3 shows the percentage of parents who supported parties on the Right by occupation of the respondent. (As might have been supposed, the percentage of respondents willing or able to state a party affiliation for parents varied considerably, being highest in the Netherlands and lowest in West Germany.) In general, parents of peasants are dramatically more to the Right than parents of those in other occupations.

Moreover, the expectation is one of a statistical interaction; i.e. the strength of transmission from parent to child is even greater among peasants than among the rest of the population.²⁰ The theoretical justification for this hypothesis comes from the similarity of the social, cultural and economic conditions that the peasants and their parents share, compared with others. The data in Table 4 support this hypothesis in

¹⁸ Inglehart, 'Industrial, Pre-Industrial. . .', pp. 41–55, 90.

¹⁹ See especially M. Kent Jennings and Richard Niemi, 'The Transmission of Political Values from Parent to Child', *American Political Science Review*, LXII (1968), 160–85.

²⁰ On interaction effects, see Hubert M. Blalock, Jr., 'Theory Building and the Statistical Concept of Interaction', *American Sociological Review*, xxx (1965), 374–80.

TABLE 4 *Pearson Correlations between Parents' and Child's Left-Right Party Preferences*

	France	West Germany	Italy	Belgium	Netherlands
Nonfarm sample (n)	·61 (587)	·58 (482)	·64 (559)	·80 (336)	·60 (650)
Farm sample (n)	·66 (62)	·76 (39)	·79 (85)	1·00*	·83 (30)
Interaction effect	+·05	+·18	+·15	+·20	+·23

* This unrealistically high correlation reminds us of the perils of sampling error when forced to deal with only twenty-two cases!

each of the five countries, with interaction effects ranging from +·05 in France to +·23 in the Netherlands.

These findings seem readily understandable, when one considers the peculiar cultural *milieu* of the peasantry. Unlike men and women in other occupations, peasants make their livelihood in the same way as their parents (who were almost invariably peasants themselves). Further, they tend to remain near the same village, if not in the very house, of their mother and father. Finally, they are surrounded by a rural population and involved in local institutions which have changed little. This comparatively stable, homogenous environment, which peasant fathers and sons (or mothers and daughters) hold in common, is nowhere approached in other segments of a complex, modern society.

Of course, this is not to say that important forces for change are not operating on peasant life. The farm population has been steadily dwindling in Europe, as elsewhere.²¹ Certainly, if one investigated the beliefs of those in urban occupations whose parents were peasants, such a faithful transmission from parent to child could not be expected. In fact, although data cannot be offered, my hypothesis is that the correlation of parent-child political preferences would be lower among those who had peasant parents but were themselves no longer peasants than among the general population. However, today's peasants are those who have *not* broken away from their parents' occupation but are following in their footsteps. By staying on the farm, they have been spared the cross-pressures to which their brothers and sisters, who left for the city, have been subjected. Free of these distracting influences, they have remained remarkably loyal to their parents' conservative politics.

Religion is another characteristic that can be inherited from parents. The political differences spawned by religious cleavages have persisted in a number of industrial societies, where they show little sign of diminishing. It has even been argued that

²¹ According to these 1970 data, the percentage engaged in farming in each country is as follows: France = 11 per cent; West Germany = 9 per cent; Italy = 13 per cent; Belgium = 5 per cent; Netherlands = 5 per cent.

TABLE 5 *Occupation and Church Attendance*

Church attendance	Peasants (%)	Workers (%)	Middle class (%)	Peasants (%)	Workers (%)	Middle class (%)
	France (n = 1,403)			West Germany (n = 1,560)		
Several times a week	4	1	6	6	2	2
Once a week	36	13	23	44	23	24
A few times a year	53	51	39	43	50	49
Never	7	34	32	7	24	25
	Italy (n = 1,231)			Belgium (n = 866)		
Several times a week	10	9	9	10	5	9
Once a week	50	43	56	78	52	55
A few times a year	38	38	29	10	26	23
Never	2	10	6	2	18	14
	Netherlands (n = 774)					
Several times a week	19	4	6			
Once a week	62	51	56			
A few times a year	15	30	26			
Never	4	16	12			

religion is the primary social foundation of contemporary western political parties.²² The findings of Inglehart certainly strengthen this view.²³ Religiosity, as measured by the frequency of church attendance, was strongly related to party preference. In fact, only parents' party identification served as a better predictor. For the countries studied here, the Pearson product-moment correlation of church attendance with Rightist party support ranged from .38 in France to .67 in Belgium. The implication is clear. The political conservatism of the peasant gathers much of its strength from traditional religious practices. Table 5, which relates occupation to church attendance, supports this suggestion. With regard to religion, peasants are 'in' but not 'of' modern society. In every country, they cling tenaciously to their faith, exhibiting a much more regular pattern of observance than the other classes. Indeed, those farm people who fail to affirm their religion by practicing it, at least a few times a year, are quite rare. Further, these firmly held religious convictions do not appear to exhaust themselves in spiritual and moral outlets but rather enter decisively into their political decisions as well.

