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Neo-Serfdom: Its Origin and Nature in East Central Europe

The freeing of the serfs occurred in Eastern Europe in the nineteenth century. Although it ended the personal subjection of the peasantry and abolished the feudal obligations of deliveries in kind and services, bringing to a close the feudal and clearing the way for the capitalist form of landholding, this transformation allowed the ex-feudal lords to retain those lands that they had administered themselves in the past by converting into peasant holdings only the so-called rustical lands that had previously been cultivated on their own account by the serfs. The demesne lands, which the feudal owners had managed themselves, were for the greater part cultivated by *robot* (*corvée*) labor, and to a lesser extent by those who worked for wages, although some parts were worked by landless peasants to whom they were rented out in exchange for a great variety of obligations. These people received no land when the serfs were freed.¹ The most serious socioeconomic problem of the capitalist century in Eastern Europe was the misery of the masses of landless peasants as well as of the small and dwarf holders who lived in the shadow of the large estates whose origin was feudal and on which they worked as wage laborers. For this reason it is quite understandable that the origin of the land-tenure system that followed the freeing of the serfs had to become, sooner or later, one of the focal points of historical research.

The question was first taken up by the historians of Germany, because there, within the borders of a state that had finally been unified after being sadly divided during the Middle Ages, one could find not only large estates

1. Emil Niederhauser, *A jobbágyfelszabadítás Kelet-Európában* [The Freeing of the Serfs in Eastern Europe] (Budapest, 1962), pp. 272–316.

Translator's note: The expression "rustical land" (*rusticalis föld*) used by the author describes the practice and system most often referred to in Western literature as *mans*, *mansus*, *Hufe*, *virgate*, or *yardland*. The German expressions *Gutsherrschaft* and *Grundherrschaft* have no English equivalents, but the literal translation of *Gut*, *Grund*, and *Herrschaft* renders their meaning into English very well. *Gutsherrschaft* means "mastery over the estate," and describes the lord's absolute dominance over everything connected with the estate, including the persons of the peasants. *Grundherrschaft*, meaning "mastery over the land" or landownership, refers to the more limited right of the lord to dispose freely of the land.—PETER F. SUGAR

of feudal origin in the northeast, but in the south and west also a landowning system consisting of small and medium holdings mainly in the hands of the peasantry. Those agrarian problems that stemmed from this “dualism” raised the question of their origin. The answer was given, in 1887, by Georg Friedrich Knapp, who stated that the duality of the agrarian structure originated in the two basic kinds of feudal estate ownership that had existed before the freeing of the serfs. According to Knapp’s still useful definition, one of them was the *Grundherrschaft*, the large feudal estate on which the owner was not a producer but earned his income from his peasants who had obligations in kind or cash. The second form of estate was the *Gutsherrschaft*, on which the lords’ lands, which they managed themselves, were worked with the help of forced labor and tools supplied without remuneration by dependent serfs—in other words, by *robot* labor.²

Because *Gutsherrschaft* took the land, labor, and tools from the peasantry, who had to be forced to make them available, it was clear to historians from the start of their research that *robot* production was closely linked to the personal subjection of these peasants and the limitations placed on their property and migration rights. Relying on the sources known at that time and on the studies based on them that were available to him, Friedrich Engels reached the conclusion that production based on *robot* labor, and the personal dependency of the peasantry that went with it, originated in the German lands after the middle of the fifteenth century, and that what had been the general rule previously was the peasant holding that required payments in kind or cash and left the peasantry the rights of inheritance and free movement (in other words, the feudal system that Knapp called *Grundherrschaft*). It is important to realize that earlier, before the thirteenth century, the great masses of the German peasantry lived under conditions of great dependence on the lords, practically on the level of slaves, as *Leibeigene* (“serfs”), the personal property of their masters. They could produce independently only on lands assigned to them on a temporary basis by the lords, and usually working with the help of tools supplied by their masters. Their major obligation consisted of their labor expended in cultivating the demesne. The deterioration of the better life that the peasantry enjoyed in the fifteenth century compared with this earlier *Leibeigenschaft* was labeled the “second edition of *Leibeigenschaft*” by Marx in a letter written to Engels at the end of 1882.

Since then the concepts of *Gutsherrschaft* and neo-serfdom (or “second serfdom”), signifying the economic and legal aspects of the same historical development, have become not only synonymous in historiography but also the subjects of a century-long and still unresolved debate. The problems dis-

2. G. F. Knapp, *Die Bauern-Befreiung und der Ursprung der Landarbeiter in den älteren Teilen Preussens* (Leipzig, 1887).

cussed are the following: what are the geographic and chronological limits of the phenomena to which these two concepts can be applied either separately or jointly; what is the causal relation between the two; and, finally, how does everything that can be subsumed under them fit into the historical development of the European continent? Research, and the debate that went hand in hand with it, produced a literature that fills a library. The relevant historiography can only be covered in passing, and given the limitations of this piece we must be satisfied with presenting in their most general outlines the latest arguments and the results that they have produced.

