8 • Hegemony and Consciousness: Everyday Forms of Ideological Struggle

> And as to the causes of social change, I look at it in this way—ideas are a sort of parliament, but there's a commonwealth outside, and a good deal of commonwealth is working at change without knowing what the parliament is doing.
>
> George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*

No one who looks even slightly beneath the fairly placid official surface of class relations in Sedaka would find it easy to argue that the poor are much mystified about their situation. Their account of the green revolution and its social consequences is widely divergent from that of the rich. Seemingly straightforward social facts about who is rich and who is poor—and how rich and how poor—are contested in this community. The poor, when they may do so with relative safety, display an impressive capacity to penetrate behind the pieties and rationales of the rich farmers and to understand the larger realities of capital accumulation, proletarianization, and marginalization. They emphasize and manipulate those values that will serve their material and symbolic interests as a class. They reject the denigrating characterizations the rich deploy against them. And within the narrow limits created by the fear of repression and the "dull compulsion of economic relations," they act to defend their interests by boycotts, quiet strikes, theft, and malicious gossip.

In this final chapter, I hope to bring these rather homely insights from Sedaka in touch with the larger issues of the social experience of class and the typical contexts of class struggle. It should be possible also to say something meaningful about class-consciousness, mystification, and ideological hegemony. The objective is a deeper appreciation of everyday forms of symbolic resistance and the way in which they articulate with everyday acts of material resistance. Just as peasants—Zola and many others notwithstanding—do not simply vacillate between blind submission and homicidal rage, neither do they move directly from ideological complicity to strident class-consciousness. If, behind the facade of behavioral conformity imposed by elites, we find innumerable, anonymous acts of resistance, so also do we find, behind the facade of symbolic and ritual compliance, innumerable acts of ideological resistance. The two forms of resistance are, of course, inextricably joined. Examining these issues in more analytical detail, though it requires us to step back a few paces from Sedaka, should allow us to clarify the debate about the extent to which dominant classes are able to impose their own

vision of a just social order, not only on the behavior of subordinate classes, but on their consciousness as well. Before addressing these larger issues, however, it will be helpful first to clarify the nature of the ideological struggle in Sedaka.

THE MATERIAL BASE AND NORMATIVE SUPERSTRUCTURE IN SEDAKA

There is no doubt whatever that the ideological conflict now under way in Sedaka is a reaction to the massive transformation of production relations made possible by double-cropping and mechanization backed by the state. It is these exogenous changes in the material base that have allowed large landowners and farmers to change the tenure system, raise rents, dismiss tenants, replace wage workers with machinery, and either to lease out large plots for long periods or to resume cultivation themselves. This shift in the balance of economic power has also allowed rich farmers to eliminate or curtail a host of social practices that were part and parcel of the earlier scheme of production relations: feast giving, Islamic charity, loans and advance wages, and even much of the social recognition and respect previously accorded to poorer villagers. What has occurred, in short, is that those facets of earlier relations of production that are no longer underwritten by the material interests of wealthy farmers are being abandoned piecemeal or wholesale.

These transformations of the material base and their economic and social consequences for class relations have worked themselves out within the context of a given, normative environment. Two general facts about this normative environment are worth noting. First, it is not some Parsonian value consensus in which actors conform to a normative order that is somehow outside and above themselves but rather a normative environment of conflict and divergent interpretations. Well before double-cropping, for example, large farmers regarded *zakat peribadi* given to harvest workers as a favor or gift, while the workers themselves came to regard it as a payment to which they were entitled as a matter of right. Second, this normative environment was itself, in part, a product of the material conditions of production prior to double-cropping and mechanization. We are not therefore dealing with purely mental constructs outside day-to-day practical activity but rather with values that were firmly anchored in a host of commonplace material practices.[1] The main point for my purposes is that the peasants of Sedaka do not simply react to objective conditions per se but rather to the interpretation they place on those conditions as mediated by values embedded in concrete practices.

In this connection, it is important to sketch briefly both the material practices associated with rice production and the normative understandings of them that

1. See, for example, Nicholas Abercrombie, *Class Structure and Knowledge* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), 68.

prevailed before double-cropping. As for the practices themselves, one can satisfactorily account for them almost entirely in terms of the concrete material interests of the actors involved. These material interests were, in turn, largely an artifact of the striking inequity in the distribution of the means of production (rice land) prior to double-cropping. For substantial farmers, the key production problem was the timely and reliable mobilization of a labor force for the major operations of transplanting, reaping, and threshing. The constraints of a rainfed production schedule produce striking peaks of labor demand which, even with migrant workers, required readily available local help in the inevitable rush to get the paddy planted and harvested. Thus it made eminent good sense for large farmers to develop a loyal work force by means of material and symbolic acts of social consideration and friendship. In the first few years of double-cropping, when migrant workers were no longer easily available but combines had not yet appeared, this strategy became even more imperative. The same process was apparent in the relations between landlords and their tenants. When it was easy to rent in land, the landlord had a vested interest in making occasional concessions in order to retain a good cultivator. To these more strictly economic motives must be joined the incentives for village elites, especially since independence, to build loyal political followings as a precondition of their preferential access to the benefits available from local state and party institutions.

For those who needed land and work—or both—a similar, but even more compelling calculus prevailed. For them, living from hand to mouth, often having to leave after the harvest to find work elsewhere, the prospect of a steady tenancy or reliable field work each season was important. The contingent but inevitable crises of crop failure, a death or illness in the family, or a sudden ritual expense meant that the possibility of loans, charity, or emergency assistance was not just a convenience but a virtual necessity for the household.[2] If they accommodated themselves publicly to these social relations of production while continually striving to redefine them to their advantage, their behavior made good sense as well.

But it is not sufficient merely to understand the obviously self-interested basis of these social relations of production. What is critical for my purpose—that is, the analysis of ideological conflict—is to grasp the nature of the normative filter through which these self-interested actions must pass and how and why they are socially transformed by this passage. Why, in other words, is economic power "euphemized" in this fashion and what are the consequences of its euphemization?[3] From one perspective what the wealthy did was to transmute a portion of their disproportionate economic means into forms of status, prestige, and social control by means of acts they *passed off* as voluntary acts of generosity or charity. This social control was, of course, again convertible into labor services—and hence again into material wealth. Are we, as Bourdieu asks in a similar context, to see in this simply a clever sleight-of-hand, "a disguised form of purchase of labor power or a covert exaction of corvées?" He answers:

> By all means, as long as the analysis holds together what holds together in practice, the *double reality* of intrinsically *equivocal, ambiguous* conduct . . . the complete reality of this appropriation of services lies in the fact that it *can only* take place in the disguise of the *thiwizi* [a ritual of disinterested gift giving], the voluntary assistance which is also a corvée and is thus a voluntary corvée and forced assistance.[4]

The euphemization of economic power is necessary both where direct physical coercion is not possible and where the pure indirect domination of the capitalist market is not yet sufficient to ensure appropriation by itself.[5] In such settings, appropriation must take place through a socially recognized form of domination. Such domination is not simply imposed by force but must assume a form that gains social compliance. If it is to work at all, it requires that the weaker party—if only publicly—acquiesce in the euphemism.

Three consequences of this euphemization of economic control are central to

2. As we have seen, this class was also capable of recognizing and bitterly resenting the way in which rich landowners could take advantage of such loans through *jual janji,* taking over title to more land and thereby reinforcing the basis for economic dependency.

3. The term is Pierre Bourdieu's (*Outline of a Theory of Practice,* trans. Richard Nice [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977], 191). The analysis in this and the next paragraph relies very heavily on Bourdieu's subtle analysis of precapitalist forms of domination.

4. Ibid., 179, emphasis in original. Bourdieu also elaborates that "Gentle, hidden exploitation is the form taken by man's exploitation by man whenever overt, brutal exploitation is impossible. It is as false to identify this essentially *dual* economy with its official reality (generosity, mutual aid, etc.), i.e. the form which exploitation has to adopt in order to take place, as it is to reduce it to its objective reality, seeing mutual aid as corvée, the khammes [client, bondsman] as a sort of slave, and so on. The gift, generosity, conspicuous distribution—the extreme case of which is potlatch—are operations of social alchemy which may be observed whenever the direct application of overt physical or economic violence is negatively sanctioned, and which tend to bring about the transmutation of economic capital into symbolic capital." Ibid., 192.

5. In this respect, the Marxist position that feudal domination is direct, undisguised appropriation, whereas capitalist domination works through the mystified form of commodity fetishism in which the worker "appears" to sell his labor as a commodity is in error. The "gift" as a disguised appropriation can be seen as the functional equivalent of commodity fetishism under capitalism. This is not, however—as will be apparent later—an argument on behalf of false-consciousness.

my analysis. The first is simply that, if it is achieved at all, it is not achieved without costs. The cultivation of people, no less than the cultivation of paddy land, demands time, effort, and resources. The large farmer who wanted to ensure his labor supply and his political following had to handcraft his social authority link by link by means of strategic gifts, charity, loans, sociability, feasts, and other concrete and symbolic services.[6]

A second, and closely related, consequence is that the euphemization of economic domination could be achieved only by virtue of a degree of socialization of the profits of cultivation. I use the word *socialization* cautiously, as there has of course never been any socialization of the ownership of the means of production. Instead what occurred was a modest and strategic socialization of a portion of the crop itself and the proceeds from it, which took the form of gifts in emergencies, *zakat* after the harvest, feasts, liberality, and so forth. This limited socialization of wealth—carried on, to be sure, between private individuals—was the only way in which wealth could be successfully converted into social credit and labor services. Here we have something of a rural analogue of what Marx called the contradiction between private appropriation and socialized production, except that in this case it is a contradiction between private appropriation and the *social use* of property. When we look closely at the charges the poor make against the rich, they are almost without exception arguments for the social use of property. Thus, the charges about the decline of feast giving, the disappearance of post-harvest *zakat*, the refusal of alms (*sedekah*), and hence the more global charge of stinginess and tightfistedness are directly related to the social use of property. Even the major issues of production relations—combine-harvester use, the resort to leasehold tenancy (*pajak*), accelerated rent collection, and the abuses of the Village Improvement Scheme—can be viewed as appeals to past practices, both customary and specifically Islamic, in which the property and influence of the rich were condoned only if they also served to provide land, work, and income to the rest of the community. This is perhaps also why the ideological struggle is largely confined to the Malay community, the only unit within which the social use of property was actively sanctioned. Such claims are now tenaciously defended precisely because they are grounded in both the symbolic and material practices of a shared, if contested, tradition.

A third aspect of the euphemization of property relations is that it is *always* the focus of symbolic manipulation, struggle, and conflict. We must not view these patterns as *merely* a ploy, a mystification, as dust thrown in the eyes of subordinate classes. While the symbolic conduct of the rich is certainly self-

6. One may plausibly argue, I think, that the total of these services—in terms of their cost—was no more than what a free market wage and tenancy market would have required to achieve the same purpose. The point, however, is not that these traditional forms of appropriation are less onerous but rather that they were necessary under the circumstances.

interested, the very definition of what constitutes self-interest is the outcome of a class struggle. Thus, we fail to apprehend the full significance of the occasional gift or *zakat* not only when we see it as the elites intend it to be seen—as disinterested liberality—but also when we treat it simply as a cynical disguise for appropriation. A more complete view requires us to grasp the double symbolic manipulation of the euphemization itself. As E. P. Thompson has observed in a related context:

> Even "liberality" and "charity" may be seen as calculated acts of class appeasement in times of dearth and calculated extortions (under threat of riot) by the crowd: what is (from above) an "act of giving" is (from below) an "act of getting."[7]

For a moment, let us try to ground this insight in a particular example from Sedaka with which we are familiar: the relationship between Hamzah and his frequent employer, Haji Kadir. Hamzah knows that Haji Kadir is in a position to provide him with, say, work or a loan against future wages. He also knows that Haji Kadir and others like him have typically described such actions in terms of help (*tolong*) or assistance (*bantuan*). Hamzah then *uses* this knowledge to pursue his concrete ends; he approaches Haji Kadir, using all the appropriate linguistic forms of deference and politeness, and requests his "help" and "assistance."[8] In other words, he appeals to the self-interested description that Haji Kadir would give to his own acts to place them in the most advantageous light. We know enough about Hamzah to gather that this is more or less what actually goes through his mind. If he wins he achieves his desired objective (work or a loan) and in the process he contributes willy-nilly to the public legitimacy of the principles to which he strategically appealed. Just who is manipulating whom in this petty enterprise is no simple matter to decide. It is best seen, perhaps, as a reciprocal manipulation of the symbols of euphemization.

I shall return to this issue later, but at this stage it is sufficient to note that the key symbols animating class relations in Sedaka—generosity, stinginess, arrogance, humility, help, assistance, wealth and poverty—do not constitute a set of given rules or principles that actors simply follow. They are instead the normative raw material that is created, maintained, changed, and above all manipulated by daily human activity. The argument I am making here about the norms surrounding the relations between rich and poor is very much like

7. E. P. Thompson, "Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle without Class," *Social History* 3, no. 2 (May 1978): 150.

