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The Operation Successful, But the Patient Died. The Gradual Elimination of the Central European Peasantry in the Light of Globalization and Interwar Processes

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Abstract

In terms of “depeasantisation,” it was with the EU accession in 2004 when Central Europe – including Hungary – reached the stage where England had already arrived in the 18th and Germany in the 19th century. The gradual disappearance of the peasantry in the continent is doubtless in connection with the tendencies of globalization, a phenomenon that could not be stopped even by the authoritarian regimes of the interwar period – the time period examined by the dissertation. However, in a latent way, the question had already arisen at the time: is peasantry necessary at all? Nevertheless, as a consequence of the defeat in World War I, there were important national political arguments for the preservation of peasantry in the region, together with the rise of peasant ideologies. After 1945 – as Barrington Moore, the ideologist of the Cold War, pointed out – the huge peasant masses meant the precondition for not only the creation of fascism but also for Eastern European socialism. Therefore, many problems had to be swept under the carpet.

But the issue can be better understood once it is examined along the “development slope.” In this aspect, many experts in new comparisons drew attention to the key role of Germany. Following the footsteps of the Canadian historian Scott M. Eddie, the author of this article compares the agrarian societies of two areas dominated by large estates, Pomerania and Somogy county, with a special focus on the significance of identity. The research questions were the following: what were the chances of the peasantry in those areas in the grip of modernity and large estates? To what extent had this process altered identity? In order to map the latter methodologically, the study required a wide interdisciplinary examination.

Keywords: “depeasantisation,” “revolution from above”-regimes, world economic crisis, “back to the agrarian state,” peasant ideologies, armament, “industrial state.”

Disciplinary Considerations, Basic Terms, Geographical Demarking

In my dissertation, as its long title (*“The Transition from the ‘Agrarian State’ toward the ‘Industrial State’ in the Peasant Societies of Central Europe, using the Examples of Pomerania and Somogy”*) shows, my goal was to examine the alternatives of the peasantry in the "revolution from above" regimes of the interwar period in a Hungarian–Eastern German comparison, based on my own model. For it seems to me that with the intensified integration in the EU, historiography will also move toward such types of comparisons. In the dissertation, by contrasting the agrarian policy and peasantry of the two countries, I tried to answer the question of what future seemed to be realized in the grip of globalization at that time for these rural societies encumbered even by the surviving of large estates? To what extent was the situation different in the two countries?

Hungary took stock of the situation on the eve of the accession to the European Union when the representatives of different disciplines clashed on the issue of the so-called “depeasantisation.” It should be pointed out that sociology has always been ahead of the agricultural history in these types of international comparisons. Imre Kovách, with his “Green Ring”- model of 2001, also intended for the newly admitted countries to be converged to particular areas of the former western bloc along with these traditions. In Kovách's opinion, the peripheral areas of Europe with large agrarian populations – regardless of their former bloc affiliation – can be classified into a uniform rural “Green Ring” because of the tenacious survival of this form of life. However, historians have generally been critical of Kovách's concept that Scandinavian and Central European peasants could be placed in the same category, that there would be sufficient important similarities between them, and that the category would refer to the same relations in both regions (Granberg, Kovách, 2001).

Conversely, social historian Gábor Gyáni argues that we should be careful about expanding the term “peasant.” It should always be taken into consideration what it means or meant in a given historical context. In Scandinavian countries, former peasants proletarianized or rose to the middle-class ranks while losing their original identities. In contrast, in Eastern Europe, the adaptation of the peasantry to modernization has not yet been completed; many have retained their former identities (Gyáni, 2003).

But it was not only Gyáni who contested the “Green Ring” theory; Hungarian agricultural historiography has always insisted on considering the political blocs in international comparisons. This has not changed after 1990, and accordingly,

Hungarian historiography has been dominated by comparisons with other Eastern countries. The Anglo-Saxon school of “cliometrics” was the first to change this approach around the 1980s and 1990s. This school, in its international comparisons, albeit narrowly, went beyond the boundaries of East and West and preferred statistical-mathematical methods. It should also be pointed out that cliometrics focused on large estates in the pre-1914 period. In this respect, the work of Scott M. Eddie should be mentioned because he dealt with the comparison of the German and Hungarian conditions in many of his writings (Eddie, 1994).

