

Chapter 7:

Rural Solidarity in Poland (1981-2)

1. The birth of the Farmers' Union

The political crisis which began in Poland in the summer of 1980 is without precedent in the communist world. The agreements signed by strike committees and government negotiators in the Baltic cities and in Silesia were unforeseen even by longstanding activists in the Polish opposition movement, and the new independent trade unions received statutory recognition a few months later in the autumn. However, from the very beginning the right of the country's individual farmers to form a union within the framework of 'Solidarity' was a highly contentious issue. The denial of formal recognition did not prevent a massive campaign for union affiliation from getting under way in the countryside. Because of their distinctive history in the socialist period, the present grievances of Polish peasants touch upon a number of revealing and very sensitive problems. By the spring of 1981 their protests were attracting more national attention than the actions of industrial workers or intellectual dissidents. The causes of this discontent lie in the social and economic policies to which the Polish peasantry has been subjected – the policies pursued in lieu of the Soviet pattern of collectivization that was imposed upon the rural population elsewhere in Eastern Europe.

In the execution of a land reform after the Second World War and in the first half of the 1950s during the early, Stalinist phase of the construction of socialism, Poland conformed faithfully enough to the general pattern. A substantial state farm sector was established and the formation of producers' cooperatives along the lines of the Soviet *kolkhoz* was encouraged by the authorities. Food supplies were regulated with the aid of 'compulsory deliveries', and the peasantry as a whole was the victim of a crude levelling process. A partial break with these policies came in 1956, when the cooperative movement virtually collapsed in the course of the political upheaval which brought Gomułka back to the leadership of the Communist Party. In Poland there has been no further attempt to accomplish mass collectivization by coercive means. The *kolkhoz* sector has survived, but it controls only three per cent of the agricultural area. The state farm sector is larger (about eighteen per cent of the sown area) but concentrated in particular regions, notably the territories regained by Poland from Germany after the war. More than three quarters of

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the sown area and the bulk of agricultural production remains under the direct control of more than three million individual farmers, and the total proportion of the Polish labour force employed in agriculture is not far short of thirty per cent. This is substantially higher than in most other socialist states. It seems plausible to suggest that slow exodus from agriculture and the inefficiency of production within that sector are among the prime causes of Poland's economic crisis.

The failure to implement collectivization along the orthodox lines does not imply that the basic tenets and trends of agricultural policy since 1956 have been favourable to the peasantry as a class or interest-group. On the contrary, as in those states where the political onslaught against the peasantry was carried through more completely, in Poland, too, it was always the countryside which was required to pay the costs of socialist industrialization. The fact that the farmer was eventually left in nominal ownership of his land served merely to ensure that the agricultural sector as a whole would be deprived of investment resources, for the private road to mechanization was not opened for many years. A 'price scissors' was put into operation, designed to discriminate against agricultural products. Moreover, industry has consistently failed to supply the inputs which have become essential on the modern farm (as an example: coal has been in very short supply in rural areas for some years past, in a country which is one of the major producers of coal in Europe).

Economic discrimination of this sort – the exploitation of the countryside and of the labour resources of the peasant family – is not always readily perceived as such by the farmer. He has, however, become increasingly sensitive to other forms of discrimination. There is dissatisfaction with the level of educational and cultural facilities in the village, and resentment at the difficulties which peasant children still experience in gaining access to higher education. The farmer grumbles, too, at his lower pension entitlements. Today he receives fewer coupons than the urban dweller, not only for meat but also for sugar as well. To enjoy a pension at all he may (in the absence of an heir) have to sign over his entire patrimony to the state. The farmer is also disturbed by powers invested in the local organs of the state administration which enable the bureaucrats to deprive a farmer of land which he 'owns' if, in their opinion, he is not utilizing his land in an appropriate manner. The individual farmer is indeed at the mercy of a veritable army of officials in every *gmina* in the country. In order to obtain machinery he usually has to turn to an agricultural circle. This institution was revived after 1956 as a self-governing association of farmers, but in the course of the 1970s it became increasingly bureaucratized and was effectively assimilated by the local government apparatus. Farmers

have also come to feel that they have little influence over the political party which is supposed to represent their interests: in practice the Peasants' Party functions largely at the behest of the Communist Party, even at the local level. Most farmers have long been convinced that the ultimate goal of the state is to 'socialize' the agricultural sector in its entirety (as an ultimate objective this is indeed the official ideology). They criticize the gross inefficiency of the socialist sector as it exists today, and they lament the millions of hectares of land which are falling out of cultivation because the socialist sector does not have the means to farm them; at the same time they understand the motives of their children, whose bleak assessment of the prospects for private agriculture encourages the more able to abandon the village.