8. In practice, he is likely to feel his way toward a request by hinting of the work that might be done or noting his own financial straits in order to ascertain in advance whether a request has a good chance of success. If a refusal seems likely, he will go no further, since an outright "no" would jeopardize the possibility of asking again in the future.

the distinction Bourdieu makes between "kinship systems" seen as "a closed, coherent set of purely logical relationships" that are obeyed and "kinship" as a practical activity of real social actors:

> In short, the logical relations of kinship to which the structuralist tradition ascribes a more or less complete autonomy with respect to economic determinants, and correlatively a near-perfect internal coherence, exist in practice only through and for the official and unofficial uses made of them by agents whose attachment to keeping them in working order and to making them work intensively—hence, through constant use, ever more easily—rises with the degree to which they actually or potentially fulfill functions indispensable to them or, *to put it less ambiguously, the extent to which they do or can satisfy vital material and symbolic interests.*[9]

As with kinship then, the objective of a social analysis of the ideology of class relations is not somehow to tease out a consensus of agreed-upon rules but rather to understand how divergent constructions of those rules and their application are related to class interests. Thus, it is hardly surprising to find that the poor in Sedaka work incessantly at maintaining, strengthening, and sanctioning a particular view of who is rich, who is poor, and how they should behave toward one another. Their view of what counts as decent conduct, their gossip, their account of the "facts," their use of nicknames, their view of what Islam requires, their strikes and boycotts, their selective appeals to customary practices are all bent toward a normative outlook that serves their material and symbolic interests. Since, as it happens, the transformation of production relations has worked largely to their disadvantage, they find themselves defending a large array of earlier practices.

The well-to-do villagers, for their part, also make use of the plasticity in any normative discourse to present themselves, their claims, and their interests in the best possible light. Their problem, as we have seen, however, is slightly different. They are unable simply to renounce the older practices and the normative assumptions lying behind them, but they are also unwilling to forgo the profit that respecting them would require. Thus they are largely driven to a construction of the "facts" that allows them to claim that the older practices are inapplicable. They assert, as we have seen, that the differences in income are negligible, that everyone here cultivates paddy on roughly the same footing, and that the conduct of those who are manifestly poor morally disqualifies them from any sympathetic consideration.

Two aspects of the ideological position of the rich deserve particular note. First, although it is rarely challenged in public, we know from unguarded derisive commentary by the poor that they hardly find it convincing—let alone hegemonic. Second, and equally important, the fact that the wealthy never

9. Bourdieu, *Outline,* 37–38.

explicitly deny the *principle* that the rich should be considerate of the needs of the poor—disputing rather the facts and their applicability to a particular case—means ironically that they themselves inadvertently "contribute to the—entirely official—survival of the rule."[10]

From a larger perspective, the ideological difficulties of the wealthy farmers in Sedaka stem from the fact that their economic behavior is increasingly based on the logic of the new market opportunities, while their social authority has been based on traditional forms of domination. They face, therefore, the classic ideological contradiction of the transition to more capitalist forms of production.[11] To the degree that the new production relations have prevailed, there is a corresponding decline in the social use of property and hence in the social authority of the propertied class.

The net result of the process has been that the large farmers and landlords affiliated with the ruling UMNO party have been losing their social grip on the poor. In the past, UMNO's political control of the countryside was predicated squarely on the social control that wealthier families could exercise over smallholders by virtue of relations of economic dependence, particularly tenancy and employment. It was enough for UMNO to attach to itself a large share of the wealthier villagers; their economic dependents were brought along as a matter of course. As the "organic" dependence of production relations has come unraveled, as profit has been steadily detached from social control over poorer villagers, these economic networks of local authority have become far more tenuous. They have not disappeared altogether but have become less numerous and less reliable. Those economic relations of dependence that remain, moreover, are now often organized more strictly by impersonal market forces—for example, *kupang* labor, leasehold tenancy, full and inflexible economic rents—so as to yield far less in terms of systematic social subordination.

It is worth recalling in this context that the inequitable distribution of paddy land in the Muda region has never in itself been legitimate. Most of the sizable landholdings in the area were, after all, acquired by *jual-janji* and other sharp dealings that took advantage of the periodic destitution of smallholders. As the stories about Haji Broom amply illustrate, the extent to which the privileged

10. Ibid., 40–41.

11. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), 182. Their situation is not unlike that of English landowners in the early nineteenth century as described by Raymond Williams:

> Yet there was always a contradiction in English agrarian capitalism: its economics were those of a market order; its politics were those of a self-styled aristocracy and squirearchy, exacting quite different and "traditional" disciplines and controls.

Although there is hardly an aristocracy in Sedaka, it is nevertheless clear that mechanization, leasehold tenancy, and their consequences for the ties of subordination and dependency are incompatible with "traditional disciplines and controls."

position of rich landowners ever carried social authority (as opposed to control) with it was based only on the extent to which their property served the practical needs of poor villagers for tenancies, work, and assistance.[12] The connection I am emphasizing between social control and the social use of property is perhaps best captured in the example of self-styled charity—*zakat peribadi, fitrah* gifts, occasional loans, and alms. Such acts serve both to symbolize and to reaffirm the existing social hierarchy. Because they are so eminently divisible and discretionary, they are also used to single out the "deserving" poor for preferential treatment and thereby reinforce—at least publicly—their compliance with the norms of subordination.[13] Once the strategic rationale behind such charity loses its economic and political force, a major element of social control is also lost. Thus many villagers have effectively been "turned loose" to fend for themselves, and it is this that wealthy farmers are at pains to justify. The results of this "freedom" are as economically painful for the poor as they are financially rewarding for the rich. But they also undermine the basis of social domination by the propertied class.

This is not to imply that the large farmers of the village have lost their control of local affairs, let alone that they face an insurgent peasantry. What has occurred, however, is that the basis of their domination has been transformed. Their control, which was once embedded in the primary dependencies of production relations, is now based far more on law, property, coercion, market forces, and political patronage. They have themselves become much more dependent upon the state for their credit and inputs, for their supply of patronage resources, and for the ultimate force that guarantees their continued control over scarce land and capital. The rewarding ties that now inextricably bind much of this class to the state mean, of course, that its members have become increasingly vulnerable to any events (for example, a prolonged recession or a major political change) that might jeopardize their access and influence. It is ironic but entirely logical that this class has been so securely wedded to the state at precisely the

12. Poor villagers undoubtedly viewed such rationalizations with skepticism. The point is, however, that in any structure of organized inequality, the only possible justification for privilege must reside in its social function. When, as in Sedaka, the practical and self-interested actions of the rich that reinforce this rationale are largely abandoned, and only the rhetoric remains, the social authority of the propertied class is bound to suffer.

13. See, for example, Howard Newby, "The Deferential Dialectic, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 17, no. 2 (April 1975): 161–64, and Brian Harrison, "Philanthropy and the Victorians," *Victorian Studies* 9, no. 4 (June 1966): 353–74. In another penetrating analysis of agrarian "patronage" by landowners, Ronald Herring suggests that the resources devoted to such activities be termed a "legitimacy fund." "Landlordism as a Social System: Quiescence and Protest in Kerala" (Paper presented to Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, San Francisco, March 23–27, 1983).

moment when its own autonomous control over subordinate classes is fast eroding. Lacking the economic control that grew from the earlier relations of production, lacking even an ideological position that is convincingly embedded in actual practices, this elite will now sink or swim depending on the resources for patronage, profit, and control the state can put at its disposal.

If the poorest strata of the rural population in Muda is no longer an integral part of paddy production, if they are no longer necessary to the process of surplus appropriation, one may reasonably wonder why wealthy farmers even bother to justify their new pattern of behavior at all. Why rationalize an agrarian system to those who are mostly irrelevant to it? Two observations are germane here. The first is that the justifications offered for the new behavior of rich farmers are in fact rather cursory, makeshift, and transparent. They are at any rate hardly convincing to those who have been disadvantaged. The second is that wealthy farmers are themselves the product of the earlier agrarian system and the normative ideas that underpinned it; we should hardly be surprised if they choose to understand and explain the new arrangements in terms of the categories with which they are most familiar.

It might be supposed, however, that if ideological hegemony is increasingly unnecessary as a part of day-to-day production relations in rice farming, it has nevertheless been historically important for surplus appropriation by the state itself. Even this supposition would, I believe, be largely mistaken for any period after, say, 1900 in the paddy sector. The remarkable thing about the colonial and independent states of peninsular Malaya is how little they have depended on systematic appropriations from paddy cultivators. Taxes on paddy land have typically been minimal, and the local producer's price has often been above the world market price. State revenue in Kedah, even in the earlier colonial period, was derived largely from sources that impinged little on rural incomes. In 1918 and 1919, for example, the "tax farming" of the opium and gambling monopolies provided the major sources of provincial revenue.[14] What the state has wanted, and continues to want, from the peasantry of the Muda Plain is a surplus of marketable rice at reasonable prices with which to feed the work force in mines, on plantations, and now in the urban areas. The vast majority of smallholders in Muda are, and have been, basically irrelevant even to this objective. We need only recall that the great bulk (roughly three-fourths) of the paddy marketed in Muda is sold by a small minority (11 percent) of cultivators, who farm more than 10 relong. The surplus can, of course, now be produced largely without the labor power of the poor. And this labor power is not required elsewhere. Recent estimates show that the natural increase of the existing labor force now on plantations and in the cities will be more than sufficient for the

14. See, for example, Unfederated Malay States, Annual Report of the Advisor to the Kedah Government for each year. The pattern extends well back into the period of Thai control at the very least.

manpower needs of these sectors for the foreseeable future.[15] The plain fact is that the poorest two-thirds of the rural population in Muda is now basically irrelevant to the process of production or appropriation, whether by wealthy farmers or by the state itself.

If we wish, therefore, to understand the reasons for the continuing ideological efforts made by local elites and by the state to justify their domination, we will look in vain to production relations in the paddy sector. We must instead look to the realm of politics. In such a diversified, open, export economy, the revenue of the state is drawn mostly from export and import duties, the corporate income tax, licenses, concessions, excise taxes, and loans. If the conservative Malay elite is to continue benefiting from the privileges and opportunities the economy and the state provide, it must, as a basic precondition, maintain its political domination over that state. Given the semicompetitive election system that currently prevails, this objective requires the political support of the bulk of the Malay electorate.[16] The largest Malay-majority states of Kedah and Kelantan, which also happen to be the main paddy-growing regions, are necessary for that support. It is in this context that one can understand the very considerable efforts in the field of development programs, grants, clinics, schools, loans, and infrastructure that the state has undertaken with an acute eye to maximizing political support. One might even say that it is now the state and the ruling party that have taken over the task of euphemizing domination by means of their discretionary subsidies to rural areas. This euphemization is accomplished of course through the mediation of the wealthy, landowning, local UMNO elites. In any event, the political control of the paddy-growing peasantry is not an end in itself nor a means by which to justify a pattern of direct appropriation. Political control is an essential precondition for appropriation, which takes place elsewhere.

RETHINKING THE CONCEPT OF HEGEMONY

Our examination of class relations in Sedaka suggests rather forcefully that the concept of hegemony—of ideological domination—merits a fundamental rethinking. Such a rethinking, as I hope to show, is required not only in the context of the seventy families that have preoccupied us in this account, but for subordinate classes in general.

15. This is the import of the *Kedah Perlis Development Study: Interim Report,* by Economic Consultants Ltd. (Alor Setar: 1977), although the consultants expect an outmigration pattern similar to past experience to continue unabated. Even during the colonial period the need for urban workers and plantation labor was met largely by migrants from China and India rather than from the Malay population.

16. I do not doubt for a moment that, if this political domination were seriously threatened at the polls, the already hedged-about electoral system would be quickly dismantled, as it was following the riots of 1969.

The concept of hegemony, as it is used here, comes to us, of course, from the work of the remarkable Italian militant and scholar, Antonio Gramsci.[17] Since his prison writings became widely known, the concept has been employed in one fashion or another by a large number of influential, revisionist, Marxist scholars, including Althusser, Miliband, Poulantzas, Habermas, and Marcuse. The ultimate source in Marx and Engels's own writings from which this analytical tradition arises is the well-known passage from *The German Ideology* cited at length below:

> The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance. The individuals composing the ruling class possess, among other things, consciousness, and therefore think. Insofar, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch, it is evident that they do this in its whole range, hence among other things, rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the idea of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch.[18]

Hegemony is simply the name Gramsci gave to this process of ideological domination. The central idea behind it is the claim that the ruling class dominates not only the means of physical production but the means of symbolic production as well. Its control over the material forces of production is replicated, at the level of ideas, in its control over the ideological "sectors" of society—culture, religion, education, and the media—in a manner that allows it to disseminate those values that reinforce its position. What Gramsci did, in brief, was to explain the institutional basis of false-consciousness.

For my purposes, the critical implication of hegemony is that class rule is

17. Antoni Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks,* ed. and trans. Quinten Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971). Ironically, Anderson writes that "hegemony" was first used by the Bolsheviks to refer to the domination the proletariat must establish over the peasantry to defeat the enemies of the revolution. As such it implies political control but not necessarily consent. Perry Anderson, "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci," *New Left Review* 100 (1976): 6.

18. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1965), 61.

effected not so much by sanctions and coercion as by the consent and passive compliance of subordinate classes. Hegemony, of course, may be used to refer to the entire complex of social domination. The term is used here, however, in its symbolic or idealist sense, since that is precisely where Gramsci's major contribution to Marxist thought lies. It is in fact the pervasiveness of ideological hegemony that normally suffices to ensure social peace and to relegate the coercive apparatus of the state to the background. Only "in anticipation of moments of crisis and command, when spontaneous consent has failed, is force openly resorted to."[19]

Exactly how voluntary and complete this hegemony is likely to be is not entirely clear, even on a close reading of Gramsci.[20] At times he appears to imply that hegemony involves an active belief in the legitimacy and superiority of the ruling group; at other times he implies that the acceptance is a more passive act in which the main features of the social order are merely accepted as given. Gramsci does, however, draw a sharp distinction between thought and action.[21] The concrete action of workers who defend their material interests may, for example, *suggest* a radical consciousness but, at the level of ideas—the level at which hegemony operates—that incipient radical consciousness is undermined by the substratum of values and perceptions socially determined from above. This blockage implies, as Femia notes, that "left to their own devices then, the masses in Western countries are powerless to overcome their intellectual and moral subordination. . . . The long and arduous process of demystification requires an external agency."[22] The function of the revolutionary party, then, is to provide the working class with the conceptual apparatus and "critical consciousness" it cannot produce on its own. Only such a party will be capable of breaking the hegemony of the bourgeoisie and replacing it with its own hegemony; this new hegemony is not, Gramsci insists, a consequence of revolution, but rather a precondition of an authentic revolution.[23]

Gramsci and other twentieth-century Marxists have, of course, developed their analysis of ideological domination in large part to explain why the material contradictions of capitalism as depicted in *Capital* have thus far failed to produce socialist revolution in the industrialized democracies. It was the manifest durability of capitalism that directed their attention forcibly to ideology and "superstructure." This attention was welcome and instructive in a number of ways.

