Henryk Słabek

## SOCIO-POLITICAL ASPECTS OF THE POLISH PEASANTS (1944 - 1948)

## INTRODUCTION

The isolation of the years covered by the title is justified by important considerations, one feels. Together with social revolution an overwhelming influence on the position and conduct of the peasant populations was exerted by the consequences of the war (devastation, mass population shifts and so on). While the year 1948, in view of a fundamental change in agricultural policy, appeared to open a new chapter in the history of the Polish country-side. In addition, it would be difficult to discuss peasant issues during the period in qestion without isolating the specific conditions prevailing within central Poland and in the western and northern territories incorporated within Poland in accordance with the Potsdam agreement.

In the western and northern territories an entirely new community arose from various population groups. Alongside indigenous inhabitants (citizens of the Third Reich who declared themselves to be Poles after the war), this was to be composed of settlers arriving from the over-populated provinces of central Poland, as well as participants in the transfer from the western Soviet republics of the Ukraine, Belorussia and Lithuania, and repatriates from the Soviet interior (in the further course of these deliberations I shall frequently combine these last two groups under the title "repatriates", on account of the popularization of this term in sociological literature, and of its use in the statistical tables).

## I. SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION AND DIVISIONS

1. Within central Poland. Of the farms existing here in December 1950 (excluding newly-arisen settlements stemming from parcelization and colonization), 45% constituted those whose situation had altered as a result of the war and post-war reforms (see Table 1). In 1948 this percentage was higher by the same amount as the overall number of farms was smaller. On the other hand, some farms, of necessity, are included two or even three times in our account (e.g. a farm expropriated, destroyed and increased). In the absence of statistics necessary for an accurate evaluation of the consequent deviations, we must assume that the proportion of farms whose situation had changed fluctuated between 38 and 40%.

The countryside of central Poland experienced a very difficult period just after the war. The lack of traction power and of natural or artificial fertilizers caused a considerable reduction in the efficiency of agriculture. The value of agricultural production in 1946 represented only two-thirds of the figure for 1937. The production of goods also decreased of course, to an even greater degree in fact, on top of which such goods were disposed of at official (fixed) prices in many cases.

New farms (305,000) found themselves in a particularly difficult situation, especially those established on the basis of parcelization (162,600, including more than 104,000 belonging to former agricultural labourers). During the early post-war years the new farmers were obliged to turn for assistance to the owners of the old wealthier farms. Most of them relied on private money loans and the hiring of traction power and agricultural equipment. Such assistance was essential, but also burdensome, as in view of the shortage of money the parcelization farmers paid off their dues mainly in labour services.

On the other hand, the parcelization farmers themselves were not yet divided by any real property barriers in the 1940s. Phenomena tending to unite the former agricultural labourers were clearly dominant. In parcelization country, the closely similar acreages apportioned and the equally difficult beginnings for families setting up as farmers did not conduce to the creation of

T a ble 1. Differentiation Factors in the Situation of Inherited Farms within the Centra Poland

Voivodship	Number of farms in 1950 (excluding	Inherited farms with altered situation (in relation to their total number in 1950)					
	those newly-created from the agricultural reform)	Total	Farms expro- priated by the Germans	Hold- ings de- stroyed or with dover 15% dam- age	Farms en- larged on the basis of agri- cul- tural reform	Farms taking over land left by families re- settled on for- mer German and Ukrain- ian farms	
		1,026,308	281,618	343,100	251,790	149,800	
				Percentage			
Central Poland	2,305,327	44.5	12.2	14.9	10,9	6.5	
Warsaw	310,038	31.14	1.8	18.2	11.1		
Łódź	221,050	59.9*	36.2	10.7	13.0		
Kielce	291,549			18.0	12.6		
Lublin	295,231	28.5ª	7.5	6.8	14.2		
Białystok	152,195	36.2	0.3	28.1	7.8		
Gdańsk	27,470	45.9°	13.4	29.5	3.0		
Bydgoszcz	101,078	73.0°	50.0	14.6	14.6		
Poznań	174,259	80.3ª	50.0	19.8	10.5		
Katowice	172,474	13.9°	0.8	10.8	2.3		
Cracow	322,018	22.9°	7.4	6.7	8.8		
Rzeszów	237,965		3.0	21.1			

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> approximate percentage, as we have no data for the last column in respect of individual provinces. SOURCE: H. Stabek, Polityka agrarna PPR [The Agricultural Policy of the Polish Workers' Party], 2nd edition, Warszawa 1978, p. 494.

conditions of exploitation and local subordination, and neither did the special norms and mutual ties fashioned over the years. The overriding tendency was to help one another and to work together. A sense of common aims and interests was very much alive.

The parcelization farmers were also aware of the differences separating them from other peasant groups. They were not generally tied to the rest of the country community either by blood relations or by social contacts. They were separated from the old community both spatially and by their way of life (living in former farm labourers' quarters), and initially also by fairly large economic differences and discrepancies. Their own customs and cultural norms, too, served to distinguish them. For some of them the private ownership of land did not represent a superior value (especially in the Poznań region and Pomerania). Many of the parcelization farmers did not see individual holdings as a source of "wealth, wisdom and happiness", either in view of their modest acreages (in the south-eastern provinces), or in view of the associated drawbacks, already perceived at that time. The former workers of fairly well organized farms, assuring them of incomes higher than those of farmers with minor holdings, could see the lack of effect of effort concentrated in technically-backward peasant farming, the inevitability under such conditions of work "from dawn till dusk", and the unavoidable subjection of the fate of one's own family to the mechanisms and demands of the farm. In self-appraisals of the agricultural labour forces of the western and, partially, central provinces, their models of procedure and social standing were placed higher than those pertaining among the peasants. The former agricultural workers found the peasant scale for evaluating people, the graduating of such evaluations according to the value of farm holdings, especially offensive. In the eyes of the peasants the parcelization farmer, in turn, still remained a rung lower in terms of prestige and culture.

In is difficult to gauge the strength of the psychological barriers and distance separating the peasants from the parcelization farmers with any degree of accuracy, since no special research has been carried out in this area. None the less it was characteristic that the parcelization farmers and the owners of inherited farm properties belonged to different parties (as we shall see below).