First of all, research has proved without any doubt that *Grundherrschaft* and *Gutsherrschaft* are basically "ideal types" (in Max Weber's phrase) or "models," to use a contemporary term. Neither of the two ever existed in "pure" form in history. Never did a given country or province have only one or the other type; nor did a given feudal estate ever use either payments in kind or cash or labor dues alone.³ On the borderline we occasionally find instances in which the lord completely ceased to produce on his own—and therefore labor dues disappeared—or the opposite, in which the independently working peasant household was missing and nothing but labor dues remained, but these extremes represent already a transition stage between feudal and capitalist agriculture. *Grundherrschaft* and *Gutsherrschaft* are only types of feudal production, and as models are valid only under feudal circumstances.

It follows from what has just been said that the only fact that can be established, for a given region or a feudal estate taken as a production unit, is the dominance of one of the two types. This is a problem of statistical data, and because we are dealing with a period that did not collect them, our findings lack the required quantitative exactness. Nevertheless, the long list of monographic studies dealing either with specific estates or well-defined specific regions permits the fairly exact drawing of the geographic and chronological limits of the extension of *Gutsherrschaft*, provided that an agreement can be reached on the economic characteristics of this type of holding, which produced under the lord's management with the help of *robot* labor.

The kind of *robot* labor that was not used directly on agricultural work must be excluded from the relevant criteria. *Robot* labor was used for transportation and the maintenance of buildings even where agrarian production was not under the lord's own management. Even if this limitation is accepted, the question must still be answered whether all lordly estates that used *robot* labor in agricultural production can be viewed as belonging to the *Gutsherrschaft* category, because, to a limited extent, this kind of labor was

3. Gerhard Heitz, *Agrarischer Dualismus, Eigentumverhältnisse, Preussischer Weg* (Rostock, 1970), pp. 2–3, makes this assertion in connection with Germany, but his remarks are also valid for all other lands that are included in the examination of the problem.

present practically everywhere in Europe during the entire feudal period, and thus represents a practically unbroken practice that was left over from the period of the "first serfdom." Apparently this is a quantitative question, and the relevant literature usually approaches it by focusing either on the number of required *robot* workdays or by comparing the size of demesne and rustical lands. In those places where, on the basis of other criteria, the existence of *Gutsherrschaft* can be established, we find a weekly one-to-three days (in theory limitless) of plowing-harvesting *robot* obligation,⁴ and this corresponds to placing between 15 and 50 percent of the arable land under the estate owner's direct management.⁵ The lower limit is extremely uncertain, because it would fit the pattern only if all *robot* labor was expended on agricultural production tasks—something that in most cases is very difficult or impossible to prove. It must be kept in mind that the sources available from the various countries differ so significantly that it is possible only in rare instances to find the common denominator and express in quantitative data the relation between the amount of demesne land worked by *robot* labor and the land and labor that remained available for rustical peasant production. Additional difficulties are created by the fact that research has been conducted according to different principles in several places, and in several given time periods. Consequently, differing quantitative and qualitative categories have been presented, and this makes comparisons impossible even when the approximative similarity of the available material would otherwise lend itself to this kind of treatment.

Although research on the expansion of *Gutsherrschaft* practically coin-

4. János Varga, *Jobbágyrendszer a magyarországi feudalizmus kései századaiban, 1556–1767* [The Serf System in the Late Centuries of Hungarian Feudalism, 1556–1767] (Budapest, 1969), pp. 541–44, established *robot* obligations (based on the available literature) of more than one day per week in the following lands during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: Mecklenburg, Brandenburg, Rügen, Poland, Hungary, Moravia; and in the seventeenth century only in the Czech Kingdom. A *robot* obligation of less than one day per week existed in Bavaria, Saxony, Anhalt, Upper and Lower Austria, and Styria.

5. Anton Špiesz, "Czechoslovakia's Place in the Agrarian Development of Middle and East Europe of Modern Times," *Studia Historica Slovaca*, 6 (1969): 22–25, quotes the relevant literature and estimates that in the German lands beyond the Elbe 20 to 50 percent of the land was demesne. László Makkai, *Rákoczi György birtokainak gazdasági iratai, 1632–1648* [Economic Documents of the Estates of György Rákoczi, 1632–1648] (Budapest, 1954), estimates (pp. 69–70) that the arable demesne land amounted to 15 to 30 percent of the rustical land on the estates located in various parts of Hungary. Leonid Żytkowicz, "The Peasant's Land and the Landlord's Farm in Poland from the 16th to the Middle of the 18th Century," *Journal of European Economic History* (Rome), 1972, p. 145, handles the question with caution, given the nature of Polish sources and the relevant literature, and states that the land of the lords did not produce as much as those of the peasantry (meaning that the former amounted to less than 50 percent of the total arable land).

