

# BULWARK OF LANDLORDISM AND CAPITALISM: THE DYNAMICS OF FEUDALISM IN NINETEENTH CENTURY IRELAND

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Ireland has figured in an extensive discussion concerning the relationship between colonialism and culture, centering around the work of Edward Said (1985, 1993). In Said's argument, Ireland serves as an example of cultural domination and resistance within the context of an imperial colonial relationship. Said's conception has sparked a number of explorations of Irish culture and politics in both the colonial and post-colonial period (Cairns and Richards 1988; Eagleton et al. 1990; Kiberd 1993; Lloyd 1987; Lloyd 1993; Rockett et al. 1988). This resurgence of interest in Ireland within the broad context of anti-colonial discourse serves to underline a curious lack of discussion of the Irish case within political economy. This absence of consideration is especially striking with regard to recent controversies concerning the nature of the

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colonial relationship within Marxian development literature. We believe such a consideration is long overdue.

A serious consideration of political economy in Ireland, and more specifically the Ireland of the nineteenth-century, is of pivotal importance for a number of reasons. The first is to provide the political economic background to the important discussion now taking place within cultural studies.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, Ireland holds an important place, along with India, as the occasion for much of Marx's own relatively limited discussion of the application of his insights concerning capitalism to areas outside of its metropolitan centers. Finally, we believe the case of Ireland can provide a crucial intervention in an ongoing and still unresolved debate within Marxism over the nature of the relationship between capitalism and non-capitalist modes of production within the world market. It is to this issue that the following discussion is primarily directed.<sup>2</sup>

The dominant Marxian perspective on the world market does not recognize the existence of the problem as one of the coexistence of different modes of production. This position, developed by Baran, Frank, and Wallerstein among others holds that capitalism as a mode of production is coextensive with the penetration of capitalist market relations.<sup>3</sup> As capitalism first comes in contact with other modes of production through the medium of trade, all essential distinction between the capitalist mode and modes outside of the initial capitalist sphere is rapidly eroded. Economic activity is increasing subordinated to the profit maximizing imperatives of the market. The problem then poses itself as one of analyzing the dependent relationship between the metropolitan core of capitalism and its periphery in the underdeveloped world. In other words, the problem of this relationship is seen by these theorists as one which is internal to the capitalist mode of production.

The adequacy of this view was challenged in the 1970s and early 1980s by a number of theorists who have been loosely lumped together in the "modes of production" school. These theorists argued that development and under development must be understood as involving the nature of the articulation of capitalist and noncapitalist modes of production rather than as a problem internal to the capitalist mode of production alone.<sup>4</sup>

The original articles in English by Ernesto Laclau (1971) and Robert Brenner (1977) were published in *New Left Review*. Laclau concentrates his critique on the work of Andre Gunder Frank. Brenner acknowledges Laclau's critical view of Frank and extends it to the work of Emmanuel Wallerstein in a critique of "neo-Smithian Marxism." Brenner contends that while capitalist expansion is often accompanied by the expansion of capitalist class relations it may in contrast result in "merely the interconnection of capitalist with pre-capitalist forms, and indeed the strengthening of the latter, ... or the transformation of pre-capitalist class relations, but without their substitution by fully capitalist social-productive relations of free wage labor, in which labor power is a commodity (p. 27)." An account centered primarily on the extension of the capitalist market will, in

Brenner's words, "fail to take into account either the way in which class structures, once established, will in fact determine the course of economic development or underdevelopment over an entire epoch, or the way in which these class structures themselves emerge: as the outcome of class struggles whose results are incomprehensible in terms merely of market forces (p. 27)." Because of the persistence of pre-capitalist class structures, "production for exchange is perfectly compatible with a system in which it is either unnecessary or impossible, or both, to reinvest in expanded, improved production in order to 'profit' (p. 32)." It is thus the persistence of pre-capitalist modes of production, not the extension of the capitalist world market, which explains underdevelopment.

Brenner's critique and that of the modes of production school is of course more extensive than the argument given above. We do not intend to rehearse the entire discussion here. Nevertheless, we find the arguments of the mode of production school compelling. Despite the cogency of the critique, the world systems approach of the dependency school remains the dominant Marxist approach to the question of the relationship between the advanced capitalist economies and other societies. In this paper we would like to propose an historic case study which may help to tip the balance between the two sides of this controversy.

The disagreement between dependency and modes of production theory has been pursued in a number of geographical contexts. The regions discussed include Latin America (Frank 1969a, 1969b, 1972; Laclau 1971, 1977) early capitalist Britain and continental Europe, East and West (Brenner 1977, 1985), Africa (Meillassoux 1964; Terray 1972; Rey 1975; Arrighi and Saul 1973), and India (see McEachern 1976 and Foster-Carter 1978). Indeed it seems odd that the case of Ireland has not figured more in this debate. Marx himself discussed the Irish economic and political situation (Marx and Engels 1971; Hazelkorn 1980). Ireland's economy was highly integrated with British capitalism and it was considered to be an integral part of the United Kingdom. If it can be shown that the local mode of production was of crucial importance in these circumstances, then the adequacy of an analysis which always and everywhere privileges the penetration of the world market must be called into question.

In the remainder of this paper we will examine the production relations of the nineteenth-century Irish social formation. If it can be shown that an understanding of the mode of production existing on the ground is important to understanding the economy of nineteenth-century Ireland, the modes of production framework will be powerfully validated. We will undertake three related tasks. We will first establish the feudal character of rent in nineteenth century Ireland. We will then develop the concepts of absolute and relative rental value<sup>5</sup> as forms in which surplus is pumped out of the peasantry in the feudal mode of production. Finally, we will apply these concepts in producing a concrete historical account of the reproduction of feudal relations over the course of the nineteenth century in Ireland.

## II. FEUDAL RENT IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY IRELAND

While the existence of rental payments in the Irish countryside is certainly not controversial, the feudal character of these payments is not universally recognized. In the following section we will establish that feudal relations of production characterized the economic base of Irish society in the nineteenth-century. We will begin by conceptually defining feudalism. We will then argue that Irish rent was indeed feudal rent, continuing on to examine some of the problems raised by this point of view.

### A. Defining Feudal Rent

The feudal mode of production can be distinguished from other modes of production by examining the specific forms through which the surplus is extracted from the laboring classes. Within a feudal mode of production, the economic surplus is appropriated by a group other than the direct producers; the surplus is appropriated from the direct producers through the application of extra-economic coercion, that is, through political or ideological coercion or some combination of the two; extra-economic coercion is most often necessary because the direct producers have access to the means to produce their own subsistence. This definition is similar to the one proposed by Laclau (1971) and is consistent with Marx's treatment of this question. Marx (1981) emphasizes the role of this extra-economic domination:

It is clear, too, that in all forms where the actual worker himself remains the 'possessor' of the means of production and the conditions of labor needed for the production of his own means of subsistence, the property relationship must appear at the same time as a direct relationship of domination and servitude, and the direct producer therefore as an unfree person—an unfreedom which may undergo a progressive attenuation from serfdom with statute labor to a mere tribute obligation. (pp. 926- 7).

Feudal rent is not merely a payment for access to land—that is a yearly payment of labor rent, rent in kind or a money rent, but is a relationship of domination of the landlord over the tenant, which may take many forms (Hindess and Hirst 1975, p. 235). Access to the means of coercion puts the landlord in a position of dominance in which he can subsume the direct laborer under his control, by imposing various demands either in kind or in money. The landlord's ability to extract this type of surplus product from his tenant depends upon customs of tenure, which are themselves determined by political and ideological conditions. These tenurial relationships have to be customary in nature because they are determined by non-economic coercion and cannot be contractual in essence, although they may be demanded in a money form. Marx (1981) was aware of the possibility that money rent could exist outside of the context of capitalist relations of production:

By money rent, in this connection, we mean not the industrial or commercial ground-rent based on the capitalist mode of production, which is simply an excess over the average profit, but the ground-rent that arises simply from a formal transformation of the rent in kind, as this was itself simply transformed labor rent. Instead of the product itself, the immediate producer now has to pay his landowner (whether the state or a private person) the price of this. (p. 932)

### B. The Irish Rental Relation

Since the plantations of the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries, the land surface of Ireland has been divided into landed estates. For example, in the division of Munster,<sup>6</sup> landed estates of 12,000, 8,000, 6,000 and 4,000 were created (although Sir Walter Raleigh received about 40,000 acres). Some estates were as small as 100 acres but it was the large landed estate which predominated (Dudley Edwards, 1973, pp. 160-2). Twenty years after the 1845 famine, about 2,000 owners of landed estates, each with 2,000 acres or more, owned two-thirds of the country's land surface (Hoppen, 1992, p. 87). Indeed, half of that surface belonged to less than 800 individuals. These landlords enjoyed a gross annual rental in the region of 10 million pounds. This was at a time when the total United Kingdom central expenditure on civil government amounted to 6.6 million (Vaughan, 1980, p. 187).

In 1870, only three percent of the population of the country owned land (Dudley Edwards 1973 p. 171). The majority of the dispossessed were not urban proletarians, but were rural dwellers. In 1841, when statistics begin to become reliable, less than 14 percent of the population lived in towns of 2,000 or more people. Almost three-quarters of the occupied males were engaged in farming. (Hoppen, 1992, p. 33) Comparable figures for Britain indicate that under one quarter of the British labor force were similarly engaged (Deane and Cole 1969 p. 142). Ireland remained overwhelmingly both a rural and agrarian country.

Rent broadly considered as a payment in return for access to the land as a factor of production is a category which exists in capitalist as well as feudal economies. Without getting into the extensive literature which discusses the theory of rent within a capitalist market framework, we will establish in the following section that Irish rent in the nineteenth century cannot be considered to be capitalist rent in this sense. Rent in Ireland was rather the extraction of surplus from the peasantry obtained through extra-economic coercion as defined above.

### *Rent in the Capitalist World Market*

The analysis of nineteenth century Ireland as a social formation dominated by the extraction of the surplus in the form of feudal rent must meet several potential objections. The first is that production in Ireland was highly integrated with the economy of the rest of the United Kingdom, which was in turn highly integrated into a world market. The economy of the United Kingdom at this time is uncontroversially capitalist in character. It is also widely accepted that the world market

at this time and subsequently can be characterized as a capitalist world market. Due to either or both of these factors, the economy in Ireland has generally been assumed, often without explicit discussion, to be capitalist in nature. In this context, Irish rental payments have implicitly been seen to be payments of capitalist rent.<sup>7</sup>

Within a Marxian framework this position is most clearly represented by the "World Systems" framework developed by Wallerstein and his associates which we referred to in our introduction. Wallerstein asserts the existence of capitalism as a world exchange system, and in consequence, rules out the possibility of pre-capitalist modes of production co-existing with the capitalist mode of production. In this vein, Wallerstein equates the world market system of the capitalist era with the specific capitalist mode of production, as the following suggests:

A mode of production is a characteristic of an economy, and an economy is defined by an effective, ongoing division of labor. Ergo, to discover the mode of production that prevails, we must know what are the real bounds of the division of labor of which we are speaking. Neither individual units of production nor political or cultural entities may be described as having a mode of production, only economies. Given this premise there are only four possible modes of production, only three of which have been known thus far in empirical reality. They are reciprocal mini-systems, redistributive world-empires, a capitalist world economy, and a socialist world government (quoted in Foster-Carter, 1978 p. 74).

Inherent in the theoretical framework of world system theorists is a focus on relations of exchange (both equal and unequal) rather than relations to the production process. In consequence, Wallerstein's analysis of the so-called 'capitalist mode of production' is actually confined to the level of the capitalist market system.

Marx had no difficulty distinguishing between the capitalist world market and the capitalist mode of production. Consequently, he was aware of the distinction between capitalist and non-capitalist modes of production and their relationship to commodity and money circulation, as indicated in the following from Vol. II of *Capital*:

Within its process of circulation, in which industrial capital functions either as money or as commodities, the circuit of industrial whether as money-capital or as commodity capital, crosses the commodity circulation of the most diverse modes of social production, so far as they produce commodities.

No matter whether commodities are the output of production based on slavery, of peasants ... of state enterprise ... or half-savage hunting tribes etc., as commodities and money they come face to face with the money and commodities in which the industrial capital presents itself and enter as such into its circuit. ... The character of the process of production from which they originate is immaterial. They function as commodities in the market, and as commodities they enter into the circuit of industrial capital as well as into the circulation of the surplus value incorporated into it. To replace them [i.e. the commodities entering the capitalist circuit in the above manner] they must be reproduced and to this extent the capitalist mode of production is conditioned on modes of production lying outside of its own stage of development, (1978, pp. 109-10).

The theoretical implications of the above passage are twofold; firstly, it allows for the possibility of the co-existence of non-capitalist modes of production with the capitalist mode of production, and secondly, it identifies the connecting structure between these modes of production as in the circuits of commodity circulation, i.e. the market system. Therefore, we can never equate capitalism as an economic system of commodity exchange with the capitalist mode of production, for it is this commodity exchange which is precisely the necessary structural link between the non-capitalist modes of production and the specific capitalist mode of production.

Just as commodities can circulate without creating always and everywhere the capitalist mode of production, so too can a producer bring commodities to market without establishing themselves as capitalist producers. Marx sees this possibility in Vol. II of *Capital* in the following:

In every production not directed towards satisfying the producer's own immediate needs, the product must circulate as a commodity i.e. be sold, not so that a profit may be made on it, but simply so that the producer may live (1978, p. 283).

Marx in Vol. I of *Capital* applies this observation specifically to the Irish tenantry:

The scattered means of production that serve the producers themselves as means of employment and subsistence, without valorizing themselves through the incorporation of the labor of others, are no more capital than a product consumed by its producer is a commodity (1976 pp. 860-1).

We have established that neither commodity production nor integration into the capitalist world market is sufficient to establish the dominance of the capitalist mode of production in nineteenth-century Ireland.<sup>8</sup> We will now argue that rental payments in this period were extracted by means of extra-economic coercion. The absence of economic coercion implies that the level of these payments was established through ideological consent, political coercion, or some combination of the two.

### *Competition and Irish Rent*

Under capitalist relations of production, rent results from a competitive relationship between agricultural capitals seeking access to the land which is held monopolistically by the landlords. It is necessary therefore to critically look at the concept of Irish rent as a competitive rent relationship. By rejecting the notion of Irish rent as determined by competition between capitals, we are forced to see it as determined by extra-economic coercion. In this light, we will then move our analysis into an examination of the customary tenurial relationships between the landlord and tenant. We conclude that the Irish rental relationship is essentially

feudal in structure, but at a stage where it operates in a developed monetarized form, that is money rent.

A critical reading of nineteenth century accounts of the Irish rental relationship establishes the non-capitalist nature of this rent. Most theorists of the nineteenth century who discussed the Irish rental relationship were generally at pains to develop the difference between normal economic rent under capitalistic agriculture and the rent paid by Irish tenants.<sup>9</sup> They generally referred to the Irish rental system as the cottier rent system. Richard Jones (1831) was one of the first to locate the difference between cottier rents and labor rent or rent in kind:

They (cottier rents) differ from the other classes of peasant rents in this the most materially; that it is not enough for the tenant to be prepared to give in return for the land which enables him to maintain himself, a part of his labor, as in the case of serf rents, or a definite proportion as in the case of metayer or ryat rents. He is bound, whatever the quantity or value of his produce may be, to pay a fixed sum of money to proprietor (p.129).