19. Gramsci, *Selections,* 12.

20. See the excellent discussion by Joseph Femia, "Hegemony and Consciousness in the Thought of Antonio Gramsci," *Political Studies* 23, no. 1 (March 1975).

21. Gramsci, *Selections,* 326–27, 419.

22. Femia, "Hegemony," 35.

23. Gramsci, *Selections,* 57, 207. This implies, among other things, that the revolutionary party will somehow be able to create its own separate institutions, which will resist incorporation by the ruling class prior to the revolution. It was never clear how Gramsci tought this could occur.

First, it avoided the pitfall of the more extreme forms of economic determinism and accorded the realm of ideology, broadly conceived, a certain degree of autonomy. The very terms *hegemony* and *false-consciousness* are, after all, a clear admission that culture, values, and ideology cannot be directly read off objective, material conditions.[24] But in making long overdue room for the analysis of ideological domination per se, many of Gramsci's successors have, it seems to me, substituted a kind of ideological determinism for the material determinism they sought to avoid. Curiously enough, Gramsci's own work is less open to this charge than the more purely theoretical elaborations of those who have followed in this tradition (for example, Miliband and Althusser).[25]

I hope to show in what follows that the notion of hegemony and its related concepts of false-consciousness, mystification, and ideological state apparatuses not only fail to make sense of class relations in Sedaka, but also are just as likely to mislead us seriously in understanding class conflict in most situations.[26] The gist of the argument to be developed at some length is summarized very briefly below and will serve to order the subsequent discussion:

First, the concept of hegemony ignores the extent to which most subordinate classes are able, on the basis of their daily material experience, to penetrate and demystify the prevailing ideology.

Second, theories of hegemony frequently confound what is inevitable with what is just, an error that subordinate classes rarely, if ever, make. This conclusion stems from a surface examination of public action in power-laden situations that overlooks both the "hidden transcript" and the necessity of routine and pragmatic submission to the "compulsion of economic relations" as well as the realities of coercion.

Third, a hegemonic ideology must, by definition, represent an idealization, which therefore inevitably creates the contradictions that permit it to be criticized *in its own terms.* The ideological source of mass radicalism is, in this sense, to be sought as much *within* a prevailing ideological order as outside it.

Fourth, a historical examination of the rank and file of nearly any manifestly revolutionary mass movement will show that the objectives sought are usually

24. See, for example, Philip Carl Salzman, "Culture as Enhabilments," in *The Structure of Folk Models,* ed. Ladislav Holy and Milan Stuchlik, ASA Monograph No. 20 (New York: Academic, 1981), 233–56.

25. It is perhaps not entirely surprising that intellectuals further removed from political combat and from the working class itself have fastened on analysis that ascribes a nearly coercive influence to the product of their own class, that is, ideology!

26. I am indebted for parts of the following analysis to the excellent general critique of hegemony in its various guises by Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill, and Bryan S. Turner, *The Dominant Ideology Thesis* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1980), as well as to the more polemical—and entertaining—broadside against Althusser in E. P. Thompson's *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978), 1–210.

limited and even reformist in tone, although the means adopted to achieve them may be revolutionary. Thus, "trade union consciousness" is not, as Lenin claimed, the major obstacle to revolution, but rather the only plausible basis for it.

Fifth, historically, the breaking of the norms and values of a dominant ideology is typically the work of the bearers of a new mode of production—for example, capitalists—and *not* of subordinate classes such as peasants and workers. Thus, subordinate classes are often seen as backward looking, inasmuch as they are defending their own interpretation of an earlier dominant ideology against new and painful arrangements imposed by elites and/or the state.

Penetration[27]

If there were a dominant, hegemonic ideology in Sedaka, it would make its presence known in several ways. At a minimum, it would require that the beliefs and values of the agrarian elite penetrate and dominate the worldview of the poor so as to elicit their consent and approval of an agrarian order which, materially, does not serve their objective interests. Its function would be to conceal or misrepresent the real conflicts of class interests that we have examined and to make of the poor, in effect, coconspirators in their own victimization.

We have surely heard enough from the poorer farmers in Sedaka to reject, out of hand, such a summary characterization of their ideological situation. If there is any penetration to be accounted for here, it is less the penetration of elite beliefs among the poor than the capacity of the poor to pierce, in almost every particular, the self-serving picture presented by wealthy farmers, landlords, and outside officials. It is true, of course, that the rights and claims the poor assert are essentially those prevailing before double-cropping. Perhaps, in this sense, they can be seen as appealing to a (pre-)existing hegemonic order. I shall return to this issue later, but here I should note at once that such an appeal is in their material interest and that the rich subscribe, in their own way, to the same values, although their economic behavior is now predicated along more nearly capitalist lines. Ironically, it is the wealthy of Sedaka who fail to subscribe to the ideology that would best explain how they behave and provide a plausible rationale for that behavior.

There is every good reason to suppose that the effective penetration of "official" realities by Sedaka's poor is not unique or rare but, in fact, commonplace. To view the peasantry of Sedaka as particularly insightful is grossly to overestimate

27. The term *penetration* as used here is borrowed from two sources: Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1979), and Paul Willis, *Learning to Labour* (Westmead: Saxon House, 1977). I am indebted particularly to Willis's study of working-class school culture, which is a remarkable combination of careful ethnography and subtle ideological analysis grounded securely in class experience.

the power, weight, and cohesiveness of any dominant ideology. Here I subscribe fully to Paul Willis's trenchant critique of Althusser:

> Structuralist theories of reproduction present the dominant ideology (under which culture is subsumed) as impenetrable. Everything fits too neatly. Ideology always pre-exists and preempts any authentic criticism. There are no cracks in the billiard ball smoothness of process. All specific contradictions are smoothed away in the universal reproductive functions of ideology. . . . on the contrary, and in my view more optimistically . . . there are deep disfunctions and desperate tensions within social and cultural reproduction. Social agents are not passive bearers of ideology, but active appropriators who reproduce existing structures only through struggle, contestation, and a partial penetration of those structures.[28]

The penetration of official platitudes by any subordinate class is to be expected both because those platitudes are unlikely to be as cohesive or uniform as is often imagined *and* because they are subject to different interpretations depending on the social position of the actors. Such divergent understandings are, in turn, rooted in daily experience. The platitudes are not received as disembodied symbolic messages but are given meaning only in the context of a continuing struggle to defend material interests.[29]

The process by which any system of political or religious beliefs emanating from above is reinterpreted, blended with pre-existing beliefs, penetrated, and transformed is characteristic of any stratified society. In this sense, one can speak in an agrarian society of "folk" socialism, "folk" nationalism, and "folk" communism just as one speaks of folk religion. If the form of Christianity believed in and practiced in the slave quarters is quite distinctive from the form of Christianity believed in and taught by the masters, we should not be surprised if tenants have an understanding of paternalism that is not at all like the one

28. Willis, *Learning to Labour,* 175. Giddens writes that one of his "leading theorems" is that "every social actor knows a great deal about the conditions of reproduction of the society of which he or she is a member." *Central Problems,* 5 and see also 72.

29. The failure to link ideology with actual class experience is often responsible for unwarranted conclusions. As Abercrombie et al., *Dominant Ideology Thesis,* 141, analyzing the research of others, concludes, "Workers will often agree with dominant elements, especially when these are couched as abstract principles or refer to general situations, which is normally the case in interview surveys using standardized questionnaires, but will then accept deviant values when they themselves are directly involved or when these are expressed in concrete terms which correspond to everyday reality." They go on to note that the "confusion" in working-class ideology is no more than one may find among dominant groups. P. 144.

held by their landlords.[30] The principles by which these belief systems originating outside the peasantry are transformed are varied, but it is clear that, in large part, they are reinterpreted in line with the material and symbolic interests of the class receiving them. Deviant interpretations—ideological heterodoxy—are hardly astonishing when they arise among subordinate classes which, by definition, have the least stake in the official description of reality.[31]

One may perhaps take this logic one step further and contend, as some have, that the normative incorporation of subordinate classes is simply "not a necessary requirement of social order."[32] Abercrombie and his collaborators, in their general critique of "the dominant ideology thesis," make a persuasive case that neither capitalism nor feudalism has been successful in achieving the internalization of the dominant ideology by subordinate classes. They explain this failure by the weakness of the mechanisms of socialization (another name for the strength of resistance?) and by the effectiveness of other forms of coercion, including the constraints that produce what we have earlier called "routine compliance." From this perspective, the function of the dominant ideology may be largely to secure the cohesion of dominant classes, while the conformity of subordinate classes rests instead primarily on their knowledge that any other course is impractical, dangerous, or both.

If this logic is applicable to the working class in advanced capitalist nations, as is claimed, then it is surely more forcefully applicable to the working class of early capitalism and to the peasantry of the Third World. This is so because the institutional bases of hegemony—for example, schools, media—are simply thicker on the ground in late capitalism and presumably therefore more effective.[33] By contrast, the early working class was, by most accounts, virtually

30. For slave society, see Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon, 1974). For the process in general, see my "Hegemony and the Peasantry," *Politics and Society* 7, no. 3 (1977), and "Protest and Profanation: Agrarian Revolt and the Little Tradition," *Theory and Society* 4, nos. 1 and 2 (1977). For other works that bear directly on this theme, see R. C. Cobb, *The Police and the People: French Popular Protest, 1789–1820* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970); McKim Marriott, "Little Communities in an Indigenous Civilization," in *Village India*, ed. McKim Marriott (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1955); and Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (New York: Viking, 1972).

31. "In general, the fewer the rewards a society offers to a particular group . . . the more autonomous that group will prove to be with reference to the norms of the society." Lee Rainwater, "Crucible of Identity: The Negro Lower Class Family," *Daedalus* 95 (1966): 212, cited in Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), 283.

32. Abercrombie et al., *Dominant Ideology Thesis*, 50.

33. Religion is perhaps an exception, but here we have only to look at the way both the early working class and the peasantry create their own sects and religious understandings outside official orthodoxy, including revolutionary millennial beliefs.

outside the institutional framework of capitalism in nearly every respect except their work. As Engels observed in his study of the nineteenth-century English working class:

> The workers speak other dialects, have other thoughts and ideals, other customs and moral principles, a different religion and other politics than those of the bourgeoisie. Thus they are two radically dissimilar nations as unlike as difference of race could make them.[34]

The peasantry, if anything, is even further removed from the institutional circuits of symbolic power. Living outside the cities where the agencies of hegemony are quartered, operating largely within an oral tradition that somewhat insulates it from printed media, being an old class (unlike the proletariat) with its own cultural traditions and patterns of resistance, and having its own shadow institutions (for example, informal religious schools, rituals, and festivals), the peasantry is simply less accessible to hegemonic practice. When we add to this the fact that the material and symbolic interests of poor peasants are likely to make them skeptical of a dominant ideology that rationalizes their material deprivation and low status, we can appreciate why they might resist "symbolic incorporation."

The fact that the penetration of official reality by the poor is so apparent in the case of Sedaka is reason to wonder how it could escape notice in any other comparable situation. It could, however, be overlooked if one observed only the public encounters between rich and poor ("the partial transcript") and ignored entirely the insinuations beneath the surface, the discussion outside the context of power relations, and the anonymous, quiet acts of routine practical resistance that occur daily.[35] For it is in the immediate interest of most poor villagers to uphold the official realities in nearly all power-laden contexts. The partial transcript, taken alone, therefore would create the impression of mystification. But we would commit the error of not realizing that mystification and impression management are as much a pose of the powerless as ideological domination by

For example, see the fascinating discussion of "peripheral spirits" and forms of possession that characterize women and also men of low status in many societies in I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971).

34. Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973), 162–63. The cultural gulf was noted by conservatives as well, for example by Disraeli in *Sybil: or the Two Nations*, which Engels cites approvingly.

35. Giddens, writing of the working class, notes, "To mistake pragmatic, ironic (for example, working to rule), humorous, distanced participation in the routines of alienated labour for normative consensus, was one of the great errors of the orthodox academic sociology of the 1950's and 60's." *Central Problems*, 148.

the rich. Gramsci is, I believe, misled when he claims that the radicalism of subordinate classes is to be found more in their acts than in their beliefs. It is more nearly the reverse. The realm of behavior—particularly in power-laden situations—is precisely where dominated classes are most constrained. And it is at the level of beliefs and interpretations—where they can safely be ventured—that subordinate classes are least trammeled. The rich in Sedaka can usually insist on conforming public behavior and get it; they can neither insist on private ideological conformity, nor do they need it.[36]

Inevitability, Naturalization, and Justice

There is another more sophisticated and influential argument for mystification and false-consciousness that does not depend upon the presumed ability of dominant classes to impose their own beliefs on subordinate classes. If the idea of hegemony implies something that is done to lower orders by those above them, this second position implies that mystification is something that subordinate classes do, in part at least to themselves, given the force of circumstances. Briefly put, the argument is that a system of social domination often appears to be inevitable. Once it is considered inevitable, the logic goes, it is apt to be considered natural even by those who are disadvantaged by it, and there is a tendency to consider whatever is natural also to be just or legitimate. The most limited statement of this position, one that omits the last step and carefully avoids equating natural with legitimate, is found in Richard Hoggart's fine analysis of English working-class culture:

> When people feel that they cannot do much about the main elements of their situation, feel it not necessarily with despair or disappointment or resentment, but simply as a fact of life, they adopt attitudes toward that situation which allow them to have a liveable life under its shadow, a life without a constant and pressing sense of the larger situation. The attitudes remove the main elements in the situation to the *realm of natural laws,* the given and now, the almost implacable material from which a living has to be carved. Such attitudes, at their least adored, a fatalism or plain accepting, are generally below the tragic level; they have too much of the conscript's lack of choice about them.[37]

Barrington Moore, who is more generally concerned with historical patterns of systematic subordination, does not hesitate to take the final step of associating inevitability with justice and legitimacy:

36. Juan Martinez Alier's analysis of Andalusian agricultural laborers is quite detailed and convincing on this score. *Labourers and Landowners in Southern Spain,* St. Anthony's College, Oxford, Publications, No. 4 (London: Allen & Unwin, 1971), chap. 1.

