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Seventeenth-Century Crisis in Brandenburg: The Thirty Years' War, The Destabilization of Serfdom, and the Rise of Absolutism

WILLIAM W. HAGEN

If a peasant, no matter whose, absconds without securing a substitute to farm his master's or Junker's property, the authorities shall, upon request, pursue him without fail, wherever he may be, as was agreed of old in consultation with the Estates; but he who wants the return of the runaway must send people of his own to bring him back. This rule also applies if a farm servant absconds and is subsequently apprehended.

Ordinance of Joachim II, Elector of Brandenburg, November 3, 1550.¹

We, Frederick William, . . . have received many complaints about the pride and insolence of the domestic servants, the peasant farmers and the farm workers . . . , and that they refuse to conform to Our previous ordinances and edicts; instead they do as they please, and through their contrariness, stubbornness and all manner of aggravations make themselves almost intolerable to their masters.

Preamble: Revised Statute on Peasants, Servants, Livestock Herders, and Shepherds, December 18, 1681.²

WHICH OF THESE PRONOUNCEMENTS FROM THE THRONE casts the truer light on the peasant-lord relationship in early modern Brandenburg-Prussia? Historians prefer the first. It conjures up the image of enservfled farmers on degraded tenures and manorial laborers dragooned into service, both looking to escape through flight. It invokes also the alliance of Crown and nobility, jointly and amicably exercising their powers of repression to compel the villagers to toil on the Junkers', that is, the landed gentry's, manor farms. But if lordly coercion

The formulation of this essay's argument benefited from discussions of earlier versions presented in papers read at the 1986 meeting of the American Historical Association and, in 1987, in the colloquium of the Zentralinstitut für Sozialwissenschaftliche Forschung at the Freie Universität Berlin. Grants from the University of California, Davis, the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, the National Endowment for the Humanities and, above all, the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung supported this research project and the related work noted below. My thanks to these forums and institutions and to the helpful staff of the Geheimes Staatsarchiv, West Berlin.

¹ Walter Friedensburg, ed., *Kurmärkische Ständeakten aus der Regierungszeit Kurfürst Joachims II (1535–1571)*, 2 vols. (Munich-Leipzig, 1913–1916), 1: 834.

² Christian Otto Mylius, ed., *Corpus Constitutionum Marchicarum*, 6 vols. (Berlin, 1737–1751 [hereafter, *CCM*]), 5.3.1, no. 21, col. 141.

shaped the social landscape, so too were the powers of noble lordship and the state itself defined in part by the peasant refractoriness and insubordination condemned in Frederick William's ordinance.

This assertion combines uneasily with the literature both on the crisis of the seventeenth century and the rise of absolutism in Brandenburg-Prussia. Here the peasant appears as a sorely abused victim. But why join together these two historiographical debates? This article aims primarily to reinterpret the social origins and context of emergent absolutism in seventeenth-century Brandenburg, the heartland of the Prussian monarchy of the eighteenth century. The Thirty Years' War plunged Brandenburg into social crisis. The Great Elector Frederick William (reign, 1640–1688), architect of Prussian absolutism, confronted and created conditions of political crisis, both at home and abroad. Although historians of Brandenburg-Prussia have not entered the debate on the “general crisis” of the seventeenth century, the social interpretation of absolutist politics conveyed in their work has figured importantly in it and continues to influence strongly large-scale discussions of the seventeenth century. The new balance sheet this article presents of the social costs and benefits of early absolutism in Brandenburg thus carries implications beyond the German frontiers into a broader realm of European history.

Some historians derive the seventeenth-century crisis from the exhaustion of the growth trend of the long sixteenth century. In their view, demographic expansion accompanied by declining agricultural productivity and deteriorating real wages in town and country alike loom up as principal causes of this conjunctural reversal. As the price of bread rose, demand for manufactures slackened. Capital flowed into seigneurialism, which sought to profit from rising ground rents or to squeeze a land-hungry peasantry. In some analyses, the nobility multiplied and stratified, bringing forth a faction interested in the acquisition of peasant rents and subjects through foreign or civil war. In any case, the pathological end-phase of sixteenth-century economic growth created social and political instabilities issuing in the wars, demographic reverses, and ensuing economic stagnation or depression that, in the material realm, constitute the seventeenth-century crisis. In the sphere of politics, the crisis manifested itself in conflicts that, in many European lands, found their steely resolution under a regime of absolutism. For those among the nobility allied to the Crown, this outcome spelled rescue and the rewards of office and patronage. For the peasantry, it entailed degradation through taxation and, in Europe east of the Elbe, tightened bonds of personal serfdom and redoubled seigneurial exploitation.³

³ In this vein, see E. J. Hobsbawm, “The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century,” *Past and Present*, 5–6 (1954), rpt. in Trevor Aston, ed., *Crisis in Europe, 1560–1660* (London, 1965), 5–58; Ruggiero Romano, “Between the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: The Economic Crisis of 1619–1622,” (1962) in Geoffrey Parker and Lesley M. Smith, eds., *The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1978), 165–225; Miroslav Hroch and Josef Petrán, *Das 17. Jahrhundert—Krise der Feudalgesellschaft?* (Hamburg, 1981 [Czech original: 1976]), a work offering a good survey of the literature on the crisis; Heiner Haan, “Prosperität und Dreissigjähriger Krieg,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 7 (1981): 91–118; Wilhelm Abel, *Agrarkrisen und Agrarkonjunktur: Eine Geschichte der Land- und Ernährungswirtschaft Mitteleuropas seit dem hohen Mittelalter*, 3d edn. (Hamburg, 1978), 122 and following; Peter

To this interpretation, emphasizing (in Niels Steensgaard's terms) a crisis of production, other historians have opposed an approach stressing a crisis in distribution.⁴ Whether or not the European economy was beginning to choke on its sixteenth-century contradictions, the seventeenth-century crisis derived independently from the social and political pressures generated by Renaissance and Baroque state-building. Military and courtly profligacy drained capital from the private sector, ruining numerous bourgeois (but also noble) financiers. It led, especially in the seventeenth century, to the taxation of the peasantry to—and sometimes beyond—the threshold of starvation. The rise of the Leviathan state not only provoked rebellions, variously successful and hopeless, but also entailed the demographic and economic reversals, evident by the mid-seventeenth century, that in some lands did not yield to a new cycle of growth for another century. The birth throes of the modern state gave rise to a crisis from which in many countries it emerged in absolutist vigor, dominating an exhausted society. The state administration proceeded, in alliance with its aristocratic and bourgeois partisans, to turn the fiscal screws on the common people, especially the peasantry.

Both these interpretive tendencies have enlisted in their support the authoritative works on early absolutism in Brandenburg-Prussia. In the West German and Anglo-American literature, the forceful arguments of F. L. Carsten and Hans Rosenberg still occupy commanding positions. In the German Democratic Republic, a Marxist analysis has taken shape that tends to complement rather than contradict them. Common to both approaches is the assumption that the power and interests of the Junker nobility set the limits to the evolution of state and society in early modern Brandenburg-Prussia. Both hold that the foundation of the absolutist regime rested on a compromise struck in 1653 between the Elector Frederick William and the Brandenburg nobility. In the *Landtags-Recess* or parliamentary agreement of that year, the Junkers granted Frederick William the taxes necessary to field a standing army, the institution whose development brought in its train the bureaucratized autocracy of the eighteenth-century Prussian state. Frederick William rewarded the nobility for their acquiescence in this political revolution by strengthening their domination of the peasantry, whom the agreement of 1653 bound more securely in the shackles of serfdom than before the Thirty Years' War. What the nobility gave up in the way of

Kriedte, *Peasants, Landlords and Merchant Capitalists: Europe and the World Economy, 1500–1800* (Cambridge, 1983 [German original: 1980]), chap. 2; on the seventeenth-century crisis in the literature of neoclassical and Marxist economic history, see William W. Hagen, "Capitalism and the Countryside in Early Modern Europe: Interpretations, Models, Debates," *Agricultural History*, 62 (Winter 1988): 13–47.

⁴ Niels Steensgaard, "The Seventeenth-Century Crisis," (1970), in Parker and Smith, *General Crisis*, 42 and 26–56, *passim*. See also H. R. Trevor-Roper, "The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century" (1959), in Aston, *Crisis in Europe*, 59–95; Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London, 1974), 15–59, 195–235, 397–431; Theodore K. Rabb, *The Struggle for Stability in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 1975), chap. 9 and *passim*; Charles Tilly, "Reflections on the History of European State-Making" and "Western State-Making and Theories of Political Transformation," in Charles Tilly, ed., *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton, N.J., 1975), chaps. 1 and 9; J. H. Elliott, "Yet Another Crisis?" in Peter Clark, ed., *The European Crisis of the 1590s* (London, 1985), 301–11.

aristocratic self-government and co-sovereignty was balanced by an increase in their seigniorial powers in their rural bailiwicks.⁵

In Rosenberg's words, Frederick William "confirmed and enlarged" the Junkers' "customary fiscal, economic, and social privileges and [their] *de facto* freedom to tyrannize the tillers of the soil and the rural craftsmen . . . In consequence, the basic social institution of agrarian Prussia, peasant serfdom, increased in severity until the latter part of the eighteenth century." "Abject poverty" and "helpless apathy" were the fate of the common people. In Carsten's formulation, Frederick William used "the Junkers' class interests to win them over to an alliance with the crown . . . The peasant-serfs were too down-trodden to revolt, and anyhow they were more oppressed by their [Junker] masters than by the government."⁶

In the German Democratic Republic, Günter Vogler and Klaus Vetter hold that the transition from the "veiled noble dictatorship" of the pre-absolutist regime (*Ständestaat*) to "the open dictatorship of one representative of the nobility in the interest of the entire noble class" served the "objective" end of maintaining the functional capability of the late-feudal state in the face of the rise of European capitalism and the sharpening class conflicts accompanying it. Brandenburg-Prussia required an absolutist armature to survive within the European state-system dominated by the western powers. Domestically, Junker manorialism provoked, if not large-scale peasant revolts, then at least the "lower forms" of peasant class struggle such as the shoddy performance or even refusal of *corvée* labor on the Junker estates. The settlement of 1653 guaranteed that the power of the absolutist regime in which the Junkers acquiesced would serve to

⁵ This argument, underpinning what might be called the compromise theory of Brandenburg-Prussian absolutism, was advanced with characteristic vigor by Otto Hintze in "Die Hohenzollern und der Adel" (1913), rpt. in Otto Hintze, *Regierung und Verwaltung* (Göttingen, 1967), 39 and 30–55, *passim*. See also Hintze's *Die Hohenzollern und Ihr Werk*, 7th edn. (Berlin, 1916), 205. The compromise theory lies also at the heart of F. L. Carsten's *Origins of Prussia* (Oxford, 1954), especially part 3, and Hans Rosenberg's *Bureaucracy, Aristocracy, and Autocracy: The Prussian Experience, 1660–1815* (Boston, 1958), esp. chap. 1. See also Hans Rosenberg, "Die Ausprägung der Junkerherrschaft in Brandenburg-Preussen, 1410–1618," in his *Machteliten und Wirtschaftskonjunkturen* (Göttingen, 1978), 24–82, which offers a revised version of "The Rise of the Junkers in Brandenburg-Prussia, 1410–1653," *AHR*, 49 (1943):1–22, 228–42. The compromise theory is emphatically advanced in Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte, I: 1700–1815* (Munich, 1987), 229, 589 n. 43; compare 142–43.

⁶ Rosenberg, *Bureaucracy*, 45, 48. Carsten, *Origins*, 275, 277. Carsten's and Rosenberg's interpretations of the political dynamics of Prussian absolutism are cast in doubt by the work of the West German historians Peter Baumgart, Klaus Deppermann, Peter-Michael Hahn, and Gerd Heinrich. Yet all of these historians accept that the absolutist regime rested on a compromise securing or strengthening the Junkers' domination of the peasantry. See Peter Baumgart, "Wie absolut war der preussische Absolutismus?" in Manfred Schlenke, ed., *Preussen: Beiträge zu einer politischen Kultur* (Berlin, 1981), 89–105; Klaus Deppermann, "Der preussische Absolutismus und der Adel: Eine Auseinandersetzung mit der marxistischen Absolutismustheorie," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 8 (1982): 550–53; Peter-Michael Hahn, *Struktur und Funktion des brandenburgischen Adels im 16. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1979), 168 and *passim*; Peter-Michael Hahn, "Landesstaat und Ständetum im Kurfürstentum Brandenburg während des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts," in Peter Baumgart, ed., *Ständetum und Staatsbildung in Brandenburg-Preussen* (Berlin, 1983), 53 and 41–79, *passim*; Peter-Michael Hahn, *Fürstliche Territorialhoheit und lokale Adelsgewalt: Die herrschaftliche Durchdringung des ländlichen Raumes zwischen Elbe und Aller (1300–1700)* (Berlin, 1986), esp. 239–57; Gerd Heinrich, *Der Adel in Brandenburg-Preussen* (Darmstadt, 1965), 295 and 259–314, *passim*.

enforce, until Napoleon's time, a harsher and more profitable form of peasant serfdom.⁷

The compromise theory of early absolutism in Brandenburg reigns unchallenged from east to west in part because research has so far confined itself mostly to the political history and sociology of the central government and the corporate nobility. While there are some good local studies of noble manors and peasant villages, the social and economic history of early modern Brandenburg-Prussia has only begun to be written in terms acceptable to present-day scholarship. The economic dynamics of the peasant-landlord relationship, especially during the seventeenth century, lack precise formulation. The alliance of Crown and nobility against the peasantry has been deduced from a one-sided reading of the political evidence, while its efficacy in practice has yet to be put to a satisfactory empirical test. Instead, the literature pays an unearned tribute to the Junkers by exaggerating their coercive powers over the peasantry and assuming that they exerted them effectively in practice. These suppositions are essential to the prevailing interpretations, Marxist and non-Marxist alike, of Prussian absolutism as a political revolution from above that advanced, or at least upheld, the economic interests of the landed nobility. But these suppositions are mistaken.

