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## AN ATTEMPT AT A HISTORY OF MEAT IN PEOPLE'S POLAND

Can meat have its own history? Certainly yes, as is testified by many publications of western historiography<sup>1</sup>. However, the analyses of this problem usually appear in a larger context of deliberations over the history of everyday life, types of diet (including the cuisine of various nations), food supply, poverty or misery. The direction of research focused on “things” or commodities shown in various social, anthropological, or cultural contexts becomes more and more distinct and arouses more and more interest. However, the idea to take meat as the subject not only of social or economic but also political history has not so far produced any exhaustive analyses. This statement certainly pertains to Polish historiography concerned with the period after 1944<sup>2</sup>. However, the hackneyed joke that sums up the history of People's Poland in the words: “There's no meat” shows that perhaps the phenomenon is worth pondering on. The present work aims at least to approximate an answer to the question about the attitude both of the communist authorities and society to the “meat problem”,

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g.: Madeleine Ferrières, *Histoire des peurs alimentaires. Du Moyen Âge à l'aube du XXe siècle*, Paris 2002, Edition du Seuil. *Ibid.* profuse literature on that subject.

<sup>2</sup> Jerzy Kochanowski tries to fill this gap with his research, the first results of which are very interesting — see: *idem*, “Serdelki oczywiście zostają” (*Certainly, sausages remain*) which is one more proof of the political role of sausage (in 1956), in: *Kuchnia władzy. Księga pamiątkowa z okazji 70-tej rocznicy urodzin Andrzeja Gąlickiego*, ed. by Włodzimierz Borodziej and Jerzy Kochanowski, Warszawa 2005, pp. 131–144; *idem*, *Das “Problem Nummer 1” und seine Protagonisten. Fleisch und Fleischspekulanten in Polen 1944 bis 1989*, in: *Unsere Feinde. Konstruktionen des Anderen im Sozialismus*, Leipzig 2004, pp. 455–464. Other interesting remarks on the subject: Kathy Burrell, *The Political and Social Life of Food in Socialist Poland*, “Anthropology of East Europe Review”, 2003, vol. 21, № 1; D. Crowley, *Warsaw's Shops: Stalinism and the Thaw*, in: Reid S. E. and Crowley D. (eds.), *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe*, Oxford, Berg, pp. 1–22.

and mainly its shortage, in the wider context of difficulties with food supply in Poland between 1944–1989.

Meat in the economy of Eastern European countries of “real socialism” was a commodity the role of which was described by, among other authors, by Janos Kornai in his now classical work *Economics in Shortage*. In accordance with his findings it was frequently rationed out, just like other goods and services, on the basis of criteria that had nothing to do with its price. Market allocation dominated in “relatively peaceful periods” characterized by “the traditional system of economic management”<sup>3</sup>. The economy of the countries of this region did not know the mechanism which decided that the shortage of consumer goods was eliminated by a rise in their prices. The reaction of households to the rise in prices, consisting in the reduction of the actual demand, as a rule was not sufficient to eliminate shortage<sup>4</sup>. Nevertheless, the economic authorities applied from time to time the rise in prices as an instrument of regulation of demand for food products.

The systemic shortages of supply, including, of course, that of meat and its products were — paradoxically, as it would sound — the “daily bread” of those who governed and were governed in Poland after 1945. The analysis of documents created by the key institutions of the communist state shows that the history of People’s Poland had no period when the social needs in the sphere of consumption of meat and its products could be regarded as fully satisfied. Even in the “golden period” of the first half of the decade of Edward Gierek’s rule (1970–1975), the preserved documentation of the sessions of the PUPW Central Committee Politburo shows that the shortages of the supply of meat and its products were assessed as diminishing, but still felt distinctly<sup>5</sup>.

This sense of unsatisfied needs of the consumers as a rule led the authorities to apply very complicated gimmickry, especially before holidays, when meat and smoked meat were bought in greater quantities. The solution of these problems was the task

<sup>3</sup> J. Kornai, *Economics of Shortage*, Amsterdam–New York–Oxford 1980.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>5</sup> Archiwum Akt Nowych (Archives of Modern Records, henceforward AAN), Komitet Centralny Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej (Polish United Workers’ Party Central Committee, henceforward KC PZPR) micr. 2929 (call N° 1760), The appraisal of the realization of the National Economic Plan in the first half of 1972, Warszawa, July 1972, l. 29.

of bureaucratic, ministerial and party structures. A calendar of "throwing" particular assortment of meat and smoked meat on the market was then scrupulously established in order to create "the atmosphere of its full satisfaction"<sup>6</sup>.

