

# RADIO FREE EUROPE

*Research*

## EAST EUROPE

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### LAND CONSOLIDATION IN POLAND

A perennial problem of Polish agriculture has been the atomization of private farmland. The division of farms into many tiny, scattered strips means a waste of arable land and loss of the peasant's time, as well as precluding agricultural mechanization. In the initial postwar period, land consolidation -- initiated in the inter-war years -- was sacrificed to the plans for collectivization. Even after 1956 and the abandonment of forced collectivization, the Gomulka regime, still guided by the perspective of future socialized land integration, largely ignored the problem of land fragmentation.

But as the country's agricultural problems -- including insufficient grain production, which had to be compensated for by imports -- remained unsolved, a number of agricultural specialists and public figures began to deal with the issue of land atomization and urge the consolidation of private farms at the present time, irrespective of their future "socialization." As Professor Ryszard Manteufel, professor of agricultural economics at the Higher School of Agriculture in Warsaw and a leading advocate of land consolidation, maintained: "... land must be consolidated in individual villages, the trend and timing of social changes notwithstanding." (1)

In response to such critical voices, the top Party leadership finally had to address itself to the issue. In October 1965, addressing the editorial staff of the PUWP's agricultural weekly,

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(1) Zycie Warszawy, 8 November 1966. (Emphasis added.) See RFE EERA Background Reports, "Private Farm Strip Consolidation in Poland," 3 November 1965, and "New Voices in Support of Private Farm Strip Consolidation," 12 December 1966.

Chlopska Droga, Gomulka admitted the existence of the problem. (2) Then last winter, addressing the Third Congress of Agricultural Circles in Warsaw on 8 December 1966, Gomulka seemed to endorse in qualified terms the necessity of the consolidation of farmland. (3)

Since December, pleas for land consolidation have continued to appear. Writing in the United Peasant Party (UPP) weekly, Tygodnik Kulturalny, of March 3, L. Kozub concluded that "land consolidation is one of the conditions of rational, highly productive farming. It is necessary despite the future anticipated transformation of our agrarian structure." (4) Z. Zagielski, writing in Trybuna Ludu of April 6, praised the "social consolidation" of land in Bialystok villages (where land was exchanged by the peasants directly, without official interference) and suggested that this method should be encouraged elsewhere. (5)

Both articles also dealt with another type of land consolidation. As Kozub wrote, "A serious step in consolidation may be taken... when creating new state farms from the State Land Fund and from the lands taken over by the state from failing farms." In other words, consolidation of land could mean, not the mutual rationalization of the area of private farms, but the creation of new state farms, or the enlargement of existing ones, with consolidated land taken over by the State Land Fund from abandoned farms or other sources.

While the evidence is fragmentary and the issue not necessarily finally resolved, there have been a number of indications that the Party leadership has accepted the necessity of land consolidation only in this latter sense. Gomulka himself supplied the most authoritative comment. Addressing the Third National Congress of State Farm employees on March 22, in a passage of his speech not publicized, he again admitted the topicality of the problem of land consolidation. "The point is," he said, "that the existing state farms might take over the land after consolidation and make use of it as quickly as possible." (6) The same point has also

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- (2) Radio Warsaw, 23 October 1965. The passage was omitted from the published version of his remarks, Trybuna Ludu, 24 October 1965.
- (3) Trybuna Ludu, 9 December 1966.
- (4) Polish Press Survey No. 2061, 5 April 1967.
- (5) Ibid., No. 2066, 28 April 1967.
- (6) PAP in English, 22 March 1967. The passage was omitted from the Radio Warsaw summary and the Trybuna Ludu (March 23) version of his speech.

been made in the press. Bydgoszcz Voivodship Party secretary Malinowski, writing in Zarzewie (4 June 1967), argued that young people could obtain land from the State Land Fund away from the socialist sector (state farms, collective farms, common land of agricultural circles) after it had been consolidated, implying that consolidated land in the vicinity of "socialist" farms would be taken over by them. Dziennik Ludowy, (1 July 1967) the UPP organ, said openly that consolidation of land in the State Land Fund was being carried out so that state farms would take over more land from the Fund.

