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Scott M. Eddie & Christa Kouschil

**THE ETHNOPOLITICS OF LAND OWNERSHIP
IN PRUSSIAN POLAND, 1886-1918**

The Land Purchases of the *Ansiedlungskommission*

May 2002

Christa Kouschil (Ph.D., History, University of Jena) did her undergraduate study at the then University of Leningrad. After a career in an international relations institute in the German Democratic Republic, she has – upon official retirement – returned to her first love, history, publishing articles primarily on medieval agriculture in the region which is now western Poland and on the activities of the Settlement Commission for West Prussia and Poznań in the period 1886-1918. She has been an active member of a Polish-German Historical Society concerned with the history of the border region between the two countries, editing a book of articles on this region by society members, and has in the last few years published a series of small books of personal and professional reminiscences under the general title of *Begegnungen* [Encounters] (Berlin: Bodoni Press).

Scott M. Eddie (Ph.D. Economics, MIT) did his undergraduate study at the University of Minnesota. He has held faculty positions at Williams College and the University of Wisconsin (USA), at the University of the Philippines and – since 1971 – at the University of Toronto. He has published books and articles – in five languages – on economic history, land reform, and the transition from central planning to a market economy, with primary focus on Hungary, Austria, and Prussia. He is a member of the executive committee of the International Economic History Association, having served in that capacity since 1994. Prof. Eddie has been the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Visiting Fellowship at All Souls College (Oxford), and has held various other post-doctoral fellowships in the USA, Germany, Austria, Hungary, and England. Prof. Eddie retired officially in 2001, but continues to be active in research, currently under a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for a book on the social distribution of land ownership in Prussia, 1860 - 1914.

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The Ethnopolitics of Land Ownership in Prussian Poland, 1886-1918: The land purchases of the *Ansiedlungskommission*

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ABSTRACT: The *Ansiedlungskommission* (Settlement Commission, hereafter SC) was the centrepiece of the Prussian government's anti-Polish demographic policy after 1886. Its mandate was to purchase large properties, preferably from Poles, to subdivide them into small farms, and then to settle German farmers on these small farms. In this paper the authors examine the extent to which the SC carried out its mandate, as well as how and why its later purchases of small peasant properties differed qualitatively as well as quantitatively from its purchases of properties for subdivision. They also consider the question of whether the SC paid "too much" for the land it bought, and its other interventions in the land market – such as the introduction of entail, the possibility of expropriation, and the policy of "fortifying" German land ownership of small properties through a credit subsidy scheme. After a brief survey of Polish reaction to these measures, the paper concludes with a summary of the effects of World War I and the reconstitution of Poland after that war. In the end, these negated almost completely what the SC had done, but the paper also concludes that the effort was doomed from the start in any case.

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Introduction

The three partitions of Poland at the end of the 18th century, sanctioned by the Congress of Vienna in 1815, divided her territory among the Habsburgs, the Hohenzollerns, and the Romanovs. Each of these empires adopted a different stance toward its newly-acquired Polish subjects; among the three, Prussia eventually developed the most comprehensive, and most explicitly anti-Polish, set of policies.

During the nearly 150 years of Prussian rule over large portions of Poland, "Prussianization" took on varying forms. After the Congress of Vienna in 1815 the Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm III promised his Polish subjects that he would respect their nationality. Also Friedrich Wilhelm IV, who ascended to the throne in 1840, at first followed a moderate course. But each and every national and social protest in Poland – the November insurrection in 1830-31, Polish activities on the eve of the bourgeois revolution of 1848, the revolt of 1863 in "Congress Poland" – led to a sharpening of repressive measures against the Polish population.¹

Therefore, when most of the German states and principalities united to form the German Empire in 1871, with the Prussian King as Emperor of Germany and the Prussian prince, Otto von Bismarck, as Chancellor, the "Polish Question" came to the fore in German, as well as in Prussian, politics. According to one Polish author, because of government propaganda the Polish question had become one of the *Reich's* most burning problems by 1885.²

¹ Balzer, Brigitte: *Die preußische Polenpolitik 1894 - 1908 und die Haltung der deutschen konservativen und liberalen Parteien* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1990), pp. 23-27.

² Grześ, Bolesław: "Teoretyczno-propagandowe aspekty dyskryminacji Polaków w Poznańskim na przełomie XIX i XX wieku" [Theoretical-propaganda aspects of dis-

To the Germans – or more precisely to the Prussians, since all the significant concentrations of Poles were found on Prussian territory – the “Polish Question” was really quite simple, and could be divided into three parts:

1. How to keep the language, culture, and political concerns of the Poles from dominating in those areas with a Polish majority, or
2. How to ensure the lasting primacy of the German language and the German culture everywhere in Germany (also in the eastern parts), and,
3. If possible, how to make loyal Germans out of the Poles?

In those days, there really was no concept of “political correctness,” or of “multiculturalism”: Today’s controversial idea of a “*Leitkultur*”³ was yesterday’s official dogma at all levels of German society and politics.

Despite their feelings of superiority, the Germans feared the Poles. They feared their large majorities in some districts, and – a longer-run danger – they feared the Poles’ higher natural rate of population increase.⁴ This ultimately threatened German dominance, even in areas currently evincing German majorities. The outmigration of Germans from some regions only intensified this fear. Therefore, besides its anti-Polish policies in the fields of culture, religion, education, and language, the Prussian government also adopted a specifically anti-Polish *demographic* policy. Some of the measures were very crudely direct, such as the expulsion from Prussia in 1885 of over 30,000 Poles and Jews who did not hold Prussian citizenship.⁵ The mainstay of the demographic policy was, however,

crimination against the Poles in turn of the century Poznań], in Trzeciakowski, Lech, and Kubiak, Stanisław (eds.), *Rola Wielkopolski w dziejach narodu Polskiego* [The Role of Greater Poland (Poznań) in the history of the Polish nation] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu, 1979), p. 202.

³ “Leading (or guiding) culture.”

⁴ In a much-criticized interview with *Le Figaro* in May of 1902, the then Chancellor von Bülow put it this way: “If I let 10 hares and 5 rabbits out in a park, in a year I will have 10 hares and 100 rabbits.” Buzek, Józef: *Historia polityki narodowościowej rządu pruskiego wobec polaków* [History of the Prussian Government’s nationality policy towards the Poles] (Lwów: Księgarnia H. Altenberga, 1909), p. 268:

⁵ Kouschil, Christa: “Die preußische Ansiedlungskommission in den Provinzen West-

an attempt to change the ethnic balance of the population in certain districts by bringing in German settlers.⁶

The law of 26 April 1886 "Concerning the promotion of German settlement in the provinces of West Prussia and Poznań" provided the initial fund and set up the *Königlich preußische Ansiedlungskommission in den Provinzen West Preussen und Posen* [Royal Prussian Settlement Commission⁷ in the Provinces of West Prussia and Poznań] to implement the policy. Under Bismarck, until 1890 both Chancellor of the Reich and Prime Minister of Prussia and vehement initiator of the Settlement Law, this was first and foremost an instrument for the external security of the *Reich*. The relatively insignificant purchases of the SC in its first years were therefore quite completely to his liking.⁸ Under Bismarck's successor, Count Caprivi (1890-94) – who personally favoured a commercial-policy-oriented "course of conciliation" (*Versöhnungskurs*) for the Polish provinces – extreme nationalistic forces arose in the Reich, above all the "All German Union" (*Alldeutscher Verband*) and the "German Eastern Marches Society" (*Deutscher Ostmarkenverein*), who sought, with all their resources, to push the Germanization mandate into the foreground and carry it through.⁹

preußen und Posen (1886 - 1918): Zur Polenpolitik des deutschen Kaiserreiches," unpublished MS, p. 15.

⁶ Indeed, under Chancellor von Bülow after 1900, settlement of Germans in the eastern territories became the mainstay of the entire Germanification policy. (Balzer 1990, p. 34.)

⁷ Although some Polish sources translate this literally as "Settlement Commission" (*Komisja Osadnicza*), the majority seems to prefer the more politically-charged "Colonization Commission" (*Komisja Kolonizacyjna*). The problem of translation may also stem from the abolition of the legal difference between "settlement" and "colony" in Prussian law in 1904 (see section IV.A.2 below).

⁸ *Oberregierungsrat* (a high civil-service rank) von Tepper-Laski, Bismarck's "commissar" at the SC, repeatedly received the order not to hurry, to take his time. (PSA, I.