Prior to 1980 it was widely assumed that the Polish peasantry would, however reluctantly, acquiesce in its own demise. Very active in the political history of the nation before the war, peasants had caused little trouble for the authorities in the socialist period. The 'Polish August' of 1980 was a workers' movement, much influenced by urban intellectuals, and it drew no immediate echo in the countryside. However peasant discontent, in Poland as in many other countries, has long found expression in a variety of passive ways. The most obvious and effective style of protest was the general reluctance to sell produce for low prices to the purchasing agencies of the state. In the late 1970s a number of small groups began to campaign in the cause of 'peasants' self-defence', along the same lines as the analogous workers' groups. They were able to coordinate localized strike activity with some success, but until 1980 their efforts were thwarted by the diversity and fragmented character of the peasantry they wished to defend. The launching of *Solidarity* gave these groups a tremendous boost, and within a short period the first moves were made to establish an independent union for individual farmers on a nationwide basis. The movement had several factions at this time, representing different sections of the peasantry, but *Rural Solidarity* was the name that caught on. It has enjoyed the full backing of the workers' leaders, including the personal support of Lech Wałęsa, and within a few months of its foundation it was able to claim over one million signed-up members.

Rural Solidarity met with an even more hostile reception in official quarters than the workers' movement proper. Union recognition was repeatedly denied by the courts, on the grounds that farmers were the 'directors' of their own peasant enterprises, and therefore not employees with the right to form unions, as defined by the International Labour Code. In dismissing these arguments as specious, leaders of the new movement pointed to the utter defencelessness of the farmer vis-à-vis a plethora of socialist enterprises and the local state

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administration, at every stage of his production cycle and in his marketing. Probably nobody on the government side seriously believed that the problem could be resolved by legal verdicts alone. By the time the issue reached the Supreme Court in February 1981, a winter of agitation had succeeded not only in politicizing the countryside but also in convincing a majority of urban Poles of the legitimacy of the farmers' demands. The verdict delivered on February 10th was generally perceived as a compromise: although formal recognition as a trade-union was once again denied, the path to registration under some other rubric was declared to be open. Even so, the disappointment caused by this verdict might have led to a serious crisis, but for the resignation of Prime Minister Pińkowski on the previous day and the subsequent formation of a new government by General Jaruzelski, the long-serving Minister of Defence.

Many observers found it difficult to understand the new government's continued refusal to give way on the issue of union recognition. It was explained by some in terms of the grave food shortages which the country was already experiencing: according to this argument, if peasant militancy were to become more organized and long-simmering strike activity more overt, the political consequences would be dramatic. However, by the early months of 1981 farmers were already taking up the strike weapon (including the tactic of hunger strikes in some instances) and exacting substantial concessions in so doing. These strikes were centred primarily in the southeastern counties of Poland (formerly belonging to the Galician province of the Austro-Hungarian Empire), where the countryside had long been very densely populated and hence the problems of the agrarian structure particularly acute. The most significant strikes began as spontaneous occupations of administrative buildings and of the old headquarters of the official and virtually defunct trade-unions in the small town of Ustrzyki Dolne and the industrial city of Rzeszów. After protracted and difficult negotiations a major agreement was signed in Rzeszów between the strike committee and a government commission (February 19th 1981). It resolved a large number of grievances, both economic and non-economic in character, and also contained the promise that on other outstanding issues the authorities would introduce reform proposals within a stipulated time. Some of the points agreed in supplementary talks at Ustrzyki Dolne were of purely local or regional significance (e.g. appropriation of land used by the communist élites as a hunting reserve) but the importance of the Rzeszów agreement was quickly grasped throughout the country. Although no details were published at the time by the national press, it became generally known that the authorities had modified their stance on key subjects, including land distribution and the eligibility of individual farmers and their families for