But how relevant is the German comparison with respect to the Hungarian perspective? The duality of the German agrarian society, together with its central position and its dominant role in the region, all contributed to making it an inevitable point of reference for international comparisons in agricultural history (Varga, 2014). The dissertation, which attempts to make the comparison by focusing on the peasantry, certainly oversteps the frames of the “Green Ring”-concept when it (seemingly) attempts to compare the rural societies of the center and the periphery from a historical point of view. But is it really a simple center and periphery comparison? On the one hand, it can be mentioned that there are those East-Elbian provinces about which Andrew C. Janos, an American political scientist of Hungarian origin, had written with a long-term perspective that there were periods when these areas were part of the Eastern bloc called Eastern Central Europe not only during the Cold War but sometime before, too (Janos, 2001). On the other hand, although Hungary is generally classified as an “agrarian state” based on the occupational structure of the population, contemporaries pointed out that as a result of the treaty of Trianon, the population of the new territory became more similar to the western states. The fact that this region, considered Central Europe, was at a more advanced stage of demographic transition than most of the surrounding Balkan states and Eastern European countries is an indication of convergence.

However, in a social-historical approach, Central Europe could rather be defined as the region that had incorporated the regimes of the so-called “revolution from above.” Areas in which not only the nobility but the peasantry was also preserved during the civic transformation. The term “revolution from above” comes from Barrington Moore, a Harvard sociologist of the 1960s, who argued that these systems were the most dangerous compositions that likely had to end in fascism. Since all pre-industrial elements were successfully preserved: the nobility entered into a partnership with a strong bourgeoisie and also won the conservative peasantry. Although Moore refers to Germany as the main

example, this type of rule was typical of all regions dominated by German culture.

However, within Central Europe, defined in such a way, Germany and Hungary differed in respect of agriculture and agrarian policy. In the former, the goal was self-sufficiency, while in the latter, they aimed at increasing agricultural export. But how did the peasantry fit into these systems? In this respect, the agrarian crisis at the end of the 19th century played an important role by bringing the large estates and the peasantry onto common ground. This bloc was dominated by large estates that were at the forefront of spreading the new productional methods. The peasantry took the next step by breaking away from these roots and articulating their interests through their own organization and political party. It was not possible in the east-Elbian provinces as the peasantry here was too small; thus, advocating interests remained possible only through the so-called "honoratiors' organizations," led by the elite. However, in Hungary – where there was a large peasantry – this important step could be made as a result of the agrarian socialist threat. In Germany, on the other hand, the peasantry lost its trust in the large estates because they unilaterally exploited the benefits of agrarian protectionism to their own advantage. In addition, despite their patriotic sloganeering, they preferred the use of cheap Polish labor.

The First World War – in which Germany and Austria-Hungary were defeated – marked a major turning point in the agrarian issue. The new situation highlighted better than ever before the intermediate position of the peasantry on the continent. In Western Europe, the situation of the peasantry had been resolved during the embourgeoisement in such a way that this large social group was gradually assimilated into the modern industrial classes. However, as living conditions improved after a while, the former peasants experienced social advancement instead of a decline. This did not occur with the peasantry of Central Europe, especially in the less developed eastern part of the region. After the First World War, the question rightly arose: could one still be a peasant? While Eastern Europe presented more of a political challenge due to the emergence of strong peasant political parties and even "peasant democracies" with ambitious land and franchise reforms achieved after the war in the newly formed states.

The Great Depression, Construction of the "Agrarian State," Peasant Ideologies

After 1918, the realm changed; the Carthaginian treaties encumbered with heavy reparations obligations – implying the possibility of a new war – threw the world market off balance. British economist J.M. Keynes, who was present at the peace conference, anticipated a pessimistic scenario regarding the future of the economy given the lack of confidence in the international markets. Historians also came to see the interwar period with its scarce possibilities as a step backwards compared to the world before 1914. In these circumstances, it was not by chance that the conservative regimes and elites of Central Europe had been pushing for returning to the “agrarian state”– as an ideal-typical conception. In my dissertation, I drew up the following hypothesis: 1, in the last third of the 19th century, the given countries started to go with great strides toward the “industrial state”; 2, but the First World War, the changes of territory, and particularly, the economic crisis urged many to return to the “agrarian state”; 3, and lastly, the agrarian ideal had been taken off the agenda due to the evolving rearmament program.