⁹ Chancellor Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst (1894 – 1900) confirmed in 1897: that "the Settlement Commission should achieve a political goal with economic measures." (PSA, I. HA, Rep. 90a, H. II. 3 .d., Nr. 3, Bd. I, Bl. 187. Cf. Galos, Adam; Gentzen, Felix-Heinrich; and Jakóbczyk, Witold, *Die Hakatisten. Der Deutsche Ostmarkenverein (1894 1934). Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Ostpolitik des deutschen Imperialismus*, Berlin 1966)

From the table below, showing the population of the four easternmost provinces, one can clearly see why the focus fell on these two provinces.

Table 1: Population by mother tongue, 1890

Province	German*	Polish**	Other	German*	Polish**	Other
East Prussia	1,525,920	316,190	116,553	77.9%	16.1%	6.0%
West Prussia	949,117	483,957	607	66.2%	33.8%	0.0%
Poznania	702,357	1,048,576	709	40.1%	59.9%	0.0%
Silesia	3,153,888	999,885	70,685	74.7%	23.7%	1.7%

* includes individuals who have two mother tongues.

** includes small numbers speaking Masurian, Kassubian, and Wendish.

Source: *Statistisches Handbuch des Preussischen Staates*, vol. 2 (Berlin, 1898), pp. 99, 118-119. 1890 chosen because of more accurate definition of mother tongue than in previous censuses.¹⁰

Previous attempts to settle Germans in the East had had very little to do with nationality policy, and much more to do with the tension between the great landlords and the peasantry. The objective of these efforts was more often to create a healthier agricultural economy by expanding the middle segment of farmers, which was to help put a stop to emigration and reduce the appeal of socialism to the peasantry.¹¹ Now, however, settlement was to take on an explicitly nationalistic character, to bring to bear “the proven Germanizing power of the German peasantry,”¹² even though the emphasis

¹⁰ See Buzek, p. 538. Note also that the inclusion of bilingual individuals overstates the numbers of Germans in the table much more than the inclusion of the smaller Slavic languages overstates the number of Poles.

¹¹ Galos, Adam: “Utworzenie Komisji Kolonizacyjnej a sprawa wewnętrznej kolonizacji w Niemczech” [The Creation of the Colonization Commission and the Question of Internal Colonization in Germany], *Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Prace Historyczne*, vol. 26 (1969), pp. 37-40.

¹² National Liberal Party deputy Enecerus, as quoted in Galos, p. 49.

remained – as it would have to if the policy were to have any lasting effects – on creating economically viable farm units and a strong peasantry.

Overview of the Settlement Commission's activities

The settlement idea was simple: The government would buy up large estates, preferably from Poles, subdivide them, and settle Germans from western Prussian provinces or other parts of Germany on these new small farms.¹³ The Settlement Commission (hereafter SC), with headquarters in the city of Posen (Poznań), began life with a fund of 100,000,000 marks. The fund was augmented first in 1898, and more frequently thereafter, so that over its active lifetime (1886-1918) the SC spent about 955 million marks in total¹⁴ – half of that on purchases of land, and the rest on administration, parcellization, infrastructure, and so forth. It purchased 828 large properties (estates¹⁵) covering some 430,450 hectares, for an overall outlay of 443 million marks, along with 631 peasant farms with 30,434 hectares for 44.5 million marks. Of the 828 estates, the SC bought 214 (115,525 ha.) from Poles for 96.4 million marks and 614 (314,926 ha) from Germans for 346.7 million marks. Of the 631 peasant farms, 274 (11,152 ha) were bought from Poles for a total of

¹³One of Germany's leading agrarian historians has claimed that the principal motive was to increase the amount of peasant property and reduce the preponderance of large estates in the land distribution. (von der Goltz, Theodor, *Vorlesungen über Agrarwesen und Agrarpolitik* (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1904), p. 94) Others, such as Hannelore Bruchhold-Wahl, also argue for the importance, if not the primacy, of this goal. ("Die Krise des Großgrundbesitzes und die Güterankäufe der Ansiedlungskommission in der Provinz Posen, in den Jahren 1886-1898," Diss. {Univ. Münster}, 1980, esp. ch. 1.) I find her arguments especially unconvincing.

¹⁴Grześ, Bolesław; Kozłowski, Jerzy; Kramski, Aleksander: *Niemcy w Poznańskim wobec polityki germanizacyjnej 1815-1920* [The Germans in Poznań and the politics of germanization 1815-1920], Studium Niemcoznawcze Instytutu Zachodniego [German Department of the Western Institute] no. 29 (Poznań: Instytut Zachodni [Western Institute], 1976), p. 268.

¹⁵The SC distinguished between "estates" (*Güter*) and "peasant farms" (*Bauernwirtschaften*) in its purchases, and we will adopt the same distinction here: Normally, a *Gut* would be purchased for parcellization, while a *Bauernwirtschaft* was purchased to "round out" a settlement scheme, to provide a site for a school, etc. Some of the larger peasant farms were, however, bigger in total area than some of the smaller estates.

16.6 million marks and 357 (19,282 ha) from Germans for 27.9 million marks.

Over the same time period, the SC managed to settle Germans on 309,475 ha: They established on this land 19,608 *Rentenstellen*,¹⁶ 2176 leased farms and 102 "workers' rental sites" [*Arbeitermietstellen*]. In other words, for the nearly one billion marks which the SC spent over its lifetime, it managed to settle only some 22,000 German families (about 150,000 people) in the two provinces in which it operated.¹⁷ Max Sering, a very influential agricultural economist, reported to the government in 1915 that the SC "had worked outstandingly, but expensively."¹⁸

It would of course be naive in the extreme to take the 22,000 or so families as the measure of the demographic gain to the Prussian side through the activities of the SC. Even aside from the obvious qualification of normal emigration or immigration, the net change in the numbers of Germans and Poles could have been greater, or smaller, than the 150,000 or so people in these settler families. As the Polish MP von Brodnicki complained in 1899 in the Prussian parliamentary debate over the SC's report for 1898:

*"The main thing is not that the Polish owner, with his family, abandons the manor house. What happens to the hundreds of Polish farm workers, who up to this time have lived peaceably on their native soil in the Polish districts? As soon as the estates are bought, the parcellization carried out, and the settlement takes place, they are summarily driven out without mercy, because they are Poles and because the law has given itself the task of settling only Germans, and displacing and rooting out the Poles. Thus thousands upon thousands have become unemployed and homeless since the establishment of this law."*¹⁹

¹⁶ *Rentenstellen* or *Rentengüter* were a German form of property which allowed buying with little or no money down, and long (sometimes perpetual) payment terms at favourable rates of interest. The government retained an ownership interest until the amortized cost of the property was fully paid off.

¹⁷ Grześ *et al.*, p. 268.

¹⁸ As quoted in Schultz-Klinken, Karl-Rolf, "Preußische und deutsche Ostsiedlungspolitik von 1886 bis 1945; ihre Zielvorstellungen, Entwicklungsphasen und Ergebnisse", *Zeitschrift für Agrargeschichte und Agrarsoziologie*, vol. 21 (1973), p. 205.

¹⁹ Prussian State Archive (PSA): I, 87 B, Nr. 9600, Bl. 141. My translation.

Against this view can be set an equally extreme opposing analysis from the German side: Hans Delbrück, an advocate of forcibly buying out Polish landlords and resettling them in West Germany,²⁰ argued in 1894 that the activities of the SC actually strengthened the Polish element, not the German: Bankrupt Polish landlords sold bad estates at good prices, used the money to buy better land, often in the same district and often from Germans, then set up shop again with Polish labour.²¹ Moreover, there were Polish settlement societies and settlement banks competing directly or indirectly with the SC in the same districts, about which more later.

While it is impossible to follow the fate of Brodnicki's labourers, the SC did check on what happened to 170 Polish landlords who sold 175 properties to the SC; it was able to determine the fate of 154 of these:

- 22 bought other properties, only one out of province
- 3 leased land in either Poznań or West Prussia
- 15 settled on their other properties in Poznań or West Prussia
- 18 changed occupation
- 61 "have been without occupation"
- 33 emigrated
- 2 were legal persons²²

From these data it would seem that Brodnicki's views might likely have come closer to describing the general fate than did Delbrück's. After the late 1890s, however, the point becomes ever more moot, as the SC is able to buy fewer and fewer Polish-owned properties (see section III.B below).

Still, the net demographic effect of the SC's policies has yet to be established. Indeed, given all the potential effects and the complexity of the situation, even a rough estimate of the difference in the numbers of Poles and Germans attributable to the activities of the SC might well be impossible. We will therefore concentrate in the rest of this paper primarily on the SC's acquisition of land.

²⁰ Grześ 1979, p. 207.

²¹ Delbrück, Hans, *Die Polenfrage* (Berlin: Verlag von Hermann Walther, 1894).