This pattern of "campaign" thinking and improvement of social feeling before the periods that were deemed by the authorities "dangerous" or important for propaganda purposes, also meant that the shops had to be better provided with meat and smoked meat before successive "pseudo-elections", and especially before important state holidays (May 1st, e.g.), etc. Such strategy was motivated by a conviction that better supply may "buy" more social peace.

### I. The Ways of Counteracting Shortages

The fact that there was always too little meat, and no change of shortage economy could be made for doctrinal reasons, does not mean at all that no methods were used to cope with this shortage. The means applied to reach this goal can be divided into two basic groups: those which increased the supply of and those which limited the demand for meat.

#### 1. To increase the supply

The methods of increasing the supply underwent many changes. Their socially "milder" version consisted above all of creating conditions for the development of agricultural production and the food-processing industry. The elements of this process embraced the gradual departure from the system of compulsory annual supplies of agricultural products, including livestock (from 1972 onwards)<sup>7</sup>, the periodic raising of the prices for the contracted supplies of livestock and cattle<sup>8</sup> and the import of the means for the production of agricultural crops and meat. In 1971 there was

<sup>6</sup> AAN, Ministry of Food Industry and Purchasing, 1/209, Minutes of the Conference of Deputy Directors of the Voivodeship Trust of Meat Processing Enterprises for Production and Trade that took place in Warsaw on 9 November 1965 on the subject of "the production and supply policy in November and December for ensuring the Christmas season supply to the market and for other current production and trade matters", l. 10-11.

<sup>7</sup> AAN, KC PZPR micr. 2914 (call N° 1745), Minutes of the 33rd session of the Politburo on 12 February 1971, l. 620.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, Minutes N° 39 of the Politburo session on 9 March 1971, l. 831; *ibidem*, note prepared by the Cabinet Planning Commission on the supply of meat and fats and other food products to the market in 1971, l. 837.

4.6 kg of meat imported to Poland per head of its population, in 1977 — 3.1 kg, and in 1978 — 1.6 kg. As a result of the collapse of livestock production in 1981, to satisfy the demand for rationed meat, this import was increased to 5.1 kg per head. The 1980s with their crisis resulted also in the decrease in the export of meat and its products: while in 1975 it made up 8% of the country's production, and in 1980 — 6%, in the later period only about 4%<sup>9</sup>.

An important instrument of increasing meat production was the import of fodder, especially large in the 1970s. It is estimated that in the years 1971–1975 about 16–19% of this production was based on imported fodder, and in the years 1976–1980 the respective index was 24–28%. In the years 1982–1986, as a result of limitations to the outlays in foreign currency, this percentage dropped to 9% of the general pool of meat<sup>10</sup>.

In the cases where for macro-economic or political reasons the above-mentioned methods of increasing the supply did not produce the desired result, a growing role was played by other, sometimes quite ludicrous and ineffective methods of possibly the most rational management of the modest, as it was written in the official documents "mass of meat". This was frequently expressed in the attempts at manoeuvring with the assortments of the existing meat and its products, or those which were introduced into the market, including the creation of new recipes of these products (the conceptions of the Economic Department of the Central Committee of PZPR of 1964 to increase the share of soya beans in the preparation of some meat products<sup>11</sup>; the reduction of the number of varieties of meat products available on the market)<sup>12</sup>. At the beginning of 1975 the Politburo decided that in the forthcoming five years at least 1 kg of the increase in the annual meat consumption per inhabitant would be covered

<sup>9</sup> B. Gulbicka, W. Sztarbałło, B. Chmielewska, A. Dyka, *Samowystarczalność żywnościowa Polski (Poland's Food Self-sufficiency)*, Warszawa 1990, p. 48.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 49.

<sup>11</sup> AAN, KC PZPR, V/77 (micr. 2894). Appendix to minutes N° 92. Note on the change in the supply of meat and its products to the market, KC Economic Department, 16 December 1963, l. 78.

<sup>12</sup> See: J. Kochanowski, *Serdelki*, p. 131 ff.; AAN, KC PZPR, micr. 2918 (call N° 1749). Information of the Ministry of Home Trade (MHW) about the envisaged supply to the internal market in September–December 1971, Warszawa 14 September 1971, l. 156–157.

by the growth of poultry production<sup>13</sup>. As a result of these actions the rise in the consumption of meat per head by 21 kg achieved in 1980 in comparison to 1970 was in a large measure due to the growth (by 7.7 kg) mainly in the consumption of broilers, produced by industrial methods with the use of imported fodder<sup>14</sup>.