Another valuable pointer is provided by the telling choice of marriage partners.

Bachelors from the families of agricultural workers were fairly successful in seeking the hands of farmers' daughters (39% of the total number of wives), while farmers' sons mostly took a different course: only 5.5% of the latter took wives from agriculturalworker circles. Bogusław Gałęski's table 1 showing the sharp division between farmer peasants and landless peasants, does not however reveal the inhibitions in spouse selection operating within the inherited peasant-farm sector, at least in relation to families possessing 0.26-10 ha. If, following Gałęski, we were to accept these data as being typical for interrelations between peasants and parcelization farmers, we would have to regard the divisions separating farmers as a whole from parcelization farmers as being stronger than the barriers operating within the group of owners of old farms. The class group of parcelization farmers clearly shows itself to be a group "for themselves", while the classical class groups (poor farmers, those with medium holdings, and kulaks) reveal themselves more as groups "within themselves".

Certain special features were to characterize settlement villages (inhabited before the war by German and Ukrainian populations expelled after 1945). Apportionment policy gave rise to a special structure here, a structure similar to that pertaining in parcelization villages. While it is true that in subsequent years a process of class stratification took place almost exclusively among settlement family farms, this did not lead to the crystallization of polar groups of country capitalists and proletariat.

There were no major differences of an economic nature between settlers recruited from the local population and the entire villages they occupied, and the inherited farms (settlers' farms were much better equipped than parcelization farms), while differences in the sphere of culture and customs did not arise at all.

Things were different in the case of repatriate settlers. These were separated for some time from the local population, with whom they had numerous conflicts and disputes. The ensuing

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> B. Gałęski, Społeczna struktura wsi [The Social Structure of the Countryside], Warszawa 1962, p. 39.

problems did not play a significant role where the number of settlers' families was limited. In the voivodships containing the greatest numbers of such newcomers (9,500 families in the Poznań voivodship, 9,000 in that of Pomerania, 7,600 in that of Rzeszów, 2,900 in that of Łódź, and 4,700 in the voivodship of Lublin), their presence antagonized the country community, dividing it into two camps.

One can thus speak of simultaneous processes serving to unite and to disintegrate the countryside in the former lands. Alongside phenomena tending to bring together the owners of old farms, there appeared certain disintegrating factors; above all one should include here the arisal of the parcelization group of farmers, characterized by different attributes and ambitions. This group possessed a refined sense of its separate identity and developed class self-consciousness. Agricultural workers on the state farms also constituted a separate, clearly defined category (in January 1949, around 150,000 manual workers were employed on state farms).

In some territories, apart from class antagonism in the classical sense, conflicts also occurred between groups of different regional origin (local peasants and outside peasants), or different social origin (peasants and minor gentry), which is to say between groups differing not so much in economic as in social terms. Towards the end of the period under discussion, new divisions were created by the arisal of the ever incrasing groups of worker-peasants and the peasants belonging to the first production co-operatives. At that time these were joined almost exclusively by families of the former farm labourers.

2. In the western and northern territories. In establishing the area of farms granted, the authorities were not influenced by considerations of the class origins of families. Not wishing to arouse unnecessary suspicion, they did not demand information from settlers from central Poland concerning the property they had left behind. Whereas in relation to the repatriates, despite the fact that their former circumstances were known to the authorities, the principle of compensation was applied only in isolated cases.

With the aim of bringing the land under cultivation as soon as possible, the size of farm was conditioned by factors determining

Table 2. Area of Farm Granted and Labour-force and Livestock of Settlers\*

Area of farm		Repa	Repatriates					Resettled	p	
granted (before regulation)	Number of farms studied (total:	Average of perso family	Average number Number of of persons per animals family 1,000 farms	Number of animals brought per I,000 farms	of per ms <sup>b</sup>	Number of farms studied (total:	Average numbe of persons per family	25	Number of animals brougth per 1,000 farms	of per rmsb
	3,195)	Total	Total 14-60 years of age	Total	Total Horses and oxen	4,049)	Total	Total 14-60 years of age	Total Horses and oxen	Horses and oxen
ip to 5 ha.	654	3.62	2.30	1,200	176	777	3.65	2.23	788	9
5-9 ha.	1,176	4.02	2.46	1,650	333	1,219	4.07	2.50	1,715	592
15 ha.	1,161	4.45	2.81	2,580	550	1,712	4.74	2.83	2,140	499
over 15 ha.	204	4.85	2.95	4,180	975	341	5.23	3.08	3,330	741

Table compiled on the basis of randomly selected individual settlers files preserved in the archives of the district community councils. they should, like those in Table 3, be taken as being approximate, though sufficient at the same time for us to be able to pick out the more In view of the fact that it is not possible to give any close definition of the degree to which the data contained in the table are representative general phenomena and trends of interest to us at this point

b Horses, cattle and pigs are included. SOURCE: H. Słabek, op. ctr., p. 506

its production levels, which is to say chiefly by the labour-force and livestock possessed by the applicant. Families which were better prepared to fulfil production targets received larger farms (see Table 2).

In turn, the area of land endowed determined the issue of

grants relating to other elements of farming. The allocation of animals and farming implements and machinery grew in proportion to the area of land settled.

In the majority of cases, through the acquiring of an apportionment of land whose size was in proportion to the amount of livestock brought, the principle operated whereby the larger grants of animals and machinery were enjoyed by those families who arrived with greater resources in terms of their own traction power. In consequence of the positive correlation between the amount of livestock brought, acreage of farmland granted, and amount of livestock granted, the differences dividing families at the point when they first set up in the western and northern territories were even magnified in relation to the amount of livestock possessed for a certain period of time. None the less the property differences occurring between groups of farms were not great.

In turn one has to consider the question of the connections and relationships operating between the former status of the settler families, during the period preceding their arrival in the western and northern lands, and their new status. From the point of view of transported livestock resources, and in part of work-force too, the landless and semi-proletarian families came off worse. The greater the farm a family came from, the greater the number of members of the family and the more livestock it brought with it.

In consequence of the interrelationship between farm area and farm equipment supplied, indirectly there occurred a far-reaching positive correlation between the acreage of the farm left behind in the former place of residence and that of the newly-occupied farm. The average area of apportionments of land for families from the two outside groups, i.e. the former landless, and former owners of farms of more than 9 ha., differed considerably. Former farmers with minor holdings also received farms of inferior structure.

