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## **DO FARMERS BLOCK THE DEVELOPMENT OF POLAND?**

Polish farmers, including rural pensioners, make up a social group which is difficult to define. It is a diversified population, dominated (in numbers) by ‘quasi-farmers’ – those who run small subsistence farms and do not sell their products in the market. This category has many negative, economic, social and psychological features. In their political choices, farmers often choose to support populist agrarian parties. The author, referring to her earlier concept of ‘blocking development’ and ‘moderating changes’, describes the political mechanisms of slowing down the reforms, triggered by a broadly understood community of Polish farmers.

Farmers – in Poland and elsewhere – constitute a group with a specific origin and distinct social characteristics. Does this group, so numerous in the Polish society, affect development processes and the transformation in progress? This is not a new phenomenon, but it is now tackled in the new circumstances.

The answer to the question posed in the title has to be complicated owing to its economic, social and political context. It also largely depends on how we define development and what perspective – sectoral or global – we adopt for analysis. In this paper, I propose to adopt a global view and analyse the farmers’ contribution to the creation of a new social deal in Poland, based on democracy and free market economy. This means that the basic indicators for the farmers’ views on development will be their attitudes and behaviours relating to broadly understood market economy and democracy. Were we to use emphatic terms, we could say that we will attempt to analyse the role of farmers in the making of contemporary history.

There are many sociological publications dealing with the role of peasants in history. In the context of this paper, I would like to draw on Barrington Moore’s analysis of the social origins of dictatorship and democracy (first English edition in 1966), where he described the roles lords and peasants played in the making of the modern world. Moore proved that the ‘agrarian classes’ exerted a strong influence on the nature of the transition from rural to contemporary society, which in turn led to the rise of democracy (England and France), fascism (Germany) and communism (Russia) in Europe alone, not to mention other continents. Reference to this classical publication is intended to emphasise the significance of ‘agrarian classes’ in moments of crisis, when not only the sheer

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numbers but also their internal structure and attitudes towards central authorities are of great import. I would like to set my argument in such a perspective, especially in view of the fact that – as we can see from the distribution of votes in the last parliamentary election (2005) – the minority government of the Law and Justice party (PiS)<sup>1</sup> won mainly the support of the residents of rural areas (see Fig. 1), and that the political image of rural areas is largely created by those who have links with agriculture.

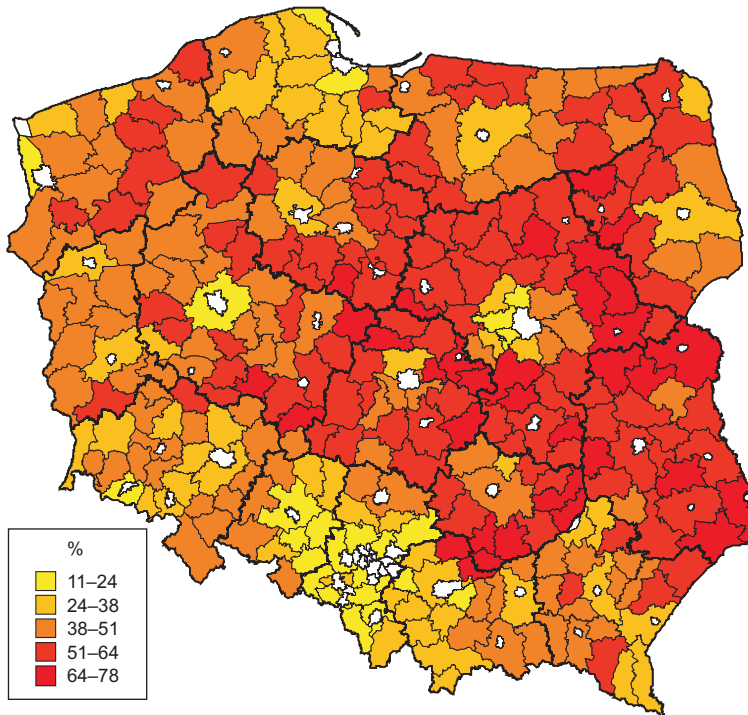


Fig. 1. Percentage of votes for populist parties (Samoobrona, PSL, LPR) in rural areas. Parliamentary election, 2005

### 1. The number of the farming population or on the nature of Polish agrarism

The farmers' influence on development processes is predominantly determined by the size of this social group. It is common knowledge that there are 'many' or 'too many' farmers in Poland. Difficulties begin when we set out to define their number on the basis of such criteria as employment, being a farm owner or source of income. The estimates can vary greatly. For instance, according to the 1995 Statistical Yearbook (*Rocznik Statystyczny*) published by the Central Statistical Office (GUS), 26.9% of people in work were employed in agriculture, as com-

<sup>1</sup> Paper delivered at a symposium of the Polish section of the RSA section on 7 March 2006.

pared to 15.4%, quoted in sociological surveys (studies on the social structure), including 13.4% of farm owners and 2% of hired labour; Domański 2004a).

We will also encounter difficulties in trying to assess the number of the ‘farming’ population on the basis of one supposedly very reliable source of information: the 2002 National Census, which distinguished the category of farming population, i.e. individuals in households with at least one farm user, which does not necessarily mean that they are farmers. It should be pointed out that the number of the population connected with small farms is quite large, unlike that connected with big farms.

