

La Belle France:
Brenner's *Other* and Wallerstein's World

Robert Brenner regarded England as the place where a capitalist breakthrough first occurred. For him this was the outcome of the class struggle between lords and peasants which took place in that country at the end of the Middle Ages. According to him, these conflicts saw the English landlord class gain control of the greater part of the arable land at the expense of the subsistence peasantry. Such landlord control made it possible for them to reorganize agriculture on the basis of large farms rented out on short term leases to enterprising farmers. The latter increasingly were able to exploit displaced peasants as wage labour and by systematic improvement initiate a process of capital accumulation which transformed the English economy.¹

According to Brenner, this breakthrough toward capitalism occurred uniquely in sixteenth century England. In developing this argument, the example of France is used as the foil or negative example to make the case. This is because France experienced the same upsurge of class struggle as England in the late Middle Ages with a quite different outcome. In the latter case, the peasants were able to keep control of roughly forty-five or fifty percent of the land as against only twenty or twenty five or thirty percent in England.² As a result of the greater share of property

1 Brenner's views are found in "The Origins of Capitalist Development: A Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism," New Left Review 104(1977), 25-92, "Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe" in The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe, ed. T.H. Aston and C.H.E. Philpin (Cambridge, London, 1985), pp. 10-63.

2 Brenner, , "Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development, p. 61

retained by the peasantry, no restructuring of agriculture along English lines was possible in France. Whatever tendency there was towards capitalism in sixteenth century France was aborted.

It is then the differing allocation of property and the contrasting relations of production which determined the divergent evolution of the two countries in the early modern period. In the eyes of Brenner France is seen as the counter-example to England's success in terms of the early development of capitalism. England is the normative example of capitalist origins. France is the *Other*.

Brenner offered his relations of production thesis as a critique of what he called the school of neo-Smithian economics. The latter-epigones of Adam Smith-saw the development of capitalism primarily as a result of the deepening of market relations both at the national and global level. According to Brenner, it is Immanuel Wallerstein's work which most recently extended this line of thought.³ In the view of Brenner this intellectual current stressing the importance of the market fundamentally misunderstood the origins of capitalism. Wallerstein, in particular, failed to appreciate the decisive importance of class struggle to the emergence of distinctively capitalist relations of production with their cumulatively higher productive capacity. This critique of course represented a reassertion of Marx's original critique of Smith and Ricardo. In fairness it should be pointed out that Wallerstein did, in fact, see the importance of the class

³ Wallerstein's views are found in The Modern World System: Volume I Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy (New York, 1974) and Volume II Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600-1750 (New York, 1980).

struggles of the late medieval ages to the end of feudalism.⁴ Moreover, Wallerstein further appreciated the view of the early modern state as the last defense line of feudalism.⁵ On the other hand, Brenner quite rightly pointed out that Wallerstein failed to appreciate the importance of such struggles to the actual emergence of capitalist relations of production in England. On the other hand, Brenner is wrong to assert that Wallerstein did not grasp the importance of such relations to the development of capitalist accumulation itself. He clearly understood the greater productivity inherent in such relations when it came to the development, for example, of capitalist agriculture in England.⁶ Indeed, the superior productivity of capitalist relations of production lies at the foundation of his sense of the superiority of the capitalist core of his so-called capitalist world-system.⁷

The case of France plays a critical part in Brenner's critique of Wallerstein. Whereas the latter sees France as part of world wide system of capitalist accumulation whose focal point is northwest Europe, Brenner insists that the origins of capitalist accumulation lie exclusively in England. It is important for him to prove that such a process did not occur across the Channel in France or anywhere else.

Brenner's treatment of France has been explicitly addressed by three of the contributions to the The Brenner Debate a volume devoted to discussing his thesis.⁸ Each

4 . To be sure Wallerstein did not see class struggle as the only factor. Cf. The Modern World System: , I, . 24, 37, 103-04.

