

A Small Village in the Age of Extremes: The Häusern Experiment

Adam Tooze (Yale)
adam.tooze@yale.edu

October 2014

NB: Please do not circulate without author's permission. Comments welcome. Apologies for the rough and terribly incomplete references. Text assembled in haste for circulation.

The persistence of the European peasantry in the twentieth century is a remarkable and underappreciated phenomenon. In Europe itself, amidst the understandable excitement about the industrial revolution, it is easy to overlook the fact that the agrarian population reached its absolute peak as late as the 1930s at a staggering total of roughly 250 million souls. Of these roughly 110 million were inhabitants of the Soviet Union. Under Lenin's New Economic Policy they were established at least until 1928 as independent peasants. Roughly 140 million lived in the rest of Europe as rural labourers, sharecroppers, long-term tenants or peasant proprietors.

This agrarian scene, if it features at all in general accounts of European history, all too often serves merely as a generic backdrop for industrialization and modernization. But this construction is lop-sided. The vastly expanded rural populations of Europe in the early 20th century was not a legacy of static, "tradition". The swollen population was the result of a revolutionary transformation in demography, falling mortality, unprecedentedly high infant survival rates and a loosening of traditional restrictions on early marriage. It was the fact that the rural demographic revolution outpaced the rate at which population could be absorbed into the cities that generated the Malthusian pressure in the countryside. It wasn't until the late 1930s that the demographic transition combined with accelerated

structural change began actually to empty the villages of Europe. The tradition v. modern dichotomy is further destabilized by the fact that from the early nineteenth century onwards the “traditional” agricultural economy was the forefront of late nineteenth globalization. And by the same token, from the 1390s onwards rural Europe became one of the great sites for the dramatic top-down efforts social engineering that reshaped the world.

There are many different ways of writing this history. In this paper I adopt a microhistorical approach, working outwards from the tiny Wuerttemberg Hamlet of Häusern, a huddle of 9 homesteads situated 2 km uphill from the Baroque village of Ummendorf, which lies 3.5 km from the main rail-line that since 1849 had connected the medieval market town of Biberach to the Wuerttemberg capital of Stuttgart.

In the modern period this corner of Europe was a zone of protean state making and unmaking. Häusern is a medieval settlement. By the late 18th century it had the distinction, peculiar even by German standards, of being subject to 4 different jurisdictions - 9 farms under 4 different jurisdictions. It was Napoleon’s dramatic eruption into Germany in 1805-1806 that abruptly swept away the old structures and squarely allocated Häusern, Ummendorf and Biberach to the newly-created, modernizing kingdom of Wuerttemberg. By early 20th century Häusern had a population of 70 plus some labourers who farmed 216.6 hectares, the largest farm running to 35 hectares the smallest to 7.

Häusern is a picturesque place in my home state of Baden-Wuerttemberg. But why it caught my eye, is that in 1930 it became the site for a pioneering experiment in agrarian reform and cooperation. In the middle of the hamlet, just by the T-junction around which the farms cluster, the villagers built a communal multi-function shed. This housed modern electric powered domestic equipment, to relieve the women of washing and cooking work. The equipment included the iconic “white goods” of the mid-century - an electric oven, washing and drying machines and a bath with hot running water. The kitchen also boasted canning equipment. In the chambers above there was a seed-cleaning machine. And in the attached garage stood the pride of the village, a tractor with multiple ploughs, and other attachments, ready to break the most brutal peak periods of overwork. The first tractor was one of the famous steel-wheeled Lanz Bulldogs, which was later replaced by a more up-to-date 35 horsepower, rubber-tired machine.

What makes Häusern fascinating is that this modest little collection of stuff made it, in 1930s Europe a unique experiment in cooperative collective farming. This unlikely place came to stand in agronomical debates at the mid-century for a special kind of agrarian modernity. It attracted attention not just in Germany but far and wide beyond. It was to become an improbable model for global development policy.

Over last couple of years I have been circling around the place, putting down trial borings through the layers of archival material, borings which suggest the possibility of four different historical enquiries.

II

The first approach takes inspiration from science studies. One route to Häusern is by way of the agronomist who instigated the collective village project. Adolf Münzinger was Professor of agronomy at the nearby Wuerttemberg agricultural college of Hohenheim.¹ Münzinger first caught my eye as a result of my interest in the role of experts in Nazi racial and economic planning. Much of this was concentrated on Poland and the Soviet Union.² Münzinger was interesting because he worked on the West rather than the East. Specifically, he was the author of the Generalplan West, a plan for the clearance and resettlement of Lorraine after the flight and forcible eviction of the French population in 1940. But the true interest of this story emerges once one traces Muenzinger's work back over the previous decades.

Muenzinger's overriding concern, it turns out, was not with the Malthusian problematic of overpopulation, which drove the Nazi-era planning, but with something more directly political. It concerned the aftermath of the revolutionary upsurge of 1917-1920 across Europe. In 1919 Münzinger himself had been caught up in one of the most violent phases of this abortive revolutionary epoch, as one of the senior farm managers of one of the gigantic Karolyi estates spanning the border territory between Hungary and Romania. In 1919 he was forced to flee for his life ahead of the Hungarian Red Army. By the autumn of 1919 the Hungarian Soviet was crushed and by 1921 with Lenin having proclaimed the NEP, revolution appeared in full retreat. In part this revolutionary defeat

¹ Münzinger, *Aus meinem Leben* and the files in the Muenzinger Nachlass in the Archiv of Hohenheim University (HA).

² G. Aly and S. Heim, *Vordenker der Vernichtung* (Frankfurt, 1991).

was, of course, attributable to the failure of the European working-class to make its date with destiny. The notorious and much-studied violence of the para-militaries and fascists played its part. But that violence for all its terror and brutality was small-scale. Nor would it have been enough to contain the unrest, but for one crucial non-event. As Russia, China and India were to demonstrate, the truly unstoppable force of anarchic disorder was to be found not in the city but the countryside. What was crucial in forestalling any general disintegration after 1917, was as much the reordering of the Central European countryside, as the “recasting of bourgeois Europe”, or at least this was the story told in the 1920s by a generation of anti-Communist, agrarian activists.³ From the Baltic to the Black Sea, the famous anti-Bolshevik cordon sanitaire erected at the Treaty of Versailles, was bolstered by land reform. This strategy was facilitated in the Baltic and the formerly German areas of Poland, by the flight or expulsion of the ethnic German population.⁴ This enabled an indigenous peasantry to be settled on their homesteads. Altogether 70 million hectares changed hands after World War I, ranging from 50 percent of all farmland in Greece, 42 percent in Latvia and 35 percent in Rumania to 6 percent in Poland.

The historian Charles Maier spoke of the early 1920s as an uneasy “global thermidor”.⁵ He echoed contemporary commentators such as the Austrian socialist Brenner who described the ironic outcome of the revolutions 1918-1919 as being the consolidation of a bourgeois revolution. From the vantage point of liberal agronomy, the 1920s appeared to the Weimar agronomist Karl Brandt as nothing less than the “continuation of the French Revolution ... “. It completed in the rest of Europe “the emancipation of the peasants...”. What the Russian experience in the early 1920s appeared to prove was that “socialization”, if it occurred at all, was a transitional device used to transfer great latifundia into the hands of smallholders. In the countryside the early 1920s seemed to be a moment of peasant triumph. The political influence of the landlords was in retreat in the face of mass democracy. The residuum of landless labourers, was draining away to the cities. The result, as Brandt insisted, was the “more solid entrenchment of

³ Max Sering et al, *Die agrarischen umwälzungen im ausserrussischen Osteuropa*, Berlin und Leipzig, Walter de Gruyter & co., 1930.

