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## FAMILY FARMING IN POLAND... WHAT NEXT?

*Le repli paysan. Trajectoires de l'après-communisme en Pologne* by Marie-Claude Maurel, Maria Halamska, Hugues Lamarche. L'Harmattan, Pays de l'Est series, Paris 2003.

Family farming in the period of the Polish People's Republic had a significant position in the Polish economy: private ownership, being the basis for land utilisation (in 1988 the private farming sector covered 78% of farm land) was rewarded by a repressive and exploitative state policy towards farmers. In spite of that, Polish farming entered the 1990s in rather good shape. Experience and practice in farming their land allowed one to assume that farmers would more easily find their way in the new circumstances than other groups. Unfortunately, the early years of transformation showed that the situation of private farming families in the new circumstances has worsened, the agricultural share of creating GDP has diminished, which has consequently led to a change in how households function: employment, work, income, changes in farm size, farmers' attitude to the land, social ties at both local and national level.

Changes in Polish agriculture after 1989 became the subject of much research and publications, however not many of them could rely on such interesting and rich research materials as the work by three authors, Marie-Claude Maurel, Maria Halamska and Hugues Lamarche: *Le repli paysan. Trajectoires de l'après-communisme en Pologne*.<sup>1</sup>

This publication is the result of over twenty years' work. It compares observations of changes taking place in Polish farming and the Polish countryside over many years. The authors represent various disciplines and academic centres: Professor Maria Halamska is a sociologist at the Institute for Rural and Agricultural Development, Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, Professor Hugues

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<sup>1</sup> Results of this research can also be found in a book, published in Poland, by the same authors: *Rolnictwo rodzinne w transformacji postkomunistycznej. Anatomia zmiany* (Family Farming in the Post-Communist Transformation. An anatomy of change), IRWiR PAN, Warszawa 2003.

Lamarche is a sociologist and head of research at CNRS (URM LADYSS in Nanterre) and Professor Marie-Claude Maurel is a geographer and head of studies at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris. The interdisciplinary nature and diversity of experience of the members of the research team are an additional asset of this work since they have allowed for a broad analysis of problems.

The book consists of three sections. The first deals with the diversity of local ways of development and the specific nature of Polish peasants over the past dozen or so years.

The results which became the basis for the analysis appearing in the book, were collected while conducting a few researches in selected communes. The first was carried out in 1988 within the framework of comparative research conducted on the nature of family farming. Soon after completing this research the authors realised that they were in possession of materials illustrating the state of a particular social group shortly before a great transformation which was to have a profound influence on the lives of all Polish people. In 1999 during research on the local political elite, farms which had previously been researched were rediscovered and then a short questionnaire was carried out with them, the results of which turned out to be so interesting, yet incomplete – that a decision was made to carry out further research in 2001. Most questions which had been raised in 1988 were repeated with the addition of new questions, so as to be able to compare with facts obtained in 1988. The group of new questions referred to changes occurring in the nineties and the farmers' attitude towards them.

Research which covered 107 farms was carried out in three communes, in different regions of Poland. Geographic, historical and economic factors played a role during selection. Each of the researched communes lies in an area which in the past (1795–1918) belonged to a different sector of partitioned Poland, which is still reflected in farm equipment and ways of functioning as well as the farmers' attitude to the land and tasks which have to be carried out. Stęszew (the former Prussian partition), Drobin (Russian) and Zator (Austrian) differ in type of farming, socio-economic character of households as well as the standard of agricultural equipment. It is evident that in such diversified communes the local development strategies have neither a similar dynamic nor similar efficiency.

The authors suggestively bring together the position and history of the researched communes, allowing French readers to appreciate the character of the researched places and to perceive their individual climate. Descriptions include not only the historical and geographic outline of the communes. The presentation of the socio-economic situation in the Polish countryside at the beginning of the 1980s allows for an evaluation of the significance of changes which took place in these communes while research was in process: demography, employment, unemployment (which only emerged officially with the arrival of the market economy

in Poland). The authors also analysed structural changes in agriculture: the structure of production and change in farm size in the researched communes. A phenomenon which deserves particular attention is the dropping number of 2 ha to 15 ha farms, while the number of under 2 ha and over 15 ha farms is growing.

The authors also analyse changes in the understanding in Poland of "peasantry" as a term, starting from the peasant economy, distinguished by attachment to the land and the feeling of a link with one's patrimony, through the times of real socialism when the peasants – independent and largely self-sufficient – were a challenge for the political system, to a difficult period of political change leading to confrontation with the free market economy.