Table 1. Farming population (based on the criterion of being a farm owner and size of the farm)

Type of farm	Population in thousand	Share in farming population	% of Poland's population	% of farming population
Individual farms, incl.:	10,474.5	100%	27.4	71.5
< 1 ha	3,016.8	28.8	7.9	20.5
> 1 ha	7,457.7	71.2	19.5	51.0
Individual farms > 1 ha	7,457.7	100%	19.5	51.0
1–2 ha	1,764.0	23.7	4.6	12.1
2–5 ha	2,311.6	30.9	6.0	15.9
5–20 ha	2,853.5	38.3	7.5	19.5
20–50 ha	446.9	6.0	1.2	3.0
50 ha or more	72.7	1.0	0.2	0.5

Source: Author's calculations based on: *Ludność and gospodarstwa domowe związane z rolnictwem*, part I: *Ludność*, www.stat.gov.pl.

We can also take into account three other criteria which help define the farming population: farm use, work in agriculture and source of income, although it has to be borne in mind that the share of the farming population determined on the basis of the individual criteria will not be the same. Moreover, it will differ within the individual criteria, depending on the degree of their stringency. For instance:

- the criterion of being a farm owner – the ‘agriculturality’ of Poland will vary from 22% households with a farm user, to 6.8% households with the user of a farm bigger than 1 ha and market-oriented;
- the criterion of work in agriculture – from 32.2% of those who contribute in any way to the functioning of a farm, to 11.6% of those who work on a farm at least three hours a day on a regular basis or do not work anywhere else;
- the criterion of income – from 17.9% of those deriving any income from work in agriculture or related to 7.2% earning income mainly from work in agriculture (Halamska 2005a). As regards rural areas, these agriculture-related indicators are on average 2.5 times higher.

We can say therefore that the concept of ‘agriculturality’ is vague and fluid, which means that Polish ‘agriculturality’ can only be contained within certain limits: a maximum which is a certain potentiality, and a minimum, which is

not tantamount to an actual boundary. The former boundary sets a potential range for the influence of agriculturality: there exists a population base which is formed of various linkages with agriculture; some specific situations may mobilise such a population to adopt similar behaviours, drawing on a corporative sense of community. This sense of community dates back to the times of the former political regime when every individual farm owner and his family were subjected to the policy of 'repressive tolerance' (Gorlach 1989). Farmers were treated as one bloc before the EU accession referendum in 2003, and later analyses of its results showed that being a farmer was regarded as a sufficient explanation of anti-EU voting preferences. Jacek Wasilewski put it in the following way: *the available analyses point to an unquestionable predominance of one factor explaining voting differences between individual districts (powiaty): it is employment in agriculture. [...] In Polish conditions, linkages with agriculture imply much more than just a designation of occupational status* (Wasilewski 2004, p. 117).

A similar mobilisation of the farming population can be expected in other precarious moments or upon the submission of other proposals, which is reinforced by an aura surrounding farming and farmers. It is frequently underpinned by an *unconscious competence expressed by mythisation of agriculture* (Perepeczko, Majewski 2004, p. 121), stereotyping the strengths of Polish agriculture and external dangers threatening it, the peasant lineage (including city dwellers) of Polish society (Wasilewski 1986) and search for an idyllic escape from stresses afflicting the Polish society: *in an era when most Poles have to cope with stress which in many cases is not a result of actual difficult conditions but pessimistic thoughts, rural areas and agriculture are perceived by the public at large as a mythological land of serenity and safety. Myths which attribute excessive value to Polish agriculture are probably to compensate for all these laments in which farmers and farming serve as an example of real and imagined injustices* (Perepeczko, Majewski 2004 p. 123). This is manifested by the generally positive stereotype of peasant-worker prevailing in the society (Łapińska-Tyszka 2004) and a high, 7<sup>th</sup> position of the 'average individual farmer' in the ranking of occupations (Domański 2004b).

On the other hand, maximum indicator values determine the potential range of agriculturality and the possible political power of the impact of the 'farming population'. However a question should be asked whether the most stringent criteria, aimed to capture 'professional farmers' and thereby reducing the number of the farming population to a small percentage of the society, fulfil the requirement of being sociologically sound? Are they realistic? The category of social identity could be helpful in finding an answer. If we agree that social identity is the result of a dual process: affirmation and differentiation, which takes place around the systems and issues which are important for individuals, we will also agree that the social identity of farmers evolves and is reinforced on the basis of their way of life and mode of work/production: *to sum up, <who you are> is for everyone the function of <what you do for a living>* (Rodrigo 2001, p.

481). Extrapolating this argument to Polish agriculturality, if we adopt income from agriculture as the criterion of agriculturality, we must agree that farmers are not only those who derive their income from work in agriculture but also those who receive their pensions and disability pensions from the Agricultural Social Insurance Fund – KRUS (Figs. 2 and 3). Which measure of agriculturality is then more adequate to delimit the potential scope of its impact on social behaviours? It turns out that the retired farmer or farmer on a disability pension remains a farmer in his mentality and in social choices he makes, which is proved by the strength of the relationship between the votes cast on three populist parties in the 2005 election and agriculturality, measured with either indicator. On the one hand, there is a strong positive interdependency (see Table 8) between the share of votes for three populist parties and agriculturality of the rural areas, measured by the share of families earning their living from work in agriculture (Pearson coefficient – 0.657), and on the other – this relationship is stronger in the case of a broader view on agriculturality: not only comprising income from work in agriculture but also from pensions for farmers (Pearson coefficient – 0.770).