²² Ansiedlungskommission 1907, p. 40.

The land purchases of the Settlement Commission

The basic mandate and general policies of the SC

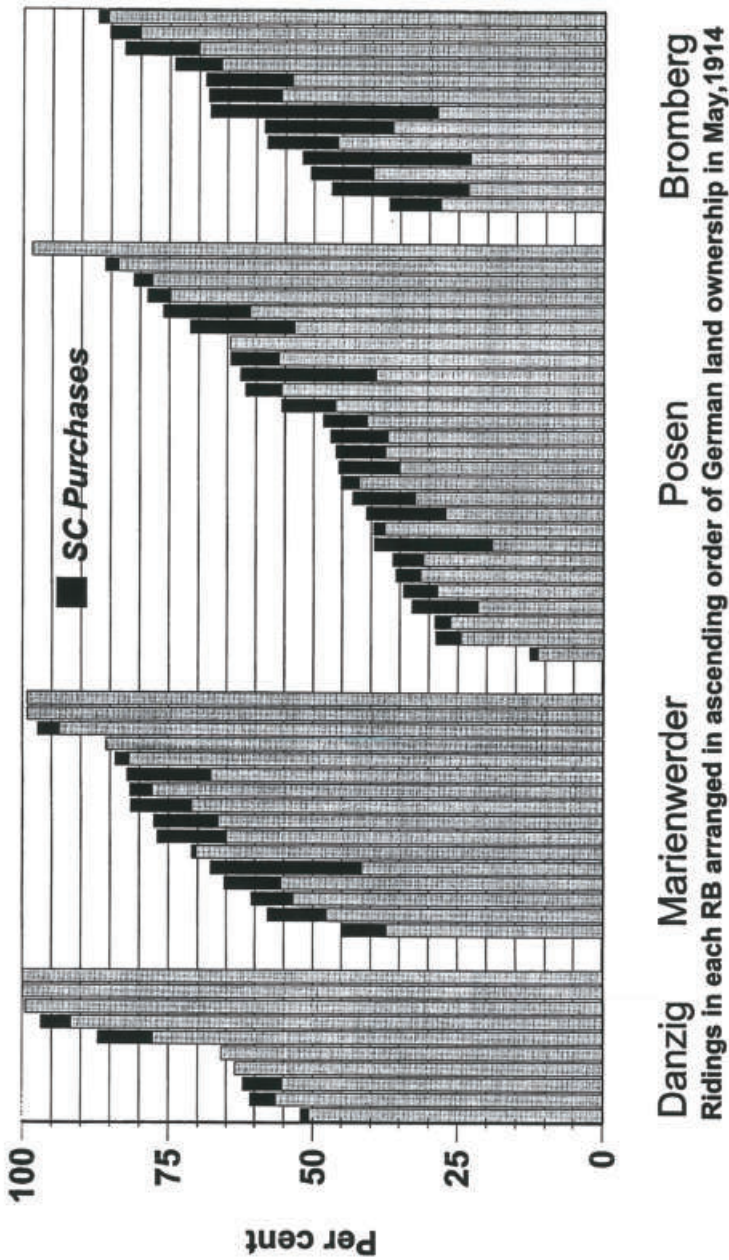
The original concept was that the SC should buy estates from Poles, parcel them into small farms and settle Germans on those parcels. At first, the SC had to receive ministerial permission *in each individual case* to buy land from a German,²³ but later (after 1896) – as the supply of Polish-owned properties available to the SC for purchase shrank – the SC received blanket permission for such purchases. Since the Commission could not buy unlimited amounts of land with the budget it had, it elected to concentrate on districts where it thought it could make a difference, i.e., districts where they thought an endangered German majority could be protected or a new German majority established. They could also buy in heavily-German districts if Poles threatened to take over German property or if the German school or church system might be in danger.²⁴

Chart 1 shows a comparison of the share of total land in each riding of each of the four *Regierungsbezirke* ("Administrative Districts": Danzig and Marienwerder in West Prussia, Posen and Bromberg in Poznań) ultimately purchased by the SC, compared to the share owned by Germans in 1914. While it would have been preferable to have had the share owned by Germans in 1886, in order to show more clearly the motivation behind the concentration of purchases, these data were not available. The share of all land owned by Germans in 1914 thus *includes* the share of each riding purchased by the SC.

²³ The archival records show that the usual argument was that it was necessary to purchase the property from its German owner in order to prevent its purchase by a Pole. See PSA, I Rep 87B (Ministry of Agriculture, Domains and Forests) and I Rep 90a (Cabinet).

²⁴ *Ansiedlungskommission: 20 Jahre deutscher Kulturarbeit* (Posen: 1907), p. 23.

Chart 1: Share of all land purchased by Settlement Commission by end of 1913 and share of all land owned by Germans, by riding



From the chart, some conclusions are possible:

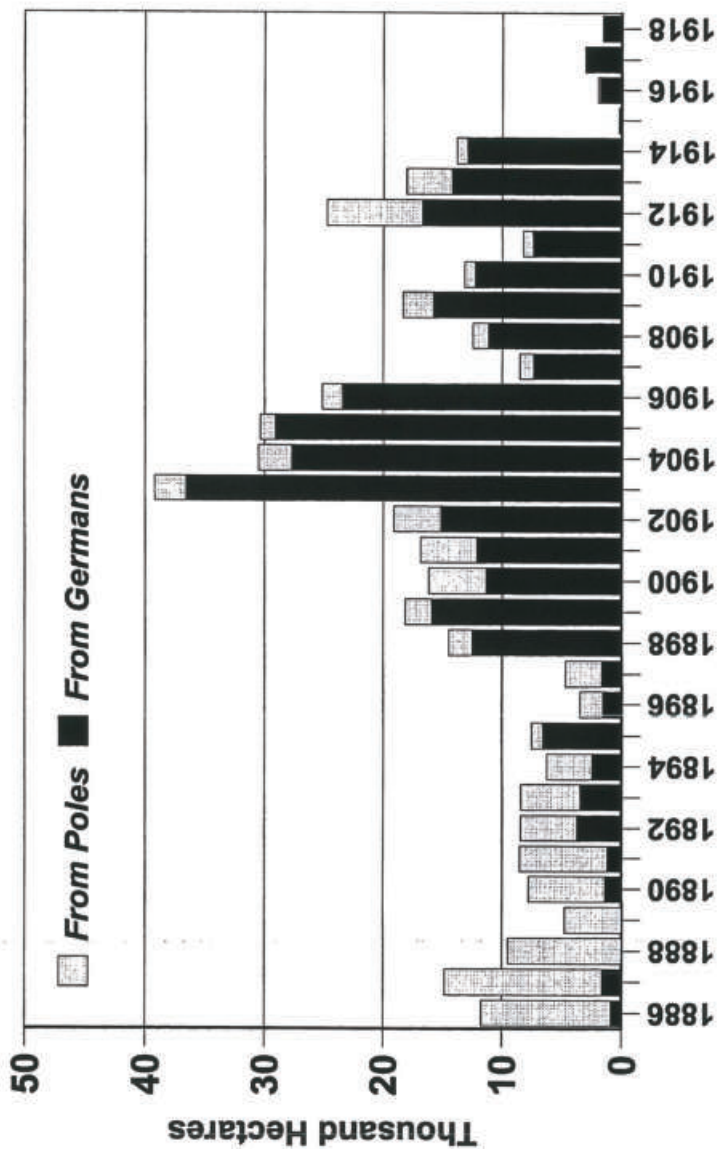
1. The SC purchased little or no land in ridings where Germans possessed 3/4 or more of the land.
2. SC purchases were insignificant in the *Regierungsbezirk* (hereafter RB) Danzig in the province of West Prussia, where Germans possessed a majority of the land in every riding.
3. The SC was relatively most active in the RB Bromberg.
4. The purchases of the SC could have accounted for the German share's rising to over 50% of the land (a) in only two ridings in the province of West Prussia (in RB Marienwerder), and (b) in the province of Poznań, in three ridings in the RB Posen and five in Bromberg. This statement must be conditional, since a purchase by the SC from a German would have done nothing to change the ethnic distribution of land ownership.
5. When looking over the two provinces as a whole, however, despite the SC's attempt to concentrate where it could build or maintain a German majority, and despite its purchases of between 20 and 40(!) per cent of the total land in seven ridings, the SC appeared to make a significant difference in the ethnic distribution of land ownership only in the RB Bromberg, where it had purchased, in total (by the end of 1913), 14.5% of all the land.²⁵

Amount of estate land purchased, and amounts from Poles and Germans

Although the goal was to buy out Polish estate owners and populate their lands with German farmers, as time passed it became increasingly difficult to purchase land from Poles. By the time the SC received its first major budget infusion in 1898, its purchases from Poles had dropped off significantly. From 1898 through 1906 was the time of its greatest activity in the land market, with purchases peaking in 1903 at nearly 40,000 hectares. Chart 2 below shows the trends in the SC's purchases of "estates."

