

HOW MIGHTY THE JUNKERS? PEASANT RENTS AND SEIGNEURIAL PROFITS IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY BRANDENBURG*

The transformation of the feudal nobility of Brandenburg into masters of large-scale demesne farms geared to market production and worked by an enserfed peasantry figures in the historical literature as an axial event. The labours of the Junker landlords in the sixteenth century set the scene within which Prussian absolutism emerged in the seventeenth century. The alliance then struck between throne and manor house endured, with massive consequences, to the end of the First World War.

The Junkers celebrated their greatest sixteenth-century triumph in the economic realm. As the architects of the manorial-serf system, they secured for themselves solid and even rich incomes from the grain, wool and livestock trade. What accounts for their success? Historical scholarship, ideologically variegated though it is, answers with one voice: the Junkers worked their economic will with irresistible political force. Exercising fulsome powers of local jurisdiction, they imposed harsh labour services on their peasant subjects and so obtained free of charge the workers they needed on their widening domanial fields. Acting corporatively, as the mightiest estate of the realm, they compelled Brandenburg's princes to sanction in law the peasantry's enserfment and their own rights, at the towns' expense, of tax-exemption and untrammelled trade in the products of their manors.¹

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¹ In western Europe and the United States the most influential works are F. L. Carsten's formidable book, *The Origins of Prussia* (Oxford, 1954), and Hans Rosenberg's trenchant study, "Die Ausprägung der Junkerherrschaft in Brandenburg-Preussen, 1410-1618", *Machteliten und Wirtschaftskonjunkturen: Studien zur neueren deutschen Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (Göttingen, 1978), pp. 24-82. The German version of Rosenberg's argument supersedes his earlier essay, "The Rise of the Junkers in Brandenburg-Prussia, 1410-1653", *Amer. Hist. Rev.*, xlix (1943), pp. 1-22, 228-42. Still fundamental is Friedrich Grossman, *Über die gutsherrlich-bäuerlichen Rechtsverhältnisse in der Mark Brandenburg vom 16. bis 18. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig, 1890).

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Only the Junkers' most imperturbable apologists have failed to deplore the seigneurial revolution of the sixteenth century. There is especially broad agreement that the regime of the Junkers reduced the once free and sturdy Brandenburg peasantry to impoverished and gloomy passivity. Hans Rosenberg framed the charge most severely: the landlords gained their success at the cost of "the legal and social degradation, political emasculation, moral crippling, and destruction of the chances of self-determination of the subject peasantry".²

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Peter-Michael Hahn presents a good analysis in his *Struktur und Funktion des brandenburgischen Adels im 16. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1979), pp. 1-109. Hartmut Harnisch has ably charted the broad perspectives opened by extensive monographic research in the German Democratic Republic: see Hartmut Harnisch, "Die Gutsherrschaft in Brandenburg: Ergebnisse und Probleme", *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (1969), no. 4, pp. 117-47; Hartmut Harnisch, "Klassenkämpfe der Bauern in der Mark Brandenburg zwischen frühbürgerlicher Revolution und Dreissigjährigem Krieg", *Jahrbuch für Regionalgeschichte*, v (1975), pp. 142-72; Hartmut Harnisch, *Bauern – Feudaladel – Städteburgertum: Untersuchungen über die Zusammenhänge zwischen Feudalrente, bäuerlicher und gutsherrlicher Warenproduktion und den Ware-Geld-Beziehungen in der Magdeburger Börde und dem nordöstlichen Harzvorland von der frühbürgerlichen Revolution bis zum Dreissigjährigen Krieg* (Weimar, 1980), pp. 7-27 and *passim*.

Despite shifting interpretive accents, these works agree in stressing the explanatory pre-eminence of the nobility's coercive power over the peasantry. From them the vast general literature takes its cue, as in Otto Hintze, *Die Hohenzollern und Ihr Werk* (Berlin, 1916), chs. 2-4; Günter Vogler and Klaus Vetter, *Preussen: Von den Anfängen bis zur Reichsgründung* (Berlin, 1979), ch. 1; Wilhelm Abel, *Geschichte der deutschen Landwirtschaft* (Stuttgart, 1962), pp. 145-8; Friedrich Lutge, *Geschichte der deutschen Agrarverfassung* (Stuttgart, 1963), pp. 96-133; Günther Franz, *Geschichte des deutschen Bauernstandes* (Stuttgart, 1970), pp. 178 ff.; Hermann Kellenbenz, *Deutsche Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 2 vols. (Munich, 1977), i, pp. 232-40; M. M. Postan, "Economic Relations between Eastern and Western Europe", in Geoffrey Barraclough (ed.), *Eastern and Western Europe in the Middle Ages* (London, 1970), pp. 167-74; Jerome Blum, "The Rise of Serfdom in Eastern Europe", *Amer. Hist. Rev.*, lxii (1957), pp. 807-35; Harry A. Miskimin, *The Economy of Early Renaissance Europe, 1300-1460* (Cambridge, 1975), pp. 57-61; E. E. Rich and C. H. Wilson (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, v (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 113-23; Peter Kriedte, *Spätféudalismus und Handelskapital* (Göttingen, 1980), pp. 9-27, 39-44; Arcadius Kahan, "Notes on Serfdom in Western and Eastern Europe", *Jl. Econ. Hist.*, xxxiii (1973), pp. 86-99; Douglas C. North and Robert Paul Thomas, *The Rise of the Western World: A New Economic History* (Cambridge, 1973), p. 13; Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York, 1974), ch. 2; Robert Brenner, "The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism", *Past and Present*, no. 97 (Nov. 1982), pp. 66-76.

² Rosenberg, "Ausprägung der Junkerherrschaft", p. 82. See also Georg Friedrich Knapp, *Die Bauernbefreiung und der Ursprung der Landarbeiter in den älteren Theilen Preussens*, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1887), i, pp. 31-49, 67-80. For an indulgent view of the Junkers, see Gerd Heinrich, *Der Adel in Brandenburg-Preussen* (Darmstadt, 1965). East German historians have energetically pursued the question of peasant resistance to the landlords. In addition to Harnisch's works, cited above, see Helga Schultz, "Bäuerliche Klassenkämpfe zwischen frühbürgerlicher Revolution und Dreissigjährigem Krieg", *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* (1972), no. 2, pp. 156-73; Günter Vogler, "Probleme des bäuerlichen Klassenkampfes in der Mark Brandenburg

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Judging the Junkers' decisive weapon to have been extra-economic coercion, the historical literature aims to show how the landlords exploited their seigniorial authority (*Grundherrschaft*), upon which they based their ancient claims to peasant rents in cash and kind, to establish large-scale demesne farms employing servile labour (*Gutswirtschaft*). The problem is economic to the extent that the nobility's decision to undertake market production on their own account requires explanation. To this end, invocation of the European demographic recovery of the late fifteenth century and the expanded grain market of the following age of the "price revolution" suffices. But a sustained economic analysis of the relationship between manor and village in the transition from late medieval *Grundherrschaft* to sixteenth-century *Gutswirtschaft* remains to be written.

Historians of individual noble estates and families assume that the lords were masters of their own houses, in the economic as well as the political-jurisdictional sense. But since the manuscript sources are so patchy, it has so far been impossible to reconstruct clearly in any single case the emergence of the manorial-serf system at the grass-roots level. The question remains clouded in speculation, like an unsolved crime.³

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im spätféudalismus", *Acta Universitatis Carolinae: Studia historica* [Prague], xi (1974), pp. 75-94. But even as it brings to light considerable evidence of local conflict and friction between manor and village, this literature arrives at strongly pessimistic conclusions on the peasantry's ability to ward off domination and exploitation. For the theoretical context, see the essays by A. N. Cizozvonov and Gerhard Heitz in Gerhard Heitz et al., *Der Bauer im Klassenkampf* (Berlin, 1975), pp. 1-26, 513-25.

³ Hartmut Harnisch, "Zur Herausbildung und Funktionsweise von Gutswirtschaft und Gutsherrschaft", *Jahrbuch für Regionalgeschichte*, iv (1972), p. 179. Among local studies of Brandenburg estates, the best is Hartmut Harnisch, *Die Herrschaft Boitzenburg* (Weimar, 1968). The others, of varying quality, include the *Geschichte des Geschlechts v. Bredow: Herausgegeben im Auftrage der Geschlechtsgenossen*, 3 vols. (Halle, 1872-90), esp. i pt. 2; Christoph Freiherr Senfft von Pilsach, "Bäuerliche Wirtschaftsverhältnisse in einem neumärkischen Dorfe (Land Sternberg)", *Forschungen zur brandenburgischen und preussischen Geschichte* (1909), no. 2, pp. 127-71; Siegfried Passow, *Ein märkischer Rittersitz*, 2 vols. (Eberswalde, 1907); Carl Brinkmann, *Wustrau: Wirtschafts- und Verfassungsgeschichte eines brandenburgischen Ritterguts* (Leipzig, 1911); Gottfried Wentz, "Das Wirtschaftsleben des altmärkischen Klosters Diesdorf im ausgehenden Mittelalter" (Berlin Univ. Phil. Diss., 1922); Johannes Simon, "Kloster Heiligengrabe: Von der Gründung bis zur Einführung der Reformation, 1287-1549", *Jahrbuch für brandenburgische Kirchengeschichte*, xxiv (1929), pp. 3-136; Joachim Sack, *Die Herrschaft Stavenow* (Cologne and Graz, 1959); Günter Vogler, "Die Entwicklung der feudalen Arbeitsrente in Brandenburg vom 15. bis 18. Jahrhundert: Eine Analyse des kurmärkischen Domänenamts Badingen", *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (1966), no. 1, pp. 142-74; Gerhard Albrecht, "Die Gutsherrschaft Freyenstein" (Pädagogische Hochschule, Potsdam, Diss., 1968); Hahn, *Struktur und Funktion des brandenburgischen Adels* surveys other fragmentarily documented sixteenth-century estates.

This essay makes a start at a solution. It argues that however great the landlords' formal coercive powers and however weak the villagers' legal status, the measure of Junker gains and peasant losses during the sixteenth century lies in the movement of seigneurial rents levied on the peasant farm and in the actual profitability to the manor of servile labour. The general thesis advanced here is that the Junkers' plunge into extensive demesne farming in the sixteenth century embroiled them in a renegotiation of farm rents, which had fallen notably in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The peasants bowed to the imposition of heightened labour services, a rent increase the landlords gained only at the cost of freezing, or even lowering, the peasants' rents in cash and kind. Despite the assumptions of a century of historical scholarship preoccupied with questions of political power and legal rights, the villagers' unpaid labour at the manor neither crushed them economically nor spared the Junkers heavy operational expenses and wage bills. Yet these were the costs which the legislation of serfdom had aimed above all to shift on to the peasantry's shoulders.

This argument will not be carried beyond all dispute in the following pages. At the outset an interpretation will be offered of the high and late medieval rural economy in Brandenburg, buttressed by some new analysis of published but neglected sources. A discussion of the innovations of the sixteenth century will follow, anchored in a reading of previously unexplored manuscript sources. Though not without gaps, they illuminate more vividly and exactly than those upon which the historical literature now rests the emergence of Junker manorialism.

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In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, German warriors wrested Brandenburg from the hands of pagan Slavic princes and settled it with Christian peasant colonists. Historians agree that the villagers obtained ample farms on good legal terms: the typical full peasant (*Vollbauer*), of whom there were some fifteen to twenty-five in a village, held 2 hides, or *Hufen*, of arable land, or altogether about 32 hectares (80 acres), along with a share in the communal pastures and woods.⁴ He was a hereditary leaseholder, secure in his patrimony so

⁴ The best treatment of the once-controversial colonization question is Hans K. Schulze, "Die Besiedlung der Mark Brandenburg im hohen und späten Mittelalter", *Jahrbuch für die Geschichte Mittel- und Ostdeutschlands*, xxviii (1979), pp. 42-178. On the size of the *Hufe*, see *ibid.*, p. 132; Evamarie Engel and Benedykt Zientara, (cont. on p. 84)

long as he paid the charges upon it, evictable only after legal process, and free to sell out and quit the village if he chose. A class of cottagers (*Kossäten*) also arose during the colonization. They combined the yields of their small landholdings with earnings from seasonal labour or the income of an artisan trade. Their tenure too was hereditary and their personal status free.