It was also in the 1970s that the top party authorities recommended to the departments of agriculture, food industry and food purchasing, among other things to continue increasing the share of "protein substitutes" in meat processing and to speed up work on "introducing new technologies of obtaining meat substitutes"<sup>15</sup>. Moreover, they ordered an economic use of "raw meat" by introducing pre-packaging and semi-finished products etc.<sup>16</sup> A similar set of proposed actions appeared also in the documents of the Ministry of Home Trade and Services in the 1980s<sup>17</sup>.

Big institutions and works, encouraged by the state authorities, decided to run livestock-breeding farms, seeing in it a possibility of improving the supply of meat to their employees. From the 1940s onwards, canteens, buffets and co-operative food-shops were created in those institutions, with support from trade-unions, in order to alleviate market difficulties<sup>18</sup>.

To improve the food supply to holiday-makers, similar solutions were applied by the Fund of Workers' Rest (*FWP*). From 1950 onwards livestock-breeding was taken up by *FWP* rest-houses<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> AAN, KC PZPR, micr. 2903 (call N° 1782), Minutes N° 143 of the Politburo session of 28 January 1975.

<sup>14</sup> B. Gulbicka, W. Sztarbałło, B. Chmielewska, A. Dyka, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

<sup>15</sup> AAN, KC PZPR, micr. 2903 (call N° 1782), Minutes N° 143 of the Politburo session of 28 January 1975.

<sup>16</sup> AAN, KC PZPR, micr. 2905 (call N° 1786). Complex programme of the rationalization of food consumption taking into account the forms of influencing the consumer till 1980. Ministry of Home Trade and Services (henceforward *MHWiU*), Warszawa, September 1975, l. 383.

<sup>17</sup> AAN, *MHWiU*, 10/8, The conditions of the departure from state controlled sale of meat and its products, Warszawa, June 1987, *MHWiU*, l. 1-2.

<sup>18</sup> See J. Naumiuk, *Na początku trudnej drogi. Ruch zawodowy w Polsce Ludowej w latach 1944-1949 (At the Beginning of a Difficult Road. The Trade Union Movement in People's Poland in the Years 1944-1949)*, Łódź 1985, p. 199; A. Kochański, *Polska 1944-1991 (Poland 1944-1991)*. *Informator historyczny*, vol. II, pp. 473, 560.

<sup>19</sup> Archiwum Ruchu Zawodowego (The Archives of the Trade Union Movement, henceforward: *ARZ*), Central Trade Union Council (henceforward *CRZZ*) Economic Department, 33/35/2, Report of the Fund of Employees' Rest.

It is interesting that this idea was also realized in the later period and was recommended by the central authorities as a way of combating meat shortages. This is testified by the minutes of the Politburo session held on October 19, 1977. During the discussion about the organization of the employees' rest, its members recommended to "all the big works to run their own livestock farms that would also supply meat to their rest-houses"<sup>20</sup>. It seems that this idea was one of the elements of coping with supply difficulties postulated by this body soon after the workers' demonstrations in June 1976<sup>21</sup>.

However, in the situation of supply shortage the authorities not always confined themselves to mild and socially inoffensive methods of increasing the supply of meat. The application of more drastic measures that would enforce (with varying success) the growth of meat production dominated in the period until 1956. Right after the war, as early as August 1944, the new authorities introduced compulsory levies, which were certainly lower than those exacted in war-time, but were nevertheless difficult to comply with. On the one hand, this was due to the economic exhaustion of peasant farms, on the other to the unwillingness of farmers to fulfil these demands<sup>22</sup>. On the strength of the act passed by the Cabinet on June 6, 1946 such levies were abolished on 1 July 1946, which was an important political gesture aimed at winning over the peasants and gaining their confidence on the eve of the so-called folk referendum of June 30, 1946<sup>23</sup>.

After a period of a relative improvement in supply in the years 1946–1949, the model of economic development realized in the later period, with its preference for the development of heavy industry, was marked by putting greater burden on the farms. At the same time, due to the adoption of a new policy towards the countryside, consisting in forceful collectivization and limitation of production possibilities of big farms, the supply difficulties were growing. To overcome them, a system of compulsory levies

<sup>20</sup> AAN, KC PZPR, micr. 2911 (call N° 1801), Minutes N° 80 of the Politburo session of 19 October 1977, l. 299.

