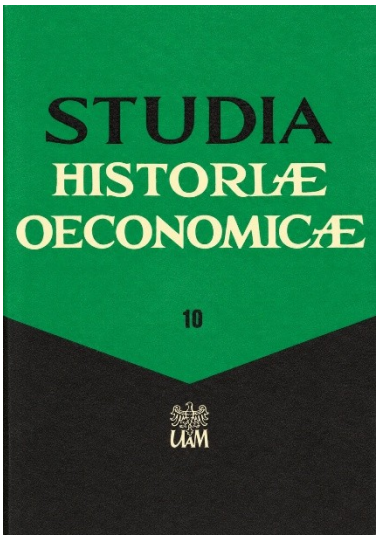


Kahk, J. and Ligi, H. (1975) 'The Peasant Household in Estonia at the Eve of Industrialization', *Studia Historiae Oeconomicae*, 10, pp. 133-144.

https://doi.org/10.14746/sho.1975.10.1.012

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Total value of the project: PLN 247,236.00. Amount of co-financing: PLN 220,836.00.









STUDIA HISTORIAE OECONOMICAE
UAM Vol. 10 — 1975 Poznań 1975

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THE PEASANT HOUSEHOLD IN ESTONIA AT THE EVE OF INDUSTRIALIZATION

Beginning with the fundamental works of K. Marx and F. Engels, Marxist historians have always treated the problems of the rate of industrial development (including industrial revolution) in a complex way paying great attention to agriculture and agrarian relations. The nature of agrarian relations and the state of the peasant household have often proved to be the lay point by the solution of the problem, why the development of industry has been rapid or slow in one country or another.

In the late feudal period, the Baltic provinces of the former Russian Empire represented a typical East-European region where the development of capitalist production relations was restrained and the main trends of the socio-economic development as well as the rates of this development were determined by the predomination of obsolete feudal relations. The enlivenment of industrial development was retarded for several decades, and the problems of urban and rural life, and of agriculture and industry which had been in the order of the day in England in the middle of the 18th century, were topical in the Baltic provinces as late as the second half of the 19th century.

The peasant economy occupies a central position in the complex of problems of industrial revolution, in two respects:

a) as consumer, having purchasing power on the interior market;

b) as free labour force for the labour market.

Historians have been long interested in the question as to the degree in which the peasant household participated in the creation of the conditions necessary for the formation and development of capitalist industry.

The budget of the peasant households — or to put it more exactly, the problem of the incomes and expenses of the peasant households — was already in the centre of attention in the Baltic provinces at the beginning of the 19th century, in connection with the elaboration of peasant laws. Those questions were treated by representatives of Baltic noblemen and Russian official figures who were responsible for the elaboration of the laws, as well as by publicists criticizing those laws. It must be mentioned that the opinions of the contemporaries were often very controversial, indeed.

Thus, in 1789 H. J. v. Jannau, a progressive publicist of that time, stated

that peasants could not grow enough corn for meeting all their requirements even in years of a normal harvest, whereas a reactionary Livonian public figure, A. v. Böttiger, maintained the view, that peasants had not only enough corn for satisfying their own needs, but had even a certain surplus left over[1]. J. G. Ewers, professor at Tartu University, and J. Johnson one of the first local agronomists, came to the conclusion (published in their books in 1806 and 1839, respectively) that even in case of a rather good soil and favourable climatic conditions the net profit of peasant economies was a minimal one, and sometimes non-existent[2].

At the treatment of those problems, historians were obliged, for quite a long time, to draw conclusions from controversial views of researchers of that period. This is understandable if we take into consideration that authentic information on peasant economies prior to the 19th century was extremely rarely preserved throughout Europe, and respective data about the Baltic provinces were altogether missing.

However, in recent years interest in those problems has been revived once again, and attempts have been made to apply more exact methods than previously in the examination of those developments.

Owing to the lack of original sources, we, too, cannot find support for our conclusions in any other way but by making hypothetical calculations concerning the following questions:

a) how much corn was consumed by peasant households, from the amount grown by them in their own fields, and how much was left over for sale;

b) what was the labour balance of the peasant economies, considering that they had to cultivate their own land and, by way of corvée labour, to take care of the fields of the baronial estates.