5 Ibid. I, 157-58. _____

6 Ibid. I, 249-50

7 Ibid., I, 77

8 Patricia Croot and David Parker, "Agrarian Class Structure and the Development of Capitalism: France and England Compared" in The Brenner Debate, pp.79-90, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, "A Reply to

of the three critiques was at pains to correct what they considered Brenner's rather superficial understanding of the evolution of French and Continental agriculture. Emmaneul Le Roy Ladurie defended his neo-Malthusian approach to French history.⁹ Guy Bois complained about the lack of substance in Brenner's scholarship especially his failure to take the feudal mode of production- France being the perfect exemplar-seriously.¹⁰ Patricia Croot and David Parker's contribution noted that the situation of the French peasant was much worse than Brenner suggested.¹¹ But two critics Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie and Guy Bois have written about the faltering of late sixteenth century French capitalism.¹² Parker has gone so far as to reject the existence of an independent bourgeoisie in seventeenth century France.¹³ Consequently none disputed his conclusion that there was little basis for the blossoming of capitalism in France in the early modern period.¹⁴ It will be the contention of this paper to show that to the contrary there was a basis for the flowering of capitalism in the *Ancien Regime* and that, as Brenner has insisted, the foundation of such capitalism lay in class struggle. But it will be shown that Brenner has misconstrued the history of such struggle.

Robert Brenner," in *Ibid.*, pp. 101-07, Guy Bois, "Against the Neo-Malthusian Orthodoxy", in *Ibid.*, pp. 107-118.

⁹ Le Roy Ladurie, "A Reply to Robert Brenner," p. 102.

¹⁰ Bois, "Against the Neo-Malthusian Orthodoxy", pp. 114-15.

¹¹ Croot and Parker, "Agrarian Class Structure and the Development of Capitalism: France and England Compared", pp. 83-5.

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Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *1 Les paysans de Languedoc* 2 vols. (Paris, 1966). 1 Bois, Guy, *The Crisis of Feudalism: Economy and Society in Eastern Normandy 1300-1550* (Cambridge, 1984).

¹³ David Parker, David, *Class and State in Ancien Régime France : The Road to Modernity?* (London, New York, 1996).

¹⁴ Le Roy Ladurie, "A Reply to Robert Brenner, p.106 sagely remarks the agrarian capitalism of the Ile-de-France and Picardy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries ignored by Brenner.

Brenner's analysis of the agrarian roots of English capitalism provides the context for his subsequently published Merchants and Revolution a masterful analysis of the English Revolution.¹⁵ The capitalist transformation of agriculture set the stage for the overthrow of the power of the Stuart monarchy, aristocracy and the established church and the eventual triumph of constitutional government. But then the question arises what of the French Revolution? The traditional or Marxist view of that revolution was that, like the English Revolution, the French Revolution was a bourgeois and capitalist revolution. The Brenner thesis could suggest that given the non-capitalist evolution of France under the *Ancien Regime* such a bourgeois and capitalist revolution was on the face of it dubious. In a curious way, Brenner's view based in Marxism dove-tailed with a developing scholarly and political trend against the Marxist view of the French Revolution known as French Revolutionary revisionism.¹⁶ This historiographical current which became ascendant by the 1980s attacked the idea that the Revolution in France could be understood as a bourgeois and capitalist revolution. Among those who denied the capitalist basis of the Revolution was George Comninel a self-professed Marxist.¹⁷ According to him, the bourgeoisie in France prior to the Revolution did not base

¹⁵ Brenner, Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict and London's Overseas Traders, 1550-1653 (Princeton, 1993).