Accordingly, we can observe that one essential feature of the cottier rent system was that payment for land was in a money form. This implies the existence of monetary circulation and commodity production.<sup>10</sup> John Stuart Mill (1965) suggests that competition is also a feature of the cottier system which regulates the level of this money rent:

The produce, on the cottier system, being divided into two portions, rent, and the remuneration of the laborer, the one is evidently determined by the other. The laborer has whatever the landlord does not take; the condition of the laborer depends on the amount of rent. But rent, being regulated by competition, depends upon the demand for land, and the supply of it. The demand for land depends on the number of competitors, and the competitors are the whole population. The effect, therefore, of this tenure, is to bring the principle of population to act directly on the land, and not as in England on capital. Rent, in this state of things, depends on the proportion between population and land. As the land is a fixed quantity, while population has an unlimited power to increase, unless something checks that increase, the competition for land soon forces up rent to the highest point consistent with keeping the population alive (p. 193).

The consequence of Mill's analysis is that in Ireland competition is not carried on by capitalists, but by the whole population looking to rent the land for its subsistence. We must be mindful here that the existence of this competition by the whole population for access to the land is initially conditioned by the conquest of Ireland by the British. This conquest began a process of the elimination of the customary access to the land of the indigenous peasantry.

While the peasantry remained, the Gaelic tribal chief was replaced by the new landlords who could treat the land as their private property, having no traditional obligations to the actual occupiers of the land. The competition for the land referred to by Mill therefore has the political subjugation of the older Gaelic order as its necessary condition of existence.

The importance of this continued political intervention was recognized by Cliffe Leslie (1870). Leslie considered that the Irish legal structure was actually feudal in nature and that the feudal domination over the Irish economy tended to undermine the necessary legal security for industrial and agricultural enterprises. He suggests that the origin of this legal insecurity was in the state's passage of the Penal Laws<sup>11</sup> and that this legal interference was the determining factor in allowing the landlord class to exploit the tenants, especially in their rent relationships. In consequence, Leslie (1870) argues the Irish rental relationship was different from the capitalist rent relationship:

Rent under these circumstances became, not what political economists define it, the surplus above average wages and profit, but the surplus above minimum wages, without any profit at all (p.128).

It is evident in this passage that by minimum wages Leslie is referring to the minimum subsistence requirement.

Wilmot Horton (1832) further highlights the non-capitalist nature of the Irish peasant's demand for land:

The application of the principle of *supply* and *demand* to the case of rent may be seen strikingly exemplified in the circumstances under which land is let in Ireland. In that country, from the deficiency of employment for the laboring population, and from the practice which has prevailed of letting land in minute portions, and sacrificing the permanent improvement of estates to the object of obtaining the greatest amount of present rent; the possession of land is sought, not by capitalists for the purpose of profit, but by mere laborers for the purpose of obtaining the bare means of subsistence. ... He [the tenant] has no capital, he therefore requires no profit: he looks only for the means of subsistence, and his habits render a very small allowance sufficient to provide those means. He knows that many others, in the same condition with himself, are prepared to offer any rent which they have the slightest hope of being enabled to pay, in order to obtain possession of the land. Having but little to lose, the apprehension of his ultimately finding himself unable to fulfill his contract is not so powerful as the fear of being out bidden in the offer of rent, and thereby losing his only present resource. Under these circumstances, he offers a rent which, in many instances, he is utterly unable to pay (pp. 8-9).

The concluding part of this passage indicates the market distorting consequences of the dispossession and reentry of the Irish peasantry in relation to the land. The contract entered into between the peasant and the landlord is not one of equals and cannot be expected to be fulfilled as if it were entered into on this basis. Despite the appeal to the principles of supply and demand, it must be recognized that the supply of land is limited and actively monopolized while the demand for land is conditioned by the dispossession of the native population. Longfield (1849) develops this perspective arguing that an Irish cottier tenant gains a profit not from production but from fraud:

The general character of the Irish tenant was, that he was willing to offer any rent in order to obtain possession of a farm, but without any intention of regularly paying that rent. On the contrary his object was to derive a profit, not by applying skill and capital to the cultivation of

his farm, but, by denying that he had any money, by defrauding his landlord and evading the payment of his rent (pp. 16-7).

In other words, the level of rent is established in a direct relationship between the tenant and the landlord, only indirectly mediated by market considerations in the letting of land. Hearn (1851) accepts much of the foregoing argument and extends it by emphasizing the lack of employment opportunities outside of agriculture:

But, if we suppose a case where from whatever causes, there is no field beyond the land for the employment of capital, the case will be different. As the capital not required for agriculture cannot be invested with profit, it will disappear, but the laborers whom it has or might have employed still remain. Since there is no other means of occupation, the whole population must look to the land for their support. ... But the demand in the present case consists of the whole population, while in the former it consisted of monied men. In the one case the cultivation is for profit, in the other for actual subsistence. It appears, then, that although the limiting principle still exists, the limit itself is changed; and that ultimately, the actual occupant will pay a rent which will be determined, as nearly as possible, by the difference between the produce of the land and the amount which he could elsewhere obtain for his labor.

This, then, is the difference between cottier's rents and farmers rents—that, in the latter case, the limit is the ordinary rate of profit, in the former, the ordinary rate of wages. ... As the rate of wages depends upon the amount of employment, and as rent in this instance depends upon the rate of wages, every circumstance which lessens the means of employment lowers wages and raises rents. (pp. 4-5)

The monopoly position which the landlord holds over the tenant is not only achieved by his ownership of the land, but also by the direct producer's inability to acquire an economic existence outside the agricultural sphere of production. The lack of industrial development in Ireland therefore not only limited the operation of the equalization process of average profit on agriculture, but also tied the Irish tenant to the land. This economic bondage could only be broken by emigration. The monopoly position of the landlord is one of the conditions which allows him to use extra-economic coercion to extract surplus labor from the direct producer.

In a second argument, Hearn recognizes that since there is no presence of a capitalist either within agriculture or outside it, the average rate of profit, and the subsequent surplus profit that is needed to pay rent within the classical Ricardian rent framework did not operate in determining the rental relationship.<sup>12</sup> However, Hearn proposes a modification of the Ricardian framework and suggests that rent depends on the rate of wages rather than the rate of profit. This, however, must be rejected, because wage labor cannot exist without capital, therefore cottier rents cannot be determined by the rate of wages.

We have rejected the idea of competition among capitals and the rate of wages determining the demand for land and the subsequent level of cottier rents. We are still in danger of falling into an essentially Malthusian analysis of the whole

population with its unlimited power of increase pressing on the land which is itself of a fixed quantity. However, Jones (1831) suggests that external checks on population increase can come about, not from the population as a whole (the demand side) but from the landlord's side—the supply:

But when cottier rents have established themselves, the influence of the landlord is not exerted to check the multiplication of the peasant cultivators, till an extreme case arrives. The first effects of the increasing numbers of the people, that is, the more ardent competition for allotments, and the general rise of rents, seem for a time unquestionable advantages to the landlords, and they have no direct or obvious motive to refuse further subdivision, or to interfere with the settlement of fresh families, till the evident impossibility of getting the stipulated rents, and perhaps the turbulence of peasants starving on insufficient patches of land, warn the proprietors that the time is come, when their own interests imperiously require that the multiplication of the tenantry should be moderated (pp. 133-4).

Therefore, the external check on the 'limitless' population demand for land comes from the supply side of the land—the landlords. While the landlords extract rent from the direct producers, they may also control access to the land, that is 'moderate' the tendencies of the cottier tenancy to subdivide and they can subsequently control the size of the holdings let out. In doing so they establish a part of the population as surplus population. Therefore, not only is the provision of arable land mediated by the existence of landed property, this same landed property may mediate the size of the agricultural population.

We have argued that rent in nineteenth century Ireland is not regulated by capitalist competition for land. Rather rent is established in the context of the essentially unequal relationship between landlord and tenant. Butt (1866) neatly summarizes the case for the feudal character of cottier rents in the following:

Land is not an article of which the supply can be proportioned to the demand. The tenant on an estate cannot deal with his landlord on equal terms. It is the power of the tenant to endure exaction, and nothing like the competition of other persons offering him lands, that limits the amount to which it is possible for a landlord to raise his rents. ... How often do we hear it said that a proprietor is a harsh and oppressive landlord, because high rents are exacted on his estate! We frequently hear a landlord praised as kind and generous, because his farms are let at a low valuation. The very language of ordinary life is sufficient to show that the fixing of rent depends upon something very different from the laws of demand. We do not speak of a harsh and oppressive grocer, because he sells his goods at a high price, or speak of a kind and indulgent draper, because he is contented with small profits and quick sales. ... But in a country like Ireland, ... rent has not yet entirely lost its character of a feudal impost, regulated by the share which the landlord thinks fit to allot as compensation for the letting of the soil (pp. 56,58).

Marx (1981) encourages us to see the Irish rental relationship as noncapitalist in the following passage:

We are not referring here to the conditions in which ground rent, the mode of landed property corresponding to the capitalist mode of production has a formal existence even though the

capitalist mode of production itself does not exist, the tenant himself is not an industrial capitalist, and his manner of farming is not a capitalist one. This is how it is in Ireland, for example (p. 763).

### *The Extra-economic Determinants of Irish Rent*

The non-capitalist and feudal character of Irish rent is further underlined by the fact that the total amount of rent rose with the creation of subtenancies. In this type of subletting, the rent charged to the occupier must cover all the rents to the various intermediate landlords (known as middlemen) as well as the head landlord. There is a tendency for each subletting to double the rent. This trend occurs because the middlemen attempt to reproduce the same life-style as that of their head landlord by attaining or even increasing the level of rent charged. Kevin O'Neill (1984, pp. 33-5) in his study of Co. Cavan backs this assumption up by suggesting that the ratio between the rent paid by the subtenant and the head tenant is in a ratio of 2:1. Therefore the level of rent paid by the actual occupier is not determined by a competitive market situation and it bears no relationship to the actual productiveness of the agricultural operation. In opposition to a competitive rent which would be determined by demand and supply, the middleman's rent is created by their position which allowed them to intervene between the direct producers and the head landlord. This intermediate monopoly position is a product of the legal political structures.

The persistence of non-monetary feudal dues, perhaps, more dramatically indicates the feudal nature of Irish rent. These were observed by Sigerson (1871):

Besides the rent aids and reliefs, the tenant had to pay certain 'dues' in kind, and perform certain 'duties'. Contributions of poultry, eggs etc., were required as 'duty fowl', 'duty eggs', and so forth. The 'duty work' to be performed consisted in labor given to plant, reap, and gather the landlord's crops, to thresh his corn, draw home his turf, or like agricultural services. A rate of payment was occasionally fixed, but this payment was always less than the market value of the labor (p.152).

In addition to these non-monetary exactions, tenants were subjected to a variety of estate rules which went well beyond the usual contractual obligations of lessees. These rules included obtaining permission from the landlord to marry, forbidding the exercise of overnight hospitality, encouraging the attendance of children at Protestant schools, fines for setting snares and traps, and maintaining the secrecy of landlord/tenant dealings.<sup>13</sup> This social control over the tenantry is not in essence a mere contractual relationship, but must be maintained by extra-economic coercion and the personal domination of the landlord over the tenant.

It might be objected that, contrary to the usual feudal practice, Irish leases tended to be yearly or at will. While this is superficially similar to capitalist contractual practice, in the context of a fundamentally feudal system yearly leases represent merely the extent of the subjugation of the peasantry to the will of the landlord. This is most obvious in the case of the tenants who held their land

without lease at the will of the landlord. The Irish tenurial system involved a minimum of security of tenure for the tenant.

This insecurity had its origins in British domination of the island. The 1641 rebellion and the subsequent Cromwellian conquest of Ireland swept away existing feudal custom and prevented the establishment of a manorial system on the European or British model. Seebohm (1869) observes:

A custom, such as the legal maxim, cannot be created de nova. It must grow, and it must have existed time out of mind. Therefore the tenants of the newly created manors, being 'tenant at will' as the copyhold tenants of English manors are nominally must of necessity be really tenants at will in Ireland, seeing that in newly created manors no customs could be pleaded in favour of their fixity of tenure and rents (p.631).

The bastardized English feudal system in Ireland failed to introduce any customary rights to the Irish feudal tenantry. In consequence, no tenurial customs were legally recognized. If they did exist or develop, it was outside the legal system. Thus, all forms of tenantry were 'tenants-at-will' in the eyes of the law.

Tenant insecurity was increased by the legal disadvantage under which the Irish population suffered. Since the British conquest of Ireland, the landlord class was able to manipulate the Irish legal system in such a way that the tenantry was almost completely subjected to the arbitrary power of that landed class. This was unlike the legal situation on the mainland in that the British tenantry were protected by Common Law.<sup>14</sup> An example of the personal discretionary powers of the Irish landlord class was that up to 1836 distress was a personal action on behalf of the landlord (Dardis, 1920, p. 35-6), which could be carried out without any formal evidence of rent being due (Report from the Lords on the State of Ireland 1825, p. 305). Another example involves the issuances of notices-to quit. Although after 1836, the landlord and his agents had to resort to the Civil Bill Court for a notice-to-quit, the landlord and his representatives were assumed to be the sole judges of what was considered misconduct by the tenant. Therefore in contrast to Britain, this Civil Bill Court was a very stunted equitable court (Molloy, 1876, p. 23). According to Vaughan (1977) acquiring these notices-to-quit from the Civil Bill Court was crucial in controlling all aspects of the tenant's lives, as the notice-to-quit:

... was the estate agent's maid-of-all-work, being used to collect arrears, to force tenants to pay increases of rent, to settle quarrels between tenants and to discourage bad farming...to prevent the dividing of farms without the landlord's consent, the harbouring of squatters, subletting, non-residence, ... (p.219).

The relationship between the subjugation of the tenant to the landlord and the length of the lease is reflected in the history of Irish land tenure. While initially leases of some duration were granted (see below), the middleman system of subletting in existence before the mid-1800s tended to lead to shorter and shorter

leases for those actually occupying the land. In order to exploit his position the middleman had to give leases to his subtenants of a much shorter duration than he himself held. There was a tendency to issue shorter leases as one moved from the head landlord through the various middlemen to the actual direct occupier/producer. In addition, the shorter the leases the greater is the ability to gain increased rental revenue, for each new lease was accompanied by an increase in rent.<sup>15</sup>

From the seventeenth-century onwards, leaseholds evolved from being of long duration to much shorter leases and finally to a point in the nineteenth-century where no leases were issued at all. The logical conclusion of this trend was reached where the direct tenant held the land from the landlord 'at will' or from year to year.<sup>16</sup> According to Solow (1971, p. 7), by the middle of the nineteenth-century, 70-75 percent of all tenants in Ireland were yearly tenants or tenants-at-will. Tenancies-at-will were implied from the payment of rent, without the existence of a written agreement and could be terminated by the landlord at anytime. Thus the evolution of the yearly tenancy demonstrates that far from indicating a commercial relationship of equality between landlord and tenant, short leases indicated the radical subjection of the tenants interests to those of the landlord.