cided with the detection of this phenomenon and its typology, the quantitative vagueness concerning its characteristics led not only to chronological differences regarding its discovery but also to disagreement about its dominant role in the total structure of agriculture. The earliest signs of the spread of *Gutsherrschaft* were first believed to have occurred in German or German-dominated territories along the Baltic coast, stretching from Schleswig-Holstein to Estonia. Poland and the lands of the Czech crown were soon added to these German territories.⁶ Only much later, and with certain reservations, was Hungary included; and even later, and with more stringent reservations, a few Austrian provinces were added to the list.⁷ When in 1928 the Polish historian Jan Rutkowski first attempted to apply the comparative method to the problem and showed that *Gutsherrschaft* was a universal historical phenomenon in East Central Europe, the geographic limits of its expansion became more or less established.⁸

6. Wilhelm von Brünneck, "Die Leibeigenschaft in Pommern," *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte*, 9 (1888): 104–52. C. J. Fuchs, *Der Untergang des Bauernstandes und das Aufkommen der Gutsherrschaften: Nach archivalischen Quellen aus Neu-Vorpommern und Rügen* (Strassburg, 1888). Friedrich Grossmann, "Über die gutsherrlich-bäuerlichen Rechtsverhältnisse in der Mark Brandenburg vom 16. bis 18. Jahrhundert," *Staats- und sozialwissenschaftliche Forschungen*, vol. 9 (Leipzig, 1890). Astaf Transehe-Roseneck, *Gutsherr und Bauer in Livland im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert* (Strassburg, 1890). Karl Grünberg, *Die Bauernbefreiung und die Auflösung des gutsherrlich-bäuerlichen Verhältnisses in Böhmen, Mähren und Schlesien*, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1893–94), vol. 2. Wilhelm von Brünneck, "Die Leibeigenschaft in Ostpreussen," *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte*, 8 (1887): 38–66. K. Rakowski, *Entstehung des Grossgrundbesitzes im XV. und XVI. Jahrhundert in Polen* (Posen, 1899). Günter Dessmann, *Geschichte der schlesischen Agrarverfassung* (Strassburg, 1904). H. Plehn, "Zur Geschichte der Agrarverfassung von Ost- und Westpreussen," *Forschungen zur brandenburgischen und preussischen Geschichte*, vol. 18 (1905). G. Aubin, *Zur Geschichte des gutsherrlich-bäuerlichen Verhältnisses in Ostpreussen von der Gründung des Ordensstaates bis zur Steinischen Reform* (Leipzig, 1910). J. Zierkusch, *Hundert Jahre schlesischer Agrargeschichte: Vom Hubertsburger Frieden bis zum Abschluss der Bauernbefreiung* (Breslau, 1915). J. Jessen, "Die Entstehung und Entwicklung der Gutswirtschaft in Schleswig-Holstein bis zum Beginn der Agrarreform," *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für schleswig-holsteinische Geschichte*, vol. 51 (1922). Heinz Maybaum, *Die Entstehung der Gutsherrschaft im nordwestlichen Mecklenburg* (Stuttgart, 1926). W. Stark, *Ursprung und Aufstieg des landwirtschaftlichen Grossbetriebs in den böhmischen Ländern* (Brünn, 1934).

7. Regarding Hungary see Alexander [Sándor] Domanovszky, "Zur Geschichte der Gutsherrschaft in Ungarn," *Wirtschaft und Kultur: Festschrift zum 70. Geburtstag von Alfons Dopsch* (Baden bei Wien and Leipzig, 1938), pp. 441–69, and Étienne [István] Szabó, "Les grands domaines en Hongrie au début des temps modernes," *Revue d'histoire comparée*, n.s., 5, no. 2 (1947): 167–92. And regarding Austria see Walther Fresacher, *Der Bauer in Kärnten*, 3 vols. (Klagenfurt, 1952–55), and Helmuth Feigl, *Die niederösterreichische Grundherrschaft vom ausgehenden Mittelalter bis zu den theresianisch-josephinischen Reformen* (Vienna, 1964).

