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Polish Peasants — between “Real Socialism” and “Real Capitalism”

Discussions on the role and position of peasants in the process of transformation of the system abound in most hypotheses. However, they all adopt the same factor as a starting point: the unique character of this group, ensuing from its specific position in the former state-socialist structure of Polish society. First of all, farmers were the only numerous social group to own private property. The work ethos was closer to them than to others. Their traditional system of values protected them, as if naturally, against the effects of excessively oppressive indoctrination by the system. Those were undoubtedly the attributes of their (relative) political and economic independence.

Secondly, farmers also ranked among the permanent clients of the socialist state which accounted for the fact that the property owned by them did not in the least make them more independent economic entities, nor did it give them more freedom than other social groups. Entrusting their affairs to the patronage of the socialist state, they became dependent on its decisions, thus losing the natural ground for developing such qualities as independence, resourcefulness, enterprise or readiness to take risks. The policy of “repressive tolerance”, combined with official anti-peasant ideologies adopted by the state, led to a significant cultural and political marginalization of the rural community. The manifold consequences of this fact have been quite extensively described by authors of empirical studies in the area of rural sociology and anthropology. It is worth mentioning the following most essential consequences:

- *psychological* (it seems that this is the source of the feeling of helplessness characteristic of inhabitants of rural areas and of their inferiority complex, a lack of self-approval or of the fatalistic conviction of their inability to effect any changes);
- *normative* (the political and economic links with the global system have resulted in the rise, within the normative system of the rural community, of both contradictory offers and conflicting expectations, e.g. to be both mediocre and enterprising);

- *social* (though the rural community as a social group has some common problems and interests to resolve, e.g. having to cope with the broader social environment, it is marked by both a lack of internal solidarity and an atomistic social system);
- *political* (freezing of the social structure of the rural community, in its shape depicting the degree of dependence on the state was possible due to the normative barriers on the development of leadership and hierarchy, the barriers created by the system and precluding a spontaneous rise of civic or political organizations oriented on the articulation of various needs of the rural community or on meeting its requirements).

Consequently, though real socialism maintained the private ownership of land and even corroborated it by virtue of the law of 1982, it imparted to it a distinctly political character. That, in turn, contributed fundamentally to the considerable economic incapacitation of the peasants and their deprivation of the characteristics of a social class. In discussions nowadays, striving desperately for an adequate formula, which would define the peasants' role and position in the process of transformation, scholars are ever more clearly inclined to accept the thesis according to which what was shaped by real socialism was, above all, a certain "formation" (attitude) of farmers. One would say a characteristic trait of this "formation" was an extremely strong group solidarity and claim-oriented interests addressed by the peasant clientele to the omnipotent patron — the state¹.

This approach accentuates common and dominant characteristics of a certain community shaped under the impact of life in similar social, political and economic reality. This gives grounds for raising the question, which of the qualities, accounting for the farmers' having become that specific social "formation", grew more pronounced in the face of the challenge of transformation? The first, ensuing from the peasants' status of owners or the second, due to their position of clients? Are peasants in favour of the changes now under way (because they create conditions favourable to the development of their property and replacement of the former activities based on underhand dealings and informal connections by market-oriented behaviour founded on enterprise and organizational skill)? Or are they perhaps against the transformation (since it does not correspond to their group interest as it leads to the elimination of the group together with its structural attributes and privileges once enjoyed by it due to the system of the day)?

¹ It is worth mentioning that the notion "group solidarity" has consciously been used in distinction to that of "group solidarity". The former denotes a kind of integration based on the feeling of a threat to common interests and is connected with the given situation; the latter refers to the sense of the common system of values, its meaning being of deeper, than merely situational, significance. W. Adamski; see his paper in: *Więś i jej mieszkańcy (Countryside and its inhabitants)*, Warszawa 1995.