#### *Surplus Labor and Rental Value*

We have argued that although the rent is expressed in a monied form it is determined by the social conditions of extra-economic coercion. Since it is a monied rent, commodities and exchange-value must be produced, but not under capitalist social conditions of production. We have contended that the Irish rental form is not a capitalist ground rent which is determined by the existence of surplus profit over and above normal profit in capitalist commodity production (Fine, 1979, p.264), but is rather a pre-capitalist rental form. Because it stands outside the normal costs of production, this rent must by necessity extract from the direct producer what under capitalism would be the 'natural' rewards from commodity production, that is profits and wages. Marx (1981) describes this process in discussing Ireland:

Here the tenant is generally a small peasant. What he pays the landowner for his lease often absorbs not only a portion of his profit, i.e. his own surplus labour, which he has a right to as owner of his own instruments of labour, but also a portion of the normal wage, which he would receive for the same amount of labour under other conditions (p. 763).

In this case, it is rent which is the normal form of surplus labor, rather than profit as under the capitalist mode of production. Because this rent is extracted in money form and because this money is obtained through the sale of commodities on the market, it is possible to designate the form under which surplus labor is appropriated in nineteenth-century Ireland as rental value.

This Irish rental form makes the reproduction of its own production process problematic. Although the whole production process is geared towards producing commodities and surplus in a monied form, the tenant is not

concerned with maximizing the exchange value of his production but is concerned merely with gaining renewed access to the land. In this way the rental process is concerned with a kind of use-value, the productive potential of the land, rather than exchange-value. The tenant must pay the rent in order to begin his production cycle. Production is therefore geared to producing enough exchange value in order to pay the rent and thereby re-enter the production process again. Value and in a sense surplus value do exist, but since production is not driven by the need to create profit, they do not take determining roles as they do under the capitalist mode of production. Since the rental process interrupts the valorization process by claiming most of the surplus in the rent form, the whole production process is determined by the customary use of extra-economic coercion.

The appropriation of surplus in the form of rental value remains essentially feudal because the rental process depends on social [extra-economic] constraints which the landlord class can impose upon their tenantry. The more constraints created the greater is the landlord's ability to extract surplus labour in the form of rental value. Consequently, it is crucial to emphasize that the extraction of rental value is not merely concerned with the money rent alone.

We have established that the Irish rental relation in the nineteenth-century was essentially feudal in character. We wish to now examine the ways in which this non-capitalist rental relationship reproduced itself over time. Further, we will contend that the dynamic changes which took place within the rental relationship during this time were determined by structures essentially internal to feudal production relations.

### III. FORMS OF THE EXTRACTION OF FEUDAL RENT

Before pursuing our historical argument, it is essential to theoretically examine the general forms of the extraction of feudal rent. This task is similar to the one undertaken by Marx in his analysis of the distinction between absolute and relative surplus value within the capitalist mode of production. Marx himself opens up the possibility of analyzing the extraction of surplus as feudal rent in an analogous manner. In his discussion of Richard Jones, Marx (1972) suggests that pre-capitalist rent relationships can exist in two specific forms:

In discussing forced labor and the forms of serfdom [or slavery] which correspond to it more or less, Jones unconsciously emphasises the two forms to which all surplus value [surplus labor] can be reduced. It is characteristic that, in general, real forced labor displays in the most brutal form, most clearly the essential features of wage labor.

Under these conditions [where there is serf labor] rent can only be increased either by the more skillful and effective utilization of the labor of the tenantry [relative surplus labor], this however is hampered by the inability of the proprietors to advance the science of agriculture, or by an increase in the total quantity of the labor exacted ... (p.400).



Therefore, if surplus labor in pre-capitalist production can be divided up into relative and absolute characteristics, it should be possible to locate this distinction with regard to the concept of rental value, which, as we have discovered is the essential form in which surplus labor is pumped out of the direct producer in nineteenth-century Ireland. We will develop this distinction before proceeding to an historical analysis.

#### A. Absolute Rental Value

Marx has suggested that absolute surplus labor is concerned with increasing the total quantity of labor extracted, while relative surplus labor attempts to increase the surplus labor by more skilful and effective utilization of labor. Accordingly, absolute surplus labor can be extracted by means of increasing the amount of surplus labor extracted from each worker on the land or by increasing the number of workers on the land. The first of these possibilities can be pursued through the simple expedient of raising the rent charged on a particular tenancy. The higher the increase, the more surplus labor is expropriated from the tenant all other things being equal. In its more aggressive forms absolute rental value extraction has been traditionally referred to as rackrenting.

The second route through which absolute rental value extraction may be pursued is through increasing the number of peasants on the land. Concretely this is accomplished through the division of the available land into smaller plots let out to a larger number of tenants. In Ireland, this subdivision was accomplished both by the employment of middlemen through the mechanism of subletting and also through family subdivision. We have already discussed how subletting tended to double the price of rent charged between the various intermediate landlords and the direct tenant, without any regard to the physical productivity or price realization of the tenant's production process.

We have pointed out that surplus labor in the nineteenth-century Irish case occurs in the rental form as money rent. This suggests that we cannot necessarily locate the surplus labor/necessary labor relationship within the immediate production process, as we could if the rent were extracted in the form of a portion of the physical product or as labor rent. The peasant does not know what percentage of labor expended is surplus until the price of the production is realized on the market and a portion set aside for the payment of the money rent. If this is so, the relationship between necessary and surplus labor can only be located in the circulation process, either before or after the production process. Because of this, the Irish tenant can be allowed to retain control over his immediate production process. If he is forced to produce surplus labor, it is not achieved at the level of the production process, but in the circulation process in acquiring the money needed for the rental payment. The overall consequence of this is that the conflict between necessary and surplus labor can potentially be

carried out in the circulation process rather than the production process as in the capitalist mode of production.

As a result, the landlords' domination of the tenants' production process is indirect and is expressed through financial demands in the form of rental payments rather than through direct control over the tenants' production. The concrete consequence of this type of rental value regime is that there was no necessity for the landlords to have immediate supervision of their estates. As long as rent was collected, the landlord was satisfied. This allowed the landlord to become an absentee.

This lack of landlords' supervision of their estates and their indirect domination of the tenants' production through the circulation process, specifically the financial demands which make up rental value, can be expressed, following Marx as the formal subsumption of the tenant under the absolute rental value regime.<sup>17</sup> The formal subsumption of the tenant under absolute rental value regimes is determined by the imposition of money rent (and the increase of that rent) on the direct producer, compelling him to hand over more and more of his surplus product in the rent form. The formal subsumption of the tenant under absolute rental value regimes does not force the tenant to adopt particular labor processes, or alter the actual mode of working. All it does is extract more surplus production in its various rent forms.

Absolute rental value, pursued either through the increase in rental charges or through subdivision has a tendency to absorb all the normal rewards of commodity production. The ultimate limit of absolute rental value is reached when the rackrented tenant can only obtain a meagre physical subsistence from his production. The Poor Law Inquiry Commission (1836) highlights this tendency and establishes an evolutionary relationship between the middleman system and money rent, in the following:

The establishment of a money measure of rent was detrimental, not only insofar as it tempted the proprietor to resign the management of his estate, but it led to the introduction of the class of middlemen, not as agents, who are everywhere common, but as intermediate landlords, who were to derive their profits out of increased rent from the land which they were authorized to sublet. This in the first instance led to the introduction of a tenantry who, by drawing nothing but wages from the land, could leave the largest profit to the middleman; and in fact both parties had a direct interest in encouraging them to subdivide their lands, and to multiply up to any point commensurate with the quantity and quality of the food, clothing, and lodging with which they were disposed to rest satisfied (p. 674).

Wages in the above quotation must be seen as referring to physical subsistence rather than to a money wage.

By relying on the most productive crops, the tenant would be able to limit the amount of his land given over to subsistence production to minimum spatial size, thereby allowing the rest of his rental land for surplus production. Under absolute rental value regimes, the rental value extracted is only limited by the necessary labor to produce the physical means of subsistence.

As a result of this tendency, not only did absolute rental value rob the tenant of any potential profit or the equivalent of money wages in recompense for his or her labor, but also of the money needed for fixed and fluid capital investment.<sup>18</sup> In this situation, absolute rental value regimes will only encourage customary labor processes rather than any technical innovations in the labor processes. Consequently, absolute rental value will not just limit the necessary capital costs of the tenant's production but will attempt to eliminate them entirely. This trend forces the direct producer further into using exclusively products of the natural economy, and their subsequent production techniques. The direct producer will substitute the spade for the plough, manure for guano, and family labor for wage labor and so forth.

### B. Relative Rental Value

In Marx's discussion of relative surplus labor and the pre-capitalist rent relationship, he suggested that rent could be increased by "more skilful and effective utilization of the labor of the tenantry" (Marx, 1981, p. 400). It is important to stress that relative rental value is not concerned with increasing production efficiency as such, but is rather concerned with increasing the rate of surplus extraction. This involves not only increasing the productivity of the direct tenant as a rent producer but also preserving and increasing the other elements of the production process. The landlord in his effort to make his extraction of rent more efficient, will attempt to achieve two diametrically opposite tasks. He will attempt to maximise his extraction of rent and yet he will also attempt to preserve the setting value of the elements of the production process.

In the absolute rental value regime, the landlord paid no attention to the number of direct producers subsisting on his estate and to the amount of necessary labor engaged in subsistence production. The landlord did not prevent subdivision, even encouraging this in the process of subletting. Under relative rental value, the landlord attempted to prevent subletting and family subdivision, and encouraged the consolidation of estate farms. To enforce the prevention of subdivision the landlord employed the estate agent and various bailiffs.

The overall consequence of the landlord's attempt to limit the amount of people surviving on the land was that the tenants' dependents who did not inherit the tenancy were posited as a surplus population outside the immediate production process. The remaining population of direct producers had to increase their individual productivity in order to produce the rental value. Previously, under the absolute rental value regime, and its process of family subdivision, the lease holder had a large pool of labor to call upon, in order to produce his rent charge. But with the coming of the new type of estate management and its essential policy of preventing subdivision, the direct tenant still had to produce the same level of rent (even without an increase) with less direct producers. Therefore, with the rent charge remaining constant, the declining numbers of direct producers had to

create more rental value per producer, if they were to remain on the land. Some increase in production per worker may come about as the remaining direct producers have access to the subsistence land used by the departed tenants. Nevertheless, if the reduction of population on the land is carried far enough the tenant will reach the limit of this newly available land and his or her ability to absolutely increase the amount of surplus labor on the land. The productivity of labor must then increase. This is the essence of relative rental value.

It is important to stress that this increase in productivity per worker is not only achieved through the introduction of technical innovations within the production process, but by the landlord's use of extra-economic coercion in controlling access to the land. Consequently, the impetus for technical innovations comes from the landlord's control over the reproduction process, in that the landlord limits the number of direct producers before the production process begins. Any technical innovations have to be paid for and maintained by the tenant. Technical development then is enforced upon the production process through landlord coercion. In this way it does not resemble the technical change which accompanies capital accumulation motivated economically by competitive production for the market. Nevertheless, under relative rental value extraction, not only did the landlords attempt to increase the productivity of the direct producers, but they also attempted to increase their rental returns on other elements of the production process.

We have already seen how the operation of relative rental value depends upon the introduction of limitations on the number of direct producers on the land. In addition, new methods of estate administration and increased social control over the tenantry were introduced. The evolution of estate-rules was crucial in this process. As we have already discussed, estate rules provided a varied number of strictures with which the tenant had to comply, on pain of being either evicted or fined. These rules varied widely from estate to estate and could include strictures on the personal behavior of the tenant. More important from the point of view of extracting relative rental value, these rules often included interventions in the production process of the tenant, specifying such things as proper crop rotations, and so forth.

These new estate rules were also used to extend the landlords' influence over the production process to include the tenants' use of the estate appurtenances, such as bog and seashore.<sup>19</sup> Again, like the land itself, it was necessary to create a monopoly control over these usufructs, which necessarily required the landlord to separate them from the land as a whole. By limiting access, the landlord could not only limit their physical depreciation but also charge a rent for their use. By restricting the use of these appurtenances, the landlord thereby extended their life as a form of fixed capital, which helped to maintain the setting value of the estate as a whole.

The promulgation of these estate rules implied a more active administration of the estate by the landlord or his representatives. This new administration was most frequently exercised through the employment of an estate agent and various kinds

of bailiffs to undertake estate administration. These new functionaries replaced the middlemen previously relied on to enforce the collection of rent under the dominance of the absolute rental value regime. The estate agent was given wide authority to run the day to day business of the estate.

The increasing supervision by landlords of their estates and the more direct domination of the tenants actual production process represent a movement beyond the formal subsumption of the tenant which takes place under absolute rental value regimes. Increasingly the production of the tenant was subject to the intervention of the landlord or his agent. This more real subsumption of the tenant under relative rental value affected the actual labor process of the tenant, introducing new methods and techniques, such as plow husbandry. This is the main difference between absolute and relative rental value.

We have established at a theoretical level that absolute rental value and relative rental value are two distinguishable forms in which surplus is potentially pumped out of the peasantry within feudal modes of production. In the next section we will employ these concepts to analyze the reproduction of feudal relations of production during the nineteenth century in Ireland.

#### IV. THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF RENTAL VALUE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY IRELAND

In this next section of the paper we will argue that the history of nineteenth-century Ireland can be understood as the transition between two different forms of the extraction of feudal rent. The early part of the century was characterized by the dominance of absolute rental value. The period between 1815 and 1850 is a time of transition between an absolute rental value regime and the establishment of a relative rental value regime. The Irish relative rental value regime persists until tenancy is undermined and abolished through land reform in the 1880s.

##### A. The Irish Absolute Rental Value Regime

We will now examine the extraction of absolute surplus and its conditions of existence in the early part of the nineteenth century in Ireland. In absolute rental value production, the landlord has only an initial control over the size of the units let and total control over the level of rent demanded. The processes of subletting and subdivision essentially eliminate the landlords' control of the amount held by each direct producer and the number of direct producers actually working on his landed estate. Consequently, the landlord only dominates the tenants' production process through the level of rent demanded and this rental relationship's ability to absorb nearly all of his surplus product through rackrenting.<sup>20</sup>

#### *Subletting and Subdivision*

The following testimony of the Poor Law Inquiry (1836) indicates the presence of the tendency towards increasing subdivision of tenancies and the consequent growth in population on the land in early nineteenth century Ireland:

In Ireland the peasant population has been suffered to multiply without the imposition of any check; on the contrary, the landlords, both superior and inferior, conceived it to be their interest to encourage the increase; and although in the present day, the superior landlords have begun to perceive the errors of their system, ... Besides the absence of that species of control which has been mentioned as existing in other countries, it will be found that the payment of a money-rent, or the calculation of it in money, by a peasantry who get nothing beyond their subsistence from the soil, is of itself an influential cause of redundant population. ... This procedure has allowed the proprietors to withdraw themselves from the immediate superintendance of their estates (p. 673).

