

Grzegorz Foryś, Krzysztof Gorlach

The Dynamics of Polish Peasant Protests under Post-Communism*

Introduction

It is a well known fact that the prerequisite for the durable political institutionalization and development of democracy is a political system, which enables the balance between “up – down” institutionalization and “bottom – up” social mobilization. When talking about democratic politics, two factors should be effective: on the one hand, the state and the political class associated with it (they influence the democratic system from above, and are conducive to its institutionalization) and on the other, society which actively participates in political life. That makes society the demanding partner of the authorities in a democratic system. In other words, democracy is based on the delicate balance between society and state.

Our paper is a small contribution to this particular issue. We would like to present the story of Polish farmers trying to participate in public life in order to defend their interests. Since the democratic system in Poland is still in the process of consolidation we shall, therefore, focus on social protests as a peculiar and important way of participating in public life. We would argue however, that in order to present a proper image of the ongoing social processes analysis should be focused on the activities of particular groups, not on society as a whole. The latter perspective has been an object of our criticism.

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Considering the Logic of Social Protest in the Context of Transforming Poland

Social protest is one of the fundamental factors affecting the consolidation of democracy in Poland. 1989 and subsequent years caused political shock and unsettled the balance between the state and society, i.e.: between "up – down" institutionalization and "bottom – up" mobilization. In the institutional sphere the state became the main force leading to reform. As for social mobilization, there was a change in the nature of motives influencing citizens' attitudes towards the state. During the socialist period their main motive was opposition towards the state and its ideology. However, after 1989 and the initial approval for the effects of reform, came disapproval and dissatisfaction with the state and its politics. This was the direct result of the social cost of reform.

The "bottom – up" social mobilization also changed, primarily as a result of the worsening economic situation of most people. That influenced society's attitudes towards reform. Moreover, political and economic changes created a visible division between those who took advantage of the transformation and those who mostly paid for it. Such a situation might be conducive to social demobilization and create a social base for democracy, although it also resulted in the escalation of conflict between the state and some social groups, who have been afflicted by the negative effects of reform.

Such a conflict is conducive to social protest which is a form of defense of interests on the part of those groups which do not derive profits from reform. These groups might also consider these protests as a form of political participation. Protests seem to be significant in the process of democratic consolidation.

Let us therefore, define the protest as a central category of our theoretical framework. As Rose (1982: 73–74) puts it: "Protest is a *collective action* using *extraordinary means* in which the protesters attempt to secure *responses* to their *demands* by constituted *authorities*. By *collective action* is meant that a protest involves the more or less simultaneous and coordinated demands by a number of people. One person's protest against authority is not a protest in the collective behavioral sense unless either: (1) many other people support his/her protest [...] or (2) many other people are protesting in the same way at the same time...". Therefore, protest actions are connected with the general political process. First of all, they are a method of intervening in government politics. Protesters use methods of persuasion and compulsion which are innovative, unconventional and dramatic and are often on the border of legality or even transgress it.

Social protests have always had an essential impact on the shape of the Polish political system. In the bygone period they were important in bringing about change and, as a result, the disintegration of the communist sys-

tem (see: Ekiert, 1996). Protests now have their impact on the process of consolidating democracy in Poland (see: Ekiert and Kubik, 1999). They raise a crucial question concerning the role of protests in the democratization process. Unfortunately, an interesting account of the dynamics of protest actions in Poland is not accompanied by accurate theses. Before considering them we will try to present the picture of protests in Poland during the period 1989–1993, as sketched by Ekiert and Kubik.

During that first five-year period of democratic consolidation the dynamic and number of protests in Poland was far greater than in the other countries analyzed by the authors (GDR, Hungary, Slovakia). Not only the scale of events determined the power and size of protests but also their duration. In Poland protest events lasted significantly longer than in the other countries. The predominance of disruptive protest strategies, territorial scope and the number of participants characterized protests in our country. They were also larger than elsewhere. In the discussed period the number of protests amounted to 1476 (Ekiert and Kubik 1999: 113). During the same period, there were 1252 protest events in the GDR, 699 in Hungary and 295 in Slovakia.

Generally, in the discussed period, the number of protest actions was on a higher level in Poland than in other East-European countries, nevertheless this level was constant. However, the intensity of protest characteristics (organizational complexity, range of protests, number of participants and duration) changed and rose. The data collected by the authors confirm this thesis. The number of workers who participated in the strikes doubled during the period 1990–1991 (from 115,687 to 221,547) (Ekiert and Kubik 1999: 121).