⁴ K. Brandt, *The reconstruction of world agriculture* (New York: Norton 1945) 40-41.

⁵ C.S. Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe* (Princeton: PUP, 1975), 136.

private property, and with it, private initiative in agriculture.”⁶ “the ingenuity and doggedness of hundreds of millions of individuals were harnessed to restore order to the house which the war had so cruelly ravaged.”⁷

This latter point was crucial. In a productivist age, it was not enough to insist that peasants were a pillar of the existing order or natural defenders of private property. For this defensive position to meet the challenge of history it had also to be demonstrated that the peasants were future-proof, that they were efficient and competitive as well as conservative. The central question in this respect was scale. The most threatening argument for the peasantists was the claim that only large-scale farms – whatever their ownership - were capable of efficient production. An essential element in the armory of the peasant activists was, therefore, the statistical demonstration that from the late nineteenth century onwards, in much of Europe, it was small farms that achieved better yields per hectare than their larger counterparts. As Ernst Laur, the chief of the Swiss farmer’s federation and one of the chief ideologues of green internationalism in the 1920s was happy to record, in Switzerland between 1900 and 1921 comprehensive accountancy figures showed that yields per hectare were two thirds higher on farms of between 3 and 5 hectares than on those over 30 hectares. As Laur showed, even the value of goods marketed per hectare by small-holdings was one third higher per hectare than on larger farms.⁸ Thus land reform was not just a potent weapon against Communism, it was economically productive.

In the wake of the war, Ernst Laur and his collaborators, notably amongst French agrarian interests, set themselves to ensuring that nothing stood in the way of the restoration of peasant efficiency. Their vision of a “green international” was explicitly directed towards countering the spread of communism and securing the position of the peasantry as a foundation of the existing order. They had enormous difficulty in corralling the different agrarian and cooperative organizations across Europe. Rival “Germanic” peasant federations met in Prague and Berlin. It was not until 1925 that all-European

⁶ Brandt, *The Reconstruction* 41.

⁷ Brandt, *The Reconstruction*, 57.

⁸ Ernest Laur, “International Agricultural Problems”, *Journal of Farm Economics*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Apr., 1924), pp. 196-211.

agricultural conferences could be held in Warsaw and Berne.⁹ What united them was the insistence that having staved off the revolution, what the peasants needed to prosper were reasonably equitable and stable market conditions. Prices must be fair in relation to the cost of inputs. Interest rates must not be excessive. Furthermore, having fought off the threat of communism there must be no excessive concessions to social democracy either. One of the first actions of Laur's so-called Green international was to launch a campaign against the International Labor Office in Geneva and its scheme to extend the 8-hour day to the countryside. The agrarian lobby in France was so vociferous that it persuaded its government to bring suit against the ILO before the International Court in the Hague. The Court decided in favour of the ILO. But the Labour Office agreed to proceed with any future social reforms only in cooperation with the International Institute of Agriculture in Rome.¹⁰ This remarkable compromise on hours of work was, as we shall see, a telltale preoccupation. Labour was the Achilles heel of agrarian self-satisfaction in the interwar period. And it was to this weak spot that Adolf Münzinger's experiment in Häusern addressed itself.

What preoccupied Münzinger after he took up his chair in agronomy at Hohenheim in the fall of 1921 was precisely the condition of the small farms that surrounded the agricultural college in Wuerttemberg. What struck him, as a former operator of very large commercial farms, was the very partial way in which agrarian propagandists accounted for the viability of the peasant farm. Because they started from the conception that agriculture was a distinct species of economic activity centered on the land, German agronomists took productivity per hectare to be the distinctive and appropriate measure of performance. On this measure European peasants were a match for the most productive farms in the world and the viability of the small peasant seemed assured. But what this ignored was the cost to the other factors of production involved in generating such high levels of per hectare yield.

To provide a more adequate reckoning of the full costs of production, Münzinger in the 1920s dispatched a series of his students to conduct in-depth investigations of medium-sized family farms in Wuerttemberg. The findings of Münzinger's farm studies, published

⁹ Sigismund Gargas, *Die Gruene Internationale* (Halberstadt, 1927), 36-43.

¹⁰ For the organizational history see Amalia Ribí Forclaz (2011). A New Target for International Social Reform: The International Labour Organization and Working and Living Conditions in Agriculture in the InterWar Years. *Contemporary European history* Volume 20 / Special Issue 03 / August 2011 , pp 307-329.

collectively in 1929 in two large volumes, warranted every effort.¹¹ They produced a minor scandal. The *Arbeitsertagstudien* constituted a fundamental attack on the complacent ideology of peasantism advocated by the likes of Ernst Laur. What Münzinger's studies revealed was the price that had been paid for this peasant "efficiency". To do so they simply accounted for all three factors of production - land, labour and capital - and showed how the productivity of each factor - output per hectare of land, output per hour of work and output per Reichsmark of capital - were inter-related and how all of them changed in relation to overall scale of production and over time. What Münzinger's students showed in their painstaking farm studies was that though a farm's output per unit of land might be high, this was generally bought at huge cost both in terms of capital and labour. This was the dark secret that lay behind the Green International's resistance to the extension of the 8-hour day to the farm. At the heart of the German countryside, in one of the most developed societies in Europe, Münzinger's students exposed an unsustainable impasse - increasingly run down farms, sustained only by a back-breaking routine of toil, for a rate of return that when translated into money wages was lower than the equivalent wages of landless agricultural labourers, let alone industrial workers. In the late 1920s, Münzinger's studies found male peasants working 3500 hours per year and peasant women 3751 hours per year, more than ten hours per day 365 days of the year. This compared to a work year of only 2400 hours for German industrial workers under Weimar's progressive labour laws. If any allowance was made for an adequate return on the capital represented by the farmland and buildings, the peasant family's return on its labour shrank to derisory levels, between 10 and 24 Pfenning per hour. At then prevailing exchange-rates that was between 3 and 6 American cents per hour, as compared to Henry Ford's famous promise of a \$ 5 day in 1914.

A variety of factors contributed to this disastrous situation. The terms of trade were not favourable to agriculture. Prices were too low and the cost of inputs were too high. Interest rates of 9 % or more for loans were exorbitant. The tax burden per hectare in the 1920s was twice what it had been in the prewar period.¹² It was also undeniably true that,

¹¹ Adolf Muenzinger, *Der Arbeitsertag der bäuerlichen Familienwirtschaft eine bäuerliche Betriebserhebung in Württemberg* Berlin Parey 1929.

¹² HA N7/1.4 (18) Die Erziehung des Dorfes zur Arbeitsgemeinschaft, p. 4.

at the margin, the peasants made poor decisions. In search of cash returns, instead of optimizing the milk yield of each cow by intensive high-quality feeding, peasants increased the head of cattle in their sheds, resulting in underfeeding, overcrowding and poor hygiene. They exacerbated their problems by chronically overstocking on prestige purchases of horses, which were expensive and useful only for limited types of farm labour. A far better rate of return was to be had on dual-use cows that could pull a plow and yield cash flow in the form of milk and calves. But, not many farmers wanted to be dismissed as a “cow farmers”. No young man could expect to marry who didn’t own at least one horse. These were inefficiencies no doubt. But they were problems at the margin. The fundamental problem that was responsible for overwork and low returns went to the very heart of the defensive strategy of peasant agrarians – it was the peasant’s relation to property. The advocates of peasant agrarianism never ceased lauding the peasant’s attachment to the land. But rapid population-growth, partible inheritance and the dogged attachment of peasant families to particular fields and strips produced in much of Central Europe a truly staggering picture of dispersed land holding. The nine farms studied by Münzinger’s students had between them 95 hectares divided into 521 plots of less than half an acre each. Münzinger made a particularly study of one Württemberg family farm which struggled to earn a living from what should have been a generous holding of 30.27 hectares. Unfortunately, this was divided into 162 separate plots, many of them barely wide enough to turn a plow. If the peasant family had taken it into their heads to make a trip by horse and cart to each of their plots, returning to the farmyard to unload after they had visited each field, they would have travelled a total distance of 412 kilometers. As a result the more out of the way plots went untended. The amount of time wasted in transit between actual field or yard work Münzinger estimated at no less than 30 percent of the total working day. Across Germany, an iron law applied, the smaller the farm and the more dispersed its holdings the more labour input per unit of output and per hectare of land. In Hesse, accountancy figures revealed that as the size of plots declined from 10 acres to half an acre, the input of labour per unit of land doubled.¹³

¹³ Münzinger in *Deutsche Agrarpolitik*.