8. Jan Rutkowski, "La genèse du régime de la corvée dans l'Europe Centrale depuis la fin du Moyen Age," in *La Pologne au VI^e Congrès International des Sciences His-*

The southern borders of the region in which *Gutsherrschaft* existed were never in doubt, because they coincide with the borders of the Ottoman Empire after these became fixed in the seventeenth century. The western border was drawn—and still is—along the line stretching from the Elbe and its source to the foothills of the eastern Alps. Nevertheless, this line is not as clearly defined as the southern border, because on both sides of the line we find strongly mixed *Grundherrschaft* and *Gutsherrschaft* regions. Furthermore, the difficulties stemming from the nature of the sources and the methodology used create uncertainties, and opinions differ when the question is raised when and where one of the two types dominated. The dispute centers mainly on Saxony and Upper Austria, even though, according to the data available so far, we see mainly the dominance of *Grundherrschaft* in these two regions.⁹

The opinion has also been advanced that this mixed region can be considered a transition area both quantitatively and qualitatively, and in fact represents a third type of landholding. Friedrich Lütge proposed the label “Central-German *Grundherrschaft*” to stress the transitory nature of this kind of ownership, and Alfred Hoffmann created the concept of *Wirtschaftsherrschaft* (roughly “management mastery”) to denote the existence of a kind of feudal economy in which the lord used relatively little *robot* for production but mainly exploited his monopolistic rights (tavern, mill, slaughterhouse, and so forth) and also engaged in commercial ventures on his own to increase his income. The attempt to create a transition economy resulted in a further attempt to assign to this type certain regions east of the Elbe whose inclusion in the *Gutsherrschaft*-dominated region had been questioned previously. First of all, this attempt was made in connection with the medieval Czech Kingdom (Bohemia-Moravia-Silesia), where the *robot* economy developed relatively late, in the second half of the seventeenth century, to a degree that influenced the entire agrarian structure. The existence of this kind of

toriques (Oslo, 1928). Since this article was published Polish historians have done more than anyone else in applying the comparative method to our problem. See, among others, Władysław Rusiński, “Hauptprobleme der Fronwirtschaft vom 16. bis 18. Jahrhundert in Polen und den Nachbarländern,” in *Papers of the First International Conference of Economic History . . . Stockholm* (The Hague, 1960). See also Leonid Żytkowicz, “Rozvoj zemědělství v českých zemích a v Polsku v XVI. a na počátku XVII. století,” *Československý časopis historický*, 14 (1966): 589–607. In this connection the beginning of Soviet interest in the subject is also important. See S. D. Skazkin, “Osnovnye problemy tak nazyvaemogo ‘vtorogo izdaniia krepostnichestva’ v Srednei i Vostochnoi Evrope,” *Voprosy istorii*, 1958, no. 2, pp. 96–119. The extensive Soviet literature dealing with the transition from feudalism to capitalism is ably surveyed by S. D. Skazkin et al., eds., *Teoreticheskie i istoriograficheskie problemy genezisa kapitalizma* (Moscow, 1969).

9. Friedrich Lütge, *Die mitteldeutsche Grundherrschaft* (Jena, 1934). Georg Grüll, *Die Robot in Oberösterreich* (Linz, 1952). Alfred Hoffmann, *Wirtschaftsgeschichte des Landes Oberösterreich* (Salzburg, 1952).

development had been established previously by a whole set of monographic studies, but, in the beginning, without questioning that these provinces belonged, in fact, to the region of *robot* economy.¹⁰ Recently the opinion has also been advanced that not only the entire Czech Kingdom but also Slovakia, then a part of the Hungarian Kingdom, properly belongs to the type of *Wirtschaftsherrschaft* economy.¹¹ The resulting very fruitful debate proved, first of all, that the position that favored the acceptance of *Wirtschaftsherrschaft* as a third type was untenable; thus it was impossible to deal with Slovakia without seeing it as an integral part of the agrarian conditions prevalent in the Hungarian Kingdom. The debate also proved that the lands belonging to the Czech and Hungarian crowns were the kind in which *Gutsherrschaft* was the prevailing tendency, although the magnitudes of its dominance were not identical.¹²

This same debate also proved that it was impossible to solve the problems of *Gutsherrschaft* and neo-serfdom separately or by attempting to subordinate the first to the second phenomenon. When research started, following the appearance of Knapp's study, legal aspects dominated the work that sought to find the basic cause for the appearance of *Gutsherrschaft* in the decline of the peasants' legal status, and especially in their diminishing rights to own land. It is unnecessary to refute the chauvinistic view, proved false repeatedly since it was first advanced, that neo-serfdom can be explained by the fact that on the lands in question the population was Slavic and therefore had a social mentality conducive to easier acceptance of servile status.¹³ The discussion of the problem today centers on the much more important and often advanced view that a given agricultural production unit or an entire territory can be considered to belong to the *Gutsherrschaft* type only if the criteria of neo-serfdom are present within its boundaries. This view was also advanced in the following categorical fashion during the debate mentioned above: "Irrespective of the size and importance of farming on big farms and the enforcing of corvée, the decisive question for the solution

10. Alois Mika, "Problém počátků nevolnictví v Čechách," *Československý časopis historický*, 5 (1957): 226-48; and *Poddaný lid v Čechách v první polovině 16. století* (Prague, 1960). František Matějka, *Feudální velkostatek a poddaný na Moravě s přihlédnutím k přílehlému území Slezska a Polska* (Prague, 1959). Josef Válka, *Hospodářská politika feudálního velkostatku na předběllohorské Moravě* (Prague, 1962). Josef Petráň, *Poddaný lid v Čechách na prahu třicetileté války* (Prague, 1964). J. Jirásek, "Moravský venkov před Bílou Horou," *Časopis Moravského musea*, 1964.