IN 1626, FOREIGN ARMIES OF OCCUPATION brought the afflictions of the Thirty Years' War to the Mark Brandenburg. Did they descend on a society gripped by structural crisis? The historical literature has addressed this problem only obliquely, by weighing the consequences of the spectacular rise in the sixteenth century of the Junker-dominated system of large estates worked by a subject peasantry and by assessing the social costs of the Brandenburg Electors' fiscal embarrassments and depredations.⁸

⁷ Günter Vogler and Klaus Vetter, *Preussen: Von den Anfängen bis zur Reichsgründung* (Berlin, 1979), quotation from 41; see also 31–33, 44. Similarly, Anderson, *Lineages*, part 2, chaps. 1–3. Compare Gerhard Heitz, "Der Zusammenhang zwischen den Bauernbewegungen und der Entwicklung des Absolutismus in Mitteleuropa," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 13 (1965): 71–83.

⁸ On the agrarian economy before the Thirty Years' War, see (both on the substantive issues and the historical literature) Hartmut Harnisch, "Die Gutsherrschaft in Brandenburg: Ergebnisse und Probleme," *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 4 (1969): 117–47; Hahn, *Struktur*, part 1; and William W. Hagen, "How Mighty the Junkers? Peasant Rents and Seigneurial Profits in Sixteenth-Century Brandenburg," *Past and Present*, 108 (1985): 80–116. On princely finances and the urban economy, see Siegfried Isaacsohn, "Die landständischen Verhältnisse in den Marken bis zum Jahre 1640," in his edn. of *Urkunden und Aktenstücke zur Geschichte des Kurfürsten Friedrich Wilhelm von Brandenburg: Zehnter Band: Ständische Verhandlungen: Zweiter Band: Mark Brandenburg* (Berlin, 1880), 10.2: 1–29; Fritz Kaphahn, *Die wirtschaftlichen Folgen des 30jährigen Krieges für die Altmark* (Gotha, 1911); Martin Hass, *Die kurmärkischen Stände im letzten Drittel des sechzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Munich-Leipzig, 1913), esp. 135–284; Hugo Rachel, Johannes Papritz, Paul Wallich, *Berliner Grosskaufleute und Kapitalisten*, 2 vols. (1934–38; rpt. edn., Berlin, 1967), vol. 1; Helmuth Croon, *Die kurmärkischen Landstände 1571–1616* (Berlin, 1938); Hahn, *Territorialhoheit*, 188–201. On pre-war trends in the larger German economy, Friedrich Lütge, "Die wirtschaftliche Lage Deutschlands vor Ausbruch des Dreissigjährigen Krieges" (1958), in Hans Ulrich Rudolf, ed., *Der Dreissigjährige Krieg: Perspektiven und Strukturen* (Darmstadt, 1977), 458–547; Theodore K. Rabb, "The Effects of the Thirty Years' War on the German Economy," *Journal of Modern History*, 26 (1962): 40–51; Hermann Kellenbenz, *Deutsche Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 2 vols. (Munich, 1977–81), 1: 212–95; Friedrich-Wilhelm Henning, *Das vorindustrielle Deutschland 800 bis 1800* (Paderborn, 1974), 179–232.

The century before 1618 undoubtedly belonged to the Junkers, or rather to those among the nobility with demesne land and peasant subjects in sufficient supply to make possible the profitable sale via the Baltic or Hamburg of grain and livestock products on capacious western markets. In the period 1560–1620, grain exports from Brandenburg were proportionally as great as Poland's. The Junkers enriched by such commerce frequently lent their earnings to the impecunious Electors in exchange for offices and on the security of pawned incomes from the extensive Crown lands. In this way, an oligarchy arose that, at least until the beginning of the seventeenth century, successfully mediated the interests of the Crown and the landed nobility and endowed the political system with a stability uncommon for the age.⁹

The secular trend of rising grain and livestock prices at home and abroad, so favorable to the Junkers, continued up to and beyond the outbreak of the war, despite a downward dip at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The yearly incomes or leases of noble properties rose accordingly. The selling prices of noble estates soared, sometimes outstripping the capitalized value of anticipated annual returns. Not surprisingly, the turnover of Junker properties accelerated in the half-century before the war, a trend that a princely edict of 1573 condemned but could not halt.¹⁰

The rising frequency of estate sales forced on Junker families to satisfy their own creditors, or those of their friends and relatives for whom they had stood surety, testified to the perils of unbridled consumption and the proliferation of dealings on credit, of which the Electors set an example unwisely followed by the moneyed classes. To make matters worse, Brandenburg, like most other German and European lands, passed in the years 1618–1622 through a wrenchingly inflationary monetary devaluation (the *Kipper- und Wipperzeit*), in which many creditors were badly clipped or ruined. These developments, representing the transfer or destruction of accumulated profits, bore witness to the limited opportunities for capital investment and the inadequacy of state revenues characteristic of the age. But they are not in themselves signs that the Junkers' estate agriculture had lost its profitability, especially since one nobleman's loss was often another's gain.¹¹

⁹ On agricultural exports, see Harnisch, "Gutsherrschaft," 121–24. On the nobility's social composition and credit dealings, see Hahn, *Struktur*. Hahn calculated that the Junker oligarchy comprised no more than the upper third of the noble lineages. The more typical nobleman had to content himself with a manorial farm and peasant *corvées* and rents securing him a rustic gentility with limited access to the export market. Beneath this level stood the noble poor (27–28, 48–49, 64, 206 and following, 239); Croon, *Die kurmärkischen Landstände*, 147.

¹⁰ On agricultural commodity price trends, see Abel, *Agrarkrisen*, appendix, table 2, and p. 188. The rising annual income or lease value (reckoned in a stable money of account) of the Neugattersleben estates in the Magdeburg region illustrates the trend on the market for large landed properties: 1573—3,000 Taler; 1596—5,500 Taler; 1617—6,300 Taler. Hahn, *Struktur*, 66; compare 344–45; on the accelerating pre-war turnover of Junker estates, 37–49, and Kaphahn, *Altmark*, 25. Estate values were optimistically appraised in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries by capitalizing annual net income at 3–4 percent. See Geheimes Staatsarchiv, West Berlin (hereafter, GStA.), Provinz Brandenburg, Rep. 2A: Kurmärkische Kriegs- und Domänenkammer: Domänen-registratur: Amt Eldenburg, Paket 1, no. 20 (1573: 3 percent); GStA. Provinz Brandenburg, Rep. 37: Gutsarchiv Stavenow (hereafter, GStA. Stavenow), no. 255 (1601–14: 4 percent).

¹¹ Hahn (*Struktur*, 48–49; "Landesstaat," 63; *Territorialhoheit*, 24, 155, 196) interprets the numerous early seventeenth-century noble bankruptcies and forced estate sales to mean that the private

So long as the commodity price trend remained favorable, the question facing the Junkers was whether or not they could maintain (or increase) their production for the market. They had, in the course of the sixteenth century, brought under cultivation virtually all their demesne land as well as the “deserted” village land (*wüste Feldmarken*) they had appropriated during the late medieval agrarian crisis. They had equipped themselves with the human and animal muscle necessary to harvest their fields by imposing weekly labor services of, typically, two or three days on their peasant subjects—the proper farmers or full peasants (*Vollbauern*) with largeholdings and teams of horses and oxen performing their *corvées* by plowing and hauling, the cottagers with small holdings (*Kossäten*) supplying manual labor. To secure as cheaply as possible the full-time manorial servants necessary, in addition to the *corvée*-bound peasantry, to the operation of their estates, the Junkers had prevailed on the government to rule that the sons and daughters of the largeholding peasantry, if not required as workers on the parental farm, could be compelled to serve at the manor one or more years for room and board and low statutory wages (*Gesindezwangsdienst*).¹²

In this way, the Junkers’ appropriation of the peasant surplus had, on the eve of the Thirty Years’ War, reached a level adequate to ensure the operation of their estates in their existing form, though not without considerable production costs in the form of manorial teams, servants’ wages, and, in many cases, food and drink given the peasants on their days of service at the manor. Any attempt to raise peasant rents, and especially to increase the odious labor services, risked strikes or communal appeals to princely adjudication. Overriding the Junkers’ objections, the higher courts regularly heard such cases in the pre-war decades. Their inclination to confine peasant rents to levels regarded as locally customary was undoubtedly a brake on the arbitrariness of individual Junkers, even if the landlords’ collective pressure on their peasant subjects tended to determine the burden of rent in the various regions of the land.¹³

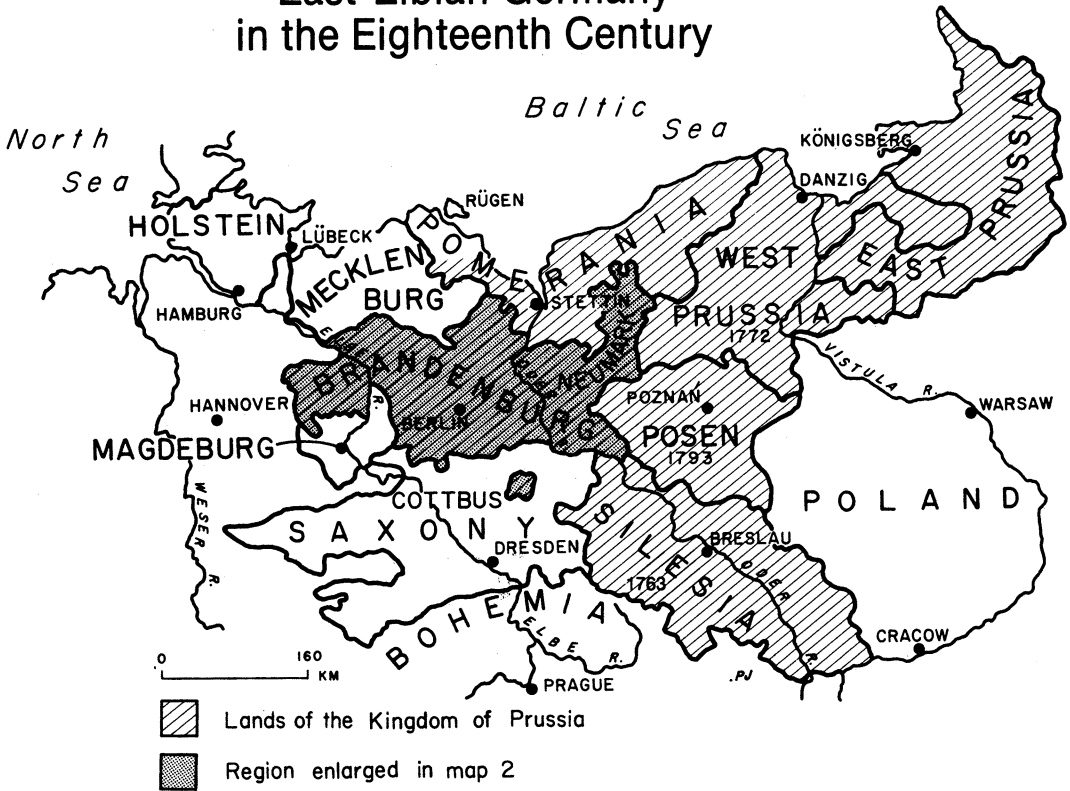
landlords as a class had fallen into economic crisis at the end of the sixteenth century. But the ready purchase at high prices of overindebted estates by capital-strong and credit-worthy noblemen would seem to argue for property redistribution within the nobility rather than generalized pre-war crisis. In 1620, debts forced the family von Rohr to sell their Freyenstein estates. The von Winterfeld family bought them for the considerable sum of 153,000 Taler, an acquisition they retained into the nineteenth century. The frequency of such nonspeculative transactions remains unknown. Gerhard Albrecht, *Die Gutsherrschaft Freyenstein* (Dissertation, Pädagogische Hochschule Potsdam, Historisch-Philologische Fakultät, 1968), 31. On the *Kipper- und Wipperzeit* in Brandenburg, see Rachel, *Grosskaufleute*, 1: 379–91.

¹² On labor services, see Hagen, “How Mighty the Junkers?” On the legal conditions of compulsory manorial service, see Friedrich Grossmann, *Über die gutsherrlich-bäuerlichen Rechtsverhältnisse in der Mark Brandenburg vom 16. bis 18. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig, 1890); and Ernst Lennhoff, *Das ländliche Gesindewesen in der Kurmark Brandenburg vom 16. bis 19. Jahrhundert* (Breslau, 1906). On material conditions, see William W. Hagen, “Working for the Junker: The Standard of Living of Manorial Laborers in Brandenburg, 1584–1810,” *Journal of Modern History*, 58 (1986): 143–58. On the size of *Vollbauern* farms, see note 20, below.