The peasantry were caught in a trap. To escape their ruinous situation of overwork, they desperately needed to avail themselves of the new labour-saving devices offered by industry. But, if they borrowed they pushed themselves further into debt. If they saved, they further squeezed their already diminished standard of living. And even if they could find the money, their widely scattered land holdings, each separated from its neighbors by wasteful and weed-infested strips of grass, made the use of modern machinery well-nigh impossible.

Against the backdrop of the much-heralded anti-Communist stabilization of the 1920s, Münzinger's message was explosive. To cling to the established agrarian order without radical reform, would be counterproductive and in the long-run ineffective. According to Münzinger's calculations, somewhere between one quarter and one third of Germany's agricultural population were in the sad state diagnosed by his students. In Baden to the North of Württemberg, the average farm consisted of 3.7 hectares divided into 16 plots. In the Rhineland there were parishes where the average number of plots per farm exceeded 150.¹⁴ Beyond the boundaries of Germany, millions of families across Europe were trapped in a condition that Clifford Geertz in Indonesia was later to dub, "agricultural involution". Perhaps not surprisingly, the Hohenheim studies were greeted by many advocates of peasantism with dismay and disbelief. What was at stake was the future structure of German society. The pressures witnessed first-hand by Münzinger's students could be felt in tens of thousands of rural families, between parents still committed to the land and their children lured by the standard of living promised by the city. Münzinger still believed that there were traditional structures of authority holding the rural order in place. "Paternal authority" still prevailed and even if the children were earning good industrial wages they gave a share to their parents. "But the general urge to freedom and the overcoming of any authority is gnawing on this last pillar of the peasantry. How long will it last before it collapses from rot...?"¹⁵

What made the Häusern project so significant was that it addressed this fundamental fault-line in agrarian peasant ideology head on. Ever since the late nineteenth

¹⁴ Münzinger, "Die Notwendigkeit der Feldbereinigung", HA N7 14 (22-39).

¹⁵ *Der Arbeitsertrag* II, 879 Aber der allgemeine Drang nach Freiheit und nach Beiseitigung jeglicher Autoritaet nagen auch an dieser letzten Saeule des Bauerntums. Wie lange wird es daueren und sie stuerzt morsch zusammen...

century, peasant cooperation had been seen around the world as one of the obvious routes to rural improvement. Germany with its Raiffeisen credit network was one of the heartlands of agrarian cooperation. American progressives had long looked to Germany as a model of cooperation. But faced with the intensification crisis of the 1920s, credit cooperatives and milk marketing were no longer enough. A cooperative method had to be found to manage not just the market relations of the peasants, but the work processes of the family farm itself. This was what Münzinger was attempting at Häusern. As a model, Münzinger looked to the cooperative seedbeds that were common in Württemberg villages. Under this system, villagers would contribute small strips of land to form a consolidated plot on which, under careful supervision, a seed crop would be reared for use throughout the village in the next planting season. It was well-known that the yields on these plots, planted under a single seed type with expert agronomical advice were uncommonly high. Münzinger proposed that all the fields of a single village should be cultivated in the same way. Private property would remain in place. But plots would be grouped together into a single common rotation. All the heavy field work would be done in common. Harvesting would be done separately, each family receiving its share of the resulting crop. With the plots grouped together and worked simultaneously, the village became a unit large enough to make best use of the most modern farm equipment, above all the tractor. Nor was Münzinger only interested in the field. Field labour was largely man's work. The most overburdened people in the village were the women. The tasks of reproducing family life were extraordinarily arduous. Baking bread for a farming household, involved hours of heavy kneading. Farmers' wives had to strike a balance. If they baked as often as once a week, the bread was fresh and eaten enthusiastically. If the farmer's wife was hard-pressed and limited her bread-making to a monthly exercise the bread would be moldy by the third week and far less would be eaten. Baking bread at two-week intervals required 10 hours of hard labour per month. A even greater ordeal was the laundry. The monthly wash for the average family required no less than 25 hours of backbreaking labour. All of this would be addressed with the help of an array of new electrically powered domestic machinery in a clean and warm communal building.

It was a simple experiment, but radical in its implications. Whereas the reactionary modernists of the Green International had wanted to ward off the ILO's demands to apply

the 8-hour day to the countryside, Münzinger took the new standards of the progressive era as his benchmark. In the *Arbeitsvertrag* study he cited the Weimar Republic's ambitious new unemployment insurance system introduced in 1928 which promised even the worst-off city dwellers benefits equivalent to 40 percent of their employed wages. As Münzinger pointed out, that was more than a farming family could expect at the best of times.

Münzinger did not dispute the advances promised to the urban workers. He approvingly quoted Carl Severing the reformist social democrat, who served as Interior Minister in the SPD government of Hermann Mueller between 1928-1930: "Only the German who can be guaranteed a human existence, is more than a subordinate (Untertan), can be a citizen."¹⁶ What Münzinger aimed to do with the Häusern experiment was to include the peasantry in this promise. As Münzinger explained to his audience in Häusern on 22 June 1930, their village was undertaking a pioneering experiment. German farmers were amongst the best-organized in the world. Across the country there were over 40,000 agricultural cooperatives. These included several thousand dairy cooperatives and cooperatives for purchasing of electricity. There were a few hundred that banded together to share threshing machinery and make collective purchases of other equipment. But Häusern was alone in its attempt to actually remodel the basic processes of farm labour around commonly owned machines.¹⁷ If they succeeded, their village "would gain fame not only in South Germany, but in Europe as a whole ...".¹⁸

Despite the onset of the depression, which drove down prices for grain and milk by 20 percent and for meat by up to 50 percent, the Häusern project got off to a good start.¹⁹ The tractor was exciting. Two young men were trained to drive and service it, establishing a new status hierarchy in the village. The tractor's use was strictly managed so as to prevent squabbling. All the heavy work was done communally in unified fields that ran to up to 20 hectares. After that, each farmer, sowed, fertilized and harvested his own share. In

¹⁶ *Der Arbeitsvertrag* II, 877. Nur der Deutsche, dem die Garantie eines menschenwuerdigen Daseins gegeben wird, ist mehr als ein Untertan, ist ein Staatsbuerger.

¹⁷ HA N7 (2.2.(5) "Eine baeuerliche Maschinen-Genossenschaft" Zeitschrift fuer Landmaschinen 22. September 1934.

