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## THE PEASANT VILLAGE IN POLAND

## - SOME REMARKS ON BACKWARDNESS

## AND OBSTACLES OF DEVELOPMENT

The issues concerning the village and agriculture have for the consecutive time emerged as one of the fundamental problems of our country, now so sharply brought to the attention of the authorities and the society by the present crisis. The fact that the immediate antecedent of the events and a direct cause of the workers' intervention was the situation on the food market, next to the distortions in the exercise of power, is indeed deeply significant. It brought bitter satisfaction to the Polish farmers, especially the peasants who had long been aware of the faulty agriculture policy, of the disastrous consequences of a retardation in the development of the village and agriculture. In our conditions the retardation is of a twofold character.

Firstly - as in probably all the countries of the world - we, too, have to cope with a historic backwardness of the village and agriculture as compared to the city and industry. The associated with capitalism progress - often at the expense of agriculture - for many decades encompassed almost solely, and later mainly the industry and non-agricultural areas of the economy as well as the urban environment. This becomes obvious independent of how one defines the notion development or progress and what spheres of human activities one takes into consideration: technology, management of labour and economy, the social sphere, education, and culture.

The depth of the phenomena of village retardation and its historic duration the generation of many false myths and harmful stereotypes - not only in the common consciousness, but also in

various ideological and political doctrines, and even in the domain of science. Some of the older ones idealized the traditional village "peaceful and happy", as if free from all social evil and abnormality, which did exist in the cities of primary industrialization. According to other myths, those that appeared later and which still function today the opposite is true - agriculture and the village as out of their own nature are doomed to a fate of constant backwardness, and the peasant economy may at the utmost vegetate on the outskirts of modern society. This last stereotype is as if substantiated by some natural and technical features of the village milieu. The modernity, initiative and rationalism of the city, entrepreneur, and worker were contrasted with the supposedly innate traditionalism, conservatism, and backwardness of the village, the land-owner, the peasant. In opposition to the process of mechanization, automatization, and robotization in industry, the creative contribution of the engineer and scientist stands the supposed constant primitivism, and low productivity of all agricultural labour treated only as mere reaping of crops. The shimmer of urban civilization and culture is so great that its superiority to the boredom, greyness, crudeness, and almost idiotism of a village existence is beyond any discussion.

These statements are, of course, exaggerated on purpose, although such an ideology of industrialization and urbanization became popular in our own country as well, and not only in the sphere of management. It gained support from the abiding model of socialism in which in perspective there was no room for the peasant and peasant family farming, and for the specificity of the village milieu.

One does not need to stress that the stereotypes are not only false, but also harmful. The effective historical developmental retardation of agriculture and village possesses its own rational causes, and its comprehension allows one to treat them as historically transitional. They are connected with such natural and organizational demands of the agricultural production which in the earlier period of industrial development were in technical and economical terms impossible to realize. They also deal with the complexity and tardiness of a biological progress which is, after all the basis of agricultural development. Finally, they

lie in the sphere of not the inferiority but distinctness of the rural social world.

In order to create a chance of development for the village and agriculture, it is of essential significance for the authorities and the whole society to reject stereotypes of a chronic retardation of the village - stereotypes which as a consequence lead to the consignment of the village to the margins of the industrialized, urbanized society, to its own doomed fate. It is essential and now feasible like in many other countries to start a new stage in which the developed industry and city serve actively the development of agriculture and village, after all, in agreement with their own interests.

And here we reach the second level or dimension of backwardness of our village and agriculture. For still - regardless of the many important achievements we did not decidedly assume that indispensable turn to the process of village modernization, acceleration, qualitative changes. It seems that its developmental retardation seems to be relatively greater in our country than it could and should follow from the level achieved by industry and cities, by the entire economy, civilization and culture.

All this came about as a result of many causes among which the stereotype discussed above played an essential role. It functioned as a concept of diminishing the role of agriculture and village in the economy and society, a concept of a one-way assimilation as a way of extinguishing the differences. The juxtaposition of the modern steel plant or car factory with a peasant farm of several hectares paralyzed the rational thinking of those who were to decide, and destructed the aspirations of young people.

And yet that supposedly primitive peasant was hardly tolerated ideologically, and he well knew that nobody could credibly guarantee him the right to remain a peasant, to be able to make his own choice within the socialist perspective of the society. Just to the contrary - a constantly changing agricultural policy, the daily harrassment of the beaurocracy, a multitude of disparities, and an aggravating propaganda added strength to his growing conviction of an insecurity and helplessness. In spite of a radical improvement of the peasant's objective conditions of living when compared with the past, paradoxically,

the peasant developed a conviction of the inferiority of his own life in comparison to that of the intellectual, the white-collar worker, the factory worker.