A basic source of analyses contained in this dissertation are the findings of empirical research, carried out in 1995, at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences, by a team directed by Professor Władysław Adamski. This is a successive survey included in the by now well-known research project entitled: *Polacy (The Poles)* which has, for a number of years, been providing a foundation for significant diagnoses concerning the condition of Polish society and the dynamics of Polish conflicts. The first survey was undertaken in the period directly preceding the “Solidarity” revolution of 1980. The second was concluded on the eve of the declaration of martial law in 1981. The eighties saw one more survey. The most recent, in 1995 bore, as did the earlier ones, the characteristics of an enquiry embracing a national representative sample (of 2,000 respondents). In it attention was concentrated on the study of the attitude of Polish people towards various phenomena and problems brought about by the transformation of the system into the life of the community (the problems of privatization, dilemmas of egalitarianism and liberalism, the needs and deficiencies of a young democracy, changes in employment, the situation of households, etc.). The aim of the author is to describe the attitudes and behaviours of peasants against a broader background of the situation of that group. The data in the tables further in this article show the rate of the respondents agreeing, in a more or less categorical way, with the opinions on a given subject as presented to them. The indices complementing the data up to 100 per cent and concerning negative answers, indecisive ones and a lack of answers have been omitted. The results of the χ^2 test (portioning to each of the items included in the specifications and the degree of freedom) are given beneath the tables).

Structural background — basic tendencies

The presentation of the research findings ought to be preceded by a few remarks of a general nature. To begin with, it is worth noting that nearly 40 per cent of Poland's total population still live in rural areas. Hence, nowadays Poland is to a large extent an agricultural country. This is a significant fact since we have entered upon the highly complex and difficult path of transformation with a structural heritage “inadequate” or, to put it more mildly, unfavourable to transformation. One of its aspects is the fragmentation of Polish agriculture. Farms with an area of 10 hectares, or more, barely exceed 1/3 of the total and, in the opinion of experts there is practically no chance for a significant change of that situation in the near, or foreseeable future. This is due to numerous factors. The very nature of the process is so complex that it takes time. Let us mention, as an example, that in the Federal Republic of Germany tripling the area of an average farm from the level approximate to the one in Poland today lasted over thirty years. This procedure took place when the increase of the labour force was

low and economic development generally dynamic not to mention subsidies from the state budget and EEC funds for the restructurization process.

The end of the eighties saw the checking of migration from country to town. Moreover, a systematic fall was recorded of the number of people living off agriculture (16 per cent in three years). On the other hand, what was to be noted as well was a 14 per cent increase in the number of the non-peasant population, largely due to the fact of abolition, after 1990, of the requirement that the buyers of land have the necessary agricultural qualifications. Consequently, the "peasantness" of the rural areas is diminishing (farmers constitute 48 per cent of the total number of inhabitants of those areas, the index dropping steadily). Moreover, "genuine" farmers (living mainly by work on their holdings) constitute under 1/4 of the population living in the countryside, their number coming third after that of hired labourers and pensioners. The occupational activity of inhabitants of the rural areas has also fallen, the phenomenon attended by the growth of the rate of both the occupationally passive population and unemployment (39.5 per cent and 8.5 per cent respectively). Although a distinct improvement has recently been observed in the age structure of people active in individual farming (due, above all, to the intensification of the process of conveyance of farms to the owners' successors) nevertheless this does not alter the fact that the rural community, as a milieu, is still relatively "aged" (a notable part of it consisting of pensioners, former farm-owners as well as non-farmers). This is essential because — as follows from relevant research findings — youth, much like education constitutes one of the most important correlates of changes taking place in Poland since 1989.

Unfortunately, the educational structure of the rural population leaves much to be desired. Barely 3 per cent of that population have completed university or other higher education; as many as almost 40 per cent have elementary education. And though the fact that the educational level of more than 60 per cent of the adult rural population is higher than elementary gives grounds for some optimism, it is in that case an "inferior" kind of education acquired mostly at primary vocational schools. As far as farmers are concerned the relevant indices are even worse: barely 1 per cent of them have higher education. Yet, the data discussed only pertain to the structural aspect of the problem. What is the actual condition in this regard of the Polish rural community of today, what are the actual functions of education in the rural areas and the topical educational, occupational and opportunities of the rural youth? For lack of scientific and statistical data on the subject, concerning recent years, one may but resort to intuition and on this basis form a hypothesis according to which the programme for reform of the system in Poland, not only failed to provide novel concepts of rural education but clearly deteriorated its condition. Moreover, it restricted, as never before the access of the rural youth to higher ranking educational facilities. The

new educational opportunities offered nowadays, whatever their profiles and form (mainly private) do not seem appropriate to the young people in the rural areas. The developmental, social and political consequences of this fact are only too evident.