Approaching the problem the other way around, there have been numerous comments in the Polish press on the expected increased expansion of the area of state farms -- a perspective logically requiring the prior consolidation of land. In the period 1961-1965, out of 913,000 hectares of land disposed of by the State Land Fund, only 231,000 hectares were sold to private peasants, the remainder going to socialist farms, mainly to state farms. (7) It seems that this ratio will change even more to the disadvantage of the private peasant. On 15 February 1967, the Ministry of Agriculture forbade the sale of any land from the State Land Fund to private peasants until the end of 1967 (with unspecified partial exceptions, for the Wroclaw, Olszytn, Bialystok, and Poznan voivodships); in at least one district, such sales will reportedly remain suspended until land consolidation has been carried out. (8) The Dziennik Ludowy article maintained that Voivodship authorities in Poznan and elsewhere had been reluctant to sell land from the State Land Fund to private peasants in view of its future socialization, in spite of the fact, it was argued, that private peasants could put fallow land to use twice as fast as state farms. (9) In the Poznan Voivodship, the paper reported, state farms would take over 50,000 hectares from the State Land Fund in the next three years, whereas they had been taking 10,000 hectares a year. This prediction was generalized by Nowe Drogi (July 1967): "the phenomenon of transferring land from the State Land Farm to socialist farms will increase."

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(7) Zagadnienia Ekonomiki Rolnej, January 1967.

(8) Gromada, 9 July 1967.

(9) Wies Wspolczesna, June 1967, the UPP theoretical monthly, maintained that the costs were half: it cost a state farm 20,000 zloty to put a hectare of land into production; a private peasant, seven to 10,000 zloty. Cholpska Droga, July 12, quoted the costs for a state farm in Poznan Voivodship as 35 to 40,000 zloty per hectare.



This evidence would seem to further support the view that, faced with a continuing agricultural crisis, the PUWP leadership has resolved, not to concentrate primarily on making private farms more efficient, but to attempt to increase the area and output of the "socialist sector" -- state farms in particular. (10) Land consolidation too, it would seem from the above, is being subordinated to this end.

But the advocates of private land consolidation have by no means been silenced. Znak deputy Konstanty Lubienski seemed to be questioning the direction of land consolidation when, in the course of an interpellation in the Sejm, he asked "...what the program is here, as far as the improvement of the agrarian structure is concerned, and whether the rate of consolidation of land should not be speeded up?" (11) Boleslaw Struzek, polemicizing indirectly in Wies Wspolczesna, May 1967, with the view that the Party leadership seems to be favoring, was the most explicit:

There are a number of causes for the relatively great unpopularity of land consolidation in Poland.... Nevertheless, for the last several years, the view of the necessity of carrying out land consolidation work has become ever more widespread.... However, the apprehension may arise that consolidation will become a factor preserving the system of individual farming .... (Yet) land consolidation can obviously not be subordinated exclusively to the need of separating and concentrating the land of the State Land Fund. The work of consolidation must contribute to an improvement in the production and socio-communal conditions of the (private) peasant population.

Private farm consolidation thus remains a necessity. This view is one part of a larger conception of an alternative to emphasizing state farms in future agricultural development. In this view, which may well be that of the UPP leadership, while socialization of agriculture remains the final aim, this goal is to be realized, not by weakening private farming, but precisely by aiding the private farmer to become an efficient producer on his own land, and then encouraging cooperation among such productive farms. As Struzek argued, "... hastening economic-technological progress on

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(10) This is the conclusion of a recent article in Foreign Agriculture, publication of the US Department of Agriculture, as reported by RFE Special of 10 July 1967.

(11) Tygodnik Powszechny, 25 June 1967 (a censored text), Polish Press Survey No.2082, 7 July 1967.

individual farms is not an antagonistic factor in relation to general social development." But a further sign of the Gomulka regime's rejection of this premise is its apparent reluctance to endorse the principle of private land consolidation.

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