<sup>21</sup> This matter was discussed by E. Gierek at his meeting with journalists on 7 October 1976. See: AAN, KC PZPR, XIA/439, Shorthand report on the meeting with journalists on 7 October 1976, l. 3.

<sup>22</sup> AAN, Ministerstwo Aprowizacji (Ministry of Food Supply, henceforward: MA), 202, The size and realization of material allowances in the economic year 1944/45 (data co-ordinated with the Department of Material Allowances), l. 1.

<sup>23</sup> AAN, MA, 202, Report on material allowances in the economic years 1945/46 and 1946/47, l. 8.

of potatoes, milk, corn and livestock was introduced in the years 1951–1952. In practice, this was a drain on the farms<sup>24</sup>. In this modern “peasant war” that broke out over the compulsory levies, only in the years 1953–1955 over 480 thousand peasants were punished according to penal law on minor offences, including over 115 thousand of those who failed to supply cattle for slaughter<sup>25</sup>. In the later years the scale of repressions on this ground in the countryside was incomparably smaller, but the system embracing in its basic version potatoes, corn and cattle for slaughter, throughout the rule of Władysław Gomułka (1956–1970) remained the chief method — apart from contracts — of securing the supply of food in People's Poland.

## 2. Restraining the demand, that is permanent state control

In face of the permanent shortage of meat, apart from various ways of increasing its supply, many and various forms of restraining the demand were also applied. In the conditions of a relatively good economic situation, the mildest method of achieving this purpose was to stimulate the consumption of food products different from meat, and the sale of various industrial articles.

In the 1970s we had to do with the “classical” version of striving for something that was usually called an almost “mythical balance between goods and money”. As a result of the decision made in February 1971 to withhold the rise in prices that was the cause of the events of December 1970, and to raise the lowest wages, family benefits, sick- and normal pensions, the purchasing power of the population grew by about 20 billion zlotys, a fact forseen by the Cabinet Planning Commission in March 1971. Because this improvement in income related mostly to those who earned the least, the authorities rightly expected that this money would be directed mainly to the purchase of meat and fats<sup>26</sup>. Nevertheless, in order to make the Poles more interested in the purchase of products other than food, efforts were

<sup>24</sup> S. Felbur, *Analiza układu cen produktów rolnych w Polsce (The Analysis of the Structure of the Prices of Agricultural Products in Poland)*, Warszawa 1962, p. 75, tab. 17.

<sup>25</sup> D. Jarosz, *Polityka władz komunistycznych w Polsce w latach 1948–1956 a chłopcy (The Policy of the Communist Authorities in Poland in the Years 1948–1956 and the Peasants)*, Warszawa 1998, pp. 228–231.

<sup>26</sup> AAN, KC PZPR, micr. 2914 (call N° 1745). A note prepared by the Cabinet Planning Commission on the supply of the market with meat and fats and other food products in 1971.

made to seek a possibility of selling the industrial articles the supply of which was sufficient and could be increased. It was then, e.g., that a "trial" sale was introduced of television sets for country-dwellers. The customer could try out the functioning of such a set during ten days and decide whether he wanted to buy it (delivery and installation of the set was free of charge). The sale of goods by postmen and rural administration activists was then made more extensive. In towns people could hire television sets: the customer could use the set for half a year, paying monthly instalments, and then decide on returning or purchasing it. The extension of the scope and form of hire-purchase also served this purpose<sup>27</sup>. It seems that this way of thinking played an important role in the calculation of the price and the selling procedures of the Polish Fiat 126 (the popular "mini") in 1972<sup>28</sup>. The decision to announce the subscription to a low-capacity car is mentioned as one of a few methods of the fight against "the looming difficulties in market satisfaction with some articles", recommended by the Politburo as early as its session of 21 September 1971<sup>29</sup>. To shape a new model of consumption, changes were also made in housing policy, consisting of raising the contributions required of the members of housing co-operatives, and extending the sale of some flats for foreign currency<sup>30</sup>.

In proportion as the growth in the production of consumer goods encountered insuperable barriers, the most frequently applied method of keeping up market balance was to raise their prices. For this reason from 1976 onwards the price of the "mini" rose from 69 thousand to 87 thousand zlotys, and at the same time the price of other car makes accessible on the market (Zaporożec, Syrena, Trabant, Skoda and Zastawa) also rose<sup>31</sup>. This thesis may be confirmed by many more examples.