¹⁸ wurde dadurch eine Beruehmtheit nicht nur in Sueddeutschland, sondern ueberhaupt in Europa erlangen

¹⁹ See the retrospective account by Josef Koeberle, N7 2.2 (4) 7 Jahre gemeinschaftliche Maschinennutzung.

the space of only three years the number of horses was cut from 29 to 19, amounting to an annual saving of at least 6000 RM, enough to purchase a small tractor. The communal bakery and laundry were a huge attraction. The electrically powered dough-kneading machine and electric oven had so much excess capacity that over and above the fortnightly baking slots for each family the village started a business selling bread to a commercial bakers in a nearby town. The communal laundry with the electrically powered washing machine and centrifuge drier was hugely popular. The women regarded the time spent tending the machine as a close substitute for leisure. Indeed, so popular was the warm, dry laundry that the cooperative introduced an hourly rate to cut down on loitering. Furthermore, the laundry was accomplished without the brutal business of mangling which was not only hard work, but destroyed the light-weight modern fabrics that the peasants shopped for on market days. Traditional costume had long since disappeared from the village. Perhaps the most popular innovation was the communal meat-canning machine. This cheap and efficient device enabled meat from slaughter to be freshly preserved without the use of salt. It was a particular relief in the case of emergency slaughtering of animals that had been injured and whose meat could not be consumed on the spot. Münzinger commented with feeling on the stress that such unanticipated loss had previously caused. In the first three years almost 12,500 kilos of meat were hygienically preserved.²⁰ The canning equipment was so popular that Häusern was mobbed by visitors from neighboring villages. Within two years it had been adopted by no less than 90 other communities in the region. No less influential was Münzinger's push to clean up Häusern's manure management. The result was to transform the efficiency of manure production, which was vital given the reluctance of hard-pressed farmers to spend their limited cash income on artificial fertilizer. Perhaps no less significant was the transformation in the appearance of the village. As Münzinger illustrated by means of a series of "before" and "after" photographs, as soon as one farmer had built a new-fangled cement-lined manure pit, all the neighbors wanted one. This was modernization and improvement that one could smell and see on one's boots.

²⁰ HA N7 (2.2(5) Die Bauern in Haeusern. *Berliner Tageblatt* 8 November 1934

The consequences of this grooming of Germany's own farmyards should not be underestimated. Across Europe in the early twentieth century, notions of development and modernity were closely keyed to the sensory and emotional register of racial distaste. The notion of the backward Slav found one of its principal supports in the aversion Germans felt towards the ramshackle farmyards of East European. Manure pits mattered. They were how you could tell you had entered alien territory. It was out of such small scale and cheap alterations in day to day life that the naturalized divide between Western Europe and "polnische Wirtschaft" in the East was constructed.

But even before Münzinger had time to fully unfold his "mission civilisatrice" in the German countryside his project fell under a menacing shadow from the East. Quite suddenly, in the late 1920s, the Europe-wide settlement of the land question that had seemed so comprehensive only a few years earlier was thrown radically into question. Stalin's collectivization coupled with industrialization was the most dramatic deliberate transformation of a political economy undertaken up to that time. As conventionally understood at the beginning of the 20th century, "socialization" touched the property of the elite – industries such railways or coal mining, or the great estates of the aristocracy or capitalist landlords. By contrast, Stalin's collectivization violated the property of 20 million peasant families. Never before had the world seen such a drastic and complete transformation of the circumstances of such a large group over such a large part of the world's farmland. For two generations to come, the prospect of collectivization would hang over the global agrarian question, as a hitherto undreamt of possibility. From the early 1930s down to the 1980s it was over the land question that some of the bloodiest battles of the Cold War would be fought.

In Württemberg, the ripples were felt immediately. Münzinger and his sponsors did not splash the news of the Häusern project. They wanted to await the results. But rumors soon spread of a strange experiment involving something that sounded ominously like one of Stalin's famous Machine Tractor Stations. In the spring of 1931 Professor Münzinger found himself the object of none too discrete enquiries by the Berlin authorities as to whether he was either "a Jew or a Communist". His outrageously bleak assessment of the state of the German peasantry, his demands for radical change and his experiment with collective tractor ownership had marked him as unreliable. He was accused in the press of

seeking to “train up our peasants to Bolshevism.”²¹ Münzinger admitted that his name perhaps sounded somewhat “ethnic”, but dismissed any such allegations out of hand.²² “This has nothing to do with Russian procedures and Bolshevism, rather the reverse: upholding peasant property and the peasant’s attachment to the land.”²³ His aim was not to drive people off the land or to deprive them of their livelihood. On the contrary, the aim was to enable them to secure their future in a way that did not undermine their human dignity.²⁴

Despite Münzinger’s protestations, in the wake of the Nazi seizure of power, it seemed safer to put the Häusern experiment on a more conventional basis. In October 1933, the original experimental construction was converted into the more familiar form of a Genossenschaft.²⁵ Münzinger collected the data for three full years of farming activity and published them as a report in the series of the Reichskuratorium fuer Technik in der Landwirtschaft.²⁶ It was left up to the peasants to decide whether they would continue the collective farming practices associated with the common use of the machinery.

Münzinger moved on to other projects. The publication of the final report, however, pushed Häusern back into the public eye and for good reason. Though the details of the experiment might be controversial, Münzinger’s basic question, the question of labour productivity, had now moved to the mainstream of German agrarian thought. As a generation of research has shown, it is reductive to see Nazi agrarian policy as either narrowly focused on autarchy or mystagogic preoccupation with blood and soil. What connected the two together was a thick network of preoccupations with the “life” of the German peasantry. At the heart of these biopolitical preoccupations was farm labour. For the first time, under the Nazi regime agricultural policy was orientated not simply towards food supply or the politics of farm prices. The price issue was now moot thanks to the complete breakdown of

²¹ Münzinger, “Ein Versuch zeitgemeasser Dorfwirtschaft”, Deutsche Landwirtschafts Gesellschaft 52/53 1932.

²² Münzinger, “Wege und Ziele der Württembergischen Landwirtschaft” in *Wuertt. Wochenblatt fuer Landwirtschaft* Nr. 21 1931.

²³ Mit russischen Verfahren und Bolschewismus hat all das gar nichts zu tun, sondern, vielmehr mit dem Gegenteil: der Erhaltung des bauerlichen Besitzes und des bodenstaendigen bauerntums.”

²⁴ HA N7/1.4 (18) Münzinger, “Die Erziehung des Dorfes zur Arbeitsgemeinschaft” (January 1932), 17.

²⁵ Founding charter in HA N7/2.2 (6).

²⁶ Adolf Münzinger: *Bäuerliche Maschinen-genossenschaft Häusern E.G.M.B.H. Ein Versuch genossenschaftlicher Dorfwirtschaft in den Jahren 1930–1934*. Beuth, Berlin 1934 (RKTL-Schriften; 54)

the liberal market order and the adoption since 1933 of state control of imports and agricultural marketing. What was at issue was the sustainability of the current production system that put such a huge burden on the farm population, above all on farm-women.