In the course of our researches we were lucky to get some additional authentic sources. Namely, at the beginning of the 19th century, the Baltic baronial organisation, the so-called Knighthood (Ritterschaft) and the tsarist officials were engaged in the elaboration of the oncoming peasant laws. In the course and as a result of that preliminary work, a theoretical model of a peasant economy was elaborated (one ought to designate it more exactly as a juridical-normative model). In the preliminary work before the adoption of the laws — particularly of the Livonian Peasant Law of 1804 — and during their enforcement, the lands belonging to the peasant households were measured, numerous data concerning those economies collected, and the daily labour

[1] (H. J. Jannau), *Provinzialblätter an das lief-und ehstländische Publikum*, Heft I, 1786, lk. 104; A. v. B(öttige)r, *Der lief-und ehstländische Bauer ist nicht der so gedrückte Sklave, für den ihn mancher hält*, Dorpat 1786.

[2] (J. Ph. G. Ewers), *Vom Zustande der Bauern in Livland und Ehstland...*, Dorpat 1806, lk. 201 - 21; J. Johnson, *Grundsätze der Veranschlagung landwirtschaftlicher Grundstücke*, Mitau 1839, lk. 62.

duties of the peasants during seasonal field-work determined. It was also attempted to state the consumption quotas of the peasants and of the peasant households, and for that purpose a special questionnaire was launched in North Estonia[3].

From the official records stating the corvée duties of the peasants in proportion to the land used by them (the so-called 'Wackenbücher') which were drawn up on the principles of the Peasant Laws of 1804, we could get following data about peasant economies;

a) the area of arable land (how much corn was sown in a peasant economy);

b) the number of able-bodied men and women;

c) the number of draught animals;

d) the number of corvée-labour days required from a peasant economy.

On the basis of those data, we have endeavoured to submit some questions to a closer examination.

The first problem to be solved was the consumption norm of foodstuffs (above all, of grain) by a peasant. On the grounds of sources from the beginning of the 19th century we could state that the most probable average yearly consumption of grain in the form of bread, of an able-bodied adult peasant was 3 Livonian tons, or 240 kg, which makes 660 g corn per day or 924 g bread[4]. According to relevant materials and hypothetical estimates of other European countries, the annual average consumption of grain by a peasant in Russia in the second half of the 15th century was 240 - 320 kg, and at the beginning of the 20th century — 250 - 290 kg; in Poland in the 16th century 250 kg; in Sweden at the end of the 18th century — 380 kg, in France 210 - 328 kg, and in Prussia — 260 - 310 kg[5].

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[3] The materials of that questionnaire were discovered by one of the authors of the present paper in the Leningrad State Historical Archives (cf. J. Kahk, *Rahutused ja reformid* (Peasant uprisings and Reforms), Tallinn, 1961, pp. 100 - 101). An exhaustive treatise dealing with these materials was published by J. Linnus in 1967 (J. Linnus, *1810 aasta ankeetvastused Döhja-Eesti ralurahva elu-olu kajastajana* (The questionnaire data of 1810 reflecting the living conditions of North-Estonian peasantry), in: Etnograafia Muuseumi Aastaraamat (Yearbook of the Ethnography Museum), Vol. XXII, Tallinn 1967, pp. 124 - 150).

[4] J. Linnus, op. cit., p. 134 - 135; Neueres ökonomisches Repertorium für Livland, Vol. 3, Chapt. 4, Dorpat 1816, S. 548; J. Johnson, *Grundsätze der Veranschlagung...*, p. 52; R. Baron Uexküll, *Verzeichnis der Rittergüter Ehstlands nebst einigen statistischen Angaben*, Reval 1853, p. 92; (J. Ph. G. Ewers), *Vom Zustande...*, p. 21.