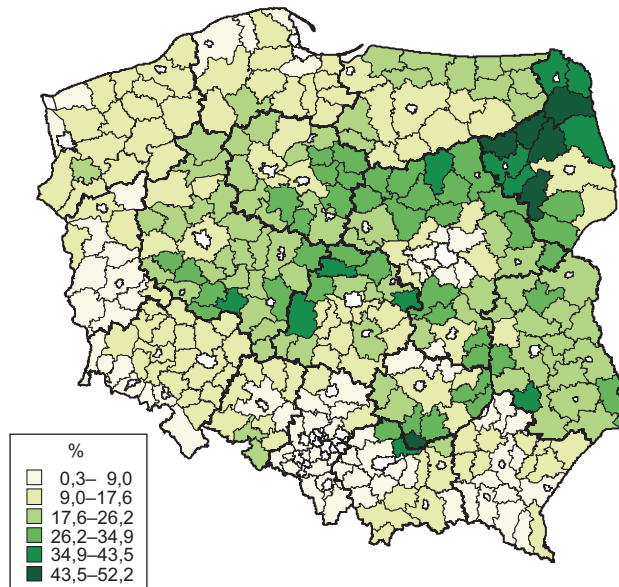


Fig. 2. Percentage of households for which agriculture is a main source of income (for rural areas of Poland, 2002)

To the above, one more and probably unprecedented form of agricultural identity should be added: ‘the stopgap identity’. In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, a representative survey conducted by the Institute of Public Affairs (ISP) noted a cer-

tain 'escape to agriculture' (Fedyszak-Radziejowska 2005, p. 142): in 2002, 64% of users of households with mainly non-agricultural income and 52% (26% in 1999) of those whose farms did not yield any tangible income identified themselves with the term 'farmer' (as compared with 27% in 1999).

This extremely interesting phenomenon of re-agrarisation highlights the specific nature of Polish agriculturality: it is not only fluctuating, but also sentimental and residual, and therefore its range is difficult to assess. In this way, I would like to point out that owing to the unique nature of this phenomenon, the scope of political influence of farmers on the transformation process is difficult to define, and its impact on the transformation process is prone to change.

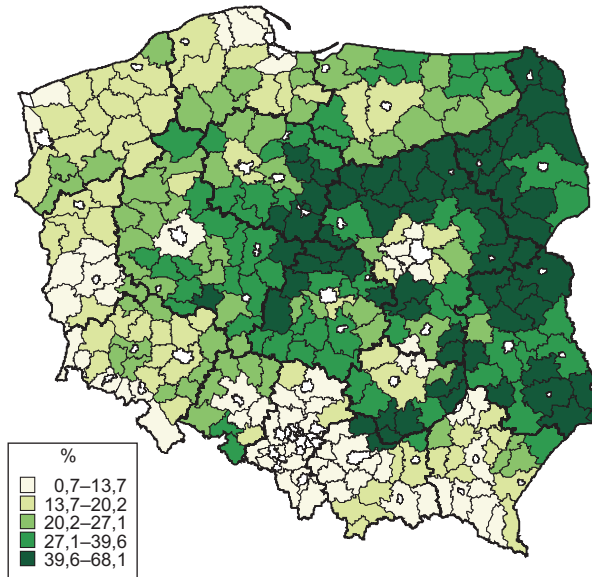


Fig. 3. Percentage of households for which agriculture and retirement benefits are main sources of income (rural areas of Poland, 2002)

## 2. What are farmers like? The basic characteristics

Farmers can be described in a variety of ways. Two factors are important for our present analysis: internal differentiation and distinctness from other groups. These factors should, however, be seen in the light of various processes occurring in agriculture since the beginning of the transformation.

Until 1989, and under the influence of the policy of repressive tolerance, agriculture and farmers operated in a kind of niche created by the characteristically socialistic economy of shortages. The dismantling of the socialist system, through the resultant liquidation of agricultural policy mechanisms, discontinued supports for rural areas and liquidation of the agriculture environment system, fostered relatively fast changes in farms. The changes in the way farms



operate, their relations with the market, principles of economic calculation and, last but not least, in the area structure (polarisation), brought about the 'end of peasantry'. In the 1990s, this process progressed in Poland in a peculiar way as the other, complementary process – of leaving agriculture – was blocked. As a result, a large population of quasi-peasants remained 'close to agriculture' or rather 'close to farms', and took shelter under the wings of agricultural identity; it was a group which had no other place in Poland's social structure. This group continues to significantly affect further changes and collective behaviours of farmers (Halamska 2005b).