Aspects of living conditions

Farmers' circumstances, and the problems which they have to cope with nowadays, are largely due to the clash of their social position in the period before and after 1989. Unlike other social groups farmers clearly consolidated their socio-economic position at the end of the eighties². That was primarily a result of the economic crisis, the economic sanctions imposed on Poland by the West and also of concessions made to peasants by the State (land ownership guaranteed by law, the right to conveyance of farms to successors, etc.). According to World Bank experts, Polish farmers appeared to be a rather resilient, professional group, not badly prepared technically for entry into the orb of the rules of a free market economy³.

The introduction after 1989 of the principles of effectiveness in the economy has brought about new phenomena and set in motion new processes which have shaken the economic position of peasant farms (the fall of industrial production, unemployment, food imports on an unprecedented scale, etc.). The possibilities of additional employment in town and of deriving income independent of that from the farm, a universal phenomenon among peasants in the eighties, have also decreased. Consequently, as follows from our research findings, the number of farms where the family budget is complemented by an additional income derived from paid employment outside that farm only amounts to 35 per cent which denotes an actual (relative and absolute) pauperization of peasants and exerts an essential impact on their psychological condition. This has been noted in many aspects of our research project, e.g. in the respondents' assessments of their material position (with five-grade scale at their disposal) which was in most cases (51.2 per cent) determined as sufficient or insufficient (38.1 per cent). The rate of persons assessing their position as good only amounted to 5.5 per cent (as compared with 10 per cent in the instance of the non-agricultural population resident in the countryside, 9.6 per cent of workers and 24.7 per cent of the intelligentsia and salary earners jointly). Not even one farmer described the material position of his family as very good (although such statements were made by numbers of other social groups).

However, what is to be observed in the group of farmers is, above all, an unprecedented deterioration of their social position. Even pensioners do not

² M. Halamska, *Chłopi polscy w okresie transformacji systemowej (Polish Peasants in the Period of Transformation of the System)*. See: *Zbiorowości terytorialne i więzi społeczne (Territorial Communities and Social Bounds)*, Łódź 1995, Wyd. UŁ.

³ *An Agricultural Strategy for Poland*, World Bank 1990.

feel it as acutely as farmers. And although the situation in that respect is unfavourable to society at large, it is most severe among farmers. In their case the feeling of social degradation is clearly strongest. This is essential as barely 18.2 per cent of them admit to having recently managed to raise (and that but insignificantly) the profitability of their farms (none of them having stated, however, a clear-cut increase). Instances where no change was recorded in the economic condition of the farm are far more frequent. Our research findings have shown that for the most part the farms suffer a setback in the early period of changes striving for a free-market economy. Consequently, half of the farmers polled complain of a more or less severe deterioration of the economic condition of their farms.

It is small wonder then that farmers have suddenly turned from a moderate contestation of the system of real socialism to distinct dissatisfaction with the realities of the market economy and to loud claiming special privileges for themselves. What makes the factor accounting for internal diversification of the group is not the size of the farm but its economic condition. For it so happens that the variable size of farms often means nothing to us whereas its economic condition (or, to be more precise, the subjective evaluation of its profitability) now and then enters into statistically essential dependencies. This would mean that the early experience gained in the period of transformation accounts for the fact that the traditional standards of assessment of the agrarian structure of Polish agriculture — based on the criterion of acreage — no longer stand the test of time whereas it is the economic criterion that acquires ever greater importance. If this is so, essential consequences would ensue to the restructurization of Polish agriculture, as a condition of both enhancement of its effectiveness and of Poland's economic union with the West. From that point of view the improvement of the area structure of farms ought to be treated not really as the aim of the strategy of agricultural development but rather as a means of raising agricultural effectiveness.

