

**Extract from: Dr. Theodor Freiherr von der Goltz: Die ländliche Arbeiterklasse und der preußische Staat. Jena 1893, S. 144-147.**

[English translation of the title: The class of agricultural labourers and the Prussian State.]  
Translation by Uta Härtling, 2003.

This book is the publication of a study about the situation of agricultural workers everywhere in Germany after the instruction of the Congress deutscher Landwirthe [Congress of German Farmers].

„If large estates are predominating, the labourers have no hope of improving their situation in life at a later time. There is no opportunity at all to buy or lease a piece of land with the help of savings they eventually have; all their life they will stay what they are, namely labourers without property, and, in addition to that they can be dismissed every half a year. This fact explains also why they are generally so inefficient and uneconomical. If they intend to improve their situation significantly, there is no other way than emigration or migration.

Finally, with large-scale land-holdings predominating, there is a shortage of regular income. However, this affects only the labourers without a contract [Einlieger], not those with a contract [Instmann, pl.: Instleute]. The latter have a contract, which ensures that they have work and wages through the whole year. However, as mentioned before, the number of workers without contract [Einlieger] is definitely increasing in the east. The owner of the estate suffices completely with his contracted labourers [Instmann, Instleute]; the other labourers, [Einlieger] which he employed during the summer, have to find work elsewhere, which is often not possible.

All these circumstances contribute to the tendency to emigrate. This is different where there is a strong and prosperous class of farmers. In farmers' villages the labourer lives among people, who resemble to him socially and financially. Here he has the possibility to eventually buy or lease a house and a piece of land; the farms more easily offer the opportunity to earn money with threshing or other work during the winter time. The last point is of great practical value. However useful and indispensable the threshing machine is for the agricultural business, in general use also had disastrous effects on the rural working situation. Threshing with the flail used to be the most important work of the agricultural labourers in winter. Much less people are needed for threshing with the threshing machine; it is often finished for the greatest part in autumn to get much marketable grain as soon as possible, especially where they use steam engines for threshing. On the large estates only as much grain is threshed with the flail as is needed to give enough work to the contracted labourers [Instleute] during the winter. The new reach of the Vereins für Socialpolitik [Society for Social Politics] proves for the most different regions of the German empire the unfavourable effects the use of the threshing machine, namely the steam threshing machine, has had on the situation of the agricultural labourers. In the eastern provinces the situation is now that the large estates have the main

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part of their grain threshed by machine, while, for the advantage of the agricultural labourers, threshing by flail still is common among the farmers. The restriction of the use of the threshing machine, and especially the steam threshing machine, is an essential means for the whole German Empire to improve the situation of the agricultural labourers and to reduce their migration and emigration. The disadvantage the owner of the estate has from this restriction is recompensed fully, even though not right away but in the future, by the higher number of labourers available in summer and their greater contentedness.

It was tried to refute the assertion that the predomination of large-scale land-holdings is an important cause for emigration from the east with the argument that, during the forties and fifties, German emigration was strong mainly in the western parts of the empire and in those regions where smallholdings were predominant, and that, in the present for example, also some West Prussian districts with many smallholdings contribute much to the migration. This fact cannot be denied, however, it does not prove anything against the assertion above, but it shows only the truth of the general proposition that the predominant kind of land distribution is a decisive factor for the extent of migration and emigration. In regions where masses of owners of small and smallest plots live crowded together they don't have sufficient opportunity to earn that part of their living which they cannot get from their own farm; they also want the possibility to enlarge their property, because the land is already in the hands of land-hungry smallholders. Thus the necessity for emigration explains itself. In the forties and fifties there was in fact an over-spill population in some land districts of western and southwestern Germany, so that emigration was rightfully seen as a relief, and even some rulers or communities supported it. Similarly, there are regions in the eastern Prussian provinces where colonists were allowed to settle in masses and their descendants have increased the number of smallholders to such an extent that not all of them can earn their living in their native country; the surplus emigrates or moves permanently to other parts of the empire or earns their living for the whole year through seasonal migration in summer (Sachsengänger [= seasonal migrants who work in Saxony in summer]). In his book, which I have mentioned several times, Kaerger has shown convincingly that the Sachsengänger generally come from towns inhabited so densely by smallholders and landless labourers that they do not have sufficient income, and where there are few large estates in the neighbourhood which could employ a significant number of labourers. So it is not the large-

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scale land-holdings in them which produce the emigration, but its massive and compact occurrence; massive and compact occurrence of smallholdings has the same consequence. So it can be said that the absence of a numerous and prosperous class of farmers encourages emigration. The truth of the often used phrase that it is most favourable to have a mixture of small, middle, and large properties is again proved with respect to the situation of the agricultural labourers.

I am far from saying that the strong emigration of agricultural workers from the eastern provinces is exclusively a result of the distribution of land; however, it is still one of the most important causes. In addition to this there are further reasons, which are psychological as well as economical. The wish and hope to obtain more wealth and reputation or to secure a better future for one's children; the praises and the money sent by relatives and friends who have emigrated; especially in the present the largely spread feature of discontent with oneself's actual situation. Also the predominant inclination to personal independence; the pretenses and temptations of agents: all these and other circumstances contribute to the increasing emigration to a certain extent and maybe the determining factor in some cases. However, it would be wrong and corrupting to see the main and real cause in this; it is economical and caused by economical ills. Where there are large-scale land-holdings in excess, there is also an overspill population or has been there before emigration started, just like where smallholdings are predominant. In the former case the number of labourers needed to farm on the large grounds in summer does not find enough work in winter; in the latter case the yield of the agricultural production and the other possible employment is not sufficient to support the existing population anyway. In both cases the common man seeks help by leaving his present home in migration or emigration. To induce him to do this it is not necessary that he is actually in need, but the prospect to get into this situation in the future in more often the cause.