Farmers have always been a diverse group, more varied than other social groups. The processes taking place during the transformation period have also had their bearing both on the criteria and strength. The broadest division used by sociologists is one into hired labour and farmers – farm users and members of their families who work with them. The group of hired labour in agriculture, also quite varied, is relatively small, and currently has about 120,000 people. The other group, of those farmers who work on a farm (users and their families) has about 2,400,000 people. Frequently, the level of income is adopted as a measure of farmers' division, even though depending on the method of management the scale of such diversity is different. In 2000, when in a survey of incomes six social and occupational groups were distinguished, farmers were the most stratified group, with the Gini coefficient of 0.466 when its value for Poland was 0.328 (Klank 2004, p. 40). This strong stratification is also demonstrated in *Social Diagnosis 2003* (Czapiński, Panek 2003), even though the next survey in the series, *Social Diagnosis 2005*, indicated that the differences in the farmers' incomes were flattened: in a survey using the decile method, the result was 4.09 in the group of farmers, and 4.94 for Poland (Panek 2005, p. 43).

The characteristics of farmers very frequently make references to inequalities concerning privately owned agricultural farms. Different criteria are used; in terms of the farm's acreage, four groups can be distinguished:

- small farms, 1–5 ha, which account for 58.8% of all farms;
- medium-sized farms, with transitional or partly agricultural character and acreage ranging from 5–20 ha, which account for 35.5%;
- small-scale commercial sales farms, sized 20–50 ha, which account for 4.9%;
- large and very large farms, over 50 ha, which jointly account for 0.9% of all farms.

In the past, the size of the farm was a basic criterion of social status in rural areas and among farmers. Contemporarily, the farm's area is not only the first and foremost indicator of the property stratification among farmers, but it also provides information about the nature of work performed by its owners. The bigger the farm, the greater number of hired labour, either on a permanent or seasonal basis. In addition to that, the nature of work performed by the owner-user changes: his involvement in work directly related to production will decrease and his managerial duties will increase, which is also reflected in the

self-identification and social identity of this group. On the basis of her research, Hanna Podedworna claims that owners of 50-hectare farms resemble entrepreneurs rather than farmers (Podedworna 2005).

Using the criterion of the objective of farming (market-oriented versus subsistence), demonstrated by the volume of sales, we can distinguish the following types of farms:

- subsistence farms, which account for 27.7% of all farms;
- farms producing mainly for their own needs, and selling surplus produce in the market – 25.4%. We should note at this point that the rationality of the operation of these two groups, comprising more than a half of all farms, is close to the rationality of peasant economy;
- market-oriented farms – 46.9%. This group is rather varied, depending on the value of sales. Only 6% of farms in this group generate commodity sales in excess of 50,000 zloty (which should not be mistaken for income).

Both the nature and role of each of these groups is not the same in the society. Only the third group – market-oriented farms – can be regarded as a fully-fledged member of market economy, while the other two groups either do not have any contact with the market or it is merely sporadic. One could say that they operate in a peasant-like way, but it has to be remembered that some of them do not generate agricultural production at all. Nevertheless, this mode of operation does not determine their social status since they do not earn their living from agriculture.

Arithmetically speaking, we could say that small farms, many of which have extremely weak links with the market, shape the face of Polish agriculture<sup>2</sup> (but not the structure of its production). This is reflected in the statistical image of a farmer – user of an agricultural farm. The majority of such farmers – farm users are owners of small farms whose contacts with the market are very few and far between.

As compared with other social and occupational groups, farmers can be regarded as a unique group not only because of their occupational activity (and ownership, in most cases). Their specific situation is succinctly summarised by two indicators, showing education and income. In 2000, as part of a project carried out by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), a team of researchers prepared a report on the level of social development in rural areas. The overall calculated value for Poland in 2000 was 0.809, including towns: 0.828, and rural areas – 0.794. The factors which were responsible for the low figures in rural areas included income and level of educational attainment. According to the authors, this result testified to an inner rift dividing the Polish society: urban areas were distinctly akin to well-developed societies (with the value of the indicator higher than 0.800), while rural areas had not reached that

<sup>2</sup> This is synthetically described by the economic size of a farm, measured by the standard gross margin – the European Size Unit (1 ESU = 1200 euro). Here, 78.9% of farms are under the 4 ESU threshold and therefore can be regarded as weak farms.



threshold yet. The report also states that the *petrification of such a division can be regarded as the basic factor destabilising, in the long term, Poland's development processes and the democratic institutions of our society* (Raport..., 2000, p. VIII). Therefore, if we use the measures responsible for the low value of the indicator for rural areas: education and income in an attempt to produce a brief description of farmers, we will notice a distinctly lower position of farmers both with regard to Poland at large, and to the entire category of rural areas. The education index is even lower than that for rural areas, so as the monthly income per head, which is lower than the so-called objective social minimum for this period (595 zloty being the poverty line). Another illustration of the social situation of farmers is the so-called index of social exclusion and being threatened with exclusion. It indicates that over two fifths of farmers either approach the boundary of social marginalisation or have already gone beyond it.

Table 2. Selected social situation indicators of farmers

Social situation indicators	Poland	Rural areas	Farmers
Education (index)	1,076	1,005	973
Income per capita in PLN	790	597	504
The excluded and threatened with exclusion in %	6.8 + 30.9		4.8 + 38.4

Source: Czapiński, Panek 2005; Frenkel 2005.