Another dimension which was on the increase was aid given by society to protest actions, especially strikes. According to Ekiert and Kubik, the rise in conflict tendencies in the political sphere was parallel with the dynamics of civil society. Social organizations were fragmented and isolated from the political parties. They were forced to use protest as a form of participation in the public sphere. Protest became institutionalized as a routine means of contesting state policy and functioned as an instrument enforcing this policy. Political opportunities influenced not only the number and size of protests, but also the level of support given to these actions. In 1992 this support was highest since the eighties. During the period 1989–1992 all forms of protest unceasingly met with social acceptance. These generally included: letters of protest, posting up banners, strikes, street demonstrations and the boycott of state decisions. The least, however still increasing support received occupying state buildings (administration) and resistance to the police.

A very interesting feature of the events occurring after 1989 was the fact that conflicts and subsequent protests, reflected the following conventional

divisions: city – country, employee – employer, centre – periphery. At that time they were more pronounced than earlier on. But the main line of division followed between the state and state employees (miners, steelworkers, workers in the air industry and others). The range of this conflict was indeed reduced due to economic reforms and changes within the economic structure but it was still high. The employment structure is a proof of this. The number of people employed by private firms increased significantly from 47% in 1989 to 63% in 1995. At the same time, the private sector output as a share of GDP grew from 28% in 1990 to 55% in 1995 (Ekiert and Kubik 1999: 123). According to the authors of *Rebellious Civil Society* trade unions were absent in the private sector. Market conditions favoured new private and privatized enterprises, and their offers were financially more attractive than those of state-owned firms. The private sector was mainly composed of small and medium firms where protest actions occurred very seldom. The growth of the private sector eliminated potential conflicts between the state and its employees. Nevertheless, protest in Poland had many dimensions. The conflict was severe and the protesters were determined. This determination was based mainly on economic grounds.

In Poland protests involved many social and professional groups. It is not difficult to understand, which of these groups expressed their dissatisfaction in this way. The protesters stem mainly from two groups or classes: industrial workers (35%) and public sector employees (23%). Most of the protesters were employed in large state-owned industrial enterprises, particularly privileged under the old regime. The youth and students participating in the protests amounted to 10.5% and farmers — 9.6% (Ekiert and Kubik 1999: 123). These data express the power of division between the state as an employer and its employees.

The protests were usually organized by trade union federations. This was a consequence of the structure of participation of individual groups in the protest. They were the organizers of protest in almost half of the cases. In this activity they outdistanced social movements (they organized 15.5% of protests), interest groups (6.2% of protests) and political parties (6.0%) (Ekiert and Kubik 1999: 125). The *Solidarity* movement was the most active protest organizer despite its official support for the democratic government. The authors explain that the low number of protest actions organized by political parties by the fact that, despite fragmentation ideological polarization was insignificant and political cleavages remained unstable. Moreover, during most of the analyzed period, many smaller parties were represented in parliament. This eliminated the necessity of protesting to participate in the public sphere. Many small organizations took part in protests. Both for them and for trade union federations it was the most available strategy of increasing their social and political meaning, a means of attracting members and resources. Hence, one of the arguments that explain

the high number of strikes in Poland is that competition between the trade unions was the main reason for the strikes. But it was not only this competition that created mutual relations between trade unions, but also cooperation and co-ordination of actions. It was conducive to the institutionalization and routinization of the protest. Therefore, protest became a form of interaction between the state and citizens. The content of these relations was devoid of violence and anti-systemic watchwords. This is one of the indicators of democratic consolidation.

Strikes were the most popular method of protest in Poland. This distinguished Poland from the other analyzed countries. During the period 1989–1993 the use of violence constituted only 4.9% (violent assault on persons and property) of all protest strategies. 46.2% of these strategies consisted of non-disruptive actions (marches, petitions and letters) and 48.9% disruptive actions (strikes, occupation of public buildings) (Ekiert and Kubik 1999: 128).

In Poland the undertone of post-communist protests was decisively reformist. The protesters did not want to give up the reformist course and did not intend to challenge the legitimacy of the political system or general direction of economic reform. They only wanted to correct the guidelines of reform. Their demands were predominantly economic: reducing unemployment, respecting the national interest in the context of reform (process of privatization, concessions for foreign investors). However, the Poles mainly protested to improve their standard of living. The second largest category covered demanding state subsidies and protection of state-owned enterprises.