²⁵ It purchased 7.7% of the land in the *Regierungsbezirk* Posen, 6.6% in Marienwerder, and only 2.7% in Danzig.

Chart 2: Estate purchases by Settlement Commission



Source: Reports of the Settlement Commission

The phasing of purchases

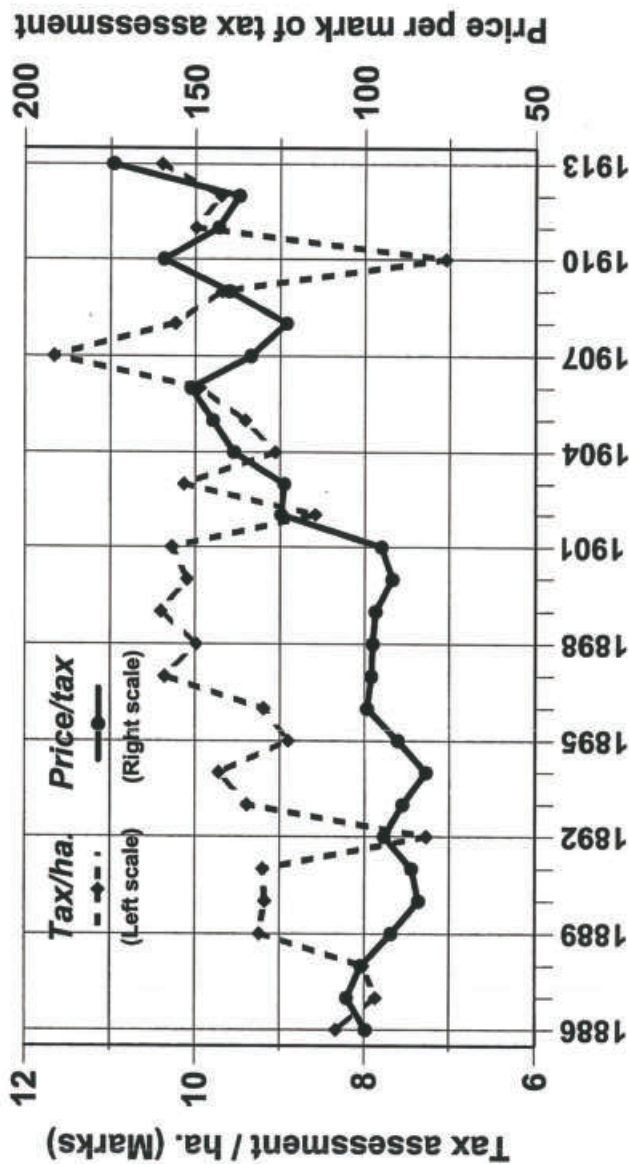
The SC itself, in its report on the first twenty years of its existence, divided its purchases into three phases:

1. 1886-1888: The SC bought properties of widely varying fertility, mostly from Poles and mostly as a result of "the accident of offers" without really knowing what the settlers would want and without any real plan in mind.
2. 1889-1901: After finding out that West German settlers strongly preferred settlement complexes to individual settlements, the SC began to buy with purpose: properties with good soil, good transport, and located in areas of at least a strong German minority. They also inaugurated a plan to create settlements near country towns, in order to create a market for German businesses. Taking the tax assessment per hectare as a rough guide to average quality of a property, we can see the progression after 1889 in Chart 3 below. Except for 1892 and 1910,²⁶ the tax assessment per hectare of properties purchased by the SC from 1889 onwards was markedly higher than it had been in the years 1886-1888.
3. 1902 ff: By now, Polish properties could be acquired "only rarely and only through a middleman," while German offers increased markedly, a result of speculative fever on the part of land owners, many of them quite unscrupulous. To outbid the Polish competition, the SC felt it had to pay prices exceeding the "economic value" of the properties.²⁷ The progression of prices paid in the diagram below is ambiguous: It can be read either as a falling trend to 1894, and rising thereafter, or an approximately level trend to 1901, after which prices rise.

²⁶ These low figures are more statistical artefact than they are indicators of reduction in average land quality: In both years the SC purchased estates with an unusually high proportion of woodland. Since the tax assessment for woodland was much less than that for ploughland or meadow, this drove down the overall average assessment per hectare to unusually low levels.

²⁷ Ansiedlungskommission 1907, pp. 24-26.

Chart 3: Estate purchases by Settlement Commission
Average tax assessment/hectare; average deflated price
(1913 marks per mark of tax assessment)



Source: Reports of the Settlement Commission

When the SC bought an estate, it did not immediately divide it into parcels. Leases existing at the time of purchase were allowed to run out, saving the cost of evicting the tenant. If there was no tenant, the SC took over the interim administration, leaving itself free to carry out the activities that prepared the estate for parcellization, especially drainage and the building or renovating of roads and buildings.²⁸

Absent specification in the law, the principles of settlement emerged from the early practice of the SC, especially that of the first two directors, von Zedlitz and von Wittemberg: Settlements were to be "self-contained productive rural communities with church and school in the village, equipped with communal assets and organized in powerful co-operatives." The ideal was the family farm run "by the owner and his family, without permanent outside labour." The decision to settle whole villages rather than individual farms was based on considerations of nationality, not of economics: The SC feared that individuals on scattered farms could too easily establish "undesirable" relationships with "foreign peoples," which could lead to "a weakening of their own national consciousness." And farms just small enough for family operation best fulfilled the nationality-policy goal – to be independent of outside labour, which therefore would "shut out the Polish farm worker."²⁹

Purchases of peasant properties

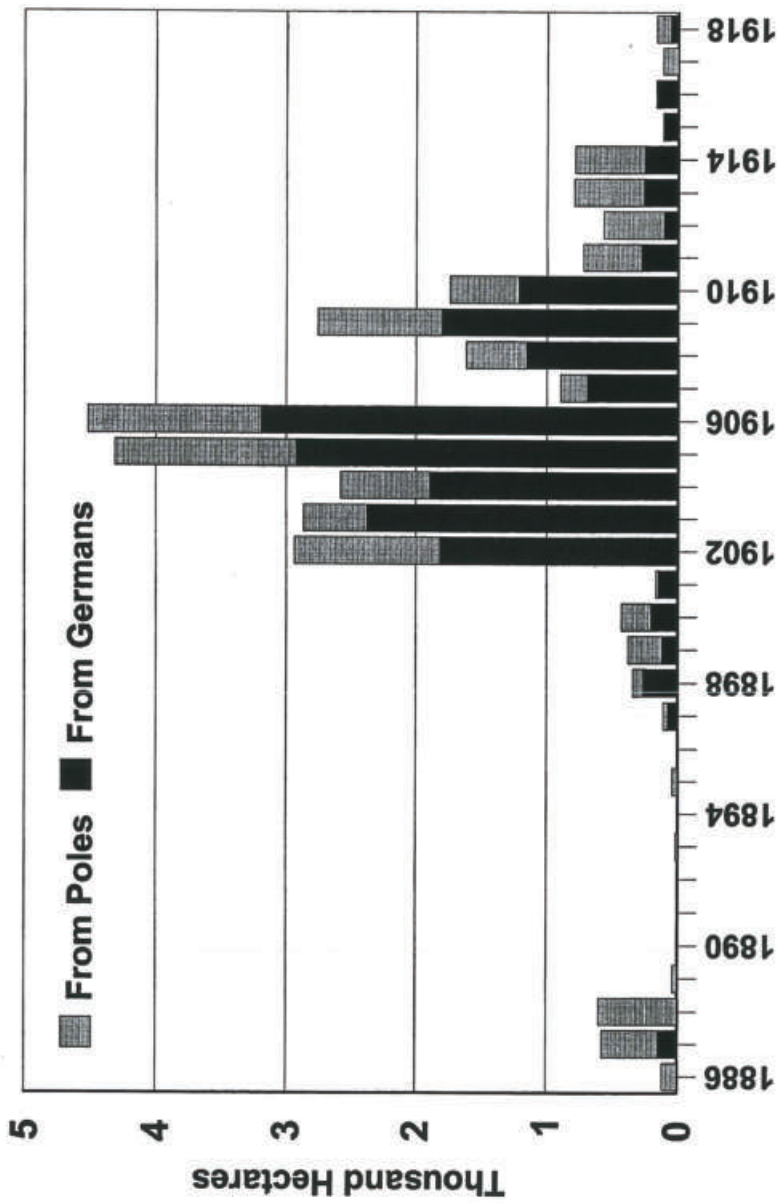
Until 1901, the SC bought a peasant property only if it were adjacent to a Commission property, and normally only from a Pole. After 1901 the policy changed, and the SC began to buy Polish peasant properties in order to "strengthen the German majority" or to "turn a minority into a majority" in ethnically mixed areas. In that year, the Commission also began to buy land from German peasants to prevent its falling into Polish hands and to block "the settlement of the first Pole" in a given district.³⁰ The following diagram shows these purchases of peasant property:

²⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 43-44.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 47-50. In the early years, the SC did set out many large (20 - 120 hectare) peasant properties, but pulled back later when they realized these were the reason for the high percentage of Poles in the settlement communities (p. 51).