<sup>27</sup> AAN, KC PZPR, micr. 2929 (call N° 1760). Information on the measures taken by the trade in 1972 to actively shape the market situation, l. 101 ff.

<sup>28</sup> AAN, KC PZPR, micr. 2932 (call N° 1763). The assumptions of the sale of passenger cars "Polski Fiat 126 P", Warszawa 19 Oct. 1972, Ministry of Finance, l. 321.

<sup>29</sup> AAN, KC PZPR, micr. 2918 (call N° 1749), Minutes N° 62 of the Politburo session of 21 September 1971, l. 103.

<sup>30</sup> AAN, KC PZPR, micr. 2902 (call N° 1781), Information on the realization of the act of the V Plenum of KC PZPR on the prospective housing programme, Warszawa, November 1974, l. 540; AAN, KC PZPR, micr. 2940 (call N° 1771), Minutes N° 84 of the Politburo session on 4 September 1973, l. 436.

<sup>31</sup> AAN, KC PZPR, micr. 2908 (call N° 1793), Note on the two-way changes of retail prices of some products, Warszawa, 20 August 1976, l. 187.

Another, relatively mild, not to say persuasive method of restraining the demand for meat that marked the way of the authorities' thinking and acting throughout the period of People's Poland was the propaganda of a change in the model of consumption. This was a steady element of the authorities' way of thinking of food problems even when the shortage of meat was relatively the least acute. In the 1970s, during the discussions of the problems of food supply held by party bodies, attention was many times drawn to the necessity of extending — as it was defined in respective documents — “the more intensive processing of meat” and propagating more rational forms of nutrition<sup>32</sup>. Especially interesting from this point of view is the discussion carried out at the session of the Politburo on September 30, 1975, concerning “the complex programme of rationalization of food consumption taking into consideration the forms of influencing the consumers until 1980”, prepared by the Ministry of Home Trade and Services. It was then recommended to “consistently exact the observance of the recommendations concerning the larger introduction of eggs, milk, vegetables and fish in the recipes of catering centres and canteens, to increase the assortment and variety of dishes which could be an alternative to traditional meat dishes, and to examine the recipes of dishes in respect of their calorificity”. It was recommended to television, radio and women's magazines to “consciously and thoughtfully «create a fashion» for various types of dishes that do not require meat components”<sup>33</sup>.

This way of thinking found its expression in cookery-books and cooking advice. As early as 1948 the authors of a book about feeding the family — Zofia Czerny and Maria Strasburger — while characterizing various types of food wrote about milk and its products that they could “perfectly replace meat, but meat cannot replace them for it has neither as many vitamins as milk, nor is it as rich in mineral components. Thus we can see that milk and cheese are even more valuable food than meat”. It is true that they admitted that meat is a satiating type of food, has “an attractive flavour and taste”, but we should not eat too much of it, since: “meat is best for us not when once in a while on a feast day we eat a big piece of roast meat or chops, but when we

<sup>32</sup> See: AAN, KC PZPR, micr. 2902 (call N° 1780), Minutes N° 127 of the Politburo session of 3 September 1974, l. 49.

<sup>33</sup> AAN, KC PZPR, micr. 2905 (call N° 1786), Minutes N° 172 of the Politburo session of 30 September 1975, l. 375.

frequently add a little piece of it to vegetable or farinaceous foods"<sup>34</sup>. In the book *Praktyczna kuchnia (Practical Cooking)* published in 1959, the value of meat was estimated in a similar way, offal being recommended especially. This book also warned: "Overloading meals with meat and eating too big portions of it in every meal is harmful to the human system"<sup>35</sup>.

In later years this quite legible anti-propaganda of meat was more toned down. A characteristic change of accents took place. In Zofia Zawistowska and Małgorzata Krzyżanowska's cookery-book published in 1982 we read that Poles still find "meat and especially its fat varieties, animal fats, sweets and sugar" most attractive in their diet. As a result "there is a growing frequency of 20th century civilization diseases such as obesity, sclerosis, caries, dysfunction of the circulatory system, liver and alimentary canal. Thus we pay a very big price for the state of satiation"<sup>36</sup>. The tendentious "disparagement" of meat was replaced by a kind of "instruction" to housewives, showing how to behave in the circumstances not only of the shortage of meat but also other food articles and how to replace them with other types — more accessible and cheaper.