11. Spiesz, "Czechoslovakia's Place," p. 61.

12. See the special issue of *Historické štúdie*, vol. 17 (1972), entitled *Materiál z vedeckého sympózia o charaktere feudalizmu na Slovensku v 16.-18. storočí*, especially the contributions by Peter Ratkoš, Pavel Horváth, Josef Kočí, László Makkai, and Ivan Erceg.

13. Among others, Fuchs takes this position.

of our problem is not the quantity but the quality, i.e. the question what legal base had been used by the landowners to build up farming on their own accounts and to enforce *corvée* upon their serfs. . . . The local feudal lords were well aware of the fact that they must deprive their peasants of all rights and liberties and in the first place of the hereditary right of using the land. . . . The reduction of this right is the most characteristic feature of the second villeinage and all other features derive from it."¹⁴

The problem created by this view is not that those who hold it deny the existence of either *Gutsherrschaft* or neo-serfdom, or that they attempt to make the first a consequence of the second. What is involved, although it is not specifically stated, is a methodological assumption according to which *Gutsherrschaft* must be present wherever the criteria of neo-serfdom are clearly detectable. This assumption could not be fully dismissed if the qualitative criteria of neo-serfdom were not as difficult to define as those of *Gutsherrschaft* are.

Usually listed among the characteristics of neo-serfdom are the following: the erosion or total disappearance of the peasantry's right to own rustical land; the tying of the peasants to the land; and, sometimes, the forced service of peasants, in the sense that the lord acquired the right to use—for shorter or longer periods—the children of the serfs as domestic servants. Although our material does not cover to the same extent the entire region under consideration, and the critical methodology applied to it differs, we have a relatively rich collection of data referring to all three forms of loss of right and the dates when these were legally approved by legislation. The peasants' right to inherit rustical land was first taken away from them legally in Hungary (1514: *nullam hereditatem habet*), but without formally sanctioning the right of the lords to expropriate the holdings. The right to "buy up" the peasants' land or parts of it at an "estimated" price favoring the lords was enacted into law in Brandenburg in 1531, in Mecklenburg in 1572, and in Pomerania in 1616. This practice had existed, without legal sanction, in the sixteenth century in Schleswig-Holstein and in East Prussia. Also without formal legal authorization, the right to transfer the peasants from one holding to another or to deprive them of parts of their holdings was recognized as belonging to the Polish landowners.¹⁵ Even earlier examples exist of the peasantry being tied to the land or having their rights to migrate limited. Laws to this effect were enacted in the Czech lands in 1487, in Poland in 1495, in Hungary in 1514, in Prussia in 1526, in Silesia and in Brandenburg in 1528, in Upper Austria in 1539, and in Livonia in 1561, and

14. Špiesz, "Czechoslovakia's Place," p. 45.

15. Varga, *Jobbágyrendszer*, p. 551.

similar measures were taken as late as 1616 in Pomerania, 1617 in Schleswig-Holstein, and 1654 in Mecklenburg.¹⁶

The question to what extent the loss of migratory rights is connected with the introduction of the *robot* economy must be investigated separately for each region. For example, laws temporarily eliminating the right to change domicile were passed in Hungary in the second half of the fifteenth century, in tsarist Russia in 1479, and in the Rumanian Principality of Wallachia at the end of the sixteenth century, while the establishment of *Gutsherrschaft* dates in Hungary from approximately 1530, and in tsarist Russia and Wallachia only from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries respectively. For this reason we never count Russia and Wallachia among the states that fall within the original limits of either *Gutsherrschaft* or neo-serfdom,¹⁷ whose territorial limits therefore coincide with the eastern borders of the Hungarian and Polish kingdoms. In the three countries that abolished the peasantry's right of free movement early, we clearly deal with an attempt to bind to the land the inhabitants who were abandoning it to escape heavy taxation. The legislation is therefore a fiscal measure, and is not related to the problem complex of *Gutsherrschaft*. This warns us that the tying of the peasantry to the land cannot always be considered a criterion of neo-serfdom when attempts are made to link it to the emergence of *Gutsherrschaft*: Finally, the institution of domestic service existed in fact in Brandenburg (at least from 1527), Prussia, Pomerania, and Silesia, and after the middle of the seventeenth century in Mecklenburg and the Czech lands, but it was totally absent in Poland and Hungary. For this reason it cannot be considered a general characteristic of neo-serfdom.¹⁸