The lords of the villages were knights, vassals of the margraves — later, electors — of Brandenburg or of the magnates (*Edelfreie*), whose participation in the conquest the margraves rewarded with a free hand in the seizure and colonization of broad stretches of territory. When they were not campaigning in the margraves' numerous wars, the knights lived in or alongside the villages. They collected modest rents and jurisdictional fees from the peasantry, but lived mainly from the fruits of the 4 to 6 *Hufen* they held in fief. This land, scattered among the peasant plots, represented the usual extent of noble demesne farming as late as the end of the thirteenth century. The knight, in Knapp's genial phrase, was the peasant's neighbour.⁵

A medieval idyll? So it appears in the historical literature, where the gauges of the peasant's material well-being are, first, his personal freedom and tenurial rights and, second, the feudal lords' minimal engagement in demesne farming. Reading the literature, one might suppose the peasant paid no rent worth mentioning. Yet that was not the case.

Hartmut Harnisch, the most knowledgeable present-day historian of the east Elbian manorial-serf system, writes that "the central problem of feudal society is feudal rent", or, "what is the same thing, feudal exploitation".⁶ No doubt medieval and early modern seigniorial lords collected rents from the peasantry without rendering anything equivalent in return.⁷ In Brandenburg neither the medieval feudal lords, nor (with certain exceptions) the Junkers after them, owned the peasants' holdings outright, so they cannot be considered landlords in the capitalist sense. Regarding this as a general characteristic of feudal

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Feudalstruktur, Lehnbürgertum und Fernhandel im spätmittelalterlichen Brandenburg (Weimar, 1967), p. 299. On medieval Brandenburg in general, see Herbert Helbig, *Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft in der Mark Brandenburg im Mittelalter* (Berlin, 1973).

⁵ Knapp, *Bauernbefreiung*, i, p. 31. On the *Edelfreie*, see Johannes Schulze, *Die Prignitz: Aus der Geschichte einer märkischen Landschaft* (Cologne and Graz, 1956), pp. 44 ff.

⁶ Hartmut Harnisch, *Bauern – Feudaladel – Städtebürgertum*, p. 7.

⁷ North and Thomas, like all theorists of "protective" patrimonialism, think otherwise. The iconoclastic neo-classicists find that the medieval peasants' selfishness compelled the nobility to enserv their wards so as to defend them: North and Thomas, *Rise of the Western World*, p. 30.

society, Marx argued that the seigneurs' extraction of feudal rent rested, not on contract or exchange, but on extra-economic coercion.⁸ Nevertheless, from the peasants' angle it was indisputable that tenure of the farm required payment of leasehold fees, taxes and tithes, which can be summed up under the heading of rent. Granting its fundamentally exploitative nature, it remains true that, from the moment of medieval colonization to the emancipation of the nineteenth century, rent varied according to the peasants' ability and willingness to pay. Market conditions, including the price of labour, shaped the movement of rents no less than seigniorial demands upon the peasantry. But neither a neo-classical analysis of ground rent, unmeasurable in the absence of a free market in land, nor the presumption of irresistible exploitative force can account for it.⁹

The earliest Brandenburg colonists' rents were low. For the lease they paid their lords a fixed yearly sum, called *Zins* (from *census*). It amounted typically to 2 schillings per hide of land, the equivalent of a few bushels of rye. In 1237 the margraves emerged victorious from a long struggle with the church over the tithe on crops. This, under the name of *Pacht* (*pactus*), the non-ecclesiastical peasants henceforth paid in kind to the prince. But the financially pressed margraves soon gave away or sold this income to their clamorous vassals, until its collection became a purely seigniorial right. The same fate awaited the princely tax (*Bede* or *precaria*), imposed irregularly until, in 1279-82, the nobility concluded treaties with their overlord instituting a yearly levy on the condition that their own fiefs, now effectively hereditary, gained perpetual tax-exemption. On peasant property the *Bede* was set at 10 per cent of the *Pacht* and *Zins*. These together were reckoned to amount, on the average, to 24 bushels of "hard grain" (rye or barley) per hide of land.¹⁰

At the end of the thirteenth century the rent, including taxes, burdening a typical full peasant holding of 2 *Hufen* thus stood at the equivalent of about 53 bushels of rye. What proportion of the net

⁸ *Das Kapital*, iii, ch. 47, esp. pp. 798-810, in *Marx-Engels Werke* (Berlin, 1976), xxxv.

⁹ See Wilhelm Abel's sensible remarks on ground rent and feudal rent in his *Agrarkrisen und Agrarkonjunktur: Eine Geschichte der Land- und Ernährungswirtschaft Mitteleuropas seit dem hohen Mittelalter*, 3rd edn. (Hamburg, 1978), pp. 18-21.

¹⁰ Eckhard Müller-Mertens, "Hufenbauern und Herrschaftsverhältnisse in Brandenburgischen Dörfern nach dem Landbuch Karls IV. von 1375", *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Humboldt-Universität Berlin*, i (1951/2), *Gesellschafts- und sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe*, Heft 1, pp. 35-76, esp. pp. 47 ff.; Helbig, *Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft*, pp. 10, 45; Schulze, "Besiedlung der Mark Brandenburg", p. 133.

farm product did this charge swallow up? The historical literature offers many ingenious, but divergent, estimates of peasant farm output. Common to them all is the tendency to assume an unvarying engagement in arable farming so that yields gained from evidence of one date are confidently projected forward and backward from it. But the Brandenburg peasantry varied the proportions of their land devoted to cereal crops and to pasturage according to the shifting trends of grain and livestock prices and the weight of rent and taxes on their shoulders. Fortunately, the *Hufe* in Brandenburg can be regarded as a landholding and practical farming unit of constant size throughout the centuries from the end of the colonization to the emancipation of the nineteenth century.¹¹ To compare peasant farm rents across time there is at present no better method than to reduce them to their equivalents in bushels of rye. The results can be contrasted with the farm's maximal capacity for grain production, recognizing that the peasant was not always interested in maintaining that level of output.

Exact surveys and appraisals of the quality of peasant farmland in Brandenburg were undertaken at the time of the nineteenth-century emancipation. In those villages continuously occupied since the high middle ages, a farm comprising 2 *Hufen* in Napoleon's day typically cultivated the same or equivalent lands in the year 1300. To take an example from a village in a region of Brandenburg that will figure largely in the argument below: a full peasant's holding in 1813 comprised 26 hectares planted in cereal crops and 6 hectares in pasturage, in addition to meadowland leased in perpetuity from the manor and the farm's shares of the village's common pastures and woods. Fallowing the 26 hectares every third year allowed a yearly sowing of 60 bushels of rye, barley and oats. The same farm in the year 1300 could have sown as much or more, though whether in fact it did is unknown. At the end of the eighteenth century the average seed-yield ratio on peasant land in Brandenburg was about 1:4. If, in the year 1300, the ratio stood more modestly at 1:3, the farm in question could have produced a surplus, after setting aside the next year's seed, of at least 120 bushels. Having paid rent and taxes at the

¹¹ Schulze, "Besiedlung der Mark Brandenburg", p. 132; Hans-Heinrich Müller, *Märkische Landwirtschaft vor den Agrarreformen von 1807* (Postdam, 1967), pp. 31 ff. Regional nuances existed and the number of *Hufen* attached to a given farm could vary. The bushel (*Scheffel*) seems also to have been a stable measurement, despite the chicaneries of millers. A bushel of rye weighed about 40 kg. Müller, *Märkische Landwirtschaft*, p. 203. Metrological questions are delicate. See Witold Kula, *Miary a hudsie* (Warsaw, 1970).

rate set in 1282, the peasant would have been left with 67 bushels. His family and farm servants (if any) needed to be fed, at an annual share of 6 bushels or more per adult, and his animals required some fodder in addition to pasturage. Part of the grain harvest remained to be sold, together perhaps with some livestock and other farm products. But it is evident that at the end of the thirteenth century his lord collected a fat share of his marketable farm surplus.¹²

Undoubtedly, farm rents rose in the thirteenth century. As the conquest of east Elbia drew to a close, the ambitions of the increasingly numerous Brandenburg nobility turned from the seizure of foreign lands to the extraction of higher profits from those they had already won. They stripped the margraves of their incomes and local jurisdiction. When the once-forceful line of Ascanian rulers died out in 1319, the high (*schlossgessener*) nobility plunged the land into an age of feuds and pillage that raged uncontrolled, except by the balance of power among the warring parties, down to the mid-fifteenth century and died out only in the sixteenth century.¹³ This storm of violence followed upon the failure of both the strategies by which, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the feudal lords had striven to improve their economic fortunes by peaceable means.

On the one hand they had greatly increased, at the margraves' expense, their income from peasant rents. But in their need for ready cash they mortgaged or even sold these rents, especially those paid in grain (*Pacht*), to urban merchants, who were eager for landed income and profits in the brisk grain trade of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. By 1375 the "feudal property" (*Lehnbesitz*) in peasant rents owned by Brandenburg townsmen, especially cloth merchants, amounted to annual payments of £2,674 sterling. This

¹² The exemplary farm was Joachim Buch's, in the village of Prenslin, in the Prignitz district of Brandenburg. Geheimes Staatsarchiv, West Berlin: Provinz Brandenburg, Rep. 37: Gutsherrschaft Stavenow (hereafter GStA, Stavenow), no. 441, fos. 13-14. On eighteenth-century farm yields, see Müller, *Märkische Landwirtschaft*, pp. 40 ff. On per capita cereal consumption, *ibid.*, p. 152; Abel, *Agrarkrisen und Agrarkonjunktur*, p. 50; Wilhelm Abel, *Die Wüstungen des ausgehenden Mittelalters* (Stuttgart, 1976), pp. 125 ff.; Otto Behre, *Geschichte der Statistik in Brandenburg-Preussen bis zur Gründung des Königlichen Statistischen Bureaus* (Berlin, 1905), pp. 224-7. On summing together rye, barley and oats, see n. 80 below. The peasant family in Brandenburg requires further study. In the eighteenth century the full peasant household typically included one set of grandparents, the working farmer and his wife and children, and, if required by the lack of mature children, a male and female farm servant.

¹³ Boleslaw Zientara, "Die Agrarkrise in der Uckermark im 14. Jahrhundert", in Engel and Zientara, *Feudalstruktur, Lehnbürgertum und Fernhandel*, pp. 377-86; Hintze, *Die Hohenzollern und Ihr Werk*, chs. 2-3.

sum exceeded by £1,000 the combined income in rents of the church and the nobility, and was thirteen times higher than the margraves' shrunken revenue from the villages.¹⁴ Among its other effects, this penetration of commercial capital into the countryside, which continued with vigour into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, impoverished many a noble family.¹⁵

On the other hand some among the lesser nobility had expanded their feudal grants of land into demesne farms, with the object of direct market production. The land survey of 1375 found that most of the 492 noble demesnes in Brandenburg comprised only the 4 to 6 *Hufen* typical of the original colonization grants. But seventy-four counted 10 *Hufen* or more.¹⁶ No doubt these enlarged demesnes arose in the thirteenth century, when they may well have been more numerous than in 1375. They must have depended in part on labour services imposed on the peasant farmers. Otherwise Margrave Ludwig the Elder would have had no occasion to decree, in 1324 and again in 1327, that "he who has high or low jurisdiction and labour services in this land shall not wrongly employ them to the ruin of his peasant subjects".¹⁷

It is true that the only surviving charter of the settlement of a Brandenburg village, from the late date of 1360, decreed that the full peasants would render their lords only three days of ploughing yearly, while the cottagers owed just three days of manual labour.¹⁸ Such minimal services, sufficing to cultivate the originally modest knights' fiefs, may well have been typical. Otherwise it must be assumed, improbably, that at the moment of colonization the lords agreed to maintain costly teams and farm servants to work their lands themselves. But when, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the lords purchased or usurped the margraves' local courts, they acquired the right to demand of the peasants now under their broadened authority the *servicium curruum* (*Wagendienst*), or obligation to serve with a wagon and team. The seigneurial courts henceforth transformed this liability, originally confined to the margrave's military service and

¹⁴ Engel and Zientara, *Feudalstruktur, Lehnbürgertum und Fernhandel*, p. 153.