The most common target was by far the state and its agencies (the government, parliament and the president). "The increasing targeting of state institutions may also signify that the 'us-versus-them' conceptualization of politics, in which the 'state' is seen as the main antagonist of 'society', was regaining its popularity after a short decline in 1989" (Ekiert and Kubik 1999: 135).

More generally, the authors' considerations on the social protests in post-communist Poland reveal a kind of "social schizophrenia" (1999: 138). An increasing number of negotiations and mediations did not result in a decrease in protests. In fact, legal procedures of resolving conflicts were very imperfect and ignored. These two ways of achieving the aims of the protesters seem to be mutually independent.

The authors' conclusions concerning social protests in Poland can be presented in some points. Firstly, the number of protests between 1989 and 1993 rose, reaching its peak in summer 1993. This had a significant influence on the political situation in the country. At this time protest became one of the most important forms of participating in public life. It was institutionalized as a routine form of exerting pressure on state policy. In the

following years (1994–1995) the number of protests decreased. Secondly, in the discussed period not only did the number of protests change but so did the indicators which characterize the protests (organizational complexity, range, number of participants, duration). Thirdly, the state and its agencies were the main opponent of the protestors. Therefore, serious divisions followed between the state as an employer and its workers (first of all the workers of big state enterprises). Fourthly, demands expressed during protest were predominantly of an economic and reformist nature (improvement of living conditions, protection of the workplace) close to “old” social movement demands. Fifthly, relations between the civil society’s actors were very weak. Sixthly, the influence of protests was of little importance for both the macro-economic policy of the state and for the privatization process.

Why does “Rural” Count?

According to Ekiert and Kubik, the quoted empirical data and descriptions of the above mentioned features of social protests in Poland express their nature and character. Nevertheless, we cannot accept all these statements without reservation. In our opinion the authors underestimate the role played by various groups of protesters in changes of government policy. We feel that the authors do not notice peculiar factors characterizing protests carried out by various social groups. On the contrary, they mainly focus on the total number of protests without specifying the peculiar logic of protest by different groups. As a result of workers’ performance industrial strikes and their logic overshadowed the image of protest activity in Poland in the period under consideration. First of all, and this is our main objection, the authors do not stress the specific dynamics of farmer protests. We would, therefore, question some points raised by Ekiert and Kubik.

Firstly, we disagree with the statement that the protesters did not have an influence on government economic policy. We agree that the main direction of reform remained unchanged, but we also claim that as a result of protests significant corrections were introduced. The story of farmers’ protests proves Ekiert and Kubik’s statement to be incorrect. As a result of the first wave of farmers’ protests the government introduced some agencies with the task to control the market of agricultural commodities as well as the debt situation of some farmers.

Secondly, we would challenge the statement that public opinion about the political-economic situation was not the factor leading to protest. Ekiert and Kubik claim that the politics of trade union leaders in fact led to protest. They argue that “the volatility of the Polish political scene during the first several years of post-communist transformation was not caused by people’s dissatisfaction with the result of economic reforms alone; its causes were

often located in the *specific institutional pattern* of the new polity. If we take the fall of the Suchocka government as an example, we notice that her cabinet was deposed not because of the deteriorating economic situation or a particularly acute fear of unemployment or a sudden drop in popularity among the population at large. Suchocka's government was forced to resign as a result of concerted action by a powerful union, whose leadership and rank-and-file members decided that in order to resolve specific problems (low wages and deteriorating finances)...” (Ekiert and Kubik 1999: 155–156).

This statement is one of the conclusions that the authors drew from the collected data. Nevertheless, we claim that growing economic indicators and the social approval for the direction of economic reforms was not tantamount to the satisfaction of citizens with their own economic situation. It was this dissatisfaction that was an impulse to the protest. According to “Rebellious Civil Society”, 57.5% of the demands were of an economic nature (Ekiert and Kubik 1999: 131). We claim that this fact weakens the above statement and makes the economic factor more important in the process of initiating mass protests in Poland.

Thirdly, the specific rhythm of farmers' protest actions supports this thesis. The authors seem to overlook this opportunity. The statism of Polish farmers accompanies their support given to protest actions. The result of this support is the participation of farmers in the protests. This participation significantly corresponds with the farmers' economic situation. The confirmations of this thesis are quoted data (see table 1 and 2 in the next section). It therefore seems necessary to supplement “Rebellious Civil Society” with an analysis of the farmers' protest phenomenon. Such an analysis should modify the authors' theses, which underestimate the economic factor in the process of generating social protest at least in the case of farmers' protests.