The concept of survival and opinions on agricultural policy pursued by the state

In spite of the generally bad economic condition of farms, and by far best situation in the institutional surroundings of agriculture, what prevails among the concepts of farm management is not the striving for innovations but rather for effectiveness and, above all, active attitudes. This is an absolutely new qualitative situation. The following concepts: expanding the attained scope of production (60.6 per cent), acquiring specialization (34.5 per cent), switching the farm over to wholesome food production (40.6 per cent), winning over buyers and adjusting farm output to their needs (37.5 per cent), purchasing or leasing more land (27.3 per cent), are all more popular with farmers than the passive and conservative behaviour (such as

waiting and seeing, orienting one's farm output, mainly to satisfy the needs of one's family — 53.9 per cent), selling part of the land or liquidating the farm — 5.5 per cent⁴.

The first of the above-mentioned attitudes refers mainly to large (and more seldom medium-sized) farms but, above all, those in good economic condition. The second attitude is most frequently characteristic of the owners of medium and small-sized farms which, moreover do not show an increase in their profitability or simply survive a setback. That is a telling illustration of a new phenomenon previously not as manifest in social relations in the rural areas and namely that of a growing diversification of peasant interests. Farmers who have achieved some economic success (and partly those who were simply not afflicted in the first period of market transformations and survived it unharmed) rank not only among those who apply active strategies of adjustment in running their own farms but also, as will later be shown, support the direction of changes now under way — wherever the general market rules are involved and the general principles of the functioning of society.

That tendency is accompanied, however, by another, which is equally significant from the statistical point of view. Where farmers' group interests are in jeopardy, and the State's agricultural policy ought to be, in their opinion, of a protective character, they behave in an extremely unanimous way: i.e. they unanimously support such a direction of the policy. And, vice versa, whenever the agricultural policy pursued by the State infringes on the egalitarian habits of the rural community and impels farmers to free-market behaviours the unanimity breaks down and distinct differences appear in their opinions, the differences disguising those in various agricultural interests. This is also manifest in answers to the question whether the state should render financial assistance only to the farms liable to meet the competition in the free market (Table 1). It shows how great the farmers' fear of that market is. They are least of all interested in solutions of that type. In most cases the fear of competition is entertained not by petty farmers but by owners of large, economically stable farms. This is rather logical — the small-size holdings are not those with a big marketable output, their production being mostly oriented on satisfaction of the needs of the family concerned. Consequently, they will not be partners in the market nor victims to the risk of failure.

The data given in the table show that the direction of the agricultural policy of the state, which does not pertain directly to society at large, is not stirring up such strong emotions. Nor does it act as a factor responsible for

⁴ According to other research findings of 1992, 20—30 per cent of farmers wanted take up expansion-oriented production activities (i.e. definitely less than in 1995). More or less the same rate — 55 per cent — opted for a survival-oriented strategy but the number of those ready to withdraw from farming was slightly higher in 1992 (8.0 per cent).

diversification of social attitudes. The behaviour of workers, representatives of the intelligentsia and of the salaried section of the working population are similar in that case. A sound, i.e. competitive, agriculture is in the interest of the former as well as the latter, although not in the interest of farmers as such. Yet, that community of interests, adverse to farmers, breaks down when the effects of market solutions in agriculture are directly felt by the whole of society (e.g. an increase in the price of farm products) or if they were to affect the egalitarian habits of those groups.

Table 1

Opinion on the state agricultural policy

The State should:	Farmers	Workers	The intelligentsia and salary earners
1. Grant allowances, additional Subsidies and cheap credits	97.0	92.1	79.3
2. Secure minimum selling prices	95.2	88.8	76.8
3. Privatise the former state farm	72.5	72.7	83.3
4. Restrict food imports	95.2	87.5	70.9
5. Support competitive farms	42.4	65.2	69.8
6. Set a limit on the size of farms	10.9	18.5	9.7

1. → 102.7106 0.0000; 2. → 115.1303 0.0000; 3. → 34.9993 0.0006;
 4. → 110.9071 0.0000; 5. → 51.94.32 0.0000; 6. → 46.7119 0.0000; DF=12