[5] *Аграрная история Северо-Запада России — вторая половина XV - начало XVI в.* p. 50; С. А. Клепиков, *Питание русского крестьянства*, Part I — *Нормы потребления главнейших пищевых продуктов*, Москва 1920, p. 4; *Нормы потребления сельского населения по данным бюджетных исследований.* Москва 1916, pp. 1 - 2; A. Wyczański, *Studia nad konsumpcją żywności w Polsce w XVI i pierwszej połowie XVII w.*, [Studies in the Consumption of Food-Stuff in the Sixteenth and the First Half of the Seventeenth Century]. Warszawa 1969, pp. 185 - 186; Eli F. Heckscher, *Sveriges ekonomiska historia från Gustav Vasa*,

According to some other rather fragmentary data (above all, the results of the questionnaire of 1810 and materials concerning the board and pay of the farmhands), the minimal annual consumption norm of an adult peasant was:

	Daily content of calories
240 kg of rye	2,100
60 kg of barley	500
30 kg of peas and beans	220
12 kg of salted Baltic herring	20
in addition, 1 l of milk, in summer only	650
Total in winter	2,840
,, in summer	3,490

According to estimates of numerous authors, the daily requirement of a peasant of that time was 3,500 calories[6], whereas the present daily norm of a person performing hard manual work is 3,900 calories. As we see, a peasant in the period concerned had hardly enough nourishment in summer, and in winter he was obliged to lead a miserable existence.

Since the data concerning the "menu" of a peasant of that time are scanty and very unreliable, we had to limit ourselves henceforth to the questions of the production and marketing of grain, only. On the basis of data concerning over 3,600 peasant households on 59 baronial estates of South Estonia in the first quarter of the 19th century, we have tried to calculate how much rye was left over when all (and only) adult persons had been provided with rye for bread, and the peasant economy had delivered its dues in corn to the manor. Here we proceeded from the condition that the yield of rye was the fifth grain.

Type of peasant farm	Total number of peasant farms	Of the total number, the farms of a certain type had a surplus of rye	Of the total number, the farms of a certain type suffered from a deficit of rye	Gross production of rye (in Livonian tons)	Surplus of rye (in Livonian tons)
4-day-farms	27	22 (71%)	5 (29%)	33,205	1,214 (3,6%)
3-day-farms	49	31 (63%)	18 (37%)	12,520	1,545 (12,3%)
2-day-farms	54	25 (46%)	29 (54%)	146,005	1,406 (1%)
1-day-farms	51	19 (37%)	32 (63%)	68,465	025 (0,6%)
				260,195	4,590 (1,7%)

Andra delen, Första halvbandet, Stockholm 1949, pp. 159; F. Braudel, *Civilisation matérielle et capitalisme (XV^e - XVIII^e siècle)*, T. I., Paris 1967, p. 99; F. W. Henning, op. cit., p. 188.

[6] A. Wyczański, op. cit., pp. 109 - 110 and 185.

In our mind, the above figures show eloquently how insignificant the surplus of rye was, and how unstable the equilibrium in the supply of the rural population with corn for bread. And, moreover, we must not forget that the above figures held only in the case when the yield was the fifth grain. But the results of an analysis by S. Vahtre show that in the interval of years from 1713 to 1870 this was the case in 56 per cent of years, only[7]. Thus we can say that in about a half of the above period peasants were suffering from a lack of bread.

The surplus that could be marketed was extremely scanty. The rye circulated in a peculiar, closed round: the peasants who had a surplus supplied with it those villagers who suffered from need.

As already pointed out, we have operated with data on rye only, without considering the summer crops. In historical reality the state of things was probably somewhat different since, firstly, peasants consumed greater amounts of summer crops, and, secondly, they added chaff to rye when making bread. Thus there was a little more of rye left over for marketing, and this was absolutely necessary for getting some salt and salted fish in exchange, or for buying the most necessary articles produced in towns.

But even if these corrections are considered, the examined data show that in general supreme misery reigned in the countryside, and that marketing production was actually non-existent in peasant households.

Though our calculations were based on sources from the first half of the 19th century, we must admit that our estimates were of a somewhat theoretical nature, in many aspects. Fortunately we have at our disposal some opinions quoted by competent experts, prominent figures of that period, and these are in good accord with the results obtained by ourselves.

Thus J. Johnson, an expert of Livonian agriculture, the author of the first handbooks on agriculture in Livonia, wrote in one of his works which was published in 1835: ..."the peasant starves during the time that he spends at home, and when he comes home from his strenuous corvée work, he must keep alive with a small piece of bread (by the way, consisting of equal parts of fine straw and flower-substance) and sour milk-water"[8].