In these periods, it is obviously impossible to ignore the effects of globalization, against which the states of Eastern and Central Europe chose the path of the closed economy as a defense – with more or less success. With respect to globalization, the role of the USA, which was at the epicenter of this phenomenon after the First World War, is unavoidable. The prominent German agrarian economist of the era, Friedrich Aereboe saw the roots of the advantage of American producers over their European counterparts as a result of the following factors: in the USA, the land was cheap while wages were high, but in Europe, it was the other way round, the land was expensive, and wages were low. Since in America, as opposed to many European countries, an industrial parity prevailed instead of an agricultural parity, cheap mechanization became possible (Aereboe, 1928).

The problems of globalization culminated in the Great Depression of 1929. It must be underlined that the agrarian crisis started before the industrial one. In Central Europe, the disappointment in the "industrial state" turned many towards the "agrarian state." What was this about? The aim was not merely reagrarization, but – in the contemporary German public opinion – all the extractive and processing industries (mills, distilleries, mines), including textile - and building industries, were included. Hungarian also spoke about the preference for agricultural industries. However, these intentions failed to

consider the fact that Germany was a country where the development of agriculture was generated by industry. While demographers also warned that the “window of opportunity” for the “agrarian state” is only open until rural productivity exceeds that of the urban, but in the long run, it can be expected to decline here, too. Since a lot depends on the degree of migration to the cities, therefore, instead of settlement – in respect of badlands in many places and the expected relapse of the food consumption – rural population should be kept in one place through decentralization of industry. (Burgdörfer, 1933)

Now turning to the peasant policy of the Third Reich, the first years of the regime were marked by the consolidation of power, with a strong emphasis on winning the rural population to the regime. Since the agrarian crisis hit mostly the eastern provinces that were mainly agricultural, the people here were greatly opposed to the Weimar regime and became voters of the National Socialists on a large scale. Within the “honorator’s organizations,” the peasantry – which could not create its own party – also outnumbered the nobility and eventually Nazified the organizations. At the time in Hungary, a statement of Hitler at his inaugural ceremony was quoted often, with great approval: “The Third Reich will become a peasant empire, or it will perish.” The aspirations to become an “agrarian state” reached their peak during the term of Richard Walter Darré as Minister of Agriculture between 1933–1936. From the first moment, Darré emerged as a peasant politician, and this social-political priority was also reflected in the title of “imperial peasant leader” he had taken up. Foreign observers, such as the American economist John Holt, who wrote his dissertation in 1936 in Heidelberg, saw the “peasant state” idealized by Darré and many Germans as a strange social experiment. Holt believed that in this case, it was not a powerful agrarian movement that came to power, but instead, the National Socialist ideology considered the peasantry as the most valuable part of the German society. The economist Holt asked the question: how long can the “peasant state” be maintained? (Holt, 1936)

The policy of Darré eventually failed as it had not reached its aim to secure self-sufficiency in food provision through a Nazi corporate state, the “Imperial Food Rationing” (“*Reichsnährstand*”), and the so-called “market regulation” (“*Marktordnung*”). As a result, rural migration had even increased. Regarding the settlements, this model that originated in the 19th century was already overstepped by life itself in the age of the starting Americanization and great rural exodus. As a contemporary writer pointed out, by that time, the German population had become an urban population; therefore, instead of settlement – if we are attributing rationality to the system – Darré tried to create a rural “core

group," the framework for which was provided by the Act of "Imperial Eternal Holdings" ("*Reichserbhofgesetz*"). In the end, "the agrarian state" materialized only in such formalities as putting the term "peasant" ("*Bauer*") a title in front of the name, the use of runic script, family coat of arms, and the promotion of genealogy, or the return to the old German calendar.