As follows from the analyses above, although in the farming community there are some economically and psychologically prepared to take up the role of active agricultural producers, they will not easily renounce external assistance for as long as possible. The point is that they do not feel able to cope on their own with the difficulties ensuing from the general social transformation. For although other groups in society now and then share the peasants' behaviour there is no intention of avoiding the burdens due to the transformation of the system. They are convinced of the inevitability of the changes occurring at present and, rather more seldom, of their necessity. In their attitudes there is an evident need for a "magical assistant" (Fromm, 1941)⁵, cultivated throughout the period of the Polish People's

5 The definition derived from Erich Fromm's analysis of authoritarian character in his book *Escape from Freedom*, New York 1941. That aspect of authoritarian personality, later on described and evolved in social psychology "the syndrome of aquired helplessness", "claim syndrome" was revealed in most studies and empirical analyses in the area of social psychology of real socialism.

Republic, an assistant that would alleviate the undesirable effects of risk undertaken in the new conditions. The need is all the stronger since assessment and comprehension of the rules of the transition period are more difficult for farmers than for representatives of other social groups (the margin of ambiguities, lack of opinion on the subject and of indecision is the largest in this respect, now and then exceeding 20 per cent of representatives of that group).

Political attitudes and preferences

The ambivalence described above, and not a distaste for changes involved in transformation, corroborate the farmers' political preferences where, on the one hand, one can observe an extraordinary popularity of the former socialist principles of the system of government and, on the other, quite a daring acceptance of at least some rules of the free-market economy. Farmers as a group may be characterized by the relatively smallest interest in market solutions and the greatest in egalitarian ones. In those preferences they even surpass the workers. In the vision of the new order, which emerges from agricultural preferences a prominent place is held by those principles which ensure a feeling of social security, above all, to that of implementing the policy of full employment. The number of farmers in favour of it amounts to 85.5 per cent. True, the support for the principle of diversified earnings is equally high (80.0 per cent), yet more than half of the farmers (65.4 per cent) think that the ceiling on incomes should be specified by law. 62.3 per cent of farmers are in favour of enlargement of the area of private property in the economy, however, in the feeling of an even larger number of them that property should be subject to control, preferably by workers' self-management (74.4 per cent of farmers are in favour of its strong position). Only the workers are even more determined in their support. Another proposal is control by the State. 41.2 per cent of farmers support the principle of a centrally planned economy. In the case of the intelligentsia the corresponding index is 22 per cent. It seems worth mentioning in this connection that all the given differences and dependencies are essential from a statistical point of view.

It would seem a matter of course that farmers, as the only social group not deprived of private property in the period of "real socialism" rank among the natural supporters of privatization processes. Yet, their opinions on the subject are particularly unfavourable and rather distant from those held by representatives of other social groups (Table 2). Moreover, they depict the peasants' exceptionally strong egalitarian standpoint. Farmers seldom share the opinion on the advantageous impact exerted by privatization on the economy. They also have a similar dislike of the share of foreign capital in the economy. Barely 48.7 per cent of farmers think it would be to Poland's advantage. And though there are certain branches of the economy whose

partial control by capital from abroad does not evoke too fierce resistance (e.g. trade — only 34 per cent of farmers would have objections in that case), there are others (e.g. privatization of land of former state farms) where foreign capital is unwelcome to as many as 63.9 per cent of the peasants. That dislike of privatization is, no doubt, justified to some extent by the fear experienced by farmers in connection with privatization changes currently taking place and which have so far meant to them, first and foremost, growth in unemployment. According to rough estimates every second peasant family has one actually, or potentially, unemployed person.