37. *The Uses of Literacy* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1954), 77–78, emphasis added.

> In varying degrees and in different ways all these people felt that their sufferings were unavoidable. For some victims such suffering appeared to a degree inevitable and legitimate. People are evidently inclined to grant legitimacy to anything that is or seems inevitable no matter how painful it may be. Otherwise the pain might be intolerable.[38]

Piven and Cloward echo Moore's assessment in their study of poor people's movements in the United States:

> However hard their lot may be, people usually remain quiescent, conforming to the accustomed patterns of daily life in their community, and believing those patterns to be both inevitable and just.[39]

What is described appears to be akin to the "naturalization" of the inescapable—a reification of the "dull compulsion of economic relations" that is here to stay.[40] Thus, Bourdieu writes of certain beliefs as being "unthinkable" and of the inclination of social "agents" "to make a virtue of necessity," that is, "to refuse what is anyway refused and to love the inevitable."[41]

Except for very rare and special circumstances to which I shall return later, I believe all of these closely related arguments for mystification to be either misleading or wrong—or both. First, they provide no convincing logic for the process by which the inevitable becomes just. Second, they ignore the great variety of ways in which the notion of inevitability itself can be, and is, negated by the historical practice of subordinate classes. I shall take up each issue in turn.

38. *The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (White Plains: M. E. Sharpe, 1978), 458–59. Elsewhere Moore notes, "What is or appears to be unavoidable must also somehow be just." Ibid., 64. As usual, Moore is so scrupulous about disconfirming evidence that his bold position is somewhat qualified in his case studies. The addition of "some" and "to a degree" in the second sentence of the citation is a more accurate reflection of his position than the final sentence. It is worth noting that the only reason he gives for the transformation of the inevitable into the "just" is similar to Hoggart's, namely, the desire of victims to somehow escape the constant psychological pain of living in an intolerable situation that must nevertheless be endured.

39. Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (New York: Vintage, 1977), 6.

40. One might expect these conclusions from scholars of a conservative bent except for the fact that the problem itself requires a prior recognition of situations that could be described as exploitive. I have quoted from these writers especially because they could all be described as left-wing scholars working on socialist issues, broadly defined. This general process is very much what Bourdieu had in mind when he wrote that "every established order tends to produce . . . the naturalization of its own arbitrariness"—an effect produced in part by "a sense of limits" and a "sense of reality." Bourdieu, *Outline,* 164.

41. Ibid., 77.

The inherent plausibility of the argument for this particular form of false-consciousness rests on the plain fact that the larger contours of the stratification system within which most subordinate classes have lived out their lives must surely have seemed inevitable and hence natural. It is unlikely, the reasoning goes, that the untouchables in nineteenth-century India, the serfs in thirteenth-century France, or perhaps even the tenants in Sedaka today could seriously entertain the possibility of raising their basic status, let alone of living in a world without castes, lords, or landords. And even if they could, they would be unlikely to devote much time or thought to possibilities that appear to be entirely excluded as practical goals. This argument, as I understand it, asks us to believe that, for subordinate classes, the larger structure of domination is typically experienced in the same way a peasant might experience the weather. If we accept this analogy for the sake of argument, it is not at all clear why the weather, which is surely inevitable, unavoidable, and even fated should, on this basis alone, be considered either just or legitimate. It is far more plausible to assume that the concepts of justice or legitimacy are simply irrelevant to something that is inescapably *there,* like the weather. There is no logical warrant for equating justice and inevitability virtually as a matter of definition; in the absence of further evidence, whatever is inevitable is simply that and no more. In fact, the analogy with the weather is instructive at another level. The inevitability of the weather has not prevented every group of traditional cultivators from personifying this natural force or from developing rituals to influence its course or, when their efforts have failed, from cursing their fate. Thus, far from removing it to the realm of the inevitable, the peasantry has historically considered even the weather to be amenable to human manipulation. If there is any "mystification" of natural laws in traditional societies, it is in the direction of bringing them under human control, not the reverse.[42]

I shall return to the critique of inevitability later, but first it is worthwhile to consider why inevitability should be so frequently confounded with legitimacy. *Appearances,* of course, nearly always seem to confirm the legitimacy of the inevitable. No matter how conscious members of a subordinate class may be of having gotten a raw deal, the daily pressure of making a living and the risks of open defiance are usually enough to skew the ethnographic record systematically in the direction of compliance, if not acceptance, of the inevitable. Here again, however, resignation to what seems inevitable is not the same as according it legitimacy, although it may serve just as efficiently to produce daily compliance. A certain tone of resignation is entirely likely in the face of a situation that cannot, in the short run, be materially altered. When the poor in Sedaka talk about combine-harvesters and say, "It doesn't matter whether you protest or not,

42. See, for example, Maurice Godelier, "Fetishism, Religion and Marx's General Theories Concerning Ideology," in his *Perspectives in Marxist Anthropology,* trans. Robert Brain, Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology, No. 18 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977), 169–85.

nothing comes of it," they are merely expressing a realistic, pragmatic, view of the situation as they experience it. They have tried to stop the combines and have failed. They certainly must adapt to the consequences, but this hardly implies approval. In this respect their situation is no different from that of most subordinate classes most of the time. Except for those comparatively rare moments when a political opening or a revolutionary situation creates new possibilities or revives old aspirations, an attitude of pragmatic resignation is likely to prevail.[43]

Compliance can of course flow either from grudging resignation or from active ideological support. What we should not do, however, is to infer ideological support even from the most apparently faithful compliance. To prove the case for ideological support—for hegemony—one would have to supply *independent* evidence that the values of the subordinate class are in fact largely in accord with those of the dominant elite. Such evidence, to be credible, would have to come from social contexts in which members of the subordinate class were least constrained by power relations.

There is another reason why the ethnographic record, even where it is collected with a view to minimizing the constraints of power, may be skewed in the direction of apparent acceptance. This is because the record is invariably oriented toward the quotidian and rarely contains much discussion of options that seem out of reach.[44] The smallholders in Sedaka, for example, do not talk about land reform. When I raised the subject with them, however, they were almost uni-

43. Thus Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner, in their analysis of the "quiescence" of the English working class in the decades just after 1850, find no evidence of effective indoctrination or normative approval, but rather a "factual" acceptance of "the economic order of capitalism and its class based social organization." *Dominant Ideology Thesis,* 122). John Gaventa, in his study of Appalachian coal miners, also finds an attitude of resignation and even demoralization. But this attitude, far from being evidence of ideological hegemony or approval, "is not irrational. . . . It has been instilled historically through repeated experiences of failure." *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1980), 254. Finally, Alier's detailed analysis of Andalusian farm workers carefully distinguishes compliance from legitimacy. "Andalusian labourers choose conduct which is compatible with the maintenance of *latifundismo* and the social structure based upon it; but they also have values which *would* result in conduct incompatible with its maintenance. If they do not adopt these forms of conduct, it is because of controls, which are not social sanctions derived from the agro-town's value system, but rather political controls exercised from the provincial capital and from Madrid, and because they remember with fear the period after 1936." *Labourers and Landowners in Southern Spain,* 314–15.

44. It is just such attention to the quotidian that gives rise to the notion that traditional social structures are accepted as a matter of fatalism—in Malay, *rezeki.* There is surely no doubt that, as a practical matter, adaptation to circumstances that cannot be changed, at least in the short run, imposes itself coercively. To conclude that this is the end of the matter, however, is not warranted, as we shall see below.

formly enthusiastic, as one might expect, often suggesting that 10 relong of paddy land was sufficient to provide the well-off with a comfortable living. But it was not a subject that ever arose spontaneously, since it was purely academic; it had never been broached by either of the political parties with which they are familiar nor by agricultural officials. Their attention was, instead, more realistically focused on the possibility of securing a reasonable tenancy within the existing system of landownership.[45] However desirable, it is simply not a realistic goal under present circumstances.

From a much more modest view of what hegemony is all about, it might be said that the main function of a system of domination is to accomplish precisely this: to define what is realistic and what is not realistic and to drive certain goals and aspirations into the realm of the impossible, the realm of idle dreams, of wishful thinking. There is surely a good deal to be said for this limited construction of hegemony, since it recognizes the vital impact of power on the definition of what is practical. If we adopt this more plausible notion of hegemony, however, at least two qualifications are in order. First, we are no longer speaking of justice and legitimacy, but only of the more or less rational understanding of what is achievable in a given situation. Second, and more important, this view is decidedly static, as it systematically excludes from our analysis just *how* the realm of the possible might, in new circumstances, be expanded.[46] While it is true that the poor in Sedaka do not now consider land reform a real option, it is also true that their view of current inequities, their resentment of large landowners, and their off-the-record bitterness all suggest powerfully that they might well become enthusiastic supporters of land reform *if* it were to become a historical option. What is nothing more than idle speculation today may become a realistic goal tomorrow, and we will best infer the possible response of the peasantry not from what they now consider possible but rather from their overall evaluation of the social order within which they live.[47] One would not expect, for example, to find French peasants talking, in *1788,* about the chateaux they would be sacking in 1789 or Russian peasants discussing, in 1916, the land seizures they would be carrying out the following year. What one could have found in all likelihood, however, were attitudes about the aristocracy and land rights that were entirely consistent with their later actions.

45. I recognize that no social context is entirely free from power relations. The opinions expressed by the powerless are often constrained as well by the opinions of their peers. There is no "true" transcript in the sense of a transcript that is entirely unconstrained. What I am comparing here are relative degrees of constraint.

46. Andalusian workers, similarly, do not often speak of *reparto,* or land distribution, although it was at one time long ago a real option and is still considered the only just solution to inequity.

47. Here I bracket temporarily the fact that it is often the action of subordinate classes that may be influential in creating new possibilities, including often those not foreseen by the actors themselves.

Having shown how pragmatic resignation and the relative absence of currently implausible objectives from class discourse might mimic the effects of hegemony, it remains to consider one final argument for linking inevitability to hegemony. This is the case that Barrington Moore makes on the basis of accounts from Nazi concentration camps and, to a lesser extent, accounts of the Hindu caste system. He contends that there *are* situations in which oppression is exercised so totally and so pervasively that the poses so often necessary to the powerless—flattery, deference, and so forth—represent the whole reality, the whole transcript, of subordinate groups. Noting that "it is very difficult to act a mask or a role continually without acquiring the character that goes with the role," he asks, in effect, what happens when the mask must be worn at all times.[48] The question of legitimacy and justice, he implies, hardly arises at all, since the realm of necessity exhausts the whole of human conduct. At this extreme it is possible to show, as Moore does, that *some* victims do indeed come to identify with the oppressor and to copy both his behavior and his values.[49] But the very extremity of the measures required to achieve this end make it, for my purpose, precisely the exception that proves the rule. As the most total of institutions, the Nazi concentration camp systematically set about destroying every vestige of independent social life. The victims, before they were murdered, were stripped of all possessions and family, worked to the extremes of exhaustion, underfed to

48. Another way of phrasing this issue is to focus on the unavoidable duality—or multiplicity—of subordinate class consciousness. Much of the daily struggle to make a living, as we have seen in the case of Hamzah and others, necessarily involves appeals to the normative system of the dominant class—flattery, deference, obsequious polite forms of address, and so forth. There will almost invariably be other offstage values as well that may contradict such poses. And yet, we are not entirely justified in treating the former as merely insincere poses and the latter as the truth. In situations where the exercise of power is quite pervasive, the offstage discourse may be confined to the nooks and crannies of social life, thereby making the formulas for action imposed by elites hegemonic in practice. Arnold Strickon, writing of an Argentine agro-town, notes that the gauchos have two sets of stratification terms: one is cast entirely in patron–client terms, the other is class based. The first, however, dominates daily life in the local context; it is both explanatory *and* strategic for lower-class action. The second is more appropriate to the rare occasions of provincial and national elections. An observer might plausibly conclude that traditional, clientelist consciousness dominated, but this conclusion would merely amount to the observation that the situational context relevant to that style of action was dominant. If the situational context relevant to class discourse were to become more frequent, so would class terminology and action. What one would be observing then would be not so much a change in consciousness per se as a shift in the relative frequency of situational contexts relevant to one style of action as opposed to another. "Folk Models of Stratification, Political Ideology, and Socio-cultural Systems," *Sociological Review Monographs,* No. 11 (1967), 93–117.