¹⁶ Cf. Michel Vovelle, 'Reflections on the Revisionist Interpretation of the French Revolution,' @ French Historical Studies 16:4(1990): 749-55.

themselves on profit but rather on rent. Moreover, wage workers were dependent not on their wages but on their own sources of subsistence.¹⁸ This view coincided with Brenner's notion of the ongoing hold of the French peasantry on the land. Indeed, it is probable that in assuming this viewpoint Comninel has been substantially influenced by Brenner.¹⁹

This notion of a non-capitalist France and indeed non-capitalist French Revolution flies in the face of the current historiography of eighteenth century agriculture. According to this body of historical scholarship, ¹ capitalist trends were general throughout most of rural France prior to the Revolution. It was in northern France in particular that a manifestly capitalist agriculture emerged prior to the Revolution. As part of this development, some nobles, urban bourgeoisie, and even clerical landowners turned to the direct exploitation of the land they owned using wage labor. But the most important form of capitalist enterprise was on the *grand ferme* or large farm. By the eighteenth century the capitalist *grande ferme* had become ubiquitous in the Paris region, Brie, Picardy, Maritime Flanders, Hainaut, Cambrais, Beauvaisis, Beauce, Orléanais, and in the north-east of Normandy. More often than not these larger holdings had been formed by the expulsion of small tenants and their replacement by enterprising farmers who paid a capitalist rent to a landlord.²⁰ In certain places social polarization reached an advanced stage. At Gonesse near

17 George Comninel, George, Rethinking the French Revolution: Marxism and the Revisionist Challenge. London, 1987.

18 Comninel, pp. 190-91, 200.

19 Comninel, pp. 160, 192,

20 Anatoli Ado, Paysans en révolution: terre, pouvoir et jacquerie, 1789-1794. Paris, 1996., p. 50.

Paris, for example, an area dominated by large farms, administrators noted that in their district there were only two classes, on the one hand farmers and proprietors and workers, day laborers, and teamsters on the other hand. Farms of 500 acres were not uncommon, and a few were more than 850 acres. Many of these holdings were still divided up into smaller parcels based on the open field system, but some were enclosed properties. At the time of the Revolution bitter social conflicts developed between such substantial farmers and the rest of the rural population..²¹

Eighteenth century demographic trends help to explain the emergence of this commercial agriculture. The century saw the expansion of the population from around twenty million to twenty-eight million. Especially marked was the disproportionate growth of the urban population that was completely dependent on the market for food. Increasing demand for food led to higher prices for land and grain. The nobility and urban bourgeoisie, who benefited from higher rents, developed an interest in expanding the level of profit from agricultural activity. The role of profit and from mid-century, of capital investment, grew in the rural economy as a result.²² In other words the

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Jean-Marc Moriceau, "Les gros fermiers en 1789; vice-rois de la plaine de France," in Les paysans et la révolution en pays de France: Actes du Colloué de Tremblay-lès-Gonesse 15-16 octobre 1988 (Paris, 1989), p.35. Social polarization in rural Artois and Flanders was comparable if not quite so extreme. Cf. Jean-Pierre Jessenne, "Rapporti di dipendenza, comunità di villaggio e 'cittoyenneté' nella Francia del Nord," in Rivoluzione Francese: La Forza delle Idee e La Forza delle Cose, ed. Haim Burstin (Milan, 1990), p. 145.

22 David R. Weir, "Les crises économiques et les origines de la révolution française," Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations 46:4(1991), 917.

expansion of the market played a role in the development of agricultural capitalism.

The common view has been that French agriculture lagged behind England's. At least some historians are now prepared to question this long-established consensus. Jean-Pierre Poussou, for example, argues that in the eighteenth century there were numerous regional examples of French agricultural improvement that were comparable to developments in England. Some of these changes entailed technical innovations and alterations in the existing system of agricultural production. In other cases such transformations reflect commercial rather than technical improvements. Yet Poussou argues that the latter innovations also deserve to be taken into account.²³ Gérard Béaur singles out the intensive agriculture of the Alsace region, the tree nurseries of the Ile-de-France, and the commercial cattle raising operations on the metairies or sharecrop holdings of the West as examples of significant innovation.²⁴ The Limousin, once thought of as remote, poor, and economically autarchical, has recently been shown to have rivalled Normandy as the prime source of beef cattle for the large Parisian market and as such, was completely integrated into the emerging national market.²⁵

23 Jean-Pierre Poussou, La terre et les paysans en France et en Grande-Bretagne au XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles (Condé-sur-Noireau, France, 1999).