These characteristics are reflected in opinions, behaviours and attitudes. The generally lower level of educational attainment denotes lower intellectual suppleness, which is so crucial to keep up with the ever-changing reality. This is confirmed by low civilisation competences. Research shows that farmers exhibit a high level of enterprising spirit and foresight when it comes to everyday matters. As many as 32% (as compared to 21% in Poland) would be willing to take up a new job if their income was not sufficient to satisfy their basic needs (Czapiński, Panek 2005). However, insufficient education has a decisive bearing on their lack of 'cognitive enterprising spirit' (Mach 1998), which determines the pool of resources for all types of life activity. Krystyna Szafranec (2005b) demonstrated how, on the one hand, the level of education positively affects the level of life activity of the rural population, and on the other – how low the level of the so-called life activity resources is in the case of farmers (only that of economically passive population is lower). Two fifths of farmers have a low level of life activity ('they haven't achieved much in life in terms of status or wealth'), accompanied by a low level of expectations ('the horizon of their needs and aspirations does not go beyond the social security minimum threshold'), while one in ten farmers has a relatively high level of both (Szafranec 2005b, p. 16). It should not be found surprising therefore that the level of fear in this group is high, higher than Poland's average and higher than the average for rural areas.

This is an all-encompassing fear situation: farmers fear not only unemployment, as some researchers suggest (Fedyszak-Radziejowska 2005), but are also very frequently concerned about their unstable incomes, hard work, and burden of duties that they cannot cope with. Although fear and aversion to the EU could be explained by inadequate behaviours of the anti-peasant elites (professors, politicians, journalists; cf. Fedyszak-Radziejowska 2005), sources of other fears must be sought somewhere else. In light of the above farmers' characteristics, the hypothesis of weak human capital and low civilisation competences exaggerating fears of the unknown seems worthy of attention.

Table 3. Anxieties and fears of farmers

I have never felt that:	Poland	Rural areas	Farmers
The source of income is unstable and insecure	37.9	35.1	16.1
Work is too heavy and dirty	36.8	31.9	21.1
I have too many duties which I cannot cope with	40.5	38.7	28.5

Source: Czapirski, Panek 2005.

These anxieties and fears are accompanied by authoritarian attitudes which are much stronger than in other social and occupational groups.

Table 4. Authoritarian views of farmers

	Total	Rural areas	Farmers
Parents should be obeyed	72.6	76.5	82.3
A good boss is a strict boss	54.4	55.5	61.9
I rely on others in unclear matters	44.2	46.7	49.7
People can be either strong or weak	54.6	59.8	66.7
Authorities should be respected	46.5	47.0	53.8
One should trust Christian politicians	40.3	42.5	43.9
Homosexuals are perverts	23.7	25.1	29.6
Atheists are suspicious characters	19.7	21.3	23.1
There are better and worse nations	43.3	46.6	53.7

Source: Szafranec 2005a.

In all questions about the scale of authoritarianism, testing either authoritarian aggression or authoritarian submission, farmers are closer to the extreme end of authoritarianism than both rural residents and Poles at large. There are marked differences in the case of some statements (up to about 10 percentage points); they are mainly confined, however, to these areas which farmers find particularly important.

The farmers' hierarchy of values, is – at least in its upper section – similar to that of the majority of Poles, although while farmers tend to put more emphasis on the role of health and family (good marriage, children), they attach more importance to money more than work. Such values as freedom of speech, education and having friends are not particularly important. These attitudes indicate

that farmers are more materialistic, and that post-materialistic approaches are encountered much more seldom.

Table 5. Farmers and conditions of a happy life

Condition of a good and happy life	Poland	Rural areas	Farmers
Money	32.9	35.9	37.3
Children	45.8	47.1	55.9
Good marriage	58.6	53.6	61.2
Work	34.5	34.4	28.7
Friends	7.8	6.5	3.8
Providence, God	15.6	17.8	13.0
Optimism	9.2	6.3	4.4
Honesty	10.2	9.2	9.9
Respect of neighbours	6.8	6.1	5.9
Freedom of speech	3.4	2.6	2.2
Health	65.2	67.1	67.0
Education	5.7	4.8	2.9
Strong character	4.8	4.9	4.7

Source: Czapiński, Panek 2005.

Table 6. Types of social attitudes of farmers

Types of social attitudes	Poland	Rural areas	Farmers
Materialistic orientation (index)			
Post-materialistic orientation (elements):	0.0131		0.2530
– being sensitive to public good	2.17	0.1475	2.09
– pro-ecological attitudes (the average of two questions)	52.2	2.03	43.6

Source: Czapiński, Panek 2005, p. 163,182,196, 204.

According to Inglehart, who introduced this distinction into the research on value systems, in the conditions of scarcity, people tend to opt for materialistic values (such as income, physical threats, social disorder). According to Maslow's theory of needs, post-materialistic values (such as freedom of speech, self-fulfilment) appear later. In Western societies, a gradual shift towards non-materialistic attitudes can be observed, while in Poland a reverse process is taking place: the group of believers in materialistic values is gaining in strength. Therefore, while their being oriented to materialistic values can be explained by their relatively low incomes, it should be noted that this is accompanied by a lower sensitivity to the public good and a much lower sensitivity to environmental issues.

