

Eyewitness Report From Warsaw

A Scene of Backwardness And Pervasive Demoralization

The author of this report has just returned from a visit to the Polish capital, Warsaw.

The long-term significance of the condition of the Polish economy was poignantly summarized by a scientist from the United States' Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory who recently visited Poland: "So, this is the bucolic beauty that Ralph Nader has in store for the United States," he said. "My God, the U.S. *will* look just like this without nuclear energy."

It is difficult to convey the true extent of the backwardness forced on Poland by its primitive agriculture. Driving through a rural area about 20 miles outside of Warsaw, where one would expect to see the greatest degree of technology in agriculture, I saw only one motorized piece of farm equipment. The rest is horse-drawn plows, wagons, and mowers. Most of the farm labor seemed to be done by hand. The archetypical scene of an old man and woman digging potatoes on their hands and knees was reproduced every day that I was in Poland, on more plots of land than I could count. The one farmer who was planting a winter cover in his field sowed seed by hand from a bag slung across his shoulder — a scene completed by a raven eating the seed behind him.

Judging the Polish political temperament from discussions with a large number of Polish scientists, the problem is entirely one of political will. The Polish government is afraid to confront the Polish peasantry. And so the psychology of the peasant outlook infects the country's intellectuals, as well as its government. These scientists assured me that agriculture could not be mechanized because "the peasants will not stand for it." Even the minimally necessary steps of encouraging larger farms (by making inheritance of land difficult, for example) are not taken. There is a pervasive political paralysis on the whole agricultural question.

The result is horrifying. All but one of the farms I saw was less than ten acres. On these tiny plots, rural life displayed its political power with privately run fruit stands on the roadside. And in the cities were the lawful

consequences of this agricultural policy. The scientists I spoke to were spending 70 percent of their income on food (compared to about 10 percent on rent), and the quality of food has declined dramatically over the past three years.

But by far the most destructive consequence is a pervasive demoralization. The peasant ideology of fatalism, based on a firm conviction of one's own impotence, had settled over even the nation's scientists. They are sure that the government is "naturally" incompetent, that the "Russians" will always "oppress Poland," that the peasantry is a fixed feature of life, and that none of this will, or can, change.

To be sure, there are exceptions. The most striking was the Polish Minister of Science, Dr. Sylwester Kaliski, who had just returned from an extraordinary appearance at a scientific meeting in Oxford, England. There he had announced to an astonished group of Western scientists that the Poles had made a major breakthrough in research into controlled thermonuclear fusion, achieving fusion with energy from chemical explosives. His experiment was truly "American" in its brash simplicity, and in its unexpected success. Kaliski showed the energy and enthusiasm that will be critical to Poland's chances of getting out from under its peasant yoke.

Perhaps one anecdote best conveys the dichotomy between Poland's very sporadic attempts to industrialize and the oppressive mix of despair, rural idiocy, and religion which could (when mixed with destabilization operations from the West) create a replay of Hungary in 1956. In Warsaw there is a large electric lamp factory, named the Rosa Luxemburg Works after the great Polish revolutionary, who understood Poland's future to lie in its co-industrialization with Russia. The factory is surrounded by a white brick wall. Inside the wall, near the employees' entrance, are political slogans, graphs of productivity, and the like. On the outside of the wall, by the gate, is a Catholic shrine, covered with fresh flowers.

— Dr. Steven Bardwell