The First Wave of Farmers' Protests (1989–1993)¹

Tables 1–4 outline the conditions of the post-1989 peasant situation in Poland. These are the effects of the systemic economic reform of 1990 known as the “Balcerowicz Plan”. First, with respect to “terms of trade”, in 1990 prices of agricultural commodities increased 3.8 times, while prices of products bought by farmers increased 7.6 times (Dzun 1993: 41–42). Hard times for farmers are also visible through the declining value of the product sold both by private, cooperative and state farms (see table 1).

¹ Data presented here were collected under the project on social protests in new democracies led by Grzegorz Ekiert and Jan Kubik. We would like to thank them both for giving us permission to use the data concerning farmers' protests in particular.

Table 1

Prices of products sold by farms (1989–1992)

Types of family	1989	1990	1991	1992	
	previous year = 100			1985 = 100	1990 = 100
State farms	94.4	93.1	80.8	54.4	59.1
Coops	97.9	82.5	81.0	55.8	69.4
Private farms	91.6	85.1	83.4	65.1	79.9
Total	92.5	86.8	82.7	62.6	74.8

Source: Statistical Yearbook 1993, tab. 45 (457).

The declining value of products sold directly resulted in declining peasant income (see: table 2).

Table 2

Private farm income in 1989–1992

Type of allocation	1989	1990	1991	1992	
	previous year = 100			1985 = 100	1990 = 100
Consumption	114.8	48.5	82.9	58.6	95.9
Modernization of housing	88.1	91.0	64.2	48.0	56.8
Modernization of farms	87.5	70.9	34.9	18.7	27.6
Total	113.6	48.6	73.9	44.7	75.1

Source: Statistical Yearbook 1993, tab. 28 (440).

These tables show that since 1990 farming families (on private farms) experienced a dramatic decline in income. As a result, the whole pattern of income allocation in peasant households changed. In 1990 this was especially visible in terms of consumption. An increase in “consumption income” observed in 1991 and 1992 resulted in a significant decline in income allocated to modernization of housing and farms. Thus, the struggle for survival impeded the process of farm modernization, which was desperately required in the face of new economic conditions. The source of peasant dissatisfaction and frustration that resulted in the first waves of protests in 1990–1992 is located in this declining income.

The following tables more clearly show the changing levels of income among various groups of Polish society and its significant decline in 1990–1992.

Tables 5–9 in turn concern peasant protests in the period 1989–1993. Between these years, 1476 protests were documented in Poland. Peasants were involved as participants in 112 cases. Thus, peasants participated in less than 10% of these protests. However, levels of peasant involvement in

social protest varied during that period. In 1989, when 314 protests were organized, peasants only participated in 14 cases (less than 5%). The next year peasant involvement increased to 34 protests among 306 cases (11%) and declined in 1991 to 19 cases among 292 protests (only 6.5%), stabilized in 1992 to 21 actions among 314 protests (less than 7%) and increased again in 1993 to 24 cases among 250 (9.6%).

Table 3

Changes in real (per capita) income

Year	Type of family			
	workers	peasants	peasant-workers	retired
1989	100	100	100	100
1990	66	75	71	72
1991	66	62	60	90
1992	66	57	52	73
1993	67	64	59	87
1994	77	72	70	101

Source: Dziurda (1993).

Table 4

Income in families (retired = 100) — comparative analysis

Year	Type of family		
	workers	peasants	peasant-workers
1989	164	168	171
1990	136	137	148
1991	109	87	102
1992	119	83	105
1993	126	83	105
1994	140	81	112

Source: Dziurda (1993).

Table 5

Peasant protests in Poland 1989–1993

Year	Total number of protests	Number of peasant protests
1989	314	14
1990	306	34
1991	292	19
1992	314	21
1993	250	24
Total	1476	112

Source: Center for European Studies, Harvard University, DATABASE.

Peasant participation in protest events was only partly organized by peasant/farmer organizations. Organizations like *NSZZ RI Solidarity*, *Samoobrona* or others led or sponsored only 77 protest events. In 37 cases peasants protested spontaneously, without any formal organizational framework. This tendency declined in the period under consideration (see: table 6) reflecting the increasing influence on peasant communities by existing peasant organizations. *NSZZ RI Solidarity* led or sponsored 28 protests, in the years 1989–1993, while *Samoobrona* led 12 in 1992 in its first public appearance in Poland and then 8 in 1993.