Although the legal lease is held by one individual, in reality the landlord has a collective tenancy, which is either made up of tenants who are related to each other or who have a number of sub-tenants. The collective nature of absolute rental value tenancy allows the tenancy to determine the amount of direct producers on the landlord's estate and the size of land held by each producer. An example of this lack of landlord's control over reproduction is given in the following from the Devon Commission:

The parent possessed of a farm looks upon it as a means of providing for his family after his decease, and consequently rarely induces them to adopt any other than agricultural pursuits, or makes any other provision for them than the miserable segment of a farm, which he can carve for each out of his holding ... Each son, as he is married, is installed in his portion of the ground, and in some cases even the sons-in-law receive as the dowries of their brides some share of the farm. In vain does the landlord or his agent threaten the tenant; in vain is the erection of new houses prohibited (Kennedy, 1847, p. 418).

Collective tenancy tends to encourage population growth by the tenantry. Since collective tenancy allowed easy access to the land, it created a situation where people could marry at a relatively early age because of the ease with which small holdings could be acquired through subletting or subdivision. This according to Connell (1950) and Lee (1968) was the leading cause of pre-Famine population growth.

#### *The Middleman System*

We have already discussed above the fact that under absolute rental value regimes the organization of the estate was conducted through the establishment of a system of middlemen on the land. The middleman system was intensified in the late eighteenth-century due to a number of legal and social changes. Catholics

became able to become middlemen because of the Catholic Relief Acts of 1778 and 1793. Clark (1979) describes the consequences:

As a result, more and more tenants became free to sublet land, and, beginning in the 1790s, the entire middleman system in Ireland underwent a substantial change. The number of middlemen increased and the typical middleman came to be, not a Protestant gentleman, but a large [usually Catholic] farmer. In this way agricultural holdings were repeatedly subdivided... (p. 27).

This new form of middleman system not only encouraged subletting, but also subdivision of land. Longfield (1870, p. 24) makes the point that there is not an inherent relationship between subletting and subdivision, that is, a farm may be sublet without being divided. But it should be stressed that this new form of subletting by farmer-middlemen was indirectly linked to subdivision because there was no need for the middlemen to curb this practice. Longfield (1870) makes the following argument:

The middleman, not having a permanent interest, did not care for the improvement or deterioration of the estate. A thought upon the subject never crossed his mind.

Two circumstances were of material assistance to the middlemen in their treatment of the tenantry. First, there were no poor laws. They were therefore enabled to cover the land with a starving population, without the possibility of being called upon by law to contribute anything to their support. Secondly, the law of distress was more severe than it is now, and enabled the landlord to distrain growing crops. At common law, the crop, until it was severed from the soil, was part of the soil, and could not be seized by distress or execution; but this was altered by Act of Parliament, to enable the landlord to seize the crops before they were ripe, to put keepers in possession to watch them, and to carry them away when they were ripe, leaving the starving tenant and his family in possession of the naked land. Thus the landlord frequently thought it for his interest to encourage subdivision of farms. I remember, many years ago, hearing an extensive land agent laying down the principle in a very authoritative manner, that it was better for the landlord that there should be as many occupiers as possible on the land, since the more occupiers, the more tillage was necessary to support the tenants, and the landlord was able to help himself to the produce of the soil before they got anything. (p. 28).

With regard to distress and ejection, before 1816, middlemen could deal with groups of tenants rather than individual tenants thereby removing one of the possible disadvantages of subdivision as John Foster points out:

Antecedently to the passing of the Act, there was a bounty given by the law to the landlord, to unite his tenants in clusters, rather than to deal with them individually. The practice was to lease a certain tract of land to a company of persons, who all held in common, no individual having any separate property in it whatever ... He [the landlord] found it more convenient to allow these companies to continue to possess the land in that manner because he could then, through the process of one ejection, deal with any number that might be united into one company; whereas, if he leased to each person to hold in severalty, he would be obliged to bring as many ejections as he had tenants. (Minutes of Evidence 1825 p. 54).

Subletting was inherently concerned with the duration of the lease and the level of rent, rather than the productive capabilities of the direct producer. This is reflected in the management of landed estates in the eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries, where it was common for the agent not to know the actual number of tenants on the estate, especially subtenants, (O'Neill, 1984, p. 40).

### *The Cottier System*

The final subdivision of the land under the absolute rental value regime involved the development of a system of unpaid productive labor, which has given its name to this entire period of absolute rental value—the cottier system and its associated system of land tenure, conacre. The Poor Law Inquiry (1836) attempts to define cottierism in the following:

The most prevalent meaning of the term 'cottier' is that of a laborer holding a cabin, either with or without land, as it may happen [but commonly from a quarter to three acres are attached], from a farmer or other occupier, for whom he is bound to work, either constantly at a certain fixed price [usually a very low one], or whenever called upon, or so many days in the week at certain busy seasons, according to the custom of the neighbourhood (p. 660).

Accordingly, the relationship between the tenant and the cottier is not a wage labor relationship but rather a form of developed feudal labor rent, where the cottier works a number of days in the year on the tenant's plot and the rest on his own cottier plot. It is a developed form of feudal labor rent in that the agreement between the cottier and tenant was paradoxically expressed in a moneyed rent.<sup>21</sup> In the cottier rent system, the cottier rents a plot of land from the tenant, which the cottier pays in labor or in money. Rogers (1847) describes this relationship:

The farmer engages his laborers from year to year, giving them land to produce their potato crop, and seed when necessary, charging, in almost every instance, a rent much beyond his own; and if a cottage be included, frequently in a similar ratio. Against this, he credits the laborer's work, keeping strict accounts of days and half-days, as the weather permits labor; and once a year, perhaps in some few instances, twice—the account is settled, and the balance, either way, struck (p. 4).

In this situation, the tenant not only gets his labor free and can call upon it when he needs it, but he can also demand from the cottier the difference between the value of the labor obtained and the price of the rent agreed upon. This provided the tenant with a financial security in a bad year. When crops failed and the labor of the cottier was not required, he could still get the moneyed rent.

In some cases, the tenant could behave like a middleman by charging such a high rent from the cottiers that it was possible for the tenant to sit rent free on his own plot by setting off his rent with the cottier's rent. The written reports of the Ordnance Survey for Donegal (1836) testify to this:

The cottier tenants, that is the persons who work for the farmer, are generally much oppressed, I have known several farms of considerable extent, a few acres of which have been set off with some miserable huts to a few cottiers, whose rents have enabled the immediate tenant of the head landlord to sit rent free—many of these poor people pay their rents in labor, which is lower than the general rates of the country but they are so bound to their landlords that they are obliged to submit to their terms however unfair they may be (p. 65).

These cottier-laborers were tied to the tenant for the period that the cottiers paid their rents, allowing the tenant to circumvent the need to pay a moneyed wage. This domination allowed the tenant not only the possible opportunity to rackrent the cottier but also the power to underpay the cottier for his labor, in the sense that the rate per day under the cottier system was much lower than the ordinary pay for a day's-work.

The quantity of land taken by the cottier varied from half a rood<sup>22</sup> to two acres (The Poor Law Inquiry 1836 p. 661). This extremely small plot, which the cottier rented from the tenant, was a highly specialized form of land tenure, known as conacre. Conacre was only rented out for an eleven-month period, and consequently had to be renewed after that month. The cottier rent tended to be far higher than the normal rackrent under the middleman system, which averaged about six pounds an acre (Ordinance Survey Memoirs 1834 p. 33). Not only was the rent higher, it also had to be paid before the potato crop was removed from the soil, (The Poor Law Inquiry 1836 p. 662).

Conacre provided the cottier tenant with his and his family's source of physical subsistence. The cottier by growing his potatoes on his plot was able to physically reproduce himself as a laborer—a cottier laborer. Therefore, the distinction between necessary labor and surplus labor was easily visible between work on his conacre plot and work for the tenant. This is completely the reverse for the relationship between the ordinary tenant and the landlord as expressed under rental value extraction.

The relationship between conacre and its essential produce—the potato—has given rise to its characterization as the 'potato truck system,' where the potato was perceived as the means of payment for the cottier's labor. Rogers (1847) summarises this system in the following:

It is a fact which cannot be contradicted, that the greater portion of agricultural laborers of Ireland, except in parts of the north, are paid for their labor by the potato, or by land to raise it... By the custom described [conacre], the potato has become the labor coin of the agricultural community. It is, in fact, as much the currency which pays for that description of labor in Ireland, as gold is in England (pp. 3,6).

### *Spade Husbandry*

We have already argued that under the absolute rental value regime, the rent tends to rob the tenant of funds needed for the investment of fixed and fluid capital. Consequently, the tenant will tend to use only those inputs which did not

have to be purchased with money on the market. The direct producer will substitute the spade for the plough, manure for guano, family labor for wage labor, etc. Caird gives a good definition of this type of production in the following:

What the ground will yield from year to year at the least cost of time, labor, and money is taken from it. (quoted in Cliff Leslie 1870 p. 63).

The typical labor process under the Irish absolute rental value regime can be characterized as spade husbandry. The spade was the most distinctive agricultural implement of Irish traditional agriculture, dating from the Bronze Age (Bell and Watson, 1986, p. 43). It was instrumental in the evolution of 'common' agricultural practices and associated customary labor processes. Especially important was the use of the spade in the creation of 'lazy-beds':

Spade work was especially associated with techniques of building up ridges on strips of untilled or lea ground. ... these ridges were commonly known as *iomairi* in Irish, but were referred to as 'lazy-beds' by most agriculturalists (Bell and Watson, 1986, p. 47).

These lazy-beds were primarily made to assist drainage in the production of crops. According to O'Neill (1984), the lazy-beds or ridge system was made in the following way:

The ridge system, which was traditionally used for oats, was also adapted quite readily to the potato. In this method, the farmer laid manure [if he were using any] directly on the surface of the sod. The seed was then placed upon the surface and covered with an inverted sod dug with the spade from a trench paralleling the seed row. This was repeated across the width of the field to create a series of troughs and ridges which provided for the drainage of the field and kept the potatoes or oats high and dry. This system, although considered archaic by outsiders, produced the excellent yields already noted (p. 87).

This type of labor process demanded a tremendous amount of labor. For example, according to W. Tighe about 16 to 20 men could plant an acre of potatoes in a day with the spade and about twice that number was required to dig out the crop (Clark, 1979, p. 216). In this situation, it is crucial for spade husbandry that the direct tenant is able to keep the costs of labor to a minimum since so much labor is required. Because of this economic necessity, the Poor Law Inquiry (1836) suggested that small tenants rather than large tenants were able to afford spade production:

It was the opinion of the witnesses, that the small farmer could better afford to till than the large one. The work of this barony is done entirely by the spade; and, between the low prices and high rents, the large farmer cannot afford to expend as much capital, comparatively, as the small one, manual labor being almost the only capital laid out on land in this barony. The small farmer has generally enough of this in his own family; the large farmer, not possessing any

more skill, and being obliged to pay for labor, does not till as cheaply nor as extensively, in comparison, as the small farmer; that is, more of the large farmer's land is left untilled (p. 680).

This accords well with the tendency of the absolute rental value regime toward subdivision and increasingly small plots.

Essential for tillage production was the ability to acquire cheap labor at the minimum cost or no cost at all. The tenant devised a number of strategies to acquire sufficient labor for 'lazy-bed' tillage. If possible, he used his own family labor only. Depending on the size of his holding and family life cycle, he acquired extra labor by using the meitheal system of co-operative work teams (see below), by allowing conacre on his plot or as a last resort by employing wage labor. Except for the use of wage labor, these concrete strategies were characterized by the minimization of monetary expenditure in the employment of labor.

Since absolute rental value absorbs more and more surplus production from the direct producer, it not only forces him to cut his subsistence to its physical limit, but it also intensifies the use of the land for crop production. This tended to produce over-cropping. In order to overcome the soil-exhausting practice of taking more than two white crops<sup>23</sup> in succession from the land, the tenant introduced a highly manured crop of potatoes as an alternative to fallowing. The consequence of this is that grass production forms no part of the crop rotation.<sup>24</sup> It only comes into play when the soil is totally exhausted from over-cropping. (Baldwin 1877 p. 5)

This causes problems for the tenant's production, for example in obtaining adequate fertilizer. Since under absolute rental value, the main supply of fertilizer must be farmyard manure as the overall tendency is to reduce all costs to a minimum, the lack of planted grass or meadow would severely restrict the tenant's ability to accumulate adequate supplies of manure. This produces an ironical situation. Although the potato crop acts as an alternative to grass in its role of restoring the fertility of the soil, it needs a large supply of manure to achieve soil recuperation. But the existence of the potato crop within the white crop rotation creates a barrier to acquiring sufficient manure. Therefore, the potato crop is a poor substitute for artificially sown grass as a means of recuperating the soil. Significantly, under this type of rotation the relationship between white crop tillage and livestock production, especially cattle and sheep, was essentially competitive, an expansion of one implied a contraction of the other. (Crotty, 1966, p. 72)

Therefore, although the spade labor process was suited for absolute rental value since it required little or no investment, it had a number of glaring defects. These are summed up by Pringle (1871):

Neglect of a rotation of crops: the infrequency or absence of turnips and mangold among the cultivated crops; the neglect of artificial grasses; slovenly cultivation; inattention to keeping the land free from weeds; neglect with respect to the collection and preservation of farmyard manure; neglect in the treatment of all farm crops, but more especially the hay crop; neglect

with respect to the proper breeding of live stock; defective dairy management; want of proper drainage; waste of land by reason of the multitude of large unnecessary fences etc. (p. 29).

Because of its labor intensity, spade husbandry had a great capacity to absorb labor into its production process. Because of the underdeveloped nature of its customary labor processes, spade husbandry needs extensive use of co-operation between the direct producers. In addition, productive use of social cooperation is absolutely necessary in Ireland with regard to the sowing and harvesting of crops due to the unpredictable nature of the Irish weather, and the highly seasonal nature of tillage production.

#### *The Labor Process Under Spade Husbandry*

The labor needed for spade husbandry can be brought together under different concrete norms of social co-operation. Probably the most significant form of co-operation in spade husbandry was that which manifested itself in family labor. The use of family labor extended beyond the nuclear family to include a number of assisting relatives. Crucial in this process of absorbing more family labor to work on a plot was the existence of family subdivision. The more the farm was subdivided the greater was the pool of labor for spade husbandry. Included in the process of subdivision was the ability of the tenant to attract unattached relatives to assist during the early and late periods of the family cycle, as O'Neill (1984) indicates for County Cavan:

Labor requirements also affected the structure of farming families throughout the family cycle. Smaller Cavan families responded to the constant demand for labor by turning to unattached relatives outside the nucleus for help on their farms. Thus, families were likely to be extended during the early years of marriage, when the children were still too young to help in the field or barn. Likewise, older couples with only one or two children at home were likely to take in other relatives. The demand for labor was so strong that many larger farmers extended their families to include non-nuclear healthy young relatives throughout most of their lives (p. 77).

Extended family systems of labor were also complemented by a wider kinship or neighborhood system of cooperative labor. This form of co-operative work team was called a meitheal (O'Dowd, 1981, p. 57). These work teams were involved in various types of work, ranging from strictly agricultural work such as sowing and harvesting to non-agricultural activities like turf cutting and thatching (O'Neill, 1984, p. 77). Weld (1832) describes the nature of a meitheal, or gathering, in the following:

In certain districts of Roscommon, as in other places, where spade husbandry prevails, it is usual for people to exchange labor reciprocally, and to unite in considerable numbers in the fields of individuals in rotation, more especially for the purpose of planting or digging out

potatoes. These congregations of workmen give vivacity to the labor, and are ordinarily scenes of much cheerfulness (p. 660).