¹³ Acting collectively as village communes, the Brandenburg peasantry, except in those few regions of strict serfdom (on which, see text below), frequently brought suits in the pre-war decades against their landlords, especially in questions of rents and labor services. See Grossmann, *Über die gutsherrlich-bäuerlichen Verhältnisse*, chap. 3 and *passim*; Helga Schultz, “Bäuerliche Klassenkämpfe zwischen frühbürgerlicher Revolution und Dreissigjährigem Krieg,” *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissen-*

MAP 1

East-Elbian Germany in the Eighteenth Century

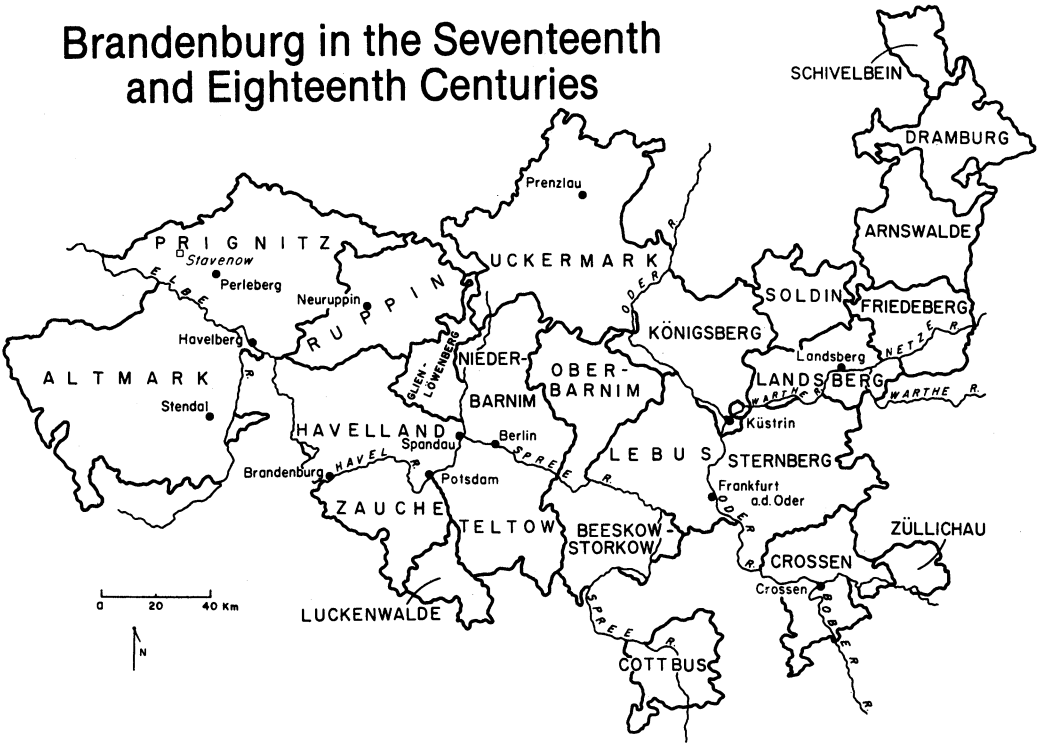


The richer Junkers, having ratcheted up their subject peasants' rents as high as seemed necessary or possible, turned toward buying up the properties of their improvident or unlucky colleagues and investing their manorial earnings in income-bearing princely offices. In the short run, neither of these tactics threatened the stability of the pre-war agrarian structure. But the poorer nobility could not play by these rules. Their interest lay in acquiring estate land or broadening their domanial acreage, and the most tempting way to do so was by the acquisition of peasant holdings. In the Uckermark and a few regions of the Neumark (see Maps 1 and 2), a strict personal serfdom (*Leibeigenschaft*) prevailed, binding the peasantry through heredity to the soil and rendering their farm occupancy insecure and purely usufructuary. But, in most parts of Brandenburg, the peasantry were personally free and held their farms firmly in hereditary tenure. Their Junkers could not summarily evict them and enclose their farms and acreage into the seignorial demesne. However, in 1540, the nobility pressured the government into confirming the Junker's right to buy out,

schaft, 2 (1972): 156–73; Hartmut Harnisch, "Klassenkämpfe der Bauern in der Mark Brandenburg zwischen frühbürgerlicher Revolution und Dreissigjährigem Krieg," *Jahrbuch für Regionalgeschichte*, 5 (1975): 142–72.

MAP 2

Brandenburg in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries



at the locally current price, peasant holdings under his jurisdiction in the event that he required land on which to erect a manor house for his own habitation. This concession opened the door to the quasi-legal expropriation of peasant land (*Bauernlegen*).¹⁴

In the sphere of peasant-landlord relations, the question of peasant expropriation, alongside the Junkers' efforts to restrict the peasantry's access to the appellate courts, generated the sharpest political controversy in the half-century before the war. While, to the lesser nobility, the enclosure into their demesnes of one or two peasant farms meant economic invigoration, to the princely regime and the higher nobility co-responsible for its financing, it signified a shrinkage in the number of peasant holdings, the principal units of taxation in the countryside. This shrinkage threatened to burden the remaining peasantry with higher taxes and so work against the Junkers' interest in skimming the peasant surplus themselves. Moreover, since the noble estates depended crucially on labor-rents, the number of peasant holdings could not be willfully reduced without forcing up the number of *corvées* levied on the surviving subject farmers. If these

¹⁴ Grossmann, *Über die gutsherrlich-bäuerlichen Verhältnisse*, 15. The government also conceded the Junkers' right to evict obdurate and disobedient peasants from their holdings but not to enclose such vacated farms into their tax-free demesnes.

farmers balked, the Junkers would face a self-induced labor shortage requiring them to raise their investments in manorial horsepower and wage labor.

For these reasons, the corporate nobility and the princely regime attempted in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries to limit the passage of peasant land into Junker hands.¹⁵ Carsten nevertheless held that peasant expropriations represented a major trend in the pre-war decades. Yet the prime statistical source, the Mittelmark cadastre of 1624, shows only that some 7.3 percent of the land of the largeholding peasantry (or *Vollbauern*) had been enclosed into noble demesnes in the previous half-century. The frequency of enclosures was indeed rising, but, in 1624, 82 percent of taxable village land still remained in peasant hands.¹⁶

The villages were not suffocating under the weight of feudal rent and princely taxation. Local studies indicate that the post-medieval rise in seigneurial rent ended with the nobility's imposition of the more-or-less oppressive sixteenth-century labor services. Heavy though this tribute often was, it did not sever the landed peasantry from production for the market, whose price trends favored them as well as their Junkers. Peasant farms on productive soils paid profits, as evidenced by interest-earning deposits of occasionally considerable sums in the coffers of the urban tax-corporations (*Städtekassen*). But such modest successes were not typical, and a better gauge of the landed peasantry's economic health would be the extent of their livestock holdings. Local and regional studies suggest that these were at least adequate to the maintenance and reproduction of the peasant household and, in many cases, strong enough to ensure profitable sales.¹⁷

¹⁵ Grossmann, *Über die gutsherrlich-bäuerlichen Verhältnisse*, 25; Kaphahn, *Die wirtschaftlichen Folgen*, 22; Croon, *Die kurländischen Landstände*, 85.

¹⁶ F. L. Carsten, "The Origins of the Junkers," *English Historical Review*, 243 (1947): 164–65, 178. The 1624 cadastre, on which the calculations in the text above are based, was published by Grossmann, *Über die gutsherrlich-bäuerlichen Verhältnisse*, 102–38; see also 28, 71. It notes the dates of peasant expropriations in two-thirds of the 242 villages where they took place. Among 170 known cases, 32 percent occurred before and 68 percent after the year 1600. Nevertheless, Grossmann's figures on the Mittelmark (71) show that, between 1570 and 1624, the number (not the area) of full peasant holdings (*Bauernstellen*) declined by only 5 percent, that of landed cottagers (*Kossäten*) by 2 percent. The figures on the distribution of peasant and estate land cited in Hagen, "How Mighty the Junkers?" 108, should be understood as applying to village lands only. Hans Goldschmidt's crude estimates of the distribution in 1618 of all land (that is, village and demesne lands combined) placed 60 percent between the Elbe and Oder in the possession of the peasantry and the towns, 40 percent in that of the nobility and Crown. In the Neumark, his ratio was 54:46. Data cited in Johannes Schultze, *Die Mark Brandenburg*, 5 vols. (Berlin, 1961–69), 5: 173. In 1710, among all of Brandenburg's 1,967 villages, 64 percent stood under noble jurisdiction, 33 percent under the Crown, and 3 percent under urban magistrates. Kurt Breysig, *Geschichte der brandenburgischen Finanzen in der Zeit von 1640 bis 1697: Darstellung und Akten: Erster Band* (Leipzig, 1895), 192.

¹⁷ On the peasantry's engagement in market production, see Walter Naudé, *Die Getreidehandelspolitik und Kriegsmagazinverwaltung Brandenburg-Preussens bis 1740* [= *Acta Borussica, Getreidehandelspolitik*, vol. 2] (Berlin, 1901), 32 and following; Hugo Rachel, *Die Handels-, Zoll- und Akzisepolitik Brandenburg-Preussens bis 1713* [= *Acta Borussica, Handels-, Zoll- und Akzisepolitik*, vol. 1] (Berlin, 1911), 71, 86–87; Hass, *Die kurländischen Stände*, 162–63; Harnisch, "Gutsherrschaft," 125–26, and, on peasant savings, 137 and following. On strong livestock holdings among the peasantry, see Hartmut Harnisch, *Die Herrschaft Boitzenburg* (Weimar, 1968), 94; GStA. Provinz Brandenburg, Rep. 16, no. 16; Werner von Kiebusch, *Geschichte des Klosters Heiligengrabe seit der Reformation* (unpub. ms., 1949), 296; GStA. Provinz Brandenburg, Rep. 37: Gutsherrschaft Kletzke, no. 1, pp. 84 and following (*Amtsbuch* of 1649, reflecting pre-war conditions). See also Grossmann, *Über die gutsherrlich-bäuerlichen Verhältnisse*, 48–49; and Hahn, *Territorialhoheit*, 346–47. On peasant well-being in Mecklenburg, Friedrich Mager, *Geschichte des Bauerntums und der Bodenkultur im Lande Mecklenburg*

While the impartibility of peasant holdings worked against immiseration through morcellation, it also condemned many peasant children to landlessness. Yet the Mittelmark cadastre of 1624 does not project a picture of actual or impending overpopulation: for every single or married rent-paying lodger (*Hausmann*) earning a living by wage labor, there were more than sixteen landed peasants, the majority with large holdings. For every lodger, there were three more-or-less economically secure households of village artisans, fishermen, and livestock handlers.¹⁸

If it is difficult to discern a pre-war trend toward generalized impoverishment and overpopulation in the Brandenburg countryside, there is clear evidence of the sporadic harvest failures and epidemics, unhappy characteristics of the age, which could temporarily destroy any rustic well-being that might have accumulated. The whole land was closed to grain exports in 1571–1572 and 1603–1604, sure signs that subsistence crisis had overridden the Junkers' lust for gain. There were widespread harvest failures in 1597 and 1623. Plague repeatedly struck not only the towns but also the countryside. Yet these scourges were intermittent and displayed no clear tendency toward worsening.¹⁹

It is, finally, hard to argue that taxation was stripping the villages of their substance. The Estates were periodically obliged to accept responsibility for retiring the Electors' debts, and the nobility for its part accordingly levied a direct tax (of variable weight) on its peasant subjects. But the principal agencies of the nobility responsible for collecting and administering these funds succeeded until the outbreak of the war in raising their quotas without incurring the rising indebtedness into which borrowing drove the urban corporations. If the villagers had not paid their public charges, the nobility would either have had to tax themselves, which they sometimes did, or carry a permanent funded debt, which, despite occasional borrowing, their chief agencies in the Mittelmark and Altmark-Prignitz districts never accumulated. As late as 1614, the nobility could afford to advance the government 210,000 Taler; yet, in 1623, both their

(Berlin, 1955), 120–22; in Magdeburg, Hartmut Harnisch, *Bauern—Feudaladel—Städtebürgertum* (Weimar, 1980), chap. 9.

¹⁸ Calculations based on Grossmann's data, *Über die gutsherrlich-bäuerlichen Verhältnisse*, 138. The cadastre did not count the itinerant and disorderly poor, whose numbers may have been considerable. In their appraisal of the Stavenow estates in 1601, the brothers von Quitzow wrote of the lodgers living in peasant outbuildings ("*Die Einwohner der Spiker Kerll*"): "of no value; some way should be found to rid the villages of them"; GStA. Stavenow, no. 255. On beggars and vagrants, Schultze, *Mark Brandenburg*, 4: 145; Kaphahn, *Die wirtschaftlichen Folgen*, 29–30. Yet, in 1608, the corporate nobility of the Altmark district complained they could not hire permanent farm workers or occasional laborers without offering them six meals daily during the harvest season and four the rest of the year. Schultze, *Mark Brandenburg*, 4: 172–73. Compare Friedensburg, *Kurmärkische Ständeakten*, 1: 839–43; CCM, 5.3.1, no. 5, cols. 14–15. Whatever the trend in the growth of the rural population may have been, the corporate nobility and the princely administration did not find the landlords oversupplied with steady and compliant farm laborers.

¹⁹ On harvest failures, Naudé, *Die Getreidehandelspolitik*, 29 and following, 76; Croon, *Die kurmärkischen Landstände*, 183. On plague and other epidemics, Kaphahn, *Die wirtschaftlichen Folgen*, 38–39, 73; Johannes Schultze, *Die Prignitz* (Köln-Graz, 1956), 173 and following. Kaphahn (73) detected a falling birth rate in the pre-war Altmark villages. He also (28) found many Altmark peasants deeply in debt to local burghers. The extent of peasant indebtedness throughout Brandenburg is unknown. The wage statute of 1620 self-righteously blamed the problem of runaway peasants on irresponsibly contracted debts; CCM, 5.3.1., no. 5, col. 15.

principal treasuries were in the black. Pre-absolutist Brandenburg was, from the Electors' point of view, a tax-starved state, and it is unlikely that its fiscal impositions on the villages were ruinous.²⁰

The long sixteenth century did not smile on the towns of Brandenburg. The Junkers dealt them hard blows by setting up rival breweries in the countryside and bypassing their wholesalers in favor of merchants abroad, especially in Hamburg. Moreover, the nobility forced the politically vulnerable towns to shoulder an increasingly heavy share of the princely debt. Nevertheless, the troubles of the urban tax-corporations should not be taken as evidence of an all-encompassing fiscal crisis of the state, especially considering the good condition of the nobility's tax-collecting agencies. The towns' interest-bearing obligations on the eve of the war must have approximated 2.5-million Taler, an imposing sum of capital that had been accumulated in the private sector, not only by the middle and upper nobility but also by the bourgeoisie and prosperous villagers.²¹

Before concluding that the evidence discussed so far does not lock together in a pattern of economic crisis, it remains to consider the trends displayed by another set of valuable, if also fragmentary, pre-war data: the returns on customs duties. Since 1569, the Brandenburg Junkers had been obliged to consent to a princely levy on their grain exports. This New Grain Duty (*Neues Kornzoll*) paid the Crown, in the years 1584–1589, a yearly average of 19,250 Taler; but the same figure from nine years in the period 1609–1624 amounted to only 12,500 Taler. While the customs rates actually levied in practice and the degree of evasion of payment are uncertain, these data suggest a faltering of grain production for export, an ill omen for the Junkers. Further, the duties on manufactures collected in the 1609–1624 period exceeded the grain levy by 50 percent. The supposition seems justifiable, in view of the modest capabilities of

²⁰ The yearly expenditures of the Electors' household and court in the early seventeenth century amounted to some 150,000 Taler; Hahn, *Struktur*, 306 n. 866. The two most important tax corporations (*Hufenschosskassen*) were those of the nobility of the Mittelmark and of the Altmark-Prignitz districts. The analogous Kasse in the Uckermark accumulated a deficit. On the finances of these institutions, see the works cited in note 6, above. At the *Hufen- und Giebelschoss* tax-rates of 1624, a typical largeholding peasant with two hides (*Hufen*) of arable land (= roughly 75–85 acres) would have paid an annual direct tax of 2.25 Taler, which, at average prices in Berlin in the period 1624–52, amounted to the value of three bushels of rye. Grossmann, *Über die gutsherrlich-bäuerlichen Verhältnisse*, 102; prices averaged from data in Naudé, *Die Getreidehandelspolitik*, 568–69. On peasant farm productivity, see Table 4, below.