If we take the Nazi economic experts seriously what is striking is precisely how crisply they honed in on labour productivity as the key to the contemporary agrarian crisis. Münzinger and his village thus found themselves adopted by the agrarians and the planning experts of the SS, led by Professor Konrad Meyer the future architect of the Generalplan Ost. There was even talk of a visit by Herbert Backe, the SS secretary of state and arch genocidaire who would escape a death penalty at Nuremberg only through suicide. It was from here that a path led to Münzinger's involvement after 1940 in the Generalplan West. The Nazi regime and its conquests lifted the constraints on the technocratic imagination. Grander, more violent solutions seemed feasible on the tabula rasa of Nazi conquest. In the summer of 1940 after the fall of France, Münzinger was given the high profile task of planning the agricultural reorganization of Lorraine. This was the western counterpart to the now much-discussed Generalplan Ost, which called for the genocidal reorganization of the entire territory from the Black Sea to the Baltic, the territory whose agrarian order had been repeatedly thrown into flux since the 1860s. This time it would not be the Tsar or the peasants themselves, but the Germans who would set the terms. Both in the East and the West the Generalplanners drew directly on the preoccupations that Münzinger had helped to push to the fore already in the 1920s. In the arithmetic of Münzinger's plans for Lothringen we can trace how he derived the outlines of a gigantic project involving the investment of hundreds of millions Reichsmarks, the reorganization of hundreds of thousands of hectares of land and the expulsion of tens of thousands of French inhabitants, from his basic premise that the German farmer's wife must be permitted at least one day off per week.²⁷ Amidst the fantasies of omnipotence awakened by the war, the line between the modesty of Häusern's experiment low modernity and the violence of "high modern" social engineering became distinctly blurred. But, by the same token, the Generalplan Ost and West remained largely at the blueprint stage. In the end it was not these long-range

²⁷ Adolf Münzinger: *Lothringens Landwirtschaft, wie sie war und wie sie werden sollte. Gutachten im Auftrag des Reichsstatthalters in der Westmark und Chefs der Zivilverwaltung in Lothringen erstattet von Münzinger-Hohenheim*. Knoblauch, Hohenheim 1941; 2., umgearb. u. erw. Auflage, [Saarbrücken] 1943

visions that mattered to the Nazi war effort what mattered was the actual management of the wartime food production system and here too Häusern would play an unexpected role.

III

To get this squarely into view, however, we have to reckon with the twisting, head-turning potential of the Cold War and its intellectual history. Reading Muenzinger's papers on Häusern for the post-1945 period one discovers that something rather strange happened after the war. The Häusern project that we have just seen leading Adolf Münzinger into complicity with the genocidal plans of the Nazi regime, came to stand after the war for what one might think was its obverse, namely a particular brand of anti-totalitarianism neoliberalism - same 9 farms, same tractor, same communal laundry and bakery. It is really as though one were moving through an Esher image in which the stairway you thought was leading upwards to the Generalplan Ost suddenly inverts and leads you downwards to the social market economy, and neoliberalism. And to compound the dizzying effect it was on the terrain of the Bloodlands, in Ukraine and Nazi occupied Soviet Union that the inversion was performed. It is in the nature of Esher-style trompe-l'oeil that they defy dissection. So on this second slice through the project we must embark on what may seem like a looping diversion.

In 1949, the Christmas issue of *Time Life* gave 7 lavishly illustrated pages to a lurid article entitled "It Takes a Russian to Beat a Russian".²⁸ Its jist was that America should be more creative in its thinking about how to combat the Soviet Union. It should not repeat the mistake of Nazi Germany that had missed the chance to take advantage of the groundswell of anti-Soviet feeling across Russia. In the summer of 1941, peasant women had welcomed the Germans in Ukraine with flowers. General Vlassov had volunteered his charisma and military skill. Through their short-sighted brutality and racial dogmatism, the Nazi leadership had botched the chance to carry out a comprehensive counter-revolutionary roll back of Communism. But some, notably in the German Army, had at least glimpsed the possibility an alternative future. "It takes a Russian to beat a Russian" had in fact been the watchword of groups of soldiers and experts in Army Group Center and Army Group South who in 1942 had struggled to formulate a viable answer to the revival of Soviet resistance

²⁸ *Time Life* December 19 1949.

both in front of and behind the frontline. From amongst this group of German “Russia hands” *Time Life* singled out a certain Dr Otto Schiller, who had long experience of the Ukraine as an agricultural attaché in the 1930s. Once placed in charge of the territory in 1941 Schiller had carried out a radical experiment. With the support of the German Army he had abolished the hated Stalinist collective farms, kolkhoz, replacing them with a system under which “the peasants were permitted to work out a land charter providing for the gradual restoration of private land ownership on a cooperative basis.” These cooperative villages, were “a phenomenal success”, *Time Life* announced to its readers. “There was no Partisan movement in their area ... no sabotage, and the peasants fulfilled the German requisitions of farm products on schedule.” In a future struggle for hearts and minds, this was exactly the strategy that the United States should pursue. “We must be prepared at the very start, if war should come, to answer the prayers of the peasant millions. We must have message to those millions – a slogan as simple as “Land for the Peasants” – which will set the steppes aflame.”

Time Life need not have worried, Otto Schiller’s potential utility was not lost to the American authorities. In 1945, after returning from his deployment to the East, Schiller had been hired to work for the US in their zone of occupation in Germany. This happened largely at the instigation of the aforementioned Professor Karl Brandt, who was drafted from the Food Institute at Stanford to serve as food advisor to the US occupation forces. Brandt had begun his career in the 1920s as one of the leading young liberal agronomists of the Weimar Republic – a lost cause if there ever was one - before being driven into exile in 1933. Like figures such as Alexander Ruestow, Hayek, Schumpeter, or Gustav Stolper, Brandt belonged to Germany’s liberal emigration. And as such he became a founding member of the mothership of postwar neoliberalism the Mont Pelerin Society. Indeed, it may have been Brandt who proposed the compromise name for the group. But the importance of adding figures like Brandt to the by now familiar picture of the Mont Pelerin gathering is more than antiquarian. What his role allows us to appreciate is that the project of postwar neoliberalism was never confined to the industrialized countries. The Mont Pelerin group were inheritors of an interwar preoccupation with Weltwirtschaft (world

economy) and the questions of Malthusian biopolitics that came with it.²⁹ If Hayek was the prophet of doom mapping out the road to serfdom, Karl Brandt was his flipside, the herald of the free peasantry. If land reform had stopped Lenin in Eastern Europe after 1917, Brandt believed that a firmly established independent peasantry was the best bulwark against Stalin in Europe and Asia.

It was in aid of this neoliberal agrarianism that Brandt mobilized Otto Schiller. In the German-occupied Ukraine Schiller had shown in practice how Stalin's second serfdom could be reversed, how the breadbasket of the East could be won back for market liberalism. By 1949, with Brandt's sponsorship, Schiller reentered the international agricultural conference circuit, attending the World Land Tenure Conference in Madison Wisconsin in 1951. Here Otto Schiller the ex-commandant of the agriculture of Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe was introduced by his Midwestern progressives hosts, to delegates from the rest of Europe, the Philippines, Taiwan, Pakistan and India. They were taken on a tour of the Tennessee Valley River Authority, the sharecropping zones of the south and the corn belt of Indiana. They were even hosted in the Rose Garden of the White House where President Truman announced that land reform was a central battlefield in the Cold War. The following year, at Brandt's instigation, *Land Economics*, one of the leading US journals of agricultural economics, published Schiller's first postwar English-language article, which continued to be cited down to the 1980s as a reference on agrarian cooperatives.³⁰ In the article Schiller put flesh on the bones of the *Time Life* report. He outlined his "experiment" in Nazi-occupied Ukraine as a model for thinking about agrarian policy in the Cold War and here finally he revealed the German model that had inspired his experienced – Münzinger's village tractor cooperative in Häusern. It was, Schiller insisted, in Adolf Münzinger's Württemberg experiment, by way of Ukraine that the world would find the model for a compromise between peasant individuality and the need for large-scale cooperation that was capable of meeting the challenges of the modern age.

Between 1947 and the early 1950s the emerging Cold War in Germany triggered a wave of new interest in Häusern, which was touted by reformists in West Germany as an

²⁹ Q. Slobodian, "The World Economy and the Color Line: Wilhelm Röpke, Apartheid and the White Atlantic," *German Historical Institute Bulletin*, Supplement, forthcoming, 2014.