### 3. Farmers and the systemic transformation

The attitude of the 'agrarian classes' to social changes has been both described and analysed by historians, economists and sociologists since the 18<sup>th</sup> century or even earlier. The representatives of any of these classes – be it landed gentry, peasantry or farmers – have never been proponents of change, and are char-

acterised by such features as propensity for the archaic and routine and a hostile attitude to innovation. In her passionate essay entitled *The Polish Systemic Residue or the Question of the Role of the Village and the Peasantry in the Process of Systemic Transformation*, Krystyna Szafranec distinguished three views summarising the farmers' attitudes to the transformation in progress:

- rural areas and peasants hinder the systemic transformation in Poland; they also force the authorities to initiate redistribution mechanisms, which moves Poland away from market economy;
- agriculturality and rusticity of Poland is not a burden but an opportunity for growth;
- peasants are moderators of social change, which means they alter the nature of social change, from being uncontrollable and violent to milder and one that does not lead to so many social protests (Szafranec 2002).

The second of these views, which is of great importance for rural development, will not be discussed in this paper because its approach to systemic change is not in its main sphere of interest. Instead, we will focus on the first and third of the above viewpoints because when we have a good look at them, we will see that the differences in the assessment of the farmers' attitude to change are relatively insignificant. The first of them, which is quite popular with sociologists, has been most fully expounded by Edmund Mokrzycki in the essays entitled: *The Legacy of Real Socialism, Group Interests and Search for the New Utopia* and *A Class from the Past*; while the second, based on the findings of Jan Szczepański (1988) concerning the role of peasants in the socialist transformation, is discussed by Krystyna Szafranec in *The Polish Systemic Residue or the Question of the Role of the Village and the Peasantry in the Process of Systemic Transformation*.

According to Mokrzycki, the post-communist transformation enables normalisation of economic relations which will now be subject to market mechanisms. Peasants are paying the highest price for this normalisation: that of economic marginalisation. In the times of socialist Poland, peasants lived in a civilisational niche, and the boundary *dividing 'the country' from 'the city' is one of a most fundamental societal divide* (2001, p. 52), a division which is not only pertinent but one which can have a serious bearing on the future of the whole Polish society. Its part which is conventionally called the 'city' follows the modernisation path, while the 'country', deep hidden in the civilisational niche, feels released from this obligation. This is one of the reasons why a substantial part of the peasant-rural section of the Polish society is heading towards an underclass – a class of redundant people whom the system does not need. Neither the peasant tradition nor ethos can be of any assistance: the social system does not absorb those quasi-peasants but replicates them. Assistance programmes are not sufficient to overcome this tendency: *an irreversible degradation of their social substance is taking place; mechanisms for reproducing misery are spontaneously triggered off, and the subculture of dependence and crime, inherited from generation to generation, is becoming a permanent fea-*

*ture of this social stratum and an inalienable component of the country's social life* (Mokrzycki 2001, p. 56). Selective development could provide a solution to this situation, however the initiation of its mechanisms is blocked by the political parties which are mainly guided by election arithmetic.

Szafraniec, who is a proponent of the moderating role of farmers, claims that not only is of common knowledge, but also *in the results of sociological surveys, rural areas have for years been perceived as the group which has the least support for societal changes. Rural residents, particularly peasants, do not feel well with situations of social anarchy and more than urban residents are ready to accept authoritarian political solutions, etc. We can recall their unenthusiastic attitude to strikes in the time of the 'Solidarity' trade movement, too indulgent views on the institution of martial law in Poland, not so friendly approach to the systemic change started in 1989, and – first and foremost – their nostalgia for old socialist Poland, coupled with aversion to EU accession. However, when we look at these events from a distance, we will notice that the differences in political views between urban and rural areas are not that significant, and that in the recent years the viewpoints of the rural residents (or rather peasants) and the society at large became more convergent in more matters than merely state policy* (Szafraniec 2002, p. 187). It would be too far-fetched to say that the farmers were responsible for a growing negative attitude to changes in the society, but as early as in 1989 (when the prices of agricultural produce were released) farmers were rather sceptical about the heralded transformation. Thereby Szafraniec does not question Mokrzycki's diagnosis, but rather confirms his observation concerning the negative attitude of farmers towards change – the most negative among all social categories which are traditionally distinguished in sociological research. Particularly vehement is their opposition to market changes in agriculture, which they dub as callous, and put the 'damaging liberalism' to blame. Szafraniec also corroborates the second thesis put forward by Mokrzycki: about the farmers' ability to trigger off redistribution mechanisms; she describes the process of rise and institutionalisation of peasant pressure: *generally speaking, the farmers' belief in the efficacy of economic activity as a way to improve their situation gradually waned. They are not as convinced as several years ago that development and intensification of agricultural production could improve their situation (in 1995, 85% of farmers were of such an opinion, as compared to the current 73%). Instead, their support to political forms of defending their interests has considerably increased. For instance, in a 2000 survey, 59% (47% in 1995) respondents opted for organising protests in order to pressurise the authorities into adopting an agricultural policy more favourable to them, and over 80% were in favour of supporting peasant parties. Generally, at the end of the 1990s farmers joined hands in formulating group interests and demands and – this should be particularly emphasised – in an overall social consolidation in rural matters, despite the deepening differences and economic divisions among peasantry, and many years of promoting negative publicity concerning (backwarded and incapable) agriculture (ibidem, p. 181). Farmers are more*

and more convinced about the need to choose a political path enabling them to improve their situation and they bring these convictions to life. Since the time this essay was written (2002), a lot of progress was made in issues related to the triggering of redistribution mechanisms.