²¹ On the urban economy, see Rachel, *Grosskaufleute*, vol. 1; Carsten, *Origins*, 136–48; Kaphahn, *Die wirtschaftlichen Folgen*, 6–9; Friedensburg, *Kurmärkische Ständeakten*, 2: 305–12. The financial accounts of the urban tax corporations tell a tale of overall economic stagnation rather than headlong decline. In the period 1571–1620, the principal indirect tax on urban consumption (the *Neues Biergeld*) yielded annually from 40,000 to 60,000 Taler, with no discernible falling tendency. In the same period, the three principal urban *Kassen* together paid out a yearly average of 141,000 Taler in capital and interest; data from five years between 1605 and 1625, if taken as representative of the entire period, yield annual payments of 140,000 Taler. But, while the global sums of these payments remained unchanged, the rate of funded-debt retirement was falling, and the annual interest payments were rising. The stagnating tax base of the *Kassen* forced them to service rather than liquidate the loans they had contracted with the public. Yet, although the devaluation of the early 1620s forced them temporarily to stop payments, they were still in business in 1625. Calculations from data in Hass, *Die kurmärkischen Stände*, 352–60; and Hahn, *Territorialhoheit*, 185, 200. See also Croon, *Die kurmärkischen Landstände*, 198; and Kaphahn, *Die wirtschaftlichen Folgen*, 12–21.

the Brandenburg towns, that most of these manufactures were imports rather than exports. Probably they were, in large measure, luxury goods destined for the households of the nobility. If so, the pre-war balance of trade was moving strongly toward a deficit. Among the Junkers, consumption must have been outrunning production. The deficit could have been financed by the export of accumulated Junker profits, but it is likely as well that many noblemen were buying luxury goods on credit. In either case, the trend, if unreversed, must have ended in a throttling of consumption at best and flurry of bankruptcies of indebted Junkers and their local merchant suppliers at worst.²²

In sum, in the pre-war decades, many of the Junkers were living beyond their means. If their exportable surplus was not in fact shrinking, neither was it likely that it could be significantly increased. Their credit calculations were based on the expectation that prices on export markets would remain favorable, whereas the international price trend would, in a few decades, suffer a secular reverse. Pairing these developments among the nobility with the fiscal difficulties and lack of commercial-industrial dynamism in the urban sector yields a picture of a lopsidedly agrarian economy approaching the end of a long growth cycle. But, before 1618, or even 1626, it would be an exaggeration to say that Brandenburg was gripped by a structural crisis. Its reserves of liquid and fixed capital were considerable, although the security of deposits in the tax corporations depended on revenues soon to be preempted by foreign armies. Above all, the Junkers' estates and the peasant villages were intact and functional. Commercialized agriculture had paid the nobility excellent returns in the preceding several generations. They felt no menace from a rebellious peasantry. When in 1620 foreign troops first passed through the land, arms were issued to the farmers of the Altmark and turned in without incident when the emergency had passed.²³ Nor did the deepening of the military crisis persuade the Junkers that the constitution of the state should be altered so as to raise up a prince bristling in arms, a role for which in any case Elector Georg Wilhelm (reign, 1619–1640) had no ambition.

THE JUNKERS' AND THE PRINCELY REGIME'S PACIFISM cost them and their subjects dearly. In 1640, two years before the end of the war's violence and plunder, the population in the provincial towns had fallen from pre-war levels by 80 percent, in Berlin-Cölln by 40 percent, and in the countryside from 90 percent in the worst-ravaged districts to 20–40 percent elsewhere. As late as 1652, half the farms of Brandenburg west of the Oder river were deserted. In 1660, half the houses in the towns of the Neumark, east of the Oder, stood empty. Before the war, the far-flung state domains had drawn rents and *corvées* from over 6,000 large and small holders and had paid over 160,000 Taler annually into the treasury. After the war, the number of state peasants had declined by nearly half, domain revenues by more

²² Rachel, *Handels-, Zoll- und Akzisepolitik*, 20, 32; calculations from data, 842.

²³ Isaacsohn, *Urkunden und Aktenstücke*, 10.2: 329. Compare Schultze, *Mark Brandenburg*, 4: 205, 212–13, 221.

than two-thirds. The losses of available workers and income on the private estates of the Junkers must have been similarly extreme.²⁴

Such are the gloomy statistics in which historians have sought to take the toll of the Thirty Years' War. But, in their search for measures of destruction, their eyes have passed over one of the most significant causes and consequences of the great upheaval's material damage. In the war-torn countryside, the villagers looked in vain to their Junkers for protection against fighting and plunder, and the hunger and disease following in their train. Seigneurial authority collapsed over wide regions, if not everywhere. The peasantry, thrown back on their own devices, ceased to obey their noble overlords. The repressive machinery of the system of serfdom, whose efficiency before 1618 was far from perfect, froze up during the war.

It is strange that this turn of events should have escaped historians' attention, for the government acknowledged it repeatedly. The statute on laborers and wages issued in 1635 for the Altmark forbade large and small holders to settle anywhere without the permission of the local seigneur (whether Junker, princely official, or town corporation): "this abuse . . . has spread so far that the peasantry presume, just as they wish, to move from one village to another." Instead of staying on their holdings and rendering their seigneurial dues and services, "as far as is still possible," they were leasing or sharecropping other people's land and paying nothing to their rightful overlords.

Villagers and townspeople alike had, "in these very hard times of war, betaken themselves, secretly or openly, to other places." Many had armed themselves illegally. Numerous farm workers refused to enter into yearly contracts and dealt instead in horses and livestock plundered by marauding soldiers, a trade the edict of 1635 tried to abolish. Those who remained in the Junkers' pay negotiated agreements (*Pacta*) with their employers, illegally raising wages above the statutory maximums by such subterfuges as claiming shares of the manorial harvests, requiring their masters to raise livestock for them, and extorting gifts in cash from them at the holidays or even for their weekend carouses (*Wochen-Zechen*). Rural artisans and day laborers were unilaterally raising their own wages and making excessive demands for food and drink, which the edict attempted to limit to three meals daily.²⁵

While forbidding the workers' excesses, the statute of 1635 paid silent tribute to the soaring cost of labor by prescribing a new schedule, superseding that of 1551, of pay in cash and kind for day laborers and for manorial servants employed throughout the year. Such wage statutes reveal little about workers' real earnings. Even if their employers insisted on observing the prescribed limits

²⁴ The demographic consequences of the war are controversial. Population figures for 1640 from Schultze, *Mark Brandenburg*, 4: 287–88; for 1652 and 1660 from Günther Franz, *Der Dreissigjährige Krieg und das deutsche Volk*, 4th edn. (Stuttgart, 1979), 22–23. On the state domains: Grossmann, *Über die gutsherrlich-bäuerlichen Verhältnisse*, 68; Breysig, *Geschichte der brandenburgischen Finanzen*, 238–39. Compare Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, 1: 54.

²⁵ CCM, 5.3.1, no. 9, cols. 23–36, *passim*; quotations from cols. 27–30, 33–35. The transgressions and disobedience of the rural population, denounced in this and the other edicts on which the present essay draws, were doubtless not everywhere prevalent. But the government would hardly have singled them out for legislative remedy if they had not been widespread.

on payments in cash, the value of income supplements in kind—housing, gardens and arable land, grazing rights, fuel, food and drink, clothing—was harder to fix in law and could decisively affect wage levels. Nevertheless, the statutory rates of pay in cash are a barometer of the Junkers' reactions to conditions in the labor market, and it is not surprising that they found themselves obliged in 1635 to recommend considerable increases in the legal maximums. Thus, in the Altmark, the average annual money wages payable to the highest category of agricultural worker on the Junker estates—the *grosser Ackerknecht*, who was responsible for plowing, team-driving, and mechanical repairs—were raised in 1635 (in terms of a stable money of account) 99 percent above their 1551 level.²⁶

Analogous statutes promulgated for the Mittelmark and Neumark in the years 1644–1646 show that wartime depopulation had driven up the cost of labor across the board. The offenders of 1635 are joined by millers, the higher sort of manorial employees (such as vintners, fishermen, and field foremen), threshers, linen-weavers, shipmasters, raftsmen, and transporters on land of persons and goods. The wages in cash and, in some cases, in kind of these and many other rural workers were fixed anew. In two districts of the Mittelmark where pre-war rates are known, the average annual money wages of *grosse Ackerknechte* now stood 82 percent higher than in 1551. The edict of 1645 acknowledged that, in the heavily depopulated Uckermark and Neumark, where strict serfdom was in whole or part the law, the Junkers were offering illegally high wages, injurious to their brethren elsewhere, in their efforts to bring their estates back into production.²⁷

The increasingly heavy direct taxes levied since 1626 on the landed peasantry impeded the resettlement of abandoned holdings. Yet both the princely regime and the Junkers had a vital interest in repopulating the villages, especially with largeholding *Vollbauern* maintaining plow and haulage teams for *corvée* labor on the Crown and private estates. There were many farmers who had stood their ground during the war or who, having fled, were willing to return to their patrimonies. Others, from inside the country as well as from neighboring principalities, were interested in taking a Brandenburg farm. Under these conditions, a tendency toward compromise emerged in the war's aftermath: the government tried to adjust its tax levies to levels that were locally bearable, while

²⁶ Pay scales for 1635, *CCM*, 5.3.1, cols. 32–34; for 1551, Friedensburg, *Kurmärkische Ständeakten*, 1: 839. The government promulgated these and the other wage statutes discussed in the present essay according to the wishes of the corporate nobility expressed at the local or district level. For brevity's sake, the fluctuations in the pay in cash of *grosse Ackerknechte* are taken here as representative of the movement of the money wages of all rural laborers. The cash earnings of less robust and highly skilled men and of most women were considerably lower.

²⁷ *CCM*, 5.3.1, no. 11 (1644), cols. 37–56; no. 12 (1645), cols. 55–76; no. 13 (1646), cols. 75–110; compare *CCM*, 5.3.1, no. 10 (1641), cols. 35–38. To the abuses condemned in 1635, the new edicts added the breakaway of the shepherds, and hence of the profitable wool trade, from seigneurial domination. See Otto Meinardus, ed., *Protokolle und Relationen des Brandenburgischen Geheimen Rates aus der Zeit des Kurfürsten Friedrich Wilhelm*, 6 vols. (Leipzig, 1889–1917), 3: 144–47, 150–54. Wage rates in 1644 (Teltow and Havelland districts): *CCM*, 5.3.1, no. 11; pre-war rates: Friedensburg, *Kurmärkische Ständeakten*, 1: 816 and following, 827 and following; wage rates in 1645 (Neumark): *CCM*, 5.3.1, no. 13.

the administrators of the state domains and the Junkers who had rescued some of their substance from the wreckage offered new settlers of peasant farms in their jurisdictions help in the form of free building materials and livestock and reduced claims on rents and labor services. In this way, a devastated large estate such as Stavenow in the Prignitz district could repopulate by 1649 nearly two-thirds of its *Vollbauern* and cottager holdings (see Table 2, below). The downward pressure on peasant rents is evident in the Privy Council's report of 1652 to Frederick William on the misdeeds of a state domain lessee, including his demand that the peasants under his jurisdiction pay from their holdings the full pre-war dues in cash and kind (*Pächte*), "which are nowhere else given or claimed."²⁸

Set against the government's and less hard-pressed nobility's pragmatic inclination to make economic concessions for the sake of repopulating their villages was the impulse, strong among the lesser gentry but felt in some measure by the entire seigneurial class, to restore or even broaden their pre-war rights over the peasantry by judicial-administrative compulsion. In the Uckermark, the nobility had looked on helplessly as, during the war, their peasants and manorial servants shook off the bonds of personal serfdom and fled their villages. In response to the Junkers' appeals, Frederick William issued in 1643 an edict restoring in full the old regime in this district. But, in 1644 and again in 1648, the Uckermark nobility complained that their "absconded subjects refused all compliance and would not return to their cabins (*Hüttern*)."²⁹

In the Prignitz district, the peasantry suffered the lesser legal disabilities prevailing in most parts of the electorate. Severe wartime devastation had left only 373 peasant and cottager holdings occupied in 1640, but in 1652 there were nearly 1,500 more, restoring the landed peasantry to 40 percent of its pre-war numbers.³⁰ This resettlement occurred in a tense atmosphere of peasant-landlord conflict. In 1643, the corporate nobility protested the Prignitz peasantry's filing of what amounted to a class-action suit before the high court (*Kammergericht*) in Berlin against excessive rents, labor services, and taxes. The Privy Council referred the nobility's petition to the high court, but Frederick William's position was unequivocal: "We cannot in any way approve the peasants' independent undertaking, especially since they do not constitute a corporate body (*Universität*). It looks more like a sedition that, if not stopped in time, might burst out in action." Spurned by the courts, the peasants armed and organized themselves in 1646 against the soldiers still moving through the land, provoking

²⁸ Quotation from Meinardus, *Protokolle und Relationen*, 4: 582–84. For examples of postwar tax remissions granted on petitions of peasants and also state domain administrators, see 2: 74, 296–97, 465, 601, 614; 4:115. On the immigration of foreign peasant settlers, Breysig, *Geschichte der brandenburgischen Finanzen*, 247 and following; Franz, *Der Dreissigjährige Krieg*, 95 and following; and the military census of 1652 in Johannes Schultze, ed., *Die Prignitz und ihre Bevölkerung nach dem dreissigjährigen Kriege* (Perleberg, 1928).

²⁹ Quotation from Meinardus, *Protokolle und Relationen*, 4: 60; see also 2: 440; Schultze, *Mark Brandenburg*, 4: 300 and 5: 36–40. As late as 1687, nearly two-thirds of the Uckermark's pre-war peasant and cottager holdings stood abandoned (although local devastation during the war of 1674–79 partly accounts for this circumstance). Calculation based on Breysig, 240; and Otto Behre, *Geschichte der Statistik in Brandenburg-Preussen* (Berlin, 1905), 179.