The above discussion of religion considers only the act of attending church. The possibility must be confronted that the relatively high attendance figures for the peasantry merely reflect denominational differences, rather than a more intense religious commitment. The denominational differences, in turn, may make peasants

²² Richard Rose and D. Urwin, 'Social Cohesion, Political Parties, and Strains in Regimes', *Comparative Political Studies*, II (1969), 7-67.

²³ Inglehart, 'Industrial, Pre-Industrial . . .', pp. 82-3.

more likely to vote Right. Specifically, peasants could actually be more Catholic than other occupations, and exhibit greater church attendance and right-wing voting as a result. Of course, it is not meaningful to test this hypothesis in France, Italy or Belgium, for almost everyone there is Catholic. However, data from West Germany and the Netherlands, where substantial portions of the population are Protestant, do not support the hypothesis.

In West Germany, it is true that Catholics were more likely than Protestants to attend church ($\gamma = .63$) and to vote for the Right ($\gamma = .53$). But the percentage of peasant respondents who were Catholic (47 per cent) was nearly identical to the percentage Catholic in the working and middle classes (48 per cent and 43 per cent respectively). Thus the more frequent church attendance and Right voting of the West German peasantry cannot be attributed to differences in religious preference. With regard to the Netherlands, peasants maintain their high levels of church attendance and Rightist support *despite* the fact that they are more likely to be Liberal Calvinists, who generally have a lower frequency of church attendance and Right voting than the Catholics or the Fundamentalist Calvinists.²⁴ These data from the religiously mixed populations of West Germany and the Netherlands indicate that, after all, the variable of church attendance is tapping an important aspect of religious involvement, rather than simple denominational variation.

TABLE 6 *Eta Coefficients between Region and Left-Right Party Preference*

	France	West Germany	Italy	Belgium	Netherlands
Nonfarm sample (n)	.11 (1,145)	.13 (1,064)	.07 (1,064)	.38 (571)	.10 (864)
Farm sample (n)	.42 (137)	.40 (87)	.26 (158)	.44 (42)	.47 (47)
Interaction effect	+ .31	+ .27	+ .19	+ .06	+ .37

In the nations under study, religiosity has often been related to regional, or 'territorial', cleavages, which are themselves regarded by some as a key determinant of political differences.²⁵ Although regionalism may be a generally declining political force in contemporary western Europe, it still appears to be influential among the peasantry. Table 6 shows the results of an analysis of variance relating the general geographic region in which a respondent lives to Left-Right party preference, looking first at the non-farm samples and then at the farm samples. The differences between the *eta* coefficients reveal consistent, noteworthy interaction effects. While region is

²⁴ In the Netherlands, 48 per cent of the peasants indicated a denominational preference of Liberal Calvinist, as compared to 30 per cent for workers and 33 per cent for the middle class.

²⁵ S. M. Lipset and S. Rokkan, 'Cleavage Structures, Party Systems, and Voter Alignments', in S. M. Lipset and S. Rokkan, eds., *Party Systems and Voter Alignments* (New York: Free Press, 1967).

not a good predictor of support for the Right in the general population, it is a moderately good predictor within the peasantry. Obviously, given modern communications and transportation, the stereotype of the isolated, immobile, backward peasant no longer holds. Nevertheless, when compared to others in the work force, peasants are still much more likely to have political attitudes formed by experience and identification with one region of the country.

THE INFLUENCE OF VALUES

Thus far, the conservatism of peasants, defined behaviorially as their voting for a party on the Right, has been linked to potent institutional and geographic factors. Nevertheless, rightist support is more than a product of these situational determinants. Additionally, it implies that the elector is making a value choice. The peasant as a conscious, conservative political actor seems motivated above all by a desire to maintain order. The peasant positions against student demonstrations, free speech and communism, all enumerated below, form a coherent whole when understood as part of a profound commitment to a stable, orderly society. In their quest for constancy, what separates peasants from others is not an emphasis on orderly conduct for themselves. They, like other interest groups, are capable of illegal, even violent, action to gain their ends, as the recent (1976) manifestations of the *vignerons* of southern France testify. Rather, what sets them apart is their greater desire for orderliness in others, and in the society generally. In the 1970 survey, respondents were asked about the priority they placed on the value of 'maintaining order in the country'. As Table 7 shows, the percentage of peasants assigning 'absolute priority' to preserving domestic order everywhere exceeds the percentage for the working and middle classes.