Another connoisseur of Livonian agriculture A. Hueck, points eloquently to the difference in the peasant's mode of life in the periods when he was more or less adequately provided for (in summer and immediately after the harvest), and in those times when he had to starve: "The living mode of the peasants moved in extremes", he wrote about the living conditions of the Estonian peasants at the beginning of the 19th century. "The very scanty fare got at once more abundant after the harvest. Pure rye-bread with butter, salted

[7] S. Vahtre, op. cit., pp. 147 - 148.

[8] J. Johnson, *Abhandlugen aus und zu der Veranschlagung der Bauernländereien in Liv- und Kurland*, Mitau 1835, pp. 115.

Baltic herring from the seacoast, or herring from the ports as the main nourishment, meat on rare occasions, and in summer sour milk or sour milk-water, and often, for economizing milk, milk mixed with flour-water and let sour; in early winter soup of groats, twice a week groat-porridge, and on Sundays meat, up to Christmas ... After Christmas peasants ate bread mixed with chaff, ... meal-porridge, meal-soup, until the beginning of the field-work ... And then, during the hard work in summer, pure bread once again, from grain borrowed from the communal granary"[9].

In order to get a clear, and above all, a comparable idea about the intensity of the feudal exploitation of the peasant economies by the landlords, historians have made use of different methods. Thus, for example, the area of the baronial fields was divided by the number of able-bodied male peasants of by the number of normal or medium-sized peasant holdings so as to obtain the relative amount of the corvée duties in different manors, which could be used for comparison[10]. Or one could obtain another index by dividing the annual number of the corvée-work days required from a peasant economy by the number of the draught animals[11]. I. Kovalchenko and likewise the authors of the present paper have tried to calculate the percentual share of the corvée-work days in the total number of the working-days at the disposal of a peasant economy[12]. However, here we must not forget the fact that agricultural work was of an extremely seasonal nature.

Here we shall discuss another attempt in which we endeavoured to find a new index for assessing the relative intensity of the corvée duties, with a simultaneous consideration of the following factors:

a) the number of the corvée-work days required from a peasant economy;

b) the size (area) of the peasant fields;

c) the economic potential of the peasant farm: the number of able-bodied people and of draught animals;

d) the seasonal nature of the field-work.

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[9] (A. Hueck), *Darstellung der landwirtschaftlichen Verhältnisse in Esth-, Liv- und Curland*, Leipzig 1845, pp. 99 - 100.

[10] J. Konks, *Eestimaa feodaal-pärisorjuslik põllumajandus ja talurahva olukord XVIII saj. lõpul ning XIX saj. 1. aastakümnel* (Feudal agriculture and the state of the peasants at the end of the 18th and in the first decade of the 19th century). Tartu 1960, p. 61; H. Ligi, *Talupoegade koormised* (Duties of serfs), pp. 270 - 271.

[11] Ю. Кахк, *Крестьянское движение и крестьянский вопрос в Эстонии в конце XVII и в первой четверти XIX века*, Таллинн 1962, p. 75; Х. М. Лиги, *Возникновение и развитие вспомогательной барщины в Эстляндии (XVI-XIX вв.)*, „Ежегодник по аграрной истории Восточной Европы — 1964 год", Кишинев 1966, p. 266.

[12] Ю. Кахк, *Крестьянское движение* ..., pp. 78 - 79; Х. М. Лиги, *Возникновение и развитие вспомогательной барщины* ..., pp. 216 - 267; И. Д. Ковальченко, *Крестьяне и крестьянское хозяйство Рязанской и Тамбовской губернии в первой половине XIX века*, Москва 1959, pp. 144 - 147.

The index which might be called the labour force index can be calculated as follows:

$$\frac{\text{Number of corvée-work days}}{\text{The total of the work-days at the disposal of the peasant economy.}} + \frac{\text{Number of the work-days required for tilling the peasant's own fields}}{}$$

In order to calculate the number of days required for tilling the peasant's own land, we must have an idea about the labour productivity in connection with the particular kind of work. Here, on the basis of sources from the time discussed, we have come to the conclusion that the labour productivity at the beginning of the 19th century (right up to the mid-century) in Estonia was very low, indeed, but not considerably lower than in other parts of the Russian Empire and in other East-European countries[13].