In Hungary, at a governmental level, the return to the idea of an "agrarian state" was urged by the far-right government of Gyula Gömbös (1932–1936). Although the concept was finally taken off the agenda as a result of the rearmament started by the program of Győr in 1938, the slogans continued to have an impact for a long time, and it was clear that something had to be done about the peasant issue. Gömbös, an old racist from the 1919 gathering of counter-revolutionaries in Szeged, had already formulated the "Christian agricultural idea" into a political program in his National Work Plan of 1932. According to this, under a certain economic dictatorship and with a gradual implementation of land reform, "Christian economic individuals," i.e., a "new smallholder class," should be created on which the "racial policy" represented by him could be built. According to this concept, the development of industry should not be at the expense of other sectors, i.e., agriculture, but rather based on the expansion of cottage industry. However, in respect of foreign trade, the problems of agriculture should be solved (Vonyó, 2011).

This brings us to the issue of agricultural export, which is of cardinal importance for the Hungarian economy. From this point of view, the German "extensive economy" ("*Grossraumwirtschaft*") certainly required adaptation. Several contemporary writers suggested that Hungary should strive to achieve a similar position as Denmark in relation to England with its food transport (Lisányiné, 2010). In a broader context, this raised the question of the framework within which external market needs should be met efficiently: should the way of the "bourgeois peasant" or that of the renewed large-scale farming be renewed? But the real revelation on this question is connected to János Adorján, a member of the People's Party, who expressed his views in several pamphlets between 1939 and 1942. Adorján's view was based on the following: 1. all the needs of land reform cannot be met; 2. It has been proven that large estates are capable of greater production than smallholding; 3. the standard of domestic production is lower than in the Western states and had declined compared to the prewar period; 4. the lower classes lack the necessary skills. In Adorján's opinion, the solution would be to separate the so-called "internal and external production circles," i.e., the activities based on the proportion of machine and manual labor, and assign them to the appropriate types of plant (Adorján, 1939).

Principles and Methodological Approach of the Comparison

In the foregoing, I have looked at the social-historical aspects of the Central European “agrarian state.” I have tried to prove that on the eve of the outbreak of World War II – following some hopeful tendencies – not only the boom of reagrarization and “peasantisation” had been put to rest, but the future of the peasants became a question. The interwar period should certainly be seen as a turning point of the subsequent “depeasantisation,” but the two countries were already at different stages. In German and Hungarian terms, the only way to understand the process of “depeasantisation” that had already begun at this time is if we look at the phenomenon along the “development slope.” In this respect, I would like to refer to those historians who argue that instead of dichotomy models, staged typologies should be used (Vári, 2001). Although other authors are opposed to this idea, referring to historical continuity as the main limitation (Ö. Kovács, 2011). This is understandable since, if we consider only a narrow era, then in the agrarian question, which mostly covered the land issue in Hungary, at least at the level of slogans, in the era of the evolving agricultural subsidies in the East-Elbian provinces (“*Osthilfe*”) it was really important who dominated the agrarian interest organizations: the large estate holders or the peasantry? Here again, we have to refer to Gábor Gyáni, who argues that the difference in approach resulting from the phase delay is best captured along the lines of identity.

In typological terms, I have distinguished “industrial states” and “agrarian states” within the “revolution from above” regimes, based on their development, with a strong simplification and taking into account the broader socio-economic context. In the agrarian states – based on the structure of the agrarian society – I distinguished between large landowners and peasant districts. Based on these, the following types of districts may be identified: 1, large estate districts of the “industrial state”; 2, peasant districts of the “industrial state”; 3, large estate districts of the “agrarian state”; 4. peasant districts of the “agrarian state.” The main social cleavage was within the first category, between the noble and civil landowners. In the second category, the cleavage was between civil and peasant owners; in the third category, between the large estate and peasantry; and lastly, in the fourth category, between the citizens of the market-town and land workers.

I set myself the task of examining the situation of the peasantry in the “revolution from above” regimes in the grip of the large estate and modernity. In this respect, the large estate districts were most relevant. In both countries,

the nature of the rule was similar in the Max Weberian sense, with the old elite being rescued in 1848 and 1918. However, the existence of a strong peasantry was also an important condition here. After all, it was also necessary to examine to what extent the peasantry's interests, economic opportunities, and relation to the elite served to maintain the individuals belonging to it as a social class in the given district. To bridge the structural differences, I used the method of asymmetric comparison proposed by Béla Tomka. The idea is that the two societies are not compared directly, along with predetermined considerations, but rather to try to reconcile them based on the overall picture (Tomka, 2005). To do this, we chose a "test region," and a "control region," where the former would be the "industrial state" and the latter is the corresponding "agrarian state" in terms of the process of "depeasantisation."