This emphasis on order shows itself quite dramatically in the strong peasant position against student demonstrations, events that were especially salient at the time of the survey. In each country studied, peasants located themselves far from other occupations in their disapproval of these protests (see Table 8). The leftist student demands of the 1960s, combined with the disruptive tactics used in their pursuit, appear to have been anathema to the peasantry. The intense negative reaction seems

TABLE 7 *Occupation and Commitment to Domestic Order**

	France	West Germany	Italy	Belgium	Netherlands
	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)
Middle class	47 (564)	48 (525)	41 (420)	50 (398)	32 (516)
Workers	51 (746)	55 (825)	37 (667)	52 (540)	40 (571)
Peasants	54 (224)	59 (165)	42 (239)	71 (68)	55 (75)

* Percentage assigning 'absolute priority' to maintaining domestic order.

TABLE 8 *Occupation and Attitude toward Student Protest**

	France	West Germany	Italy	Belgium	Netherlands
	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)
Middle class	29 (542)	20 (478)	24 (401)	26 (376)	22 (500)
Workers	38 (696)	35 (773)	29 (626)	36 (484)	27 (555)
Peasants	46 (192)	41 (155)	38 (213)	48 (58)	43 (72)

* Percentage who feel 'very unfavorable' toward student demonstrators.

due neither merely to a distaste for university revolutionaries nor to feelings against the urban character of the protests. While these European data are unfortunately incomplete, data on United States farmers indicated that antagonism toward student demonstrations is part of a more general right-wing sentiment, which dictates their stance on the whole range of national political issues.²⁶

The effect of differing value priorities on the political preferences of the western European voter has been examined extensively by Inglehart.²⁷ He specifies two basic value types: Materialist and Post-Materialist. The former involves giving priority to meeting economic and physical security needs, whereas the latter concerns fulfillment of life-style needs for self-expression and participation. Materialist values incline the voter to the Right, Post-Materialist values to the Left. The fact that Materialists are located largely in the working class, which has traditionally voted for the Left, while Post-Materialists are found mostly in the middle class, which has generally voted Right, has led Inglehart to predict a significant shift in the future class bases of European political parties. Regrettably, it is not meaningful to apply exactly the same Post-Materialist index to peasants, because of the particular wording of certain of the questionnaire items.²⁸ However, it is illuminating to see how the peasants score on key components of the measure.

Two of the four value priorities that compose this index treat, respectively, the maintenance of order and the guarantee of free speech. Materialists give high priority

²⁶ Lewis-Beck, 'Agrarian Political Behavior', pp. 31-5.

²⁷ Inglehart, 'The Silent Generation', and 'Industrial, Pre-Industrial . . . '.

²⁸ The Materialist/Post-Materialist variable is constructed from the respondent's comparison and subsequent ranking of four goals: maintain order, improve participation, fight rising prices, guarantee free speech; see Inglehart, 'Industrial, Pre-Industrial . . . ', pp. 56, 77-8. Use of this index does not seem appropriate for purposes of examining peasant values because of the ambiguities contained in the 'fighting rising prices' item. Clearly, a farmer may place a lower priority on fighting rising prices because, given the way the survey item reads, 'prices' could refer to prices for farm produce. Of course, this possible source of bias contaminates the comparative ranking of all four goals. Unfortunately, all the other questions in the survey that consider the value of economic security, which this item is intended to tap, are also biased for farm respondents. For example, questions about the importance of 'job security' or 'salary increases' make little sense in the context of farm enterprise. Similar biases infect the value priority items dealing with participation.

to maintaining order and a low priority to freedom of expression. In the foregoing discussion, the peasant stress on order has been made evident. The data further indicate a lack of concern over free speech which parallels to that of the working class.²⁹ Nevertheless, it does not seem proper for peasants to be regarded as typically Materialist. Their attachment to order even surpasses that of the workers, the group Inglehart identifies most clearly with Materialist values. Instead, peasant values, if they can be classified at all, would seem closest to a 'Pre-Materialist' type, appearing more congruent with a society very different from that of contemporary industrial Europe. In fact, as historian Frank Huggett has put it, peasants have 'remained conservative in a deep and fundamental sense, harbouring values, attitudes and desires which [are] not of the urban age'.³⁰

TABLE 9 *Occupation and Importance of Fighting Communism**

	France	West Germany	Italy	Belgium	Netherlands
	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)
Middle class	38 (517)	50 (495)	60 (401)	49 (356)	55 (501)
Workers	32 (621)	54 (765)	47 (604)	61 (482)	62 (543)
Peasants	41 (195)	61 (155)	59 (219)	80 (61)	76 (71)

* Percentage who either give 'absolute priority' to fighting communism or consider it an 'important objective'.