Because the meitheal was convened on a semi-arranged basis, a certain amount of organization was necessary in convening the work force to ensure that everyone's crops were saved. According to O'Dowd (1981) certain persons were invited because of their adeptness in a special skill (p. 80), and crucially:

the delegation of responsibility also took the form of placing the best workers in key positions to set a pace for the others to follow. In Co. Clare, the special person to regulate the pace was known as a 'meithloir,' and in Co. Fermanagh one particular individual was asked year after year to lead a meitheal for making cultivation ridges as he was renowned for being a hard worker (p. 99).

One of the major problems associated with the co-operative nature of spade husbandry was whose farm was the meitheal moving onto first and the order of subsequent farms. Custom provided the answer, as suggested in the following from Lord Arran's estate in Co. Mayo, where the meitheal:

meet together on a certain day, and draw lots to see whose land will be first plowed, hay saved, or corn reaped, as the case may be—when they all assemble, with their respective workmen, and effect in one day what could not be done by the individual resources of a single holder in several weeks; they then proceed to the farm of the next highest drawer, and so on, until each person's business is complete (cited in Clark, 1979, p. 42).

Spade husbandry under the meitheal system significantly highlights one of the crucial trends of absolute rental regimes, that is, the propensity of the direct producers to use customary labor processes rather than technical labor processes as in the capitalist mode of production. The customary nature of spade husbandry is maintained in two ways, firstly by the lack of technical development in spade work and secondly by the customary organization of the meitheal. The essence of the meitheal mechanism is the customary relationships between the tenant farmers within the neighbourhood. Custom regulates not only the division of labor within the meitheal but also the intensity of labor. Crucially, the meitheal's organization of labor is not mediated by exchange value but rather by these customary relationships. The productive power of the meitheal is achieved by the ability of the direct producers to gather together on a specific day and consequently to concentrate their individual labors to a specific task at a particular time, that is by direct physical co-operation.

We have observed how the tenant under absolute rental value has attempted to eliminate any financial costs with regard to his use of other people's labor through the use of the processes of family labor and the meitheal. It must not be overlooked that these labor sources under the absolute rental value regime were augmented through the use of the final subdivision of the land tenure in the cottier system, discussed more fully above.

### *The Potato*

The ability of absolute rental value to absorb all surplus labor is reflected in the tenantry's propensity to become exclusively dependent upon the potato for physical subsistence in the Pre-Famine period. Not only did they come to subsist on the potato, but on the most prolific variety:

Though most of the small occupiers and laborers grow apples and cups, they do not use them themselves, [they sell them] with the few exceptions mentioned, except as holiday fare, and as a little indulgence on particular occasions. They can only afford to consume the lumpers or coarsest quality themselves, on account of the much larger produce, and consequent cheapness of that sort. The apples yield ten to fifteen per cent less than the cups, and the cups ten to fifteen per cent less than the lumpers, making a difference of twenty to thirty per cent between the produce of the best and the worst qualities (The Poor Law Commission 1836 p. 666).

By relying on the most prolific potato, the tenant was able to limit the amount of his land given over to subsistence production to minimum size, thereby allowing the rest for the production of rent. Therefore, in the reproduction process of the direct producer as a whole under the absolute rental value regime potato production became the essential component of necessary labor. It was important not only in its ability to feed the direct producer and his dependents but also as the recuperative agent in white crop production.

### *The Tendency Toward Crisis within Absolute Rental Value*

The collapse of the ability of the means of production to produce the physical means of subsistence is an inherent tendency of the absolute rental value reproduction process. This is determined by two of the trends of absolute rental value regimes. The first of these is the landlord rackrenting his tenantry. This forces the direct producer to hand over more and more surplus product in the form of money rent and will therefore have a tendency to limit the amount of land given over to the production of physical subsistence. Secondly, the collective nature of tenancy under absolute rental value will force its tenantry to continually subdivide the means of production under their control, in order to accommodate a growing population.

The concrete manifestation of these two tendencies, is the propensity of the tenantry to engage in more intensive farming. Grain production and the pig were produced as surplus production for the rent, while the potato crop became the staple crop for physical subsistence. This growing dependence of the collective tenantry on the potato as the essential source of subsistence had the tendency to force these people to move nearer the physical minimum level of subsistence. Consequently, the failure of or even a contraction in potato production will undermine the ability of the direct producer to physically reproduce himself not only as a person but also as a rent-paying tenant. Tragically, this occurred during the Famine period (1845-1849).

The collapse of the potato crop in the Famine, not only forced tenants to voluntarily emigrate if they had survived the ravages of the Famine, but it also provided the landlord class with the opportunity to clear their estates of 'surplus population' ultimately forcing these 'surplus' tenants to emigrate. Emigration under absolute rental value production is determined by the inability of the reproduction process to continually reproduce the physical means of subsistence under the twin pressures of subdivision and increasing rental demands. In consequence, this type of emigration is susceptible to variations from year to year depending upon vicissitudes of the potato crop and the landlords' reaction to the subsequent lowering of tenants' resistance to coercion.

#### B. The Transition Period, 1815- 1850

This tendency of the absolute rental value regime towards crisis played a large role in the transition to the relative rental value regime which dominated the Irish feudal mode of production up to the 1880s. A period of transition existed in the first half of the century. Its boundaries were marked on both sides by crisis. It began with the economic crisis which followed the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815. The terminus of this transition period is marked by the Great Famine. Both of these events were conditioned by the particular character of the absolute rental value regime. The relationship of the dynamics of absolute rent to the Great Famine is explained briefly above. The fall of agricultural prices which accompanied the 1815 crisis was particularly detrimental to the continuation of the absolute rental value regime.

##### *The 1815 Crisis*

The absolute rental value process of subdivision is greatly facilitated in a market situation of rising prices. It is obvious that the number of renters and the increasing level of rent can be more easily accommodated if agricultural prices are rising. Conversely, this process finds it difficult to operate in a situation of falling prices. If the direct producer finds himself unable to pay his rent, each middleman in turn would fail to pay their respective rents and the whole system is then in danger of collapse. Between 1760 and 1815, Ireland experienced rising prices. Louis Cullen (1976) has documented the economic crisis and consequent declining prices which befell Ireland in 1815 after the boom years of the Napoleonic Wars:

The boom was halted with the termination of hostilities in 1815. Prices fell sharply from their inflated level, and the trend was now downward. Despite a 10 per cent rise in the volume of exports between 1815 and 1820, their value fell. The volume of exports rose further in 1821; their value fell still further. A major economic crisis occurred in the spring of 1820, the most severe in two decades. It was in the main a consequence of falling prices, induced by falling markets in England where severe depression was experienced in 1819. Grain prices fell

through 1818 and 1820: between 1818 and 1822 they were halved. Prices of beef and pork fell by about a third between 1819 and 1820. The abrupt character of the crisis in 1820 was contributed to by monetary deflation (p. 101).

The slump in agricultural prices caused many farmers extreme difficulty in keeping up high rental payments. (O'Tuathaigh 1972 p. 135). The landlords as a class were determined to do something about the increasing amount of rent arrears. In service of this goal, the landlords attempted to reform estate management. This reform chiefly involved getting rid of their middlemen and directly running the estates. After 1815, landlords in general refused to renew leases of middlemen, especially leases for lives.<sup>25</sup> (Donnelly, 1975, pp. 51,53) This was of necessity a long drawn out process as the head landlords had to wait until leases for lives expired before they could take over their lands directly. But the head landlords were helped by the post-War depression when rents were more difficult to collect. Donnelly (1975) pointed out the consequence of this for middlemen:

On the Earl of Bandon's estates, several gentlemen, who held large tracts which they had partly sublet at a profit, fell hopelessly into arrears between 1815 and 1845 and had to surrender their leases for three lives long before these might have been expected to expire. (pp. 49-50).

##### *The Demise of the Middlemen*

The year 1816 marks an important watershed in the development of the law of distress. Changes in the law were especially timely in view of the increasing number of middlemen and sub-tenants who found themselves in arrears. These changes generally weakened the position of the middleman. Up to 1816, there was a tendency for the direct tenant to be forced to pay a double distress, one to the head landlord and the other to the middleman. Landlords, when the middlemen neglected to pay their rents, could distrain from the direct tenant even after he had paid his rent to the middleman.<sup>26</sup> The Civil Bill Act 56 George III c 88 s6 of 1816 allowed the direct tenant to recover from the middleman by civil bill the amount of the sum he had actually paid with costs and damages as compensation. This stopped the occurrences of double distress caused by the actions of the middlemen. The position of the middlemen with regard to the laws of distress was decisively weakened with the Landlord and Tenant [Ireland] Subletting Act, Statute 2 and 3 Will. IV c 17 in 1832. Ferguson and Vance (1851) explain that it

... declares that the tenant subletting without consent, contrary to his covenant shall have no remedy for the rent or the occupation. ... It has also gone a step further, and copied to some extent the law of Scotland, by declaring that a landlord consenting to sublease shall not recover from the subtenant any rent which the latter may have previously paid to his own immediate landlord, the middleman; but the head landlord, on failure of payment of his rent by his tenant, is entitled to give notice to the subtenant requiring him to pay his rent to him and thenceforth he becomes entitled to demand and enforce it (p. 185).



The legal elimination of the double distress and the subsequent allowance of the head landlord to take over the direct tenancy must be seen as a part of the factional conflict between the landlords, head and middleman. This intraclass conflict was carried out on the political/legal level as well as the strictly economic. Certainly one of the most politically significant aspects to lives leases was that they created a freehold, and thereby at the same time created a parliamentary franchise. Up to 1793, only Protestant tenants who held a lives or life lease and who declared a freehold in land of a yearly value of 40 shillings had this voting right. However, from 1793, with the passage of Hobart's Catholic Relief Act, the franchise was extended to Catholics with the same valuation qualification. Thereafter, in an effort to enhance their political power, landlords began either to grant more life leases or allow their middlemen to do so. Consequently, lives or life leases grew in numbers. The evolution and expansion of the forty shilling franchise after 1793 must be seen in the context of subletting and the political needs and desires of the landlord class. By giving leases for lives or a life, the landlords expanded their local control over the electorate. As voting was in public until 1872, the landlords had practically absolute control over their tenants' votes. Sigerson (1871) sees this political control as a feudal structure:

The freeholders were not required to follow their lord to war as against the Scots; the campaign for which they were needed had, however, merely changed character with the times. They were now pledged to stand by him in election contests. For this political service they were as absolutely his retainers as for that; and a contemporary unconsciously designated their position, when recording that 'every proprietor has an army of freeholders' [Wakefield]. In both cases the lord's interest, advantage, and dignity were in proportion to their multitude, and he consequently studied to increase their number in order to augment his power (pp. 157-8).

By the 1820s, there were about 85,000 registered 40 shilling freehold voters in Ireland and their potential electoral influence in the county constituencies was of major importance (O'Tuathaigh 1972, p. 71). Lord Anglesey (Hansard, Vol. XXI) describes the condition of the 40 shilling holders:

These freeholders were first created for electioneering purposes. As long as they allowed themselves to be driven to the hustings, like sheep to the shambles, not a murmur was heard. But the moment these people found out the value of their tenure, the moment they exerted their power constitutionally, that instant they are swept out of political existence (p. 400).

The moment arrived with the general election of 1826, when the 40 shilling freeholders were mobilized by Thomas Wyse and Daniel O'Connell and successfully defeated the landlords' candidates in Waterford, Louth, Monaghan and Westmeath (O'Tuathaigh 1972 p. 70). Butt (1866) outlines the effect of the tenants' revolt on the landlords:

The fierce party struggles which followed, in which the political power of the tenantry was wielded against landlord influence, embittered and perpetuated that strife. The proprietors of

the soil began to refuse leases to those whom the lease would confer political power to be used against themselves. The possession of the franchise by the tenant placed him in antagonism with his landlord, and the result was that he lost the security of tenure which he had previously enjoyed. So universal was the determination not to grant leases on the part of the proprietors that a constituency qualified by tenure could no longer be found (p. 32).

Butt's last assertion is an exaggeration, because in 1828, on election day in Co. Clare, 'the forty-shilling freeholders marched into Ennis, the county town, led by the parish priests, to vote for God and O'Connell' (Walpole, 1878, p. 488). Walpole (1878) outlines the consequence of O'Connell's election and the dilemma it posed for the government:

The blindest Protestant could not fail to perceive the importance of this election. The Irish had learned their power; they had returned a Roman Catholic to Parliament; there was no reason to doubt that they were as powerful in almost every other Irish county as they had proved themselves in Clare... (p. 488-9).

The fright experienced by the 'blindest Protestant' was not a Catholic revolt against Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland, but a far greater danger. The Irish 40 shilling freeholders challenged the great landed interest's traditional control over county politics. By undermining this political control, they posed a serious threat to the legal mechanism of landed property, not only in Ireland but also in Britain itself. Robert Peel (Hansard Vol. XX) expresses this sentiment:

We must look for real security in the regulation of the elective franchise of Ireland. It is in vain to deny or to conceal the truth in respect to that franchise. It was, until a late period, the instrument through which the landed aristocracy the resident and the absentee proprietor—maintained their local influence; through which property had its legitimate weight in the national representation. The landlord has been disarmed by the priest; the fear of spiritual denunciation has already severed in some cases, and will sever in others, every tie between the Protestant proprietor and the lower class of Roman Catholic tenantry. That weapon, which he has forged with so much care, and which he has heretofore wielded with such success, has broken short in his hand (p. 769).

The result of the disfranchisement act of 1829 was that the 40 shilling freeholders were immediately disfranchised and the franchise qualification was raised to 10 pounds (Hunt, 1898, p. 1-2). According to O'Tuathaigh (1972 p. 74) this affected the Irish electorate by lowering it from 100,000 to around 16,000. From 1829, a number of bills were proposed to the Government concerning the franchise and the registration of electors, of which three reached the statute book, the Irish Reform Bill of 1832, The Parliamentary Voters [Ireland] Act of 1850 and The Representation of the People [Ireland] Act of 1868. These acts either increased the qualification level, such as the Act of 1850, or imposed stricter requirements of registration.

From 1829, the 40 shilling freeholders were no longer needed by the landlords for political purposes nor was the tenure system needed that created them—the

middleman system. Consequently, from 1829, landlords did not in general renew leases to middlemen. But the landlords had to wait until middlemen leases fell in before they could take possession of their property again. The consequence of the demise of the 40 shilling freeholders and the economic crisis in 1815 was that head landlords eventually took over the sub-tenants of the middlemen. The demise of the middlemen was the conclusion of the conflict between two factions of the landlord class.

With the introduction of the Poor Law Act of 1838 and its extension in 1843, the landlords were called upon by law to contribute to the support of the poor. This acted as a further incentive for landlords to prevent subletting and subdivision. Donnelly suggests that landlords began a vigorous reform of the management of their estates in the 1830s and 1840s (Donnelly, 1975, p. 111-2).

After retaking direct control of their estates, the landlords' major attempt at reform involved preventing the subletting and subdivision of the land. In order to achieve this aim they appointed estate agents, whose job was to personally supervise the estate tenants with regard to their rent payments, tenants' family settlements, and so forth. Especially important was the agent's efforts to encourage consolidation. In this new type of estate management the landlord and his agents began to take an interest in the economic and social affairs of the direct tenants, especially with regard to the relationship between the numbers of people on the land and their subsequent ability to produce a surplus over and beyond their necessary subsistence requirements.