Within this framework, on the one hand, Pomerania of East-Elbia and, on the other hand, Somogy county of Southern Transdanubia were selected as regions dominated by large estates and a considerable peasantry. A good starting point for this comparison was an analysis by Scott M. Eddie from the 1990s, in which the Pomeranian and the Transdanubian landowners in pre-1914 were compared.

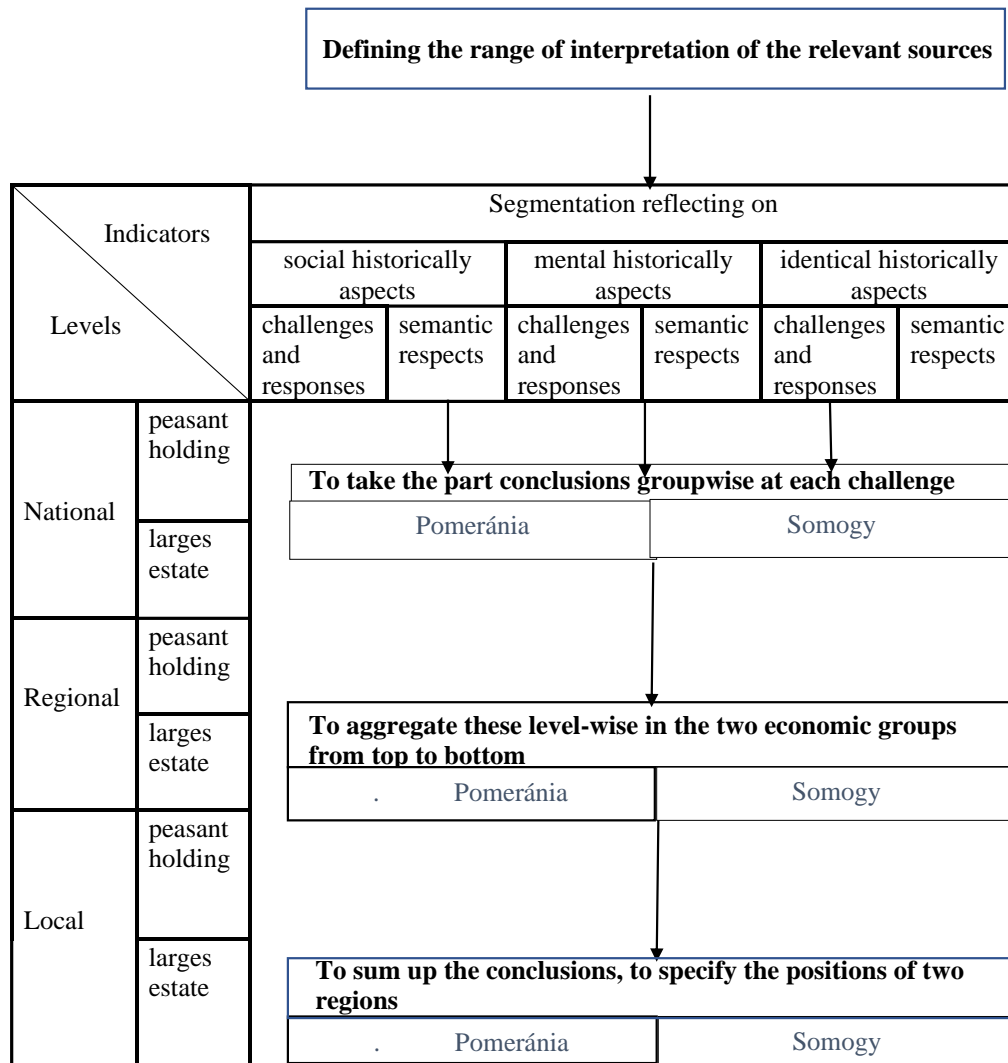


Figure 1. The Structure of the Applied Model

In the case of the peasantry, such a comparison can only be made by comparing identities – while taking into account the differences in development – that is, the change in the perception of the social role that was associated with the transition to modernity. A complex study in this respect must necessarily include the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels, and in such a way as to bring together the “real challenges and answers” with the “semantic aspects.” At the national level, the “real challenges” at that time were the aspects of the nation, democracy, economy, and social matters. At the regional level, local society and politics, local economy, the cohesion of the group itself, and the management

of other groups were the most relevant. At the level of smaller groups, the main identity-forming factors were the village community, family farming, consumption opportunities, and social mobility/migration opportunities.