³⁰ Schultze, *Die Prignitz*, 208–09.

fear among the nobility that the villagers, who were already refusing to render their dues and labor services, might now stage an armed revolt against them. In 1648, the peasant bands had still not been disarmed. In 1656, an edict appeared announcing the arrest of the ringleaders who had led the Prignitz peasantry's resistance not only to seigneurial rents but also to auxiliary military services and taxes. In one village, sentences to the local jail were still being meted out to the recalcitrant in 1658.³¹

In 1651, the Brandenburg nobility demanded new legislation to bring the peasantry to heel. In the Privy Council's words, the Junkers were complaining "that the statute on laborers and wages promulgated here some years ago absolutely cannot be brought into effect and that the manorial servants, especially the plowmen and drivers (*Knechte*), have to be paid much more than the statute allows." The council confessed to Frederick William that it did not see how this state of affairs, "given the present shortage of hands," could be remedied, "unless some emphatic means of coercing the insubordinate into obedience are agreed upon and strictly applied"—this was the essential point—"in all parts of the land."³²

IN 1652, FREDERICK WILLIAM SUMMONED THE ESTATES of the Altmark and Mittelmark to win them over to his fiscal reforms. The nobility countered with a litany of grievances. They complained that during the war the landlords "did not hold the [peasant farmers] too strictly to the performance of their labor services and the payment of their rents and dues, so that they might the better bear the burden of the heavy taxes and other public charges. But now, some of them, denying they owe any dues at all, are forcing lawsuits [before the appellate courts] over this issue on their landlords (*Gutsherren*)." While the nobility conceded that no one should be deprived of the right of legal redress, they urged the government to support the rulings of seigneurial justice and to punish, with prison or otherwise, peasants and their attorneys in cases of unjustifiable appeals. The Junkers also complained that the government, in repopulating the villages attached to the state domains, was granting new peasant settlers "far too many" years of exemption from taxes and rents. This policy put the private landlords under heavy pressure to follow suit or lose the competition for new subject farmers.³³

³¹ Quotation from Meinardus, *Protokolle und Relationen*, 2: 233; see also 3: 491, 673; 4: 182–83; 5: 144–46. Schultze, *Die Prignitz*, 201–04; CCM, 6.1, no. 126 (1656); GStA. Provinz Brandenburg, Rep. 16, no. 97; Max Wichmann, *Die Höfe von Breddin (Prignitz) von der ersten Erwähnung bis zur Gegenwart* (unpub. ms., 1941), 80.

³² Quotation from Meinardus, *Protokolle und Relationen*, 4: 356–57. At the year's end, the government announced it was preparing a new statute on laborers and that, pending its publication, manorial servants in compulsory service whose terms were now ending could be required against their will to serve another year under their present master; CCM, 5.3.1, no. 15 (1651). Another edict accused the "insolent farm servants" of wishing to flee "the fatherland" for foreign parts. To forestall this, the seigneurial authorities were now empowered to refuse their subjects permission, except for "sufficient reason," to settle under another jurisdiction. On disregard of this ruling, see note 46, below. CCM, 5.3.1, no. 14 (1651).

³³ Grievances and quotation, Isaacsohn, *Urkunden und Aktenstücke*, 10.2: 238.

Against this background, the paragraphs of the *Landtags-Recess* of 1653 defining in law the postwar peasant-lord relationship hardly add up to the abandonment of the villagers to noble abuse so widely deplored in the historical literature. The government promised to reject appeals entered “frivolously” by the peasantry against their lords and to punish groundless complaints with prison terms. But it explicitly upheld the access of all subjects without exception to the Crown tribunals, promised that all appeals would be heard “in case of denial of justice” at the seigneurial level, and refused to intimidate lawyers representing the Junkers’ subjects.³⁴

The nobility requested confirmation of their right to evict “obdurate and disobedient” farmers when circumstances warranted it. But the government ruled that evictions were permissible only “ob grave et enorme delictum,” and then only after a proper legal inquest and assenting judgment of a higher court. The nobility also asked the government to support their efforts, in those districts where strict personal serfdom was customary, to recover those of their subjects “who had stealthily absconded so as to set themselves illegally in the liberty of new lords who had accepted them as their subjects.” The *Landtags-Recess* did indeed uphold the oppressive custom of the Uckermark Junkers. Emancipation there from personal serfdom could not be claimed on grounds of the passage of time but only through “bona fides, titulus, vel scientia et patientia Domini.” This ruling permitted the reimposition of personal serfdom on those who had escaped it during the war, provided their former masters could track them down. Finally, while the government endorsed the nobility’s claims to the full measure of pre-war peasant rents, it canceled all arrears owed by the Crown’s own peasant subjects and urged private landlords to follow its example. Moreover, it put its own interests first in ruling that the collection of unpaid taxes took legal precedence over the claims of private individuals against peasant farms.³⁵

Shortly after the negotiation of the *Landtags-Recess* with the Estates of the Altmark and Mittelmark, the government sealed a *Landes-Recess* with the nobility and towns of the Neumark. There the pre-war condition of the non-servile

³⁴ *Landtags-Recess de dato den 26. Jul. 1653*, CCM, 6.1, no. 118 (hereafter, *Landtags-Recess* 1653), col. 435.

³⁵ Isaacsohn, *Urkunden und Aktenstücke*, 10.2: 273 (quotation), 239, 250; *Landtags-Recess* 1653, col. 438 (quotation), cols. 437, 440, 443–45, 450, 461. The historical literature sometimes holds or suggests, without offering empirical proofs, that the Junkers misapplied the rulings on strict serfdom in the *Landtags-Recess* to deprive freemen or freedmen of their personal liberty. See F. L. Carsten, “Gutsherrschaft und Adelsmacht,” in Schlenke, *Preussen*, 36; Franz, *Der Dreissigjährige Krieg*, 115, 123; Hobsbawm, “Crisis,” 25, 35–37; Henry Kamen, “The Economic and Social Consequences of the Thirty Years’ War,” *Past and Present*, 39 (1968): 57; Gerhard Schormann, *Der Dreissigjährige Krieg* (Göttingen, 1985), 124–25; Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, 1: 74, 162. But, while the question requires further study, it is unlikely that enserfment occurred on any large scale. In 1652, the Privy Council cited scripture against any such abuse. Isaacsohn, 10.2: 272–73. Both before and after 1653, the government heard appeals against false attributions of servility. See, for example, Meinardus, *Protokolle und Relationen*, 5: 626. In an edict for the Neumark of 1653 (CCM, 6.1, no. 120), the government declared that “where strict serfdom (*Leibeigenschaft*) is not customary it shall not be introduced.” But the government certainly did support the restoration of strict serfdom where it had existed before the war, including numerous villages of state peasants in the Uckermark and Neumark. See CCM, 6.1, no. 204 (1655). In 1644, Frederick William ordered that a stable boy sentenced to the lash (*fustigatio*) be enserfed instead. Meinardus, 2: 438.

peasantry had been harder than that west of the Oder. Now it was ruled that, in those cases in which a farmer had two able sons, not only must one succeed his father on the farm, as was customary, but the other could be compelled to take an abandoned holding under his Junker's jurisdiction. Unoccupied farms could also be forced on the numerous able-bodied lodgers living, "in these times of low prices," an undeserved life of ease: The government also soured the peasantry's lives further by sanctioning the nobility's proposals to replace the "onerous feeding" (*beschwerliche Speisung*) of their subjects during manorial service with more or less unpalatable substitutes.³⁶

Whether such measures were well designed to overcome the acute postwar labor shortage in the Neumark may be doubted. During the fighting, a large-scale flight of the peasantry into Poland had occurred, probably especially from the districts of strict serfdom and degraded tenures. It was said in the Privy Council in 1643 that such fugitives "were laughing at those who had stayed behind on their holdings." The *Landes-Recess* of 1653 shows that no progress had been made in negotiating their recovery with the government in Warsaw.³⁷

THE ECONOMIC FORTUNES OF SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ESTATE AGRICULTURE are represented in Tables 1 and 2, the first assembling the available aggregate data on the Mittelmark and Altmark, the second illustrating the conjunctural trends by the example of the Stavenow estates in the Prignitz district. Both convey a grim picture of wartime losses and a postwar depression so severe as to prevent the restoration of pre-war levels of profitability before the early decades of the eighteenth century. These data suggest that, for three generations after the Thirty Years' War, the most vital interest of the noble landlords and state domain administrators was the reassemblage of their war-decimated labor forces, both of subject peasants and manorial farm servants.

It is not surprising that Tables 1 and 2 both reveal a fairly close correlation between the movement of rye prices, levels of grain production, and net earnings of private and princely estates. More interesting is the perhaps closer relationship between profits and peasant subjects reflected not only in the parallelism of the two series but also, obliquely, in the soaring rates at which the

³⁶ Churfürstl: Brandenburgl: Neumärckischer Landes-Recess, de anno 1653, den 19. August, CCM, 6.1, no. 119 (hereafter, *Landes-Recess*), cols. 465–78, *passim* (quotations from cols. 472, 476). In the Neumark, the supernumerary children of the peasantry had been liable since 1572 to unlimited (rather than one to three-year) terms of compulsory manorial service so long as they remained unmarried and without their own households. But there were also numerous peasant holdings in the Neumark that owed the Junkers no more than two days of weekly *corvée*. Compare Christoph Freiherr Senfft von Pilsach, "Bäuerliche Wirtschaftsverhältnisse in einem neumärckischen Dorf (Land Sternberg)," *Forschungen zur brandenburgischen und preussischen Geschichte*, 22 (1909): 127–91.

³⁷ Quotation from Meinardus, *Protokolle und Relationen*, 1: 621. *Landes-Recess*, cols. 467, 472. In 1654, the government commissioned a Neumark sheriff to investigate illegal labor practices in his district; CCM, 5.3.1, no. 16, cols. 133–36. Since "one knows only too well that both master (*Herr*) and servant (*Knecht*) gladly conceal the truth" (col. 133), he was ordered to have all employers and workers swear under oath that they were not paying or receiving excessively high wages in cash or kind. One wonders whether the sheriff had the energy and, when it came to interrogating Junkers in violation of the wage statutes, the nerve for this assignment.

TABLE 1
Economic Trends in the Mark Brandenburg, 1645–1727 (1600 / 1624 = 100)

| | 1641–50 | 1651–60 | 1661–70 | 1671–80 | 1681–90 | 1691–1700 | 1701–10 | 1711–20 | 1721–30 |
|---|---------|---------|----------------|---------|---------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|
| 1. Nominal rye price at Berlin | 86 | 96 | 69 | 71 | 67 | 123 | 92 | 116 | 94 |
| 2. Population (Mittelmark and Altmark) | ~50 | | | | 63 | | | 105 | 120 |
| 3. Net income from state domains | 36 | 51 | 23 (= 1659) | 15 | 50 | 59 | | | |
| 4. Revenues from direct taxes (<i>Kontribution</i>) | ~70 | 270 | 142 | 182 | 209 | 209 | 164 | | |
| 5. Appraisal value of dairy cattle | 83 | | | | | 267 | | 267 | |
| 6. Appraisal value of sheep | 150 | | | | | 125 | | 200 | |
| 7. Statutory wage of <i>Grossknecht</i> (Mittelmark) | 139 | | | | 190 | | | | 204 |
| 8. Appraisal value of full peasant's labor services | 200 | | | | | 300 | | 500 | |

SOURCES:

- 1 (prices). Pre-1653 prices, Naudé, *Die Getreidehandelspolitik*, 568–69; post-1653 prices, Behre, *Geschichte der Statistik*, 277. The indexes in the table above represent decennial averages: 100 = 1624–1633.
- 2 (population). Behre, *Geschichte der Statistik*, 67, 172, 198 (estimates for the years 1648, 1688, 1713, 1725).
- 3 (state domains). Breysig, *Geschichte der brandenburgischen Finanzen*, 239–240, 285, 372, 376–77 (data for the years 1647, 1651, 1659, 1674, 1681, and 1696). The indexes in the table represent cumulative averages of Breysig's figures, reduced (for 1695/96) by 11 percent to discount administrative costs.
- 4 (revenues). Behre, *Geschichte der Statistik*, 78; Friedrich Wolters, *Geschichte der brandenburgischen Finanzen in der Zeit von 1640–1697*, vol. 2, *Die Zentralverwaltung des Heeres und der Steuern* (Munich, 1915), 575; Rachel, *Handels-, Zoll- und Akzisepolitik*, 857. Data from the years 1650; 1657; 1662 and 1667 (whose indexes of 136 and 147, respectively, are averaged in the table); 1672 and 1677 (whose indexes of 148 and 216, respectively, are averaged in the table); 1682; 1697; and 1710.
- 5–6 (livestock values). GStA. Stavenow, nos. 255 (1614), 57 (appraisal of Prignitz estate of von Capellen family, 1646), 282 (1694), 240 (1717).
- 7 (wages). Friedensburg, *Kurmärkische Ständekasten*, 1:827–38 (wage rates set in 1550); CCM, 5.3.1, nos. 11, 12, 21, 36 (wage rates set in 1645, 1681, and 1722).
- 8 (labor services). GStA. Stavenow, nos. 255 (1614), 57 (von Capellen estate, 1646), 282 (1694), and 240 (1717).

TABLE 2
Production and Profits of the Stavenow Estates, 1614–1717 (Appraisal and Inventory Values, 1614 = 100)

| | 1647 | 1649 | 1666 | 1675 | 1694 | 1717 |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 1. Number of largeholding peasants (<i>Vollbauern</i>) and landed cottagers | 29 | 62 | | 51 | 78 | 95 |
| 2. Yearly net profit | 52 | | 44 | | 79 | 107 |
| 3. Total grain output | | | | 33 | 62 | 67 |
| 4. Sheep and cattle as percent of net profit | | | | | 233 | 350 |
| 5. Peasant rents and labor services as percent of net profit | | | | | 254 | 392 |

SOURCES: GStA. Stavenow, nos. 255 (1614), 32 (1647), 131 and 43 (1649), 67 (1675), 282 (1694), 240 (1717).