The realization that behind the loss of the peasantry's three privileges (free migration, peasant inheritance of land, and freedom from obligatory servant duties) lies the peasants' relation not to the land but to the landlord is more important than either the recognition that these legal limitations nowhere extended to all peasants or the usage of the three deprivations in the critical analysis of the criteria of neo-serfdom and their partial rejection. In his analysis of the massive documentation dealing with the Hungarian

16. Ibid., pp. 561–66, and Śpiesz, "Czechoslovakia's Place," pp. 22–25.

17. After the debate this view was adopted by most of the Soviet and Rumanian historians also. See, for example, L. V. Danilova, "K itogam izucheniia osnovnykh problem rannego i razvitoogo feodalizma v Rossii," in N. M. Druzhinin et al., eds., *Sovetskaia istoricheskaia nauka ot XX k XXI s'ezdu KPSS: Sbornik statei* (Moscow, 1962); V. I. Koretsky, "K istorii formirovaniia krepostnogo prava v Rossii," *Voprosy istorii*, 1964, no. 6, pp. 77–95; A. G. Mañkov, "K otázke 'druhého vydania' nevoľnictva v Rusku v 16.–17. storočí," in *Materiál z vedeckého sympózia (Historické štúdie, vol. 17)*, p. 103; Florin Constantiniu, *Relațiile agrare din Țara Românească în secolul al XVIII-lea* (Bucharest, 1972).

18. Varga, *Jobbágyrendszer*, p. 557.

serf system, supported by comparative data dealing with all of Eastern Europe, János Varga concludes that (in Hungary and East Central Europe in general) "the peasant is first of all simply a given person: he belongs to the landlord, and represents an accessory of a given estate only through the person of the lord."¹⁹ His relation to the land stands in the foreground, "because only through the use of a certain piece as real estate is he able to fulfill his duties of producing deliveries in kind."¹⁹ This is no less than an assertion that the essence of neo-serfdom is the dependence of the serf on the landlord, and that his relation to the land is only a function of this basic fact. This explains how the lords' right to dispose freely of the persons of the peasants could lead to the seemingly contradictory measures of depriving them of their land while tying them to it, to the duty of domestic servitude, and, in extreme cases, to the alienation of the person of that peasant who had already been separated from his land (this occurred mainly in Hungary and Poland, but also elsewhere).

This realization raises the question: when did the landlord get the right to dispose of the person of the peasant in an arbitrary manner? In seeking an answer one has to agree with those who claim that the abolition of the "first serfdom" in the late thirteenth century in East Central Europe and the rights of free migration and inheritance of rustical lands that accompanied it did not establish themselves firmly enough to resist the counter-currents that began to appear in the middle of the fifteenth century, which allowed the landlords limitless disposition of the peasants' persons once socio-economic developments made them wish to act in this manner.²⁰

This assertion does not mean that in the socioeconomic development of East Central Europe, in the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, the influences of *Grundherrschaft* were not without important consequences and that *Gutsherrschaft* in these lands was the direct continuation, without an interrupting hiatus, of the "first serfdom." Zsigmond Pál Pach showed more clearly than anyone else, using the example of Hungary, how the originally dominant obligations of payments in kind and labor were transformed by the end of the fifteenth century into cash payments, and how this trend was reversed, in the first half of the sixteenth century, and by the beginning of the seventeenth century had moved back to the dominance of labor obligations.²¹ This ap-

19. Ibid., p. 174.

20. Špiesz, "Czechoslovakia's Place," p. 14; Varga, *Jobbágyrendszer*, pp. 528, 536–38. For the special features of the "first serfdom" in Eastern Europe see László Makkai, "Les caractères originaux de l'histoire économique et sociale de l'Europe orientale pendant le Moyen Age," *Acta Historica* (Budapest), 16 (1970): 261–87.

21. Zsigmond Pál Pach, "Das Entwicklungsniveau der feudalen Agrarverhältnisse in Ungarn in der zweiten Hälfte des XV. Jahrhunderts," in *Études historiques*, 2 vols. (Budapest, 1960), 1:387–435; this work is also vol. 46 of *Studia Historica* (1960).

proach to the problem, by examining the development of the various kinds of obligations, released the research concerning the origins and development of *Gutsherrschaft* from the dead end it had reached by limiting itself to the quantitative analysis of *robot* labor and the existence of rustical holdings. There is no doubt that the development of these obligations can also be understood with the help of certain quantitative estimates, but when dealing with this problem the available sources are more reliable, and less doubt attaches itself to their evaluation. Most important, this method permits the discovery of general developmental trends. Using this approach it becomes evident that *Gutsherrschaft* and neo-serfdom represent two aspects of the same evolution in whose recognition the major help is supplied by the discovery of the basic trends and by the linking of criteria of separate and seemingly contradictory developments (loss of land and the tying to the land) to those of the basic issue. This is important, and not the application to the problem of dogmatically accepted characteristics. In Pach's works we also find most clearly expressed the assertion that although the trend toward the development of *Gutsherrschaft* is the earlier occurrence, neo-serfdom—that is, the development of class relationships (and not that of the legal system that only mirrors them)—is by no means simply a function of the development of *Gutsherrschaft* but an active history-making force reflected in the various forms taken by peasant resistance movements.

