

MANORIAL DOMAIN AND SUBJECT PEASANTS
IN THE BOHEMIAN STATE UNDER THE
STÄNDESTAAT.
NEW CZECH INVESTIGATIONS ON THE ECONOMIC
HISTORY OF THE 15th AND 16th CENTURIES

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There is still no comprehensive Czech economic history. Marxist investigations which dealt with this theme in the past decade focused above all on agriculture as the production basis of the mediaeval economic world. In this connection a study by F. Matějek appeared in 1959 on „The Great Feudal Estates and the Subject Peasants in Moravia” etc. and one by A. Míka in 1960 on „The Subject Population in Bohemia in the First Half of the 16th Century.” The two works converge roughly, with Míka devoting attention more to the subject population, and Matějek tracing more closely the development of the great feudal estates and comparing it with Polish and Silesian conditions. The studies are of fundamental significance for European economic history, because they deal with a period in which the income basis of the manorial economy shifted from rentals to the private manorial farm, when, as it were, the „noble rural life” originated.

In posing such themes attention must be devoted inductively to certain questions which Marxist Czech research has attempted to comprehend since the summary of Czech history in the form of theses in 1954: 1) the so-called second serfdom after the Hussite wars, 2) the progress of social differentiation in the 15th century, and 3) the deeper causes of the development of private manorial farm enterprises. Both authors deal with these questions with noticeably more realism than did the authors' collective of 1954. They reject directly the deterioration of the position of the subject population, in other words, a “second serfdom”; they describe the process of social differentiation in the countryside as insignificant in the period under consideration; particularly in Matějek's formulation of the question, which in this respect is more thorough, they find the cause of private manorial management in the incentives from long-distance trade and in the refinement of production (beer), rather than in the exploitation of the subject peasants on the local markets, according to the theses of 1954.

Finally there remains the question whether the manorial economic forms of the 15th and 16th centuries may be described as “early capitalism.” Only Míka has taken up a position more precisely here. Of course the West-

ern reader must first acquaint himself with Marxist terminology in order to notice that Míka has not only asked for a purely functionalistic concept of capital, but that his judgment depends upon whether "power as the mid-wife of capitalism" (according to Marx) had already become conspicuous in this period. He denies this question. This not only distinguishes, to his advantage, his presentation from the uncritical deductions in the relevant Soviet Textbook of Political Economy of 1955 (4th ed.), but also approaches O. Brunner's views of an aristocratic guiding image for the social order, which until the end of the 18th century also dominated the economic world.

Apart from the systematic aspect, both studies offer valuable individual data.