24 Gérard Béaur, "L'histoire économique de la Révolution n'est pas terminée," in La Révolution française au carrefour des recherches, eds. Martine Lapiéd and Christine Peyrard. (Aix-en-Provence, France, 2003), pp.25-26.

25 Jean-Pierre Delhoume, "L'élevage bovin en Limousin au XVIIIe siècle: Des bouefs gras pour Paris," Histoire & Sociétés rurales 22:1(2002), 65-101.

Jean-Marc Moriceau argues that in the Ile-de-France and over much of the rest of the north of France genuine agricultural progress took place. Especially in regions close to cities that were affected by new agronomic ideas and by the growing availability of manure, productivity significantly increased in the second half of the eighteenth century.²⁶ He notes the almost universal extension of arable at the expense of waste and pasturage and the resulting disruption of the traditional agricultural equilibrium in the same period. He furthermore remarks on the suppression of fallow and the improved processing and storage of crops. The idea of introducing such agronomic improvements spread to the better-off peasants through the increasing influence of rural postmasters who often were themselves successful farmers.²⁷

The rich peasants who rented large farms favored a free market in grain. They organized production using their own tools and equipment. At the same time they employed a workforce paid in wages. The Physiocrat Anne Robert Jacques Turgot described them as “agricultural capitalist entrepreneurs.” Based on their operations, they derived a profit and as a result paid the landlords what amounted to a capitalist rent.²⁸ Indeed, the farmers of such enterprises had

26 Moriceau, “Au rendez-vous de la ‘révolution agricole’ dans la France du XVIIIe siècle: à propos des régions de grande culture,” Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations 49:1(1994), 32; Moriceau, Terres mouvantes: les campagnes françaises du féodalisme à la mondialisation XIIe-XIXe siècle (Paris, 2002), pp. 236-80.

27 Moriceau, “Au rendez-vous de la ‘révolution agricole,” 35-36, 38, 43-44, 45-46. Maurice Garden argues for a trend toward agricultural improvement and productivity gains extending from the eighteenth century through the Revolution to the Restoration. Cf. Garden, “Un procès: la ‘révolution agricole’ en France,” in Histoire économique et sociale du monde, ed. Pierre Léon, 4 vols..(Paris, 1978), vol 3., 311-37.

28 . Ado, Paysans en révolution, p.51.

to pay not only these rents, but usually also seigneurial dues, taxes, and tithes. But since their farms were on fertile lands that were close to good roads and towns, they were able to take advantage of high prices and to enjoy profitable returns. Yet they often enhanced their revenues by farming ecclesiastical tithes and seigneurial obligations. As such the income of such farmers were made up of both capitalist profits and feudal rents. They also earned money from taking interest on loans to poorer peasants. Through their business and social connections and their lifestyle, such farmers constituted part of the bourgeoisie alongside those of the middle class who lived in the surrounding bourgs and towns. Moriceau describes these wealthy farmers in the Ile-de-France as attaining the level of a kind of gentry in pre-revolutionary France. The sons of this group could aspire to a place in a college, entry to the law and even to the ideas of the Enlightenment.²⁹

In northern France this elite of wealthy farmers constituted a minority among the more numerous and broader group of prosperous peasant ploughsmen or labourers. On a lesser scale than the wealthy farmers, they, too, hired wage labor and loaned grain, plows, wagons, and money to their less well-off neighbors. As such, they too were part of a emergent class of rural capitalists. More generally we can say that the French countryside even in the south and west, saw a halting and tentative progress toward capitalist relations in agriculture. The eighteenth century even in these regions was marked by the timid emergence of a certain rural bourgeoisie, on the one hand,