### *The Potato Famine*

The reorganization of the feudal rental regime and the establishment of a regime of relative rental value was greatly accelerated by the impact of the potato famine. This was due to the process of depopulation and the subsequent consolidation of farm holdings. Between 1845 and 1851, the number of farm holdings under 15 acres decreased by 25 per cent (Solow, 1971, p. 92). In Co. Cork between 1844 and 1851, the percentage decrease of holdings between 1 and 5 acres was 61.8, between 5 and 15 acres was 53.5 per cent, and over 15 acres, 11 per cent (Donnelly, 1975, p. 119).

Consolidation of holdings was certainly facilitated by the Famine. Clearances during these years were far easier since the ability of the tenants to resist this kind of coercion was lowered. For example, Donnelly (1975) on Co. Cork's clearances:

Before the Famine many improving landowners were satisfied with something less than wholesale clearances of cottiers when the leases of middlemen expired; they rearranged farms and added land to already large holdings, they often placed the more industrious smallholders on better ground while transferring the less promising ones to poorer plots or relegating them to the position of a laborer. This restraint however, was rarely in evidence after the potato failures. Now when old leases to middlemen terminated, head landlords commonly conducted sweeping clearances of cottiers (pp. 113-4).

Starvation and epidemic diseases had, in any case, completely undermined the cottier's will to resist by the summer of 1847, when the evictions began on a large scale... (pp. 118-9).

These clearances sometimes involved inducements like sponsored emigration which not only cleared the tenant off the land but cleared him and his family out of the country as well.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, forced eviction was the ultimate form of coercion used by the landlords. This type of coercion not only used the full legal powers of the state, notices-to-quit, etc., but direct physical coercion as well. Marx himself used the following quotation from a Galway newspaper to describe this type of eviction:

The tenantry are turned out of the cottages by scores at a time... Land agents direct the operation. The work is done by a large force of police and soldiery. Under the protection of the latter, the 'crowbar brigade' advances to the devoted township, takes possession of the houses... The sun that rose on a village sets on a desert (Marx and Engels 1971 p. 135).

The Famine period must be seen as a watershed, not because it was in itself the cause of the evolution of relative rental value production, but because it allowed the landlords to overcome the barrier of the middleman system and the resistance of the tenants. The landlords were thereby allowed to introduce onto their landed estates the new management system of the estate agent, and to increase their social control over the tenantry.

### C. The Irish Relative Rental Value Regime

Marx (1976) characterizes the years following the famine in the following way:

The depopulation of Ireland has thrown much of the land out of cultivation, greatly diminished the produce of the soil, and in spite of the greater area devoted to cattle breeding, brought about an absolute decline in some of its branches, and in others an advance scarcely worth mentioning, and constantly interrupted by retrogressions. Nevertheless, the rents of the land and the profits of the farmers increased along with the fall in the population, though not so steadily as the latter. The reason for this will easily be understood. On the one hand, with the throwing together of small holdings, and the change from arable to pasture land, a larger part of the total product was transformed into a surplus product. The surplus product increased although there was a decrease in the total product of which the surplus product formed a fraction. On the other hand, the monetary value of this surplus product increased still more rapidly than its actual quantity, owing to the rise in the price of meat, wool, etc., on the English market (p. 860).

This decrease in the total product produced, although the amount of surplus product increased, is an indication of the changeover from absolute rental value production to relative rental value production as the amount of direct producers decrease along with the amount of land given over to physical subsistence. Crucial to this particular transition period is the necessary decline in population to allow for the emergence of relative rental value production.

The institution of the relative rental value regime involved a conscious attempt by the Irish landlords to increase the efficiency of Irish tenantry as rent producers, thereby increasing the rate of rental extraction. This involves not only increasing the productiveness of the direct producer, but also the other elements of the production process. While absolute rental value regimes are concerned primarily with the amount of rental value, relative rental value regimes involve themselves with the rate of extraction of rental value.

#### *The Prevention of Subdivision*

In setting the stage for the imposition of the relative rental value regime, it was essential for the landlord to prevent subletting and family subdivision, and encourage the consolidation of estate farms. Cullen (1976) points out this trend:

In the richer farm land of Leinster, Munster and East Connaught, which produced a substantial surplus of livestock and grain for the market, subdivision of farms were not prevalent. Landlords were against it, so were the tenants themselves. Marriages were entered into with deliberation, and not until the dowry was settled (p. 117).

In this new form of social control, the tenant was not allowed to increase the amount of direct producers on the land. This involved the landlord strictly controlling access to the land. Especially significant in this process was the landlord's ability to have the ultimate decision over the tenants' marriage partners and their succession to the land. The landlord or his agent generally had to give the tenant permission for his son to get married, because one and only one son inherited the occupancy of land. The tenants sometimes attempted to evade the landlord's strictures:

It requires the most careful watch to prevent subdivision of the farms, and the modes of evading the landlord's refusal to permit it are various, a man will come to beg for leave to divide a farm, already too small for one tenant to live comfortably upon it, his son wishes to be married, and must have a garden, grass for a cow and a spot for his potatoes; the landlord or his agent refuses, and apparent submission follows, but a room is added to the parental cabin, no second house indeed appears upon the farm, yet the son marries, and occupies that newly made apartment, the landlord's mandate is evaded, two families live upon the farm, in the same house, it is true but the farm is to all intents and purposes divided between them. (Anketel, 1843, p. 17).

To enforce the prevention of subdivision the landlord employed not only the estate agent but various types of bailiffs to watch over the occupation of houses. In order to aid this type of constant surveillance, the direct tenant was more than just encouraged to locate his domicile in one specific location. The following illustrates this trend on Lord Arran's estate in Co. Donegal:

Catherine Thomas was not at home, I said I would call again on the 8th of March, the son her sub-tenant is going back to live with his mother, they wanted to know would the sub-tenant's

house be left up for a cow shed and to have the manure more convenient. I told them I thought it would not, that you might be thinking they would go back to it again... (Diary of the Agent of Lord Arran p. 54).

The logic of this type of constrained occupation of households reached its conclusion when the tenantry were not allowed to even entertain or provide hospitality to a stranger in their own homes for a night (Butt, 1866, pp. 37-8).

The overall consequence of the landlord's attempt to limit the amount of people surviving on the land was the creation of a surplus population of non-inheriting sons and daughters without access to the means of production in the land. This surplus population had no alternative but to seek their livelihood outside the agricultural sphere of production. In general, they had a tendency to emigrate rather than stay in Ireland. Donnelly (1975) gives the following example for Co. Cork:

Even before the Famine, however, landowners had reduced the tendency to marry early by forbidding farmers to divide their holdings among their sons, and the extent and effectiveness of these efforts increased as time passed. Other pressures undermined early marriages during and after the Famine. With the landlords' policies of clearance and consolidation as well as the shift towards grassland farming, small holdings on which to start and support a family became extremely difficult to obtain. ... When succession to the family holding became limited to a sole heir, the other children were usually 'reared to regard their own emigration as a very real possibility the person thinking of emigrating is unlikely to marry, and it is easier for the boy waiting for the land to remain unmarried if his friends are single too.' (p. 222).

This accounts for the tendency of Irish people to emigrate as individuals rather than in family groups, outside of Famine conditions.

We would certainly not be the first to observe that changes in the partibility of inheritance were responsible for the peculiarity of certain demographic trends within nineteenth century Ireland. We want to emphasize, however, that all these changes are directly related to the decline of the absolute rental value regime and the emergence of relative rental value production. The dynamics of surplus extraction in the two forms of rental regimes can account for Lee's 'intractable problems' of 'Ireland as a demographic freak':

Within the rural community the class balance swung sharply in favour of farmers, and within the farming community it swung even more sharply in favour of the bigger and against the smaller farmers. These striking shifts in rural social structure may help explain one of the most intractable problems to perplex students of nineteenth century Ireland, the apparently abrupt reversal of demographic direction involved in converting the Irish from one of the earliest marrying to the latest and most rarely marrying people in Europe. Between 1845 and 1914 average male age at marriage rose from 25 to 33, average female age from 21 to 28. The decline in crude marriage rate [the number of marriages per 1,000 of population] from about 7 in the immediate pre-Famine period to about 5 by 1880, and the increase in the proportion of females in the age group 45-54 never married, from 12 per cent in 1856 to 26 per cent in 1911, distinguished Ireland as a demographic freak (Lee, 1973, p. 2).

The change in inheritance patterns also changed the character of intra-family conflicts according to Fitzpatrick (1984):

The development of the stem family system which accompanied the reduction of subdivision had a multiple impact upon the character of intra-family conflict. First, it provided an increasingly acceptable range of compensations for those children who were not selected to take over the bulk of family property, and for the retiring heads of household. Surplus children were settled with emigrant passages, 'fortunes', apprenticeship, training or even subsidiary plots of land; surviving parents reserved certain rights and sometimes rooms. The more the principle of stem family succession was accepted, the more intra-family conflict tended to arise from dissension over compensation rather than indignation over exclusion from the land (pp. 63-64).

However, it should be stressed that individualized tenancy under relative rental value demanded these forms of financial compensation if the inheriting son was going to reproduce himself as a tenant. A lingering brother or son could threaten the whole family with eviction as the landlord might perceive such unwillingness to leave as a form of farm subdivision.

Previously, under absolute rental value, and its inherent process of family subdivision, the leaseholder had a large pool of labor to call upon, in order to produce his rent charge. But with the coming of the new type of estate management and its essential policy of preventing subdivision, the direct tenant still had to produce the same level of rent (or an increase) with less direct producers. Therefore, with the rent charge remaining constant, the declining numbers of direct producers had to create more rental value per producer, if they were to remain on the land. These direct producers had to therefore increase their individual productivity in order to produce the rental value. This is the essence of relative rental value.

#### *The Enclosure of Estate Appurtenances*

We have already seen how the operation of the relative rental value regime depends upon the introduction of the new estate administration and its increased social control over the tenantry. Consistent with this development, we also see an attempt by the landlords to increase their rental value by separating the land from its appurtenances and imposing the rental process on, for instance, turbary,<sup>28</sup> seashore, water and so forth. The evolution of estate-rules was important in this process. The tenants' production and reproduction depended on a number of important physical elements provided by the appurtenances of the estate. The seashore produced seaweed as fertilizer and kelp. The bog provided not only turf but also a number of raw materials for the production of fertilizer. The use of these appurtenances or usufructs was strictly controlled by the office of the estate agency. The landlords' agents and their various bailiffs were a crucial element in separating these appurtenances from the tenant's general access to the land. In

addition to charging a rent, the landlord could also slow their depreciation by limiting access.

Relative rental value domination of the estate appurtenances could actually increase the tenant's personal dependence upon the will of the landlord, as is indicated in the following from the Devon Commission:

In order to obtain some hold over the tenants, the above landlords do not include a right of turbary in their leases, and in no case does the privilege extend beyond the supply of one fire (The Poor Law Inquiry, 1836, p. 676).

On Lord Arran's estate, the estate agent used access to the bog as a lever to get rid of sub-tenants by not allowing them to use the bog. He also prevented the direct tenants from selling the turf to those sub-tenants (Diary of the Agent of Lord Arran p. 7).<sup>29</sup>

#### *Plough Husbandry*

In consequence of the near demise of the absolute rental value regime, spade husbandry and its various forms of direct labor co-operation become spatially restricted and structurally subordinate to the specific labor processes which operate under relative rental value regimes.<sup>30</sup> The declining labor force under relative rental value production forced the tenant to attempt to introduce new technical means of production. The following testifies to this trend:

Thus, there is abundant evidence that, from the late forties to the early sixties, a rapidly decreasing agricultural population sought to maintain, almost undiminished, the area of tillage. Obviously, such a result could only be achieved by having recourse on a large scale to the use of labor-saving agricultural implements and machinery, or by resorting to less intensive methods of manual cultivation (Hooper, 1922, p. 226).

The most important innovation was adoption of the all-metal Scottish swing plough. Its use had become common throughout Ireland by the middle of the nineteenth-century (Bell and Watson, 1986, p. 77). This new type of plough technology marks a watershed according to Hooper (1922):

The great abundance of labor and low rate of wages—some of it could not find employment on any terms—coupled with the smallness of the holdings up to late in the forties, and the defective appliances for horse husbandry, led inevitably to spade cultivation. When the consolidation of holdings took place after the famine, and emigration on a large scale set in, the way was paved for the expansion of plough husbandry (p. 222).

Plough husbandry superceded spade husbandry as the dominant labor process under the Irish feudal mode of production after the Famine period. This plough husbandry demanded a whole new system of agricultural production. As labor was the essential power of spade husbandry, the horse is the source of power

under plough husbandry. Horse power not only demanded new improved technical implements but also a crop rotation which included oats and hay. Richard Barrington (1887) suggests this structural link in the following:

A good crop of wheat cannot be produced without a proper rotation of manured green crops,<sup>31</sup> and neither wheat nor green crops can be grown without horses and implements, and horses require oats and hay. And in order to have manure, cattle must be kept, and horses and cattle must have shelter in the winter time; and implements wear out and break, and new ones have to be purchased; so that to grow wheat, or even barley or oats, a regular system of farming must be carried on, with its many accidents and losses (p. 149).

The 'regular system of farming' which Barrington advises for plough husbandry must be seen as a combination of the two British agricultural revolutions, that is the convertible husbandry of the eighteenth-century and high farming of the nineteenth-century. Convertible husbandry relied on the alternate use of fodder crops and corn crops to obviate fallowing and keep the soil in heart and provide feed for the beasts. (Chambers and Mingay, 1975, p. 61) High farming, according to Chambers and Mingay (1975) meant:

...intensive farming, producing the highest output per acre through the application of the recent techniques of drainage, fertilizing, feeding, rotating and mechanizing. Its advocates strove after high technical efficiency... (p. 177).

Oats and hay were crucial crops in plough husbandry, since the daily allowance of food for farm horses consisted of 12 lbs. of oats and 21 lbs. of hay (Baldwin, 1874, p. 83). Hay production had been severely neglected under spade husbandry. Proper hay production needs the sowing of artificial grasses, such as perennial rye grass or clover. Most of these grasses could be undersown with oats or barley (Murphy, 1844, p. 59), thereby cutting out of the rotation system the bare fallow which was a necessary consequence of white crop rotation. The need for hay as a source of food for livestock and especially the farm horse encouraged the use of convertible husbandry and subsequently a more efficient use of crop rotations.

Horse power in itself was insufficient for plough production, in the sense that the horse needed to be combined with a number of technical implements. These implements varied according to the task to be carried out and consequently were of a very specialized nature. Unlike the spade which was a multi-purpose implement, the implements of plough husbandry were confined to their specific tasks, for example, the plough, the harrow, the roller and the grubber. Not only did these implements cost money and tend to depreciate in value with use, but also were not fully utilized during all of the production process.