The discussed above twofold retardation of our entire agriculture concerns especially family economy and peasants. Since the retardation is conditioned by the consciousness - especially in its second dimension - then a change of reality requires an earlier change in the way of thinking about this reality - in the city and in the village, in the industry and in agriculture. A time of crisis favours a sharper perception of problems, it favours through discussion and polemics a reorientation of the public opinion and verification of ideological and political doctrines, and thus changes in the social and economical practice. Let us turn our attention to chosen issues relevant in terms of the village and agriculture, especially peasant farming.

1. The stereotype of the second-rate of peripheral position and role of the village in the economy, policy, national culture, etc.

First one needs to repeat that the factual multifold retardation of the village and agriculture does not diminish, but to the contrary it clearly visualizes their fundamental significance, its necessity in contemporary society. The ability of surmounting the retardation the crucial progress in food production, and as a result also the social and cultural progress of the village - all these are an obvious necessity in the overall development of the society. This requires the application of all of the achievements of civilization, the participation of all the other non-agricultural sections of economy connected with mechanization, chemical and biological progress, agricultural professionalism. It also requires a constant social and economical reorganization of agricultural production and modernization of the rural environment.

2. The stereotype of absolute superiority  
- economical or ideological -  
of these or other organizational forms in agriculture

It is extremely advantageous that there exists a conviction about the unity of our agriculture, the equality of rights of all sectors, the rightfulness of a division into economically better-off and worse-off farms, and not into peasant, cooperative, and state-owned farms. And specifically practice has shown that, contrary to expectations, peasant farms in spite of difficult conditions, did not succumb to liquidation, but relatively strengthened their position not only in Poland. They display a capability of further technical and economical progress, and a possibility of adapting also in the socialist system (a blockade of tendencies of capitalization, a receptivity to planned economic steering, cooperation between sectors).

The family farm as a form of property and organizing production excluding in our conditions exploitation and realizing the principle of a distribution according to work - what was noted by Marks about so called parcel peasant - has the right to be considered a permanent element of the socialist economy. Permanent means possessing not as much conditions for existence, but rather chances of development in the economic competition. This conviction was expressed by the so-called peasant record in the Constitution and to a great extent the present agricultural policy.

The point is, though, that the authorities should not treat this circumstantially as an extorted and temporary compromise but as a truly offensive developmental strategy. It is also equally essential that the peasants do not see it as a freeze of the existing state of affairs, as a non-conditional guarantee for each individual farm. It would, for example, have been disastrous or even impossible to maintain prices which would have been profitable for the worst farmer. It deals then with lack of discrimination, an equality of changes, which does not exclude but rather assumes the existence of competition changes of the agrarian structure, etc, also in the sphere of the peasant economy itself.

The necessity of the progression of a broadly understood process of socialization in agriculture and in the life of the village is obvious. Socialization does not signify collectivization or nationalization, but an increase of social work distribution and cooperation between agriculture and both industry and service trade, cooperation between sectors, development of the social-cultural infrastructure of the village, development of the self-governing body, and participation of the peasants in matters of the nation and state.

On the other hand, one needs to add that the reality of the last years has totally negated the hopes of the adversaries to the presence of the socialized sector in our agriculture. Large state-owned farms and cooperatives in conditions of implanting the economical reform - that is in conditions of increased independence and self-financing - display an improvement of economic results and a productive vitality. In the agrarian structure of all countries - for production, economic and social reasons - the appropriate participation of small, medium and large farms is necessary. The large farms fulfill indispensable, characteristic functions: the realization of some kind of production, stabilization of the food market, the implantation of technical and biological progress, employment of individuals incapable of independent farm-work, etc. It is important that while they are enabled to fulfill these specific functions, they should not be at the same time treated especially from an ideological point of view as a model for generalizing for the future of the village and agriculture. It becomes at the same time obvious that in the conditions of a socialist system those large farms cannot become capitalist concerns. It is also only natural - though, of course, highly undesirable - that they vary from good to bad - a phenomenon which also appears in individual farming.