²⁹ Moriceau, Les fermiers de l'Ile-de-France, pp.703-69; , Moriceau, "Les gros fermiers en 1789," pp. 46-47.

and of a category of wage-earning cottagers who clung to small peasant properties on the other hand. By the end of the century well-off peasants throughout the Kingdom who had enough land, wagons, tools, and livestock and who were able to hire labor constituted an emergent rural bourgeoisie. Within the framework of general countryside development of the capitalist system, small-scale peasant ownership and production thus constituted a wide base for the development of an agrarian bourgeoisie.³⁰ Summing up the flowering of capitalist agriculture at the end of the eighteenth century Moriceau characterizes it as follows: “ the mania for agriculture improvement accelerated a movement which already existed in connection with the diffusion of capitalism. This action transmitted by local agricultural societies, individual entrepreneurs and the government benefited from the increase of market exchanges and the improvement of networks of transportation..The penetration of commercial agriculture incited specialization and adaptations in the majority of regions.”³¹

It is evident that a stratum of capitalist farmers or rural bourgeoisie had emerged in the French countryside fully orientated to the pursuit of profit prior to the Revolution. Contrary to the view of Comminel of rural workers being able to live off their own subsistence, it seems evident that what drove these rural workers to work for wages was that they could not produce their own subsistence, lacking *sufficient* or any means of production. Not only were they forced to sell their labour power in the market, but they

30 Ado, Paysans en révolution, p.53.

31 Moriceau, Terres mouvantes, p.271

were compelled to buy the greater part of their subsistence there as well. Population growth and land expropriation had created a large population forced to sell their labour for subsistence. Downward pressure on wages marked the whole of the eighteenth century. According to Florence Gauthier, “the situation of the Kingdom reveals that not only did the towns need to be provisioned with grain to feed themselves but the countryside as well. The process of expropriation and impoverishment of the peasantry had reached the point where 80% of agriculturalists no longer had any or enough land to feed themselves. The peasants were accordingly required to buy all or part of their subsistence. They had to find wage work or complementary employment to gain a livelihood.”³²

In order to perpetuate this situation the Physiocrats emphasized the need to preserve the so-called minimum of wages, a form of economic coercion critical to maintaining a sufficient workforce available to employers in what was an emerging capitalist agriculture. The fact that some of the prerevolutionary workforce continued to resort to self-provisioning which Comninel makes much of does not signify that they were not dependent on wages. As Michael Perelman has pointed out, limited self-provisioning historically helped to raise the rate of surplus value by making it possible to keep wages at a minimum.³³ In the final analysis, it was success in extracting surplus value from workers rather than the unlimited character of market

32 Florence Gauthier, *Tribulations Ministérielles*, <http://revolution-francaise.net>

33 Michael Perelman, *The Invention of Capitalism: Classical Political Economy and the Secret History of Primitive Accumulation* (Durham, North Carolina and London, 2000), 92-123.

coercion upon them which determined the capitalist character of the most productive sectors of French agriculture.³⁴

If a capitalist agriculture existed in France prior to the Revolution the question becomes where did it come from? Clearly the expansion of the market in the eighteenth century has a great deal to do with it. But as Brenner has rightly insisted, it is changes in the relations of production based on class struggle which are critical to the development of capitalism. Peasants have to be transformed into workers who sell their labour power in the market. Unfortunately Brenner has failed to understand the nature of such transformations in France. At the conclusion of the volume devoted to his thesis Brenner replies to his critics reiterating among other claims that his view of France as a country in which small-scale peasant property predominated is essentially correct. In support of this view he triumphantly cites the by now classic Annaliste thesis of Jean Jacquart on the Ile-de-France.³⁵ After close to a century of urban development, growth of population, expansion of the market and inflation Brenner invokes Jacquart to assert that most of the soil was still in the hands of the small holding peasantry in 1550-60.³⁶ Brenner 304.