What is really interesting about the “semantic aspect” is the “big narratives,” the change of communication of politics to the outside world. How did the government want this group to be seen? To what extent in this regard did the great visions of the era (for example, the “re-formation of the German peasantry”) cover the real situation? How far has the peasantry, as a class, been carved out of a block? Did individuals seek their own prosperity alone or in groups?

As far as the disciplinary aspects of the research are concerned, in order to map the change in identity, it was necessary to go beyond the narrower professional context examined by the eastern and western economic history and move towards a broader spectrum of social science. Since this is a complex process, which can only be approached through several layers, I examined the transition steps in the framework of an incremental model. Accordingly, the first level of analysis was a social history, the second was a history of mentality, and the third was identity history. During the practical implementation, I examined the differences in social-historical factors arising from the dichotomy of the “democratizing- authoritarian” environment: what was the attitude of the elites? Regarding the historical mental factors, the focus was on the particularities arising from the structural differences between the “agrarian state” and the “industrial state”: how far had traditionalism been overcome? The interesting thing about the factors of identity history was the crisis of consciousness and the search for a way, which was characterized by the conflict between “modern” and “premodern” values: the extent to which the transition was reflected in the structures of linguistics, the “word-juggling” of the time?

The question then was how to integrate the above sections into a complex model that makes it possible to compare the agricultural data of the two different regions with different situations? To do this, I first created indicators layers of the disciplinary levels and then placed them in tabular form in the frameworks I have created specifically for mapping the national, regional, and local levels of self-identity. I then tried to draw “aggregated” conclusions for each level. In the end, I summarized the conclusions for each large landowner district.

The Two Regions of Large Estates: Pomerania and Somogy County

First of all, let us look at how the “development slope” prevailed in the two selected large-scale districts, Pomerania and Somogy county, taking into account that in 1920, both countries managed to save their large estates. In Germany, this was due to the Kapp coup, which, although its leaders failed to gain power, was successful in terms of its ambition. This was also the case in Hungary, despite the fact that the biggest party of the newly elected parliament was that of the smallholders. István Szabó Nagyatádi, leader of the smallholders’ party with ties to Somogy county, agreed to a deal that if the party contributed to the withdrawal of the previous electoral law – that was favorable to a relatively wide section of the population –, there may be negotiations on the land reform. But this gesture was only reciprocated with relatively narrow land reform. Later, however, the economic situation of the large estate was shaken in the German Weimar Republic, even though they sought to assert their political influence strongly.

On the other hand, in the counter-revolutionary Horthy system in Hungary, the aristocracy lost much of its political power while the economic value of the large estates increased. Another symptom of the “development slope” was the weakening of large estates in Germany and peasantry in Hungary as a result of the economic crisis. In the East-Elbian case, this opened the way for the disintegration of the large estates into peasant farms – the economic interests of the two had already diverged before – but the traditions of the corporate state were still strong. In Transdanubia, however, the crisis had forced the peasantry to establish economic cooperation with the large estates while articulating its political interests through the Smallholders’ Party.

Table 1

The Two Regions Along the "Development slope"

Indices	Pomerania*	Somogy**
Area, km ²	30 290	6 695
Population, persons	1 920 897	385 635
Population density, persons/km ²	68.5	57.4
Agricultural population, %	33.4	69.1
of which: agricultural workers	27.9	18.0
Percentage of large estates, %	20.9	38.0
Average area of large estates (over 500 ha)	1 013.3	1 240.6
Average area of peasant farms (under 50 ha)	7.3	2.8

Percentage of landholdings, % a.)	8.0	19.5
Percentage of the area claimed for settlement/land reform % a.)	4.5	6.1
Average yields of main crops, q/ha:		
wheat	7.6	4.7
rye	5.9	4.3
sugar beet	88.4	70.2
potato	54.2	28.0

* The demographic data are from 1933, and the agriculture data are from 1925.** The population data come from 1930, and the agricultural data come from 1935. a.) In proportion to the entire area before 1914. b.) In Pomerania, the data refer to 1919–1930, in Somognál to 1920–1928.