¹⁵ Konrad Fritze, *Bürger und Bauern zur Hansezeit: Studien zu den Stadt-Land-Beziehung an der südwestlichen Ostseeküste vom 13. bis zum 16. Jahrhundert* (Weimar, 1976), *passim*; Helbig, *Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft*, pp. 177 ff., 151-4.

¹⁶ Müller-Mertens, "Hufenbauern und Herrschaftsverhältnisse", p. 71.

¹⁷ "We ock gherichte hogeste eder sideste und dhenest hevet in dhome lande, dhe scal sine undersaten mit dhome dheneste und gherichte to unrechte nicht verderven": text of 1324, cited *ibid.*, p. 47.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

construction of his roads and fortifications, into a claim on the full peasants' labour and teams in the operation of the lords' demesne farms. In contrast to whatever limited labour services the original colonization agreements may have stipulated, the *servicium curruum* knew no legal limits and so could be abused, as the decrees of 1324 and 1327 indicated. In practice the lords' interest in this service varied with the breadth of their demesnes, and whether the peasants would acquiesce in it was still another question. But the legal pretext for a considerable extension of labour services existed long before the sixteenth century.

By 1375 the economic appeal of noble demesne farming was waning. In the period 1375-1450 the land devoted to it in the Middle Mark, comprising most of Brandenburg, shrank by 4 per cent, although the massive desertion of peasant farms that occurred in these years would have easily permitted enlargement of the noble demesnes.¹⁹ But arable farming had grown unprofitable in the late medieval agricultural depression. Drastic population contraction sent cereal prices plunging. Labour grew scarce in the villages. A landlord who tried to squeeze higher rents or services from the surviving peasantry risked losing them to more lenient masters or to the towns. Some landlords turned to sheep farming, but the decline of the textile industries of the Brandenburg towns in the fifteenth century weakened local markets.²⁰ Livestock was also prime and vulnerable booty in the innumerable raids the feuding nobility launched upon each other's manors and villages.²¹

The demographic disasters of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were undoubtedly the immediate cause of the late medieval agrarian crisis, which in Brandenburg, as elsewhere in central Europe, set the stage for the triumph in the sixteenth century of the manorial-serf system. Because of the attrition of the full peasantry and drastic shrinkage in the ranks of the cottagers, many landlords of the late fifteenth century, especially those who had seized the deserted fields of whole villages (*wüste Feldmarken*), were rich in land but poor in working capital and labour to invest in them. When, in the late

¹⁹ F. L. Carsten, "The Origins of the Junkers", *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, cxxliii (1947), p. 153. In 157 villages surveyed in 1450, 29 per cent of the 6,667 peasant *Hufen* were deserted. In 117 villages for which data from 1450 and 1480 survive, the proportion of deserted farmland rose from 28 per cent to 33 per cent. *Ibid.*, pp. 152-3.

²⁰ Helbig, *Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft*, pp. 143 ff.

²¹ Peter Kriedte undertakes a sharp-eyed critique of the economic literature in his "Spätmittelalterliche Agrarkrise oder Krise des Feudalismus?", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, vii (1981), pp. 42-68.

fifteenth century, grain prices began their long secular upturn, the time was ripe for the landlords to shift the costs of expanded demesne farming on to the surviving peasantry by raising their labour services, performed not with the lords' but with the peasants' own teams and implements.

It has been suggested that sixteenth-century manorialism emerged "naturally", as the result of shifts in the land-labour ratio attributable to exogenous demographic factors, particularly epidemic disease.²² But in the case of Brandenburg it is probably more realistic to argue that feudal violence unleashed the demographic and economic regression presaging the emergence of the manorial-serf system. Basic research remains to underpin this assertion. Yet in the three decades before the Black Death struck, civil war among the nobility ravaged the villages, obliterating some of them forever. The population's strength in the face of the recurrent epidemics that followed depended not only on the density in relation to food supply that it had reached in the era of high medieval expansion. War, arising from the nobility's struggle against shrinking incomes, impoverished many among the peasantry and weakened their biological defences. War and plunder can alone explain the total desertion of many villages that had once cultivated soil of excellent quality. Much of this land, together with less fertile fields also abandoned in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, fell into the nobility's hands as a result of their warlike depredations upon the peasantry, and not because plague had emptied the villages and forced the landlords first to engross and later to cultivate the deserted fields as demesne land.²³

The sum of rent the nobility succeeded in extracting from the villages also bore on the peasantry's powers of resistance. Between 1282 and 1375 the landlords, having diverted the princely tax (*Bede*) into their coffers, raised it twice over or more.²⁴ But the margraves' frequent devaluations of the coinage, in effect a tax on cash transactions, offset these gains.²⁵ Moreover, good evidence shows that

²² Lütge, *Geschichte der deutschen Agrarverfassung*, pp. 102-23; Heinrich, *Der Adel in Brandenburg-Preussen*, pp. 273-8; Anneliese Krenzlin, "Das Wüstungsproblem im Lichte ostdeutscher Siedlungsforschung", *Zeitschrift für Agrargeschichte und Agrarsoziologie*, vii (1959), pp. 153-69; cf. Harnisch's discussion of the question, *Herrschaft Boitzenburg*, pp. 13-17.

²³ Zientara, "Agrarkrise in der Uckermark", pp. 325 ff.; on the deserted villages, see Abel, *Wüstungen des ausgehenden Mittelalters, passim*; Krenzlin, "Wüstungsproblem", *passim*.

²⁴ Müller-Mertens, "Hufenbauern und Herrschaftsverhältnisse", pp. 50-7.

²⁵ Karl Heinrich Schäfer, "Märkischer Geldkurs, Preise und Löhne in früheren Jahrhunderten", *Wichmann-Jahrbuch*, i (1930), pp. 74-7; Helbig, *Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft*, pp. 104-6.

between the onset of the plague in 1348 and the land survey of 1375 many landlords in the Teltow district of Brandenburg acquiesced in sizeable rent reductions, no doubt to head off peasant desertions.²⁶

In 1282 the normative farm rent throughout Brandenburg, including the tax, stood at the equivalent of 26.4 bushels of rye per hide of land. In 1375 the analogous figures were, in Brandenburg's Teltow, Barnim and Zauche districts, 18 bushels; in the Havelland, 24 bushels; in the Old Mark, 34 bushels; in the Uckermark, 36 bushels. Only in the last two regions of Brandenburg, more fertile than the others, did rents in 1375 exceed the late thirteenth-century norm, which had been set as an average for the whole of the margraviate. It seems fair to conclude that between 1282 and 1375 peasant rents not only did not rise, but in some cases fell distinctly.²⁷

In 1450, following the nobility's grant of a new princely tax on peasant households, a cataster (*Schossregister*) was drawn up. A sequel survives from the year 1480. Carsten compared these registers of the fifteenth century with the survey or *Landbuch* of 1375, tracing the desertion of peasant farms and fluctuations in noble demesne land. But these sources also define the movement of peasant rents during the long agrarian depression. While a full-scale analysis remains to be undertaken, interesting results emerge from a limited foray.

In the forty-one villages of the Havelland district surveyed in each of the three inquests of 1375, 1450 and 1480, the average rent per hide of land in 1375 was 30.4 bushels. These were villages cultivating the better soils, since farm rents, which certainly varied with the yields of agriculture, stood in 1375 among all the Havelland's ninety villages at an average of 24 bushels per hide. Seventy-five years later, rents in the forty-one villages had fallen by 29 per cent, to 21.6 bushels. Adding the newly restored princely tax to the peasants' burden raised the rent in 1450 to 25.2 bushels, still 17 per cent below its level in 1375. By lowering their peasants' rents, the lords, whether consciously or not, prevented desertion of the villages: in 1450 more peasant *Hufen* (1,086) were under cultivation than in 1375 (1,026).²⁸

²⁶ Helmut Assing, "Zur Entwicklung der bäuerlichen Abgaben in der Mark Brandenburg während des 14. Jahrhunderts", *Jahrbuch für Regionalgeschichte*, iv (1972), pp. 240-58.

²⁷ The 1375 rents are given in Engel and Zientara, *Feudalstruktur, Lehnbürgertum und Fernhandel*, p. 79.

²⁸ *Das Landbuch der Mark Brandenburg von 1375*, ed. Johannes Schultze (Berlin, 1940). The *Schossregister* of 1450 and 1480 were published as an appendix in *Kaiser Karl's IV. Landbuch der Mark Brandenburg*, ed. Ernst Fidicin (Berlin, 1856), pp. 255-336. In my calculations I have followed Schultze's edition of the Latin text of the *Landbuch*. The rents and taxes reported in these sources were payable in a variety of
(cont. on p. 92)

The decline of seigneurial rents in these forty-one villages outstripped the price fall of the period. According to Abel's series, both in Braunschweig, not far from Brandenburg, and on an average throughout Germany, rye sold, in constant terms, at 20–22 per cent less in the 1440s than in the 1370s.²⁹ Between 1450 and 1480 prices hovered around the level of the 1440s. Average rents in the forty-one villages also remained unchanged.³⁰

Clearly the profits of landlordism (*Grundherrschaft*) shrank notably during the depression. But the Havelland seigneurs could count themselves lucky: despite sporadic violence, unfavourable terms of trade with the towns, and the bite of princely taxation after 1450, the farmers in these villages stayed at the plough. Lower rents would have allowed the peasantry to increase household consumption, if not to earn more on the market. Many took short-term leases on deserted land in their neighbourhood and used it as pasturage. In the twenty-two villages among the forty-one in question where the cottagers were fully listed both in 1375 and 1480, their numbers declined by 43 per cent. Probably many had risen into the ranks of the full peasantry, either in their own or other villages.

Certainly the lords did not plague their villagers with increased labour services. In all forty-one villages, demesne land contracted from 306 *Hufen* in 1375 to 292 *Hufen* in 1450, and then rose only slightly to 320 *Hufen* in 1480.³¹ There was no tendency towards manorial farming on a larger scale. If in the operation of their manors the lords extracted at least some compulsory services from the full

(n. 28 cont.)

natural products and in cash. I have reduced all such rents to bushels of rye according to the conversion scale employed in the tax levies of the late middle ages (*Frustalrechnung*). On this subject, and contemporary monetary equivalencies, see A. Suhle, "Die Münzverhältnisse in der Mark Brandenburg im 14. Jahrhundert", published as an appendix to Schultze's edition of the *Landbuch*, pp. 462-9; L. Brehmer, "Ueber die im Landbuch vorkommenden älteren Münzen", in Fidicin's edition of the *Landbuch*, pp. 337-40; Schäfer, "Markischer Geldkurs, Preise, und Löhne", pp. 74-83. The names of the forty-one villages in question can be found by comparing Fidicin's index with Schultze's. The rents, reduced to bushels of rye, do not represent precise market values, since commodity prices varied continuously, while the *Frustalrechnung* converted natural rents into cash values (and vice versa) at a price per bushel set as a norm at the time of each survey. But since most rents in these Havelland villages were paid in deliveries of grain, the disparity, if any, between the rents surveyed and their market equivalents is negligible.

²⁹ Abel, *Agrarkrisen und Agrarkonjunktur*, appendix, table 2.

³⁰ Average rents per *Hufe* in 1480: before taxes, 21.7 bushels; including taxes, 25.3 bushels.