What Brenner fails to mention is Jacquart's view of the rural social differentiation which occurred in the subsequent decades of the sixteenth century. The second

34 Neil Davidson, "How Revolutionary Were the Bourgeois Revolutions: Four Critiques and a Reconstruction," Historical Materialism 13:3(2005), 20-21.

35 La crise rurale en Ile de France (Paris, 1974).

36 , "Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe", Brenner, The Brenner Debate, p. 204.

half of the sixteenth century was marked by the terrible religious wars and increasingly heavy royal taxation. The nobility and the bourgeoisie were the primary beneficiaries of these developments. But they profited at the expense of the largest part of the peasantry. Summing up the transfer of land from the mass of the peasantry to the rural and urban bourgeoisie on a national level which resulted from the burden of war and taxes, Jean Jacquart notes "that the great wave of appropriation of the soil by the bourgeoisie took place between 1530 and 1600. Afterwards there ensued a continuation and consolidation of a hold which has never since been brought into question despite political, economic and social revolutions."³⁷ It was the bourgeoisie who most benefited from the expropriation of part of the peasants' land, the appropriation of their property and its inclusion in the circuits of commercial exchange. At the end of this process the peasantry was left on average with fifty percent of the soil and in some places with as little as one-third.³⁸ According to Jacquart, "one can affirm that from the seventeenth century three-quarters of the French peasantry were not able to exploit enough land to reach let alone to approach what we today call the vital minimum".³⁹

The latter sixteenth century marked by the wars of religion saw not only a seigneurial reaction on the part of the nobility but an accompanying process of primitive accumulation to the benefit of the bourgeoisie both rural

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1 *Histoire de la France rurale*, Georges Duby and Armand Wallon, eds. Vol.II: *L'Age Classique: 1340-1789*, ed. Hugues Neveux, Jean Jacquart and Le Roy Ladurie(Paris, 1975), p. 274. Cf. Jacquart, "Les problèmes de la paysannerie française au temps de Henri III" in *Henri III et son temps* ed. Robert Sauzet(Paris, J. Vrin, 1992), pp. 282-3. Citing Jacquart J.P. Cooper pointed out this consolidation of landholding in "In Search of Agrarian Capitalism," *The Brenner Debate*, p. 171

38 *Histoire de la France rurale*, Georges Duby and Armand Wallon, eds, p. 275

39 *Paris et Ile-de-France aux temps des paysans* (Paris, 1990), p. 34.

and urban. The increased dependence of the expropriated peasantry on wages ensured the growing availability of abundant supplies of cheap labour for agricultural work. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, we can conclude, an agrarian capitalism had partially implanted itself on French soil. Especially was this the case in the vast grain lands of the Ile-de-France and the northern provinces of the Kingdom.

Brenner has placed the emphasis on the class struggle and the distribution of landholding as between landlords and peasants. He is certainly correct to stress the importance of class struggle in France and England. But he overestimates the durability of the victory of the French peasantry at the end of the Middle Ages. By the latter half of the sixteenth century most of this class was clearly placed on the defensive by both the nobility and the emerging bourgeoisie. In this context what proved structurally determinative was the redistribution of property among the commoners themselves at the expense of the lesser peasants and to the benefit of the bourgeoisie both urban and rural.

The stage was set for the development of rural capitalism in northern France. What delayed its flourishing in the seventeenth century was not so much the distribution of property holding as the weight of taxes and rent which weighed on profits. As Le Roy Ladurie points out, in Languedoc as in much of the rest of France, increases in rent were keyed to increases in state taxation as proprietors passed on tax increases to tenants.⁴⁰ Indeed, the decline of

⁴⁰ Le Roy Ladurie, *Les paysans de Languedoc*, I, 448).

profit and rise of rent must not be understood as merely the inexorable struggle of reified economic concepts- rent and profit. Rather, as Le Roy Ladurie narrative suggests, the economic antagonism between rent and profit should be seen as the metaphorical expression of the actual struggle to consolidate a political and social order which consolidated the rule of the absolute state and the nobility over the bourgeoisie and the rest of society. In other words, the seventeenth century was a period of seigneurial reaction or class war from above backed up by the overwhelming power of the absolute state. Brenner's stress on class struggle properly understood in the French context could not be more apropos.