The daily working achievement (in hectares) at different kinds of field-work:

	In Estonia (in the first half of the 19th c.)	In Byelorussia and in Lithuania (in the middle of the 19th c.)	In Germany (in the first half of the 19th c.)
Ploughing	0.3 - 0.5	0.3	0.5
Hay-mowing	0.5 - 0.6	0.4	0.4
Harvesting of corn	0.1 - 0.15	0.15	0.15

The labour force index illustrates the state of the peasant economy when (and because) the required corvée duties coincide with the time during which the peasant's own land must be tilled. When the index is smaller than 1, the state of the peasant economy is relatively favourable, and it possesses some labour reserves. However, when the index is bigger than 1, we can design the state of the peasant economy as oppressive.

We have examined the state of the more than 3600 peasant farms previously already subjected to investigation, by two methods: above all, we have determined the percentual share of the corvée-work days, and simultaneously computed the labour-force index. Here we have obtained the following results: (See the table).

As we see, the labour-force indexes reflect approximately the same tendency as the data about, the percentual share of the corvée-work days: the corvée duties of the bigger farms are relatively higher than those of the smaller ones.

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[13] В. И. Неупокоев, *Подготовка проекта инвентарных правил и применение инвентарного положения 1844 года в Литве*, в: Материалы по истории сельского хозяйства и крестьянства СССР, сборник У, Москва 1962, p. 296; (J.Ph.G. Ewers), *Vom Zustande...*, pp. 15 - 18; Полное Собрание Законов Российской империи. Собрание второе, vol. XXIV, Part I 1849, Спб, 1850, pp. 420 - 421; Полное Собрание Законов Российской империи с 1649 года, vol. XXVIII 1804 - 1805, Спб. 1830.

Type of farms	Number of work-days at disposal in summer	%%	Number of corvée-work-days in summer*
4-day-farms	163	100	55
3-day-farms	131	100	43
2-day-farms	112	100	32
1-day-farms	93	100	23
4-day-farms	147	100	53
3-day-farms	127	100	40
2-day-farms	107	100	30
1-day-farms	93	100	20

%%	Number of work-days required peasant's households	%%	Balance (in relationship to the number of days at disposal)*	%%		Index	
Ploughing							
34	162	100	−55	−33		1,33	
33	121	92	−33	−25		1,25	
28	100	90	−20	−18		1,18	
25	66	71	3	3		0,97	
Hay-making				Balance		Index	
				b	(%%)	a	b
36	65	44	29	20	−4	0,8	1,04
32	48	38	39	30	9	0,7	0,91
28	40	37	37	34	14	0,66	0,86
22	26	29	47	49	34	0,51	0,84
Harvest							
29	78	21	183	50	35	0,5	0,65
26	58	18	178	56	43	0,44	0,57
23	48	18	159	59	77	0,41	0,53
18	32	14	158	68	12	0,31	0,4

As we see we are dealing here with a peculiar dialectical controversy: the smaller farms suffer more from lack of bread and less from the burden of feudal exploitation, and with the bigger farms it is the opposite case. Perhaps that phenomenon testifies to the fact that the differences in the economic state of the peasants of a feudal society were in a way precursors of the social differences which were to become the typical traits of the capitalist society.

We can obtain a very interesting picture of the contacts of the peasant economies with the market if we juxtapose the data about the production and consumption of grain to the answers of the 1810 questionnaire. When the yield of the crop was the 5th grain, then 20 per cent of the corn was used for seed, 70 - 80 per cent for the nourishment of the farm-folk and for duties in kind, and only about 10 per cent of the grain (rye) remained for marketing — i.e. for exchanging for other market ware or for selling in order to buy the most necessary goods (only about one-third of the "surplus" grain was sold for money, 2/3 being exchanged for other goods)[14].

On the basis of all these data (and also some data of the manorial estates) we have attempted to represent, in the figure attached, a peasant economy and its relations to the market and to the baronial estate.