³¹ The average size of a demesne farm rose from 6 *Hufen* in 1375 to 7.3 *Hufen* in 1450, falling to 6.7 *Hufen* in 1480. Between 1375 and 1480 new demesnes appeared in six villages, while in seven others old demesnes disappeared.

peasants, such labour cannot have heavily influenced the level of rents in cash and kind. Both in 1375 and 1480 rents in villages with demesnes were considerably higher than in the purely peasant villages.³² This suggests that the lords located their manorial farms where land was relatively fertile, but did not demand so much labour from the peasantry that their rents in cash and kind suffered. Conversely, peasants in villages without manors, less exposed to the demand for labour services, paid lower rents than their opposite numbers because their farms yielded less. The highest rents typically flowed from those few villages with land rich enough to raise wheat.

Such were the fortunes of forty-one villages that survived the late medieval agrarian crisis intact. Despite the restoration of princely taxation, farm rents had fallen. The ranks of the cottagers, the prime suppliers of hired labour, had thinned. Demesne farming, though not inconsiderable in extent, had stagnated. It is likely that this pattern prevailed in the other Brandenburg villages that did not succumb to heavy or total desertion. Where desertion not assignable to war and feudal violence occurred, it is tempting to suppose that the lords' failure to lower rents was at fault.

Like their brethren elsewhere in Germany, the Brandenburg nobility found themselves, as a class, financially battered and tattered at the end of the long depression. Even where rent rolls were still full, shrunken yields aggravated the fissiparous tendency of seigneurial rent, driving many families into ruinous debt and others into "feudal gangsterism". Purchase or seizure at swordpoint of rents may have fattened inherited incomes and worked against noble impoverishment, but the division of estates among families with expensive tastes inexorably lightened their purses.³³ Escape from this vicious circle only became possible when, at the turn of the sixteenth century, the profits of agriculture began again to rise.

The landlords' response was to plunge then into large-scale demesne farming. They descended on the villages and raised their subjects' compulsory labour services until, by the beginning of the seventeenth century, the peasant farm commonly owed the manor house two or three days of weekly labour. These greatly increased labour services built, operated and quintessentially defined the Junker estates of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. To

³² Rent per *Hufe* in villages with demesnes fell from 1375 to 1480 from 35 to 25 bushels, in villages without demesnes from 24 to 18 bushels.

³³ In addition to Abel's works, cited above, see Peter Blickle, *The Revolution of 1525: The German Peasants' War from a New Perspective* (Baltimore, 1981), chs. 2, 4.

explain how in practice such rents were fastened upon and accepted by the peasantry is to supply the crucial term in the analysis of the rise of the manorial-serf economy. Yet at this point evidence becomes exceedingly scarce.

Among the Brandenburg estate records surviving from the period before the Thirty Years War, three collections throw strong light on the agrarian revolution of the sixteenth century. These documents refer to a complex of manors and villages in the possession of the von Quitzow lineage and located in the Prignitz district, in north-western Brandenburg. Between 1495 and 1515 inheritance settlements created several separate estates, among them Stavenow, Kletzke and Eldenburg. Examined together, these records, especially the Stavenow and Kletzke papers, show that in the sixteenth century, under circumstances that qualify as typical of most parts of Brandenburg and wide stretches of east Elbia, the peasantry submitted to heightened labour services on conditions that held the total burden of rent weighing upon their farms within tolerable limits. Conversely, despite formal success on provisioning their demesne farms with unpaid labour, the landlords at the beginning of the seventeenth century could neither extract from their subject peasants the work they considered their rightful due nor, in consequence, could they avoid high operational costs cutting sharply into manorial profits.³⁴

* * *

Magnate allies of the margraves of Brandenburg conquered and colonized the Prignitz in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. At the end of the thirteenth century it was secure in the mar-

³⁴ The archival location of the Stavenow *Gutsarchiv* is given in n. 12 above. The Kletzke papers consist of three detailed registers (1560, 1649 and 1707), copies of which are preserved in the Geheimes Staatsarchiv, West Berlin, under the signature: Provinz Brandenburg, Rep. 37: Gutsarchiv Kletze, no. 1 (hereafter GStA, Kletzke). The Eldenburg papers, also in the Geheimes Staatsarchiv, bear the signature: Provinz Brandenburg, Rep. 2A: Kurmärkische Kriegs- und Domänenkammer. Domänenregistratur: Amt Eldenburg (hereafter GStA, Eldenburg).

The Eldenburg papers, which will serve here to illuminate certain questions arising from the analysis of the Stavenow and Kletzke estates, have not hitherto been investigated. Kletzke has not received systematic study, but see Hahn's remarks in his *Struktur und Funktion des brandenburgischen Adels*, pp. 62-3, and R. Rudloff, "Die Quitzows", *Prignitzer Volksbücher*, boxvi-boxvii (1928). The Stavenow papers are very voluminous. Joachim Sack's dissertation, *Die Herrschaft Stavenow* (Cologne and Graz, 1959), is a compact and useful account of the ownership and organization of the estate. But it rests on an incomplete reading of the evidence, offers no systematic economic analysis, and paints the landlord-peasant relationship in unrealistically rosy colours.

graves' rule, but in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries it was the scene of protracted warfare against the dukes of Mecklenburg, into whose hands it repeatedly fell. The Prignitz grew notorious for the turbulence of its robber barons, chief among them the Quitzows, whose wide-ranging depredations and extortions ravaged the Brandenburg lands in the early fifteenth century.³⁵

In 1405 one branch of the Quitzows acquired Stavenow, an important and hard fought-over fortress, together with its appurtenant fields and villages. Kletzke, manor and village, had been a lesser Quitzow possession since 1376. The Quitzow lineage's Prignitz holdings fluctuated greatly in the fifteenth century, but in 1515 a family settlement established the shape of the Stavenow and Kletzke estates to the Thirty Years War and beyond. Stavenow, long since demilitarized, encompassed in whole or in part the fields of seven deserted villages, together with demesne land in a still occupied village. Its jurisdiction swayed, undivided or shared with neighbouring estates, over nine settled villages. Kletzke counted five fields, deserted and domanial, and peasant subjects in seventeen villages.³⁶

The Prignitz, like the rest of Brandenburg, was colonized by full peasants each farming 2 hides of land in hereditary leasehold. The rents they paid are difficult to chart, since the land survey of 1375 excluded the Prignitz, pawned at the time to Mecklenburg, while tax rolls from the fifteenth century have not survived. But in the years 1315-16 a hide of peasant land in two villages later in Stavenow's possession paid an annual rent of 24 bushels of rye, 2 schillings, and the (lesser) tithes on livestock. The levy in a nearby village was 20 bushels and 2 schillings.³⁷ These rents are close to the Brandenburg averages both of the years 1282 and 1375.

By the second half of the fifteenth century some Prignitz landlords were collecting farm rents in cash alone, probably because they had lost confidence in the grain market and preferred to let the peasantry bear the brunt of depressed prices. Between 1468 and 1489 Stavenow and Kletzke took in 15-27 schillings per *Hufe*. This translated, at average prices in the period 1460-90, into a very low rent of 5 to 8·5

³⁵ Johannes Schultze, *Die Prignitz*, pp. 103 ff.

³⁶ GStA, Stavenow, no. 707, fos. 1-5, 13-14; GStA, Kletzke, no. 1, pp. 8-51.

³⁷ *Codex diplomaticus Brandenburgensis*, ed. Adolph Friedrich Riedel, 41 vols. (Berlin, 1838-69), series A, vol. II (hereafter Riedel, A II), pp. 205-6. Riedel's fifty-one documents on Stavenow, spanning the years 1263-1548, supplement the estate archive.

bushels of rye.³⁸ Some late fifteenth-century rents paid in grain rather than cash were more profitable to the landlords. Such were the 12 bushels per hide delivered at Stavenow in the 1480s and 1490s by the farms of two village mayors, normally the most prosperous of peasant holdings. But the Quitzows collected other natural rents of only 6 bushels from each *Hufe*.³⁹

This evidence raises the possibility that, in the Prignitz, peasant rents fell even more precipitously from the fourteenth to the late fifteenth centuries than they did in the neighbouring Havelland. If, as has been claimed, the Prignitz suffered unusually severe depopulation in the late middle ages, a land-labour ratio shifting strongly in the peasants' favour may account for the movement here of rent, which was roughly paralleled by a sharp decline in the prices landlords fetched when they pawned or sold their seignorial incomes. In 1316 a rent of 24 bushels of rye was worth the equivalent of 1,064 grams of silver; between 1477 and 1485 the average value of four such transactions was, at 805 grams, 24 per cent lower.⁴⁰

At the end of the fifteenth century seigneurialism paid the lords of Stavenow and Kletzke a paltry return. Nor is there any evidence that demesne farming had fattened their wallets during the agrarian depression. In 1440 the Stavenow Quitzows purchased in three nearby villages, in the words of the contract of sale, "jurisdiction high and low, with the patronage of the church at Glövizin, labour services (*dinsten*) and all and every fee [and] rent".⁴¹ Here the lords' claims upon the peasantry to labour services are spelled out explicitly and independently of seignorial jurisdictional rights. Yet such services must have been still quite limited in scope. In 1468 the Kletzke Quitzows mortgaged to a group of burghers the rents, payable in cash, of 16.5 peasant *Hufen*. The sellers agreed that the buyers, if they wished, could have at no extra cost the peasants' labour services too. Meanwhile the Quitzows, who promised to protect the farmers of the mortgaged holdings, kept the services and jurisdiction in

³⁸ Rents: *ibid.*, pp. 226, 228, 230-1. Prices: Abel, *Agrarkrisen und Agrarkonjunktur*, appendix, table 2; Schäfer, "Märkischer Geldkurs, Preise, und Löhne", pp. 81-3. Currency values and conversions: *ibid.*, pp. 77-81; Wilhelm Jesse, *Der wendische Münzverein* (Braunschweig, 1967), pp. 208-19.

³⁹ GStA, Stavenow, no. 706, fo. 26; no. 101, fos. 2-5; no. 162, fos. 188-91.

⁴⁰ Rent in 1316: Riedel, A II, pp. 205-6, converted into the silver value in 1333 of the Brandenburg *Gewichsmark* following Schäfer, "Märkischer Geldkurs, Preise, und Löhne", pp. 74-5. Fifteenth-century rents: GStA, Stevanow, no. 697; no. 706, fo. 26; no. 698; no. 101, fos. 1-5. Conversion into silver values following Schäfer, "Märkischer Geldkurs, Preise, und Löhne", and Jesse, *Wendischer Münzverein*.

⁴¹ Riedel, A II, p. 225.

their own hands.⁴² Labour services so casually treated cannot have amounted to much.

At Stavenow, Hans von Quitzow mortgaged numerous properties in the 1470s, "because", as he complained, "of my great need".⁴³ But his son Claus, inheriting the estate at the nadir of its fortunes, struck back in a way that foreshadowed, if it did not inaugurate, the manorial revival of the sixteenth century. In 1482 Claus mortgaged the rents from three peasant farms to the same burgher to whom, four years previously, the hard-pressed Hans had sold some incomes. Unlike his father, Claus reserved for himself "alone and in particular the labour services of these farms and *Hufen*". He promised, in a clause that here made the first of many appearances, that he would "not burden the farms with improper field labours or fees" that would jeopardize payment of the mortgaged rents.⁴⁴

In 1483 Claus and his brother Reimann, pawning another income, promised they would "protect" the peasant farm's occupants and "not lay contributions on them" (*nicht beschatten*).⁴⁵ Two years later Claus mortgaged more of the same farm's dues, adding that he would not burden the peasant owner (*besitter*), "so that he cannot pay his rent but, if the farm is deserted, [the mortgagees] may lease it out to anyone of their choosing who can pay from it what is owed them".⁴⁶

This evidence suggests several conclusions. In the 1480s money-lenders began to fear that a movement among the landlords to raise peasant rents — whether in cash, kind or labour — threatened their investments. The scope of this movement remains unclear, but it coincided with the Brandenburg nobility's first effort, launched at an assembly with the elector Albrecht Achilles in 1484, to prevent peasant farmers from leaving their holdings without their lords' consent. The nobility also demanded wage controls on farm labour.⁴⁷ It is tempting to suppose that at Stavenow in the 1480s Claus von Quitzow, acting on an impulse animating many of his peers, fired the motor of demesne farming with the energy supplied by his subject farmers' labour services. The prospects of agriculture, after long

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 226.