welfare benefits. These negotiations were reaching their decisive stage when the Supreme Court delivered its verdict of February 10th, and the Rzeszów agreement could not therefore bestow formal recognition upon *Rural Solidarity*. However, in coming to the negotiating table the authorities were conferring *de facto* recognition. For the farmers' movement this agreement was a moment of triumph, highlighting in front of the whole of society the need to guarantee individual farmers a stable framework in which to operate and a reasonable level of profitability. The agreement also contained a pledge concerning the inviolability of the private property of the farmer, a declaration of intent to build more churches, and concrete proposals to curtail the advantages gained in the 1970s by dynamic 'specialists' (often party members who enjoyed the favour of the local apparatus) at the expense of the mass of individual farmers.

The Rzeszów agreement became a charter for the farmers' movement, just as the agreements signed at Gdańsk and elsewhere had been for the workers. However, the failure to obtain legal recognition was the pretext for continued obstruction of the new organization at the grass roots and failure to implement the details of the agreement. Thus the atmosphere was still tense and uncertain when the first national conference of *Rural Solidarity* was held in Poznań at the beginning of March. Despite some official threats it was attended by elected delegates from almost every county of Poland. This conference achieved a great deal, although it was totally ignored by the official media. Previously the movement had been composed of three fractions, reflecting to some extent difference regional traditions and varying considerably in their political orientations. Unity was now attained under the title of '*Independent and self-governing trade union for individual farmers – Solidarity*'. However, *Rural Solidarity* has remained the most common designation in everyday speech.

No detailed programme emerged from this conference, but more important than the new name was the decision of the conference to settle for nothing less than full trade-union status. It was feared that combining in any other form of 'association' would leave the organization powerless to defend farmers' interests or even to preserve its own identity with any degree of security. The conference also elected a steering committee, composed of one delegate from each county plus the committee which had handled the original negotiations at Rzeszów, and a President, Jan Kułaj, who had distinguished himself in the long negotiations there. Throughout the conference security provisions were very strict, for all the leaders feared a provocation by the authorities. The spectacle and iconography inside the Poznań Opera House were fascinating. The stage was decked with slogans such as 'We alone are feeding the entire

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nation!'. There were plenty of flags, with the yellow of the Vatican almost as prominent as the red and white of Poland. *Górale* Highlanders, conspicuous in their colourful costumes, added a touch of populist authenticity. But the majority of delegates were earnest politicians, and their average age was surprisingly young (Kułaj himself is in his early twenties). Even the proponents of a more moderate political line argued with passion, whilst many clearly saw themselves as heirs to the traditions of the peasant parties which played much an important role in Polish politics before 1948. The first item on the delegates' agenda in Poznań was attendance at Sunday mass, and throughout the later proceedings an imperturbable figure holding a large crucifix stood behind the speakers' rostrum.

This conference brought no immediate change in the strategy of the government. Perhaps it was hoped that the beginning of the 1981 agricultural season would lead to a drop in the tension. No doubt it was intended that the spring congress of the Agricultural Circles would strengthen the claims of that organization to be the legitimate representative of peasant interests. For the authorities a complex hierarchy of alliances was at stake, including other nominally self-governing rural institutions and the Peasants' Party. (The government had been assiduous in strengthening links with the latter after August 1980, but outside the upper leadership of this party it was plain that many of its members were sympathetic to the demands for a free farmers' union.) Over and above the basic ideological problem - what is the place of individual peasant farmers in the socialist polity? - the authorities must have feared that there were political dangers in granting to the peasantry what had already been conceded to factory workers. Yet, after the strikes of early 1981 they seemed to have no other option. According to an opinion poll carried out amongst farmers in the closing months of 1980 by an Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences (provisional results published in *Polityka*, 7th March 1981), more than eighty-two per cent of farmers believed there was a need for an independent union to represent their interests, and a large majority was of the opinion that the Agricultural Circles were too discredited to perform this task effectively.

Despite these signs, in the middle of March the government of General Jaruzelski was convinced that implementation of the principles agreed at Rzeszów, and particularly of the provisions concerning the profitability of individual farming, would be enough to curb the irresistible spread of the 'illegal' union. The General won a wide measure of respect when he declared the priority of agriculture to be one of the main features of his programme. The state of the economy frustrated the realization of his slogan 'Everything for

Agriculture', but the large increases in the buying prices of agricultural products introduced from April 1st were well received. Farmers had no wish to set up a new organization if there were no substantial tasks awaiting it, and it is possible that full satisfaction of the economic grievances of the peasantry might have forestalled the political treat posed by the new movement.