Table 6

Number of protests organized or sponsored
by peasant organizations

Year	Name of organization			
	Samoobrona	NSZZ RI Solidarity	other	not-spons.
1989	0	4	2	8
1990	0	10	6	18
1991	0	7	5	7
1992	12 (!)	8	1	0
1993	8	8	6	2

Source: Center for European Studies, Harvard University, DATABASE.

The above tables show us the peculiarity of peasant political protest in the period under consideration. The largest number of protests in the first cycle began in the first half of 1990, immediately after the new economic policy (the so-called “Balcerowicz Plan”) was introduced. In turn, the largest number of protests in the second cycle occurred in the second half of 1992. In this period the same political formation which was “responsible” for the “Balcerowicz Plan” came to power after the collapse of Jan Olszewski’s rightist cabinet. This time the period of political crisis was used by *Samoobrona* to mobilize the peasants.

Looking back at the years 1989–1993 we see several phases characterized by varying levels of peasant social and political mobilization, a variety of protest actions and subsequently, diverse responses of the State. Regardless of the variety of methods and levels of mobilization the main aim of the protests seems to be the same. In most cases protesting peasants approached the State, demanding greater state involvement in the process of economic transition, a new agricultural policy, state intervention on the market for agricultural goods and means of production, inexpensive state guaranteed credit and financial help for indebted farmers and unemployed workers on bankrupt state farms.

The first wave of peasant protests may be divided into two cycles, which has not been observed in the case of any other social group. It was not noticed by Ekiert and Kubik focusing on aggregated data concerning various social groups. We shall here refer to the first as the *Solidarity* cycle and the second as *post-Solidarity*. The first peaked during the farmers' national protest in summer 1990 and died out in late summer and autumn 1991. The next cycle began to peak during the *Samoobrona* protesters' clashes with the police in summer 1992 and faded out in 1993. The "peaks" of both cycles are characterized by the national farmers' protest, blocking roads throughout the country. Thus, in the tables presented below the first cycle refers to 1989–1991 and the second to 1992–1993.

The differences between the two cycles are three-fold. First, the basic type of farmers' claims (see: table 7).

Table 7

Demands and grievances in peasant protests

Type	Year (number of cases in %)				
	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
Material compensation	57.1	26.5	15.8	42.9	data not available
Change in economic policies	42.9	47.0	63.1	52.3	data not available
Change in other specific policies	–	20.6	5.3	–	data not available

Source: Center for European Studies. Harvard University. DATABASE.

In the first cycle the problem of material compensation was initially more important. After 1989 there was a continuing decline of such grievances. However, in 1992, as *Samoobrona* became the leading force of peasant protests, the number of demands increased rapidly. On the other hand, demands for change in economic policies also increased that same year, while grievances concerning change in other policies vanished. It might be concluded that this is a reflection of *Samoobrona*'s heavy concentration on material compensation and economic equality.

In the first cycle, marches, demonstrations, sit-ins and road blockades constituted the peasants' repertoire of action in their struggle to protect their interests. In the second, hunger strikes were added as well as significant moves beyond the traditional non-violence of the *Solidarity* ethos which involved: clashes with police, violent attacks on court executive officers sent by banks to the indebted farms, throwing Molotov cocktails, etc. These were spectacular yet relatively rare methods used by protesting farmers. However, these events as described by the media created the

stereotype of "wild and violent" peasant protesters. In fact, as Table 8 indicates, most protests in both cycles used such methods as: demonstrations and marches as well as "strike alerts", "open letters" and public statements i.e. typical democratic actions.

Table 8

Scope of peasant protests

Scope	Year (number of cases in %)				
	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
Local	42.9	73.5	52.6	47.6	79.2
Voivodship	7.1	8.8	5.3	4.8	4.2
Regional	7.1	5.9	5.3	4.8	4.2
National	35.7	11.8	36.8	23.8	16.7
Data not available	7.1	—	—	4.8	—

Source: Center for European Studies. Harvard University. DATABASE.

Table 9

Type of peasant protest events

Type	Year (number of cases in %)				
	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
Single protest	57.1	88.2	84.2	61.9	87.5
Series of protests	28.6	5.9	—	9.5	4.2
Protest campaign	14.3	5.9	15.8	28.6	8.3

Source: Center for European Studies. Harvard University. DATABASE.

Table 10

Number of participants in peasant protests

Number of participants	Year (number of cases in %)				
	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
Under 1000	21.4	23.5	31.6	38.1	50.0
Under 10,000	—	11.8	5.3	4.8	8.3
10,000–50,000	—	—	15.8	—	—
Data not available	78.6	64.7	47.4	57.2	41.7

Source: Center for European Studies. Harvard University. DATABASE.