The correlation existing between the former and new status of particular peasant groups did not, however, amount to a simple restoration of the old social system, for the inter-group differences were considerably reduced, while some families exchanged roles and social position.

In consequence of the regulation—from 1947 on—of the area of

farmholdings in accordance with official norms, farm structure was subject to standardization, and the number of farms in the outside groups considerably decreased. A radical process of evening-out of the differences, even if we ignore the formerly landless, becomes clear in a comparison of the structure of the former and newly-acquired farms of repatriates. The structure of the farms of owners who had left medium-sized or larger settlements was more profitable. But in contrast to those who had previously had minor holdings (up to 5 ha.), some of the farmers of former medium-sized and large holdings received smaller farms than those they had left. Among repatriates who had previously held 5 - 9 ha., the number promoted to a higher group of holdings (38.6%) was greater than the number demoted to smaller holdings (9.4%). Whereas among former owners of 9 - 14 ha. and over, a process of demotion was dominant.

The demotion, however, and this is something characteristic, was relative. Over 90% of the families with former medium-sized and large holdings acquired independent settlements (over 5 ha.), which most likely reduced the level of dissatisfaction among that portion of farmers whose holdings were smaller than those they had left. On the other hand, a sense of disappointment and resentment might have spread among those families demoted to the level of farmers with minor holdings.

Pre-war farmers, and those without land even more so, enjoyed better farming conditions. Apart from better buildings and a modern infrastructure, the production growth of farms was assisted by the wealth of effective farming equipment they possessed. In a sample of repatriate settlers' farms the level of farming machinery and equipment was already 70% higher in 1948 than it had been in 1938, while in relation to those resettled from central Poland, the figure was 43%. It is true that in comparison with the inter-war period, in 1948 livestock levels in both categories of farm were still lower, but comparison with the year 1944 shows a decided increase within both groups.

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Alongside the incompatible aspirations of the three basic population groups (indigenous elements, repatriates and those re-

settled from central Poland), integration tendencies also operated, with greater and greater effect.

It is characteristic that despite the divisions and prejudices which existed, there was no outbreak of open antagonism during this period. This was because fundamental ties took stronger and stronger effect: ethnic, religious, socio-professional and economic ties. All the groups were Polish and were proud of their national status, which they had attested in the past in the fight against the partitioning powers for Polish culture and for a united independent Poland.

All country dwellers celebrated the same feast-days, and had similar customs and traditional rites. Where considerations of faith divided the local population from the newcomers (Masury), integration processes took their course more slowly.

The fundamentally similar socio-professional make-up of the different groups had a positive influence on relations between them, and this was still further enhanced by general post-war changes. None of the groups was strong enough to gain a position of privilege. It is true that certain differences obtained—among the repatriates for instance there were comparatively more members of the intelligentsia, while among the indigenous elements there were more craftsmen—but the basic majority of the new society was comprised of peasant, working-class, and intelligentsia elements. Only among ruling circles was the balance uneven—here the new population was more strongly represented.

Of considerable significance finally, was the fact that the new population gradually adapted to new conditions—concerning climate, soil, the farms and their equipment. It learned how to utilize other farming appliances, became accustomed to the use of artificial fertilizers and to the cultivation of new crops. In addition the new arrivals accommodated to those of their neighbours who possessed greater agricultural know-how—which usually meant the indigenous population or settlers from Poznania. The repatriates achieved better and better results in farming, and reduced the differences in income which set them apart, thus securing a higher and higher standard of living (affecting dress, diet, secondary education for their children and so on), and gradually shedding their "poor relation" complex.

With the passing of time, the ties and similarities existing from the outset underwent a natural reinforcement and development. Life, work, entertainment together, common organizations and institutions, created the need for contact between people from different groups, and gave shape, albeit slowly and gradually, to new ties in the countryside—as between neighbours, professions, fellow-workers, friends and families.<sup>2</sup>

The barriers dividing people from different groups gradually disappeared. Opinions and accounts to this effect are fairly convincingly confirmed by statistics showing the marriages contracted in the settler families (Table 3). During the first years, up to 1948, a decided majority of marriages were contracted inside particular groupings. In the following period the picture changed dramatically. Inter-group marriages now constituted the majority. This came about not only because the younger people became better acquainted with each other; it was also a result of a weakening of mutual aversion and prejudice.

## II. SOCIAL CHANGES AND THE POLITICAL ATTITUDES OF THE PEASANTS

1. General remarks. As a result of the reforms carried out, the peasants gained a new position in society. The exchange of goods completed with the state turned out to be relatively profitable. Taxes and material services from mid-1946 on were no longer so very burdensome. The peasants gained access to the organs of power at every level. They obtained the means of production (land, former German and Polish stock and buildings, and timber from state forests). From 1946 there was a distinct improvement in the market supply of essential farming articles. Finally, the peasants gained broad access to schools, education and culture.

Fundamental changes also arose in the relation of countryside to town. The monopolies and old bureaucratic apparatus which

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Cf. Ziemie zachodnie w polskiej literaturze socjologicznej (wybór tekstów A. Kwilecki) [The Western Territories in Polish Sociological Literature (Texts Selected by A. Kwilecki)], Poznań 1970.

Table 3. Marriages Contracted in the Western and Northern Territories During the Years 1945 - 1967, According to Regional Origin of Spouses<sup>a</sup>

Rigional group, huibands	Number of	f	Regional group, wives				
nus banas	husbands (and of	Repatriates		Resettled.			
	marriages)	from Lithu- anian SSR and Belo- russian SSR	from Ukrainian SSR	from Poznań, Bydgoszcz and Gdańsk voivodships	from the remaining voivodships of central Poland		
			%				
	_		ing the years 1				
TOTAL Repatriates from Lithuanian SSR and	534	15.6	30.9	18.5	35.0		
Belorussian SSR Repatriates from	72	72.2	8.4	6.9	12.5		
Ukrainian SSR Resettled from Poznań, Bydgoszcz	206	6.3	64.1	2.9	26.7		
and Gdańsk central Poland Resettled from the remaining voivod- ships of central	81	8.6	6.2	74.1	11.1		
Poland	175	6.3	12.6	16.0	65.1		
В.	Marriages	contracted	during the year	s 1949 - 1967			
TOTAL Repatriates from Lithuanian SSR and	2091	7.2	26.7	16.5	49.6		
Belorussian SSR Repatriates from	255	18.4	11.0	21.2	49.4		
Ukrainian SSR Resettled from Poznań, Bydgoszcz and Gdańsk	745	3.2	44.3	9.4	43.1		
olvodships Resettled from the remaining voivodship	321 os	6.8	11.2	36.8	45.2		
of central Poland	770	7.4	21.3	13.3	58.0		

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The data from both periods (1945 - 1948 and 1949 - 1967) relate to marriages contracted in the same villages, and often within the same families, and for this reason they are comparable.