49. Moore, *Injustice,* 464.

the point of starvation, brutalized both systematically *and* capriciously, while their waking life was minutely controlled by the guards. No effort was spared to destroy all networks of informal solidarity and thoroughly to atomize the prisoners. Virtually the only autonomous choice left was that of suicide. What is remarkable is not that such extremity produces a certain "identification with the oppressor" but rather that only "*some* concentration camp inmates came to accept the moral authority of their oppressors."[50]

One might, in this context, compare different forms of oppression by the degree to which they allow their victims some semblance of an autonomous social existence. By this criterion, the concentration camp would lie at one extreme, followed perhaps by mental asylums and civilian and military prisons. Here one might plausibly expect that atomization and nearly total control might achieve a perverse moral authority.[51] The fact is, however, that all of the "routine" and historically common patterns of social subordination and exploitation—slavery, serfdom, sharecropping, or even wage labor—are unlike the concentration camp in that their "victims" retain considerable autonomy to construct a life and a culture not entirely controlled by the dominant class.[52] In other words there are, for each of these groups, situations in which the mask of obsequiousness, deference, and symbolic compliance *may* be lifted. This realm of relatively "safe" discourse, however narrow, is a necessary condition for the development of symbolic resistance—a social space in which the definitions and performances imposed by domination do not prevail.[53] This social space is, moreover, defined not only by the absence of vertical power relations but by the presence of sanctions and influence exercised by others who find themselves in the same boat.[54] Thus,

50. In his analysis, Moore (*Injustice,* 64) relies heavily on Bruno Bettelheim, *The Informed Heart: Autonomy in a Mass Age* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1960). For an account of how various forms of moral and organized resistance can grow in only slightly less draconian conditions, see Emmanuel Rigelblum, *Notes From the Warsaw Ghetto,* trans. Jacob Sloan (New York: Schocken, 1974).

51. Especially, perhaps, in mental institutions and civilian prisons where there is at least an ideology claiming that they are operated for the ultimate benefit of their inmates. Even here, however, control is not total and resistance is evident. See, for example, Erving Goffman, *Asylums* (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1961), and Jack Henry Abbot, *In the Belly of the Beast* (New York: Vintage, 1982).

52. Such autonomy, it is often pointed out, is not simply a failure of control but is necessary to the very functioning of the institution.

53. The dominant class may make efforts to infiltrate this social space with spies. The effect of such spies may be less the information they carry back than the way in which the fear of spies itself may neutralize a possible realm of autonomous discourse.

54. The monoclass village under the domination of a single outside landlord thus has marked advantages for class mobilization that are not confined to the fact that the material situation of all villagers is more or less the same. They also have a realm of autonomous discourse that is coterminous with the village itself.

when Pak Yah gathers on his steps with a few other laborers and smallholders who belong to PAS, the discourse is not only different from what one would hear if Basir or Haji Kadir were present, but its content is influenced by the social fact that the men gathered are both poor and opposed to UMNO. This influence is stronger by virtue of the fact that these men also depend on one another for a wide array of petty favors and exchanges; there are power relations here too, although they are more nearly reciprocal and balanced. If the exercise of domination depends upon a social context for its creation and maintenance, so does the exercise of resistance.[55]

It is, of course, theoretically possible for the discourse found even in "non-mask" situations to conform in most or all particulars with the dominant ideology. But whenever we are dealing with any of the large-scale structures of social subordination, which invariably imply both the appropriation of labor and the assignment of inferior, if not degrading, status to its subjects, this is unlikely. Thus, there is some evidence that the untouchable castes in India, when they may do so safely, reject much of the stigmatized identity assigned to them by the caste system.[56] The work of Genovese and others reveals that, in the slave quarters of the antebellum South, one encountered a set of values very different from those that officially prevailed.[57] There was a religious emphasis on liberation and equality drawn from Old Testament texts, a profane view both of the masters and of slavery, justifications for resistance in the form of theft, pilfering, flight, and shirking. Not all of these attitudes were incompatible, as Genovese notes, with the continuation of slavery as a system, but they were decidedly different from the dominant ideology. The subculture created in the slave quarter was normally hidden from the master's view. It might, however, occasionally intrude onto the public stage when strong drink temporarily overcame the slaves' normal caution. As Mullin notes in his study of slavery in nineteenth-century Virginia:

> While drunkenness tends to leave most people either quiet and withdrawn, or out-going and loud-spoken, acculturating slaves when drunk and addressing their masters—with no exceptions—were always "bold," "obstinate," "daring," "impudent," or "turbulent."[58]

Except for those rare instances when the curtain is momentarily parted, the

55. We know enough from ingenious psychological experiments to conclude that resistance to domination increases markedly once there is the slightest possibility of social support for it from peers. See Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 116–21.

56. Joan P. Mencher, "On Being an Untouchable in India: A Materialist Perspective," in *Beyond the Myths of Culture: Essays in Cultural Materialism,* ed. Eric B. Ross (New York: Academic, 1980), 261–94.

57. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll.*

58. Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972), 100.

relatively uncensored subculture of subordinate classes must be sought in those locales, behind the scenes, where it is created—in all those social situations outside the immediate surveillance of the dominant class. Given its shadowy but palpable existence in informal discourse, this subculture is unlikely to be a systematic refutation of the dominant ideology. One does not expect *Das Kapital* to come from working-class pubs, although one may get something quite close to the labor theory of value! Unless the curtains are parted by open revolt, political freedoms, or a revolution that allows the subculture to take on a public, institutionalized life, it will remain elusive and masked. What is certain, however, is that, while domination may be inevitable as a social fact, it is unlikely also to be hegemonic as an ideology within that small social sphere where the powerless may speak freely.

My argument to this point has focused on the danger of equating the possible fact of inevitability with the norms of justice and legitimacy, even though the ethnographic record may encourage it. I have also stressed the importance, in anything short of total institutions, of an autonomous sphere in which the values of elites may be contested despite their practical inevitability. Completing this critique requires that I also reexamine the concept of inevitability itself, a term I have thus far taken for granted. The question is not whether or not a given structure of domination is inevitable at a factual level, since no historically contingent state of affairs is inevitable in that sense. The question is rather the extent to which a system of domination can be made to appear inevitable to those who live in it and under it.

The first problem is to specify exactly what it is that is "inevitable." If it is taken to mean a pattern of domination in all its historical particulars, then it is clear that no system is inevitable to its subjects in this sense. To imagine that long-established systems such as feudalism or slavery were, even in their heyday, so inevitable that those who lived within them were not constantly trying—and succeeding—to modify their contours is to ascribe an unwarranted "thingness" to any social order.

If, however, by "inevitable" we mean the central features of a mode of domination, not just its details, then the argument for perceived inevitability becomes far more plausible. From one perspective, the argument is in fact both self-evident and coercive. How would it be possible for a thirteenth-century French serf or an eighteenth-century Indian untouchable, neither of whom we may assume had any experience of any social order other than the one into which he was born, to conceive of anything else than what he knew, namely, feudalism or the caste system? It is but a short logical step to claim that these cognitive limitations rule out, in principle, any possible revolutionary consciousness. If the fish do not talk about the water, how can we expect them to talk about the air? Such reasoning seems to lie behind Jean-Paul Sartre's position:

> For it is necessary to reverse the common opinion and acknowledge that it is not the harshness of a situation or the sufferings it imposes which lead people to conceive of another state of affairs in which things would be better for everybody. It is on the day when we are able to conceive of another state of affairs, that a new light is cast on our trouble and our suffering and we *decide* that they are unbearable.[59]

This position is, I believe, quite wrong. On my reading of the evidence it is in fact more plausible to contend that *so far as the realm of ideology is concerned, no social order seems inevitable,* even in this larger sense, to all of its subjects. The fact that serfs, slaves, or untouchables have no direct knowledge or experience of other social orders is, I believe, no obstacle to their creating what would have to qualify as "revolutionary" thought. To argue along these lines is not so much to refute Sartre as it is to show that the imaginative capacity of subordinate groups to reverse and/or negate dominant ideologies is so widespread—if not universal—that it might be considered part and parcel of their standard cultural and religious equipment. Here again we may stand Gramsci on his head; subordinate classes—especially the peasantry—are likely to be more radical at the level of ideology than at the level of behavior, where they are more effectively constrained by the daily exercise of power.

The argument against inevitability may be made at two levels. As I have made this case at much greater length elsewhere, I shall confine myself to a summary exposition.[60] The first point to be made is that, even if one accepts that the serf, the slave, and the untouchable will have trouble imagining social arrangements other than feudalism, slavery, or caste, they will certainly not find it difficult to imagine reversing the distribution of status and rewards within that social order. In a great many societies, such a simple feat of the imagination is not just an abstract exercise: It is historically embedded in existing ritual practice. To mention but a few, the Feast of Krishna (*Holi*) in large parts of India, Carnival in Western and Latin American Roman Catholic societies, Saturnalia in Roman society, the variant of the water festival in Buddhist Southeast Asia, Dionysian cults in antiquity—all involve to a considerable extent a reversal of status, the breaking of routine codes of deference, and the profanation of the existing social order. In some forms, these rituals of reversal may be seen as a sanctioned and contained ritual effort to relieve temporarily the tension unavoidably produced by a rigid hierarchy. To stop here, however, would ignore both the degree to which such rituals often get out of hand and the strenuous attempts made by dominant elites to eliminate or restrict them. The centuries-long campaign of Roman Catholic authorities to eliminate the pagan aspects of carnival—burlesques of the mass, hedonism—and to replace them with the passion plays and more orthodox ritual is a striking example.

59. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (London: Methuen, 1957), 434–35, quoted in Bourdieu, *Outline,* 74.

60. "Protest and Profanation," 224–42.

If it requires no great leap of the imagination to reverse the existing social order, then it should come as no surprise that it can as easily be negated. This is precisely what is involved in nearly all of the millennial religious ideologies that have formed the normative underpinning of a host of large-scale peasant revolts throughout history. Such movements are often closely linked to the reversals discussed earlier, but they are not so easily dismissed as empty rituals, given their practical consequences for political control. The radical vision contained in millennial and utopian ideologies can best be understood as a negation of the existing pattern of exploitation and status degradation as it is experienced. At the risk of overgeneralizing, one can say that this reflexive symbolism often implies a society of brotherhood in which there will be no rich or poor and no distinctions of rank (save those between believers and nonbelievers). Property is typically, though not always, to be held in common and shared. Unjust claims to taxes, rents, and tribute are to be nullified. The envisioned utopia may also include a self-yielding and abundant nature as well as a radically transformed human nature in which greed, envy, and hatred will disappear. While the earthly utopia is an anticipation of the future, it often harks back to a mythic Eden from which mankind has fallen away. It is no exaggeration to see in such historically common ideologies a revolutionary appropriation of religious symbolism in the service of class interests.

Millennial and utopian thought typically make their appearance in the archives only when they take the form of sects or movements that pose a threat to the state. In this respect, the written record is as negligent of ordinary forms of symbolic resistance as it is of everyday material resistance. The prophetic tradition that underlies such sects may remain dormant and peripheral for long periods. But, as Marc Bloch observed, the tradition is both continuous and deeply rooted in popular culture. Citing peasant revolts in France from 821 through "the blazing summer of 1789," which Taine had described as "spontaneous anarchy," Bloch writes:

> But there was nothing novel about this "anarchy." What appeared a newly-minted outrage in the eyes of the ill-instructed philosopher was little more than the recurrence of a traditional phenomenon which had long been endemic. The forms rebellion took (and they were nearly always the same) were also traditional: mystical fantasies: a powerful preoccupation with the primitive egalitarianism of the Gospels, which took hold of humble minds well before the Reformation.[61]

The circumstances under which these beliefs triggered mass action had, to modern eyes, all the marks of revolutionary crises. Thus, in Europe and elsewhere, famines, plagues, wars, invasions, crushing new taxes, subsistence crises, or

61. Marc Bloch, *French Rural History: An Essay on Its Basic Characteristics,* trans. Janet Sondheimer (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1970), 169.

periods when "traditional social bands were being weakened or shattered and the gap between rich and poor was becoming a chasm"[62] might form the backdrop against which millennial expectations become mobilizing myths. The deroutinization of daily life, in which the normal categories with which social reality is apprehended no longer apply, appears to be as important as material deprivation in creating the social soil for millennial activity.

It has occasionally been assumed that millenarianism is a particular product of the prophetic and apocalyptic tradition of the Judeo-Christian world. And yet we find parallel religious traditions in both the Buddhist and Islamic regions of Southeast Asia, as well as in the largely Christian Philippines. In Burma, for example, a belief in the return of a just king (*Setkya min*) who will return to set things aright exists side by side with a belief in a Buddha-Deliverer (*Buddha yaza*) who will usher in a Buddhist millennium. In Islamic Indonesia, we encounter both a traditional belief in a returning monarch-savior (*ratu adil*) and a traditional belief in an Islamic conqueror who will sweep away the heathen and restore justice. The belief in a returning just king, similar to that of the tsar-deliverer in Russia, represents a striking example of how an erstwhile conservative myth of divine kingship can, in the hands of the peasantry, be turned into a revolutionary myth by a kind of symbolic jujitsu. While kingship per se is symbolically maintained, both the actual king and the social order he represents are negated. It goes without saying that these religious traditions in Southeast Asia have also formed the ideological basis for countless rebellions.[63]

The paradox of millennial beliefs is of course that they typically envision the most radical change in the distribution of power, status, and wealth—not to mention human nature—while at the same time being very much leadership centered. At the center of virtually all such movements is a leader, a prophet, a just king, a savior, who will set things right. Compared to everyday forms of resistance that avoid direct symbolic confrontations in the interest of concrete, piecemeal gains, millennial beliefs are all-or-nothing affairs[64] which, once activated, aim at changing the society root and branch. As such they are inherently extralocal and depend on a shared collective history, with its antiestablishment symbols and myths.

62. Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (London: Seecker & Warburg, 1957), 32.

63. For examples from Burma and Indonesia, see E. Sarkisyanz, *Buddhist Backgrounds of the Burmese Revolution* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965), and Sartono Kartodirdjo, *Protest Movements in Rural Java: A Study of Agrarian Unrest in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1973).

64. Not a few millennial sects have historically settled into the social fabric as more or less permanent, district communities that aim either to live their own lives in relative isolation from the rest of society or to transform the world merely by their example of piety, etc. A peaceful outcome seems to depend at least as much on how the sect is treated by the state as on its initial beliefs.