Not only did convertible husbandry for intensive mixed farming demand a change in crop rotations and technical implements, but also a large investment in permanent improvements essential for the adequate operation of plough husbandry. Crucial in this respect was the provision of clay piped drainage

systems, which according to Chambers and Mingay (1975) was the great improvement in British agriculture:

Drainage was the great improvement of the age. If properly executed, it enabled the farmers of heavy and ill-drained soils to cut their costs of cultivation, speed up their operations, and follow the trend towards mixed farming with the introduction of root breaks into their rotations; it enabled machinery to be used, and better advantage taken of the new fertilizers... (p. 175).

However, drainage was expensive. According to the Devon Commission in 1847, the cost of labor alone was about £3 per acre (cited in Bell and Watson 1986 p. 27). Although drainage was crucial for the intensification of production with regard to the necessary green crop rotation, it was not sufficient in itself. Since cattle was the essential source of manure, a number of permanent improvements were necessary to facilitate intensive cattle production. Old tillage fences had to be levelled and new fences made which provided adequate shelter for grazing cattle. With fencing, new gates were necessary to allow not only the movement of cattle from one field to another, but also to restrict their movement when necessary, for example, to prevent trespass. Probably the most important aspect of intensive cattle production was the need for house-feeding and the keeping of livestock indoors in order to facilitate the collection of farmyard manure. The provision of these out-houses was an expensive capital outlay, especially in a situation where the tenants themselves inhabited second rate houses.

In consequence, plough husbandry and its system of mixed farming demanded a considerable amount of capital expenditure, not only of fluid capital in the form of seed and fertilizer, but also of fixed capital in the form of permanent improvements. Although costly, plough husbandry could achieve a high output per acre with far less labor than spade husbandry. However, achieving high technical efficiency through plough husbandry may be hindered when that technical efficiency has to operate under the social form of relative rental value conditions of production, which demand a specific form of economic efficiency.

Crucially, plough husbandry depended upon the tenant's ability to accumulate the necessary capital and to apply that capital on the land in the form of permanent improvements. The necessary accumulation of capital depended on the level of rent demanded and the size of the holding which the tenant worked. However, ignoring these aspects for the moment, the ability to carry out permanent improvements also depended on tenurial security as provided by custom or by the law.

Without tenurial security, the landlord was able to either confiscate improvements carried out by the tenant or to confiscate the value of those improvements through increases in rent. The consequence of this has detrimental effects on the development of plough husbandry in Ireland. Because of the landlord's power to confiscate these necessary improvements for plough husbandry, the tendency for the tenant was to invest in fluid capital alone or in fixed capital that could be

removed from the farm, for example, farm implements. Therefore, those aspects of plough husbandry used by the tenant most prominently included purchased seeds, especially artificial grasses and clover, and the use of fertilizer, for example, guano. Those features of plough husbandry that came under fixed capital which could not be carried away were certainly underdeveloped. The lack of permanent improvements in the form of drainage, outhouses and adequate fencing severely stunted the development of plough husbandry, as a means of developing the forces of production. Of these three forms of permanent improvements, the lack of housing for cattle was probably the most important.

The stall-feeding of cattle was the pivotal element of green crop production and the catalyst for the intensification of production under plough husbandry. Stall-feeding of cattle on green crops allowed not only a shorter production time for cattle but also allowed a greater intensification of crop production by removing the cattle from winter pasture. In addition, the concentration of cattle within their respective byres facilitated the necessary accumulation of farmyard manure. Therefore, without cattle outhouses, there is little chance of green crop production intensifying cattle production and without green crop production:

... it will be evident that the system which prevails in most parts of Ireland is not calculated to increase materially the production of live stock. It is an old saying that without green crops there can be no cattle; and without cattle, no manure; and without manure, no corn. The whole rests on green, or root crops; and this foundation is wanting, generally speaking, in the routine of farm management in Ireland, whether on small or large occupations (Pringle, 1871, p. 32).

The specific form in which plough husbandry developed in Ireland was a form of mixed farming without the intensity of green crop production. In this situation, the amount of cattle produced increased considerably in comparison to spade husbandry, but this was a particularly extensive development unique to relative rental value regime production rather than intensive as under green crop production proper. This type of cattle production, that is without green crop production, reflects the general trend of relative rental value in that it forces the tenant to augment labor as much as possible but without developing the capital intensive side of plough husbandry.

#### *The Labor Process Under Plough Husbandry*

We must now turn our attention to how labor was integrated under plough husbandry and specifically the relative rental value regime. Again, like spade husbandry, family labor will be the dominant form of labor under plough husbandry because of its minimization of monetary cost. Plough husbandry can be extremely expensive, even without any investment in permanent improvements.<sup>32</sup> The cost of fluid capital would impose severe financial restraints on the tenant even without employing wage labor. Therefore, family labor is essential for plough husbandry in order to cut the costs of this system of agriculture.

The ability of the family to provide sufficient labor for plough husbandry depended upon the stages of the family cycle. Two critical periods of the family cycle were in the early period of family creation and the later period when the children had deserted the nest. As under the absolute rental value regime this shortage could be met by bringing in unattached relatives as the following suggests for Co. Cavan:

Smaller Cavan families responded to the constant demand for labor by turning to unattached relatives outside the nucleus for help on their farms. Thus, families were likely to be extended during the early years of marriage, when children were still too young to help in the field or barn. Likewise, older couples with only one or two children at home were likely to take in other relatives (O'Neill, 1984, p. 131).

One of the characteristic features of plough husbandry was that the length and intensity of the labor process was determined by the ability of the tenant to apply his horsepower on the land. Although horsepower could achieve all the requirements of agriculture more quickly than spade husbandry, the horse and its machinery were more restricted in their use with regard to weather conditions. Therefore, horse time determined labor time in the production process. This domination of horse time within plough husbandry led to a considerable amount of enforced idleness on the direct producer. This enforced idleness encouraged a "growing preference on the part of farmers for temporary rather than permanent laborers" (Fitzpatrick, 1982, p. 78). This trend caused the decline of permanent wage labor and further encouraged the rise of assisting relatives on the farm.

Not only did the tenants under the new rental regime use their relatives as labor, they also used their relatives' or neighbours' technical means of production as well, including horsepower. One horse could do a lot of the tasks of plough husbandry, but other operations such as ploughing itself needed a pair of horses. This lack of horsepower on a one-horse farm was overcome by the following strategy:

All operations that require a pair of horses, such as ploughing, are performed by hiring a second horse, or by co-operation; that is, two neighbouring farmers agree to make up a team, which is employed first upon one and next upon the other farm (Baldwin, 1874, p. 124).

This type of reciprocal co-operation is different from that of spade husbandry, in that it was a sharing of the technical means of production rather than labor exclusively. This type of technical co-operation was called cooring:

These relics of former communal habits are becoming less frequent with mechanization, but in many districts not less than a quarter of the small farmers possess only one horse, so that 'joining' or 'cooring' to make up a two-horse team is usual. In all such cases no money payments are made (Evans, 1979, p. 23).

Not only were horses coored, but also the technical implements of horse technology such as harrows, rollers and even ploughs when necessary. Therefore,

cooring allowed the small tenants to benefit from the increased productivity of plough husbandry through the more developed technical labor processes without having to bear the full cost of those technical innovations.

However, family labor with assisting relatives and cooring were not sufficient to meet all the labor requirements of plough husbandry. Certain processes, such as sowing and harvesting, demanded more outside labor which could only be supplied through wage labor. Without the presence of the cottier-laborer on the land, there was a growing shortage of labor. The demand for seasonal employment was partially filled by the 'spailpini' (seasonal migrants) from the west, especially from Co. Mayo (O'Grada, 1980, p. 189). The labor shortage problem only manifested itself at certain times within the production year, specifically at the sowing and harvesting of the crops, and this seasonal shortage encouraged higher wages.<sup>33</sup> One limited solution to the labor problem was the evolution and expansion of bound farm servants. These servants, both male and female, were fed and lodged and were employed for a six to nine month period, earning £8 or £9 per year (O'Neill, 1984, p. 100). It is interesting to observe how farm servants were tied to the tenant farmer by bringing them into their households. This domestication of wage labor reflects the trend of the tenant farmers using unattached relatives for plough husbandry.

The development of plough husbandry under the relative rental value regime had a stunted growth due to the lack of necessary capital improvements. The overall consequence of the underdeveloped incorporation of plough husbandry was that agricultural production in the post-Famine period became a system characterized by its extensive nature rather than the intensity of normal plough husbandry. Normal in this sense refers to the operation of plough husbandry under the capitalist mode of production as, for instance, in Scotland.

#### *Pasturage and the Production of Cattle*

Crucial in this stunted development of plough husbandry was not only the decline in green crop production but also the subsequent evolution of the pasturage system of cattle production. This is indicated by G.F. Shaw in 1868:

Our agricultural statistics show, for the last twenty years, a marked tendency towards the production of more cattle and less corn, and this increased number of cattle has been fed not to any extent by an increased quantity of green crops, but by turning land from tillage into permanent pasture (quoted in Monsell, 1869, pp. 57-8).

The laying down of this much grass is not caused by the expansion of plough husbandry and its intensive rotation of green crops but its actual contraction. These new grasslands were the physical manifestation of pasturage—an extensive system of cattle production. The grasslands under pasturage competed with tillage production rather than complementing tillage crops as should have existed under normal plough husbandry.

According to Crotty (1966), the significant trend in Irish agriculture was the shift towards cattle production:

A falling supply of labor and relative worsening in corn prices powerfully orientated Irish agriculture towards pasture in the years between the Great Famine and the First World War. During this period, beef cattle production in particular expanded while dairying made no progress; the volume of total agricultural production changed little if anything. (p. 83).

Although it was competing with tillage since the 1820s, cattle production only became dominant after the Famine. Cattle numbers doubled from 2.7 million in 1848 to 5 million in 1914 (Lee 1973 p. 10). Therefore, it is important to stress that not only was cattle production competing with tillage production but it was also competing with plough husbandry as a mixed system of farming. Pringle (1871) outlines the characteristics of the pasturage or grazing system:

The grazing system, as pursued in Ireland with reference to the rearing of live stock, may be described as a system which is based altogether on unassisted nature. Art has nothing whatever to do with it, beyond saving a crop of hay on some piece of old pasture which has been specially reserved for 'meadowing'. There are no houses on such farms for sheltering cattle during winter, ... Not a turnip is to be seen. (p. 45)

This extensive grazing system of cattle and sheep production has given rise to the assumption that it signalled the emergence of agrarian capitalism in Ireland (Lee, 1973, p. 10). However, the laws and tendencies of the grazing system fit into the framework of relative rental value regime production rather than that of the capitalist mode of production. David Jones (1978a) suggests the overall characteristics of this type of cattle production in the following:

In contrast to the fruit-grower and cereal producer, the grazier's initial outlay in working capital and fixed assets is minimal. He has only a fraction of the capital expenditure of the tillage farmer since he has little need to invest in such fixed assets as storage buildings, implements and manures. Thus the individual who has decided to invest in a herd of bullocks needs only to acquire a grass holding for his purpose. Moreover, the physical development of bullocks and sheep on open grazing is relatively rapid. As a result, bullocks and sheep can be profitably sold again within a short space of time. The grazier could therefore realize the full value of maximum net gain on his capital outlay within a much shorter space of time than the tillage farmer. This meant that he did not need for the efficient operation of his enterprise, the same guarantee of tenurial security as the tillage farmer (p. 9).

With regard to the grazier's limited outlay on fixed assets, we can observe how this type of production suited the Irish situation. The existence of a rental regime tended to discourage the tenant from investing in permanent improvements on the land, since the landlord has a propensity to confiscate either the value of these improvements or the physical improvements themselves. As we have already argued, the consequence of this relationship was that the tenant was far more likely to invest in fluid capital rather than fixed capital. The fluid or circulating

capital needed a limited security of tenure lasting one production process, which allowed that particular type of capital to realize its value quickly.

Since the major inputs of grazier production consisted of fluid capital, seed and cattle or sheep, it was a type of production ideally suited for rental regimes. But it was also a type of production which had the specific characteristics of relative rental value. Since grazing of sheep and cattle needs extensive pasturage, a large supply of land is needed. This was provided by the landlord, who from the 1820s onwards and especially during the Famine was able to expropriate a large number of tenants of their land through clearances.

Not all the land which was cleared of small holders was relet in formal tenancy or lease. According to Jones (1978a, pp. 15-6), a certain proportion remained in the direct possession of the landlord as untenanted pasture. Even after the Famine, landlords continued to appropriate large areas of untenanted land. Jones suggests that all classes of untenanted land were expanded—demesne, home farm, out-farms, and mountain pasture and bogland.

This enclosure of the land was accompanied by fining the tenants for the trespass of their livestock. The estate tenants who put cattle on the landlord's reserved pasture were forced to identify their cattle by putting their individual brand on them. The branding of cattle and sheep of course helped the agent in the supervision of access to the landlord's reserved pasture. Consequently, it is not surprising to discover that the tenants' failure to brand their livestock resulted in a fine or an increase in rent as the following indicates from Lord Leitrim's estate in Co. Donegal:

The tenants whose cattle and sheep are reported to me as being on the reserves without being branded—I may double the rate for sheep and one shilling per head extra for all cattle.

and

The tenants in Fanneth who have been trespassing on Rinmore and Cooladerry reserves—I propose putting an increased rent at the rate of about 15 per cent. (Report by J.L. Murray, 1st August, 1864).

The increase in the amount of untenanted land, especially reserved pasture gave rise to a unique form of land letting, which was compatible with dry cattle and sheep production, the eleven-month letting:

After 1870, landlords increasingly began to let their pasture land under a short-term letting arrangement known as the eleven-month system... Under the eleven-month arrangement, land was competitively let for a season, i.e. for eleven months. At the end of the eleven-month period, the usufructuary relinquished the holding which was then put up for auction. At no point could the taker of eleven-month land claim formal tenancy or tenant-interest. The landlord always retained direct possession as rateable occupier and the usufructuary was always deemed as a temporary occupant (Jones, 1978b, p. 9).

Consequently, if conacre was the ultimate conclusion of spade husbandry under absolute rental value production, the eleven-month system was the conclusion of plough husbandry under relative rental value. This is especially so because the grazing system demanded a far lower labor input than either spade husbandry or the mixed farming of plough husbandry. The development of plough husbandry was limited by the supply and cost of labor, but the grazier was free from this type of encumbrance, and consequently he could expand or contract his production without worrying about labor supply. According to Pringle (1871):

Herdsmen are paid mostly in kind, and it is very difficult to estimate the value of their earnings. I have heard the wages of a head herdsman valued at over £60 a year, but they are expected to keep two lads as assistants, and if these should be their own sons the whole of the earnings are kept in the family (p. 70).

With low costs of labor and no investment in fixed capital, the grazier under the eleven-month tenure had the capacity to respond to agricultural price fluctuations. But this versatility of grazing without capital investment in permanent improvements had short-run effects on the quality of the cattle produced and long-run effects on the fertility of the soil. With regard to dry cattle production:

The manner in which cattle are kept during winter has been already hinted at. They run at large over the pastures, and it is only during severe weather that they get any artificial food, which is simply hay, scattered over the ground. In those parts of the country where hedges are abundant and well-grown, or where plantations exist the outlying cattle have shelter to some extent, but there are many stock-rearing districts which do not possess those advantages. The early part of the summer grazing is, therefore, spent in recovering the condition lost during winter; and thus the cattle pass through alternating periods of fullness and scarcity, until they are transferred to a higher class of pasture, where they are fattened, or to the feeding stalls of English and Scotch farmers (Pringle, 1871, p. 45-6).