³⁰ Buzek, p. 321.

Chart 4: Purchase of peasant farms by Settlement Commission



Source: Reports of the Settlement Commission

Polish reaction to the SC's land acquisitions

Self-help and public pressure

One reaction to the attempt to de-Polonize these districts was to organize for self-help, to improve the economic situation of Polish farmers. An important organization of this sort was the network of farmers' circles (*kolka rolnicze*), which aimed to educate Polish farmers to modernize and improve their farming techniques. Their educational activities even attracted Polish farmers from Russian Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine.³¹ The farmers' circles also supplied credit to farmers,³² but they remained primarily the domain of mid-size and large farmers; the small peasantry did not join in.³³ A system of Polish credit co-operatives also acted in aid of Polish farmers. They were organized into the Union of Co-operatives (*Związek Spolek*) and the Bank of the Union of Financial Co-operatives (*Bank Związku Spolek Zarobkowych*), both based in Poznań. Especially after 1892, the area witnessed a "blossoming" of the activity of Polish co-operatives, which were even used to acquire land.³⁴ Between 1890 and 1914, the number of co-operatives grew from 82 to 344, and from 1885 to 1914 their membership expanded from "a few thousand" to 160,000.³⁵

The rise of Polish Co-operative Funds (*Kasy Spolkowe Polskie*) helped peasants save their money for reinvestment into more land. The Funds gave good credit terms, but required speedy repayment of

³¹ Jackowski, Tadeusz: "Samoobrona Polaków przed pruską polityką eksterminacyjną w końcu XIX i na początku XX wieku w Poznańskim. (Fragmenty pamiętników)" [Self-defence of the Poles against the Prussian extermination politics at the end of the XIX and the beginning of the XX century in Poznań. {Fragments of diaries}], *Przegląd Zachodni* {Western Review} vol. R27 (1971), p.143.

³² Kaczmarczyk, Zdzisław: *Kolonizacja niemiecka na wschód od Odry* [German Colonization East of the Oder] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Zachodniego [The Western Institute Publishers], 1945), p. 218.

³³ Jakóbczyk, Witold: *Studia nad dziejami Wielkopolski* [Studies of the History of Greater Poland (Poznań)] (Poznań: Polska Akademia Nauk, 1967), p. 46.

³⁴ Ochociński, Stefan: "Polska spółdzielczość kredytowa na Pomorzu Gdańskim do 1918" [Polish credit co-operatives in West Prussia until 1918], *Zapiski Historyczne* [Historical Review], vol. 28 (1963), *passim*.

³⁵ Wiatrowski, Leszek: "W czasie rozbiorów" [During the Partitions], in Inglot, Stefan (ed.), *Historia Chłopó Polskich* [The History of Polish Peasants] (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1992), p. 172.

the debt. To make this repayment, the debtor usually went to West Germany to make money to pay off his debt quickly. Thus these Funds actually promoted temporary emigration. The money earned in West Germany and repatriated to the East improved the economic situation, particularly of the poorest strata of the Polish population. At the same time it also led to increased membership and expanded financial reserves of the Polish Co-operative Funds.³⁶ In addition to the longer-term migrants, Buzek estimates the number of Poles seasonally employed in western Germany to have been about 70,000 in 1905.³⁷

The Poles also brought public pressure on Polish land owners not to sell to the SC.³⁸ The Association of Landowners (*Zwiazek Ziemian*) was created in 1900 to help out farmers in a difficult economic situation in order to prevent their selling to the SC. After some considerable success at this activity, the *Zwiazek Ziemian* issued a proclamation directing Polish land owners not to sell to anyone without their permission. According to Tadeusz Jackowski, anyone who sold to the SC in violation of this proclamation suffered "ruthless public judgment and had to find refuge abroad."³⁹ Indeed, in each year from 1898 onwards, the SC's reports to Parliament indicate that Poles have stopped selling to the Commission, and Polish land can be acquired only through middlemen. Even that, according to Buzek, was becoming more and more difficult because of the increasing "vigilance of Polish society."⁴⁰

The Poles also undertook action to thwart Prussian policy intentions. Under the slogan "*Swoj do swego*" ("One's own to one's own") many Poles limited their economic relationships to other Poles, which in some areas, at least, led to a very effective boycott against German merchants and tradespeople.⁴¹ The Polish-language press

³⁶ Buzek, pp. 304-305.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

³⁸ One organization, *Straż* ("The Guard"), even published a "Black Book" listing the names of all Poles who had sold land to the SC. Trzeciakowski 1973, p. 325.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁴⁰ Buzek, p. 314.

⁴¹ Banach claims that the boycotts even led to emigration of German business people from West Prussia. Banach, Jacek: *Niemiecka polityka narodowościowa w Prusach Zachodnich w latach 1900-1914 w świetle polskiej prasy pomorskiej* [German nation-

also joined the fray, even suggesting specific forms and tactics of opposition to the SC.⁴²

Polish settlement agencies

Besides the political agitation, boycotts, and other measures mentioned above, the Poles also entered into direct competition with the SC in the land market. The Polish counterattack began in 1886 with the founding of the Land Bank (*Bank Ziemska*), which was originally created to try to save the large Polish estates.⁴³ After 1888, when Teodor Kalkstein (despite his German name a fervent Polish nationalist) became President, the Land Bank began to support parcellization.⁴⁴ In 1894, a new settlement agency was formed, the Farmers' Parcellization Co-operative (*Spółka Rolników Parcelacyjna*), which also took advantage of the "rent lands" provision of the law to establish Polish settlements.

Buzek claims that co-operation between German landlords and Polish settlement agencies actually resulted in the siphoning of SC funds into the coffers of the Polish agencies. It worked as follows: The German land owner and the Polish agency, acting in concert, would agree on a price for the estate, but leave room to break the contract if the SC offered a higher price. If the SC took the bait and paid a higher price to save the property from the danger of falling into Polish hands, the land owner paid the Polish agency a substantial compensation for breaking the contract.⁴⁵

Comparative data on the extent of settlement activity are few and far between. Jakóbczyk refers to a "secret Prussian document" from 1906 which showed that Poles had parcelled about 150,000 hectares into 35,536 farms from 1896 to 1904, while the Germans,

ality policy in West Prussia in the years 1900-1914 in the light of Polish Pomeranian press] (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 1993), pp. 124-126.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁴³ Trzeciakowski, Lech: "Społeczeństwo Polskie w Oczach Ottona Bismarcka" [Polish society in the eyes of Otto Bismarck], *Kwartalnik Historyczny* [Historical Quarterly], vol. 100, no. 4 (1993), p. 179.

⁴⁴ Buzek, p. 222.

⁴⁵ Buzek., p. 318.

including the SC and other institutions, had created 24,969 farms on 124,076 hectares.⁴⁶

Government actions to impede Polish settlement efforts

Regulatory and legal measures

Introduction of entail

A law of 8 July 1896 introduced a new inheritance system for farms created by the SC. The farm could be sold intact to the owner's next of kin only; any other sale – in whole or in part – had to be approved by the SC. This effectively established entail and removed these properties from the market, so far as Poles were concerned.⁴⁷

The Settlement Amendment of 1904

In an act of 25 August 1876, Prussian law defined the difference between a "colony" and a "settlement." The latter was a collection of farms, but could be a single farm or even a single building.⁴⁸ The local authorities could refuse a building permit to either if it would interfere with its neighbours' use of their lands. A colony, unlike a settlement, also had to make proper arrangements for a contribution to local school and church authorities, and its building permit could be denied or delayed if it did not. This latter provision had been used against Polish "colonies" since the 1890s. But, since most Polish parcellization created "settlements" of individuals, the government enacted a new amendment to the law on 10 August 1904.