In Sedaka itself, one can hardly speak of a lively millennial tradition. There is evidence, however, that religious prophecies are far from entirely dormant. Four or five villagers spoke to me of predictions made by religious men (*orang alim*) who teach at the various informal religious schools (*pondok*) in the region. Such prophesies were typically vague and predicted much bloodshed, the punishment of the wicked, natural disturbances (earthquakes, flood) as well as often naming the Islamic year in which all this would come to pass. Occasionally, prophesies circulate in the form of "flying letters" (*surat layang*) of anonymous authorship—letters purportedly written at some sacred Islamic site in the Middle East under the inspiration of a vision or dream. (One such *surat layang* came into my hands and is reproduced in translation in appendix E.) In 1969, after racial riots had erupted in several Malaysian cities, a climate of fearful anticipation swept much of Kedah. Local religious figures, politicians, and those versed in the traditional Malay art of self-defense (*silat*) joined a group called the Red Sash Society (Pertubohan Selendang Merah), a body with shadowy connections to UMNO politicians in the national capital. Its purpose was to defend the race and the religion. To this end, an "oathing" ceremony was held for at least forty men from Sedaka and Sungai Tongkang in the house of Haji Salim, now a prominent UMNO official in the district. Someone claiming to have been sent from Kuala Lumpur conducted an initiation, using chants (*jampi*), anointment with lime juice and water, and a demonstration of how the red sash worn by members would render them invulnerable to wounds from a machete (*golok*). In the end, the unrest did not spread to Kedah and the group never went into action.

The point of this brief account of prophesy and religious mobilization in Sedaka is not to claim that such exceptional events preoccupy villagers. They do not. It is rather to suggest only that prophesy and religious mobilization are a part, however dormant in relatively ordinary times, of the cultural equipment of the Malay peasantry. In 1979 a shadowy organization (*Nasrul Haq*) which, it was said, had thirty thousand members in Kedah was banned. The government claimed that it had political connections as well as teaching *silat* (self-defense) and that its "un-Islamic" promotion of magical chants, trances, and female participation as well as unorthodox dress made it a threat to public order. A mystical cult named *Auratis mailiyyah,* which developed in the poor Kedah district of Sik and about which far less is known, was outlawed by an Islamic (*Syariah*) court at about the same time.[65] For Malaysia as a whole, Stockwell has documented the reappearance of millennial and ecstatic Islamic cults during virtually every episode of historical crisis.[66] Had I attended more carefully to it,

65. Judith Nagata, *The Reflowering of Islam: Modern Religious Radicals and Their Roots* (Vancouver: Univ. of British Columbia Press, forthcoming), chaps. 3, 6.

66. A. J. Stockwell, *British Policy and Malay Politics during the Malayan Union Experiment, 1945–48,* Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, Monograph No. 8 (Kuala Lumpur: Art Printing Works, 1979), 151–61.

I am certain that I would have uncovered more *surat layang* and local prophesies.[67] Under exceptional circumstances it is entirely possible that such marginal phenomena could move quickly to the center of the political stage.[68]

My concern here has been exclusively directed to the issue of whether or not a subordinate class, having no experience or knowledge of other social systems, can conceive of the domination under which they live as anything other than completely inevitable. The historical fact is that they can and do. All three of the claims examined in this section have proved to be untenable. There is no basis for supposing that subordinate classes equate the inevitable with the just, although the necessity of pragmatic resignation may often make it seem so. There is no basis for imagining that *any* of the common historical patterns of domination so completely control the social life of subordinate classes as to rule out the creation of partly autonomous and resistant subcultures. Finally, there is no reason to assume that the lower orders are so encompassed by an existing system of domination that they cannot either imagine its revolutionary negation or act on that negation.

Conflict within Hegemony

For the sake of argument, I have thus far taken for granted what I believe to be the core assumption of the case for hegemony and false-consciousness. Put bluntly, the assumption is that, to the extent dominant classes can persuade subordinate classes to adopt their self-serving view of existing social relations, the result will be ideological consensus and harmony that will in turn block the perception of conflicting interests, let alone class conflict. Hegemony is, after all, fundamentally about the misrepresentation of "objective" interests. Once this assumption is granted, we find ourselves inquiring if and how subordinate classes can penetrate, neutralize, and negate that hegemony. But is the initial premise credible? I believe it is not credible for at least three reasons, one of which is theoretical or conceptual and two of which are empirical. The theoretical problem requires our prior attention, as it stems from what I take to be a misunderstanding of the nature of any purported hegemonic ideology.

This misunderstanding can best be grasped by recalling the basic feature of

67. Rarely a month goes by without a newspaper account of the prosecution of a religious teacher accused of propagating false doctrines. In 1979 one such teacher, a Cambodian Muslim, led an attack of his disciples on a police station in the state of Pahang.

68. The belief in invulnerability, produced both by magic and by the aid of divine sanction, is a standard feature of most millennial practices. It also illustrates a final, key element of the negation of inevitability. The effect of millennial ideology is not only to negate the social order itself but also to negate the very power that serves to keep that social order in place. Of course, the conquest of inevitability at the level of religious ideology is, alas, not the same as its conquest in practice, as the fate of the vast majority who have joined such rebellions tragically attests.

ideological struggle in Sedaka: the fact that it takes place almost entirely *within* the normative framework of the older agrarian system. The struggle is, in other words, within what most observers would call an existing hegemony.[69] Smallholders, petty tenants, and landless laborers are continually using the values and rationale of that earlier social order to press their claims and disparage the claims of their opponents. They make abundant use of the values of help (*tolong*) or assistance that rich villagers have typically used to describe their own behavior. They stigmatize the rich as stingy and hardhearted, thereby turning the values of generosity and liberality against those who justified their property and privilege in just such terms. They insist, albeit in vain, on their right to employment and to tenancies, which the large landowners once claimed to bestow upon them out of a sense of helpfulness. In each respect, the claims of the poor derive their normative force and strategic value from the fact that lip service is still being paid to them by the locally dominant elite. There is virtually no radical questioning of property rights or of the state and its local officials, whose policies are designed to further capitalist agriculture. Almost everything said by the poor fits easily within the *professed* values—within the hegemony—of local elites. And if the ends sought by the village poor are modest, so are the means used to accomplish them. The modesty of means, however, is less a consequence of small ambitions than of other givens—the presence of economic alternatives, the fact of "dull compulsion," and the knowledge of probable repression.

Short of the deroutinizing crises that are said to touch off millennial expectations, such modest claims may be found at the core of most class conflict. Nor are such small demands incompatible with more violent and even revolutionary action when conditions permit. There is, in other words, no necessary symmetry between modesty of ends and modesty of means. The claims can be said to arise from the inevitable gap between the promises that any hegemony necessarily makes and the equally inevitable failure of the social order to fulfill some or all of these promises. Properly understood, any hegemonic ideology provides, within itself, the raw material for contradictions and conflict.

To appreciate why this is so, we need only turn to the implications of the passage from *The German Ideology* quoted at length earlier. "The ruling ideas [that is, the hegemonic ideology] are nothing more than the *ideal expression* of the dominant material relationships." Gramsci understood, far better than many of his successors, precisely what was involved in idealizing the dominant material relationships:

> Undoubtedly, the fact of hegemony presupposes that account be taken of the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised, and that a certain compromise equilibrium should be formed—in other words, that the leading group should make sacrifices of an economic-corporate kind. But there is also no doubt that such sacrifices and such a compromise cannot touch the essential; for though hegemony is ethical-political, it must also be economic.[70]

69. There is a problem with the term *hegemony* itself since it often implies that a hegemonic ideology is the sole creation of an elite, whereas in fact it is always the creation of prior struggle and compromises that are continually being tested and modified. See, in this connection, the illuminating discussion of "counterpoints" in W. F. Wertheim, *Evolution or Revolution* (London: Pelican Books, 1973).

Thus, a hegemonic ideology requires, by definition, that what are in fact particular interests be reformulated and presented as general interests. If it is to become an effective instrument of consent, it must meet two criteria. First, it must claim that the system of privilege, status, and property it defends operates in the interest not only of elites but also of subordinate groups whose compliance or support is being elicited. To do this it must, in effect, make implicit promises of benefits for subordinate groups that will serve as the stake which they too have in the prevailing social order.[71] Second, as Gramsci realized, the dominant class must make good on at least a portion of these promises if it is to have the slightest hope of gaining compliance. That is, hegemony is not just a symbolic bone tossed to subordinate groups; it requires some actual sacrifices or restraint by the dominant groups.

The dominant ideology that developed before double-cropping in Kedah and that still, by and large, prevails as a normative framework may be understood in just these terms. The large farmers rationalized their social status, their property, and their privileges by emphasizing the benefits they provided for the rest of the village—tenancies, wage labor, charity, loans, feasts, *zakat*. This rationalization was embedded in concrete material practices and entailed a modest socialization of their profit in the interest of continued domination. For the issue at hand, it matters not that this rationalization and the practices associated with

70. Gramsci, *Selections,* 161.

71. Writing of the state in particular, later in the same essay, Gramsci makes a similar observation about dominant ideologies:

> [The winning party brings] about a unison of economic and political aims, but also, intellectual and moral unity, posing all the questions around which the struggle rages not on a corporate but on a "universal" plane, and thus creating the hegemony of fundamental social group over a series of subordinate groups. . . . In other words, the dominant group is coordinated concretely with the general interests of the subordinate groups, and the life of the State is conceived of as a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria . . . between the interests of the fundamental group and those of the subordinate groups—equilibria in which the interests of the dominant group prevail, but only up to a certain point, i.e. stopping short of narrowly corporate economic interest.

Selections, 181–82. Thus a key function of the dominant ideology is to discipline elites so that their short-run interests do not jeopardize the stability of the social order as a whole.

it were a product of struggle or that they did not infringe on the fundamental interests of the agrarian elite. The crucial point is rather that the very process of attempting to legitimate a social order by idealizing it *always* provides its subjects with the means, the symbolic tools, the very ideas for a critique that operates entirely within the hegemony. For most purposes, then, it is not at all necessary for subordinate classes to set foot outside the confines of the ruling ideals in order to formulate a critique of power. The most common form of class struggle arises from the failure of a dominant ideology to live up to the implicit promises it necessarily makes. The dominant ideology can be turned against its privileged beneficiaries not only because subordinate groups develop their own interpretations, understandings, and readings of its ambiguous terms, but also because of the promises that the dominant classes must make to propagate it in the first place.[72]

In this context, what we find in Sedaka is an eroding dominant ideology that never quite delivered the goods and that now no longer even serves the interests of the larger cultivators. It is therefore a vanishing and even retrograde tradition that has become the ideological weapon by which the rich may be further delegitimated. The irony, of course, is that the ideological weapon the poor now find so serviceable was earlier fashioned and handed to them by the same rich cultivators and landlords. A "shared" ideology is by no means a guarantee of consent or harmony.[73]

The structure of ideological conflict in Sedaka is far from unusual. In his searching analysis of slavery in the United States, for example, Genovese has shown how its legal codes and its ideology of paternalism—both violated with impunity in practice—came to be used by the slaves themselves to assert their claims for subsistence, humane treatment, and the preservation of the slave family. As in Sedaka, a large part of the critique of ruling group practice could be read directly from the text of ruling group ideology.[74] Much the same analysis

72. See, in this context, Gidden's discussion of the struggle by the working class to universalize what are originally the "sectional" interests of the bourgeoisie. *Central Problems,* 193ff.

73. Once again, the concept of hegemony is, to my mind, not sufficiently reflexive here, since both the "compromise" and the "corporate sacrifices" are as much won by resistance and struggle as given or imposed by an elite. The struggle of subordinate classes, in other words, helps determine what kind of compromise will make consent possible.

74. See, for example, Frank Parkin, *Class Inequality and Political Order* (New York: Praeger, 1971), 72–102. Willis (in *Learning to Labour,* 110) would go much further and claim that if in fact the dominant class were successful in inculcating the dominant ideology it would find itself with far more working-class anger and dissent. In particular, he argues that if English working-class children believed what was taught them at school—that is, that doing well in school and following its rules would result in social mobility in a working life where competence and skill are

could almost certainly be made of the critique of "real existing socialism" in Poland that found expression in the Solidarity movement.[75] How is it posible to understand what amounted to the revolt of most of civil society against the state in Poland except against the background of a self-proclaimed socialist system that *ideologically* insisted that it operated on behalf of proletarian interests?[76] Polish workers daily confronted evidence that flew in the face of official ideology (hardly a hegemony in this case)—entrenched privilege and corruption, declining standards of living for workers, special shops for party officials, repression of worker protests, and so forth. This is not to say that neither slaves nor Polish workers were able to imagine a social order run along quite different lines. It is only to claim that, in each case, the ideology formulated by the ruling class to justify its own rule provided much of the symbolic raw material from which the most damning critique could be derived and sustained.

Similar logic might be applied to the routine forms of working-class disaffection in advanced capitalist nations. Although the work force in such countries has easier ideological access to radical alternatives, much of its critique of the social order appears to rest on premises that are also, broadly speaking, drawn from the ruling ideology itself.[77] Without straying beyond the prevailing ideology, workers may contrast the meritocratic ethos with the reality of "connections," favoritism, and unequal access to superior education; they may contrast the democratic ideology of "one man, one vote" with the reality of corporate influence on the media and elections; they may contrast the bountiful promise of capitalism with periodic recessions and unemployment. The solutions proposed by radical parties and intellectuals may, and frequently do, lie outside the dominant ideology. But for my purposes, it is clear that a radical critique of *existing* arrangements may arise in virtually any subordinate class that takes the dominant ideology to heart and, at the same time, penetrates in daily life the realities that betray or ignore the implicit promises of that ideology. On closer inspection,

rewarded—they would feel far more cruelly deceived later. Thus, he argues implicitly that social stability and compliance requires that the ideology of the school fail to impress itself on working-class youngsters. Indeed, those working-class youngsters who pose the greatest problem for school authorities enter the work force thoroughly cynical but without aspirations that could possibly be betrayed. *Learning to Labour* is, in my opinion, the finest study available of hegemony in any setting.