Yearly net profit reckoned for 1614, 1647, and 1717 at 5 percent of estates' market value, for 1666 and 1694 at annual lease price.

landlords assessed (for purposes of property sales) the value of the labor services of settled and working peasant subjects. On the state domains, as at Stavenow, seigneurial incomes followed the melancholy decline of the population during the war. A tendency toward what might have been a rather rapid postwar recovery halted before the resumption of war in the years 1655–1660, during which villagers and townspeople alike suffered the sharp bite of Frederick William's newly increased direct taxation or *Kontribution*. The plundering and destruction of these years must have reversed the population recovery throughout Brandenburg more or less as drastically as it did the settled peasantry at Stavenow.³⁸

In the 1660s and 1670s, estate incomes and grain prices fell to the lowest levels of the seventeenth century. Heavy taxes and localized devastation returned with the war of 1674–1679, the last to torment the country before 1740. Only in its wake did a sustained, if slow, recovery of the population and the profits of landlordism start. The cadastre of the Prignitz villages drawn up in 1686 found 73 percent of all landed holdings in the possession of peasant farmers, while, in the district of Ruppín, the figure was 87 percent. Yet, as late as 1713, the total population of the Mark Brandenburg only just exceeded its 1618 level. The government of Frederick William I (reign, 1713–1740) required long years to wring acceptable yields from the state domains, and, in 1717, the Stavenow estates changed hands for a sum that, in real terms, was some 20 percent lower than what they had fetched in 1614.³⁹

³⁸ For descriptive evidence of the material losses and depopulation occasioned by the war of 1655–1660, see Isaacsohn, *Urkunden und Aktenstücke*, 10.2: 344–45, 489–91; Meinardus, *Protokolle und Relationen*, 5: 469.

³⁹ Prignitz occupancy rate calculated from a sample of fifty villages among a total of 267. Data from Werner Vogel, ed., *Prignitz-Kataster 1686–1697* (Köln-Wien), 1985. On the Ruppín district, Franz, *Der Dreissigjährige Krieg*, 20–21. It cannot be said with certainty when the population of the entire Mark Brandenburg first recovered its pre-1618 numbers. The pre-war population of the

The shortage of working subject peasants meant that the Junkers had to farm their domanial acres, in whole or in part, with hired labor and costly teams of their own. The Junkers and princely estate administrators were driven to this expedient in the second half of the seventeenth century to a degree unrecognized in the literature. At Stavenow in 1694, seigneurial holdings of thirty-six to forty oxen and eight to twelve horses had to be maintained to till but 62 percent of the arable land that had been harvested in 1614 with the help of only twelve manorial oxen. At the end of the seventeenth century, the cost of a manorial labor force of sixteen steadily employed workers was, as a proportion of net seigneurial income, as high as the cost of twenty-seven workers had been at the end of the sixteenth century. Such relatively capital-intensive yet minimally profitable seigneurially financed demesne farms (*Eigenwirtschaften*) were a characteristic feature of the agrarian landscape long after the Thirty Years' War.⁴⁰

A dilemma faced the Junkers at Stavenow and elsewhere. Population contraction and the ruralization of much of the country's urban economic life had weakened domestic demand for cereals at the same time as west German and West European grain export markets were shrinking. The terms of trade in livestock production were more favorable, as Tables 1 and 2 illustrate. From the 1640s, Brandenburg landlords were keen on strengthening their holdings of sheep and cattle. But this entailed considerable investments, beyond the means of many a Junker. Moreover, grain production could be cut back but not abandoned entirely. If local and export prices were low, the postwar landlords' immediate response was still to try to market as much as possible.⁴¹

Neumark is unknown but is unlikely to have exceeded the figure of 115,000 that Behre supplies for 1713; *Geschichte der Statistik*, 198. On state domain revenues after 1713, see Behre, 91–98. GStA. Stavenow, nos. 30, 255 (estate sales).

⁴⁰ GStA. Stavenow, no. 704, fols. 134–36; no. 705, fols. 127–29; no. 43, fol. 40; no. 282, *passim*. The following local studies document the existence of seigneurial *Eigenwirtschaften* during the second half of the seventeenth century and, in some cases, the early decades of the eighteenth century: Harnisch, *Die Herrschaft Boitzenburg* (Uckermark), 138–41; Günter Vogler, "Die Entwicklung der feudalen Arbeitsrente in Brandenburg vom 15. bis 18. Jahrhundert: Eine Analyse für das kurmärkische Domänenamt Badingen" (Uckermark), *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (1966), 1: 156; Albrecht, *Die Gutsherrschaft Freyenstein* (Prignitz), 84–94; Siegfried Passow, *Ein märkischer Rittersitz* (Ober-Barnim), 2 vols. (Eberswald, 1907), 1: 98 and following; Hahn, *Fürstliche Territorialhoheit* (Altmark), 208 and following. To judge from the frequency in the Crown villages of the commutation of labor services into cash payments, the state domain administrators and lessees must also have depended heavily on their own teams and hired labor. Breysig, *Geschichte der brandenburgischen Finanzen*, 298–99, 359.

⁴¹ On the post-1648 conjunctural trends in the European and German agricultural economies, see Wilhelm Abel, *Agrarkrisen*, 163 and following; and Wilhelm Abel, *Geschichte der deutschen Landwirtschaft vom frühen Mittelalter bis zum 19. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 1962), chaps. 6–7. Despite falling domestic and West European rye prices, Brandenburg producers exported during the years of peace between 1662 and 1674 shipments yielding an average annual customs duty (for nine known years) of over 26,000 Taler; but, in the thirteen years between 1676 and 1688, the grain duty paid an average of only 15,000 Taler. These sums, given the precipitous increase of 1632 in the customs rates and the devaluation of the Taler as a money of account by 14 percent in 1667, suggest that the volume of postwar grain exports was much reduced from pre-1618 levels. From the late seventeenth century until after the Seven Years' War (1756–63), the Junkers were largely dependent on the domestic grain market. Calculations based on data in Rachel, *Handels-, Zoll- und Akzisepolitik*, 842; see also 32 and following, 82 and following, 208, 238, 269 and following, 511–636; and Naudé, *Die Getreidehandelspolitik*, 60–183. On estate owners' efforts to reduce their dependence on bread grains and expand their brewing and distilling operations, see GStA. Stavenow, no. 282 (*anno* 1694).

If the landlords were to cut their costs of tillage, they needed to resettle the large and small holdings in their villages. This would enable them to return to the pre-war regime of unpaid labor services. It would, by repopulating the countryside, free them of the compulsion to bid up among themselves the price of still scarce wage labor. But it was an expensive undertaking. Not only did the landlords have to grant settlers who were rebuilding fully devastated and abandoned peasant holdings years free of rents and labor services; in many or perhaps most cases, they had to provide the necessary building materials and essential livestock and equipment as well.⁴²

Alternatively, the Junkers could pursue the repopulation of their villages by extra-economic coercion. They could invoke the statutes of 1651 and 1653 to compel the children of their surviving subject farmers, if any there were, to accept and rebuild abandoned farms and thereafter to pay heavy seigneurial rents on them. They could attempt to hold down their wage bills by invoking the letter of the law governing compulsory manorial service. If before the Thirty Years' War they had thought themselves land-poor, they could incorporate abandoned peasant lands into their demesnes and try to evade the government's demands—first, that they pay the taxes due from them and, later, that they should be resettled with peasant families for the sake of the “Peuplierung” of the country and to broaden the pool of military recruits. In short, the landed nobility could try to overcome the unfavorable conditions facing them in the commodity and labor markets by exerting their seigneurial authority to raise the rate of exploitation of their village subjects. To the limited extent that the historical literature has recognized the Junkers' postwar dilemmas as agriculturalists, it has assumed that this was the path they trod.

IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY, the nobility and the government did indeed repeatedly attempt to gain their economic ends through

Compare Paul Gottlieb Wöhner, *Steuerverfassung des platten Landes der Kurmark Brandenburg*, 3 vols. (Berlin, 1805), 1: 79 and following.

⁴² In 1717 at Stavenow, the value of the labor services and rents in cash and kind of the thirty-six peasant farms resettled since 1649 (most in the 1680s and 1690s) added up, when capitalized at 6 percent, to nearly 6,000 Taler, a large sum included in the price paid that year by the estate's new master; GStA. Stavenow, no. 220. In the Uckermark, the cost to the landlords of the buildings and the essential livestock and tools (*Hofwehr*) of a peasant farm was, around the year 1700, 431 Taler. In 1622, under more favorable market conditions, it had been only 260 Taler; Harnisch, *Die Herrschaft Boitzenburg*, 148–49. In those numerous cases in which the landlords fully financed peasant resettlement (the colonists supplying only their labor), peasant tenurial rights suffered a degradation in comparison with pre-war norms. Outside the districts of strict serfdom, the peasantry typically held such rebuilt farms not as hereditary property (*Erbeigentum*) but in hereditary usage (*Lassitentum*), since the buildings and fixed stock now belonged in law not to the peasant but to his landlord. This, rather than personal enserfment, was the most important legal consequence for the peasantry of the great war. In practice, the difference was not great, since even proprietary peasants were not permitted to alienate or divide among their heirs their farmsteads and fixed stock but rather only, as was also the case among the *lassitische* peasants, other assets and property they had accumulated. See Grossmann, *Über die gutsherrlich-bäuerlichen Verhältnisse*, chap. 4. For examples of postwar peasant settlers with somewhat meager livestock holdings of their own, see GStA. Stavenow, no. 131 (*anno* 1649). Sixteen peasants each held, on average, 2 oxen, 2.33 cows, and 0.67 horses.

judicial-administrative coercion of the peasantry. But, by their own admission, their success was meager, not least because they were competing among themselves for the peasant surplus. The war into which Frederick William plunged in 1655 augured badly for landlord interests under emergent absolutism. Not only did the Elector squeeze more revenue from the land than the agreement of 1653 allowed, but in 1656 he urged the nobility to arm themselves in a feudal levy and to agree to the formation of peasant militias to defend the home front. Their reply was that two-thirds of their brethren were too poor to equip themselves for war. They were already paying heavy taxes “through their subjects, since they had to go without the full measure of labor services and rents the peasants owed them.” The Junkers’ spokesmen feared that the villagers, if armed, would “not only refuse to pay their taxes but will stop rendering their labor services altogether” since, as they added later, the peasants “have become more and more desperate because of so many tax levies.”⁴³

At the war’s end, Frederick William, without having consulted the Estates, decreed “by virtue of princely power and sovereign authority” that all persons prepared to rebuild a devastated and abandoned peasant farm must without exception be granted six years free of taxes, rents, and military quartering. This he justified by the “very ruined” condition of the Mark Brandenburg, whose settlements had been stripped by renewed war “to no small degree of their labor power.” The nobility protested that they had “a high interest in what belonged to them” and that their claims to rents and labor services could not be denied them against their will. They expressed the fear that foreign colonists would abuse their free years to “exhaust the soil” and at their expiration “disappear into the dust.” They should be required to deposit money with their landlords against this eventuality. But the government ignored the Junkers’ complaints and the six-year ruling remained on the statutes.⁴⁴

Between 1660 and the resumption of war in 1674, Frederick William’s regime blamed the slow pace of recovery on Junker egotism and peasant insubordination. In 1667 and again in 1670, Frederick William denounced those among the nobility who, instead of resettling their abandoned peasant farms, annexed the land into their own demesnes or even drove settled peasants from their holdings for this purpose, “as He himself has observed in various places.” The Elector commanded the Estates to desist from such “shameful, pernicious things.” Stung, they replied that the whole nobility should not be blamed for the actions of a few, and that they too wished that all peasant farms were occupied.⁴⁵

At the same time, a decree of 1670 announced that the statute of 1651 on laborers and wages in the Altmark and Mittelmark was “very seldom observed.”

⁴³ Quotations from Isaacsohn, *Urkunden und Aktenstücke*, 10.2: 328, 322, 329; see also Meinardus, *Protokolle und Relationen*, 5: 85–86, 469; 6: 597–99. The nobility’s and his own officials’ protests led Frederick William to issue another edict of 1656 forbidding his recruiters to lure away to the colors the land’s farmers by playing on their dissatisfaction with taxes and military requisitions; *CCM*, 6.1, no. 215, cols. 491–94. See also Meinardus, 5: 83–84; *CCM*, 6.1, no. 128, cols. 495–98.

⁴⁴ Frederick William’s edict, *CCM*, 6.1, no. 131 (1661), cols. 501–02; the nobility’s protests, Meinardus, *Protokolle und Relationen*, 6: 345–46.

⁴⁵ *CCM*, 5.3.2, no. 3, cols. 335–38; Isaacsohn, *Urkunden und Aktenstücke*, 10.2: 416–17, 424, 535–37.

It complained that “in these times, when still only the fewest villages are repopulated,” the children of the peasantry were refusing to take over empty holdings. Many people in the countryside were living as lodgers from day labor, raising their wages “as they please” and evading “all *oneribus publicis*.” Henceforth, all such persons resident for three years or more in any one place could be compelled to take either a steady job or an abandoned farm. Landlords should try to resist the demand that meals be provided on days of manorial service. But the peasants’ strong bargaining position emerged in the proviso that substitutes should be offered “so that the subjects will stay where they are.”⁴⁶

In the Neumark, “this war-ravaged and devastated land,” the authorities had publicly denounced in 1660 the demand of the “unbridled peasants and workers” that their employers serve them strong beer. These people, who in the war’s aftermath “imagine themselves to be indispensable,” were responsible for the present illegally potent brewing. “One can no longer find a natural beer in the towns, but instead such a thick murky drink that one might think Satan had invented it to smother human reason and drive people deeper into sin and vice.” The government believed that no fewer than fourteen barrels of beer should be brewed from twenty-four bushels of barley. But, in response to the entreaties of the nobility, fearful of the loss of laboring hands, it reluctantly approved a twelve-barrel minimum.⁴⁷

In 1683, there occurred the last assembly of the corporate representatives of the Altmark and Mittelmark nobility before the collapse of the old regime in 1806. The grievances they submitted to the princely regime expressed great bitterness over the swelling power of the absolutist military, fiscal, and judicial administration and the eclipse of their rights of corporate self-administration and consultation with the government. Their only recorded complaint about the peasantry was that “frivolous lawsuits” against their landlords were still not being punished. But otherwise they posed as the agriculturalists’ defender, denouncing strongly the burden on the peasant farmers of direct and indirect taxes, military quartering, grain marketing restrictions, and overpriced manufactures monopolized by the government. Even if their solicitude was genuine, they were conceding at the same time that the absolutist regime had become, to their disadvantage, a major extractor of the peasant surplus.⁴⁸

The corporate nobility’s attacks on the bureaucratized and militarized autocracy did not prevent their political flagship from slipping beneath the waves. But, soon after the assembly of 1683, the government issued a new statute on laborers and wages for the Mittelmark and associated districts, prefaced by the exasperated remarks on the common people’s refractoriness cited at the beginning of this article. Undoubtedly, this law incorporated the suggestions of local estate owners, but in it the government pursued its own objectives, not

⁴⁶ CCM, 5.3.2, no. 5, cols. 337–40. Two years later, the government had to concede that manorial laborers on both Crown and private estates were still compelling their employers illegally to supplement their wages by sharing the seigneurial harvest with them; CCM, 5.3.1, no. 18, cols. 137–38.