This amendment ended the distinction between colonies and settlements and introduced the uniform term *Ansiedlung*. A permit was now required even for the building of a single house, or modifying an existing farm building for the purpose of habitation. Most important, however, was §13, under which building permits

⁴⁶ Jakóbczyk, Witold: *Pruska Komisja Osadnicza, 1886-1919* [The Prussian Settlement Commission, 1886-1919.] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie [Poznań Publishing], 1976), p. 132.

⁴⁷ Buzek, p. 245.

⁴⁸ Jakóbczyk 1976, p. 136.

could be denied if the new settlement "contradicts of the aims" of the Settlement Act of June 26, 1886.⁴⁹

Since most Polish settlements *ipso facto* contradicted the aims of German settlement, district officials routinely turned down their requests for building permits. For example, in the RB (Administrative District⁵⁰) of Posen/Poznan only 44 Poles had been given building permits, and 322 denied, as of 1 October 1905.⁵¹ The Settlement Amendment seriously impeded Polish settlement efforts, so that in the five years preceding the outbreak of World War I, the "battle for land" became relatively quiescent.⁵²

The famous case of Michal Drzymała

The Poles were ingenious in finding ways around the Prussian rules. Every Polish school child learns the story of the settler Michal Drzymała, who first tried living in a shed to avoid the need for a building permit. When the authorities ruled that this contravened the aims of the Settlement Act, he purchased a trailer from a circus and lived in the trailer on his land. Eventually the courts ruled that this habitation was equivalent to founding a new settlement, so Drzymała was forced to move.⁵³ But his protest achieved lasting significance, and his story became a part of the curriculum in all Polish schools.

The "battle for land" and the question of prices

Both the Germans and the Poles were aware that a "battle for land" had been going on for some time, but largely on an individual

⁴⁹ Wajda, Kazimierz: "Działanie pruskiej ustawy o osadach z 1904 roku na Pomorzu Gdańskim i w Wielkopolsce w latach 1904-1913" [The functioning of the Settlement Amendment of 1904 in West Prussia and Poznań in the years 1904-1914], *Zapiski Historyczne* [Historical Review], vol. 29, no. 3 (1964), pp. 44-47.

⁵⁰ The province of Poznań was made up of two administrative districts, Posen and Bromberg. The province of West Prussia also had two, Danzig and Marienwerder.

⁵¹ Jakóbczyk 1976, p. 140.

⁵² Wajda, Kazimierz: "Przemiany w polskim stanie posiadania ziemi na Pomorzu Gdańskim w drugiej połowie XIX i na początku XX w." [The changes in Polish land ownership in West Prussia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries], *Zapiski Historyczne*, vol. 37, no. 4 (1972), p. 131.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 58-60.

basis. The conflict had sharpened with the competition between the SC and the Polish settlement agencies, and now was being fought by organized community groups – the Prussian government on one side and various groups of the Polish community on the other. The ethnic struggle focussed on the land because the area was primarily agricultural, and even the regional cities (with the exception of Danzig/Gdansk) were heavily dependent on the agriculture of their surrounding areas.

Historical background and economic considerations

From the time of partition up to 1867, there was net German immigration into Poznań, and a significant buying up of Polish estates by Germans, reaching “mass scale” in the years 1848-1860.⁵⁴ A similar process was underway in West Prussia. The great landowners brought managers, officials, and sometimes even workers for their estates. These in turn often ended up buying smaller farms of their own. Hence, even though there was no German parcellization, except under Flottwell⁵⁵ (1830 - 1841), the number of German farms increased steadily. It was only in 1867 that the emigration of Germans from Poznań began and this trend reversed.⁵⁶

Buzek sees the period from the founding of the SC in 1886 until 1896 as a period of German victories in the battle for land, with the SC playing a major role. The turnaround came in 1896, when Poles registered a net gain in land ownership in West Prussia, followed by a net gain in Poznań the next year.⁵⁷ This trend continued and extended right up to 1914.

The “battle for land” is supposed to have driven prices beyond any rational economic limits, and most commentators – both Polish and German, and including the SC itself⁵⁸ – have blamed the activities

⁵⁴ Buzek, pp. 293-294.

⁵⁵ *Oberpräsident* (similar to a provincial premier, but an appointed, not an elected, official) in Posen/Poznań during the years cited.

⁵⁶ Buzek, p. 294.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 306. One should note, however, that the Prussian government only began to collect comprehensive statistics on the nationality of landowners in 1896, so the turning point might have come earlier.

⁵⁸ *Ansiedlungskommission* 1907, p. 37.

of the SC and the competition of the Polish settlement agencies for this alleged fact. The evidence, however, is circumstantial and a number of considerations argue in the opposite direction:

1. There continued to be private sales of land in both provinces between parties in arm's length transactions. It is difficult to believe that irrationality had overcome everyone who operated in the land market in these provinces. Indeed, the SC was often outbid for properties by private individuals, not just by the Polish settlement societies.
2. The market for land in Germany was essentially a national one; if prices got too far out of line in one province, buyers would switch their search to others. This normal equilibrating market force is very powerful.
3. Land prices were rising all over Germany, but productivity increases were biased toward greater output from exactly the kind of soils and the mix of crops that characterized Poznan and West Prussia.⁵⁹ Hence one would expect land prices to rise more there than elsewhere.
4. There were many restrictions on SC purchases. They were not allowed to outbid a German at a foreclosure sale, for example, nor could they exceed price ceilings set by the Ministry, except with explicit permission, which was often denied.⁶⁰
5. The jump in prices in 1902, while it coincided with an increase in the budget of the SC, also coincided with a new tariff. There is no a priori reason to assign cause to one or the other of these factors.⁶¹ In fact, the change from 1901 to 1902 in the price paid per mark of assessed value of properties purchased by the SC is no larger than several later fluctuations. Moreover, when viewed over time, the price paid per mark of tax value exhibits an essentially linear upward

⁵⁹ Chrzanowski, Bogdan von: *Die Preisbewegung landwirtschaftlicher Güter in der Provinz Posen in den Jahren 1895 - 1912 und die Begründung der Preissteigerung* (Posen: Praca, 1914), pp. 61 - 64.

⁶⁰ Ansiedlungskommission 1907, p. 20.

⁶¹ Eddie, Scott M.: "The Distribution of Landed Properties by Value and Area: A Methodological Essay based on Prussian Data, 1886 - 1913," *Journal of Income Distribution*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1993), esp. p. 118.

trend which began (unsurprisingly) from a low point in 1893, a bad year for grain prices, and continued (with year-to-year fluctuations) right up to 1913.⁶²

Some direct evidence

In 1893, the Prussian government enacted a wealth tax, referred to officially as the "supplementary tax" (*Ergänzungssteuer*) because it allegedly supplemented the income tax. This tax fell on land, as well as on other capital assets. To establish land values for taxation purposes, the Finance Ministry charged the district cadastral offices – which were responsible not only for cadastral records but also for the land tax – with the duty of collecting data on actual land transactions in the area of their jurisdiction. For the area of operation of the SC, quite complete records of these data were available in the state archive of Bydgoszcz (Bromberg) from the cadastral office of the riding of Wirsitz (*Urząd Katastralny w Wyrzysku*) in the administrative district of Bromberg, Province of Posen (Poznań).

The SC began purchasing properties in the riding of Wirsitz in 1901, and records from the regional archive in Gniezno (Gnesen) provided details of purchases up to 1910. During the period 1901 through 1910, these archival records show purchases of 20 "estates" in this riding, totalling about 12,700 hectares, for which the SC paid a total of nearly 14.7 million marks.

These two sets of records can be compared. Given differences in the way the data were collected and recorded, the comparison cannot be definitive, but it is instructive. From the data collected by the cadastral office, we have taken all records of properties 50 hectares or larger purchased by private individuals or groups between 1900 and 1913 as our benchmark data for prices. We chose 50 hectares as the dividing line because the smallest "estate" ever purchased by the SC was 45 hectares (in Wirsitz the smallest was 141 hectares). The smallest of these 33 benchmark properties was 52 hectares, the largest 624 hectares.

A simple regression on these data yields very good results. This should not be so surprising: Previously-published research has shown

⁶² *Ibid.*, Figure 1, p. 113.

that, in Prussia, taxable value can be a remarkably good proxy for market value of land, especially for small units such as the riding (*Kreis*), which is typically smaller than a county.⁶³ Accordingly, we estimated a regression of the form

$$\text{Deflated purchase price} = f(\text{Tax Value, trend variable})$$

for the data on private purchases.