The above-mentioned "mild" methods of restraining the demand for meat most frequently appearing in source documents, did not, of course, always lead to a socially accepted improvement in the supply of meat. For this reason they often co-existed with or were replaced by the so-called administrative-restrictive methods.

Among them worthy of attention are the "no-meat days" introduced as early as 1946. On February 1 that year, on the strength of the decision issued by the Prime Minister it was forbidden "to serve or sell meat dishes in any form, except for those made of poultry, fish, rabbit and game" in catering centres on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays of every week. On Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays it was allowed to serve or sell those meat meals up to the maximum weight of 200

<sup>34</sup> Z. Czerny, M. Strasburger, *Żywnie rodziny. Wiadomości ogólne. Przepisy potraw (Feeding the Family. General Information. Recipes of Dishes)*, Warszawa 1948, p. 21.

<sup>35</sup> M. Dudzik, M. Laskowska, K. Pyszkowska, S. Witkowska, *Praktyczna kuchnia (Practical Cooking)*, 2nd ed., Warszawa 1959, pp. 25–26.

<sup>36</sup> Z. Zawistowska, M. Krzyżanowska, *Książka kucharska (Cookery-Book)*, Warszawa 1982, p. 9.

grammes with the reservation that one person could be sold or served only one such dish<sup>37</sup>. These regulations were largely alleviated in 1949.

The invention of Gomułka's team in this respect was the "no-meat Monday", introduced by the decision of the minister of home trade of 29 July 1959 (many times changed, and finally lifted on 2 March 1981). On such Mondays it was forbidden to serve meat dishes in restaurants and canteens, while the shops were allowed to sell only the offal, black pudding, headcheese, lard and bacon<sup>38</sup>. On 28 October 1959, in the period of intensified meat shortage, restrictions were introduced on Mondays on the sale of meat coming from private slaughter (lifted in June 1962)<sup>39</sup>. The regulation of the turnover of this meat, usually decided by the Ministry of Home Trade, was a steady element of influencing the demand, applied until the 1980s<sup>40</sup>.

A much more effective practice of restraining this demand was the direct administrative control of the supply of meat and its products called *reglamentacja*<sup>41</sup>.

The system of rationing, embracing also meat, was introduced by the instruction of the Economic Bureau at the Presidium of the Polish Committee of National Liberation (*PKWN*) on 27 September 1944 and from 1 May 1945 till 1 January 1949 embraced the whole country<sup>42</sup>. As early as 1946 the number of people benefiting from such a system ran to 9,689 thousand (41 % of the total population) and in 1947 — to 4,262.4 thousand (34%)<sup>43</sup>.

<sup>37</sup> Prime Minister's disposition of 1 February 1946 on the consumption of meat dishes in the catering centres and restaurants and on the limitation of the trade turnover of meat and meat products coming from the slaughter of beef cattle, DZ.U. 1946, N° 9, item 68.

<sup>38</sup> M. Zaremba, *Spółczesństwo polskie lat sześćdziesiątych — między "małą stabilizacją" a "małą destabilizacją"* (Polish Society of the 1960s — Between "Little Stabilization" and "Little Destabilization"), in: *Oblicza Marca 1968*, ed. K. Rokicki and S. Stępień, Warszawa 2004, p. 32.

<sup>39</sup> A. Kochański, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 186.

<sup>41</sup> I use this term in the sense given to it by Jacek Kurczewski, who maintains that *reglamentacja* is "a set of conditions determined politically (that is by the organs of power) of coming into possession of definite goods by an individual consumer". See J. Kurczewski, *Umowa o kartki* (A Contract for Ration Cards), in: *Umowa o kartki*, ed. J. Kurczewski, Warszawa 2004, p. 213.

<sup>42</sup> Z. Zblewski, *Leksykon PRL-u* (Lexicon of People's Poland), Kraków 2001, p. 69.

<sup>43</sup> AAN, MA, 202, The population that was provided with ration cards in 1946 and 1947, ll. 58-59.

After the rationing system was abolished, in some regions six types of fat coupons were introduced. On 26 October 1949 there appeared a regulation of the head of the State Commission for Economic Planning (*PKPG*), which included among controlled articles corn and the main corn products as well as meat and fats coming from the slaughter of private livestock, poultry and the products of this meat<sup>44</sup>.

