

30 NOVEMBER 1963

RFE TARGET AREA RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

Background Report

Polish Unit - W.K.

POLISH AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION IN 1963

Polish agriculture in 1963 has had a quite good year -- much better than many observers had expected and than many Polish regime spokesmen had predicted. This is the estimate which emerges from the speech of Agriculture Minister Mieczyslaw Jagielski to the Sejm (Parliament) on November 12, and reported by "Trybuna Ludu" of November 13.

Jagielski himself stated that the results were better than originally expected. Some of the expectations had been gloomy indeed. On July 1, Edward Ochab, himself a former Minister of Agriculture, blamed the previous (1962) year's "bad results" for the need to import three million tons of grain, in order "to maintain the level of our livestock production." On September 6, Deputy Premier Zenon Nowak, stated that "there is no doubt that the results of our agricultural efforts will be much worse than expected". Two days later, at the annual "Harvest Festival" Gomulka himself warned the country that "the 1963 total output may be lower than that of the last year".

Jagielski's Speech

These statements by regime leaders had been accompanied by many articles in the press which were in a similar vein. The more observant sections of the Polish public must, therefore, have been surprised by the much more optimistic note struck by Jagielski in his speech to the Sejm.

Jagielski, who had himself been very pessimistic in a speech he made exactly two months earlier, attributed his change of tone to the "favorable atmospheric conditions prevailing in September and October". He was particularly pleased with the results in five sectors:

1) in potatoes, where average yields per hectare are over the 150 quintals mark. This is more than 20 quintals higher than in 1962 and 15 quintals higher than the average yields for this crop during the last five years;

2) in sugar beets, where the yields will "probably be better than last year although the sugar content will be smaller;

3) in cereals. Here Jagielski quoted an estimate of the State Crop Inspection Board giving the average yield of the four cereal crops (wheat, oats, barley and rye) as just over 17 quintals per hectare. This is considerably better than the 16.1 quintals per hectare of 1962;

4) in vegetables. Here Jagielski was particularly happy, claiming a 24 per cent increase over 1962;

5) in tobacco, where the crop this year will amount to 59,000 tons, an increase of 22,000 tons over last year.

In other sectors Jagielski was not so optimistic. The crop of oleaginous plants would be lower than that of last year, when the crop had been relatively good. Much more worrying, however, was the livestock situation, particularly in pigs, the number of which had been decreased by two million heads. For this Jagielski blamed the poor crops of 1962 and the consequent lack of fodder. In cattle, though the situation was not much more favorable -- the number was now almost 10 million -- there was a shortage of milk which could be blamed on the lack of fodder and the unfavorable weather which had lowered the milk yields per cow.

But Jagielski summed up on an optimistic note. Total production in 1963, he said, would be about three per cent higher than in 1962. This success had been due not only to "the sense of responsibility prevailing among our peasants and agricultural workers" but also to the manifold help given by the state.

Political Motives

Jagielski's note of cautious satisfaction raises the obvious question of why practically all previous speeches on agriculture (including one by him) had been pervaded by gloom and pessimism. One, of course, must assume that the regime leaders were genuinely concerned about the very severe winter and the subsequent drought in the summer. They must also have welcomed with great relief the better weather of September and October. But even allowing for this, and also for the fact that some of the gloomy prognostications could have had an exhortatory character, it is difficult to account for the sudden change simply in terms of an optimum September and October.

It should be remembered in this connection that the record breaking year of 1961 seems to have made the Polish leaders think that records could go on being broken indefinitely. What was good for 1961 was good for every other year. This was a pious hope which was shattered the very next year when agricultural production was well below the 1961 figure. It was immediately condemned as a calamity whereas in fact the production figures in 1962 were the second best in Polish history. But in terms of 1961 it was a poor year and became imprinted as such in the minds of the Polish leaders. Thus when it seemed that 1963 might only be as good as 1962 -- perhaps even a bit worse -- the situation seemed tragic indeed.

Now it is turning out slightly better. Thus, in the first place, there is no need for such despondency and, in the second place, the Polish leaders may at last have concluded that, in so precarious a sphere as agriculture, bumper years should not be taken for granted.

There is also an important political factor which should be taken into consideration. This year has been a bad one for Poland and its people. Most of the evidence points to the population being in a pretty disgruntled mood. There has been a considerable shortage of foodstuffs and consumer goods, the so-called action "R" has caused unemployment. There was ample reason, therefore, for the regime to come up with some pronouncement which, if not the occasion for jubilation, might convince people that the situation was not as bad as they expected.(x) Thus, this political reason may, ironically, have forced the regime to take a more realistic view of the agricultural returns and this may have been the reason why Jagielski gave a favorable interpretation to figures which, had they been judged in terms of 1961, could have been used to spread further a sense of despondency and alarm.

(x) It is also conceivable that the current factional struggle in Poland may have had some bearing on the decision to put a good face on the agricultural situation. It may have been thought that a pessimistic report would only have played into the hands of those urging a harder line in the economy.

Development of Agricultural Production in Poland since 1960

	1960	1961	1962	1963 (Jagielski's estimates)
4 cereals (in qph)	16.1	18.0	16.1	"slightly over 17.0"
Potatoes	132	160	130	150
Sugar beet (in qph)	256	275	236	"probably better than last year's, but lower sugar per- centage"
Vegetables (in thousand tons)	3,359	3,207		3,500
Tobacco (in thousand tons)	41	46	37	59
Fruit (in thousand tons)	1,114	616		"no worse than last year's"
Pig population (in million head)	12.6	13.4	13.6	"nearly two million head less"
Cattle population* (in million head)	9.0	10.4	12.0	"almost 10 million head"
Total Agricultural Production	+ 5.4 % (over 1959)	+ 10.4 % (over 1960)	- 8.5 % (compared with 1961)	+ 3 % (over 1962)

*) According to the Central Statistical Office communiqué of 29 July 1963 ("Trybuna Ludu" of 30 July 1963) the number of cattle increased (in June 1963, as compared with June 1962) by 2.5 per cent; this contradicts Jagielski's statement ("almost 10 million" is two million less than in 1962), but we cannot advance an explanation.

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