The hypothesis about two cycles and the declining level of mobilization among farmers after 1992 seems to be supported by the following tendencies visible in tables 9, 10 and 11. First, the increasing number of single protests (table 9) should be stressed. Then, the declining number of more

organized forms of protest (i.e. series of protests as well as protest campaigns) proves the declining level of protest mobilization among peasants. Finally, the growing number of protests involving less than 1000 participants (Table 10) shows the general decline of peasant involvement in protest activities. It is clearly associated, in our opinion, with the rising income of farming families since 1992. The so-called farmers' income parity rose from 48% in 1992 to 58% in 1993 (Hausner and Marody, 1999: 28).

It is significant that in Poland in 1989–1993 peasant protests took various forms. These forms followed the tactics of collective protests observed in other countries where farmers present their common claims. Road blockades, demonstrations, etc. are good examples here. We would argue that these protests confirm the **historic** theory (Jenkins 1983) of peasant rebellions. It was clear that the introduction of market relations resulted in the commercialization of farm production and farm family life that promoted increasing dissatisfaction, anger and frustration among farm owners. Therefore, protests became a typical form of **reform commodity movement** and were concerned mostly "with the control of the market in agricultural commodities" (Paige 1975: 70).

During the hunger strike in Zamość in autumn 1991 one of the protesting farmers said: "Under communism there was no freedom but there were cheap loans". This statement reflects the dilemma faced by farmers during the economic and political transition. Many peasants express great uncertainty and dissatisfaction under the present conditions. "We wanted to enter capitalism and now we've got it" or "You cannot eat freedom" are among the bitter statements which may be heard when talking to people in rural communities. **Freedom** and **credit** should be treated as main **frames of meaning** (Melucci, 1996) in the farmers' discourse. We would argue that both have positive and negative meanings. Freedom is treated as an ideal opposite to the communist system and exercised its positive meaning in the context of that particular "game for survival". Now, however, freedom is part of a harsh reality losing the positive meaning it had under communism. Therefore, credit became a symbol in opposition to the growing uncertainty linked to freedom in the new experience. Its positive meaning is no longer associated with the overwhelming state structure but with the reduction of constraining uncertainty.

Second Wave of Farmers' Protests (1998–1999)²

During the four years of the government formed by the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) and the Polish Peasants' Party (PSL) coalition farmers re-

² Unfortunately we do not have similar systematic data concerning the period 1998–1999. Our analysis of protest in this part of the article was based on reports published in two daily newspapers, i.e.: "Gazeta Wyborcza" and "Rzeczpospolita".

mained relatively calm for at least two major reasons. Government policy at that time was far more favourable towards farm owners than the policies of previous Solidarity-led governments, focused on rapid, major economic and social changes. The PSL–SLD coalition government slowed down the tempo of reform while trying to solve some of the social costs which emerged before 1993. It helped to capitalize the main agricultural bank in Poland (Bank of Food Economy — BGŻ), put up some customs tariffs for imported agricultural products, decided to subsidize diesel fuel used by farmers as well as gave some social benefits to farming families. On the other hand, the results of the market economy already hit farms and of unity among peasants strongly built in the years of communism and collectivization threat and still visible in the first years of post-communist transformation started to disappear. Internal divisions inside the farming community due to the type of major agricultural goods produced on farms seemed to become a more significant factor shaping farmers' interests, rationalities and discourse. 1998 and 1999 showed two major protest cycles, which we would call the "grain" and the "pork" ones respectively.

In 1998 farmers again experienced a dramatic decline in income. The income parity dropped from 65% in 1996 to 40% in 1998 (Hausner and Marody, 1999: 28). The new wave of peasant protests started in July 1998 when about 15 thousand farmers marched in Warsaw demanding better prices for grain and forcing the government to stop import of grain from other Central European countries. Farmers also wanted the government Agency of the Agricultural Market to buy their grain immediately in order to counterbalance the low prices offered by private businesses as well as merchants. On 22 January 1999 3,000 farmers, members of *Samoobrona*, *NSZZ RI Solidarność* and *Krajowy Związek Kółek i Organizacji Rolniczych KZKiOR* (The National Union of Agricultural Circles and Organizations) blocked the main checkpoint on Poland's western border in Świecko. They presented two main demands: a limitation of agricultural imports to Poland and setting up "profitable" prices for basic agricultural commodities produced by Polish farmers. One may argue that the master frame has been significantly changed and simply contained the interests of agricultural producers facing typical problems caused by the market economy. As Jacek Janiszewski, the Minister of Agriculture at the time and member of *Stronnictwo Konserwatywno-Ludowe* (Peoples' Conservative Party) pointed out that the real problem lay in Russia's financial crisis resulting in the rapid decline of food export to the Russian market. This caused a huge overproduction of various agricultural commodities in Poland, mainly in the pork sector. And at the same time Poland is unable to subsidize its food export to the level of the European Union. Therefore, Polish food is more expensive.