The second part of the work comprises an analysis of the evolution of Polish agriculture towards dual agriculture, carried out on the basis of already existing work and mainly on the results of panel research which, according to the authors, seems to confirm general tendencies in Poland. On the basis of research carried out at different historical times, an analysis was carried out of the dynamic of changes on different types of farms. The authors draw attention to the slow, yet systematic fall in number of farms, their selection principles, new sources of income for farmers, growing contrasts between family households. An analysis was carried out of work, productivity and efficiency. The authors notice that the changes taking place on farms fall into two trajectories: adaptation and absorption by the market economy and the second, marginalisation and elimination of farms. An interesting fragment in the second part of the work is a chapter devoted to the peasants' new changing rapport towards the land, which is evolving alongside changes taking place in Poland as a whole.

The authors draw attention to the specifically Polish rapport to the land, which for Polish farmers has always had not only practical significance, but in the past was also a guarantee of independence and sovereignty. As a result of a complicated history of relations with the changing state authorities, land for the Polish peasant acquired more than simply practical value – it became a value in itself. Research carried out for over a dozen years provides the possibility of describing this phenomenon. The authors distinguished four strategies among landowners in the researched territories: accumulation, expectation, closure, self-preservation. Each of the mentioned types of farmers' behaviour was presented and discussed in detail.

The third part of the book is devoted to the farmers themselves: their rapport with their immediate environment, views, opinions about what is taking place nearby, their worries and associated concerns. The authors notice that between different research periods (between 1988 and 2001) social ties in the researched communes slackened. This process may be the result of a growth in social inequality, as well as economic changes, which have totally changed the hitherto existing formal and institutional basis of social ties and has led to the collapse

of previous forms of community life. Most farmers became excluded from market relations and became enclosed within their family circle, restricting personal contacts to a few people closest to them. According to the authors the collapse of local social ties has called into question the very existence of local communities. A social vacuum has appeared between the family household and the relatively distant administrative centre, i.e. the commune. The researchers notice that the family as a circle where farmers are increasingly retreating is becoming the focal point of social contact.

Individualism and the significance of professional ties is growing among members of the rural community, yet new forms of organisation are still weak and are mainly connected with protest activity. They are not paving the way to creating a real system of professional organisations. Farmers have not yet managed to get organised into a way which would allow them to become significant actors on the local stage. Passiveness which in the past was a form of resistance against the imposed system of behaviour, continues to be the dominant position of people living in the researched communes.

The authors wonder how, given such a social situation, the integration of the peasants into a global society will take place, they analyse their changing power and structure of links with wider groups, they ask farmers how they perceive their own position in society. The conclusions after analysing the research results show that the researched communities are experiencing a phase of disintegration, the system transformation process is continuing. A fact which is of particular concern to the authors is the widespread mistrust among Polish farmers: mistrust towards those closest to them: their immediate neighbours, the local community and to the more formal – the authorities and the state.

The most visible change is that which concerns the farmers' attitude towards the state. Their attitude is ambiguous. The farmers perceive the state in a negative light, and they are convinced of the degradation of their role and position in society. The long duration and repetitiveness of the research allowed for an analysis of changes taking place among the views of the researched people over the years. The way the farmers evaluate the situation in Poland is interesting and symptomatic. Retrospectively they consider that the eighties were the best period for them (called, according to Krzysztof Gorlach "the period of repressive tolerance"), whereas they consider the present times as being hardest. The declaration of most representatives of this social group which was highly repressed in the past system, that they wish for a return to the old times, became the subject of deep analysis by the authors of *Le repli paysan*.

In the third section the authors discuss the prospect of Poland's integration with the European Union and consequently the changing attitudes of rural inhabitants. The authors present results of pre-referendum declarations by rural inhabitants and

farmers, analyse their potential gains and losses, connected with Poland's entry into the EU, they present the hopes associated with the prospect of integration.

This work deserves attention not only because it presents the results of very interesting research during which it was possible to register a moment of particularly significant historical change in Poland. These results give us a broad insight into the lives of three communities and changes taking place over the last dozen or so years. What particularly distinguishes *Le repli paysan* among works published for non-Polish readers is the fact that the authors, apart from the effects of their own work present the state of knowledge and research carried out in Poland on subject areas they have raised themselves. Apart from knowledge about the changes which the inhabitants of Drobin, Stęszew and Zator experienced the reader also acquires information about relations between the state and the peasants, knowledge about how the social position of peasants in Poland changed, how their rapport to the land has changed, how farms and farmers are behaving in the context of these changes and the prospects arising for the European community after Poland's entry into the EU.