The dependent variable is the "net price"⁶⁴ paid by the purchaser for the property, deflated to 1913 marks using the Jacobs-Richter wholesale price index.⁶⁵ The independent variables are the "net yield for the land tax," or assessed income for tax purposes (*Grundsteuerreinertrag*) in Thaler (3 marks = 1 Thaler) and a trend variable which is simply the (year of purchase – 1913) times the "net yield for the land tax" of the property. The following table shows the results of this regression.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

⁶⁴ The cadastral office recorded the actual purchase price, then made adjustments (up and down) for such things as sales between relatives, the lack of "normal" inventory of stock or machinery, presence of a tavern or industrial establishment on the farm, etc. The "net price" thus established represented what that property would have cost as a farm with normal buildings and inventory. As such, it represents an ideal measure with which to compare prices paid by the SC.

⁶⁵ Jacobs, Alfred, and Richter, Hans, *Die Grosshandelspreise in Deutschland von 1792 bis 1934* (Berlin: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt Hamburg, "Sonderhefte des Instituts für Konjunkturforschung," Nr. 37, 1935).

Table 2: Regression with deflated net purchase price as dependent variable

<i>Independent Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Standard error</i>
Net yield for land tax	455	26.6
Trend applied to net yield for land tax	20.1	5.15
Standard error of estimate	Constant suppressed	50,892
Mean purchase price (deflated)	156,369	
Pseudo - R squared ⁶⁶	0.82	

These coefficients, both significant at the 1% confidence level, can be used to calculate a predicted purchase price (again in marks of 1913 purchasing power) for each of the "estates" purchased by the SC. The following table shows the results of those calculations:

⁶⁶ Calculated using same formula as if there were a constant. The regression, when run with a constant term, produced an R-squared of 0.85 with 30 degrees of freedom. The constant was not significantly different from zero, as one would expect from the theory of price determination. When the constant was suppressed, the program calculated an R-squared of 0.82 with 31 degrees of freedom.

Table 3: Actual and predicted prices of properties purchased by the Settlement Commission in Wirsitz riding

Year	Property	Size (ha.)	GSRE(M)	Nominal		Deflated Price		Actual – Predicted	
				Price		Actual	Predicted	Absolute	Percentage
1901	Eichenhagen	603	5,066	400,000		328,000	360,665	-32,665	-10.0%
1904	Seehof	421	4,501	360,000		291,600	410,956	-119,356	-40.9%
1905	Marienthal	177	1,641	180,000		154,800	160,829	-6,029	-3.9%
1905	Schönrode	151	1,688	175,000		150,500	165,435	-14,935	-9.9%
1905	Seedorf	551	4,655	460,000		395,600	456,221	-60,621	-15.3%
1905	Wiele	901	6,228	577,500		496,650	610,386	-113,736	-22.9%
1906	Erlau Nr. 1	523	6,423	975,000		887,250	672,552	214,698	24.2%
1906	Herrschaft Lindenwald	2,142	19,793	2,200,000		2,002,000	2,072,525	-70,525	-3.5%
1906	Kunau Nr. 35 & 46	143	1,362	160,000		145,600	142,615	2,985	2.1%
1906	Nakel	213	3,373	530,000		482,300	353,187	129,113	26.8%
1906	Schliepershof	200	2,856	515,000		468,650	299,052	169,598	36.2%
1906	Victorsau	583	4,895	605,000		550,550	512,555	37,995	6.9%
1906	Wolfshagen Bd. I Bl. 1 & Kaiserdorf Bd. I Bl. 8	322	3,668	470,000		427,700	384,076	43,624	10.2%
1907	Gross Eflingen	896	12,057	1,190,000		1,130,500	1,343,311	-212,811	-18.8%
1908	Grabowo und Kaiserswalde	2,313	20,818	1,895,000		1,686,550	2,458,953	-772,403	-45.8%
1908	Rittershof	187	2,224	340,000		302,600	262,691	39,909	13.2%
1909	Poburke	853	9,074	1,417,500		1,289,925	1,132,617	157,308	12.2%
1909	Wertheim 1	243	4,074	470,000		427,700	508,517	-80,817	-18.9%
1910	Freymark	630	7,395	945,000		1,304,100	972,615	331,485	25.4%
1910	Julienfelde	631	6,583	811,757		869,400	865,818	3,582	0.4%
Overall totals				12,683	14,676,757	13,791,975	14,145,576	-353,601	-2.6%

According to these – admittedly rough – calculations, the SC bought some properties at bargain prices and paid too much for others. On balance, these tendencies seemed to have offset each other: the small overall net underpayment shown in the data is well within the likely margin of error of the data. Moreover, the wide range of variance of the actual compared to the predicted price, from a low of -46 per cent to a high of +36 per cent, should give us pause: Many factors, including both local and national political considerations, entered into the decision to purchase and how much to pay, yet our regression is based on tax assessment alone.

All one can reasonably conclude from the foregoing analysis is that the question of the SC's generally overpaying for the properties it purchased remains open. Further work, both more research into actual prices paid by many private buyers in other areas of Prussia and research into the land market in the provinces of Posen and West Prussia, would be required to settle whether or not the SC in fact paid "inflated" prices for the properties it bought. The data we have been able to bring to bear on the question do not support this contention, especially in the last few years of the SC's existence, when this tendency was supposed to have been particularly strong.

Extension of the mandate of the Settlement Commission

The Expropriation Act of 1908 and Polish reaction

Whatever price might have been paid, the SC was having difficulty fulfilling its mandate, and rising prices throughout Germany had improved the position of landlords. Polish, as well as German, estate owners now had the chance to obtain mortgage credit for property improvements or to sell a part of their property for parcellization and use the funds to improve the balance of the estate. Since ordinary purchases in the market could not induce the desired people to sell,⁶⁷ the government gave in to political pressure to adopt more forceful measures to acquire land for settlement: On 20 March

⁶⁷ The SC complained that it could not purchase land from either Germans or Poles. Jakóbczyk 1976, p. 163.

1908 the Prussian government enacted an expropriation law allowing it to take up to 70,000 hectares of land for the SC.⁶⁸ Political protest, both domestic and international (with the Austro-Hungarian government playing the chief role in the latter), delayed implementation.⁶⁹ On the Polish side, Nobel Prize winner Henryk Sienkiewicz organized an international petition against the expropriation act.⁷⁰ Inside Prussia, the passage of the Act unleashed a storm of indignation in the Polish provinces, and led to rallies and demonstrations in many areas, as police reports available in the archives clearly show.⁷¹

The combination of local and international protest, and sharply divided opinion even within the Prussian government, continued to delay implementation of this Act for years after its passage. In fact, it was used only in one year (1912) to expropriate four properties totalling 1656 hectares of land. Interestingly enough, the government apparently felt constrained to give a "fair" price for these four properties: It paid more per hectare for these four properties than for the average of the others it acquired through free purchase in the same year.⁷² Although the law remained on the books, it was never used again.

"Fortification" of existing German land ownership

Numerous sales of German peasant farms to Poles or to the SC began to worry both the administration and the Commission. In 1900 Finance Minister Miquel agreed to an expenditure of two million marks to clear debts on lands of German peasants and turn these farms into *Rentengüter* in order to prevent their being sold to Poles. The SC would administer this program, which was to be financed through a newly-created institution, the *Deutsche Mittelstandskasse* (German Middle Class Fund), formally chartered in 1904. The *Bauernbank*

⁶⁸ Kaczmarek, p. 221.

⁶⁹ Trzeciakowski, Lech: *Pod pruskim zaborem 1850-1918* [Under the Prussian Partition 1850-1918] (Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna, 1973), p. 299.

⁷⁰ Banach, p. 115.

⁷¹ Kouschil, pp. 24-25.

⁷² Eddie, p. 109.