SOURCE: H. Stabek, op. cit., p. 524.

had so harrassed the peasants were eliminated. A growing proportion of town inhabitants consisted of fugitives from the country (especially in the western territories). In this way select groups of workers and the lower middle classes lost much of their exceedingly privileged status, and town dwellers were now no different from country dwellers as regards ethnic, linguistic and religious considerations. The town community gradually became free of the negative stereotypes and emotional colouring with which it was regarded by the country community.

Significant changes were taking place within the countryside itself. Social groups and institutions serving to discriminate against the peasants had disappeared or were in the process of disappearing (the landed aristocracy, the pre-war police force, the old local administration apparatus, usury, and private trade); the glaring contrasts revealed before the war as between the position of the peasants and that of the country intelligentsia became a thing of the past, and peasant influence on local decisions and their implementation was growing.

The changing situation of the peasant in society was to have a beneficial effect on agriculture and the country's economy generally. It had been difficult to make an efficient farmer of a peasant who felt like a pariah, whose opportunities were circumscribed by the commune boundary, with all prospects of a career in life obliterated in consequence of having been born in a country shack, and with a sense of injury and social degradation. Post-war Poland, where the position and prestige of the peasants underwent a relative strengthening, while a number of objective circumstances giving rise to antagonism in relation to the outside world lost their relevance or their former significance, saw the confirming of the thesis that "[...] only when the peasant frees himself of centuries-old oppression can a new era of development of agriculture and country life begin".

Their new social situation determined the peasants' political

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Evert W. Hofstee, Rozwój i struktura wsi [The Development and Structure of the Countryside], "Roczniki Socjologii Wsi", 1970, No. 9, pp. 16-17.

stance, though not at once. Initially their political attitudes did not play a decisive, or perhaps even the most important, role in the complex of factors serving to shape the peasant population's attitude towards the government and the workers' parties. For at the same time reverse processes came into play, unconducive to the influence of the workers' parties. Above all, these consisted of such phenomena as the breakdown of pre-war social divisions, the internal unification of the countryside in social and property terms and in a political sense, and finally—and most important—the shaping of the peasants' attitude to the workers' parties on the basis not only of their current activity, but also of their supposed intentions for the future.

Among peasant families during the years 1944-1946, an intensive process took place of equalization of their social position. Even in the former lands during the first post-war years as many as  $50-60^{\circ}/_{\circ}$  of such families either found themselves in a totally new situation (parcelization families and settlers), or their situation had changed to a greater or lesser degree (expulsion, destruction or migration).

The majority of farms were classified as medium holdings, but at the same time the number of cases where the material position of the farmer was incompatible with the surface area of the farm he possessed, was incomparably greater than it had been before the war. Especially among owners whose farmsteads had been destroyed, as well as settlers and parcelization farmers, there were many poor farmers or outright paupers with full-sized holdings. Throughout entire regions of the country (for instance the western territories and territories near the former military fronts) the pre-war class divisions temporarily lost their meaning.

New distinguishing factors arose. Not infrequently social divisions came to the fore which were connected not so much with area of holdings as with the various fortunes and origins of farms and families. Differences emerged as between owners of old and newly-arisen, destroyed and undestroyed, and impoverished and improved farms, between local families and those newly-arrived (Opole voivodship Warmia and Masury partly, and Poznań and Bydgoszcz voivodship), and between settlers from different socio-

cultural backgrounds (immigrants from beyond the Bug, from central Poland, and so on).4

Changes in the social structure exerted a considerable influence on the views and attitudes of the peasants. Above all, during a period of overall poverty caused by the war, the fundamental erosion of property differences and barriers conduced to a paternalistic interpretation of the network of dependences. In peasant opinion, assistance on the part of the strong, even if it was glaringly insufficient, was seen as a desire to help and as an act of good will. The bleak economic situation, as well as vivid memories of the united front created during the occupation, served to intensify a sense of intra-group solidarity. The fluidity of war relations and experiences marked off a new scale, a new gauge with which to look at and evaluate people. One can say that in general, pre-war class differences were less strongly reflected in the social self-awareness of the peasants as well. It would seem that the peasants' political self-evaluation was more often determined by these new divisions (origin of farm, fortunes and political tradition of family and so on) than by size of holdings.

Such social transformations were accompanied by processes tending to integrate the countryside politically as well. However, the political leanings of the countryside, and above all those of the owners of inherited farms did not favour the workers' parties, especially during our first period. The chief reason for this was the fact that even in those accomplishments of the Polish Workers' Party (PPR) accepted by the peasants, many of the latter more and more persistently saw the first steps towards socialist changes of the kind carried out in the Soviet Union in the 1930s. The question of the future shape of agriculture aroused particularly strong fears.

The individual peasant, becoming the central figure in agriculture in the 19th century, was left in an antagonistic position vis-à-vis the forces serving to discriminate against him. However, even the poorest of the peasants saw a way out of this difficult situation in the development of their own farms, and not in their

<sup>4</sup> Not all researchers share such a point of view. Cf. Kształt społecznej struktury [The Shape of Social Structure], edited by W. Wesolowski, Wrocław 1978.

liquidation: they too were totally in favour of a programme of individual farming. This truth was first demonstrated by the Russian agricultural revolution of the years 1917 - 1919. The Social Democrats' visions of direct socialization of agriculture turned out to be illusory. The peasants supported the Bolsheviks only when the latter changed their programme of socialization of landed estates in favour of their parcelization. Those with minor and medium-sized holdings engaged in active war not only against the wealthier landowners. The poor farmers especially also came out decidedly against the rich peasants, seizing most of their land and stock. But when the Bolsheviks wanted to transform the "antikulak war" into a socialist agricultural revolution, these same farmers with minor and medium-sized holdings came out against the revolutionary powers without any hesitation.