⁴³ Quotation from *ibid.*, p. 227. See also pp. 228-9.

⁴⁴ "Ock schal yck Clawes von Qwitzow . . . de bewant der guder nicht beswaren myt unredelikem brakedinst edder bede": GStA, Stavenow, no. 706, fo. 26. The term *brakedinst* seems to refer more precisely to ploughing services. See K. Schiller and A. Lübben, *Mittelniederdeutsches Wörterbuch*, 6 vols. (Wiesbaden, 1969), i, p. 413.

⁴⁵ GStA, Stavenow, no. 698.

⁴⁶ GStA, Stavenow, no. 101, fos. 1-5.

⁴⁷ Grossman, *Über die gutsherrlich-bäuerlichen Rechtsverhältnisse*, pp. 11-12.

decades of depression, were again turning propitious. German rye prices in the 1480s stood 25 per cent higher than they had in the 1470s. At Hamburg they had risen 77 per cent.⁴⁸ At Stavenow the Quitzows in 1483 could pawn 12 bushels of grain-rent for 15 Rhenish gulden; in 1518 the same transaction (in the same village) yielded them, at 25 gulden, two-thirds more.⁴⁹

Claus von Quitzow probably did no more than reactivate on a larger scale the demesne farm on the open field (*Feldmark*) belonging directly to the manor house, once shared with the village of Stavenow but, since that village's total desertion, in the landlords' sole possession. Between 1495 and 1515 the estate's other domanial fields remained in part reforested and uncultivated and in part leased out to peasants as arable or pasture.⁵⁰ But in these twenty years the Quitzow lineage divided and regrouped its extensive possessions in the Prignitz so as to create compact estate-complexes, such as Stavenow and Kletzke, readied for efficient demesne farming conducted from the manorial seat.⁵¹ Stavenow in its original boundaries the Quitzows had held since 1405 as a pledge from the dukes of Mecklenburg, redeemable upon payment of the 6,000 Lübeck marks the dukes gained by pawning it.⁵² In 1495 the Quitzows decided to sue for possession of Stavenow as an hereditary fief. In 1508 the Mecklenburg courts ruled against them and in 1510 the ducal regime aggravated their defeat by squeezing 4,000 gulden from them merely to prolong their occupancy at Stavenow. Only in 1533, after paying the dukes another 3,000 gulden, did the Quitzows finally acquire a secure hereditary title to Stavenow.⁵³ Between 1510 and 1533 the Quitzows did not think 7,000 gulden too high a price although, correcting for devaluation, it amounted to 84 per cent of what their forebears had already once paid for the same property in 1405. The 7,000 gulden represented an entry-fee into the age of sixteenth-century manorialism, and a rough measure of the increased value of seigneurial property as that age began to dawn.

⁴⁸ Abel, *Agrarkrisen und Agrarkonjunktur*, appendix, table 2.

⁴⁹ GStA, Stavenow, no. 707, fo. 39; no. 102, fos. 2-5. The Rhenish gulden, the chief money of account in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Germany, sank in value between 1483 and 1518 by no more than 13 per cent. See Jesse, *Wendischer Münzverein*, p. 219. All gulden cited in the text below are Rhenish gulden.

⁵⁰ GStA, Stavenow, no. 105, fos. 1-3; no. 707, fos. 1, 129-30.

⁵¹ Sack, *Herrschaft Stavenow*, p. 22.

⁵² Riedel, A II, p. 222. At 1403 rates the dukes received the equivalent of 6,890 Rhenish gulden. See Jesse, *Wendischer Münzverein*, pp. 209, 214.

⁵³ Riedel, A II, pp. 233-6, 239-40; GStA, Stavenow, no. 707, fos. 17-22.

In 1515 the energetic Lütke von Quitzow took command of Stavenow. In the next four decades he hammered the rudimentary estate economy he had inherited into a profitable complex of demesne farms. His son Albrecht, also an ambitious landlord, succeeded him in 1556 and, in another span of forty years, raised the manorial economy to the pinnacle of its strength before the Thirty Years War. An appraisal of 1601 displayed Stavenow in a flourishing condition not again to be attained until the eighteenth century. Lütke and Albrecht brought most of the deserted manorial fields of 1515 under the plough. To these they added demesne land purchased from neighbouring noble houses. By 1601 the annual sowing of winter rye and summer barley and oats amounted to 1,847 bushels, equal to the productive capacity of 62 *Hufen* or about thirty-one full-peasant holdings such as the exemplary farm discussed earlier in this essay.⁵⁴ Stavenow's herds counted one thousand sheep and more than three hundred cattle, half of them milk cows producing butter and cheese for the market. The estate possessed ample pastures together with forests so large that their capitalized value overshadowed manorial grain production.⁵⁵

The Quitzows also drew handsome fees from three grist-mills under their jurisdiction, while in seven villages they could count as their own the rents of forty-eight full peasants and twenty-seven cottagers. In the seigneurial statutes it stood written that, apart from rents in cash and kind, the full peasants each week owed the manor three days of labour with a team of horses. Most of the cottagers worked three days weekly at manual labour, bluntly called serving "with the neck" (*mit dem Halse*), but some had to send a servant to the manor every day. Beyond this, in return for grazing rights on manorial land, eighty-nine "foreign" peasants, subjects of other landlords, owed the Quitzows a yearly total of 84 days of labour with teams and 274 days of manual labour.

The Table overleaf displays the components of the Stavenow fortune, including the value of the various forms of peasant rent.

⁵⁴ See n. 12 above. By this reckoning the Stavenow estate at the end of the sixteenth century was nine times larger than the average demesne farm in the Havelland at the end of the fifteenth century. See n. 31 above.

⁵⁵ GStA, Stavenow, no. 255, "Taxa undt Anschlagk der stauenowischen Lehn-güter", fos. 1-32. This appraisal of 1601 is reliably dated on the title page of no. 162. The Stavenow forests' high value derived partly from the herds of swine that they supported (not separately appraised). An inventory of 1584 judged that the forests could fatten 1,500 pigs, of which 200 to 300 were kept by the estate for consumption and sale, while the rest belonged to the villagers, who paid mastage fees to graze their pigs in the manorial woods. GStA, Stavenow, no. 704, fos. 134-6; no. 705, fos. 127-9.

TABLE
COMPOSITION OF THE CAPITALIZED (MARKET) VALUE
OF THE STAVENOW ESTATE 1601*

	Value in gulden	% of value
Manor house and demesne farm buildings	5,813	8.6
Income from forests	15,552	23.2
Demesne production		
Income from grain sales	12,104	18.0
Income from livestock	10,917	16.3
Income from fisheries and gardens	3,615	5.4
Rent of seigneurial mills	4,400	6.5
Income from seigneurial courts and jurisdictional fees	1,649	2.5
Income from peasant rents		
Fixed rents of Stavenow's subject farmers		
Labour services	8,454	12.6
Rents in grain	1,375	2.0
Rents in cash	864	1.3
Short-term rents of "foreign" peasants		
Labour services	1,609	2.4
Rents in grain	804	1.2
Total	67,156	100.0

* Source: Geheimes Staatsarchiv, West Berlin. Provinz Brandenburg, Rep. 37: Gutsherrschaft Stavenow, no. 255, fos. 1-32.

The Quitzows' turn to demesne farming had increased the value of the Stavenow estate at a pace far outstripping the progress of the "price revolution". Corrected for monetary depreciation, the price of rye, both at Stavenow, in Spandau near Berlin, and on an average throughout Germany, rose between 1515 and 1601 by a multiple of about 2.7.⁵⁶ By 1533 the Quitzows had, since 1405, paid rather more than 14,000 gulden to purchase Stavenow. In 1601 they assessed it for nearly five times as much, and in 1614 actually sold it, within the family circle, for that sum.⁵⁷

Undoubtedly the labour services of their subject peasants contributed mightily to the Quitzows' exemplary success. It was these

⁵⁶ Prices at Stavenow, 1515: GStA, Stavenow, no. 707, fo. 15; Spandau prices in Hahn, *Struktur und Funktion des brandenburgischen Adels*, pp. 343-8; German averages in Abel, *Agrarkrisen und Agrarkonjunktur*, appendix, table 2. For sixteenth-century currency values in Brandenburg, see Emil Bahrfeldt, *Das Münzwesen der Mark Brandenburg*, 3 vols. (Berlin, 1889-1913), ii, pp. 528-33.

⁵⁷ Apart from their payments in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries to the Mecklenburg dukes, the Quitzows rounded out the Stavenow estate by the purchase of adjacent properties. The cost of these minor acquisitions cannot be precisely determined, but seems not to have exceeded a few thousand gulden. On the sale of the estate in 1614, see GStA, Stavenow, no. 320, fos. 1-6.

peasants' compulsory and unpaid work (*Hofdienst*) that brought and kept the once-deserted manorial fields under the plough. Fixed labour rents, though comprising in 1601 only 12.6 per cent of Stavenow's market value, accounted in large measure for the estate's considerable income from demesne production, its most valuable asset.

How did the Quitzows impose these labours on their peasants? In 1515 Lütke von Quitzow and his brothers agreed, as they divided their inheritance, that "the people who from olden times have served with their teams at the manor will work there as before, and two will be reckoned as one full service with wagon or plough".⁵⁸ In 1594 Dietrich von Quitzow at Kletzke, preparing a lawsuit claiming his uncle Lütke had wrongly inherited more than his brothers, wrote of the agreement of 1515 on labour services:

The old people report that the farmers who served at the Stavenow manor in those days usually paired up, two to a team. That is why Lütke got so many more farmers and labour services. The same old people know very well whether the services were left as they had been. They say they had to work the whole week through at the manor, and deliver letters and make trips on Sunday.⁵⁹

Dietrich's assumption that labour services at Stavenow were lighter in 1515 than at other Quitzow manors cannot be tested. But if the old-timers' words that Dietrich reported were true, then Lütke confronted his new subjects with the demand for unlimited labour, for which the phrase "six days at the manor, letters on Sunday" was a bitter sixteenth-century synonym.⁶⁰

Between the 1520s and the 1540s Lütke rebuilt the Stavenow manor house, constructed two new demesne farms, built two new mills, moved a stream bed, and brought at least four new domanial fields under cultivation. He needed abundant wagons and ploughs, and it is unlikely that he hesitated to claim them from his own farmers when, at the same time, he was raising rents on seigneurial grazing land leased out to other landlords' subject peasants. In an agreement of 1543 Lütke confirmed one village's pasturage rights only on condition that each farmer supplement pre-existing cash rents with two days of ploughing each year.⁶¹ From fifty-eight other peasants he demanded, in addition to new cash payments, a surcharge on

⁵⁸ GStA, Stavenow, no. 707, fo. 14: "Die Lüde die von alders tho Hope gespannen scholen darbey blywen und sindt Twe vor einen Wagendienst oder Plug angeschlagen". Designation of labour services as *Wagendienst* illustrates their derivation from the original *servicium curruum*.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Friedrich Mager, *Geschichte des Bauerntums und der Bodenkultur im Lande Mecklenburg* (Berlin, 1955), chs. 4-6, esp. p. 105.