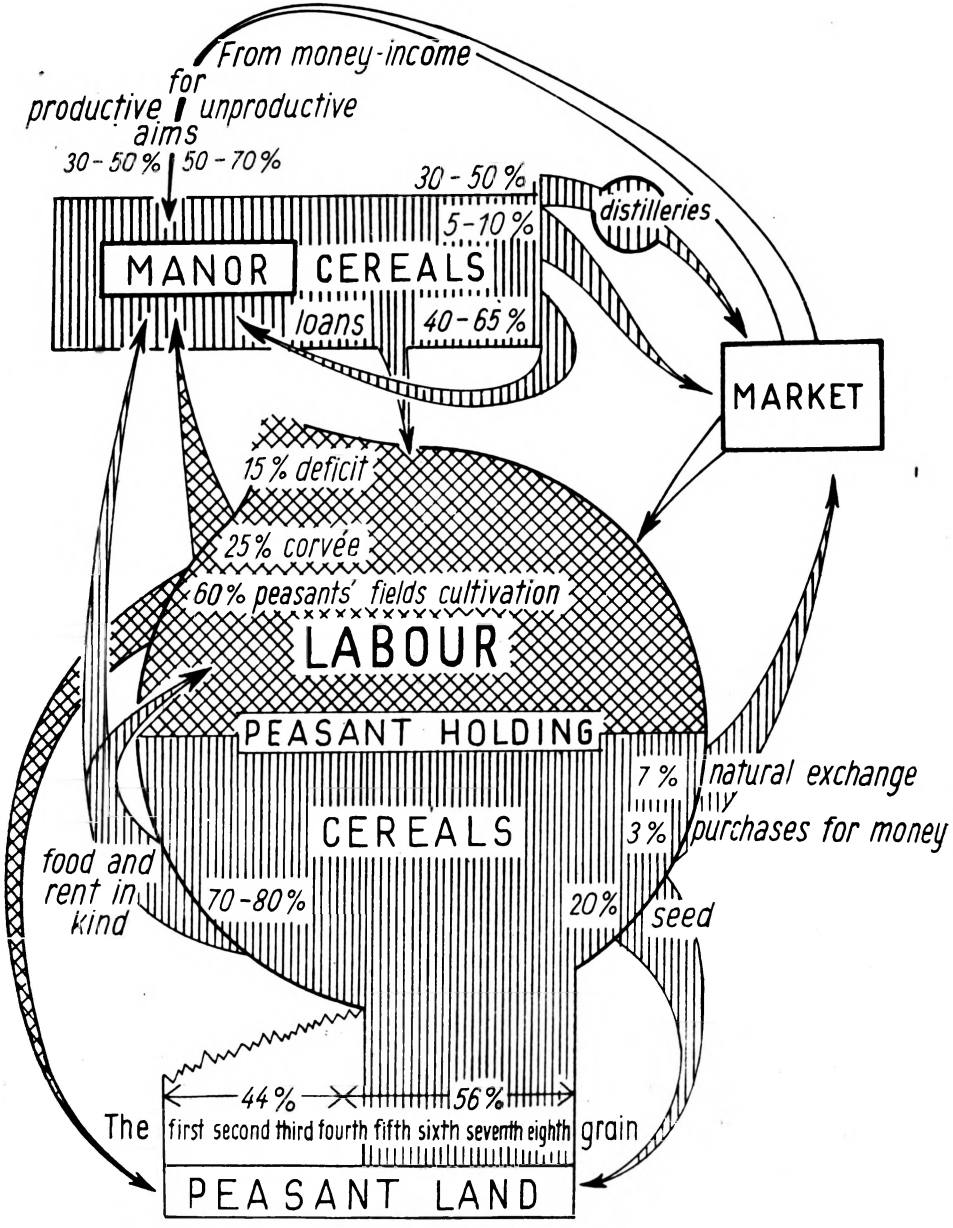
We hope that this figure conveys an idea as to what extent a peasant farm represented an endogenous economy. Of all the grain produced by the peasant only 1 - 12 per cent went beyond the boundaries of the farm, and about 4 per cent, at the utmost, underwent the transformation "goods-money-goods". And even that small amount had needs to be given away so as to procure such articles that could not be produced on the farm (tools, clothes) or some absolutely vital products as, for example, salt.