What, then, is the true nature of the common economic and societal developmental trends of *Gutsherrschaft* and neo-serfdom? We are dealing with a socioeconomic system covering East Central Europe whose essence is a feudal agrarian economy that prevents the free circulation of land and labor. More specifically, we are dealing with that variety of restrictive system just described, in which the demesne was worked with the tools and forced labor of peasants who were tied personally to the landlord but who continued to work rustical lands on their own account. Although in this system the demesne and rustical lands apparently became strictly separated, in fact they became closely tied together, because they were worked by the same labor force.²²

Zsigmond Pál Pach, *Die ungarische Agrarentwicklung im 16–17. Jahrhundert: Abbiegung vom westeuropäischen Entwicklungsgang*, vol. 54 of *Studia Historica* (Budapest, 1964).

22. The investigation into the structure of the *robot* economy and its theoretical analysis was carried out mainly by Polish historians. Some of the more important titles included in this extensive literature are Władysław Rusiński, "Drogi rozwojowe folwarku pańszczyźnianego," *Przegląd Historyczny*, 47 (1956): 617–55; Antoni Mączak, "Folwark pańszczyźniany a wieś w Prusach Królewskich w XVI–XVII wieku," *Przegląd Historyczny*, 47 (1956): 353–92; Andrzej Wyczański, *Studia nad folwarkiem szlacheckim w Polsce w latach 1500–1580* (Warsaw, 1960); Witold Kula, *Théorie économique du système féodal: Pour un modèle de l'économie polonaise, 16^e–18^e siècles* (Paris, 1970). Also the already cited Żytkowicz, "Peasant's Land," with its rich bibliography deserves men-

In one sense, the precondition for such a system is a primitive agrarian technology incapable of producing more grain (the basis for the alimentation of the population in those days) than about three to four times the amount of the seed sown, thus keeping the production of the peasantry at the self-sufficiency level as far as their own and the lords' needs were concerned. Higher yields occurred only in exceptional cases and by chance.²³ When the landlords began to demand higher than customary production, asking for amounts that surpassed the traditionally accepted ones, to cover the needs of their households (this is what happened beginning in the middle of the fifteenth century), these higher demands could only be met by forcing the peasants to perform additional labor duties. In applying this pressure the lords had to resort again to the almost forgotten right to dispose freely of the peasants' persons, and to revive the slowly disappearing custom of obligatory labor. In another sense, the landlords were helped in reasserting themselves by the sociopolitical fact that in East Central Europe the system of the "republic of the nobility" strongly limited the power of the central authorities, whose direct contact with the peasantry living under feudal dependence was completely cut off by the firm establishment of seigneurial jurisdiction.²⁴

Both aspects of the developmental process were the result of the relative weakness of the development of urbanization and the middle classes in the East Central European states. In the absence of a healthy home industry and commerce, the domestic market relationship between city and village did not develop systematically and strongly and thus failed to stimulate peasant production for the market and the improvement of agricultural techniques. The small development that occurred in this respect was sufficient to produce the beginnings of a trend toward dues paid in cash, but was far from important enough to satisfy the suddenly increasing needs and demands of the landlords for the payment of obligations in cash. For this reason the landlords could not turn to the alternative of having their demesne lands worked by wage labor. Given the rudimentary development of the money economy and the constraints of the feudal labor force, the interest

tion. Concerning Hungary see László Makkai, *Paraszti és majorsági mezőgazdasági termelés a XVII. században* [Peasant and Seigneurial Agrarian Production in the Seventeenth Century] (Budapest, 1957), which stresses the strong interrelationship between the demesne and rustical economies.

23. Leonid Żytkowicz, "Grain Yields in Poland, Bohemia, Hungary and Slovakia in the 16th to 18th Centuries," *Acta Poloniae Historica*, 24 (1971): 51–72.

24. Two studies are devoted to the comparative study of two similar economic-social-political systems: Marian Małowist, "Die Problematik der sozialwirtschaftlichen Geschichte Polens vom 15. bis zum 17. Jahrhundert," *Studia Historica*, vol. 53 (1963); and László Makkai, "Die Hauptzüge der wirtschaftlich-sozialen Entwicklung Ungarns im 15–17. Jahrhundert," in the same issue.

rate was much higher than the yield of demesne lands worked by expensive and hard-to-get wage labor. The income derived from what was produced on the demesne land was destined to cover the expenses of procuring for the landlords those goods that could only be bought for cash; and because the skills of local artisans were underdeveloped, these goods were mainly imported industrial products. To get them the lords could either resort to increasing the feudal dues or they could involve themselves directly in the commerce of agricultural production, in the first place in the export trade, given the weakness of the domestic market. In the Baltic lands this search for added income took the form of the direct involvement of the landlords in the grain trade, while elsewhere it mainly consisted of raking off the profits indirectly from the trade in goods produced on their lands and sold by the peasants (meat, cattle, wine, and so forth).²⁵