Let us look at the two regions separately. In Pomerania, the local elite that took an active part in the Kapp coup maintained its position for a long time, while the “rural leadership” of the noble landowners in the East-Elbian provinces was generally weakened. This is also shown by the fact that the province was a bastion of the Hugenberg party, the DNPV, that fraternized with the Nazis in the early 1930s. But the “brown breakthrough” did not fail to come about here either, as the underdeveloped peasantry in the region, struck by the agrarian crisis, became supporters of the Nazis. After 1918 everyone had expected that the time of the peasantry had finally come. In fact, the concept of the “new nobility” (“*Neuadel*”), which was then created to exclude the old nobility, was actually on the streets of Germany in the 1920s and 1930s. There is no doubt that peasantry in Pomerania, like in other East-Elbian regions, was a narrow, relatively homogeneous group with the principle of undivided inheritance, which made it significantly different from its western counterparts. Within the villages here, the wealth gaps were greater than there. For a large number of agricultural workers (“*Landarbeiter*”) – members of the class created as a result of the emancipation of the tenants – the only opportunity for social advancement was inner colonization, which was encouraged during the Weimar Republic. To be at the frontier was an additional argument in favor of the settlement, and the large landowners were under considerable social pressure to facilitate this. It is important to note that for the settlement, which reached its peak during the crisis years in Pomerania, they rather relied on the “*Landarbeiter*” than the average in East-Elbian (Baranowski, 1995). Moreover, Pomerania became the main agricultural region of the country after the loss of Posen.

After 1933, the peasantry, which until then had been an ardent supporter of the National Socialists, soon became disillusioned with the new regime. The policy or tradition? of self-sufficiency discouraged the peasants from being the puppets

of the state. The 1934 sentiment reports of the organization of Darré also reported that peasants were dissatisfied because, although the Nazi market regulation created stable prices, there were shortages of goods, and the state intervened in everything. They were also dissatisfied as the borders were closed before the Polish seasonal workers on large estates, and the state forced the peasants to produce sugar beet (Barch, 1937). In addition, settlements, which increased every year in Pomerania in terms of land and number of farms until 1932, started to decline drastically after the “seizure of power” (*“Machtergreifung”*).

In principle, there was no chance to disintegrate the large estates for a long time since it was supported here by a large-scale national political agitation. It could also build on the well-developed agricultural machine industry (Kerék, 1935). In more peaceful times, it would have been possible to achieve a breakthrough for the peasantry by applying the recipe of mechanization developed for Southern Germany to local conditions. However, the large rural exodus and the limited resources favored the large farm. It was better suited to the requirements of efficient mechanization imposed by national socialist economic policy. (During the economic crisis, the large estate was still very self-limiting, as they did not want to exacerbate social tensions.) In Pomerania, the expansion of settlements was limited by unfavorable natural geographical conditions, the doctrines of German socio-political thought, as well as Protestant traditions.

In Somogy county, the other region that is much smaller in area and population, the social responsibility of large estates increased in the interwar period, as shown by the increasing importance of taking farming under their control. The chances of becoming a modern large-scale farm were all the more given here, as the agrarians of Somogy county had by this time moved from the second line to the front line as a result of the treaty of Trianon. As far as the peasantry was concerned, the new course established from 1920 had manifested its desire to rely more on this class – considered nationalistic and traditionalist – than on the sinful urban proletariat. Despite significant wealth gaps within the group, many peasants in the county hoped for a land reform only because the small estates had been fragmented by the inheritance rule of “equal division,” and the growing population was constantly facing shortages of land. However, as a result of the land reform completed in 1928, associated with the name of Istvan Szabó Nagyatádi, the small estates expanded.