However, the shift in the emphasis of government strategy came too late. Full recognition of the new union was conferred in the wake of the national crisis provoked at Bydgoszcz on March 19th, when police clashed with *Solidarity* leaders. This incident was indirectly brought about by the action of militant farmers, who had occupied the local headquarters of the Peasants' Party. When the workers' movement had invoked the threat of a general strike, the issue of recognition for *Rural Solidarity* was once again the most contentious subject in emergency negotiations with the government. It was provisionally agreed that the authorities would cease all interference in the development of the farmers' union. In April a negotiating team went to Bydgoszcz, and on Good Friday an agreement was signed. In the middle of May registration of the trade-union for individual farmers was formally approved by the courts, and the long saga was over. In the following months the political temperature in the countryside dropped, though factional differences within the union re-emerged from time to time. The leadership of the Peasants' Party was shaken up, and relations with the Agricultural Circles were placed on a new footing, with leaders of the new union showing moderation and a willingness to compromise. Jan Kułaj was emerging as a charismatic leader of the calibre of Wałęsa, though the media continued to pay much less attention to the peasants' wing of *Solidarity* than to the workers' union.

The difficult birth of the union for individual farmers offers a good illustration of the intractability of the Polish authorities, and of the obstacles which *Solidarity* as a whole had to face, despite the official rhetoric of political renewal at all levels. It has also been instructive in demonstrating that the authorities can no longer rely on factionalism within the peasantry or on the passivity of the countryside as in earlier decades; nor can they hope to exploit potential conflicts of interest between workers and peasants. Socialist industrialization has indeed engendered a persistent antagonism between town and country, but within the framework of *Solidarity* workers and peasants shared an identity of interest in 1980-1. The consequences of the Polish model of industrialization and urbanization, in terms not only of the inefficiency of the agricultural sector, but also of the extent of urban overcrowding, long-distance commuting, shortages of consumer goods etc, have proved in many respects more unfortunate than the results of the blunter instrument of

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collectivization. Successful variants of collectivization, notably the Hungarian, have allowed a healthy agricultural sector to develop alongside industry. In Poland the authorities have preferred to continue relying on the self-exploitation of the peasantry, whilst greatly constraining the independence of the farmer, starving him of investment goods, and offering him neither support nor security in the longer term. This was the consistent trend of agricultural policy for twenty-five years, and considerations of economic rationality alone were never sufficient to induce changes. The present political momentum of the *Solidarity* movement raises the prospect that the Polish peasantry will not only escape insidious demise, but through evolving into a prosperous class of individual farmers will again become the basis of a healthy and prosperous agricultural sector.

2. A rural angle on the crisis

Wisłok is a small village in the Beskid Hills, an attractive and relatively low-lying section of the Carpathian chain. It falls in the southeastern corner of contemporary Poland, close to the Czechoslovak border and about three hundred miles from the capital Warsaw. Prior to socialism Wisłok was a large community with more than four thousand inhabitants. Apart from a handful of families of Jewish or Polish extraction, these original inhabitants belonged to the Lemko ethnic group. They spoke a language closely related to Ukrainian, and they belonged to the Uniate (Greek Catholic) church. Polish ethnographers have argued that the Lemkos emerged as an 'ethnographical group' as a result of complex migration processes in past centuries, that they were always devoid of national self-consciousness, and that they have absorbed at least as much from Polish culture as from Ukrainian. However population transfers between Poland and the USSR in the wake of the Second World War together with the activities of the Ukrainian underground army resulted in the mass evacuation of the Lemkos from their mountain homes. Many were transported to the USSR in 1944-45. Later those still resident in 1947 were forcibly resettled on the former German territories of the new Polish state. Since the end of the 1950s, a number of Lemkos have succeeded in returning to their old villages, with the tacit consent of the Polish authorities. There are eight such families in Wisłok today, plus a similar number of mixed Polish-Lemko households. The remaining forty or so households are immigrants of Polish ethnicity, for the most part former manorial farmworkers or landless peasants. The task of constructing a new community in Wisłok has proved difficult; the population figure has been stable at just over the three hundred mark for the last two



Map 3. Wisłok: General Location

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decades, but onward emigration has always been high and living standards remain significantly below the – far from exalted – standards that presently prevail in other areas of the Polish countryside.