Ration-cards for meat, its products and fats appeared again in August 1951. This control obliged till 3 January 1953. On that day it was abolished, and “for the effective combat against the forms of transgressions practiced by anti-social individuals who want to gain illegal profit by preying on consumers’ interests”, a decree was soon passed on the protection of the buyers’ interests in commercial turnover<sup>45</sup>.

Gomułka’s team, despite the difficulties in the supply of meat articles to the market, did not decide to introduce the rationing system. They feared the expansion of the “black market”, speculation and the natural tendency of this system to expand and embrace — as a result of social pressure — more and more occupational groups. Stefan Jędrychowski, a member of the Politburo, explained to the secretaries of Voivodship PUPW Committees in October 1959: “The rationing system is an enterprise of wartime or nearly wartime character and for this reason if only possible it would better be avoided. [...] The rationing system — experience shows — does not allow to maintain a diversified assortment of supply, which is disorganized and degenerated, since in the end meat is sold by the cut”<sup>46</sup>.

The last time in the history of People’s Poland, control of the sale of meat and its products was introduced on the basis of the Cabinet’s act of 20 February 1981 and, despite various changes in the subsequent years, it was lifted in 1989 with the beginning of the Polish systemic transformation<sup>47</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> Disposition of the President of the State Commission of Economic Planning (henceforward *PKPG*) of 26 October 1949 on the acknowledgement of some products as subject to state control, *Dz.U.* № 56, item 444.

<sup>45</sup> *AAN*, Ministry of Justice (Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości — henceforward: *MS*), 2147, The justification of the project of a decree on the protection of buyers in trade turnover, l. 45.

<sup>46</sup> *AAN*, *KC PZPR*, 237/V/458, Conference of the First Secretaries and Economic Secretaries on the rise in meat prices of 10 October 1959, ll. 248–249.

<sup>47</sup> M. Fuszara, *Prawne aspekty reglamentacji (The Legal Aspects of State Control)*, in: *Umowa o kartki...*, pp. 124–131.

It seems, however, that the system of direct control of meat turnover under discussion is only the most expressive form of another, permanent method of administrative management of this commodity. It consisted in the regulation of meat supply from above with the use of very diversified criteria, including mainly (though not only) territorial ones, connected both with the character of a given locality (the size of an urban agglomeration, the countryside) and its consequent socio-occupational structure. In other words, the possibility of buying meat was diversified mainly depending on where the consumer lived. It is difficult to reconstruct this system, however, one can detect certain general regularities upon reading the documents under analysis, although we cannot always establish precisely all the premises determining the concrete shape of that system.

On the strength of the rationing system introduced in 1944, among the 7 million people provided for in this way in February 1948 the largest group was that of state employees (1,027 thousand) and the employees of state and state-governed enterprises (4,340 thousand)<sup>48</sup>. In those times already the norms of supply (including that of meat) were higher in the so-called main cities (in February 1945 they were: Warsaw, Łódź, Poznań, Cracow, Katowice, Częstochowa, Bydgoszcz, Chorzów, Gdynia, Lublin and Białystok) than in smaller cities and localities. Special, higher rations were allotted to Militia (MO) and Security Service (UB) functionaries<sup>49</sup>.

Especially selective was the rationing system introduced in 1951. The Commission established by the Central Committee of PUPP for the examination of the functioning of this form of supply in September 1951 concluded that although this system embraced over 2 million blue- and white-collar workers in 290 cities and localities, it was not introduced at all in Białystok, Olsztyn and Koszalin. As a result of the introduction of this system in Łódź and Warsaw, the percentage of the employees embraced by ration cards was estimated at 65–85, in the Cracow and Łódź voivodeships at 34–42% (it embraced 25% of the general pool of meat), and in less industrialized voivodeships (apart from the

<sup>48</sup> AAN, MA, 202, The table of the results of a questionnaire on the division into groups of persons provided with ration cards according to the state of February 1948, ll. 124–125.

<sup>49</sup> L. Kamiński, *Polacy wobec nowej rzeczywistości 1944–1948 (Poles in Face of the New Reality 1944–1948)*, Toruń 2000, p. 143.

above-mentioned Białystok, Olsztyn and Koszalin) — 15–30%. Its defect was the “injustice” perceived by the authorities. The system divided the employees in a given city into “privileged” and “non-privileged”<sup>50</sup>.