As the economic crisis swept away many smallholdings that were established during the land reform, the Gömbös administration taking office in 1932, sought

to increase the number of “viable farms .” This was the goal of the entail and settlement law, but only a few of these had been implemented in Somogy county. A much more important measure was the decision to settle land debts and to declare them “protected estates.” With all this, the recovery from the crisis in the “agrarian state” context also required a structural change. This led to the development of concepts for fruit growing and livestock breeding in Somogy county that was initially aimed at the British market. The policy also included the development of the processing industry, particularly in the canning and meat sectors. All these developments were well in line with the long-term vision of the country’s future, which was to develop the “agricultural industries.” Not only Gömbös but also as the newly formed oppositional smallholders' party saw domestic industry – and “cartel rule” – as a colonial formation that had been imposed on the country during the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

With fideicommissary law aimed at undivided inheritance, Gömbös thoroughly misjudged the Hungarian people, so this model of creating a peasantry from above did not succeed. In fact, this opened the way to the hegemony of the large farm and “post-peasantisation” at the time of transition to a war economy. In the wake of the crisis, faith in property ownership and the need to export faltered, and the benefits of large-scale production became more apparent. This led to an increase in the importance of cooperatives, which sought to unite peasants under the aegis of the state and under the direction of large landowners (Szuhay, 1962). At the same time, in terms of land tenure policy, they returned to the principle of granting small ownerships together with the concept of expanding small leases. The model of large estates in Somogy county was important in livestock breeding, which was a breakthrough point for the peasantry. War orders also played an important role in economic reconstruction, especially after 1938. In order to broaden the rearmament, steps were taken to decentralize the industry, which had a long-term impact.

Outlook

All in all, the leaders of the “revolution from above” countries, the German Darré or the Hungarian Gömbös, showed a serious misunderstanding of the political situation if they expected a war of a limited scope at the beginning of the 1930s in the shadow of which the “agrarian state” could be implemented. From this point of view, I see the interwar period as a kind of stalemate for the “revolution from above”-regimes. On the one hand, contemporaries also report the weakening and erosion of the large estates, while at the same time, there was

an expectation – mainly due to the land reforms of the successor states – to prove its viability, to set an example in farming, to lead new initiatives. On the other hand, the large landholders were resented for their willingness to take up mechanization, the real challenge of the era, despite the fact that they were always talking about the need for "multi-production" agriculture. This contradiction was resolved by encouraging peasants to consolidate parcels and cooperatives for an undivided inheritance, develop livestock farming and improve their quality of skills.

Rhetoric was also important here: Darré was fond of contrasting the German "peasant" with the "farmer" of the Anglo-Saxon countries. According to him, while the former had a deeper spiritual connection to the land he cultivated, the latter would be guided solely by business considerations. For Darré, the "Vitéz" order (an order of merit) created by Governor Horthy served as an example in many cases. According to him, Hungary was the first to take steps towards creating a "new nobility," with the order of merit, regardless of rank or origin. They created a village leadership class out of war veterans rooted in the Hungarian land (Darré, 1930). On the other hand – in respect of the war – England could have been a revelation for the theorists of the "agrarian state," where food provision was successful during the First World War. This was probably because it was the place where the peasantry was abolished the earliest.

After this, the question is, why did a peasant breakthrough not occur in "Ostelbien" and Hungary by the end of the 1930s? It must be seen that just as the Nazis' – or more precisely, Darré's – attempted to create a state peasantry failed, so too did the hopes that were attached to the bourgeois peasants in Hungary. In any case, the strong ideologization probably was overwhelming for the peasantry in the German large-estate districts, while in the Hungarian "control areas" – where the importance of large-scale farming was clearer – the increasing commercialization and scarce economic opportunities probably caused frustration. But to what extent was the large estate the cause of these underlying "social diseases," rural migration, and the one-child policy? Contemporary authors drew attention to the fact that by the end of the 1930s, these phenomena were already experienced in peasant regions, for example, in Southern Germany and the Hungarian Plainland (Kaposi, 2013).

In general, after 1920, the possibilities of the self-made-man type narrowed in both countries, and the agrarian society also transformed. In the East-Elbian provinces, the number of hopeless rural people was also increased by refugees

who had to leave the territories that had become part of Poland and who therefore needed the help of the state. While the exodus – that affected younger and younger people – emptied the countryside. Although some groups of land workers ceased to exist in Hungary, a downward levelling was experienced here, too. The large peasantry became narrower, and many of them tried to work in large estates and the industry while cultivating their smallholdings.

To sum up, the strong concentration of capital in the wake of the crisis coupled with the challenges of an emerging consumer society and the subsequent preparations for war and rearmament, as well as the demographic situation typical of the region, combined to make the peasant turn in agriculture irrelevant in the “revolution from above” countries after 1938.

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