⁶¹ GStA, Stavenow, no. 707, fo. 18.

their grazing fees of four loaves of bread and eight eggs. Lütke “commanded a man from Sargleben, whose loaves were too small, to stay away” from the field.⁶² In 1584 each of the fifty-eight farms owed, in place of the money rent, four days yearly of labour service.⁶³

In the early sixteenth century most of the full peasants and cottagers figuring in the Quitzows’ transactions owed labour services alongside rents in cash or kind, but some services were “better” than others, a distinction implying that labour obligations possessed a more or less long-established quality.⁶⁴ But at Stavenow the evidence suggests that in his first decades of demesne farming Lütke von Quitzow sharply raised his claims on labour services, both for purposes of building and construction (*Baudienst*) and for bringing previously uncultivated land under the plough (*Pflugdienst*). Until the 1540s Lütke may well have refused to acknowledge any limits to his seigneurial demands, so that, intermittently at least, his bailiffs worked the peasants non-stop. But by 1549 he was content to fix his claim to labour services at three days weekly, except during the harvests, when more work was demanded, in varying degrees, from full peasants and cottagers alike. The miniscule village of Mesekow, inhabited by eight cottagers and a miller, presented an interesting exception. Completely reorganizing this old fishing community, Lütke enlarged the landholdings of the cottagers, who henceforth lived as small farmers. In return he claimed six days of weekly manual labour from each holding. Here is a clear case of the imposition of unlimited labour services, though gained at the price to the Quitzows of surrendering some farmland.⁶⁵

The sources are silent on the genesis of the agreement of 1549 establishing the weekly limit of three days of manorial service, which remained in force until the peasant emancipation of the early nineteenth century.⁶⁶ From Lütke von Quitzow’s point of view it was a

⁶² GStA, Stavenow, no. 704, fo. 16.

⁶³ GStA, Stavenow, no. 704, fo. 135.

⁶⁴ GStA, Stavenow, no. 162, fos. 188-91. See also no. 105, fos. 1-3, for the “equalization of labour services” agreed upon in an inheritance settlement of 1495.

⁶⁵ GStA, Stavenow, no. 704, fos. 13, 135; no. 131, “Dorf Mesekow”. After the Thirty Years War the Mesekowers succeeded in gaining, without any corresponding loss, a reduction in their labour obligation to three days weekly. See no. 282 (*anno* 1694), fo. 8.

⁶⁶ The text has vanished. It is mentioned in a survey of the Stavenow estate and its seigneurial rights written in 1649, in which the subject peasants’ labour obligations are confirmed by “old registers” of 1549 and 1584. Since the register of 1584 asserts the three-day rule, and the survey of 1649 treats the two sixteenth-century documents as complementary, it is fair to assume that the rule originated in 1549. GStA, Stavenow, (cont. on p. 103)

logical moment to regulate labour services, since in 1548 he had brought the third and last of his demesne farms into operation.⁶⁷ His subjects, especially the full peasants, could sue, as many village communes in Brandenburg did, for fixed labour obligations before the high court (*Kammergericht*) in Berlin.⁶⁸ But at nearby Kletzke the Quitzows rescheduled their subjects' labour services in the patrimonial courts.⁶⁹ In all likelihood it was no different at Stavenow. Although on later occasions the Stavenow peasants waged law suits against their landlords before the princely courts, there is no evidence they appealed against the terms formalized in 1549.⁷⁰ Perhaps they were too weak or dispirited to do so. There is no reason to think they regarded the new labour dues otherwise than as a burden heaped upon them by a grasping landlord. Yet the question remains: how heavy was the burden?

* * *

In 1560 the full peasants at Kletzke owed, for each hide of land in their possession, one day of weekly manorial service with a team of horses, so that the typical farm rendered two days of weekly labour. But some, in place of performing this work, paid a commutation fee instead, which varied between 30 and 40 Lübeck schillings per hide. Converting these commutation fees, together with the farmers' other rents in cash and kind, into their equivalents in bushels of rye provides an interesting example of how the introduction of weekly labour services affected the level of peasant farm rent.

In two Kletzke villages, where rents in 1560 comprised (commuted) manorial service and cash payments (*Zins*) but no deliveries in grain, total rents measured in rye, according to the average current price at Spandau, were very low: from 5 to 7 bushels per hide. In two other villages, where grain rents were levied and labour services actually performed, the total charge, reckoning the value of the services at 40

(n. 66 cont.)

no. 43 (anno 1649), fos. 45-6; register of 1584: no. 704, fos. 134-6 and no. 705, fos. 127-9.

⁶⁷ GStA, Stavenow, no. 707, fos. 26-31; no. 170, fos. 1-4; no. 696, fo. 1.

⁶⁸ Cf. Grossman, *Über die gutherrlich-bäuerlichen Rechtsverhältnisse*, chs. 2-3. For an extreme case of legal, and occasionally physical, conflict between lords and peasants in sixteenth-century Brandenburg, see *Geschichte des Geschlechts v. Bredow*, i pt. 2, pp. 174-268.

⁶⁹ GStA, Kletzke, no. 1, pp. 38, 48.

⁷⁰ GStA, Stavenow, no. 705 (circa 1614-20), fo. 157.

schillings per hide, was higher: from 16 to 17.5 bushels per hide.⁷¹ In one of these four villages the rent per hide in the year 1468 had been 27 schillings, together with indeterminate but minor labour services. Here in 1560 the Quitzows collected from each hide a fee of 40 schillings commuting the one day of weekly labour service, plus the old cash rent of 27 schillings. Taking depreciation of the Lübeck currency into account, the commutation fee represented roughly a 100 per cent rent increase since 1468. But converting the rents into rye equivalents at current prices shows that in 1468 the Quitzows could buy 6.6 bushels for 27 schillings, whereas in 1560 for 67 schillings they could get only 5.9 bushels. In this case the price inflation of the sixteenth century meant that the peasant in 1560 had to sell fewer bushels of rye to earn the cash to pay his rent than had his predecessor in 1468.⁷²

Not surprisingly, commutation in cash of labour services was unpopular among the sixteenth-century Junkers, who usually demanded real work instead. They did not press to raise their peasants' money rents, probably fearing income erosion through inflation and currency depreciation. At 27 schillings, the typical cash rent (*Hufenzins*) at Kletzke in 1560 remained unchanged from its late fifteenth-century level. Rents collected in grain grew increasingly valuable. But in the late medieval agrarian depression these had either been converted into cash payments or fixed at quantities lower, sometimes much lower, than the late thirteenth- and fourteenth-century levies. In the sixteenth century the landlords hesitated to increase rents in kind at the same time that they imposed the weekly labour obligation.

At Stavenow in the early seventeenth century the full peasants owed, in addition to their labour services, natural levies of between 6 and 9 bushels per hide or, alternatively, cash payments of about 13 schillings. If, as is highly probable, the usual cash rent paid by all the Quitzows' Prignitz full peasants had earlier been 27 schillings per hide, then the Stavenow farmers, though compelled to shoulder the heavier labour services of the sixteenth century, gained a notable reduction of their natural or cash rents. In one Stavenow village the rent in the 1480s amounted to 12 bushels per hide; in the early seventeenth century it stood at 9 bushels, of which 3 bushels seem

⁷¹ The villages in question were Reckenthin and Tüchen (lower rents) and Kletzke and Kunow (higher rents). GStA, Kletzke, no. 1, *Erbregister 1560*. Spandau prices in Hahn, *Struktur und Funktion des brandenburgischen Adels*, pp. 344-8.

⁷² Riedel, A II, p. 226. 1468 currency values following Jasse, *Wendischer Münzverein*, pp. 208-19; Abel, *Agrarkrisen und Agrarkonjunktur*, appendix, table 2.

to have represented payment for pasturage rights on seigneurial land, leaving the farm rent proper at 6 bushels plus labour services, which by then was the norm in the other Stavenow villages.⁷³ Here, clearly, natural rents fell during the sixteenth century by 25 per cent or even 50 per cent. Unless, improbably, the other full peasants at Stavenow paid late fifteenth-century rents much lower than their neighbours at Kletzke, their cash or natural rents also fell during the sixteenth century by half. Perhaps this was the price Lütke von Quitzow paid to gain his subjects' assent to three days of weekly service instead of the two days levied at Kletzke and many other Prignitz manors.

* * *

There is solid evidence that, faced with acquiescing in weekly labour services, peasants successfully bargained away part of their previous obligations. In 1588 Philipp von Quitzow, lord of the Eldenburg estate not far from Stavenow, traded four of his subjects, full peasants in the village of Deibow, to Hans von Blumenthal, master of the village and demesne farm at Deibow. In return Blumenthal gave Eldenburg four full peasants in the villages of Boberow and Milow. Philipp von Quitzow demanded of his new subjects heavier labour services than the Blumenthals had imposed. The peasants balked, whereupon Philipp von Quitzow began confiscating the grain rents, now payable to the Blumenthals, of his former subjects in Deibow. The Blumenthals, aggrieved at this raid upon their new incomes, sued Quitzow before the *Kammergericht*, finally winning a judgement that in 1603 forced him to pay the plaintiffs for their losses between 1588 and 1600. During its investigations the court heard the testimony of the four recalcitrant farmers. Such voices, hitherto silent in the historical literature, conjure up the tension between lords and peasants in the sixteenth century with laconic force. Ties Keibell, who farmed 3 hides in Boberow, had this to say:

[He reports] that his father belonged under Blumenthal, whom he served and to whom he paid his dues in grain. Originally his father performed no manorial services beyond one half-day of ploughing before each sowing. Later, when Blumenthal needed more labour to get ahead, they agreed to his request (*bitte*) that they should serve one half-day every week, except that when they didn't serve with horses they would work a whole day at manual labour, for which they were to be given food. They each gave 36 bushels of rye every year in return for the 3 hides of land.

Now [he serves,] like the Quitzows' other people in Boberow, two days each week

⁷³ GStA, Stavenow, no. 707, fo. 39; no. 101, fos. 1-5; no. 131, "Dorf Karstedt".

with the horses or three days with the neck. He gives 24 bushels, but he would rather stay with his previous manorial service and pay the full 36 bushels.⁷⁴

Keibell's fellow ex-Blumenthal subject, Menze Schultze, said he first served six half-days each year, then under Jacob von Blumenthal nine half-days, "until finally Hans von Blumenthal forced them to the point (*sie so weitt gezwunge*) that they had to serve one half-day weekly". Now that they work two full days weekly for the Quitzows "it is impossible for them to give more than 24 bushels", nor "are they willing or able to pay the arrears" occasioned by their refusal to pay the old rent in full.⁷⁵

Philipp von Quitzow's two new subjects in Milow took the opposite tack. They paid their previous rents of 40 bushels for 2 *Hufen* but refused heavier labour services. Drewes Jordan testified that Jacob von Blumenthal's subjects in Milow originally served him one half-day weekly. "But then he started court proceedings with them" (*Rechtfertigung mit ihnen angefangen*), so that they had to accept one full day's labour each week. It was "impossible" to work more than this for the Quitzows.⁷⁶ The two Milowers complained that the Quitzows' other subjects in the village, while working two days weekly at the manor, paid only 15 bushels in rent, 25 bushels fewer than they delivered. If their grain rents were not also reduced to 15 bushels, they would work no more than two half-days weekly, and then only if the manor gave them food in return.⁷⁷

For more than twelve years Philipp von Quitzow's four new subject farmers refused to meet his demands. He acknowledged that, as hereditary tenants of their holdings (*Erbleute*), they could not be dispossessed without cause. But after 1594 he tried, on his own seignorial authority, to evict Keibell, whom he thought to be the ringleader, for non-payment of rent. This effort failed when, in 1601, the *Kammergericht* asserted its jurisdiction in the conflict. In the end he struck a deal with the two farmers in Boberow. An inquest of 1668 revealed that before the Thirty Years War all farms of 3 *Hufen* paid 28 bushels in rent, 4 bushels more than Keibell and Schultze had wanted to pay, but 8 bushels fewer than Philipp von Quitzow had claimed. The outcome of the conflict in Milow is unknown, but the very powerful tendency toward equalization of the obligations of

⁷⁴ GStA, Eldenburg, Paket I, no. 17, fos. 44-5, undated (1590s).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, fos. 37-8.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, fo. 37. Jordan's partner in opposition, Claus Douel, concurred, adding that under Jacob von Blumenthal they had served two half-days weekly between Easter and Michaelmas and one full day weekly during the rest of the year: *ibid.*, fo. 44.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, fos. 1-3, 35.

farmers of the same class in any one village in all likelihood reduced the recalcitrant farmers' natural rents while increasing their manorial service.⁷⁸

* * *

Whether cash or natural farm rents stayed fixed at late fifteenth-century rates or whether the villagers' bargaining with their lords drove them down even lower, the fact remains that the peasants could not evade the Junkers' demands for heightened manorial service. As the appraisal of the Stavenow estate in 1601 makes clear, the value of the new labour obligations far outweighed the older forms of peasant dues. But it is more difficult to discover the economic cost to the peasant of the labour rent. The cottagers, who seldom paid any considerable cash or natural rents, typically lost the value of one household member's manual labour on two or three days of the week. At Stavenow this obligation did not spark any serious conflict in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For their part the full peasants could perform their labour services without having to keep more horses or servants than they required in the operation of their own farms, provided they worked at the manor no more than three days weekly.⁷⁹ They did not begrudge the manpower lost in manorial service so much as they resented (and resisted) abuse of their horsepower in its performance.