### 3. The stereotype of "clear" rationality, total steerability and non-conflict mechanisms of development

How delusive, and how harmful is the common conviction that the developmental processes can or should proceed automatically,

as if put into action by the rational or "rightful" regulations and planistic decisions, resulting automatically from an abstract wisdom and all-power of authority, or the democratically attained "will of majority". The commonness of such utopian assessment of the social reality is not, of course, an accidental "stupidity" of the mass or their leaders. It results from an enormous development of comprehensive and technical possibilities of the contemporary society which extrapolates in an unauthorized manner into the sphere of strictly social implanted actions. In our system there still exists a false way of comprehending the way of achieving socialism as a way of simple application of a ready theory of scientific socialism and a widely applied form of propagating this kind of superiority of socialism over capitalism. Meanwhile, real phenomena and processes are engaged in determined discrepancies of aspirations and interests of different groups and fractions of society, often even comprehended falsely and shortsightedly, what became so sharply seen in the relations between city and village in the last years, as well as in the village itself.

On the other hand beurocracy, on the other a certain part of the working class feel interested in "ruling" over the peasant, in exploiting him to final limits, in blocking from him possibilities of achieving wealth even through hard and wise labour, although in the long run it might lead to the next food crisis. The desired direction of the development of agriculture and village enters then into a sphere of discrepancies with any beaurocratization and with too equalitarian tendencies, present after all in the village and among the peasants themselves

The problem though is significantly deeper: a miner working on free from work Saturdays finds no reasons for envying the farmer his wealth, but such reasons seem to be present for the worker, clerk or engineer who is deprived by a system of governing and managing means of production by poor management. the organization or technology of production - of the possibility of maximalizing the quantity and quality of his efforts and of achieving pay corresponding to these efforts. This points to the fact that the success of the economical reform which would give to possibly everyone the till now peasant privilege of increasing income through an increased amount of work, in this sense decides about

the future of the village, constructing an objective community of interests and rules of behaviour as a basis for an effective peasant - worker alliance.

At this point the activity of the village itself and the peasant is the greater necessity - not only at the level of local self-government and through the activities of social and labour organizations. The truly indispensable activity is first of all the authentic political representation of the village and peasant class - such a peasant party which does not possess the formal power of constructing the state system and frontal to institutions of cooperation, but possesses its own social and political forces, can become an effective partner for the working class in the so-called coalition system of exercising power. This must be comprehended by the farmers themselves, and the present liveliness and strengthening of the United Peasant Party arouses some hope. Its programme sets the task of struggling for not only the economic, social and cultural parity of the village, but a political one as well. It calls on the traditional social and political ideas of the peasant movement, and on the certain elements of agrarism and populism.

Meanwhile, it is generally known that multiple pro-agricultural decisions and more general resolutions lose their power of enactment at the central and local levels. As an example the accepted as a principle income parity has been in the last few years seriously infringed. Similarly the participation of agriculture in the investment fund is definitely lower than the one formally agreed upon at the highest level. Thus these are not issues of an ill or good will of the authorities, their mistakes or wisdom, but live spontaneous social processes, collisions of class and group interests. Besides the system of guidance in the socialist system is highly inefficient.

#### 4. The stereotype of inner harmony and consistence of the peasant economy

The future of the village and agriculture is conditioned not only through its relations to other sections of the economy and fractions of the society. Specific discrepancies, restraints and



dangers of development are contained within them as well. There also exist deep differentiations between sectors, inner and regional differentiations. But setting the technical and economic problems aside and limiting oneself only to peasant farming, we should turn our attention to its inner discrepancies, to the strictly social accomplishments and to its defects.

The family manufacturing plant constitutes, especially in agriculture, a socially and psychologically attractive form. One needs only to point to the high degree of self-dependence, the resilience of activities, the specific combination of management and labour, physical and intellectual work, the values of the family as of a production group, an economically and culturally motivated discipline and self-control.

But the single fundamental defect of the peasant farm is the system of family self-exploitation, constraint for the sake of continuous work, and constant readiness for work. This comes as a result of both demands of natural environment and a family organization of production. Beside certain forms of farming and rather introductory experiments in organizational innovations - in the normal farm the family is practically irreplaceable and almost completely subservient to the needs of the farm. Progress in technology and agricultural cultivation on one hand allays, and on the other literally increases the subserviency.

This situation excludes the urban notion of free time, or in other words the possibility of a systematic and prolonged period of time free from work. This blocks or significantly limits the chance of realizing certain important and more and more often desired forms of consuming the effects of work, such as vacation leave, health, tourism or culture. Besides, the identification of individual and family bonds - in the perspective of each day and whole life - paralyzes tendencies to individualization and non-materialization of social relationships.