These conservative peasant values find their direct political expression in anti-communism. Respondents were asked to rank the objective of 'fighting communism'. Peasants generally gave a higher priority to fighting communism than other classes, as Table 9 reveals. In the section on the influence of social class, socialist distrust of farm populations was discussed. It appears that there is also some ground for peasant distrust of socialists or communists. Marx firmly believed in the necessity of replacing the small, private peasant holdings with collective agriculture. For many communist governments, the struggle with the peasants over the 'land question' has been long and bitter. These historic examples have undoubtedly played some part in pushing the western European peasant to side with the capitalist forces, even though the excesses of the free-enterprise system have led to economic disaster for millions of small farmers. Still, the peasant belief may be that capitalists, with their emphasis on private property, are more likely than communists ultimately to defend the *status quo* the peasants are trying to preserve. Of all the value priorities measured in the

²⁹ The percentages of peasants (P) and workers (W) giving top priority to free speech are as follows: France, P = 45 per cent, W = 48 per cent; West Germany, P = 46 per cent, W = 45 per cent; Italy, P = 28 per cent, W = 37 per cent; Belgium, P = 63 per cent, W = 50 per cent; Netherlands, P = 35 per cent, W = 35 per cent.

³⁰ Huggett, *The Land Question and European Society Since 1650*, p. 140.

five-country survey, the desire to fight communism is the most potent general predictor of a vote for the Right. The correlation, which ranges from .21 in Belgium to .46 in Italy, compares favorably with the important relationship of religiosity to rightist support. Peasants score especially high on this anti-communism variable, apparently because it provides an explicit ideological focus for their strong opposition to radical change.

A CAUSAL MODEL OF PEASANT CONSERVATISM

To this point, the analysis carried out has been essentially bivariate, examining the relationship of Right voting with first one, then another, independent variable. To summarize the dominant findings, emphasis shifts to a multivariate explanation of peasant conservatism. Figure 2 offers a five-variable, exactly-identified, recursive