75. The term "real existing socialism" is taken from Rudolf Bahro, *The Alternative in Eastern Europe,* trans. David Fernbach (London: Verso, 1981).

76. See the forthcoming book on Solidarity by Roman Laba. For a socialist critique—within the hegemony—of working life in Hungary, see the remarkable account by Miklós Haraszti, *A Worker in a Worker's State,* trans. Michael Wright (New York: Universe Books, 1978).

77. On this point see, for example, Abercrombie et al., *Dominant Ideology Thesis,* 17; Richard Hoggart, *Uses of Literacy,* and Charles Sabel, *Work and Politics: The Division of Labor in Industry* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982).

then, the ideologies of slavery, communism, liberal democracy, and even "agrarian paternalism" à la Sedaka may turn out to be a provocation and incitement rather than the general anesthesia which a hegemonic ideology is presumed to be.[78]

The implicit promises embodied in any would-be hegemonic ideology may seem, even to many of its subjects, to be nothing more than a cynical "protection" racket. From whom was the feudal lord protecting the serf, if not from other marauding lords like himself? How can the slaveholder be said to provide a "service" of subsistence when it is the slaves who feed both themselves and him? Such hypocrisies are, however, "the tribute vice pays to virtue" and they have *real* consequences.[79] In Sedaka, it is tactically sound for the poor to make their case in terms of older agrarian norms. They are not only the moral categories in which villagers actually think; they also allow the poor to appropriate, as it were, the ideological resources of the well-off and turn them to good advantage. Finally, by remaining prudently within the accepted and familiar categories of moral discourse, the poor minimize the risks of a more dramatic confrontation.

Trade Union Consciousness and Revolution

> Common sense is not a single unique conception, identical in time and space. . . . Its most fundamental characteristic is that it is a conception which, even in the brain of one individual, is fragmentary, incoherent and inconsequential, in conformity with the social and cultural position of those masses whose philosophy it is.
>
> None the less the starting point must always be that common sense which is the spontaneous philosophy of the multitude and which *has to be made ideologically coherent.*[80]

For Gramsci and for many other Marxist scholars, the primary obstacle to radical

78. In his fine study of inmates in a Norwegian prison, Thomas Mathiesen stresses that, while in practice there is little peer solidarity, there is a widespread attitude of "censoriousness." By this he means a readiness to seize on the norms propagated by the prison officials themselves and accuse them of violating their own standards at every turn. In this case, the progressive (paternalistic?) ideology of prison officials provided effective raw material to serve prisoners' interests. The inmates constantly pushed for "mechanical" equality, automatic rights, seniority rules, and stated minimum requirements along trade union lines, while prison officials strove to maintain discretionary controls just as management would. *The Defenses of the Weak: A Sociological Study of a Norwegian Correctional Institution* (London: Tavistock, 1965).

79. Moore, *Injustice,* 508 and 84. See also James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Subsistence and Rebellion in Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1976), chap. 6. It is of interest in this context that Russian Orthodox priests in tsarist Russia were occasionally beaten when the crops, which were under their ritual protection, failed.

80. Gramsci, *Selections,* 419, 421, emphasis added.

change is to be found at the level of ideas. For reasons of "intellectual subordination,"[81] Gramsci argued, the working class gets most of its ideas secondhand from dominant groups and, by itself, is therefore not able to rise above an "incoherent" and "fragmentary" conception of its situation. The result, at best, is a kind of "trade union consciousness" focusing on limited and concrete benefits rather than the "revolutionary consciousness" that might make radical change possible. It is this ideological shortcoming of the proletariat, of course, that defines the intellectual role of the vanguard party.

A number of assumptions lie behind this position, each of which requires examination. The first is that dominant classes *do,* in fact, share a well-defined and coherent ideology. I will not examine this claim here, but it is worth suggesting that such ideological coherence may be quite rare—perhaps even among intellectuals whose stock in trade is the formulation of systems of thought. To what standard of coherence the consciousness of the working class is being compared, in other words, is not entirely clear. A second, and more nearly explicit, assumption is that revolutionary action can follow only from a thoroughly radical (Marxist?) consciousness that is not only diametrically opposed to the dominant ideology but that envisions an entirely new social order that will take its place. This assumption is certainly true, but tautological, if we define revolutionary action solely in terms of the consciousness of the actors. If, however, we do not adopt this sleight of hand, is it correct to assume that a less than revolutionary consciousness will inevitably lead to accommodations with the dominant class—to reformism and/or "trade union" politics?

What I wish to argue briefly here is that there is no necessary relationship between the small and limited demands typical of a "reformist" consciousness and the kinds of actions taken to achieve these demands. One may go still further and assert with some assurance that the rank-and-file actors in most, if not all, revolutionary situations are in fact fighting for rather mundane, if vital, objectives that could in principle—but often not in practice—be accommodated within the prevailing social order. The typical revolutionary crisis is, in other words, brought about by small but essential demands that are experienced by large numbers of people simultaneously and, because they are thwarted, can be achieved only by revolutionary action. The making of a revolutionary crisis, to be sure, depends on a host of factors outside my immediate concern, but the one factor it does *not* require is revolutionary ambitions among the rank and file. In this sense there is no fit between ends and means. At one level, this is no more than commonsense; the demands of subordinate classes spring from their daily experience and the material they face. The only reason why this commonplace merits restatement is that so many theoretical discussions appear to assume otherwise and to impose quite fanciful ideological requirements on working-class

81. Ibid., 327.

consciousness. Those requirements have, to my knowledge, never been met by any real working class.

Let us turn briefly to two revolutionary situations and examine the issue of working-class consciousness in each context. The groundwork has been laid by Barrington Moore's analysis of German workers in the Ruhr after World War I who participated in what he terms "the closest approximation to a spontaneous proletarian revolution that has taken place in a modern industrial state"[82] and of the Russian proletariat on the eve of the Bolshevik revolution.

For Germany, Moore has uncovered some remarkable evidence from open-ended surveys of proletarian values conducted around 1912 that allows him to address this issue. Although support for the Social Democratic Party was common, the hopes and aspirations of workers were largely personal rather than public or political. Among the most common wishes were those for better wages, enough to eat, decent humane treatment, and, more farfetched, a house of one's own with some land. These were the modest aspirations of a working class that was already quite radical in its actions and would become more so. Those who had joined the socialists were a minority, and the vast majority of them were, it appears, absolutely innocent of socialist theory. Even in the case of coal miners, who, prior to 1914, were the most militant sector of the working class, "there is not the slightest hint that they were the carriers of revolutionary sentiments."[83]

> Over and over again the evidence reveals that the mass of workers was not revolutionary. They did not want to overturn the existing social order and replace it with something else, least of all one where ordinary workers would be in charge. They were however, very angry. They were backed into a corner and fought in self-defense . . .
>
> Yet even if one grants all those points, from the standpoint of political consequences they do not really matter. Revolutionary objectives are generally imposed by leaders on an angry mass that serves to dynamite the old order when other conditions make it possible. Indeed, I would hazard a guess that in any of the great revolutions that have succeeded, the mass of the followers has not consciously willed an overturn of the social order . . .
>
> To the extent that angry little people want something new, it generally amounts to their perception of the old order minus the disagreeable and oppressive features that affect them.[84]

To call the issues behind the near revolution in Germany "bread-and-butter" issues and petty questions of decent treatment is, as Moore notes, to miss their

82. Moore, *Injustice,* 351. Recent events in Poland offer another competing case for such honor.

83. Ibid., 340.

84. Ibid., 351–52.

significance.[85] They were not only materially vital to a working class with its back to the wall, but they were reinforced by the anger arising from their felt legitimacy. In fact, it is fair to say that the tenacious pursuit of such small goals was in part generated *because* they appeared to lie within the normative framework of the existing order. The claims of the German working class in this period were not much more ambitious or far-reaching than those of Sedaka's poor. The reason why a revolutionary situation prevailed in the former case but not in the latter is due to many other factors; it does not, however, have anything to do with the presence or absence of revolutionary class consciousness per se.

The evidence for working-class demands in Russia immediately before the October revolution—and after the February revolution—comes from the autonomous demands of factory committees formed all over European Russia.[86] Once again they reflect exactly what Lenin would have termed a reformist, trade union consciousness. The most popular demand was for an eight-hour day. Other demands included an end to piecework, a minimum wage, raises, and severance pay in case of dismissal. In the workplace the laborers insisted on politeness from management, on an end to arbitrary fines deducted from their pay, cooking and toilet facilities, and tools supplied by the factory, not the workers. Their most radical demand was apparently for the abolition of child labor and discrimination by sex, but they fully supported differential pay based on skills and experience. These were hardly the kinds of demands that, of themselves, suggested a revolution.[87] As Moore summarizes them, "the whole thrust of these demands . . . was to improve working conditions, not to change them. . . . Once again we see that the workers' idea of a good society . . . is the present order with its most disagreeable features softened or eliminated."[88]

Further examples might be added to the weight of evidence here—for example, from the demands of the peasantry in Morelos during the Mexican Revolution

85. Ibid., 273. See also E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage, 1966), 168.

86. Moore, *Injustice,* 369.

87. As for the Russian peasantry, their actions were, of course, quite radical, seizing land and burning the homes of the gentry and officials. Their goals, however, were quite modest and parochial. According to one assessment:

> While the various elites argued constitutional and policy questions in the capital, the peasants were forming their own political order in the countryside. . . . They repudiated the national level, and their alternative was something quite different from simply a new version of the modern centralized state. . . . Petrograd may well have constituted the center of the national political state, but the peasants were boycotting the play and writing the script for their own production.

John H. Kress, "The Political Consciousness of the Russian Peasantry," *Soviet Studies* 31, no. 4 (October 1979): 576.

88. Moore, *Injustice,* 370.

and from the *cahiers de doleances* during the French Revolution.[89] The point of introducing evidence from the working class is precisely that, for Marxist theory, it is among this class and no other that a revolutionary consciousness is considered possible. Even here, however, we find not only that it is largely absent, but that petty reformist demands are quite compatible with revolutionary action. A revolutionary vanguard party may be necessary for revolution to occur, but its necessity does not arise from the need for ideological instruction and consciousness raising among subordinate classes.[90] Revolutionary conflict, so far as the rank and file is concerned, is normally generated within the confines of the existing hegemony. It is often only the means employed that are out of the ordinary. This observation is at least as applicable to peasant movements as to proletarian.

As Hobsbawm quite correctly observes, "Revolution may be made *de facto* by peasants who do not deny the legitimacy of the existing power structure, law, the state, or even the landlords."[91] The peasantry of Morelos, as a case in point, set out merely to recover communal lands the sugar haciendas had taken from them, not to destroy the hacienda system, let alone transform the Mexican state. Their dogged persistence in recovering their land, however, helped bring about both of these larger consequences. Just as small and uncoordinated acts of petty resistance may aggregate to a point where they jeopardize state structures, so may petty, reformist, "ideological" goals aggregate to a point where their attainment implies a revolution.

It is, of course, still possible to assert that outside leadership in some form—

89. Assembled just before the revolution, the *cahiers* were essentially lists of complaints and demands from every department. As they were written by local elites, they were not quite mass opinion, though for that reason one might judge the *cahiers* to represent something closer to the eventual program of the bourgeois revolution. In fact, virtually all of the *cahiers* focused on local grievances; the vast majority assumed the continuation of feudalism and demanded adjustments (for example, restrictions on lords' hunting rights, uniform weights and measures, rights to woodland, a limitation on curé salaries). No *cahier* outside Paris even hinted at popular sovereignty, and most argued their claims by reference to custom. As one historian concludes, "it follows that the revolutionary state of mind expressed in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the decrees of 1789–91 was a product and not a cause of the crisis that began in 1787." George V. Taylor, "Revolutionary and Non-Revolutionary Content in the Cahiers of 1789: An Interim Report," *French Historical Studies* 7, no. 4 (Fall 1972): 501.

90. Here the debate between Luxemburg and Lenin is relevant, but neither appreciated, I believe, the possibly radical consequences of modest working-class—or peasant—demands. See Kathy E. Ferguson, "Class-Consciousness and the Marxist Dialectic: The Elusive Synthesis," *Review of Politics* 42, no. 4 (October 1980): 504–32.

91. Eric Hobsbawm, "Peasants and Politics," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 1, no. 1 (October 1973): 12.

for example, a political party, an intelligentsia—may be necessary to transform a host of insurrections into a revolution that will seize power and transform the state. I do not address this particular issue here except to note that, if this argument is admitted, it is largely a matter of taste as to whether one sees subordinate classes as helpless without a radical intelligentsia or the radical intelligentsia as helpless without an insurgent mass. What is definitely being asserted, however, is that neither "revolutionary consciousness" nor an elaborate ideology, as those terms are ordinarily understood, is necessary to create the revolutionary crisis of which such leaders might conceivably then take advantage.

Who Shatters the Hegemony?

> To sum up provisionally, spontaneous conceptions among pre-factory workers, factory workers, and modern revolutionary peasants have been mainly backward-looking. They have been attempts to revive a social contract that had been violated, most frequently they were efforts to remedy specific and concrete grievances in their particular occupation.[92]

Is it possible to speak of a social contract that is being violated in Sedaka? I believe it is possible, providing the social contract is understood as a set of practices and the norms associated with them, providing we recognize that the interpretation of this contract varies markedly by class, and providing we realize that the poor have in large part created and recognized their version of the contract only in the context of its violation. This violation has been mediated almost exclusively by the larger farmers, seeking to improve their returns, although the opportunity to create new relations of production was provided by the state-built irrigation scheme. These budding capitalists have dismissed tenants, raised the rent, switched to leasehold, and called in the machinery. It is they who have steadily abrogated the customs of *zakat*, charity, loans, and large feasts. It is they who have thus all but eliminated the modest "socialization" of paddy profits, which once served their interest. It is they who have increasingly monopolized the supply of state subsidies and inputs as well as the political institutions of village life.