The village economy was and remains predominantly agricultural. Land was distributed to the new settlers after 1947 in parcels of about six hectares – larger than the typical pre-war farm, but completely inadequate for commercial levels of output in the mountain environment. Hence, as in pre-war years, peasant farming has been supplemented by wage-labour employment off the farm. Opportunities are available nowadays in the socialist sector, thanks to the establishment of regional forestry commissions, state farms, and a large wood-processing plant within daily commuting range. There is a general shortage of labour in the socialist sector, and the needs of the state farms are met in large part by prisoners. Individual farmers are in general very poorly equipped technically (in the whole village there are presently only three privately-owned tractors). They are likewise poorly served by their local agricultural circle, which maintains a machinery depot in a neighbouring village seven miles away. The quantity and quality of the supplies available at the village shop, also controlled from the neighbouring village, are very poor and unreliable. The upshot of all this has been that many farmers have sold only a small proportion of their annual produce in commodity form to the state.

The impact of the crisis which began in August 1980 upon agriculture has been significant. In some respects the effect has been rather to speed up a process of rationalization which has been under way for almost a decade. The Wistok farmers have been encouraged to expand their farms, and several plots owned by the socialist sector (state farm or agricultural circle) and not cultivated in recent years have been sold off to the private sector with a minimum of fuss. The government has acknowledged that the poor results of Polish agriculture are attributable primarily to a complete neglect of the investment needs of this sector, and has assigned priority to the task of improving the supply of the goods and services demanded by individual farmers. Even more important in the short term was the implementation of substantial increases in the official buying prices for agricultural products in spring, 1981. These increases have already brought a response in Wistok: larger quantities of all products will be taken to market this year than last, and more young persons will reconsider a future on the parental farm.

The present crisis has also prompted major changes in the socialist sector of agriculture. A plan has been drawn up to decentralize decision-making

powers from ministerial and county authorities to the state farm units themselves, and to abolish the system of subsidies on which such farms have depended heavily in the past. These reforms are approved of enthusiastically by the individual farmers of the village, but the state farm administrators have little idea how they will cope as independent self-accounting entities. They point out that pure economic principles should not be applied to them when the requisite skilled labour force is entirely missing. They are waiting to see what changes the long-promised reform of the economic mechanism will bring in other sectors of the economy.

State farm officials are not the only personnel in the local bureaucracy suffering from a sense of uncertainty and anxiety. The same is true in local cooperatives and in the organs of local government. For example, in the case of the agricultural circles there has been a campaign to restore democratic principles. Many Wisłok farmers believe this to be a precondition for an improvement in the efficiency of the circle. They are also keen to have a machinery depot re-established in Wisłok, under local control. At a meeting in spring 1981 a formal warning was issued to the leaders of the circle in the neighbouring village: unless the standard of services improves significantly in the present agricultural season, this autumn will see a mass withdrawal of the Wisłok members and the creation by them of a new organization.

Perhaps the most significant development at the grass roots over the last year has been the willingness of the authorities to listen to the demands of the population, usually articulated at 'village meetings' called and to some extent managed by the officials themselves. In Wisłok and elsewhere this forum has upstaged the formal structure of representative local councils. The local Communist Party organization has also endeavoured to respond to the call for 'political renewal', admitting a plethora of mistakes in the 1970s and endorsing a genuine reformist platform in the run up to the special congress convened for July 1981. There has been no sudden large turnover of party members: it is not so much that the local apparatus has been transformed, but that the same set of officials is adopting a new profile in its dealings with the population.

To some extent these changes have been influenced by the emergence of *Rural Solidarity*, the trade-union for individual farmers which obtained formal recognition in May 1981 (see preceding section). There is an active group in the neighbouring village, but it does not have many signed-up members. This may be because the activists do not command much personal esteem, in some cases because they are or have been members of the communist party.

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Attempts to found a group in Wisłok itself have so far proved unsuccessful: despite encouragement from the pulpit the only farmers who showed up at the inaugural meeting were the local party members (3 persons in all).