Where the full peasants' labour services were commuted into cash fees, the share of their income consumed by seigneurial rent can be roughly estimated. Such was the case in several villages under the jurisdiction of the Kletzke manor. It was shown earlier in this essay that total farm rent in the village of Kletzke, including the commuted value of labour services, amounted in 1560 to the equivalent of 17.5 bushels of rye per *Hufe*. According to an inventory of 1649, a hide of land in this village, assuming a minimal seed-yield ratio of 1:3, produced an annual net surplus of 74 bushels of rye, barley and oats.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, fos. 1, 33, 42, 103.

⁷⁹ Harnisch places the limit at two days weekly. Harnisch, *Bauern – Feudaladel – Städtebürgertum*, p. 190. After the Thirty Years War the landlords at Stavenow provisioned their repopulated and rebuilt villages with the livestock and equipment necessary to full peasant holdings obligated to three days of weekly manorial service. This *Hofwehr* included one team of four horses and beds for two adult farm servants. This shows that, in the landlords' view, work at the manor could be performed with the normal resources of a peasant farm. In practice the full peasants tended to keep more than four horses, if only for horsetrading. See GStA, Stavenow, no. 30, *Hausbuch* (anno 1727); no. 353, *Urbarium* (anno 1790), fos. 7-8.

The rent in 1560 thus represented 23·5 per cent of the farm's grain production. A farm of 2 *Hufen* would have disposed of a net surplus of 113 bushels, of which, according to conventional reckoning, the household consumed one-half and sold the rest. A farm delivering each year 50 bushels or more to the merchants, to say nothing of its other sales, certainly supported the household while paying some kind of profit, particularly since direct taxation of peasant production was not heavy before the Thirty Years War.⁸⁰

The profits of Junker manorialism were real enough, but it is hard to argue that they were gained at the cost of the ruin of the peasantry. In the course of the sixteenth century Brandenburg recovered fully from the demographic regression of the late middle ages. In 1624, just before the fires of the Thirty Years War engulfed the land, a census of the Middle Mark showed its 689 villages fully occupied. Of a total of more than 26,000 *Hufen*, the peasantry tilled 77 per cent, the clergy held 5 per cent, while the Junkers farmed 18 per cent.⁸¹ Carsten showed that demesne land in 291 villages increased between 1375 and 1624 by 71 per cent. Nevertheless in 1624 throughout the Middle Mark, 4 of every 5 *Hufen* belonged to a peasant farm.⁸²

* * *

At Stavenow the landlords did not delude themselves about the value of the labour obligations they had imposed on their peasants, nor in their estate operations did they trust themselves to rely exclusively

⁸⁰ See n. 71 above, and GStA, Kletzke, no. 1, p. 84. Barley and oats were usually less valuable on the market than rye. But the distortion this introduces into the computation in the text was probably offset in practice by the value of the other marketable products of the peasant farm, such as dried fruit, hops, flax and peas. In 1727 a full peasant in the Stavenow village of Premslin could escape the three days of weekly manorial service by paying a commutation fee (*Dienstgeld*) of 20 Thaler. This amounted, according to the price of rye upon which an estate appraisal of 1717 was based, to the equivalent of 18 bushels per *Hufe*. The Premslin farmers' only other rent by then was a grain levy (on 2 *Hufen*) of 3 bushels. Thus in this case total rent per *Hufe* was 19·5 bushels, not much more than the rent at Kletzke in 1560. GStA, Stavenow, no. 220 and no. 30. But direct taxes were much higher in the eighteenth than in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In 1711 a full peasant in the village of Premslin paid a yearly *Kontribution* equal to about 16 bushels of rye. In the early seventeenth century he would have paid a *Land- und Giebel-Schoss* amounting to about 4 bushels. GStA, Stavenow, no. 355 (*anno* 1711), fo. 5; Grossman, *Über die gutherrlich-bäuerlichen Rechtsverhältnisse*, p. 102.

⁸¹ Grossman, *Über die gutherrlich-bäuerlichen Rechtsverhältnisse*, table 9, p. 138. See also his brief remarks on the economic condition of the peasantry before the war, pp. 48-9.

⁸² Carsten, "Origins of the Junkers", p. 178.

upon compulsory manorial services. In the appraisal of 1601 the Quitzow brothers agreed that while the labour services of full peasants, “especially when they are not given food”, should normally be capitalized at 200 gulden, “it was not uncustomary hereabouts” to reduce the figure by one-third to 133 gulden. In an appraisal of the nearby estate and village of Rambow, drawn up in 1573, the Quitzows and Blumenthals had capitalized at 100 gulden the services of full peasants working each week one full day “with the neck” and only one half day with their horses, on which day they were given “something to eat”.⁸³ Thirty years later the Stavenow farmers’ three days of work with a team were worth not much more than the much lighter labours of the Rambow peasants.

The Quitzows in 1601 viewed quite differently the services performed for them by “foreign” peasants in exchange for grazing leases. Each day of such labour with a team they valued at 6 schillings. At Kletzke a master metal worker earned 8 schillings daily in the 1590s, an unskilled construction worker 3·3 schillings.⁸⁴ The Quitzows thus reckoned the “foreign” peasants’ labours roughly at their market value, while rating the compulsory services of their own farmers, assuming they actually worked three days weekly, at one-sixth of their market value. But it is likely that the three day limit was not strictly observed in practice.

The demesne farm at Stavenow maintained at its own expense twelve plough-oxen and two full-time ox-drivers, “so that everything can be well cultivated without the need for any other ploughs”.⁸⁵ At the demesne farm of Semlin, “the numerous [peasant] subjects” ensured its smooth operation, while at the Premslin manor the nineteen full peasants in the adjoining village “cultivated the farm easily” (*mit guten [sic] gemach*).⁸⁶ In 1584 the Junkers of Stavenow commanded the work of forty full peasants and twenty-three cottagers, together with the services of the “foreign” subjects and their own full-time manorial servants. A labour force of this size, if worked briskly, could probably have well met the Quitzows’ needs. Yet in the following seventeen years, in an apparent eagerness to secure more hands, they settled in their villages, on land they might otherwise, if

⁸³ GStA, Eldenburg, Paket 1, no. 20, fos. 19-23.

⁸⁴ GStA, Stavenow, no. 705, fo. 76.

⁸⁵ GStA, Stavenow, no. 43, fo. 40. Compulsory manorial service at this demesne farm was, accordingly, devoted to such tasks as harrowing, manuring, cartage and harvesting.

⁸⁶ GStA, Stavenow, no. 43, fos. 45, 55.

illegally, have absorbed into their demesne, eight more full peasants and four new cottagers.

Compulsory manorial service was notoriously slow-paced, so the Quitzows cannot reasonably have valued it as highly as free labour. But under the heading in the 1601 appraisal of “transports of grain, which the people make in addition to their regular manorial service”, the brothers agreed that “compelling reasons” prevented entry of what should have been an important asset, since the Brandenburg Junkers normally expected their peasants to haul the manorial surpluses to the river ports or urban markets for sale. At Stavenow either the peasants refused to perform this job or, as was their practice in the eighteenth century, agreed to make only one such haul annually, for which they were paid, if inadequately.⁸⁷

* * *

The Marxist historical literature conceives the classic Junker estate economy not as self-enclosed manorialism (*Eigenbetrieb*), in which the landlords farmed their fields with hired labour and their own equipment. Rather it regards it as a form of seigneurial market production (*Teilbetrieb*) in which, by means of extra-economic coercion, the landlords forced the peasantry to shoulder the cost of the

⁸⁷ GStA, Stavenow, no. 259, section 14; no. 353, fos. 21-2. Although the text below will offer some additional analysis of the Stavenow papers, the divergence between the argument advanced here and Sack's views can be briefly identified. Sack erred in estimating peasant farm output: Sack, *Herrschaft Stavenow*, pp. 74-5; cf. pp. 86-7 above and n. 12 above. He assumed that farm rents remained unchanged after the early fourteenth century until, in the sixteenth century, the Quitzows proposed to their peasant subjects an “exchange”. By “mutual agreement” a massive reduction in heavy natural rents was traded for acceptance of weekly labour services. Sack conceded this to be a hypothesis for which he could marshal no evidence: *ibid.*, pp. 87-8, 109. This precarious analysis, embellished with invocations of the reciprocal loyalty binding together manor and village in a connection governed by scrupulous legality rather than seigneurial compulsion, has not found acceptance in the historical literature. See Harnisch, “Gutsherrschaft in Brandenburg”, p. 134; Lütge, *Geschichte der deutschen Agrarverfassung*, pp. 102-23. The evidence discussed in the present essay supports the argument that the landlords unilaterally imposed the heightened labour services upon a peasantry who, although their rents had fallen in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, were decidedly hostile to the new obligation. Though they acquiesced in it, they also succeeded in some cases, by various forms of resistance to the landlords, in gaining reductions in pre-existing rents. On a broader front they managed to confine the new labour services within limits securing their subsistence and access to the market. Neither seigneurial patriarchy nor irresistible Junker despotism defined the relationship of lords and peasants.

labour, horsepower and tools necessary to demesne farming.⁸⁸ In this perspective peasant rent was a feudal levy whose weight reflected the power of the landlords as a social class to exploit the peasantry. Conversely, conservative and neo-classical analyses interpret peasant farm rents as payments for goods that the noble lords could legitimately proffer, notably physical protection, legal jurisdiction and the peasant farm itself. But in Brandenburg the princes granted the nobility income-bearing fiefs on condition they upheld and, later, administered the law in their bailiwicks, while the peasant colonists received their farms as hereditary leaseholds, a kind of feudal property. It was only because the nobility had, by purchase or usurpation, converted princely jurisdiction into an appurtenance of their hereditary fiefs that in the sixteenth century they could, as Jacob von Blumenthal's former subject put it, "start court proceedings" against the peasantry and force upon them sharp increases in their labour services.

If the Marxist concept of rent is the historically sounder, its application has nonetheless exaggerated the landlords' power to shift the costs of manorialism on to the peasantry's shoulders. In the light of the evidence marshalled above of the steep fall, previously unremarked in the historical literature, in Brandenburg farm rents in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the seigneurial counter-offensive of the sixteenth century could have surprised no one. Yet at the Quitzows' several Prignitz manors, as no doubt elsewhere in Brandenburg and east Elbia where the hereditability of peasant farms endured, the increase in farm rents in the form of heightened labour services entailed either a freeze or a reduction in pre-existing cash and grain rents. In practice the full peasants' labour obligations did not exhaust their teams and so undermine the productivity of their farms, whose profitability cannot have been unaffected by the great rise in agricultural prices. From the landlords' angle, their exploitation of the villages must have seemed imperfect if, as at Stavenow, they needed to maintain expensive teams of oxen and secure "foreign" labour by leasing out valuable grazing lands, besides paying, clothing and feeding twenty-seven steadily employed farm officials and workers. At the end of the sixteenth century this manorial work crew cost

⁸⁸ See, in addition to the works by Harnisch cited above, Gerhard Heitz, "Bauernwirtschaft und Junkerwirtschaft", *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (1964), nos. 2-3, pp. 80-8; Gerhard Heitz, "Zum Charakter der 'zweiten Leibeigenschaft'", *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* (1972), no. 1, pp. 24-39.