The negative selection for the profession, the migration of women, lack of successors are all results of certain conditions and cannot be considered only as the protest against cultural and civilizational retardation of the village and a captivation by urban myths.

All this allows us to believe that one cannot a priori fore-judge the as if everlasting durability of peasant farming. The

family peasant farm does not have to constitute the only or even main form of future for Polish agriculture. But what counts is that the peasants themselves should possess a true possibility of a choice and equality of chances, and it should be a choice out of a range of possibilities.

Summing up, I enclose a few remarks about the chances of survival for the peasant village - with such a perspective in time which is relevant to the presently farming generation. And thus in today's contemporary world of polarized ideologies and political and social systems there exists a surprising consensus of opinion in apprehending and treating peasants. Both the liberal doctrines (and corresponding practice of developed capitalistic countries) as well as the ideology and theory of orthodox Marxism (and the resulting policies of the socialist countries) recognise peasantry - quoting G Plekhanov - as "non-existent, historically speaking". This "ideology of depeasantation" is brought down to the following "article of faith": "In one way or another, the peasants ultimately will have to be sacrificed upon the altars of industrialization to the thirsty gods of modernity and progress. The question is only how kindly or how cruelly the sacrifice is to be made". This coincidence of conclusions does not mean the commonness of premises. Quite to the contrary - in the liberal doctrine peasants are irrational, uneconomical and primitive relic of the past, and their disappearance is both the condition and the result of the complete modernization of the society; in the socialist doctrine they are the potential seed of capitalism, and thus their liquidation (demise) constitutes the indispensable element of the construction of socialism.

Therefore the survival of Polish peasantry is endangered from several directions and by several factors. From outside - by the modernizational processes and their ideological implications (it was never an accident that the peasant village revived in the times of crisis and directly after crises). From inside - by decaying capability of a peasant family to self-exploitation in peculiar to it regime of overwork and underconsumption. These are deep dangers, reaching far beyond the social consciousness. The attempt to contemplate the chances to resist these dangers constitutes the central task of the rural social theory. It is a difficult question, but certain points seem to be evident here.

Firstly, the survival of at least certain elements of peasantry cannot be done on the basis of staying out from the above problems; to the contrary - it requires changes and development of the peasant village, its complex modernization carried on in a political cooperation between the state and peasants themselves. Secondly - even the progressing decay of peasantry in the conditions of socialist system does not have to mean the transmutation of peasants into state-owned or cooperative farm workers; to the contrary, the nonpeasant but still family farming integrated vertically in the system of socialist food economy is already possible. Thirdly - the decline of the peasant village would not necessarily bury all its specific values - to the contrary, everything valuable in peasant's farming, social relations and culture can and should be maintained. Thus the Polish rural social theory ought to think on a peasant-oriented basis. This is its basic intellectual challenge as well as an elementary social duty.

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WIEŚ CHŁOPSKA W POLSCE - NIEKTÓRE UWAGI O ZACOFANIU  
I WARUNKACH ROZWOJU

Zacofanie wsi i rolnictwa w stosunku do miasta i przemysłu jest źródłem fałszywych mitów i stereotypów. Nowoczesności i atrakcyjności miasta przeciwstawia się tradycjonalizm, konserwatyzm i ciemnotę wsi i jej mieszkańców. Szkodliwe dla rzeczywistego postępu i właściwej oceny miejsca i roli wsi w makrostrukturze stereotypy dotyczą m. in.:

- 1) drugorzędności czy peryferyjności wsi i rolnictwa w gospodarce, polityce, kulturze narodowej itp.,
- 2) bezwzględności wyższości ekonomicznej czy ideologicznej innych form organizacyjnych w rolnictwie a niżeli indywidualne rodzinne gospodarstwo chłopskie,
- 3) "czystej" racjonalności, pełnej sterowności i bezkonflikto-wości mechanizmów rozwoju,
- 4) wewnętrznej harmonii i spójności gospodarki chłopskiej.

Przetrwanie polskiego chłopstwa zagrożone jest z wielu stron i przez wiele czynników. Wymaga ono zmian i wielostronnej modernizacji wsi chłopskiej realizowanej we współdziałaniu polityki państwa i samych chłopów. Zmierzch tradycyjnej wsi chłopskiej nie oznacza pogrzebania wszystkich właściwych jej wartości, ponieważ można i należy utrzymać to, co było cenne w chłopskim gospodarowaniu, współżyciu społecznym i kulturze.