Peasant reluctance here to support new political groupings seems to be deep-seated. The majority is very sympathetic to the aims of *Rural Solidarity* but equally convinced that union militancy has no place in the village. People say that the strikes organized by the workers' movement have done irreparable damage to the country. There is even resentment at some of the gains which the workers have won. For example, the relaxation of Saturday working hours also covers the civilian employees of the state farms, but it has no bearing on the hours worked by private farmers. Media coverage of political events over the last year has contributed to this rather jaundiced view of the workers' struggle. At the same time many villagers have quite a sophisticated understanding of the deep causes of the crisis; they do not blame the personal excesses of Edward Gierk and the top party leadership so much as the follies of economic policy, and above all discrimination against private agriculture. The definitive reversal of these policies would go a very long way towards satisfying their grievances.

The everyday manifestations of the national economic crisis in shops can also be observed in the village. Yet the introduction of rationing for a wide range of basic products has actually improved the relative standing of the rural population vis-à-vis the cities. Rationing is nothing new in Poland. Sugar has been officially rationed for many years, and rural families have always complained that they were given a smaller allowance than city families. In the countryside distribution was commonly resolved informally. Shortages were experienced for almost all products, ranging from essential fuels to foodstuffs, newspapers and magazines. The present crisis is deeper than anything experienced hitherto—men became convinced of this in 1981 when both vodka and cigarettes were unavailable for long periods. But family consumption of goods acquired in the regular state shops has risen in Wisłok as a result of the ration coupons. Even now supplies are insufficient to allow everybody to use their coupons in full, but for the first time in years sausage and butter are regularly available in the local shop, at very low, subsidized prices. Flour, fat and other basics appear from time to time, and the village children have had more chocolate this Easter than ever before (chocolate is available to those possessing sugar coupons). Townspeople may indeed grumble that their standard of living has declined in the last year, but the levelling effects of a rationing system have accomplished a substantial redistribution of goods (and state subsidies) toward rural dwellers.

I have been talking of the village as if it were a homogeneous mass. Of course it is no such thing, and the problems of the individual farmers are quite different from those of the forestry workers or the daily commuters. It is especially interesting in ethnically differentiated Wisłok to listen to the more critical and cynical attitudes of the Lemko (Ukrainian) minority. 'This is what Polish economic management leads to', they often say (sometimes availing themselves sarcastically of the German phrase *polonische Wirtschaft*). Some of them see *Solidarity* as a movement of Polish national assertion, in close alliance with the Roman Catholic church. They do not wish to see it succeed because their own position, as non-Poles and non-Roman Catholics, is better protected under the present régime of weak socialist government. Generally more sympathetic to Germans than to Poles, some seem to believe that a further weakening of the Polish state might lead to a German intervention to restore order, and they would expect favourable treatment and some form of special recognition in such circumstances. (These statements are made by individuals old enough to recall a similar pattern of events during the Second World War.)

The unifying standpoint of the Polish population of Wisłok is that put forward by the Roman Catholic church. When the priest speaks from the pulpit he seldom refers explicitly to political organizations or to current political events. His sympathy for *Solidarity* does sometimes come through, but only in specific contexts - such as the occasion when union members at the local timber factory donated their Saturday pay packets to a fund to construct a new church. Otherwise, he contents himself with proclaiming that the national renewal must be first and foremost a moral and a spiritual one, and that the Catholic church has the best historical qualifications to lead the Polish nation out of the present difficulties. Citation of proven instances of corruption and moral scandal ('dozens of Polish virgins consigned to a life of prostitution in Italy' etc.) is preferred as a strategy to a frontal attack on the secular authorities. Many farmers agree that the decline of the national economy is somehow linked to the degradation of the traditional system of values, and also of labour discipline *within* the peasant family. Some industrious and successful farmers actually welcome the media publicity given to queues and empty shelves, hoping that this will lead people to recognize the priority of food production and cure them of the dangerous prodigality of modern times. (It seems to me that these peasant opinions have something in common with the puritanism of at least some elements in the Communist Party, but there is no mutual recognition.) The church's pleas for moral renewal seem to have fallen on deaf ears in the cities: discipline in the urban queues is often poor, and in some areas public order has been jeopardized by a series of alarming incidents. The

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villagers of Wisłok are well informed of this trend. They condemn it and distance themselves from it. They hope that the settlement of their own economic grievances will prove durable, but they have no far-reaching political ambitions and no taste for organized militancy. The deepest chord is struck by the moderate voice of their priest, whose conservative call for moral retrenchment is based on 'traditional Christian values', coupled with a strong infusion of Polish national sentiment.