After weeks of protests and talks on 8 February 1999 agreement was reached. It contained the farmers' main demands, namely: the new "profit-

able" price for pork, more preferential credits for farmers, a moratorium on "old" credits as well as a schedule for future negotiations concerning the price of grain, milk, subsidies for diesel fuel and a reduction of VAT on agricultural commodities. One may argue that this part of peasant history in contemporary Poland clearly shows the europeanization of the peasant discourse. The character of these demands reflected the typical demands made by farmers in European Union countries, urging their governments to guard their interests.

Farmers' protests in January and early February 1999 resulted not only in temporary agreement and short-term measures taken by the government but also in more general effects. It should be stressed that the government decided to start elaborating a far more complex programme to solve many problems in agriculture and rural areas called "The Social Contract for the Countryside". On 18 February the Sejm debated on the problems of agriculture and three weeks later over 100 politicians, leaders of farmers' organizations and social activists participated in the discussion on the problems of the countryside in the Presidential Palace in Warsaw.

However, on 21 March over 10,000 farmers again marched in the streets of Warsaw presenting two main demands: a new policy for agriculture and the resignation of Leszek Balcerowicz from the Ministry of Finance. Members of *Samoobrona* marched separately a few days earlier on 17 March. Since March great efforts by Andrzej Lepper and some *Samoobrona* leaders to dominate the farmers' discourse could be observed. This was particularly noticeable at the beginning of May during *Samoobrona's* national meeting. In mid-May *Samoobrona* also supported by *NSZZ RI Solidarity* and *KZKiOR* met the members of the special government task committee on agricultural and rural issues and urged for immediate decisions concerning "profitable" prices for various agricultural commodities. They also demanded more participation of farmers in the process of privatization in the food processing industry and a total moratorium on debt repayments. Finally on 30 May representatives of three farmers' trade unions signed an agreement with the government setting up minimum prices for grain.

Let us also briefly comment some interesting phenomena concerning the wave of protests presented above. *Samoobrona* emerged as a leading force in organizing and supporting farmers' protests. Such a situation has been clearly reflected in the farmers' consciousness as is shown in tables 11 and 12 below. Data presented in the tables were collected in 1999 under the research project focused on recent changes in the farm owners' community (for more details see: Gorlach, 2001).

More farmers interviewed in 1999 about the organization defending their interests pointed to *Samoobrona* rather than PSL. What is even more interesting is that such a tendency was especially noticeable among owners of large and modern farms rather than small, traditional ones. Such a lead-

ing position of *Samoobrona* was also reflected during the last parliamentary election in 2001 when that organization gained more support among the constituency than PSL (13% and 8% respectively).

Table 11

PSL as a defending organization pointed out
by various categories of farm owners (1999 — in %)

Category	Small, traditional farms	Medium farms	Large, modern farms	Total
Yes	7.3	8.1	14.5	9.1
No	92.7	91.9	85.5	90.9
Total	48.2	30.7	21.1	100.0

Source: Gorlach (2001).

Table 12

Samoobrona as a defending organization pointed out
by various categories of farm owners (1999 — in %)

Category	Small, traditional farms	Medium farms	Large, modern farms	Total
Yes	22.1	30.0	33.8	27.0
No	77.9	70.0	66.2	73.0
Total	48.2	30.7	21.1	100.0

Source: Gorlach (2001).

Table 13

Participation in protest events in 1998–1999
by various categories of farm owners (1999 — in %)

Category	Small, traditional farms	Medium farms	Large, modern farms	Total
More than one event	3.6	5.8	15.2	6.7
Just one event	1.5	5.8	13.1	5.3
No participation	94.8	88.5	71.1	88.0
Total	48.3	30.5	21.2	100.0

Source: Gorlach (2001).

We would like to point out (see: table 13) that a significant majority (almost 90% of the investigated farmers) confirmed no involvement in the protest campaign of 1998–1999. But some interesting tendencies may be observed among various categories of farm owners. The owners of large, modern farms were more involved in protest activities than their small, traditional counterparts.