What certainly differentiates the attitudes discussed above is the viewpoint from which they are analysed: in the former case, it is the perspective of a global society and mechanisms of its transformation, and in the latter – the current group perspective, the point of view of one of the society's segments, devoid of any attempt at reflection or evaluation of the impact such a situation could have on the group's future.

This is probably the reason why the emotional load of every such standpoint is different. It has to be admitted that the debate about agriculture, farmers and their future is *full of moralising, which obscures an objective analysis of the situation* (Mendras 1984, p. 266). These views seem wholly convergent when we realise that peasants, even when they block the process of change, cannot stop it entirely, and when they moderate it, they slow down change instead of accelerating it. The former position is plain and clear, while the latter is formulated in the language of political correctness, even though the context and the tenor of the term 'moderation' ascribed to it by Jan Szczepański was different. In light of the above, it might seem more expedient to introduce the term of 'slowing down change', with a reservation that such a slowdown, while alleviating some tensions, at the same time lays foundations for the appearance of others.

#### 4. Mechanisms which slow down change

There are many arguments in favour of such a view concerning the impact of farmers on the transformation process. This is due to a number of reasons: imperfect, 'socialist' modernisation of Polish agriculture; symbiotic linkages between the peasant economy with the centrally planned economy of shortages and the resultant distortion of the farm operation mechanisms, specific identity of peasant-farmers, defined by overly valued work and naturalised ownership, the emergence of a marginalised, structurally reproducing itself population of quasi-peasants (cf. Halamska 1992; 1995; 2000a; 2005a) and the impact of this group on the shape of Polish agriculture and the interests it gives expression to. In the late 1990s, the channels for the articulation of the interests of farmers and quasi-peasants were institutionalised. Such institutionalisation of pressure (in the form of trade unions or parties) is not new, either. In his *La fin des paysans*, Henry Mendras wrote: *What should we do to take the place in the nation that is due to us? First of all – we should unite!* (1984, p. 265). In the 1990s Poland, it was mainly opposition parties which tried to unite peasantry around certain interests, while the remaining trade union organisations did not fulfil this role as they were occupied by political parties competing with them. As a result, this consolidation had a specific political expression, with demands that triggered off political forms of pressure but without attempting at organising any action 'using common effort', with a preference for mass manifestations while neglecting collective activities. This was manifested by a virtual absence of farmers'



trade unions in rural public life and the failure of the so-called producer groups.<sup>3</sup> Instead, in all the elections held since 1991, farmers predominantly voted for parties which tackled rural and agricultural issues: in the 1991 election, 54% of farmers cast their votes for two peasants' and farmers' parties: PSL – Programme Alliance and PSL – People's Alliance, and in the 1993 election support for such parties became even stronger (PSL, Programme Alliance, KKW 'Homeland', Self-Defence); altogether, they collected 71% of farmer votes (Żukowski 1995). This concentration still continues, which is proved by the results of the 2001 election. This time, parties using populist – and not only peasant and farmer rhetoric – reaped 71% of farmer votes (PSL – 34.5%, Self-Defence – 29.9%, LPR – 6.9%), as compared with 45.3% in rural areas and 27% in the country at large (Fedyszak-Radziejowska 2002). The last parliamentary election once more confirmed this trend: rural areas have markedly different preferences than cities, and the relationships between the 'agriculturality' of rural areas and the strength of the support for populist agrarian parties are quite significant (as shown above).

Table 7. Results of 2005 parliamentary election (in %)

Turnout / Party-Grouping	Urban areas	Rural areas
Turnout	43.1	36.2
Law and Justice (PiS)	28.8	23.3
Civic Platform (PO)	28.5	15.0
Self-Defence (SO)	7.0	20.6
League of Polish Families (LPR)	6.9	10.1
Polish Peasant Party (PSL)	3.2	14.7
Democratic Left Alliance (SLD)	13.1	7.7
Other	12.5	8.6
Total populist parties	20.4	45.4
Total unwritten coalition	49.2	68.7

Source: website of the National Electoral Commission (PKW).

Nearly every second rural resident voted for the three populist agrarian parties: Self-Defence – one in five; LPR – one in ten, PSL – one in six. This means that the three parties using the agrarian and populist rhetoric retained their influence in rural areas.

These results of the election indicate that the farmer vote was quite well 'covered', and the ways to exert pressure to ensure redistribution which would be favourable to farmers were institutionalised. In democratic systems, this is a standard social mechanism. Does that mean that farmers' interests are well catered to? For the time being, I will leave this question unanswered, and will

<sup>3</sup> A producer group is an EU institution organising small producers from one sector in a given territory to enable collective negotiations with customers concerning production and sales. In 2001, 753 such structures were initiated in Poland. In 2004, only 55 were still in operation (Kamiński 2005).

focus on two aspects: programmes of parties elected by farmers and the mechanism for articulating their demands.

Table 8. Support for PSL, Self-Defence, LPR and the degree of 'agriculturality' by district (*powiat*) (in %)

Percentage of households with main income from agriculture + households of rural pensioners	Percentage of votes cast					Total N = 100%
	5.7–19.5	19.5–33.3	33.3–47.2	47.2–61.0	61.0–74.8	
< 10	50	41	6	3	0	36
10–20	8	35	48	9	0	87
20–30	0	10	53	36	1	87
30–40	0	4	13	67	16	45
> 40	0	2	7	38	53	59
Total	25	57	100	93	39	314

Source: prepared by the author.