Table 2

Opinion on privatization

Privatization brings about:	Farmers	Workers	The intelligentsia and salary earners
1. Profits to the economy	38.2	50.5	68.8
2. Profits for the very few	72.8	70.3	56.6
3. Growth of social injustice	71.5	61.7	48.1
4. Looting of national property	56.3	52.1	37.2
5. Improvement of the standard of living	20.0	27.0	37.7

1. → 87.2774 0.0000; 2. → 70.9188 0.0000; 3 → 85.8634 0.0000;
 4. → 104.1105 0.0000; 5. → 37.2242 0.0012; DF=15

Farmers are apprehensive of the new priorities in the foreign policy pursued by the State. Poland's opening to countries abroad and, especially, to linkages with the defensive structures of Western Europe has found a very positive response from the Polish people (less than 6 per cent were opposed). Yet, in comparison with other socio-occupational groups (workers and the intelligentsia) farmers are relatively less in favour of Poland's opening towards, and contacts with, countries abroad and that irrespective of what "kind" of foreign countries are concerned. That difference is not, however, very pronounced (not exceeding 10 per cent), nor statistically essential. The only exception is the question of Poland's accession to the European Union. In this case the gap between farmers and the groups most interested in that direction of Polish foreign policy amounts to 20 per cent (positive answers: 63 per cent of farmers and as many as 84 per cent of the intelligentsia). It is significant that among the farming community, owners of small farms are the strongest supporters of Poland's accession to the EU

while owners of large farms which are less prosperous, are least supportive. The latter have certainly much to lose in competition with western agriculture. However, what are the motives of petty farmers? Is it the hope for subsidies and cheap credits? The prospect of being absolved from responsibility for decisions concerning the kind and volume of production?

Probably, the core of the matter is the lack of realization of the actual meaning of such an economic union. After all, small-sized farm owners have rather a specific type of experience. It results from the role of a minor agricultural producer, unfamiliar with the rigours of free market agriculture. Perhaps that is why they support a political direction which they do not fully understand. Large farm owners, least interested in Poland's accession to the EU are a group showing particular interest in matters concerning Poland's co-operation with the East and with countries beyond our southern frontier. They probably believe that markets in Eastern and Central Europe would be more favourable to them, less competitive and, consequently, hope could be placed with them for profits and an economic success for Polish agriculture.

The individual in the face of transformation: frame of mind

In the polled farmers' opinion, the changes taking place in Poland since 1989 have brought about more threats than possibilities. This is the standpoint of 65.7 per cent of representatives of that group. In comparison with others, that is the highest index of the feeling of insecurity. At the same time, only 19 per cent of farmers perceive the changes due to transformation as those heralding new possibilities. And, in turn, this is the lowest index of optimism (whereas every third worker is an optimist and every second a member of the intelligentsia). Farmers rank among people who do not really believe in the chance for improvement in the quality of life in this country within a few years. Nor do they expect a quicker pace of implementation of their plans in the new Poland. In this regard they are the most sceptical of all. They also belong to those people who are fond of the past, as shown by as high as 60 per cent index of those stating that Poland before 1989 was a better country to live in. A very good illustration of the farmers' attitudes is their comparison with those of the intelligentsia and salary earners who are far more satisfied with life in Poland today and feel sure that, within a few years, Poland will be an even more inviting country to live in. The relevant indices are: 32.5, 52.0 and 59.0 per cent respectively.

Farmers' attachment to socialism is obviously the greatest (see Table 3). As follows, they assess both socialist ideas and socialist realities more leniently: they agree more seldom than other social groups with the negative opinions about that system and more frequently identify themselves with positive statements concerning socialism. Simultaneously, they are in the

vanguard of people censuring capitalism. The poor included in their ranks share those negative views to a greater degree (66.6 per cent). Nevertheless, those who suffer from the deterioration of the economic condition of their farms (the rate of negative opinions amounting in their case to as much as 71 per cent, are even more critical).

Table 3

Opinions on capitalism and socialism

	Farmers	Workers	The intelligentsia and salary earners
1. Capitalism — more injustice	58.8	49.0	38.1
2. Socialism brought about indigence	32.1	38.5	48.4
3. Capitalism — freedom and affluence	27.2	36.1	36.9
4. Socialism — wider possibilities of development	22.4	20.5	12.5

1. → 69.0650 0.0000; 2 → 25.9638 0.0109; 3 → 19.5145 0.0768;

4. → 104.0020 0.0000;

DF=12

And, in turn, as regards approval of capitalism, farmers clearly lag behind the other social groups. Owners of declining farms and poor farmers make that gap even wider (positive opinion on capitalism dropping in their instance to 12 per cent). It seems worth mentioning, by way of comparison, that no less than 60 per cent of the owners of good farms identify themselves with the positive statements on capitalism. It is only the rural pensioners that are the nearest to the peasant point of view. Even the unemployed differ in their opinions from those characteristic of farmers. They are not as lenient in their assessment of socialism and show less dislike with regard to capitalism.