³⁰ Otto Schiller, "The Farming cooperative: a new system of land management" *Land Economics* February 1951.

antidote to the Communist agriculture system that was being installed in the East. In 1949, the Kuratorium fuer Technik in der Landwirtschaft in Stuttgart, the descendant of the original sponsor of the experiment, judged the public interest to be such that it commissioned a documentary film jauntily entitled “Zehn unter einem Hut” (Ten under a Hat), which screened in both Munich and Frankfurt.³¹

Meanwhile on the global stage, Brandt and Schiller put the cap on their collaboration with a major monograph published by Stanford under the title *Management of Agriculture and Food in Fortress Europe*, a study which remains the standard reference for most people working on the economics of Nazi-occupied Europe.³² The book is best read for its data. The text, true to McCarthy-era America discourse on how the Americans “lost China”, peddles the line that the Germans “lost” Ukraine because they did not listen to their own “Russia hands” and, instead, allowed Hitler’s perverse racial ideology to trump agronomical reason. To drive home the point Brandt and Schiller dedicated their text to the men of the aristocratic resistance of 20 July 1944, who paid with their lives for their attempt to assassinate Hitler. In the summer of 1942, as the war in the East appeared to hang in the balance, Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg spoke openly in Army Group Center of his enthusiasm for Otto Schiller’s land reform programs in the German occupied areas and his contempt for the racial ideology of the SS that was consistently undermining them.³³ So, what was at stake in Brandt and Schiller’s seemingly technical account was actually something far vaster. Nothing less than a vision of a different Germany, leading the way towards a post-Soviet future solidly founded on strategic hamlets populated by contented and market-oriented peasants. It’s a characteristic and widely disseminated early cold war imagining.

In fact, there are good grounds for doubting that the counterfactual anti-Communist formula touted by Germany’s Russia Hands was really the magic bullet that they claimed and that some historians have taken it to be.³⁴ But by the 1950s Professor Otto Schiller was in any case rapidly leaving Ukraine behind. He was now advising the UN on Asian

³¹ HA N7 2.2 (3), Aktennotiz ueber den Besuch in Haeusern am 5. Und 6.1.1949.

³² Karl Brandt, Otto Schiller, Franz Ahlgrimm *Management of agriculture and food in the German-occupied and other areas of Fortress Europe*. (Stanford, Cal: Stanford Food Research Institute 1953).

³³ E. Zeller “Claus und Berthold Stauffenberg”, *Vierteljahrshefte fuer Zeitgeschichte* 12. Jg 3 Heft (july 1964) 223-249.

³⁴ C. Gerlach, “Die deutsche Agrarreform” in Gerlach et al *Besatzung und Buendnis* (1995)

development and urging Konrad Adenauer's government to develop a cultural and economic counteroffensive against the spreading menace of communism in the third world.³⁵ By the end of the decade he had established himself as West Germany's leading development economist, visiting both Pakistan and India, along with the Middle East.³⁶ In 1969 Schiller featured prominently as the only continental European to contribute to a commemorative volume on the theme of *Indian Economic Thought* for no lesser personage than Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru with a foreword by Lord Mountbatten. To an expert Indian audience, Otto Schiller's name had become synonymous with the enthusiasm for peasant cooperation that marked Indian development policy in the late 1950s. That he is not exactly a household name amongst global historians of development reflects the Anglophone parochialism of that area of study. One can still find stray observers who recognized the connection. One gem was provided in 1973 by the Indian Marxist, Ranjit Sau who remarked scathingly "Since the morrow of independence", in 1947, "the feudal landlords and rich peasantry have been a powerful force" in shaping whatever the most recent fad had been in development policy. "Whatever they have given, under pressure, as a concession for their own survival, they have got back many times over in other forms. in the sixties they have gladly prostrated at the feet of Theodore Schultz and Norman Borlaug."³⁷ In the 1950s this Indian observer went on "they gleefully bowed to Otto Schiller". Here we have truly reached the dizzying heights. By way of the Ukraine, the Schiller connection and India our little village in Wuerttemberg has found itself elevated to the Nobel prize-winning firmament alongside Schultz the author of human capital theory and Borlaug the father of the green revolution.

IV

These are the kind of google-finds that makes global intellectual history such fun nowadays. Do some imaginative clicking and you find yourself lead all over the flat, digitized world, to remarkable and completely unexpected places. But the more one ponders Ranjit

³⁵ C. Unger, *Ostforschung in Westdeutschland: Die Erforschung des europäischen Ostens und die Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, 1945-1975* (Franz Steiner Verlag, 2007)

³⁶ C. Unger, "Modernization à la mode : West German and American Development Plans for the Third World", *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 40 (2007), 143-159.

³⁷ Ranjit Sau, "Political Economy of Indian Agriculture: What Is It All About?" *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 8, No. 20 (May 19, 1973), pp. 911-914.

Sau's question, the more pressing it becomes. Who were the people, what were the forces that made Häusern tick? These questions opened the third phase of the project.

In one of the more picturesque newspaper articles about Häusern from the postwar period a journalist recorded a visit he made to the hamlet in the fall of 1947.³⁸ He described taking the train to Biberach, arriving in the late afternoon in Ummendorf in the valley below, then hiking up to Häusern and sitting down with Josef Koerbele the leading figure in the cooperative. Together they leafed through the pages of a guest book in which all the dignitaries who had visited the village since 1930 had inscribed themselves. In 1930, when they had initiated the cooperative Münzinger and his sponsors had promised the peasants fame. This book was a record of their fame.

The story was irresistible. In the summer of 2013, having just finished the manuscript of a book and going through a bit of a personal crisis, I got it into my head to follow in his footsteps. So I rode the train across Baden-Wuerttemberg the province where I grew up and took the bus out to Ummendorf and hiked up to Häusern for a meeting not with Koerbele but with his son. And I have to say that for someone unfamiliar with this kind of historical exploration it was a head-turning experience in amateur anthropology.

What do you encounter as you walk into the village? First of all the accouterments of modern day rural Europe: the detritus of earlier modernist enthusiasms; the new, subsidized renewable energy economy for which Germany is now famous. And then you come face to face with a very large modern tractor, dwarfing what you soon realize is the famous, 1930s cooperative shed. And then you realize that they are all still there, the familiar family names from the historical documents. Furthermore, the village knows its own history. At the crossroads in the center of town stands a little shrine to agricultural cooperation then and now. And if you sit with Josef Koerbele's son and his wife in the family parlor, they may get out the photo album and share pictures: the men of the village planning; the tractor; farmer's sons learning to drive; the women washing; village children enjoying an electrically heated bath. The conversation flows in the heavily accented Schwaebisch of the region. There are photos of the improvised screen on which the villagers watched the documentary film about themselves in 1949. A DVD copy of the film

³⁸ HA N.7.2.2 (3) Genossenschaftliche Dorfwirtschaft Haeusern 10.12.1947 report by Hoechstetter.

is proffered. And then, after a while, Frau Koerbele looks at you knowingly and says: there is something else you are after, isn't there? The guest book is what you are after isn't it? And, as charming as the pictures are, you can't deny it. The guestbook is the rosetta stone that might open up the network into which this project was inserted. And Frau Koerbele reaches across the table and places it in front of you, neat, cloth-bound, well-preserved. It contains page after page of signatures including some that afficiandos of development economics will recognize, perhaps, most notably, Dorreen Warriner, the great British agrarian expert, who visited not once, but twice. Bulgarians came. People from the US. In due course, once the handwriting is deciphered the guestbook will allow a mapping on Häusern's visitors. But already on page 1 and later on again, you stumble across a truly surprising name: Freiherr von Stauffenberg. The same family name as that of Schenck von Stauffenberg, Hitler's would-be assassin in 1944, the man to whom Schiller and Brandt had dedicated their Cold War era analysis of Nazi agricultural policy in the east.