What do farmers and rural residents find so appealing in the programmes of the parties they support so faithfully and in such large numbers? I will not examine in detail the bizarre economic programmes, each of which – responding to the well known dissatisfaction from the systemic reform – conveyed a clear message: that from now on poor people will have a better life because they will get the social minimum wages and benefits merely because they do not work, etc.

Table 9. Opinions about transformation

Opinions	Poland	Rural areas	Farmers
Life was easier before 1989	43.6	44.2	52.7
The post-1989 reforms were not successful	46.7	47.2	52.9
They had an adverse effect on my life	56.1	62.6	65.5

Source: Czapiński, Panek 2005.

On the other hand, if we take the election results as an indicator of a certain body of opinions characterising the rural and farming community, then we have to conclude that the party programmes and the election campaigns have brought it into the open. During the election campaign, each of these parties exploited, though with varying intensity, anti-EU, anti-elitist, anti-liberal symbols, appealed to the ideas of state protectiveness and valorised 'folksiness'. They responded to the need for institutionalised protectiveness, which existed in rural areas, without which numerous groups of rural residents (such as large families, old people, the unemployed, farmers) found it difficult to cope, dispelled the fears against the unknown and whatever is alien and ennobled the well-known and familiar, promoted an autocratic style of exercising power and

a simplified view of the world and the mechanisms shaping it. Thereby, they contested all the ideas underpinning the country's development strategy to date. The acceptance for these political proposals was accompanied by a scarce pool of knowledge and low civilisation competences, distrust and authoritarianism of the voters. They were all interrelated features, whose replication is made easier by *rural environment, understood as a certain closed social and cultural whole with relatively strong mutual bonds and a hierarchic system of social relations* (Szafraniec 2005a, p. 393).

Who was 'delegated' by farmers to represent them and champion their interests? What is the place of their preferred parties in the political scene and what is their attitude to political coalitions which exist in all periods between elections? Nearly all the parties of farming and rural sentiments can be found on the opposing side of the political spectrum. Even if they join the ruling coalition, at some point they will break it up (PSL-People's Alliance and twice PSL). I can see a certain regularity and an effect of the mechanism involving 'formulating a demand – possibility of satisfying it'. Unquestionably, at the beginning of the transformation, both agriculture and farmers were left to themselves, which led to violent protests, frustration and withdrawal of widespread social support for the reforms. On this frustration, populist agrarian parties built their original political capital and made up a list of demands which cannot be satisfied not because of the ill will of the elites but due to the limited capacity of the state. In the last decade, expenditure on broadly understood agriculture accounted for nearly 9% of the state budget, and this share cannot be easily increased. Most of these funds – about 70% – are earmarked for the social needs of farmers: the Agricultural Social Insurance Fund (KRUS), which this year will have a budget of ca. PLN 15 billion. Expenditure on agriculture itself and its modernisation accounts for only a portion of the remaining 30% because other needs of rural areas are also met from this budget. Pro-farmer parties which come to power are quick to perceive this financial barrier and break up the coalition in order to save their social support. They must also act quickly because there is intense competition in the political market: other populist agrarian parties also strive for the support of the rural electorate. They are also 'courted' by the government since, as Mendras writes, *every new social order, every new political orientation look for a way to take root in the country, to do 'something' for peasants* (1984, p. 251). This creates a self-perpetrating mechanism for multiplying demands and promises, without any real possibility for satisfying them.

Let us go back to the issue of representing the farmers' interests. This special concern voiced by many parties does not mean that the interests of farmers are well represented. Agriculture is an extremely varied sector, there are different farmers and different farmers' interests. Drawing on these differences in the political debate and addressing the party programme to a certain farmer group cannot be successful, which is proved for example by the disappearance of Roman Jagieliński and his grouping (which targeted the largest farms and promoted modern farming) from the political scene. It can be said therefore

that there is no possibility to formulate a programme for selective development and that no party has a vision of future agriculture. Here rules the 'law of large numbers' and there are only programmes which promise happiness to everyone: each party wants to achieve something beneficial for all farmers in order to either win or keep their support. Although these are programmes for the 'peasant masses', at the same time various particularistic interests of producers' or food processors' groups, which are not numerous but economically strong, are promoted. The presence of such groups and their interests is revealed in various scandals which regularly hit the headlines. This means that there are two paths for the articulation of interests: an open way, controlled by various democratic procedures, and a covert one, which remains beyond public control.

In summary, it can be said that the influence of farmers on the rhythm and pace of change has many facets. The numerous and diverse community of farmers, which is dominated by quasi-peasants and 'part-farmers' has the power to pressurise the policy makers into redistribution which serves their interests, and which is mainly related to satisfying their social needs. This redistribution logic, however, can weaken the internal dynamics of change in agriculture, which is extremely worrying because the principles of EU funds allocation are also subordinated to such logic. Another threat for development is the dual procedure for the representation of farmers' interests which can threaten the nascent democratic mechanisms and transform them into plain political clientelism and a self-perpetuating mechanism for increasing demands which cannot be met, which in turn may strengthen populism even further.

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