Initially the Polish peasants were sympathetic and greatly interested in the Russian revolution against the landowners. In the 1930s, however, the situation changed. The radicalization of the peasant masses, directed against the estates, monopolies and dictatorial regimes of the sanacja period, went hand in hand with an aversion for collectivization. To the Polish peasants this appeared as another form of deprivation of land and freedom. Following the years 1939 - 1941, the situation worsened still further. And following the war, even the crudest and most intensively spread rumours about kolkhoz farms sank deep into the peasant consciousness and gave cause for anxiety.<sup>5</sup>

The peasants, both before and just after the Second World War, placed their hopes in the prospect of the modern individual farm. They rejected all other alternatives. It is something of a paradox that even those among them to whom, before 1939, the collectivization programme had meant something, were now against it, for thanks to the people's government they now found themselves within reach of opportunities inaccessible to them before the war. The former landless, adapting their point of view in accordance with their new circumstances, either staked their future on the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Wieś polska 1939 - 1948, Materiały konkursowe [The Polish Countryside, 1939 - 1948, Competition Material], edited by K. Kersten, T. Szarota, vol. III, Warszawa 1968, pp. 439, 441 - 442.

farm they had acquired on the basis of the agricultural reform—as in the vast majority of cases—or—as was the case in Poznań and Bydgoszcz voivodships—turned towards paid work on state lands or in state enterprises. The new era also opened up opportunities, which they felt to be more attractive than work on collective farms, to those not granted land. The views and opinions of the Polish peasants at this time were deceptively similar to the attitude of the Russian peasants at the turn of 1919. The Polish peasants also accepted the revolutionary changes accomplished in social and agricultural relations, but at the same time were decidedly against socialist transformations in agriculture in the mostly distorted form familiar to them.

Barriers just as difficult to overcome for the workers' parties were created by world-view and national issues. Generally speaking, the country population was just as deeply attached to the clergy as it was to religion. Even before the war, the condemning of atheism by politically-minded priests had alienated the peasants from communism. It is significant that the Communist Party of Poland (KPP) and the communist-inclined peasant parties (the NPCh and the ZLCh "Samopomoc") were chiefly influential in villages whose inhabitants were opposed to the Roman Catholic Church. The communists mostly won supporters among peasants belonging to the Polish National Catholic Church, and during the Nazi occupation of Poland also among the most anti-clerically disposed "Wici" members. Taking advantage of the country community's anxiety, following the war members of the clergy and their followers were extremely active in spreading rumours to the effect that the Polish communists were planning to persecute religion and the Church. For the Polish Workers' Party (PPR) in particular, but also for the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), the repercussions of such rumours were just as damaging as the sowing of defeatism on the question of the maintenance of Poland's western borders, or the fanning of anti-Soviet feeling.

The suspicions of the greater part of the countryside concerning the new authorities were also rooted in past experience. For hitherto the Polish peasants had always found themselves on the lowest rung of the social ladder, their social prestige was the lowest, and the term "peasant" sounded like an affront, it was degrading and offensive. At the same time they were burdened with the highest taxes and dues relative to earnings. For centuries the peasants had been victim to the privileged groups of the population, both in a social and an economic sense. Consciously or unconsciously, they were aware of the fact that any attempt to improve their position within society would meet with scorn, or perhaps even worse pressure. The peasant lived in continual uncertainty and fear. He felt distrust, and sometimes hatred, towards the government, authorities and town, towards everything that forced him to continue in submissiveness and obedience, that constrained him to bear his fate like something natural. The most enlightened and courageous of the peasants took up a defensive position, organizing themselves in parties, usually in opposition and anti-government parties. In the first place, in consequence of the legacy of the partition era and of the war and occupation, a large section of the peasants entered the People's Poland period with a customary predisposition to opposition activity in relation to every government, regardless of its policies. Initially this opposition habit and mentality also made itself felt in relation to the people's government.

A large proportion of peasants was inclined to interpret the lack of goods, tremendously acute at first it's true, in terms above all of inefficiency of the new forms of industrial organization, and of inequalities in foreign trade relations. In addition the poorer peasants did not understand and did not agree with the granting of priority to the larger farms in respect of state building aid. What worried the richer farmers most on the other hand were the material services they had to provide, and the unfavourable relation between prices for agricultural goods and those for industrial goods. The bitterness was aggravated by cases of official corruption and the misuse of power to claim personal damages, real or imaginary. Each such case had considerable repercussions at a local level, and was inclined to be generalized, and put down, not to the account of the perpetrator, but to that of the party to which he belonged.

Even changes tending to advance the cause of the peasants as a social stratum were not welcomed by everyone, and often gave rise to disappointment and bitterness.

A particularly easy prey to moods of frustration during the years 1945 - 1946 were those groups of peasants which did not directly benefit from the post-war reforms. At times the richer farmers could not stomach the social advance of the poor farmers and their children. Along with those who, for one reason or another, declined to accept their allocation of land, they tended to exaggerate the shortcomings of the agricultural reform. Some were not happy with the allocation of land to "beggars", others again were indignant at the inclusion of land rights for the "rich", which is to say peasants with medium-sized holdings. All those who felt they had been unfairly treated expected the reforms to be reviewed to their own advantage, and abused both those who benefited from parcelization and the authorities.