As Le Roy Ladurie and others demonstrate rent as a result increasingly tended to dominate in the French countryside as the seventeenth century unfolded. But Le Roy Ladurie should not be misconstrued. The latter's comparison of the relative weight of rent and profit, in fact, is rightly premised on the ongoing existence of a class of profit-minded rural capitalists in seventeenth century France. The rural middle class, Le Roy Ladurie informs us, "...play an important role in the seventeenth century under Louis XIII and Mazarin".⁴¹ No doubt the great majority of French peasants were subsistence farmers or even farm labourers. Small in numbers, nonetheless, a capitalist element which had originated in the sixteenth century owned or more typically rented a large part of the available arable land which it exploited with the help of its own operating capital and wage labour⁴². Capitalist rent collected

41 *Ibid.*, I, 172).

42 Pierre Goubert, *Mazarin* (Paris, 1990), p.167

from profit-minded peasants, thus, constituted a substantial if indeterminately large element of the rural surplus throughout the period.

It is in the reign of Louis XIV that rent and taxes may be said to have overwhelmed profits as a result of a long drawn-out and sustained attack.⁴³ In the late seventeenth century the fortunes of the enterprising labourers and fermiers reached their nadir. High taxes and rents crushed their profits forcing many into bankruptcy. But some did survive. Among these were the so-called fermiers of the Ile-de-France studied by Jean-Marc Moriceau. His path-breaking work follows this class from the time it consolidated itself in the Ile-de-France in the late sixteenth century until it assumed power in the course of the French Revolution. In the course of this long trajectory, the latter part of the reign of Louis XIV was clearly the low point. Some members of this group succumbed. But its overall survival is what impresses.

Networks of family solidarity and the strict rationalization of farming and commercial operations made it possible for many of them to maintain their profits while preparing the way for the great prosperity and expansion of their power in the next century.⁴⁴ While one cannot register any real improvements in agricultural productivity during this bleak period, ongoing restructuring of operations made it possible to sustain profitability and await better times. It seems likely that the agricultural capitalism of the eighteenth century was rooted in a stratum of rural capitalists who had persevered as well in other regions of

43 Le Roy Ladurie, Les paysans de Languedoc, I, 585-92

44 Moriceau, Les fermiers de l'Ile-de-France, pp.611-23

France in the course of the seventeenth century.⁴⁵ 1. It was then the perdurance of this stratum of capitalist farmers in the French countryside and the explosion of the grain trade in the eighteenth century which accounts for the development of capitalist agriculture in France prior to the Revolution.

We have spent a lot of time examining Brenner's views which have attracted much attention. It is even assumed in many quarters that Brenner's stress on relations of production has placed Wallerstein and his neo-Smithian emphasis on markets in the shade. As a matter of fact Wallerstein's understanding of France is more deeply rooted in the scholarly literature and more balanced and carefully qualified than is Brenner's. Based on his exploration of the literature, Wallerstein in contrast to Brenner sees more similarities than differences between England and France.⁴⁶ Reflecting his stress on the play of the market, he notes that producers in both places had to deal with depressed grain prices in the critical period 1650-1750. In both cases farmers attempted to safeguard profit levels by lowering costs of production through higher efficiency.

Wallerstein's understanding of this process of economic rationalization is almost prescient in the light of the subsequent appearance of Moriceau's authoritative research on the Ile-de-France. Exports from northern France to the rest of the Kingdom paralleled the growth in English grain exports abroad. In both countries the rise of

45 Guy Lemarchand,, La fin du féodalisme dans le pays de Caux : conjoncture économique et démographique et structure sociale dans une région de grande culture de la crise du XVIIe siècle à la stabilisation de la révolution(1640-1795) (Paris,1989), pp.138-45, Ado, Les paysans en Revolution, pp.51, 53.