This is disconcerting to say the least. We have just taught ourselves to read the postwar sources on the Nazi occupation skeptically. We have just uncovered them as a neoliberal, Cold War inversion pivoting on the postwar legitimacy of July 1944 as a moral alibi. We had our skeptical, critical reading of Brandt and Schiller's historical text down. And now find that a prominent member of Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg's extended clan was a bona fide founding force of the Häusern project. And as one digs into the local history the network of connections becomes progressively tighter. It emerges that in the 18th century the Stauffenbergs, one of the great catholic aristocratic families of the region, had owned a slice of Häusern as their feudal property. In fact they shared it with, of all people, the Metternichs. Could it be that what was at work here was more than neoliberal anti-totalitarian myth-making? Is it possible that Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg did in some sense die for this vision of an alternative modernity that was rooted in his family's history and their regional roots in Wuerttemberg?

This discovery makes it all the more urgent to figure out what the energies were that drove the Häusern project. Was it reforming aristocratic initiative? Was it kulak class energy as Ranjit Sau, our Indian Marxist suggested? Clearly class played a role. The farmers in Häusern were unusually well-off by contemporary standards and well-connected. This project was certainly their chance to get a slice of the modern pie. But talking to the

Koerbeles, visiting the village and discussing the cases with the archivist who covers Ummendorf and Haeusern in nearby Biberach two other forces seemed indispensable to the story, both of them forces of modernity. To rework Lenin's famous formula for communism: the Haeusern version of modernity consisted of two ingredients – electricity and social Catholicism. The two key local actors in the story, the leading peasants of Häusern and the Stauffenbergs, stand for both – electricity and Catholic solidarism - melded together.

In the late nineteenth century Häusern was a hotbed of revivalist Catholicism. After the landownership structure settled down in the mid 19th century, the first collective project of the devout farmers in the hamlet was to build their own chapel. The contributions to the chapel-construction project mirror their shares in the tractor and the electrical appliances fifty years later. Josef Koerbele, Muenzinger's collaborator in launching the project, was the youngest and most energetic member of the Center Party in the Wuerttemberg parliament in the 1920s, the forerunner of the modern CDU. As a peasant son he was fortunate to attend high school. He did not have much chance to travel. His most daring exploit in his youth, over the protests of his mother, was to hitch a ride in one of the Zeppelin's that were built down the road on Lake Konstanz. But if you read Koerbele's denazification file, you discover that he made two trips abroad in his life, one to Lourdes the other to Rome.³⁹ Denazification in the case of this Catholic pilgrim was truly beside the point. His promising political career had been brought to an end abruptly in 1933 when he ended up in a Stuttgart Gestapo cell. He was arrested again in August 1944 when young Stauffenberg's assassination attempt went wrong and the Nazis unleashed a nationwide purge against 20,000 disloyal subjects.

Koerberle's religion was deeply rooted in local culture. He was trained by priests in the village church in Ummendorf where the relatively well-off farmers from Häusern are buried with pride of place close up against the church wall. And they were the inheritors in Ummendorf church of a line of catholic revivalists who between 1880 and 1892 had launched their own site of local pilgrimage, the Kreuzberg, a miniature Lourdes or Marpingen. Unfortunately, there was no spectacular miracle to energize this local catholic

³⁹ Staatsarchiv Sigmaringen.

initiative. So, instead, they organized something else, their own *via dolorosa*. And, at least according to the archivists in Biberach, the first line of electrification was laid through Ummendorf up to the Kreuzberg to provide its pilgrimage way with eye-catching arc light illumination.

Whether in conjunction with Catholicism or not, electrification was one of the great projects of early twentieth century provincial Germany. The key actor in the South-Eastern corner of Germany was the regional cooperative group, the Oberschwäbisches Elektrizitätswerk (OEW). Its founder, perhaps at this point in this interconnected story we should no longer be surprised, was none other than that frequent visitor in Häusern, Freiherr Franz von Stauffenberg, from the cadet branch of that ramified family. Franz von Stauffenberg lacked his famous relation's charisma and good looks, but he was a force in local politics and economic development. After studying agronomy and engineering amongst other places at Hohenheim, Stauffenberg in 1909 launched the OEW, as a cooperative venture of local generators in opposition to the giant coal-fuelled networks of North and Central Germany. The OEW grew through the war and by the 1920s, Stauffenberg was overseeing a large regional network. In 1926 the OEW joined in the German mobilization of American capital, taking up a 4 million dollar loan in Wall Street.⁴⁰ The funds helped to pay for the construction of a gigantic new hydroelectric dam, not in Germany but over the border in Austria from where they ran power-lines all over the South of Germany. To document this remarkable modernist project the OEW commissioned a local film maker, Anton Kutter, to make a series of films about their endeavor. Kutter who had trained in Paris and Cologne in avant garde film-making constructed two remarkably experimental documentaries, followed by a more low-brow comedies designed to encourage electricity consumption through broad humor.⁴¹ In 1933 he was banned from making feature films, for his oppositional anti-Nazi attitudes and so turned full-time to docudrama genre including a film about the proposal to dam up the Mediterranean and irrigate the Sahara and one of the most prescient 1930s sci-fi films about a moon landing. In 1949 when the Cold War made it seem timely to knock together a documentary about

⁴⁰ Oberschwäbische Elektrizitätswerke (OEW). *Beiträge zur Geschichte Oberschwäbische Elektrizitätswerke*, Ravensburg 2009

⁴¹ Anton Kutter, *Licht und Kraft* (1928), *Kuriert* (1929) and *Grosskraft der Berge* (1931)

the tractor cooperative in Häusern, Wuerttemberg's extraordinary local repertoire of hybrid modernity included a networked avant-garde film maker with a sophisticated studio immediately to hand.

But Stauffenberg's OEW wasn't in the business of filmmaking only for the cultural cache. They were a business bent on selling electricity. And it was this that led them to Häusern. It was precisely in 1930, as Münzinger and Koerbele put their project together, that the OEW began heavily promoting the domestic use of electricity in rural settings. Biberach and its surroundings were a key market. So when Münzinger and Koerberle needed a sponsor to foot the bill for the crowd-pleasing washing and cooking facilities in their model village, Stauffenberg and the OEW were only too happy to oblige. Behind the smiling children in the bathtub in Häusern was a response to the age of extremes that hitched the rural family and the community of the catholic faith to the power of an Austrian hydroelectric power station and a large loan from the Wall Street.

V

But when we learn that Häusern was a loss-leading test bed for rural modernization it raises another question, a question that pushes us towards a fourth axis of enquiry. Hailed far and wide as a great example of efficiency in modern agriculture one of the great mysteries of the Häusern project were its economics. Jealous locals were convinced that far from being a model of efficiency, it was a gigantic boondoggle, a creature of subsidy and corruption.

This was neat, but it begged the question. How had Münzinger been able to coax the inhabitants of Häusern into his experiment? Beyond a general increase in productivity, what more specific inducements had been offered to encourage the peasants to cooperate? Who or what was paying for this project? The locals in the surrounding villages were easily convinced that the secret to Häusern's success was simply bribery. Münzinger was repeatedly accused of having enriched both his peasant clients and himself. When, one of the curious journalists who visited Häusern in the late 1940s hitched a lift back to Biberach with a jealous big-wig from a neighboring village, he was subject to a tirade about the 270,000 Reichsmarks that had been squandered on the project, which had served merely to line the pockets of the locals. During the war, the famous tractor village had repeatedly

failed to meet its basic delivery quota and since 1945 had become notorious for its activity on the black market.⁴² The story of the 270,000 Reichsmarks and Münzinger's kickbacks had in fact originated in gossip spread by a disgruntled staff member at Hohenheim with connections in the Nazi Party.⁴³ Münzinger had had to go to considerable administrative lengths to protect himself. But the longevity of these rumors testified to a basic uncertainty about the Häusern experiment. How much subsidy had this experiment in "low modernity" actually cost?