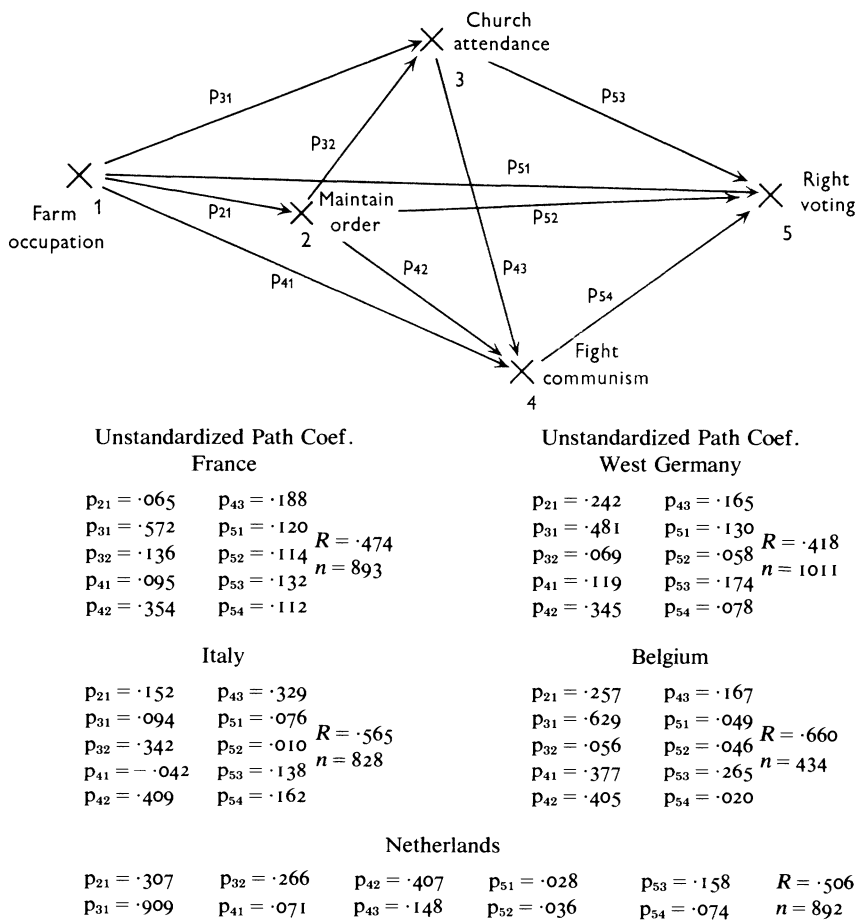


Fig. 2. Occupation and Left-Right Voting

causal model relating farm occupation to support for parties of the Right. According to the model, peasant status produces a set of conservative values and practices, which engenders a rightist political response. Specifically, occupation (X_1), dichotomized into nonfarm and farm categories, is depicted as ultimately affecting the vote (X_5) through its direct and indirect influences on the intervening variables of maintaining order (X_2), attending church (X_3), and fighting communism (X_4), all of which were considered separately earlier. It is not claimed that the diagram completely sketches the complex causal process which links agricultural occupation to a vote on the Right, for other variables could be included. Rather, the model aims simply to present, in a parsimonious way, critical effects uncovered in previous sections of the paper. The multiple correlation (R) for the model ranges from .418 in West Germany to .660 in Belgium, indicating that the variables chosen provide an important part of the explanation. These multiple correlations, along with the path estimates, accompany Fig. 2.

Cross-national comparisons of the path estimates are especially meaningful, because the variables were measured in the same manner in each country. This equivalence of measurement allows the use of *unstandardized* path coefficients which, due to their relative insensitivity to variance changes, are generally preferred over standardized ones for such comparisons. As can be seen from the path estimates, the theory diagrammed in Fig. 2 receives general empirical support in each of these western European nations.³¹ Interestingly, this support appears weakest in Italy. The paths from farm occupation to church attendance (p_{31}) and to fighting communism

³¹ When a causal model meets recursive assumptions, ordinary least squares (OLS) is the preferred technique for estimating the path coefficients; see R. J. Wonnacott and T. H. Wonnacott, *Econometrics* (New York: Wiley, 1970), pp. 193–4. Further, despite the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable of Left–Right voting (X_5), these OLS estimates remain unbiased; see J. Kmenta, *Elements of Econometrics* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 425–8. The path estimates in Fig. 2, then, are simply equal to regression coefficients, in this case unstandardized ones symbolized by ‘ b ’.

These unstandardized coefficients are generally to be favored over the standardized for purposes of comparison across nations, because they are less affected by shifts in variance. Specifically, suppose one is estimating the same equation in more than one nation; the standardized beta (β) are subject to change when the variance of either the independent variable(s) or the dependent variable changes from one nation to the next. The unstandardized ‘ b ’, in contrast, would be affected only by variance change in the dependent variable. Thus, the obvious risk in employing the standardized coefficients for comparison is that a change in a relationship across nations might be inferred when in fact the functional relationship, as indicated by the unstandardized ‘ b ’, remained the same for both nations; in this case, what actually happened was merely a change in variance in an independent variable from one nation to the other. (For an excellent explication of this point, see H. M. Blalock, Jr., *Causal Inferences in Nonexperimental Research* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1964), pp. 114–26. For a later, but flawed, discussion, see his popular article, ‘Causal Inferences, Closed Populations and Measures of Association’, *American Political Science Review*, LXI (1967), 130–6.) The difficulty with the unstandardized coefficients, of course, is that the relative importance of the independent variables *within* a given country cannot be easily determined, due to lack of a common measurement base.

(p_{41}) are smaller than for any other country, and that to maintaining order (p_{21}) is surpassed in all save one. These more fragile linkages of the Italian peasants to conservative values and traditions help explain their relatively greater receptivity to leftist politics, fitting in well with findings on Italian peasant communism.³² In evaluating the evidence for the model, the French case also merits attention. The path connecting French peasants to maintenance of order (p_{21}), while positive, is more tenuous than for the other nations, a noteworthy result in light of the agrarian upheaval that country has experienced.³³ Consideration of the special characteristics of the Italian and French cases, which provide a weaker confirmation of peasant conservatism, is informative. Nevertheless, it must be recalled that even the peasants of France and Italy clearly distinguish themselves from the working and middle classes in their propensity to vote for parties of the Right (see Table 2).