3. Epilogue, 1982

Since writing the above accounts last year there have been a few changes in Poland and a little 'updating' is called for. I was in Poland until the second half of September, and there was no further sign of political unrest in the countryside. There were, however, continuing frustrations with supply problems, particularly concerning winter fuel. All the major clashes of the autumn involved workers only. But to those who would argue that *Solidarity* was exclusively a workers' movement and that the farmers were never perceived as a serious political threat, the only answer can be to point out how hard the authorities fought to prevent the emergence of the rural movement, and how promptly they moved to snuff it out when martial law was declared in December 1981. All of the nationally known leaders were interned and as far as I know many are still in the camps. While it seems at the moment that the government plans to allow independent workers' unions to continue in some attenuated form, there is no word about the future of *Rural Solidarity*. It was reported in February that farmers would in future only be allowed to form associations of agricultural producers, the same half-measure which provoked such militancy in the spring of last year. This objection to the idea that farmers should have an independent union to represent their interests is as hard to understand now as it was then.

At the same time, draft laws have been submitted to the Sejm which appear to offer some of the substantive concessions the farmers were seeking. Thus, their ownership rights are to be reaffirmed, and they are to be allowed to expand the size of individual farms up to 250 hectares, to enable them to run 'economically strong and productive farms'. This is reminiscent of the line developed by Gierek's team in the 1970s, designed to encourage differentiation within the peasantry and to increase the farmers' dependency upon units of the local administration. It was precisely this trend that ensured support for *Rural Solidarity* from the less privileged and less well protected sections of the peasantry. All farmers will welcome confirmation of the security of their

ownership, but it was plain last year that a powerful current within the rural movement wishes to resist the emphasis on economic rationalization. In doing so, it is even prepared to draw on socialist rhetoric dating back to Lenin's analysis of the Russian peasantry at the turn of the century concerning the dangers of increased economic differentiation.

In short, there are basic contradictions in government policies which are still nowhere near to being resolved. It is hard to miss the irony of a socialist government's trying to make small farms more efficient by ever greater reliance upon the principles of private property and capital accumulation. Obviously, the deficiencies of agriculture have had serious consequences for the productive system as a whole; but the importance of this element of private property in the social relations of production in Poland is much less clear. Nobody denies that the sentimental attachments of the farmer to his land are very strong, strong enough to make it unthinkable for any Polish régime since 1956 to contemplate mass collectivization. But does this 'ownership' of property make the class positions of the Polish peasant fundamentally different from, say, that of the cooperative farmer in Hungary? Does it make Poland *less* of a socialist society than Hungary, when Hungary has the market incentives which Poland lacks, but substantially less private property? Perhaps the private ownership of land is not really very important when it is so difficult to obtain, difficult even to hire, the other means of production needed to work the land, and when the controls exercised by the state apparatus seriously qualify those ownership rights in so many ways.

It seems to me that, despite the failure to collectivize, the relations of production in rural Poland have been effectively socialist for a long time now. It is the socialized sector of agriculture which has been supported by the authorities. It still farms less than a quarter of the land surface, but it owns more than half of the stock of machinery and is responsible for almost seventy per cent of investment outlays. These figures will have to change if discrimination against the private sector is to cease, but probably no one in Poland really expects the authorities to commit themselves to 'the capitalist road'. Let me conclude with one more statistical indicator that must change: it was reported in *Trybuna Ludu* (the main party daily) last year that in Czechoslovakia and East Germany the proportion of industry's aggregate product going to meet the needs of agriculture is twelve per cent. This percentage is probably much higher again in Hungary. For Poland the figure was four per cent. This is the most tragic consequence of the failure to collectivize in Poland – it has meant discrimination not only against the mass of peasant producers, but discrimination

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against the agricultural sector as a whole. This is why the country's food supply is in the state it is in. General Jaruzelski has promised that both kinds of discrimination will cease: until they do, I think it will be very difficult for him to forget about *Rural Solidarity*.