The original equipage of collectively-used machinery was provided free of charge by Münzinger's collaborators in the Reichskuratorium fuer Technik in der Landwirtschaft, at a cost of perhaps 50,000 RM. Those machines reserved for individual use came at a 50 percent discount.⁴⁴ The Oberschwaebische Elektrizitaetswerke in Biberach provided electrical installations and equipment to the tune of 13,000 RM including several private connections.⁴⁵ When the experiment was converted to a conventional cooperative in October 1933 Münzinger was frank about the fact that the equipment was to be put on the books for the nominal sum of only 6000 RM, payable over three years without interest, "so that the public cannot make the accusation that equipment provided out of Reich's funds was handed over to Häusern free of charge."⁴⁶ This was less than one fifth of their actual value. But the peasants, nevertheless, haggled him down to 5000 RM payable over 5 years. Even at this generous rate, the village missed its 1937 payment. The RKTL and Münzinger soon became disenchanted with the endless flow of demands from their model village.⁴⁷ By 1938 the bill had run up to 70,000 RM including salaries for advisors and statistical assistants. But Koerbele, knowing that Häusern was being used as a showcase, now requested an upgrade to the original equipment, which by the late 1930s was beginning to look long in the teeth. Did Münzinger and the RKTL want Secretary of State Backe to inspect the famous tractor cooperative, only to find it kitted out with an aged steel-wheeled

⁴² HA N7.5 GAPI Feuilleton 8. May 1950. "Zehn unter einem Hut – Der Film eines Schwabenstreiches?".

⁴³ HA N7 6.1 (1-2)(1-3) Münzinger, Im Wartezimmer des letzten Arztes, 134.

⁴⁴ HA N7 2.2 (4) Protokoll 22. June 1930.

⁴⁵ HA N7/2.2 (6) Bezirksverband Oberschwaebische Elektrizitaetswerke, Kostenaufstellung 8. April 1931.

⁴⁶ HA N7 2.2 (3) Besprechung in Haeusern ueber die Gruendung der Genossenschaft am 17. Juni 1933. damit in der Oeffentlichkeit nicht der Vorwurf gemacht werden kann, dass diese aus Reichsgeldern gestellten Einrichtungen umsonst an Häusern abgegeben wrden sind

⁴⁷ HA N7/2.2 (1-2) Koeberle to Münzinger 13.6.1937.

Lanz Bulldog that could not be used on public roads? Koerbele could see no reason why spending on Häusern should be cut. After all the Nazi regime was now dispensing subsidies to the German peasantry as a whole on a quite unprecedented scale.⁴⁸ Were those who had been led first to the trough, he had the effrontery to ask, now to be put at a disadvantage?

What these numbers and the accusations of bribery highlighted was the undeniable vagueness with regard to accounting that was one of the Achilles heels of agrarian reform ventures. Did modernizing improvement actually pay, or was it doomed to be a creature of subsidy? As Münzinger well knew, it was all very well to call for radical land consolidation in Württemberg but the total cost for surveyors, lawyers, road-building and fencing would have run to several billion Reichsmarks, for one of the smaller states of the Reich. Who would pay for that? The impoverished peasants could hardly be expected to foot the bill. Even when he was operating on a tabula rasa, as in his planning for Lothringen in 1940-1941, Münzinger was not able to make his sums work. He ended up having to resort to an optimistic faith in technological improvement and widespread cooperative farming for which there was no precedent either in Germany or Lothringen in recent decades.⁴⁹ In the Ukraine, as several acerbic critics remarked, there was little more than ideological surmise to suggest that Schiller's "liberal" alternative, had actually performed better than more brutal systems of exaction.

What this points to is the need for a fourth history, a longitudinal economic history of the hamlet and its farms. Remarkably all 9 are still in operation one way or another. How did they make it through the 20th century? Continuous improvisation and networking within modernity seems to be part of the key. Koerberle junior, like his father and grandfather before him, is a farmer activist. Since the 1960s he has managed a far vaster machine-sharing ring than his father ever envisioned. Like his father he is an agrarian notable and holder of the Bundesverdienstkreuz. There is a history here of postwar European agrarian modernity that remains to be written.

The aim of this turn to economics is not of, course, to debunk the complex cultural, political and social story I have been trying to tease out here, but to grasp the framework

⁴⁸ HA N7 2.2 (3) RKTL to Münzinger 9.2.1938.

⁴⁹ Münzinger later blamed this embarrassment on the fact that the data from which he proceeded were based on 1929 a year of exceptionally poor harvests. HA N7 6.1 (1-2)(1-3) Münzinger, "Im Wartezimmer des letzten Arztes", 147.

within which it operated and how those changed dramatically over time. After 1945 many of the defining parameters of the agrarian economy that appeared to have been frozen and immobile in the early twentieth century and that conditioned such stark choices on the part of the modernizing regimes of the 1930s, seemed to dissolve. In Germany, as in the rest of Western Europe after 1945, the peasant question evaporated in the face of an experience of economic growth more dramatic than anything previously seen in history. If the planners of the 1930s were forced to think in terms of an opposition between an immobile rural reality and violent change, that uprooting was accomplished after 1945 by the “non-violent” means of the great boom, the “trente glorieuse”. Württemberg became world famous not for its peasant cooperatives but for the industrial exports of Stuttgart - Mercedes Benz, Porsche and Robert Bosch – built first by commuters from the surrounding German villages and then by tens of thousands of Gastarbeiter drafted from villages further afield in Calabria and Anatolia. Meanwhile, West European agriculture was reconfigured not into a system of free trade as neoliberals like Karl Brandt had fantasized, but as a bunkered-in agroindustrial complex. The countryside became the site of a Europe-wide system of state control, protection and regulation prefigured by the Reichsnaehrstand of the 1930s. At the same times the technical preconditions of farming were changed beyond recognition. In files pertaining to the Marshall Plan and its successors in regional archive one can trace the truly amazing proliferation of farm machinery across the region from the 1950s onwards. Not one tractor per village as Schiller and Münzinger imagined, but one for every farmer.

How was this possible and what effects did it have? In its own terms, it is a success story. The living standards in rural Germany converged with those of the town. But by the same token it was also a development that provincialized Europe. Whereas it had once been possible to construct around the experience of the Wuerttemberg peasant a chain of associations that reached out to the world, the divisions of the Cold War and the divide between first and third worlds was now absolute. The sense of a seamless world in which Otto Schiller and Häusern could be linked to the Rose Garden, the Ukraine, and post-Partition Pakistan disintegrated. The discourse of “the peasant” as a historical actor continued to circulate through Europe in the 1960s and beyond, but through rather round about ways – no longer as the heightened and rhetorically charged actual experience of

people like the Koerbele's on their family farm in Häusern, but through remote figures: Vietnamese insurgent peasant and increasingly as history, through the work of figures like Eric Hobsbawm or Eric Wolf and the discovery of the peasant in the ethnologically infused French medieval history of the 1960s. Where that leaves a place like Häusern, with its faded Macdonalds signs, its machine ring, biogas units, solar panels and its memories of its own earlier moment of modern fame is something still to be explored.