IMPLICATIONS

This paper has attempted to demonstrate and explain the distinctive conservatism of western European peasants as a class of political actors. One might contend, however, that their political uniqueness will soon be undermined, or even ended, by the modernization process. The socioeconomic transformation occurring in the agrarian sector, it could be argued, will inevitably bring the peasants into the political mainstream. While this expectation is certainly plausible, the available evidence suggests that western European peasants are not likely soon to lose their

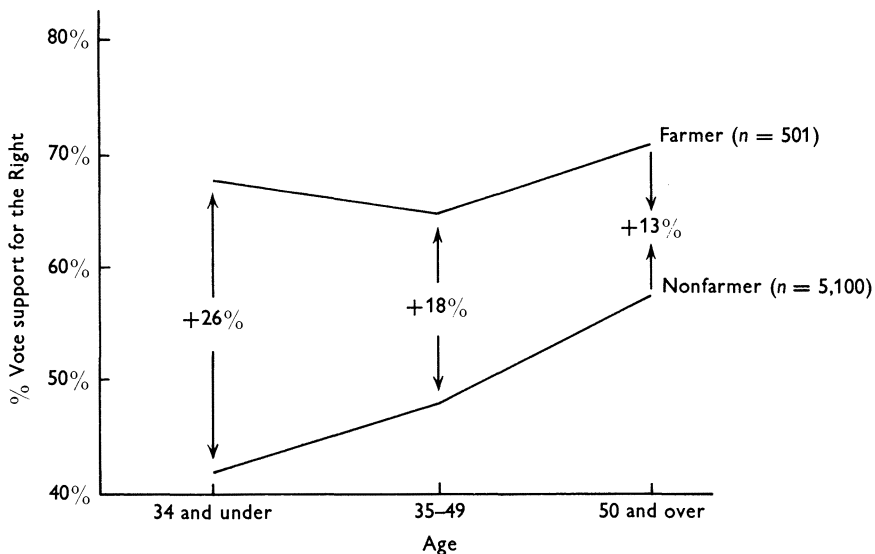


Fig. 3. Age and rightist support. (Note: Samples from all five nations pooled.)

³² Sidney G. Tarrow, *Peasant Communism in Southern Italy* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1967).

³³ G. Wright, *Rural Revolution in France* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1964).

especially conservative political orientation. Figure 3 shows the level of support for parties of the Right within the various age cohorts, comparing the farm and nonfarm samples.³⁴ As the upper curve in the figure illustrates, older farmers are only slightly more supportive (3 per cent) of the Right than younger farmers. Further, the Rightist distance (26 per cent) separating farmers 34 years of age and under from their nonfarm counterparts is *twice* as great as the distance (13 per cent) of the farmers aged 50 and over from their nonfarming peers. The inference is that, as these populations move through the age cycle, peasants will remain at least as supportive of the Right as they are now, both absolutely and in comparison with other occupations.

This inference is bolstered by findings from the 1971 survey, which asked farmers whether they would advise their children to get out of farming. In each of the five nations, there was a positive correlation between voting Left and urging the children to leave the farm (from $r = .06$ in West Germany to $r = .27$ in France). Such a relationship is suggestive not only because parents are so important in shaping political and economic decisions of their offspring; it also tells something about the rather weaker commitment of these left-voting parents to keeping to the land themselves. Again, the implication is that those staying in farming will perpetuate traditional peasant support for parties of the Right.

The electoral impact of the peasantry has been declining, and will undoubtedly continue to do so. Whereas until recently countries such as Italy and France had nearly one-quarter of the population involved in agriculture, these numbers have fallen to no more than 13 per cent and 11 per cent respectively.³⁵ Despite their diminishing electoral influence, however, the data indicate that, as a group, the peasants of western Europe will remain strongly attached to the Right for some time to come.

³⁴ For clarity of presentation, the age cohort categories were collapsed, and the country samples pooled. The basic pattern remains the same if the age cohorts are smaller, and each country is analyzed separately. Figure 3 also affords the opportunity to test a critical hypothesis of spuriousness. Specifically, one might contend that the greater conservatism of the peasantry merely reflects the effects of their greater age, which has come about as a result of the changing composition of the farm population. (The data do show that, with the exception of Belgium, the average farmer is slightly older than the average member of the general adult population.) Figure 3 does not support this hypothesis of spuriousness for it shows that, with age controlled, peasants nevertheless consistently demonstrate a substantially higher level of Right voting.

³⁵ See fn. 21.