⁴⁷ CCM, 6.1, no. 130, cols. 499–502 (quotations, col. 499).

⁴⁸ Isaacsohn, *Urkunden und Aktenstücke*, 10.2: 582–602.

necessarily agreeable to the Junkers. It was, for example, now ordained that no single adults would be tolerated in the villages. The seigneurial authorities would compel everyone, including the farm servants, to marry and settle down by their twentieth year. This, in effect, limited the compulsory manorial service of the children of the *Vollbauern* to those under the age of twenty. More to the nobility's liking was the command that married lodgers must, if they would not or could not take over a farm, render their landlords two days of weekly labor services in exchange for food and drink, a concession at odds with official policy to abolish such meals. Moreover, it was now ruled that all the sons of settled farmers, and not just two, could be compelled to take over unoccupied holdings.⁴⁹

Yet the wage rates decreed in 1683 show that the economic conjuncture still benefited labor. The average of the locally variable, highest permissible yearly cash payments to a fully skilled farm servant or *Ackerknecht* now rose to 12.7 Taler. This represented a nominal increase of 37 percent and a real rise of 32 percent over the rates fixed in 1644. The statute regulated working conditions in the Uckermark for the first time since before the great war. It grimly ratified the Junkers' unlimited powers there over the labor power of those of their subjects trapped in strict serfdom. But their inability to reassemble a sufficiently large population of servile farmers had led them to lease unoccupied holdings in large numbers to short-term tenant farmers who were personally free, a strategy they continued to follow throughout the eighteenth century.⁵⁰

Despite a legacy of strict serfdom, the wages in cash and kind paid to manorial laborers in the Uckermark, a land plagued by "paucity of inhabitants," were higher than elsewhere in Brandenburg. A *grosser Ackerknecht*, capable of working a team of four horses and strong enough himself "to carry six bushels of grain," could each year claim 10 to 13 Taler in cash and the harvest of four to six bushels of grain sown at his landlord's expense, or 4 to 6 Taler in their place. Beyond this, he received housing, fuel, and an ample yearly food allowance. The Uckermark shepherds were commanded to stop demanding as their own every fourth head in the herds they shared with the Junkers and to content themselves with the customary fifth.⁵¹

Two years later, the government issued a revised statute on laborers and wages for the Neumark. It attempted a crackdown on the villagers. Personally free lodgers, if they had lived in one place for four years, were declared hereditary subjects (though not serfs) of their Junkers. Freeman leasing farms

⁴⁹ *Revidirte Pauer-Gesinde-Hirten- und Schäfer-Ordnung* (Mittelmark, Prignitz, Beeskow-Storkow). CCM, 5.3.1, no. 20, cols. 141–70, esp. 142–43, 146–49. The statute also denounced the habit among some settlers of abandoned farms of absconding at the end of their free years.

⁵⁰ Mittelmark wage rates averaged from seven districts, CCM, 5.3.1, no. 20, cols. 150–52, 169–70. On the Uckermark, see cols. 144–45, 152–58, 167–68. On the replacement there of serfs by freemen, see Harnisch, *Die Herrschaft Boitzenburg*, 116 and following.

⁵¹ CCM, 5.3.1, no. 21, cols. 153 and following, 163–64. The 1683 statute entitled threshers in the Uckermark to keep as their own every sixteenth bushel. The statutes of 1644–1645 had tried to limit threshers' shares elsewhere in Brandenburg to no more than the eighteenth bushel. In reality, threshers everywhere appear to have taken a larger proportion of the harvest. The records of church land farmed in the Uckermark in the period 1651–1696 show that threshers' shares varied considerably but in most cases made up at least the fourteenth and in many cases the tenth bushel or more. GStA. Provinz Brandenburg, Rep. 16, no. 95: Kirchenregister von Rossow.

were required to sell the fixed improvements they had carried out to their landlords or else become hereditary subject farmers. The sons of peasants were obliged by the age of twenty-five to take over unoccupied holdings of any size, and not only farms in their fathers' class. Farmers who could not pay their taxes and render their labor services faced demotion to farm-servant status until they had saved enough to take on a new holding. Fierce penalties were spelled out for runaways and those who assisted them. Finally, the wage rates decreed in 1685 either perpetuated those of 1646 or lowered them.⁵²

The reaction of the Neumark villagers to the authorities' efforts to enforce the 1685 statute appears to have been tumultuous. For, in 1687, the government published a "clarification" aimed at "setting a limit to the opposition (*Widersetzlichkeit*)" of the peasantry, farm servants, and rural artisans to the earlier edict, which had stirred up "all manner of conflict and doubts." Even though it did not retreat from its policy of reducing lodgers of four years' duration to legal subjection, the government made considerable improvements in the allowable wages in cash and kind payable to subject and free villagers, male and female, in manorial service and to free and mobile workers in the building and carrying trades. In three counties where the wages paid to *grosse Ackerknechte* can be accurately traced, the money rates fixed in 1687 amounted to an increase since 1646 in nominal terms of 50 percent and in real terms of 43 percent. The clergy may have encouraged the common people's protests by refusing to pronounce the 1685 statute legitimate. The edict of 1687 ordered the local pastors or, if they were too old or weak, their sextons to read both edicts in church without fail, or face stiff penalties.⁵³

The statutes of the 1680s did not reduce the countryside to order. In the Mittelmark, the government complained in 1691 to the church administrators (*Inspectores*) that the statute of 1683 "was observed only in the fewest districts" and that, when disputes came before the *Kammergericht*, people pled ignorance to excuse their violations. The *Inspectores* were commanded to make sure that all pastors read the statute once a year from the pulpit. In 1695, the government had to admit that the law was "almost a dead letter." By 1698, Frederick III's officials, responding to the corporate nobility's complaints about the refusal of the seignorial authorities to abide by the statute in their judicial and employment practices, had given up on the higher clergy. They now commanded the patrimonial courts—that is, among others, the Junkers themselves—to see that an extract of the 1683 law, presumably of their own formulation, was read annually to the villagers in their churches, an admission by the regime of its inability to force the landed nobility to comply with the law.⁵⁴

At the end of the seventeenth century, local conditions in the labor market

⁵² CCM, 5.3.1, no. 24, cols. 171–212, esp. 171–81.

⁵³ CCM, 5.3.1, no. 26, cols. 213–22, *passim* (quotation, col. 215).

⁵⁴ CCM, 5.3.1, nos. 27–29, cols. 223–24. On the difficulties the absolutist regime faced in enforcing its laws within the jurisdictions of the nobility and at the grass-roots level in general, see Peter-Michael Hahn, "'Absolutistische' Polizeigesetzgebung und ländliche Sozialverfassung," *Jahrbuch für die Geschichte Mittel- und Ostdeutschlands* (Berlin, 1980), 29: 13–29; and Hahn, *Fürstliche Territorialhoheit*, 227 and following.

rather than the government's wage statutes governed the economic relationship between manor and village. In the first two or three decades of the eighteenth century, the restoration of pre-1618 population levels in the countryside strengthened the Junkers' hands in their dealings with their subjects. The landed peasantry, having arduously rebuilt and restocked their farms, ran the risk of losing them by refusing their landlords' long-evaded claims to rents and labor services in full. Farm laborers, increasingly numerous, faced a tighter job market. By the 1730s Berlin was a city of 80,000, where 6,000–8,000 beggars plied their trade.⁵⁵

Under these conditions, it was possible for the authorities, in the statute on laborers and wages of 1722 issued for the Mittelmark and associated districts, to freeze the real wages of freely contracted farm servants at roughly their 1683 levels. Moreover, by raising the age at which villagers should marry from twenty to twenty-five, the government widened the pool from which landlords could forcibly recruit their manorial servants. In a similar statute of 1735, the term of compulsory service in the Altmark, hitherto three years, was extended on the model of the rest of the country until marriage.⁵⁶

These were the reflections in legislative practice of a new and tense era in the landlord-peasant relationship whose discussion need not be pursued here.⁵⁷ But the government's and the corporate nobility's own testimony shows that the first half-century of absolutism did not witness the bending of the rural population's neck under a yoke of seigneurial domination heavier and more irresistible than before the Thirty Years' War. Until the beginning of the eighteenth century, the laws meant to secure the landlords' advantage over their village subjects were widely violated by Junker and peasant alike.

IN THE COURSE OF RESETTLING THEIR VILLAGES with subject farmers, the noble landowners and state domain managers confronted peasants who exploited the scarcity of their own labor in order to resist as long as possible the obligation of rendering their seigneurial dues in full. While the landlords sought the restoration of peasant rents as they had been claimed or paid before the Thirty Years' War, the peasants tried to evade their reimposition.

How far did they succeed in this, and at what cost to their landlords? Full answers are not yet in sight, but the evidence at hand suggests two conclusions about the movement of peasant rents in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.⁵⁸ In nine private and princely seigneurial jurisdictions scattered

⁵⁵ Rachel, *Grosskaufleute*, 2: 4–5; Schultze, *Mark Brandenburg*, 5: 62.

⁵⁶ CCM, 5.3.1, no. 36 (1722), cols. 267–300, esp. 268, 274; no. 39 (1735), cols. 303–32, esp. 311–12.

⁵⁷ See William W. Hagen, "The Junkers' Faithless Servants: Peasant Insubordination and the Breakdown of Serfdom in Brandenburg-Prussia, 1763–1811," in R. J. Evans and W. R. Lee, eds., *The German Peasantry: Conflict and Community in Rural Society from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Centuries* (London, 1986), 71–101. Compare Hans-Heinrich Müller, *Märkische Landwirtschaft vor den Agrarreformen von 1807* (Potsdam, 1967).

⁵⁸ Peasant rents comprised a complex and varying mix of labor services and haulage, payments in cash and kind, and sometimes (secularized) tithes as well. They cannot accurately be reduced to a

TABLE 3
Average Rents and Labor Services Claimed from Largeholding Peasants
(*Vollbauern*) in Four Stavenow Villages

| | 1618–47 | 1694–1700 | 1727 |
|--|---------|-----------|------|
| 1. Days weekly of manorial service with team of horses | 3 | 2.5 | 2.8 |
| 2. Yearly rent in grain (bushels of rye) | 7 | 3.6 | 7.4 |

SOURCE:
GStA. Stavenow, nos. 131 (1647), 282 (1694), 356 (1699–1700), 30 (1727).
1618–47: conversion (where necessary) of money rents into rye values based on the average price at Berlin, 1624–53, following Naudé, *Die Getreidhandelspolitik*, 568–69; analogous conversion of 1694–1700 data based on Berlin average, 1653–1702, following Behre, *Geschichte der Statistik*, 277.

throughout Brandenburg and encompassing many dozens of villages, the record of the landlords’ formal demands for labor services and shares of the peasants’ own production reveals that, in the second half of the seventeenth century, rents of large holders (*Vollbauern*) on rebuilt farms tended to fall below pre-war levels. In the early eighteenth century, the landlords succeeded at best in making good their predecessors’ claims of a century earlier. But, in other cases, the postwar rent reductions proved irreversible.⁵⁹

The records of the Stavenow estates illustrate the first of these trends with some accuracy. And, since the seigneurial rents demanded of the peasants there were neither especially heavy nor light in comparison with those of other Brandenburg villagers, their experience may not have been atypical. As Table 3 shows, before the Thirty Years’ War, the *Vollbauern* owed their landlords labor services with a team of horses or oxen of three days weekly (apart from one full week’s labor in the rye harvest). Beyond this, they delivered to the manor house a yearly average of seven bushels of rye. These were the most important components of their feudal rents. By the years 1694–1700, when most of the abandoned farms at Stavenow had been resettled and their new tenants’ free years had expired, the landlords still could not extract from the peasants more than 2.5 days of weekly labor services and half their pre-war grain levies. Even

single quantifiable variable. Nor do formal seigneurial rent claims illuminate daily practice in which, for example, the ruthlessness or reasonableness of a manorial foreman could determine whether labor services were ruinous or merely burdensome.

⁵⁹ For cases in which pre-1626 rents were reduced after the Thirty Years’ War but then restored in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century to pre-war levels: Stavenow (see text below); Wichmann, *Breddin*, 18–20, 169–73 (eighteenth century: optional low commutation fee in place of labor services); Kiekebusch, *Heiligengrabe*, 300–18; and Johannes Simon, “Kloster Heiligengrabe,” *Jahrbuch für brandenburgische Kirchengeschichte*, 24 (1929), 3–136, esp. 80–88; Harnisch, *Die Herrschaft Boitzenburg*, 138–39, 206; Vogler, “Badingen,” 154 and following; Albrecht, *Die Gutsherrschaft Freyenstein*, 84–112. For cases in which pre-1626 rents fell permanently after the Thirty Years’ War, see Carl Brinkmann, *Wustrau: Wirtschafts- und Verfassungsgeschichte eines brandenburgischen Ritterguts* (Leipzig, 1911), 67–68; Passow, *Ein märkischer Rittersitz*, 119 (postwar labor services fixed, peasant farms enlarged); GStA. Provinz Brandenburg, Rep. 37, Gutsherrschaft Kletzke, no. 1 (villages of Kletzke, Kunow, and Viesecke). Data on the Neumark are unavailable, but mid-eighteenth-century rents at Sandow were not unusually high. See Pilsach, “Bäurliche Wirtschaftsverhältnisse,” 142–43.

if, as is quite unlikely, the Stavenow Junkers' postwar rent losses had never exceeded these limits, they were still, spread over a period of a half-century and more, considerable. But, in the early eighteenth century, the landlords pressed the Stavenow peasants hard for a return to the old norms. In a settlement of 1727 that retained its force until the emancipation of the early nineteenth century, the peasants had to accept labor-service obligations near the pre-war levels, but they could substitute their actual performance with cash payments (*Dienstgeld*), which most of them chose to do to rid themselves of at least one of their days of weekly manorial service. Grain rents in 1727 stood slightly higher than before the great war but were still in most cases quite low. Moreover, in the settlement of 1727, the peasantry had successfully bargained to reduce their old haulage obligations and persuaded their landlord to lease them seigneurial meadow land on advantageous terms.