Stavenow about 470 gulden annually.⁸⁹ Capitalized at 5 per cent, this sum amounted to a debit of 9,400 gulden, a negative sum greater than the market value to the Quitzows of their peasant subjects' compulsory labour services, which in 1601 stood at 8,454 gulden.

Beyond this wage bill the Quitzows paid considerable sums to building contractors. For example, in 1560 Albrecht von Quitzow hired Phillipus Hase to build a moat around the Stavenow manor house. For this job Hase, who had his own workers to pay, received: one barrel of butter, one and a half barrels of cheese, 36 bushels of rye, a bushel of salt, twenty barrels of beer, 4 bushels of peas, four fattened sheep, 3 bushels of buckwheat, 1 bushel of wheat, two fat pigs, eight sides of bacon, one old cow, "his thin beer" (*Covent*), 12 bushels of turnips, and 310 gulden.⁹⁰

In assessing their properties for sale or division at inheritance, the Brandenburg Junkers customarily equated the marketable grain surplus with the average annual quantity of seed: for each bushel of seed sown, 1 bushel could be sold. If the Junkers expected average seed-yield ratios of 1:3, they were assuming that, setting aside next year's seed, the manor would consume one-third of each harvest in operating expenses, especially in payment of wages in kind to servants, tradesmen and threshers. But if that was the case, why did the Junkers invariably assign prices to the commercializable surplus far below current market prices, as when Stavenow's rye output in 1601 was valued at 8 schillings per bushel when the price of rye at Spandau and Stettin hovered between 18 and 21 schillings?⁹¹

No doubt the landlords feared both crop failures and falling prices

⁸⁹ I have estimated this sum on the basis of wage-rates and costs *in natura* reported in an undated late sixteenth-century document, doubtless the register of 1584 mentioned in the inventory of 1649: GStA, Stavenow, no. 704, fos. 134-6; no. 705, fos. 127-9. I have assigned low values to those items paid the workers *in natura* for which no corresponding prices in cash could be found. For a fuller discussion of the estate labourers, see my essay, "Working for the Junker: Real Wages of Manorial Servants in Brandenburg, 1584-1810", forthcoming in *Jl. Mod. Hist.* (1985).

⁹⁰ Summary of the contract of 1560, written in 1649 by the administrator of Stavenow, Johann Lindt, who found Hase's fee "much higher" than that which Lindt had recently paid for similar work repairing the damages of the Thirty Years War: GStA, Stavenow, no. 43, fo. 23.

⁹¹ Prices at Stettin in W. Naudé, *Die Getreidehandelspolitik und Kriegsmagazinveraltung Brandenburg-Preussens bis 1740. Acta Borussia: Die Getreidehandelspolitik*, 4 vols. (Berlin, 1896-1931), ii, p. 610. Prices at Spandau in Hahn, *Struktur und Funktion des brandenburgischen Adels*, p. 346. The peculiarity of sixteenth-century estate appraisals remarked upon here puzzled Hahn: *ibid.*, ch. 3. Finding the practice inexplicable, he corrected the appraisals by reckoning the income from grain production according to current market prices.

at times of bountiful harvests. But evidence from the eighteenth century shows that internal production costs, including the consumption of the landlord's own household, instead of comprising a sum equal to the seed grain, could account for as much as "one and a half kernals" or, reckoning on average seed-yield ratios of 1:3, half of each harvest. In this case only one-sixth of the harvest remained to be sold. The low prices upon which sixteenth-century appraisals were typically based point to the conclusion that the Junkers were well aware of the high production costs and internal food consumption of their estates.⁹²

* * *

The historical literature assigns considerable weight to the laws on serfdom promulgated, at the Junkers' insistence, between the late fifteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Some of them undoubtedly inflicted injuries upon the peasantry, particularly the statutes empowering the landlords, under certain conditions, to buy up peasant land and engross it into their demesnes. Yet the Junkers did not seize peasant land in great quantities. The census of 1624 reported that 1,500 peasant *Hufen* in the Middle Mark, amounting to 7 per cent of all full peasant landholdings, had been incorporated into noble estates. In addition to these enclosures the Junkers in the Middle Mark had added 1,200 *Hufen* to their tax-free holdings since 1450.⁹³ Other statutes allowed the landlords in some districts of Brandenburg, notably the Uckermark and New Mark, to raise claims to unlimited labour services. But in court rulings or in practice these services were finally defined in a customary routine expressing the local balance of power between lord and peasants.⁹⁴

Servility (*Untertänigkeit*) in most of Brandenburg, including the Prignitz, attached to the peasant holding, not ineradicably to the person of its occupant nor even to all those persons subject to the Junkers' legal authority. Villagers without landholdings could, upon payment of a fee (*Losgeld*), freely quit their seignorial jurisdiction and, upon payment of another fee (*Annehmegeld*), settle under a new lord. So too could a full peasant or cottager, on condition that he

⁹² GStA, Stavenow, no. 259, *Anschlag (anno 1760)*, section 3, "An Aussaath".

⁹³ Grossman, *Über die gutsherrlich-bäuerlichen Rechtsverhältnisse*, p. 138; Carsten, "Origins of the Junkers", p. 178.

⁹⁴ See the local studies by Brinkmann, Harnisch, Pilsach and Vogler cited in n. 3 above.

provided a successor acceptable to the manor house.⁹⁵ The children of full peasants were liable, in return for statutory wages, room and board, to three years of compulsory work as manorial farm servants (*Gesindezwangsdienst*). But in practice the manor required relatively few workers of this type, and self-interest dictated that it should choose only the willing.⁹⁶

The purpose of servile legislation was to strengthen the Junkers' claims to manorial services from the peasant farm. Yet the actual extent of labour obligations needed to be fixed precisely at each manor through negotiations, tilted though they were in the lord's favour. The landed peasants constituted the village commune (*Gemeinde*), the legal entity with which the Junkers disputed farm rents, if necessary before the Brandenburg high court. The villagers' defences rested on their communal solidarity, typically very strong, and on their hereditary tenures, which made evictions of obdurate farmers difficult, especially when they acted collectively. Equally important, the manpower and horsepower of the full peasant holdings were in great demand throughout the sixteenth century. The burgeoning noble estates depended critically on repopulation of the village farmsteads abandoned in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Servile legislation did not suspend competition among the Junkers for gaining and holding peasant subjects.⁹⁷ In the last resort, peasants could quit or flee their landlords. But since they prized their farms, especially when market conditions were propitious, they preferred to stand their ground, accepting increases in manorial services that seemed manageable, going to court or staging rent or labour strikes against those they found intolerable.⁹⁸

The Prignitz can perhaps stand for most of the Mark Brandenburg, but Brandenburg cannot stand for all of Germany or northern Europe

⁹⁵ In 1573 new subjects of the Deibow manor paid an *Annehmegeld* of 1 gulden, equal in value to seven or eight days of unskilled manual labour: GStA, Eldenburg, Paket 1, no. 20, fo. 12. In the eighteenth century the *Losgeld* was fixed by statute, but at Stavenow it was customarily waived: GStA, Stavenow, no. 498, *passim*. Neither at Stavenow nor at the Uckermark latifundium of Boitzenburg, where a stricter form of serfdom (*Leibeigenschaft*) could be invoked, did servile status or the fees associated with it stir up much conflict between lords and peasant. See Harnisch, *Herrschaft Boitzenburg*, pp. 114-29.

⁹⁶ Ernst Lennhoff, *Das ländliche Gesindewesen in der Kurmark Brandenburg vom 16. bis 19. Jahrhundert* (Breslau, 1906), pp. 101 ff. and *passim*.

⁹⁷ Neo-classical analysis would have it otherwise. See the works of North and Thomas and of Kahan cited in n. 1 above.

⁹⁸ Schultz, "Bäuerliche Klassenkämpfe", *passim*; Harnisch, "Klassenkämpfe der Bauern", *passim*; *Geschichte des Geschlechts v. Bredow*, i pt. 2, pp. 174-268; Grossman, *Über die gusherrlich-bäuerlichen Rechtsverhältnisse*, chs. 2-3.

east of the Elbe. Yet the argument advanced here suggests that the great expansion of noble demesne farming in central and eastern Europe during the sixteenth century cannot bear the weight of the fateful significance the historical literature assigns to it. By throwing themselves into manorial production the landed nobility rescued and even greatly magnified their fortunes. But this required neither the economic subversion of the peasantry nor the rise of an absolutist state guaranteeing by the force of princely arms the landlords' fleecing of their peasant subjects.⁹⁹

It is argued that noble manorialism blighted the economy of the towns of Brandenburg. But the medieval cloth trade, the only industry the land could boast of, had withered under south German competition already in the fifteenth century, before the Junkers had beaten their swords into ploughshares. Even at the height of their medieval prosperity the burghers of Brandenburg, like their counterparts in the Hanseatic ports, poured their profits into the purchase of farms and peasant rents instead of reinvesting them fully in industrial or commercial expansion. The concentration of commercial capital and industry in the south and west of Europe antedated Junker manorialism, and if in the sixteenth century and later the Brandenburg landlords shipped their rye and wool abroad, they were not aiming to beggar the local bourgeoisie, but to sell on the best market.¹⁰⁰

The historian need not exonerate the Junker. In economic wrongdoing, the greater the wealth, the greater the guilt. But to exaggerate the Junkers' dominance is to diminish without warrant the peasantry's powers of resistance. The Junkers' success in the sixteenth century did not predetermine the rise of Prussian absolutism, nor did it cause the agrarian social structure of Brandenburg to diverge ominously from the western European pattern, in which the power and income of noble landlords also loomed exceedingly large. After two centuries

⁹⁹ Before the Thirty Years War both the domestic authority and the armed might of the Brandenburg electors were notably limited. Perry Anderson, who holds the general view of the socio-economic function of absolutism questioned in the text above, recognized that the Junker estates antedated Prussian absolutism. To account for the expansion of noble demesne farming, he invoked the landlords' extra-economic coercive powers over the peasantry, thus embracing the standard interpretation enshrined in the historical literature, whose onesidedness and oversimplifications this essay has discussed. Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London, 1979), pp. 238, 260-5, and *passim*.

¹⁰⁰ For the older view, see Carsten, *Origins of Prussia*, pp. 115-16. It must be qualified in the light of Helbig, *Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft*, esp. pp. 151-4; Engel and Zientara, *Feudalstruktur, Lehnbürgertum und Fernhandel*, *passim*; Fritze, *Bürger und Bauer zur Hansezeit*, *passim*.

fraught with feudal violence and economic regression Brandenburg became in the sixteenth century a land of pre-capitalist noble estates and of villages dominated by big peasant farms paying rent at the manor primarily in the form of limited labour services. This was a burden that did not cancel out the modest profits of peasant farming. The manors depended functionally on the preservation of the full peasant holding, so that population growth in the villages condemned ever more peasants to cottager status or landlessness. But before the consequences of rural overpopulation could be felt, the Thirty Years War burned wide regions of Brandenburg to the ground.

The sixteenth-century agrarian constitution rose again after the war, in a form more profitable to the Junkers and especially to the ascending absolutist monarchy. By the late eighteenth century the villages were again overcrowded, while favourable markets tempted the landlords to confront the landed peasantry with heightened claims on their labour. It is the task of another essay to argue that the peasantry so effectively fought off those demands as to ensure the abolition after 1806 of serfdom and the labour rent, its chief tangible expression.¹⁰¹

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¹⁰¹ See my essay, "The Junkers' Unfaithful Servants: Peasant Insubordination and the Breakdown of Serfdom in Brandenburg, 1763-1811", forthcoming in Richard J. Evans and W. R. Lee (eds.), *The German Peasantry: Conflict and Community in Rural Society from the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (London, 1985).