In comparison with the peasant farm, the share of the marketable production of the baronial estate was relatively bigger. According to the data recently published by H. Strods, a specialist in the agrarian history of Latvia, at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century, the Latvian baronial manors had the following amounts of grain left over from the total crop, for marketing, after having covered their own requirements: the estate of Stendes — 25 per cent, Keveles — 50 per cent, Vegu — 34 per cent, Kargadu — 42 per cent, and Nurmuiža — 60 per cent. According to the same author, the local authorities of Courland assumed, in 1811 - 1827, that about 17 - 28 per cent of the total crop of the province remained for marketing, and the respective estimate of the Livonian authorities in 1848 was 27 per cent[15].

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[14] These computations were effected in respect to winter corn (rye) only.

[15] H. Strods, *Lauksaimnieuba Latvijā pārejas periodā no feodālizma uz kapitalismu (18 gs. 80 gadi — 19. gs. 60 gadu sakums)*. (The agriculture of Latvia in the transition period from feudalism to capitalism — the 1780s to the beginning of the 1800s), pp. 204 - 208, 211, 239.


From money-income
for
productive aims
unproductive
30 - 50 %
50 - 70 %
30 - 50 %
5 - 10 %
distilleries
MANOR
CEREALS
loans
40 - 65 %
MARKET
15 % deficit
25 % corvée
60 % peasants' fields cultivation
LABOUR
PEASANT HOLDING
7 %
natural exchange
CEREALS
3 %
purchases for money
food and
rent in
kind
70 - 80 %
20 %
seed
44 %
56 %
The
first second third fourth fifth sixth seventh eighth
grain
PEASANT LAND

But we must not forget that the above data concerning the baronial estates are also of a hypothetical nature: it was the corn that was left over for marketing, but we cannot be absolutely sure that it was actually sold. Very instructive in that respect, are the records preserved from some Livonian estates of 1828 - 29: at the rectory-estate of Paistu, of the 17-per cent surplus of the total crop, only 7 per cent were taken to the port of Pärnu and sold there; the respective percentages of the Aidu manor were 35 and 6 per cent, and of Oisu manor 43 and 13 per cent[16].

On the basis of all available data we can state with a certain probability that the "surplus of grain" of the baronial estates in the first half of the 19th century did not exceed 30 per cent of the total crop, and that only 10 per cent was actually marketed.

According to the records found by us about the estate of Kuremaa covering the years 1832 - 53, approximately 10 per cent of the total crop was spent on wages in kind, 5 - 10 per cent on the nourishment of the estate's servants, about 50 per cent on distilling spirits, about 5 per cent on loans to peasants and church dues, 20 per cent on seed, and only ca 5 per cent were left over for selling on the market[17].

What conclusions could be drawn on the basis of the available data concerning the Baltic peasant economies in the first three decades of the 19th century, i.e. on the eve of the formation of capitalist relations and industrial development in this region?

The low productivity of labour of peasant farms and the circumstance that the peasants hovered at the border of an existential minimum were the main reasons why the inner market needed for an intense development of industry was extremely restricted. The agricultural market production was mainly supplied by baronial estates, but the number of estate-owners was too limited and the nature of their own requirements too specific for warranting an inner market to local industry.

In the peculiar hierarchical structure of peasant economies we may perceive a controversy very unfavourable for the development of an inner market and industry. The smaller farms suffer from a lack of bread, but they have a certain balance of labour forces, whereas on the bigger farms this is the opposite case. Owing to that circumstance there arises such a state that the smaller farms and the holdings of the rural proletariat are forced to lend their labour forces to the bigger land-owners (farmers) so as to get nourishment in return. As a result, the labour forces make a circle of the village proper, without being able to leave it in the interests of industry. But in the background of that

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[16] State Central Historical Archives of the Estonian SSR, F. 934, Reg. 1, No. 20.

[17] J. Kahk, *Die Krise der feudalen Landwirtschaft in Estland* (*Das zweite Viertel des 19. Jahrhunderts*), Tallinn 1969, pp. 114 - 115.

situation is the system of serfdom, owing to which all the peasant farms are obliged to give most of their labour to the baronial estate.

The unfavourable politico-economical situation of the peasant economy, its transformation, according to Lenin's words, into an appendage of the baronial economy, and the state system which, in turn, warranted and intensified that state of things — those all were the main causes of the retardment of the industrial revolution in the Baltic area.