In the eastern provinces especially, the situation was also immeasurably complicated by growing underground terror. In many areas of these provinces in 1945, to all intents and purposes the country population found itself under the control of an armed underground movement, which persecuted communists and their families in an especially determined fashion. Those with the greatest tenacity remained within the party organizations, themselves forced to go underground in many cases. The less hardy yielded under the pressure of direct threat, escaped to other areas or gave up their party activity.7

In mid 1945, when an uncertain and anxious future appeared to await the peasants, and faith in the independent reconstruction of the country was beginning to crumble, the official birth of the Polish Peasant Party (PSL) on 22 August, 1945, came as a welcome relief to many, who saw in it a source of hope that it would in fact find a means of delivering the peasants from poverty and anxiety. The countryside identified the newly-arisen PSL with the Peasant Party of the thirties and the occupation years, which is to say with a party which even then was regarded as the most peasant-oriented organization. Particularly in territories traditionally influenced by peasant party activists, peasants from entire villages and parishes joined the PSL (which soon had as many as several

<sup>6</sup> See ibidem, vol. III, Warszawa 1970, p. 249; ibidem, vol. I, Warszawa 1967, p. 188.

<sup>7</sup> See *ibidem*, vol. III, p. 412.

hundred thousand members), in the belief that it would lead the way to a Poland stronger by virtue of a "peasant government", full sovereignty, independent individual farms and a liberal-democratic system, to a Poland with a Christian outlook, and benefiting from the generous aid of the United States.

The scope of the left's influence in the countryside was determined above all by the extent to which it could disperse the doubts and fears preying on the peasants. The Polish communists therefore maintained a low profile on the most unpopular aspects of their tradition, attempting at the same time to enlighten the peasants as to the appropriateness of the post-war programme. From the spring of 1945 especially, the PPR increased its efforts to explain its programme on national and peasant issues.

The Potsdam agreement, conceding the western and northern territories to Poland, served to confirm the practical significance of the orientation of the workers' parties towards the shifting of Poland's borders to the line of the Oder and Western Neisse. The determined campaign of both parties for the restoration of the western territories to Poland on a permanent basis, as well as their decisive contribution to the re-Polonization and administering of these lands, meant that increasing numbers of peasants associated Poland's return to the Oder with the names PPR and PPS, and that tens of thousands of peasant families, notwithstanding the counter-propaganda and the numerous setbacks, transferred to the regained territories and painstakingly began to bring them under control.

The favourable settlement of the western border also served to place in a new light the question of the eastern borders. For owing to the gaining of the western territories, it not only became possible to transfer the population of the former eastern borderlands, but also to provide them with better prospects on the whole in their new homes. The repatriates, and especially the peasants among them, acquired better living conditions, which was of supreme assistance in helping the Poles as a whole to come to terms with the post-war changes, and to understand that the orientation of the opponents of the workers' parties, looking to another war and to Britain and America, who had already ac-

cepted the Curzon Line at Yalta of course, was a gross misunder-standing.

In a desire to counteract certain negative stereotypes, some PPR branches in 1946 did not hesitate to arrange the participation of members even in various church ceremonies and celebrations. The leaders of the workers' parties persistently emphasized the patriotic nature of their achievements.

They were very skilful in their handling of the progressive—patriotic tradition in their style of propaganda, celebrating national anniversaries and holidays with all solemnity, in the forms and scope of changes in the system, an expression of which was the cultivation of institutions and symbols dear to the Poles (the office of President, the Sejm, military distinctions and dress, the multi-party system and so on), and finally in the scope and nature of social reforms, the democratic and nation-wide aspects of which were prominently displayed.

During these same years, the leaders and activists of the workers' parties maintained at rallies and meetings that the collective model of agricultural growth was not relevant in Poland. The campaign of agricultural enfranchisement was accelerated, the planned resettlement of farmers in the western and northern territories was abandoned, so as not to arouse suspicions of lack of respect for the peasant's property, and a resolution was passed to take over only  $10^{\rm 0}/_{\rm 0}$  of land used for agriculture for the purposes of the State Landed Properties enterprise in the western territories.

Combined with mass educational and propaganda campaigns, further counteraction of a practical nature—exemption of the peasants from compulsory duties in 1946 and the practical suspension of tax liabilities, a distinct improvement in the supply of industrial goods to the agricultural sector, the gradual dissolution of PSL organizations, and the disintegration of the armed underground movement—conduced to a change in the balance of forces in favour of the workers' parties.

2. Within central Poland. Initially, a specific feature of the territories within central Poland was the political differentiation of farmers in accordance with the origin of their holdings and the previous social status of their families. The surface area of farms

on the other hand played a subsidiary role. During the years 1945-1946, the new landholders, chiefly from the former agricultural labour force, concentrated in the peasant organizations of the PPR and PPS, irrespective of the size of their holdings. Whereas farmers not benefiting from land grants, those with both medium-sized and minor holdings, organized themselves chiefly within the SL and PSL. In 1946, the proportion of such farmers within the PPR and PPS peasant circles did not exceed much more than ten per cent in Great Poland and Pomerania. Like enough the picture was the same in the other territories.

In 1946 the workers' parties had the greatest organizational influence in those territories with the largest number of parcelization farmers from among the former agricultural labour force. Despite the absence of a communist tradition, even in December 1946, of the 80,000 PPR peasant members in the nine provinces of central Poland, as many as  $55^{\circ}/_{\circ}$  were located in the western and northern territories (in Poznań voivodship— $19^{\circ}/_{\circ}$ , in Pomerania— $18^{\circ}/_{\circ}$ , and in Warsaw voivodship— $17.8^{\circ}/_{\circ}$ ). In contrast, the proportion of peasants from the south-eastern regions was modest (Kielce voivodship— $10.7^{\circ}/_{\circ}$ , Cracow voivodship— $8.2^{\circ}/_{\circ}$ ) or negligible (Rzeszów voivodship— $4.3^{\circ}/_{\circ}$ ).

At the turn of 1946 the SL organizations passed over almost in their entirety to the Polish Peasant Party. However, the western voivodships (Pomerania and Poznań), where the PPR and PPS country organizations were fairly strong (parcelization), the struggle of the workers' parties for a favourable change in the balance of forces brought the desired results as early as the second half of 1946. The situation was different in the south-eastern territories. Even in January 1947, in the commune people's councils of the Rzeszów, Cracow and Kielce voivodships. PSL representatives were numerically stronger than both representatives from the workers' parties, and especially, SL representatives.