46 Wallerstein, The Modern World Ssystem, Vol II, 81-90

the prosperous tenant cereal-farmer at the expense of non-prosperous farmers is underlined. Wallerstein concludes that overall there was far less of a difference in the level of agro-industrial development between England and northern France in this period than is frequently asserted. Indeed, he specifically rejects Brenner's notion of the survival of the small peasant in northern France: "What, then, of the argument that Brenner puts forth...that it was 'the predominance of petty proprietorship in France in the early modern period which ensured long-term agricultural backwardness.' We have suggested our scepticism about both assumptions-the predominance of petty proprietorship(not true of northern France) and the agricultural backwardness of northern France relative to England(doubtfully true of northern France, at least up to 1750).⁴⁷ For good measure he dismisses the idea that there were real barriers to the concentration of land in northern France disputing Brenner's claim that the French peasantry were able on average to hold onto to 45 %-50% of the land. According to Wallerstein, Brenner fails to distinguish the lands of northern France from the notoriously small holding Midi.⁴⁸

This view of course accords with Wallerstein's overall view of a France divided between an increasingly capitalist north which is part of the Northwestern European capitalist core and a Midi which is part of a more backward European secondary zone. As part of his world-systems approach Wallerstein it turns out that has a much firmer

47 *Ibid.*, II, 89

48 *Ibid.*, II, 90

and more nuanced understanding of French agronomic realities than does the more parochial Brenner.

Indeed, Brenner's views on the origins of capitalism are even under question on his home turf. Jane Whittle's The Development of Agrarian Capitalism: Land and Labour in Norfolk 1440-1580 challenges Brenner's notion that short term leases by landlords helped to spark the engrossing of the land in England.⁴⁹ If we follow Brenner the result of such engrossing was the emergence of capitalist farms organized on the tripartite class division between landlord, tenant farmer and wage labourers. Whittle's evidence is based on a limited amount of evidence from Norfolk which would have to be extended to be conclusive. Nonetheless, she shows that landlord interference in the market for customary land was minimal in the period up to 1580. The value of rents to landlords fell in the fifteenth century and they were diminished further in the sixteenth century by inflation. Tenants not landlords benefited from rising land values and it was tenants not landlords who brought about engrossment. Far from the market being imposed upon peasants from above as Brenner would have it, the land market was integral to strategies of peasant acquisition and landholding.⁵⁰

In conclusion we can reiterate that Brenner's critique of the neo-Smithian view that capitalism simply grew out of the expansion and intensification of market relations is well-taken. Class conflict and changes in the relations of production were more important to the genesis of capitalism because they were more essential to the process

49 (Oxford, 2000).

50 Whittle, The Development of Agrarian Capitalism, pp. 307-8.

in England, but also in France as we have seen. Above all they were important because proletarianization was essential to the production of value including surplus value. But in reacting to what may have been an overemphasis on the market, Brenner it seems emphasized relations of production too much. The generation and realization of surplus value as profit requires the sale of labour power as a market commodity in the first instance and then the sale of commodities produced by labour power likewise in the market. The widening of the market is a precondition to the division of labour in production and the spurring of capital investment. Moreover, the process of capitalist accumulation including the assimilation of technological innovations into production is based on the competition of capitals in the market. In reality capitalist relations of production and market relations go hand-in-hand as a capitalist economy develops. The existence of separate capitals in the first place is premised on the existence of the market.

Brenner is perhaps right to have criticized Wallerstein for missing the importance of class struggle to the development of capitalism if not to the decline of feudalism. Wallerstein might also be faulted for not emphasizing enough the degree to which noble exploitation and the government of the *Ancien Regime* fettered the development of the French economy in the early modern period. On the other hand, Brenner wrongly criticized Wallerstein for under-estimating the importance of capitalist relations of production. Moreover, in our view Wallerstein's understanding of France including the

important role of market relations in that country is better than is Brenner's.