The rich of Sedaka thus find themselves in an anomalous, though powerful, position. The precondition of their new wealth has been the systematic dismantling of the practices that previously rationalized their wealth, status, and leadership. Their economic domination has come at the cost of their social standing *and* of their social control of their poorer neighbors—the cost implied by their having broken their own hegemony. The poor, by contrast, find themselves with an ideologically serviceable past; they have a vital stake in defending both the norms and practices of the earlier agrarian order. It is useful, in this context, to distinguish two sorts of tradition: one that is taken for granted—what Bourdieu

92. Moore, *Injustice*, 476.

calls *doxa*—and is thus not perceived as tradition but is simply what is done and another that is the imaginative reconstruction of the past in the service of current interests.[93] It is this latter form of tradition that the poor are both creating and defending. It is not, of course, constructed out of whole cloth. If it were, it would have little ideological value. It is instead a recognizable but partisan facsimile of earlier values and practices drawn up to legitimize essential class interests.

If the ideological situation in Sedaka is at all characteristic of early capitalism, as I believe it is, then the usual argument about dominant ideologies will have to be fundamentally recast. Gramsci and many others assume that the key task for any subordinate class is to create a counterhegemony that will ultimately be capable of transforming the society.[94] This position may have some merit for mature capitalist societies, where an elaborated ideology may already be in place. But it ignores the central fact that it has been *capitalism* that has historically transformed societies and broken apart existing relations of production. Even a casual glance at the record will show that capitalist development continually requires the violation of the previous "social contract" which in most cases it had earlier helped to create and sustain. The demystification of an existing hegemony is thus accomplished at least as much by the inevitable disregard for custom inherent in capitalism as by the "penetration" of subordinate classes themselves. The history of capitalism could, in fact, be written along just such lines. The enclosures, the introduction of agricultural machinery, the invention of the factory system, the use of steam power, the development of the assembly line, and today the computer revolution and robots have all had massive material and social consequences that undermined previous understandings about work, equity, security, obligation, and rights.

The conflict in Sedaka can be grasped only against this background of the transforming power of capitalism—its tendency to undermine radically the past and the present. Raymond Williams vividly captures the process:

> Since it has become dominant in one area after another, it has been uncontrollably disturbing and restless, reaching local stabilities only almost at once to move away from them, leaving every kind of social and technical debris, disrupting human continuities and settlements, moving on with brash confidence to its always novel enterprises.[95]

This is also what Brecht must have had in mind when he claimed that it was not socialism, but capitalism, that was revolutionary.

The backward-looking character of much subordinate class ideology and protest is perfectly understandable in this context. It is the revolutionary character of capitalism that casts them in a defensive role. If they defend a version of the older hegemony, it is because those arrangements look good by comparison with the current prospects and because it has a certain legitimacy rooted in earlier practice. The defense and elaboration of a social contract that has been abrogated by capitalist development is perhaps the most constant ideological theme of the peasant and the early capitalist worker[96]—from the Levellers and Diggers of the English Revolution to the craftsmen and weavers threatened with extinction to the "Captain Swing" rebels fighting the use of threshing machines. The same defense of beleaguered traditional rights is found at the core of popular intellectual attacks on capitalism by figures as ideologically diverse as Cobbett, Paine, and Carlyle.[97]

93. See also Bourdieu, *Outline,* 164–71.

94. Gramsci, *Selections,* 178, 334.

95. *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays* (London: New Left Books, 1980), 259.

In Sedaka, as in nineteenth-century England, the attack is directed less against capitalism per se than against capitalists. The violation of hard-won earlier arrangements appears to its victims as a heartless and willful choice of concrete individuals and not as the impersonal working out of some larger systematic logic. As in the case of Andalusian laborers, described by Alier, the victims see malevolence when nothing more than economic rationality is involved:

> My point is that there is and has been unemployment, and that labourers have attributed, and still do attribute unemployment to the unwillingness of landowners to give them work. As we have seen, there is some substance to this view, even though it is not as much a matter of bad will on the part of the landowners as of decisions which are economically rational from the point of view of the individual enterprise.[98]

At another level, however, the personalization of the causes of distress is not a misperception at all. The choices made by the large farmers in Sedaka or Andalusia—though they may be constrained by economic logic—are *also,* manifestly, the result of conscious individual choice. In seeing that things might be otherwise, those who personalize the issue also perceive the larger fact that even capitalistic logic is a social creation and not a thing. What is certain, moreover, is that the personalization evident in charges of stinginess, greed, and hardheartedness, whether in the novels of Dickens or in the mouths of Sedaka's poor, are far more generative of anger and possible action than if the causes were seen as impersonal and inevitable. If personalization is partly a myth, then it is a powerful, politically enabling myth.

The conquest of this sense of inevitability is essential to the development

96. The creation of the modern state has many of the same rupturing effects on local arrangements and might be examined in the same fashion.

97. See, for example, Thompson's analysis of Cobbett in *The Making of the English Working Class,* 761.

98. Alier, *Labourers and Landowners in Southern Spain,* 93–94.

> of politically effective moral outrage. For this to happen, people must perceive and define their situation as the consequence of human injustice: a situation they need not, cannot, and ought not to endure. By itself of course such a perception . . . is no guarantee of political or social changes to come. But without some very considerable surge of moral anger such changes do not occur.[99]

The personalization I observed in Sedaka is to a large degree the natural consequence of the capitalist transformation experienced there. For the victims as well as the beneficiaries of the large abstractions we choose to call capitalism, imperialism, or the green revolution, the experience itself arrives in quite personal, concrete, localized, mediated form.

Let us suppose for a moment that poor peasants in Sedaka had instead chosen to emphasize the larger causes of their difficulties. They are not, as we have seen, unaware of these larger issues. But what if they had, as an intellectual critic (or supporter) of Malaysian development might have, focused on such matters as the accumulation of wealth, the growth of capital-intensive agriculture, and the policies of the state, which favor the interests of rich farmers to ensure the provision of cheap wage goods to the enclaves of urban industry? Can one imagine a rural protest movement with banners proclaiming "stop agrarian capitalism" or "down with the cash nexus"? Of course not. Such undeniable facts are far too abstract and remote; they fail completely to capture the texture of local experience. Were they in fact the center of attention, one imagines that the smallholders and landless laborers of the village might simply stand aside in recognition of the apparently inextricable forces that will shape their future. To see the causes of distress instead as personal, as evil, as a failure of identifiable people in their own community to behave in a seemly way may well be a partial view, but it is not a wrong view. And not incidentally, it is quite possibly the only view that could, and does, serve as the basis for day-to-day resistance.

Resistance in Sedaka begins as, I suspect, all historical resistance by subordinate classes begins: close to the ground, rooted firmly in the homely but meaningful realities of daily experience. The *enemies* are not impersonal historical forces but real people. That is, they are seen as actors responsible for their own actions and not as bearers of abstractions. The *values* resisters are defending are equally near at hand and familiar. Their point of departure is the practices and norms that have proven effective in the past and appear to offer some promise of reducing or reversing the losses they suffer. The *goals* of resistance are as modest as its values. The poor strive to gain work, land, and income; they are not aiming at large historical abstractions such as socialism, let alone Marxist-Leninism. The *means* typically employed to achieve these ends—barring the rare crises that might precipitate larger dreams—are both prudent and realistic.

99. Moore, *Injustice,* 459.

When flight is available—to the frontier, to the cities—it is seized. When outright confrontation with landlords or the state seems futile, it is avoided. In the enormous zone between these two polar strategies lie all the forms of daily resistance, both symbolic and material, that we have examined.

Such resistance, conceived and conducted with no revolutionary end in mind, can, and occasionally does, contribute to revolutionary outcomes. The end in such cases is ironically likely to appear to the peasantry or the working class not as an end at all, but rather as the necessary means to their modest goals. Even when such slogans as "socialism" take hold among subordinate classes, they are likely to mean something radically different to the rank and file than to the radical intelligentsia. What Orwell had to say about the English working class in the 1930s is almost surely true for lower classes in general:

> The first thing that must strike any outside observer is that socialism in its developed form is a theory confined entirely to the middle class.
>
> For it must be remembered that a working man . . . is seldom or never a socialist in the complete logically consistent sense. . . . To the ordinary working man, the sort you would meet in any pub on Saturday night, socialism does not mean much more than better wages and shorter hours and nobody bossing you about. To the more revolutionary type who is a hunger-marcher and is blacklisted by employers, the word is a sort of rallying cry against the forces of oppression, a vague threat of future violence. . . . But I have yet to meet a working miner, steelworker, cotton-weaver, docker, navvy, or whatever who was "ideologically" sound.
>
> One of the analogies between Communism and Roman Catholicism is that only the educated are completely orthodox.[100]

The observation is of course nothing more than the intellectual division of labor one might expect in any class-based movement between workers or peasants whose struggle must grow directly from the realities of material life and an intelligentsia whose sights are set on a more distant horizon. The division of labor in this case, as in others, is not only a complimentarity but carries within it the possibility of conflict as well.

It is true, as Lukacs has argued, that the peasantry as a class is unlikely to envision a new plan for the total organization of society:

> The outlook of other classes (petty bourgeois or peasants) is ambiguous or sterile because their existence is not based exclusively on their role in the capitalist system of production but is indissolubly linked with the vestiges of feudal society. Their aim, therefore, is not to advance capitalism or to transcend it, but to reverse its action or at least to prevent it from devel-

100. George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (London: Left Book Club, 1937), 173, 176–77.

oping fully. Their class interest concentrates on *symptoms* of development and not on development itself.[101]

What he might have added, however, is that the working class itself, for different reasons perhaps, is in the same boat. That class too, if Moore, E. P. Thompson, Orwell, and Luxemburg are at all correct, deals with the "symptoms" of development as they are manifested in daily life. There is no point in aspiring in vain for a proletariat or peasantry that will somehow detach itself from its insistence on the mundane objectives that will make for a tolerable material life and a modicum of dignity. There is, on the contrary, every point in seeing precisely these ends and their dogged pursuit through thick and thin as the central hope for a more humane social order—as the core of the critique, in symbol and in action, of any and all social orders erected above peasants and workers by those who claim to serve their interests.

The reader will detect, correctly, a certain pessimism about the prospects for revolutionary change that will systematically and reliably respect the insistence on small decencies that are at the core of peasant or working-class consciousness. If the revolution cannot even deliver the petty amenities and minor humanities that animate the struggle of its subjects, then there is not much to be said for whatever else it may accomplish. This pessimism is, alas, not so much a prejudice as, I think, a realistic assessment of the fate of workers and peasants in most revolutionary states—a fate that makes melancholy reading when set against the revolutionary promise.[102] If revolution were a rare event before the creation of such states, it now seems all but foreclosed. All the more reason, then, to respect, if not celebrate, the weapons of the weak. All the more reason to see in the tenacity of self-preservation—in ridicule, in truculence, in irony, in petty acts of noncompliance, in foot dragging, in dissimulation, in resistant mutuality, in the disbelief in elite homilies, in the steady, grinding efforts to hold one's own against overwhelming odds—a spirit and practice that prevents the worst and promises something better.

101. Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), 59, emphasis in original.

102. To quote Orwell one last time: "For a left-wing party in power, its most serious antagonist is always its own past propaganda." Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, eds., *The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell*, vol. 1 (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1968), 515.

Appendix A • A Note on Village Population, 1967–1979

Despite the growth of Sedaka's population, the first point to note is that it has grown much less than the rate of natural increase would suggest. Had the rate of household formation kept pace with natural increase, there would have been something on the order of eighty-three households by 1979, nearly twice the actual increase. This finding is neither new nor surprising.[1] Population has been leaking away from the rice plain of Kedah for some time,[2] owing both to the extended boom in the national and urban economy and to the fact that, even with double-cropping, the prospects for the children of tenants and smallholders are hardly encouraging. Their departure has slowed the process of involution in the local economy but has hardly reversed it.

Aside from the departure of young people, which simply reduces the size of an existing household, there were fourteen households present in 1967 that are absent today. Six families simply died out.[3] Eight households left the village. Four of these bought paddy land elsewhere, renting or selling locally owned land in the process. All but one of these four families purchased land in Seberang Perak, one of the last "paddy frontier" areas where suitable land can be bought at reasonable prices and cleared for cultivation. This form of mobility required capital; one such family owned 10 relong in Sedaka, another owned 6 relong, and still another had rented in at least 15 relong. Only one household, which owned 2 relong, was anything less than a family of substance. The four remaining families had the good fortune to be accepted as settlers on government plantation schemes (*ranchangan*). Attracted by the assurance of high incomes, they left and in three cases were able to arrange for one or more of their brothers to be taken in as well. Again, these families were not by any means poor in the village context. One owned a shop and small rice mill, two others owned nearly 5 relong apiece, and the last owned only 1 relong but was said by villagers to have been fairly well-off. In fact, of the eleven individuals who applied successfuly for

1. This assumes, of course, that the average size of a household did not increase. Since all evidence indicates that household size, even in rural areas, has been declining, this is a safe assumption.

2. S. Jegatheesan, *Land Tenure in the Muda Irrigation Scheme*, MADA Monograph No. 29 (Alor Setar: MADA, 1976), 26, notes that the rural population in Muda grew at an annual rate of only 1.54 percent from 1957 to 1970, while the national rate of population increase was 3.1 percent for the same period.

3. In two of these cases the surviving widow or widower has moved to a nearby *pondok* in Yan. The *pondok* in this and many other cases is both a center for religious teaching and a kind of Islamic retirement home at which old people prepare themselves spiritually for death.