In the final analysis, the basic reason for the appearance of *Gutsherrschaft* and neo-serfdom was the change that took place in the market structure. Between 1450 and 1750 serious changes occurred in the European market's balance between supply and demand as well as in its magnitude. The prices of agricultural products, compared with their previous decline, were at first stabilized after 1450. Then after 1500 they began to go up rapidly, especially compared with the slower price increases of industrial goods. The resulting price "scissors" favored either those who disposed of marketable agricultural products or those who were not forced to buy them for cash. The price increase started in Western Europe probably because the agricultural sector operating with the traditional agrarian technology was unable to satisfy the demands of the population for food and industrial raw materials, especially when this dependent population was increasing because of both the higher rate of demographic growth and the steadily increasing number of those leaving the agrarian sector of the economy. This situation gave Eastern Europe the possibility of a large-scale agrarian export business based on the increase of imports of industrial goods from the West. This export trade could not be handled by an agricultural economy that operated mainly to satisfy its own needs without forcing *Gutsherrschaft* and neo-serfdom on the producers.²⁶

When this happened, the export trade of Western industrial goods to

25. Antoni Mączak, "Agricultural and Livestock Production in Poland: Internal and Foreign Markets," *Journal of European Economic History*, 1972, includes a bibliography on the problem. See László Makkai, "Der ungarische Viehhandel, 1550–1650," in *Der Aussehandel Ostmitteleuropas, 1450–1650* (Cologne and Vienna, 1971), and also the other articles in this volume.

26. The latest summary for Eastern Europe of the extensive literature dealing with the history of price movements is Vera Zimányi, "Mouvements des prix hongrois et l'évolution européenne (XVI^e–XVIII^e s.)," *Acta Historica*, 19 (1973): 305–33.

Eastern Europe already had a long tradition going back to the early Middle Ages, but during the fifteenth century both the nature and the volume of this export activity underwent significant changes. The appearance of commercial capitalists from Holland and England in the Baltic region and from south Germany in the lands of the Czechs, Poles, and Hungarians took the form, in part, of establishing local mining and textile enterprises, but concentrated in the main on the massive flooding of these markets by textile and metal goods for mass consumption while also maintaining the previous trade in luxury items.²⁷ To quote Pach's apt remark, "West European capitalism grew up on the East European market" before it turned to expansion overseas.²⁸

The influx of West European industrial goods had a double effect. On the one hand, it stimulated agricultural production and its robot-based production system; on the other, it retarded the local industrial development and consequently prolonged not only these agricultural practices but together with them the entire late-feudal sociopolitical order. During the great agricultural boom of the sixteenth century, industrial investment did not pay in Eastern Europe, while during the agricultural depression of the seventeenth century nothing was left that could have been invested. It was only during the new agricultural boom of the eighteenth century that the structure of the ossified socioeconomic conditions of East Central Europe began to crack, commencing a century-long development that transformed the system of *Gutsherrschaft* and neo-serfdom into a capitalist developmental pattern following the "Prussian model."

These explanations answer the questions dealing with the origin and chronological limits of *Gutsherrschaft* and neo-serfdom. The reader must be warned that the debate is still in progress as far as several related problems are concerned, and that for this reason the explanation presented is to some extent still a hypothesis.

27. The relevance of our problem for the Baltic states is to be studied in the pioneering works of Małowist and his school. See Marian Małowist, "Le commerce de la Baltique et le problème des luttes sociales en Pologne aux XV^e et XVI^e siècles," *La Pologne au X^e Congrès International des Sciences Historiques à Rome* (Warsaw, 1955); "The Economic and Social Development of the Baltic Countries from the Fifteenth to the Seventeenth Centuries," *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 12, no. 2 (December 1959): 177-89; and *Croissance et régression en Europe, XIV^e-XVII^e siècles* (Paris, 1972). The latter work is a collection of the relevant studies by the author. See also Benedykt Zientara, "Z zagadnień spornych tzw. 'wtórnego poddaństwa' w Europie Środkowej," *Przegląd Historyczny*, 47 (1956): 3-47. Concerning the expanding activities of South German merchants see László Makkai, "Die Entstehung der gesellschaftlichen Basis des Absolutismus in den Ländern der österreichischen Habsburger," *Études historiques*, vol. 1 (Budapest, 1960), pp. 627-68; this work is also vol. 43 of *Studia Historica* (1960).

28. Zsigmond Pál Pach, "The Shifting of International Trade Routes in the 15th-17th Centuries," *Acta Historica*, 14 (1968): 287-321.