(Peasants' Bank) was established in West Prussia to perform a similar function.⁷³

In 1908 a major increase in the fund for this activity occurred: the SC received 125 million marks from the government (they had asked for 300 million). Another 100 million was added in 1913, but the war broke out before this could all be used.⁷⁴ Acts of 26 June 1912 and 28 May 1913 about strengthening the German element extended this action to other provinces.⁷⁵

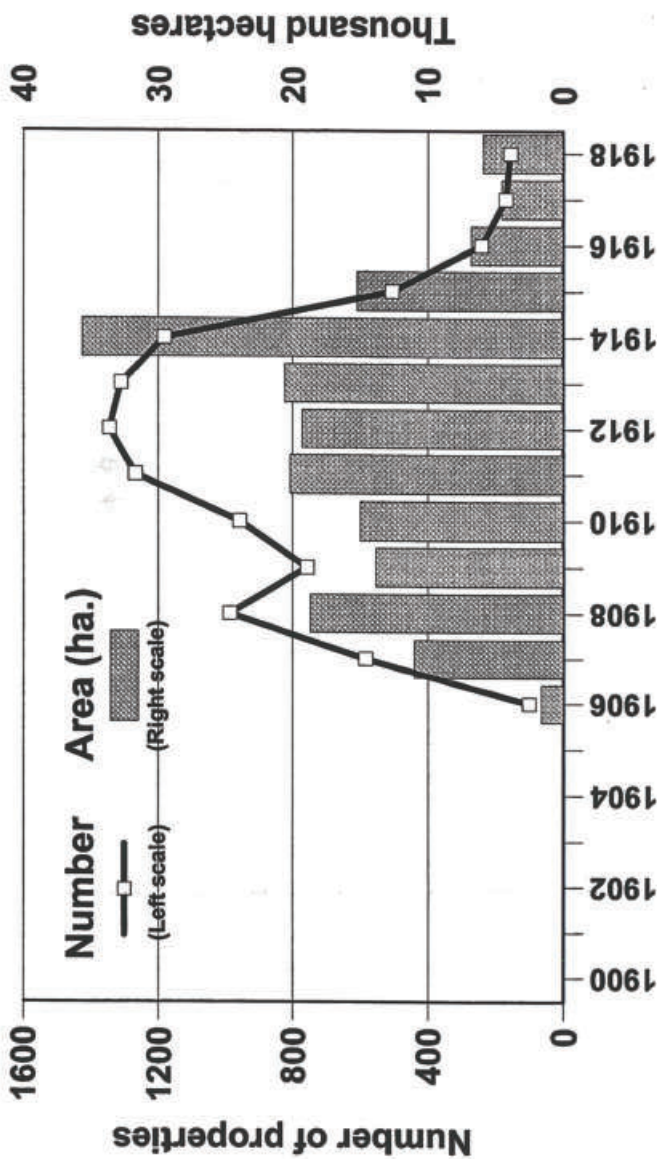
In the typical case, the SC paid off the debt of the farm owner, then turned the farm back over to him as a *Rentengut*, on which his payments were less, and at a lower interest rate, than on the previous debt. In the typical contract the SC retained an ownership interest, so that its permission would be necessary in order to sell the land. In this way it could keep the land permanently out of the hands of Poles. The bargain with the German landowner amounted to an interest-rate subsidy in return for his ceding some ownership rights to the SC. The following diagram shows the extent of the "fortification" of German land ownership by the SC:

⁷³ Jakóbczyk 1976, pp. 174-176.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 179-180.

⁷⁵ Sukiennicki, p. 50.

Chart 5: "Fortifying" German land ownership
Number and total area of properties "fortified" by the SC



Source: Reports of the Settlement Commission

As the diagram shows, once the action got going, it picked up speed very quickly, going from only 102 properties totalling 1628 hectares in 1906 to 990 with 18,700 hectares only two years later. From 1908 onwards the numbers rose each year through 1912 (with one exception) but the area did not, showing that, on average, smaller and smaller farms were being "fortified." This turned around abruptly in 1914, when the average size of "fortified" property doubled. After that, the war cut into the action, so that fewer and fewer properties came into the program, although the average size never dropped back to where it had been before 1914.

Comparing charts 2, 4, and 5, we can see that while the purchases of estates and of peasant farms were essentially complementary acts by the SC (the period of most intense activity in estate purchases was 1898-1906, in peasant purchases 1902-1906), the inauguration of the program of "fortifying" peasant land ownership appeared, on balance, to have diverted funds and attention from the other two activities.

A brief balance

To what avail was all this effort? Since it all turned around the "battle for land," let us close with two assessments, one contemporary and one recent, both from works that have earned the designation "standard":

First, Ludwig Bernhard's view from 1920:

Only in 15 ridings of the provinces of Poznan and West Prussia have the Germans gained land from 1896 to 1914. In 49 ridings, on the other hand, despite all the exertions of the Prussian Settlement Commission, despite the exceptional laws against Polish settlement, the Germans have been driven back.... The belief that the State could decide the battle for land through its financial power has been revealed as mistaken. The monetary might of the State treasury was outbid by the credit audacity of private speculators and surpassed more and more each year. The Prussian Fiscus became an object of speculation.

The result was the demoralization of the eastern land market and finally the complete isolation of the Settlement Commission. On the other hand the battle for land brought to the Poles a social and economic reorganization, forced them into a reordering of their unhealthy land distribution, compelled them into reforms that the old Szlachta would never have tolerated in peacetime, and developed on the new land a polity that appeared to the Poles as the embodiment of Slavic culture.⁷⁶

Next, Thomas Nipperdey's view from 1992:

The "battle for the land," which in any case the Prussian government had introduced as a political measure, and which the Polish banks, co-operatives, and settlement societies took up, indeed did essentially alter the agrarian system in Posen: Of the cultivable land 16.2% was newly settled by the Prussian state and 16.8% was newly distributed privately; the share of properties larger than 100 hectares declined from 58.5% in 1882 to 46% in 1907; the Settlement Commission had – with an expenditure of a billion gold marks – created almost 22,000 new farms, plus nearly 5000 Rentengüter (that was another, not nationalistically motivated program). Polish as well as German estates passed into peasant possession, and the peasant holdings of the Germans increased more strongly than that of the Poles. In 1913 the land was almost exactly half German, half Polish. But the population proportions were only slightly changed from 1871 through 1890 to 1910 (Poles: 61 – 63.3 – 64.7%, Germans: 35.1 – 33.9 – 34%, Jews: 3.9 – 2.5 – 1.3%); only between 1900 and 1910 did the German rural population increase more than the Polish (11.5 to 6.5% in Posen). That was also a result of settlement, but it barely made up for the "losses" of previous decades. The influx as a result of the settlement policy (about 81,000) and the Polish emigration which set in after 1890 did not offset the much higher Polish birth-rate

⁷⁶ Bernhard, Ludwig: *Die Polenfrage: Der Nationalitätenkampf der Polen in Preußen* (3rd edition, Munich and Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1920), pp. 569, 572.

*The settlement policy stabilized the situation for a while, but in the long run it could not. Overall: Neither language nor school policy, nor land and settlement policy had germanized and integrated, or repressed, the Poles; these did not halt the process of their nationalization, but rather abetted it.*⁷⁷

Since Nipperdey focuses only on the Province of Posen, where the SC was most active, his conclusion must be counted – from the German nationalistic point of view – as having an inherent "optimistic" bias. Bernhard, by taking both provinces into account, is led to a much more "pessimistic" conclusion. Nipperdey also shows that it was far easier to establish a majority in land ownership than it was to establish a majority in population.

Whichever side – the Polish or the German – one might favour in interpreting the actions of the SC up to 1914, the border changes and the reconstitution of Poland after the Great War were absolutely decisive for the final outcome of the Prussians' settlement policy. All their effort and expense ultimately came to naught, from the Prussian government's point of view: Of all the land purchased by the SC over its lifetime, only 18,200 hectares, a mere 3.9 per cent, remained within the new territory of Germany following the reconstitution of Poland after World War I.⁷⁸ Although some of the German settlers were able to remain on their farms in their new Polish home after 1919, approximately half of the Germans settlers in these territories fled, or were driven from, the new Poland.⁷⁹ The Poles had taken over the SC and its offices in early 1919, even before the new borders had been defined, and only settlers who were resident on the now-Polish territory before 1 January 1908 could keep undiminished title to their

⁷⁷ Nipperdey, Thomas: *Deutsche Geschichte, 1866-1918*, vol. 2 (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1992), pp. 275-276 (my translation).

⁷⁸ Ansiedlungskommission, *Denkschrift für die Jahre 1919 und 1920* (Preußischer Landtag, 1. Wahlperiode, 1. Tagung 1921, Document no. 900).

⁷⁹ Falk, Carl, *Die Ansiedlungskommission für Westpreußen und Posen: In und nach dem Kriege, Ergebnis und Abschluß ihrer Tätigkeit*, PhD dissertation, Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Berlin, 1927, p. 61.

land.⁸⁰ All as yet unparcelled land owned by the SC on the Polish side of the border became property of the new Polish state.⁸¹

Although the SC remained officially in business until the Spring of 1924, its activities were limited to winding up what work it still had to do on the German side of the border, and to a largely fruitless attempt to negotiate with the Polish authorities over questions of the security and the rights of the settlers who still remained across the border in Poland.⁸² Its activities before 1914 had encouraged the Poles to extra efforts to nullify those activities, both in the form of Polish settlement activity in direct competition with the SC before the war, and in the form of manifold measures to roll back the German settlements after the war. On this front, the victory clearly went to the Poles.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-41.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

⁸² *Ibid.*, *passim*.

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