A radical change took place throughout the territories of central Poland in 1947, though to varying degree. There was a sharp drop in the number of SL councillors. A parallel development took place in the balance of forces among the peasants themselves, but here the numerical superiority of the three parties was not so overwhelming. For in January 1948, the proportion

of PSL representatives among the total number of party members in the commune people's councils of four voivodships amounted to less than 90/0, while among the village administrators the figure was more than 180/0, so that it was as much as twice as high.8

In contrast to the period directly following the war, during the years 1947-1948 more and more owners of inherited farms joined the PPR and PPS organizations, including former PSL members on occasion. However, the majority of those belonging to the parties still consisted of parcelization farmers and settlers.

3. In the western and northern territories. In the countryside of the western and northern territories fairly specific political configurations occurred. While it is true that during our first period, here too there was no mass joining of the workers' parties by the owners of inherited farms (indigenous elements), nevertheless, in comparison with the situation within central Poland, most of the latter were characterized by a passive attitude altogether. Only in rare cases did they join one of the parties operating in the countryside. Those who acquired new farms on the other hand were characterized by considerably greater political activeness, as was the case in central Poland. However, the degree of such activeness, as well as the choices made, was fairly varied as between settlers of differing regional provenance.

The restraint of the indigenous elements in political organization just after the war was determined by a number of factors. A not inconsiderable role must be ascribed, in relation to all territories, to sharp anomalies in age and sex structure. The lack of young men directly predetermined the question of the lower level of party membership among the indigenous population. In addition, the indigenous elements, exhausted by the difficult post-war conditions, were not always aware of the possibility, or could not see the sense in organizing in political parties. This sort of factor, at least in Warmia and Masuria, was in evidence fairly often, but it was not the only one. In some cases the moderation and reserve

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Taking the party affiliations of members of community Councils (for villages) and village administrators (for peasants) as indices of influence would appear to be justified on a number of counts, with the reservation that such indices tend to underestimate actual PSL influence.

could be explained either by too conservative an outlook politically, or by a national consciousness which was not fully crystallized.

The continuation of Polish culture and customs under German rule depended in large measure on the financial position of particular families and on the network of Polish cultural centres. In the Opole region and other territories, the wealthiest farms were usually strongholds of Polish culture. Most of the so-called "Great Poles" and leaders of the national movement were recruited from among the rich peasants. Following the war, too, a large section of the indigenous elements, professing rather conservative attitudes along with their leaders, gravitated towards the less radical parties, initially towards the PSL. During the first half of 1946 the PSL won over a large proportion of the indigenous population in the Bytów and Złotów districts, and also in some areas of Silesia and Masuria. "The local population," wrote A. Kuźmiński after carrying out an inspection of the district of Bytów. "shows two fundamental, and at the same time characteristic, features: materialism and religiousness. Everyone would like to belong to the party from which he could receive the greatest material benefit [...] they are less interested, or not at all interested, in ideological issues. Since there are not enough land grants to be able to satisfy the fairly large number of applicants, the second feature is exploited, namely religiousness. This is exploited by the PSL party, and this is how one explains the fact that the party has so many members". 10 The new farmers adopted different, though rather varied attitudes.

The special trials of the repatriates had a negative influence on the political stance they adopted. In comparison with resettled farmers, the repatriates were distinguished by a decidedly lower susceptibility to the influence of political parties. The greatest disproportion in party organization as between the two groups of settlers occurred in the south-western region, where most of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Cf. K. Małłek, Polskie są Mazury [Masury is Polish], Warszawa 1972.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Archiwum Akt Nowych (Central Archives of Modern Records) Ministry for the Regained Territories files, t. 1175, report of starosta inspection carried out on 15-18 October, 1946, by an official of the sociopolitical department of the Provincial Office.

repatriates consisted of newcomers from the western territories of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic (USRR). In the north-western region, where most of the inflowing population came from the Vilna area, the situation was fairly different, numerically speaking. But here, too, the number of repatriates joining together within parties was less than the number of resettled farmers.

In the north-western region, where the PSL achieved its greatest success, out of 100 repatriates affiliated to parties were 36 PSL members, while the corresponding figure for resettled farmers was 25. Apart from the PSL, the repatriates joined the PPS fairly readily, while they were least attracted to the PPR.

If during the spring of 1946 within the former lands the PSL had an overwhelming predominance among peasants organized within parties, then in the western territories, during this peak period of its development, its share of the politically organized farming community could not have exceeded 40 - 50%. More important, from the spring of 1946 on, the process of disintegration of the PSL circles took on additional strength here. The PSL did not manage to gain any great influence within the institutions connected with the countryside, while its share of delegates to the commune people's councils and in the filling of village mayor and administrator posts was quite negligible by the beginning of 1947. In comparison with the situation within the former lands, here the PSL was ousted out of the countryside more than a year in advance.

Another special feature of the political distribution of forces in the countryside of the western territories was the relatively strong position of the PPS. Statistics fully confirmed the general observation that very likely the former PSL members—above all repatriates and non-farmers—mostly swelled the ranks of the PPS from the autumn of 1946 on. Whereas few peasants joined the SL, which for a considerable period of time had not managed to earn itself the name of a politically independent party, especially in the Szczecin and Olsztyn voivodships. The influence of the three parties among the farming population created a slightly different picture, if we can regard the political affiliations of village administrators as a reliable indicator. In this case the socialists were in the weakest position. Nevertheless the presence of both

workers' parties among the peasants was incomparably firmer than it was within the former lands. Already at the end of 1946, of the total number of village mayors and administrators with party affiliations,  $60 - 70^{\circ}/_{\odot}$  here belonged to the PPR and PPS organizations.

The changes in the configuration of forces were caused by such numerous factors that it would be impossible to discuss even the most important of them here. Let us confine ourselves to social determinants, as being of most interest to us. It would appear to be no accident that in the first half of 1948, too, the socialists maintained or even increased their level of influence among the peasants and in the parishes within central Poland. Here the fiercest competition of forces took place between the workers' parties on the one hand, and the peasant party activists on the other. The workers' parties continued to find support in what socially was a fairly homogeneous environment—above all among the new farmers. Whereas the SL operated almost exclusively in the old countryside, in what had often been former PSL territory. The situation was different in the western territories more precisely among the settlers, whose varying party affiliations were often determined by different regional backgrounds. An important fact was that in this respect the structure of the PPR was practically identical to that of the SL, while in the PPS peasant organizations there was a much greater proportion of repatriates, almost equal to that of resettled farmers from central Poland. Moreover, with the probable exception of certain Wrocław territories, the greater part of the PSL activists went over, not to the SL, but in fact to the PPS. Differences of regional origin, and the differing political traditions fairly closely tied up with this, brought about a situation where in the countryside of the western lands the PPR and PPS were in competition with one another. Here the PPR consolidated its position at the expense of the PPS.