Fattening and subsequent starvation of Irish cattle under the grazing system tended to produce animals deficient in tallow, and consequently not liked by British butchers (Pringle 1871 p. 47). This deficiency in the quality of the cattle was also reflected in the quality of the soil:

Of late years much of the land laid down to grass has not only been sown out in an imperfect manner, both as regards the condition of the land and of the seeds used, but much of it also is not so suitable for permanent pasture as it is for rotation cropping. This last consideration has been much overlooked. People saw the better class of pastures, and they concluded that all descriptions of land would produce equally good grazing if sown out. Hence, it is frequently found that pastures do not keep the same number or class of stock that they maintained at first (Pringle, 1871, p. 56).

Like dry cattle production, dairy production was hindered by the lack of cow stalls and the availability of adequate winter feed. According to Crotty (1966, pp. 76-7) the lack of adequate wintering of dairy cows was caused by the high cost of



providing the necessary physical infrastructure and labor needed for winter feeding. The effects of the minimal winter feeding of milch cattle tended to limit the amount of milk and butter produced in comparison to cows fed in-house during the winter (Donnelly, 1975, p. 140).

We cannot assess the evolution of labor processes such as spade and plough husbandries without locating those processes within their specific social conditions of production, that is, within absolute and relative rental value regimes. From this analysis of the structural-relations within the immediate production process, we can begin to see that the development of the forces of production in Irish nineteenth-century agriculture is determined not by the inherent increase in productivity from a low level to high level as the century moved on, but rather by the relationship of the forces of production to the two essential forms of the extraction of surplus as rent. Absolute rental value tends to increase labor intensity, while relative rental value limits its use. But the increase in productivity of relative rental value through plough husbandry has a limit, in that although the labor input is limited, the normal productivity of green crop production in plough husbandry is severely stunted by the propensity of rent relations to undermine investment in permanent improvements, especially the erection of the necessary out-houses for stall-feeding. The subsequent emergence of an extensive system of livestock production, that is pasturage or grazing, is an indication of the failure of plough husbandry to develop its forces of production.

## V. CONCLUSION

In the opening section of this essay, we argued that the Irish social formation in the nineteenth-century can most accurately be described as feudal in character. We contended that this was the case despite the fact that Ireland was territorially integrated with the most advanced industrial capitalist economy of the time. This conclusion calls into question the widely held position that the establishment of a world capitalist market tends to rapidly eliminate all pre-capitalist modes of production. In the immediately preceding section we carried this argument further. We have demonstrated that an understanding of the dynamic tendencies of the nineteenth century Irish social formation are explainable only in terms of the development of different regimes of surplus extraction in the form of rent. Specifically, we have argued that the trajectory of Irish society from the late eighteenth century to 1815 depends on the development of the logic of an absolute rental value regime. The first half of the nineteenth century can best be characterized as a period of transition between rental regimes. Finally, that the remainder of Ireland's feudal history to the 1880s is dominated by a relative rental value regime. Not only was Ireland in the nineteenth-century feudal in character but its dynamics are not primarily those of a world capitalist market but are conceivable only in terms of the internal relations of the feudal mode of production.

The feudal mode of production in Ireland does come to an end in the late nineteenth-century. Nevertheless, this demise was not primarily due to the dynamics of the international capitalist market. Rather the feudal rent relationships came to an end because of the developing class struggle between landlord and tenant within the Irish feudal mode of production. This struggle broke to the surface in the Land War of the 1880s. In 1879, Michael Davitt founded the Land League, whose purpose was to organize resistance among the tenantry to the landlords. The League agitated against eviction and for a reduction of rents. Its ultimate goal was to transform the tenant farmers into owners of their own holdings. Agrarian unrest spread throughout the countryside.<sup>34</sup>

In response to this agitation, a series of land Acts was passed between 1881 to 1909. This legislation brought about a change in the ownership of land in rural Ireland. These Acts included the 1881 Land Act, followed by the Ashbourne Act of 1885, the 1891 Balfour Act, the Wyndham Act of 1903, and finally the Birrell Land Act of 1909. They allowed the Irish tenant farmer to borrow money at increasing attractive rates from the British Government in order to buy out the land from the landlords (Lee, 1973, p. 102-3).

With the end of landlordism, peasant proprietorship was established. Once feudalism had been eliminated from the Irish countryside and replaced with a small farming regime, only then was the stage set for the penetration, albeit in a very uneven way, of actual capitalist production in Irish agriculture.

## NOTES

1. The relationship between Marxian economic analysis and the specifically colonial relationship in Ireland is an important discussion which is certainly not developed in any detail below. In this article we are primarily concerned with the economic structures internal to the mode of production within Ireland.

2. The situation in Northern Ireland is also an important one for progressives to come to grips with. We do not deal with it extensively here because Northern Ireland emerges as a separate problem with the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922 after the period with which this paper is primarily concerned. In addition, in contrast to the rest of the island, Northern Ireland has received a relatively extensive discussion in the Marxist literature. See Whyte (1990, pp. 175-93) for a discussion of this literature.

3. For a useful survey of this literature, see Brewer (1990).

4. Brewer (1990) also provides a comprehensive survey of this literature.

5. In the course of analyzing the feudal surplus, we use the terms absolute and relative rental value because during the period which we are analyzing the feudal surplus takes a monetary form realized on the market.

6. As well as into 32 counties, Ireland is divided into four large regions of which Munster is the southernmost.

7. In the most influential recent volumes on the nature of the nineteenth-century Irish economy (Mokyr 1983; O'Grada 1988), there was no discussion of the feudal nature of the rent relationship. This suggests implicitly their acceptance of the notion of a capitalist rent relationship.

8. These observations allow us to situate ourselves in relation to the commercialization/commodification debate in the mainstream literature on nineteenth-century Irish agriculture. An attempt

has been made to determine the degree of integration of Irish agriculture at this time into the world market and to distinguish the degree of integration across time periods (before vs. after the famine), regions (east vs. west) and classes (large vs. small holders). Much of this literature seems to implicitly identify commercialization with capitalization of agriculture. While we regard this debate as interesting, the theoretical discussion above establishes that the degree of commodification is not directly relevant to the question of whether the dominant relations of production on the island were capitalist or feudal (see for instance Cuddy and Curtin, 1981; Curtin, 1986).

9. They were especially at pains to distinguish the Irish rent situation from the Ricardian concept of rent (Black, 1960, p. 17).

10. Lynch and Vaizey (1960 p. 11) were the first twentieth-century economic historians to attempt to differentiate the East of Ireland from the West with regard to the process of commercialization and money circulation. The East was conceptualized as a 'maritime capitalist economy,' the West as a 'subsistence economy.' But this dual economy thesis has been criticized by Cullen (1968 p. 13-4) and by Lee (1973 pp. 191-201). Money circulation existed through out all of Ireland and among all classes (Mokyr, 1983, p. 20).

11. The Penal Laws were passed at the beginning of the eighteenth-century and placed the Catholic population at a severe social and economic disadvantage. Importantly, they made it illegal for Catholics to buy land, obtain a mortgage on it, rent it on a long term basis, or make a normal profit on such rental. Normal inheritance was also affected.

12. R.D.C. Black (1960, p. 15) used the same comparative approach in establishing the unique nature of the Irish situation by comparing it to the Ricardian doctrines on rent.

13. For accounts of these rules see Lex (1860 pp. 15-6), *Diary of the Agent of Lord Arran, Report by J.L. Murray on Lord Leitrim's estate*, and *Diary of Frances Alcorn*.

14. According to Butt (1867), the legal enactments brought into operation in Ireland with regard to the forfeitures of tenants' interests were based on principles diametrically opposed to the Common Law of England:

'Forfeitures were odious in all English courts. Irish legislation has exactly reversed these principles. Commencing in the reign of Queen Anne contemporaneously with the Popery Laws, a number of Acts of Parliament have been passed constituting what is known in Irish jurisprudence as 'the ejectment code', ... The whole object of that code was to expediate and facilitate the eviction of the tenant—to get rid of every formality and difficulty by which the good old wisdom of the common law obstructed the forfeiture of the tenant's estate, and lastly to extend that forfeiture to cases in which, according to the common law, it did not exist. Statute after statute was passed for those purposes... In Ireland, by statutes passed for the special benefit of landlords, every difficulty which the requisitions of that common law interposed in the way of such an ejectment is swept away. In England it is the duty of the judges to administer the law so as in every doubtful case to protect the tenant. In Ireland it has judicially declared to be their duty in every doubtful case to facilitate his eviction' (p. 188-9).

15. This process of subletting will only occur in a market situation of rising agricultural prices. It cannot operate in a market of downward price trends because if the direct producer failed to pay his rent, after a time each middleman in turn would fail to pay their respective rents and the whole system would collapse. This is exactly what happened in 1815, but between 1760 and 1815 Ireland experienced rising prices, as Crotty (1966) points out:

The prolonged period of rising prices after 1760 had a profound influence on Irish economic and social life. Some aspects of this influence have already been noted, namely the increase in agricultural exports and the fourfold rents.... How these windfall profits were shared in Ireland during the period 1766 to 1815 may be judged from the fact that while prices approximately doubled rents appear to have quadrupled (pp. 23,28).

16. According to Maguire (1972) there has been much confusion over the terminology of yearly tenancy and tenancy 'at will':

The essential difference between them was that whereas a yearly tenancy began on a certain date and ended a year from that date, a tenancy at will had no exact terminal date but continued so long as both landlord and tenant—in practice no doubt it was usually the former who ended it—wished it to continue (p. 108).

17. Marx (1976) explicates the characteristics of formal subsumption in the following:

The form based on absolute surplus-value is what I call the formal subsumption of labour under capital. I do so because it is only formally distinct from earlier modes of production on whose foundations it arises spontaneously [or is introduced], either when the producer is self employing or when the immediate producers are forced to deliver surplus labour to others. All that changes is that compulsion is applied, i.e. the method by which surplus labour is extorted (p. 1025).

18. John Weeks (1981) describes the functions of these two capitals:

These categories identify the manner in which the realization of value occurs. Circulating capital includes all of those elements of production that are completely consumed in the production process, and consequently, whose value circulates with the circulation of the newly produced commodities. These elements are labor power, raw materials, and intermediate commodities. Fixed capital is that part of the means of production that is not completely consumed in production, the part of the value of these means of production that does not circulate but remains fixed ['fixed' Marx sometimes says] in noncirculating material objects such as machines, buildings, etc. (p. 176).

19. The estate appurtenances provided a number of crucial physical elements for the tenants' production process. The seashore produced seaweed as fertilizer and kelp. The bog provided not only turf for fuel but also a number of raw materials for the production of fertilizer.

20. It should be stressed that absolute rental value is the financial manifestation of the landlord's total use of extra-economic coercion and consequently includes a number of other financial demands over and above the annual rent. These included renewal fines for leases for lives (see footnote 25) and the tenants, prior to 1816, could be forced to pay double distress (see below). Because distress was a personal action on behalf of the landlord, periodic distress could be carried out since no legal evidence of rent due was needed. Other charges such as annual payments to estate agents and estate pound-keepers were also demanded as well as various dues as described above, depending on the discretionary powers of the landlords and their representatives.

21. The feudal character of the cottier rent system is made manifest in the use of extra-economic coercion, which allowed the tenant to restrict the economic freedom of the cottier. For example, O'Neill (1984) states the following for Co. Cavan:

Cottiers were subject to the usual restrictions upon labour, such as fines for absence from work, and Cavan tenants even imposed economic restrictions upon their cottiers. For example, many Cavan tenants forbade their cottiers from keeping chickens to reduce competition with them in the growing egg trade (p. 104).

22. One rood is equal to one quarter of an acre.
23. White crops usually refer to grain crops.
24. Grass feeds livestock, which produces manure.

25. From the seventeenth-century, Ireland developed a form of tenure which was unique to Ireland, which was known as leases for lives renewable for ever (Finlay, 1829, p. VII). According to Wylie (1975, p. 223) the standard form of this type of lease consisted of a conveyance to the tenant for the duration of the lives of three specified persons, with a covenant of a fine to be paid on each renewal.

26. William Samuel Curry was asked the following question before the State of Ireland Inquiry (1825):

Have you known instances in which several drivings have taken place for rent, for the same period upon the same holding, by different landlords?

'I have heard of such instances, but I cannot speak of any particular instance myself, but I have no doubt of such instances occurring (Commons—Report from the Committees on the State of Ireland 1825 vol. VIII p. 305).

27. Landlord assisted emigration accounted for 22,000 emigrants during the Famine period. This was, however, only about 5 percent of the total number (Daly, 1986, p. 106).

28. Turbary is bog land from which peat can be dug for use as fuel.

29. Lord Arran's agent not only restricted access but also imposed strict regulations on the harvesting of the turf in his letter to Lord Arran:

At last time, you told me to let the tenants know your wishes and for their own good that they should cut their turf in time and attend to it, get them dried and home in good time and if they did not do so, it was most likely you would not allow them the bog in future to cut. For when cut too late, it's next to not cutting at all, many such persons steals from the early cutters etc., would it be useful sir to have little printed notices served on them saying the day they should have cut. (Diary of the Agent of Lord Arran p. 104).

Subsequently, this agent introduced bog tickets, which the tenants had to purchase at the agency's office. Later, he began to charge a fee for the tenants' horses as they grazed on the bog-land while the turf was harvested (Diary of the Agent of Lord Arran, p. 70).

30. Absolute rental extraction tended to continue in the Post-Famine period in the poorer parts of the West of Ireland with its accompanying labor processes associated with spade husbandry (Bew, 1978).

31. Green crops include clover, turnips, carrots, cabbages, and vetches.

32. Richard Barrington (1887) has estimated the number of horse days needed per crop and cost of that horse power:

It will be seen that the potato crop consumes the most time, requiring 42 1/2 days' horse labour, turnips 35 1/2; wheat, 10; oats, 11; and barley, 14... The average cost per acre of horse labour from 1870 to 1879 was for potatoes, £5-8s-3d; turnips, £4-10s-9d; wheat, £1-6s-0d; Oats, £1-8s-0d; and barley £1-14s-11d; and the cost of each horse per day, 25/6 1/2d. (p.148).

33. Pringle (1871) reports:

That wages are higher than we recollect them to have been is a well-known fact; still, I think, the average rate does not exceed 7s. or 8s. a week. In harvest and other busy seasons the rate of wages rises very much above this; but it must be remembered that there are many districts

where there is no regular employment for labourers, except at such seasons as hay harvest, turf-cutting, or potato-planting, so that labourers in those districts are fequently compelled to live in idleness, and they naturally seize the opportunity of 'a spurt of work' to ask and get higher wages than they would expect in regular employment (p. 54).

34. Cullen (1976) summarizes the course of the conflict:

The Land League advised tenants to offer landlords what they regarded as a fair rent, and, if that was not accepted, to pay nothing. Landlords replied to this challenge with evictions; evictions in turn were resisted, and on occasion process-servers and bailiffs were attacked. This was economic war; if the landlord refused to accept the rent offered, the tenants had a new weapon against him—boycott. Agrarian unrest declined somewhat after the early 1880's, but it revived in the middle of the decade when farm prices fell further (p. 149-50).

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