It might be objected that, if the Stavenow peasants were obliged finally to re-shoulder the burden of pre-war seigneurial rent, the combined weight on them of these charges and post-1653 absolutist taxation must have staggered them. But, as Table 4 shows, this seems not to have been the case. No doubt princely taxation soared to cruel or unbearable levels during the wars of the 1650s and 1670s and again in the first decade of the eighteenth century. But the government levied the land tax or *Kontribution*, to which by 1733 the peasantry's troop-quartering and other peacetime obligations to the militarized monarchy had been assimilated as cash surcharges, on the basis of a cadastre that considerably under-reported the Stavenow peasantry's tillable and taxable acreage. In 1686, the peasants, probably with their landlords' connivance, succeeded in concealing from the government's tax assessors the full extent of their landholdings. In reality, as the seigneurial rent roll of 1727 shows, they sowed one-third more rye and nearly four times more barley and oats than the government took as the measure of their direct taxes. Fortunately for them, cadastres were difficult and expensive to draw up, and the Prignitz survey of 1686 was not revised before the emancipation of the early nineteenth century.⁶⁰

Thus the share of a Stavenow full peasant's annual rye crop claimed by the *Kontribution* and associated taxes was, at early eighteenth-century average prices, about 16 percent, while seigneurial rent (including *Dienstgeld* for one day's weekly labor service plus the grain levy) consumed about 18 percent. Monetizing the value of a peasant household's combined rye and barley surplus shows that it could, on average, claim 65 percent as its own after paying taxes and feudal rents. Of course, the members of the household consumed much of the surplus

⁶⁰ In the eighteenth century, the peasants at Freyenstein also benefited from the under-reporting of their taxable production. Albrecht, *Die Gutsherrschaft Freyenstein*, 129–31. After 1700, government inquiries uncovered similar evasions in the Crown villages. Rudolph Stadelmann, *Friedrich Wilhelm I. in seiner Thätigkeit für die Landeskultur Preussens* (Leipzig, 1878), 18–19. A memorial to the Crown of 1710 claimed that undertaxation, but also overtaxation, was common throughout the monarchy; Luben von Wullfen, "Relation," in Stadelmann, 214. Wullfen's broadside against official corruption and abuse of the peasantry cautions against breezy views of the period. But the geographical incidence of the conditions he denounces remains unclear. The famine and epidemics that ravaged East Prussia and Pomerania in 1709–1710 scarred Brandenburg as well. Naudé, *Die Getreidehandelspolitik*, 182–83; Stadelmann, 21.

TABLE 4
Grain Output, Rents, and Taxation of an Average Peasant Farm
(*Zweihufnerstelle*) in Four Stavenow Villages

| | 1686–1716 | 1727 | 1727–33 |
|---|-----------|--------|---------|
| 1. Annual sowings assessed for taxation | | | |
| a. barley and oats | 7.1 bu. | | |
| b. rye | 19.6 bu. | | |
| 2. Annual sowings actually cultivated | | | |
| a. barley and oats | | 24 bu. | |
| b. rye | | 24 bu. | |
| 3. Rents and taxes as percentages of average rye yields (= 84 bu.) | | | |
| a. seigneurial rents | | | 18.2% |
| b. direct taxes | | | 15.7% |
| c. seed reserved for next sowing | | | 28.6% |
| d. farm surplus | | | 37.5% |
| | | | 100.0% |
| 4. Rents and taxes as percentages of rye and barley surpluses (monetized = 69 Taler) | | | |
| a. seigneurial rent | | | 18.3% |
| b. direct taxes | | | 16.3% |
| c. consumable and marketable surplus | | | 65.4% |
| | | | 100.0% |

SOURCES:

- 1. Vogel, *Prignitz-Kataster*, 113–25; Wöhner, *Steuerverfassung*, 2:40–45.
- 2. GStA. Stavenow, no. 30.
- 3. Seed-yield ratio of rye = 1:3.5 (GStA. Stavenow, no. 640), of barley = 1:3 (Vogel, *Prignitz-Kataster*, 113–25); signeurial rent includes commutation of one day of weekly manorial service into *Dienstgeld*; direct taxes include *Kontribution* and *Fourage- und Speisegelder* at 1733–1805 rates (Wöhner, *Steuerverfassung*, 2:71; and GStA. Stavenow, no. 355).
- 4. Monetization of rye yields at average Berlin price, 1703–1732, following Behre, *Geschichte der Statistik*, 277; of barley at 62.5 percent of rye price (GStA. Stavenow, no. 240).

directly. But grain sales produced only part of their income on the market. They also sold horses and other livestock, spun flax, marketed vegetables and fruit, and earned money from cartage.⁶¹

The economic condition of the Stavenow peasantry cannot have been wildly anomalous. The movement of rent there, as elsewhere in Brandenburg, hardens the point that the emergence of the absolutist regime hindered the landlords from reasserting or raising their pre-war claims on the peasantry precisely during those years, from the 1650s to the early eighteenth century, when the

⁶¹ The data represented in Figure 4 are averages and are not meant to paint the economic situation of the Stavenow peasantry in a rosy light. Years of poor harvests (and war) would have altered the size of their marketable surplus significantly. And, while plague had retreated after the 1680s, other human and animal epidemics still periodically wrought havoc in the villages. The data merely show that the shares of the peasant surplus appropriated on average by taxation and seigneurial rent were not confiscatory.

weight of taxation on the villages was, relatively speaking, the heaviest. Thereafter, the bite of royal taxation was not so deep as to undermine the peasant farm economy in normal years.

By the early eighteenth century, the noble and Crown estates had recovered from the blows of war. Henceforth, the Junkers' fortunes were tied to the policies of an absolutist regime that regulated, sometimes to their disadvantage, the domestic and export grain and wool trade in its own military and fiscal interest.⁶² The catastrophes of the seventeenth century had changed the face of the Junker class. Numerous families had been ruined by the Thirty Years' War. Many of the pre-war debtors among them had sold their estates at bargain prices to military adventurers enriched by the spoils of war or to well-heeled favorites of the absolutist court.⁶³ Those who before the war had invested their earnings in the public tax corporations were lucky to recover one-third of their capital, shorn of accumulated interest, by the 1670s or 1680s.⁶⁴ Some of the Junkers were able to repair their fortunes by seizure of abandoned peasant holdings.⁶⁵ Others found an economically safe haven in state service, but not as many as the literature sometimes suggests.

Frederick William certainly welcomed the high nobility of his lands, especially its Calvinist members, into his diplomatic and civil service. His generals undoubtedly recruited many of the lesser nobility into the army officer corps. All the same, he relied inordinately on foreign noblemen and bourgeois administrators to launch and sustain the absolutist revolution. In 1689, the number of army officer positions numbered only slightly more than a thousand, of which nearly a third were held by newly arrived refugee Huguenot noblemen. As late as 1720, the number of posts in the higher civil service amounted to only 500 for the entire Prussian monarchy. It must have been a relief to many of the lesser nobility when, after 1713, Frederick William I accorded them preference in

⁶² Naudé, *Die Getreidehandelspolitik*, 199 and following; Rachel, *Handels-, Zoll- und Akzisepolitik*, 648–753; Carl Hinrichs, *Die Wollindustrie in Preussen unter Friedrich Wilhelm I* (Berlin, 1933), 133 and following, 377–78; Karl Heinrich Kaufhold, "Leistungen und Grenzen der Staatswirtschaft," in Schlenke, ed., *Preussen*, 106–19.

⁶³ See the *Landes-Recess* 1653 (Neumark), col. 472; Schultze, *Mark Brandenburg*, 5: 305; Ulrich Wille, *Die ländliche Bevölkerung des Osthavellandes vom Dreissigjährigen Krieg bis zur Bauernbefreiung* (Berlin, 1937), 60–64; Rachel, *Grosskaufleute*, 2: 11–22, 102–12.

⁶⁴ Isaacsohn, *Urkunden und Aktenstücke*, 10.2: chap. 4. Rachel, *Grosskaufleute*, 1: 379–91; Hahn, *Fürstliche Territorialhoheit*, 201–02.

⁶⁵ In the Mittelmark, farmland equivalent to 573 large peasant holdings (*Zweihufnerstellen*) was engrossed into the large-estate sector between the end of the Thirty Years' War and the early eighteenth century, comprising some 25 percent of all domanial land in its boundaries of the year 1800. Siegfried Korth, "Die Entstehung und Entwicklung des ostdeutschen Grossgrundbesitzes," *Jahrbuch der Albertus Universität zu Königsberg/Pr.*, 3 (1953): 162; the analogous figures for the Uckermark are 420 *Hufen*, amounting to 22.5 percent of the estate land in the year 1800. According to Grossmann's figures (*Über die gutsherrlich-bäuerlichen Verhältnisse*, 71), the number (not area) of full peasant holdings (*Bauernstellen*) in the Mittelmark in 1725 was 10 percent lower than in 1624, but in 1750 it was 2 percent higher. Analogous figures for cottagers: –42 percent, +10 percent; for laborers without arable land (*Hausleute*): +100 percent; +300 percent. On Frederick William I's retreat from the policy requiring the resettlement of all peasant holdings in their pre-war form, see CCM, 5.3.2, nos. 20 (1709), cols. 359–62, and 24 (1717), cols. 363–66.

appointments to an expanding officer corps of an army that, during his reign, never fought a war.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, in the late eighteenth century, when the Junkers are sometimes thought to have returned, with Frederick II's blessings, to the center of the political stage, only some 15 percent of the nobility equipped themselves with a military education, while no more than that number acquired the credentials for a career in the civil service. Two-thirds of the late eighteenth-century Brandenburg-Prussian nobility had no prospects for employment in the state administration supposedly raised up for their benefit as a class.⁶⁷

It seems highly probable that, among the two-thirds of the 259 noble families of Brandenburg that died out or disappeared between 1540 and the late eighteenth century, a majority succumbed between the Thirty Years' War and the early eighteenth century. In any case, under the regime of absolutism, the casualties were replaced primarily by rising members of the military and bureaucratic nobility, including immigrant noblemen and ennobled commoners.⁶⁸ The regime of absolutism certainly depended, in addition to bourgeois talent, on a service nobility. But the historical literature, especially when it rests on the conviction that the "compromise of 1653" guaranteed the vital economic interests of the noble class, overdraws the continuity between its eighteenth-century and pre-absolutist forms. The nobility of the eighteenth century was, in important respects, a new class, many of whose members were indispensable both as state servants and landlords to the monarchy. But they were compelled to compete among themselves and with the educated and propertied commoners for state posts, while absolutist mercantilism and militarism constrained their freedom of action in the economic tug of war with their village subjects.

One of the principal aims of early absolutism in Brandenburg was, undoubtedly, the reestablishment of the agrarian regime, shaken and in part dissolved by the Thirty Years' War, of noble estates and state domains worked by a subject peasantry. But Frederick William and his successors did not purchase the Junkers' assent to their state-building innovations by sanctioning intensified noble domination of the villages. The ascendant absolutist regime had bills of its own to present to the peasant farmers, who in their turn played taxes against seigneurial rents in such a way as to compel their landlords to bear a significant share of the costs of the bureaucratized state.

In Brandenburg, the seventeenth-century crisis did not erupt from an impending structural breakdown of the social and political system that had

⁶⁶ Hahn, "Landestaats," 63 and following; Hahn, *Fürstliche Territorialhoheit*, 269 and following. Compare Gustav Schmoller, "Über Behördenorganisation, Amtswesen und Beamtenthum im Allgemeinen und speciell in Deutschland und Preussen bis zum Jahre 1713," = *Acta Borussica: Die Behördenorganisation und die allgemeine Staatsverwaltung Preussens im 18. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1894), 1: 79–143. On the size and membership of the army officer corps in 1689, Carsten, *Origins*, 272; and Rosenberg, *Bureaucracy*, 59; on the size of the higher civil bureaucracy in the eighteenth century, Baumgart, "Wie absolut war der preussische Absolutismus?" 102; Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, 1: 261–63. Note also that, after 1679, the government was no longer inclined or compelled to treat the state domains as noble sinecures but leased them instead to bourgeois tenant farmers.

⁶⁷ Heinrich, *Adel*, 308. See also Fritz Martiny, *Die Adelsfrage in Preussen vor 1806 als politisches und soziales Problem* (Stuttgart, 1938).

⁶⁸ Heinrich, *Adel*, 305–06, and 299–312, *passim*.

arisen during the sixteenth century. Whatever the strains gripping the land in the early seventeenth century, it was only the bloodying it suffered in the Thirty Years' War that triggered the crisis, whose causes were more political than socioeconomic. For it is quite thinkable that the pre-war political regime could have been restored after 1648, as happened in neighboring Mecklenburg to the advantage of its own anti-absolutist Junkers. But, in Brandenburg, Frederick William's ambition to create a political regime uniting the electoral heartland with the Hohenzollerns' territorial acquisitions in East Prussia and on the Rhine produced a decades-long postwar crisis of distribution, arising out of taxation and war. This was accompanied by a crisis of production in the second half of the seventeenth century, not only because the terms of trade had shifted against agriculture east of the Elbe but equally or even more so because harsh taxation and other military imposts in the villages and towns of Brandenburg impeded their demographic and economic recovery. Between 1679 and 1713, the exactions of the state diminished enough to bring an end to the production crisis. In the following decades, the absolutist regime stabilized its fiscal levies and laid out the mercantilist grid within which the economic development of Brandenburg-Prussia proceeded for the rest of the old regime.

The seventeenth-century crisis in Brandenburg was in a double sense state-induced: the military weakness of the sixteenth-century regime had invited the ravages of the great war, while the exactions of its successor enfeebled the social organism long after 1648. The peasants and burghers of Brandenburg paid the price both of the state's weakness and its gathering strength. But so, too, did the Junkers. Their coercive powers over the villages failed them during the drastic labor shortage into which they were plunged by the Thirty Years' War and Frederick William's subsequent trials of arms. When the smoke of the seventeenth-century crisis had cleared, they confronted a subject peasantry whose labors for the king of Prussia left them unwilling to follow unaccustomed commands from the manor house.