Apart from regional background and political tradition, the attitudes of the settlers, as well as the geography of party organizations, were also influenced by factors of a strictly social nature. The new owners of farms of differing sizes were characterized by varying degrees of political mobility. It was highly significant that for the most part the owners of the larger farms of more

than 9 ha. elected to join both the peasant parties and the workers' parties, though to a slightly lesser degree in the case of the latter.

The large degree of susceptibility of owners of farms of over 9 ha. to the influence of political parties, including the workers' parties, is explained by several considerations. The owners of the larger farms were more satisfied and felt under a greater obligation to the political organizations to whom, in their understanding, they owed their social advance. At the same time these owners, more acutely aware of the lack of resources for running their farms, hoped to obtain the latter through identifying themselves with the centres of authority and with those parties whose representatives had a decisive voice within the institutions responsible for allocating assistance and allowances (the co-operative movement, the starosta offices, land offices and so on). However, the attitude of this category of farmer cannot be reduced to mere economic considerations, for neither were the remaining groups of settlers devoid of such aspirations of course. The particular predisposition of peasants with medium-sized holdings to organization within the framework of political parties must also be taken into consideration. This predisposition, already clearly evident in the two inter-war decades, was no doubt further reinforced after the war.

Very helpful in this respect is information giving a picture of the party affiliations of farmers according to social background, i.e. their social and financial position before arriving in the western territories. The greatest degree of passivity towards the four parties was displayed by former landless peasants (14.5% of whom belonged to one or other of the parties) and those with large holdings (where the corresponding figure was 12.5%), which is to say those settlers who, before arriving in the new lands, had occupied positions at opposite ends of the village social ladder. In comparison with the situation relating to those with medium-sized holdings (5 - 12 ha.) the index of party membership for the two outside groups was around as much as two times smaller. In addition, those formerly with large holdings (over 12 ha.), both repatriates and those resettled, did not join the PPR and PPS, membership of which was preferred in turn by the former agri-

cultural proletariat and semi-proletariat to participation in the peasant parties. For every 100 former owners of farms of over 12 ha. belonging to one of the four parties, there were 20 members of the PPR and PPS, for every 100 former landless peasants—55 members, for every 100 former owners of minor holdings—50 members, and for every 100 former owners of medium-sized holdings—42 such members.

The outside post-war settler groups in the western territories were also characterized by the greatest degree of political passivity. However, the weaker inclination of settlers possessing farms of over 15 ha. and up to 5 ha. to organize within political parties had different causes.

In consequence of the positive correlation between size of farm left and size of farm newly-acquired, which was discussed earlier, a considerable portion of those settlers possessing farms of over 15 ha. were farmers who formerly had large holdings, and it was these who, as I have already mentioned, refrained from joining parties—and especially the workers' parties—in the greatest degree. Moreover, in 1947 and especially 1948, from the end of which year the data are taken, the farmers with large holdings felt that they had suffered the most harm and were under the greatest threat in connection with stringent activity on the part of the administrative authorities (reductions in farm areas, increased tax rates, rigorous provisions for repayment of state loans and so on).

On the other hand, the restricted political activity of settlers with minor holdings, up to 5 ha., was doubtless caused by the fact that their situation was objectively worse, and to the farmers themselves appeared to represent either a modest advance (those resettled) or social demotion (some of the repatriates who had left larger farms behind them). Those with minor holdings were not usually satisfied with their own situation, which often failed to measure up to their lofty aspirations, and which was often set alongside the position of the remaining settler groups. Nonetheless, of considerable significance was the slightly different make-up of the minor-holdings group in terms of sex, education and age. The fact that farmers with minor holdings were excessively

weighed down by unproductive families—widows, children, old people—had a negative effect. The index of education had even greater significance.

Among the settlers with minor holdings there was a large proportion of the former agricultural proletariat and semi-proletariat. This in itself meant that their ranks included a disproportionately high number of illiterates and people of low cultural standing, for there was a strict correlation between social and cultural status: the greater the farm the settler had come from, the higher his educational credentials. Meanwhile a strict relationship arose between the indices of education and party membership. Together with higher educational levels, the index of party membership also rose, and vice versa. In comparison with the total number of farmers in a given community, settlers without education had around twice as less representation within the parties.

The particularly high degree of susceptibility to organization within political parties of the owners of larger farmsteads, and the specific structure within the western territories, brought about a situation whereby the farmers with medium-sized holdings held a decidedly dominant position within the peasant party organizations.

The fact that owners of larger farms were most prominent in organizing within the parties meant that the farmsteads of party farmers were among the better equipped. In relation to the situation of settlers' farms overall, the farms of PPR and PPS members received a greater average of farm implements (around 25%) and animals (around 12%). Although we do not possess totally reliable data, the farmsteads of party members were no less poor when compared with those of SL members either. And in this respect the situation was therefore rather unique. In comparison with the overall number of old farms within the former lands, partymember settlers also came off worse of course. But only in nationwide terms are we entitled to find that party-members were in a worse position. Whereas in the western territories themselves, the membership base of the party organizations was composed of farmers with medium-sized holdings and the relatively wealthy.

Concentrated in these organizations were the most resourceful and thrifty farmers.<sup>11</sup>

Let us repeat in conclusion that during our first post-war period, the political (party) preferences of the peasants took shape in accordance with farm origin and social differentiation as between their families. The new farmers, including the more wealthy among them (some of the settlers), were susceptible to the influence of the workers' parties. The same applied, to an even greater degree, to the families of the former agricultural labour force. There was no confirmation of the earlier fears of the Social Democrats that in a proletarian state, too, the distribution of land among the former agricultural labourers would result in the "rustification", political retardation, and going over to the side of counter-revolution.

(Translated by Phillip G. Smith)

<sup>11</sup> See in more detail H. Słabek, Polityka agrarna..., pp. 455-556.