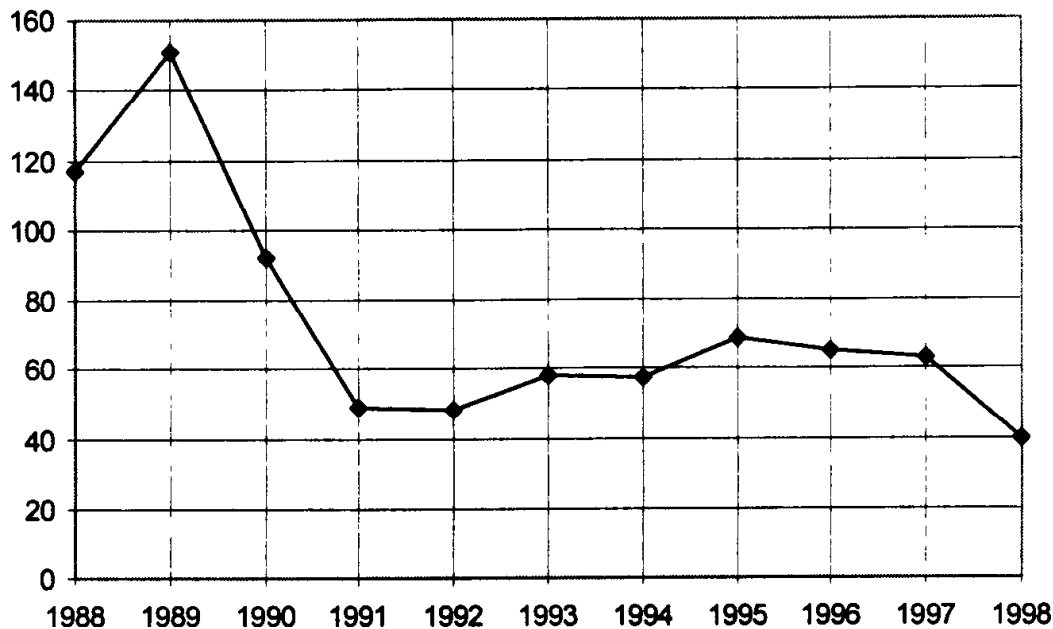
Conclusion

The presented characteristics of farmers' protests in Poland confirmed their peculiar dynamics and character. This conclusion is the result of a few facts where the economic aspect of peasant protests played the main role.

Firstly, the decline in peasants' income since 1990 and changes in the pattern of peasants' income allocation were the result of economic transformation. This was a source of peasant dissatisfaction and frustration resulting in the first waves of protests in 1990–1992 and then in 1998–1999 (compare: scheme 1).

Scheme 1

Parity of agricultural income in Poland 1988–1998



Source: J. Hausner, M. Marody (1999).

Secondly, the largest number of peasant protests in the first cycle began in the first half of 1990 immediately after the "shock therapy" (the "Balcerowicz Plan") was introduced. This plan reduced the economic position of the peasants. And the second cycle of peasant protests occurred in the second half of 1992 after the political grouping responsible for the "Balcerowicz Plan" came to power.

Thirdly, the demands of the protesting peasants were economic and agreed with the demands of other social groups. But the peasant demands concerned their own problems. They demanded more state involvement in the process of economic transition, a new agricultural policy, state intervention on the market for agricultural goods and means of production, and inexpensive state guaranteed credit, financial help for indebted farmers and

unemployed workers on bankrupt state farms. This just goes to show that peasant protests had economic roots. The confirmation of this thesis was a second wave of farmers' protests (1998–1999) also caused by economic factors. The peasants demanded: a "profitable" price for pork and grain, preferential credits for farmers, a moratorium on "old" credits, subsidies for diesel fuel, etc. In the context of integration with the European Union the demand for protecting the Polish agricultural market has had a special meaning. It therefore seems quite understandable that the owners of large, modern farms i.e. those that have been more market-oriented are more involved in protest activities. Yet again such a tendency confirms our thesis that, quite contrary to Ekiert and Kubik's claim — economic factors seem to have a significant and prevailing influence on the emergence as well as peculiar form of farmers' protests. It might also encourage us to put forward a statement that treating protests organized by various groups as a common phenomenon might lead to an incorrect analysis of processes occurring in a society. We would argue that a proper perspective requires focusing on groups' activities separately. Such a separate analysis of farmers' protests, workers' strikes, student demonstrations, etc. seems to be the only way to construct adequate descriptions and explanations of social processes.

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