Actors or clients?

A study of the results of this research project has given us grounds for becoming convinced that farmers do not take a unanimous stand in the face of the challenge of transformation. And however great, occasionally, the differences in their attitudes, even those most favourable with regard to changes do not equal the corresponding attitudes of the groups leading in

approval of the transformation, i.e. of the intelligentsia, managers or private enterprise owners. Nonetheless (or, perhaps, even more so) one cannot say that farmers are opposed to structural transformation. They simply offer the changes now under way less support than the other social groups. They take an ambivalent attitude in respect of most of the changes and in many cases are more or less divided. This is the principal observation. Now, were we to make an attempt at evaluating that state of affairs, we would have to admit that, as a matter of fact, what appears here is a positive tendency. Farmers did not rank among the main addressees of structural transformation. They were not to play a leading part on the economic and political scene. What they did represent at the starting point of changes was not consonant with the very nature of the offer and challenge of transformation. With a fragmented agrarian structure, poorly prepared for it in both the occupational and psychological sense, mistrustful of changes launching aggressive economic liberalism, they have to determine their position in the new socio-economic conditions.

The experience gained in the early period of transformation has accounted for changes in the structural realities of that group and in its direct social milieu — the rural community. And although the agrarian structure of Polish agriculture has not changed in any fundamental way, a few years were enough to see clear-cut differences arise in the social and property status of farmers. For in their midst there are those who fell victim to the transformation, who did not succeed (and now rank among the most fervent advocates of the idea of state patronage over agriculture) and also those who have found a place for themselves in the realities of the free-market economy (and support to the changes involved seems to be in their interest). Yet, a factor conclusive to the divisions discussed are not quite the traditional criteria of social differentiation in the rural community (as e.g. the size of farm). What acquires ever greater importance are the criteria of economic effectiveness.

Is it therefore possible to say which farmers score economic success, or become active economic entities, coping on their own with the challenge of transformation? As follows from our data, those who have taken up the challenge are, for the most part, (relatively) young farmers, rather well educated and, besides, commanding some resources deriving from the previous period which made it possible for them at the very beginning of the structural changes, to make investments in their farms or take up marketable output without the necessity of getting into debt with the bank. One can hardly overestimate any of these characteristics: age, education, personal assets. At the same time, it is generally known that none of them is a strong point of farmers as a social group. For, though generally falling into somewhat younger age brackets than before, they are not young; though having some education, they are not well-educated; though in possession of some property, they do not rank among the well-off.

Consequently, no essential changes will take place in the lifespan of one generation. A long period of time will be necessary for the process of indispensable structural changes to occur first. What we observe today is, undoubtedly, a big step towards that process. Besides, what is taking place in the rural areas is not merely the change of generations. Life preferences and career decisions of the contemporary generation of farmers also reflect the requirements of the new times. Suffice it to mention that education of one's children is one of the most valuable assets. However, it is an open question, what this means in actual fact. Whatever we have learnt so far about education as a value and problem of the rural community seems to indicate, we cannot expect any revolutionary changes in this area. Education has always been treated by the rural community in, above all, instrumental categories. Moreover, it used to be adjusted to the (modest) possibilities of the young people resident in the countryside, to the (always inferior) primary school education there and also to the (always actually limited) offer of post-primary school education outside the rural districts.

A particularly essential argument liable to support the thesis on revival of the subjectivity (mainly economic) of the peasant stratum in Poland, seems to be the dynamic attitude toward the problem of coping with the condition of the own farm. While the group of followers of the strategy of survival has not diminished (more or less half of the total sample of polled farmers), nevertheless, a distinct increase is to be noted in the number of those in favour of active economic ventures. At the same time, no growth has been recorded in the rate of those ready to give up running their farms. And so the passive farmers and a considerable part of the inhabitants of the rural areas whose existential conditions are threatened are the main problem. Those groups are — and will be — “troublesome” to the process of structural transformation, chiefly on account of their claim-oriented attitude and expectation of assistance due to patronage which had become deeply ingrained in the peasant mentality. The feeling of impending danger, the realities of structural changes and the costs borne in this connection account for the fact of the patron — client type of relations seeming even more desirable. As is well known, farmers and a substantial group of inhabitants of the rural areas are not the only sceptics regarding changes, nor the only ones looking for assistance from without. All groups of society address some expectations to the government, and a decided majority would not today renounce a justification for the state's patronage over their matters. There is a big difference, however, between the expectations of farmers and those of the groups making the principal actors of transformations, e.g. the intelligentsia. According to the farmers, the most important tasks of the government consist in the assurance of the feeling of social security; in the case of the intelligentsia — in creating stable conditions of life and economic development, the differences in priorities being by no means the only disparities in that instance (Table 4).

Table 4

Expectations addressed to the government

The government should:	Farmers	Workers	The intelligentsia and salary earners
1. Determine the amount of wages	62.5	45.3	33.7
2. Control prices	90.3	85.0	89.0
3. Provide new jobs	94.0	94.5	89.0
4. Restrict its impact on economy	37.2	41.6	40.4
5. Finance modernization of industry	91.5	92.1	86.5
6. Finance declining enterprises	80.0	73.7	53.6
7. Finance modernization of agriculture	95.2	91.7	82.3

1. → 69.7077 0.0000; 2. → 54.7039 0.0000 3. → 27.4380 0.0067;
 4. → 18.9828 0.0889; 5. → 26.0338 0.0106 6. → 84.33.19 0.0000;
 7 → 52.8192 0.0000;

DF=12

The expectations of farmers (and other villagers) directed at the government are always greater than in the case of other social groups. And indeed, farmers have a particularly extensive system of claims as regards their own, group interests. They admit, together with others that the government ought to take upon itself the burden of the duties ensuing from the main tasks of the transformation (modernization of the economy, creation of new jobs). And, finally, they expect to a greater degree than others, that the government take up activities striving for alleviating the social costs of transformation (limiting wages, price control, financing of declining enterprises). Representatives of the intelligentsia or, to put it more broadly, of the better educated social strata are nearer in their expectations to the concept of the “minimal state” than of the “welfare state”. Besides, their stock of knowledge, capacities and interests — clearly connected with the progress of transformation — realize stronger motivation to activity, tolerance and readiness to postpone for some time obtainment of gratification. Farmers and, first and foremost, those among them who have gained nothing due to the transformation meet the workers and occupationally passive population half-way in their claims. The liberal rules of the game recognized by them as

highly unjust, they perceive social problems not in the light of rational criteria but those of "fairness". Moreover, their lack of awareness, limited cultural abilities and interests unconnected with the logic of transformation arouse the feeling of impending threat, impatience and aggressive group solidarity, expressing, to a greater degree, the demand for conservatism and authoritarian political solutions than for the parliamentary democracy, and an attitude more open to punishment than tolerance. It is precisely those qualities and those behaviours that seem to act — even more pronouncedly than factors of a structural nature — as a ballast of changes which hardly yields to correction by the new experience.

And now, reverting to the question raised in the title of this chapter (one should, first of all, rescind the alternative contained in it, i.e. admit) that the farmers' role and place in the structural transformation in Poland cannot be reduced to any of those formulas. Farmers are neither active actors, subjects of the transformation nor its clients waiting merely for external assistance. They are more differentiated now than ever before. At the same time, they are also more confused than ever and lost, tired, and terrified of the necessity of having to cope on their own with the problems of a young democracy and an unfledged market. This is exemplified if only by the readiness with which they chose answers like: "it is hard to say" or "I have no opinion on the matter". And although farmers do not rank among the vanguard of the advocates of changes yet, as has already been mentioned, some of them manifest attitudes that are not specific to their group (i.e. an explicitly pro-reformatory orientation). Nevertheless, the premises available today are insufficient to decide on their basis which of the tendencies will be gathering momentum in the immediate future.