The unquestioned priority in the redistribution of meat throughout the period under discussion (and not only in the period of direct administrative control) was better supply to big urban agglomerations and working class centres at the cost of smaller settlements, the countryside and the so-called “green territories”. It is true that many documents also contain the postulate to gradually diminish the disproportion between them, but in the situation of permanent shortage, and especially its cyclical aggravation, the realization of this postulate came across insurmountable complications<sup>51</sup>. Detailed research, embracing the years 1982–1987, has shown that the very principles of the rationing system have permanently delayed the levelling of regional differentiation and sustained the privileged position of big urban agglomerations<sup>52</sup>.

More research is necessary to answer the question when and to what extent the immediate political considerations were taken into account in the construction of the distribution of supplies. We know, e.g. that between June and September 1981 an especially large additional quota of meat, surpassing by 1,500 to 1,800 tonnes the quota resulting from the rationing system of sale, was directed to the Katowice voivodeship. As we read in a note of the Ministry of Mining and Power Industry, this was an element of a socio-existential “package” that was to improve the public feeling in Silesia. Considering the fact that in 1981 coal mining industry for the first time in the post-war period lost its housing preferences, the apprehension of social unrest in this

<sup>50</sup> AAN, PKPG, 5478, Note of the Commission called by the KC PZPR for ration cards for pork meat and fats, submitted to the vicepremier H. Minc on 27 Sept. 1951, ll. 1–2.

<sup>51</sup> See: AAN, KC PZPR, micr. 2914 (call N° 1745), Minutes N° 39 of the Politburo session of 9 March 1971, l. 831; AAN, KC PZPR, micr. 2918 (call N° 1749), Information of the Ministry of Internal Trade on the envisaged supply to the home market in September–December 1971, Warszawa 14 Sept. 1971, l. 156; AAN, KC PZPR, micr. 2921, Appraisal of market situation at the end of the fourth quarter of 1971 and of the envisaged supply to the market in the first half of 1972, MHW, Warszawa January 1972, l. 461; AAN, KC PZPR, micr. 2937 (call N° 1768), Minutes N° 69 of the Politburo session on 17 April 1973, l. 12.

<sup>52</sup> E. Lorek, *Zmiany w strukturze konsumpcji w Polsce w układzie przestrzennym (Changes in the Structure of Consumption in Poland in Spatial Arrangement)*, Katowice 1993, p. 187.

region seemed quite justified. This method of "quenching" the actually emerging or expected local social unrest by "throwing" additional quotas of meat seems to have been applied in many other areas<sup>53</sup>.

A much more socially painful method of restraining the demand for meat was certainly raising its price. This problem has already found its reflection in a rich historical and economic literature. Here I would only like to say that this inclination to raising the prices of food, motivated by the tendency to balance supply and demand, aroused great social tension, mainly because of the large share of expenditures on food in the budgets of Polish families. These rises, even if it was possible to introduce them, restored this balance only temporarily. So it was in the first place in 1959 and in February 1982. The latter rise (the index of the rise in the prices of food amounted from 340–350%) enabled a departure from the state control of the majority of food articles (with the exception of meat and some milk and confectionary products)<sup>54</sup>.

After the experience of December 1970 and June 1976 when the rise of basic food products was one of the main reasons for the massive social protests, the authorities less willingly reached for this instrument of restoring the market balance, although its necessity was more and more obvious. This is testified, among other things, by the report submitted to the session of the Politburo on 13 December 1977, prepared by a special party team which worked out the principles of the policy of prices of basic food products. The authors of this document stated that the prices of those articles had remained unchanged for more than ten years. At the same time, it was computed that every 1% rise in the income of the population entailed a rise in the demand for food by 0.6% and for meat and its products by 0.8%.

The essence of the Polish problem of food prices was expressed by the authors of this report in its conclusion. They said that a large section of society "is especially sensitive to the problem of the prices of basic food products. They understand them not only as an economic and social, but also political

<sup>53</sup> AAN, KC PZPR, XIC/33, Ministry of Mining and Power Industry, Socio-Existential Matters in Coal-Mining Industry, Warszawa, September 1981, l. 7.

<sup>54</sup> Cz. Bywałec, *Wzrost gospodarczy a poziom życia społeczeństwa polskiego (Economic Growth and the Standard of Living of Polish Society)*, Warszawa 1991, pp. 87–88; K. Świetlik, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

problem. Therefore any decisions concerning this problem must be accompanied by indispensable political conditions. "For this reason, when constructing the principles of the policy of shaping the prices of food products "economic reasons must be confronted with social and political ones, which taken together compell the maintenance of the prices [of food] at the previous level for a certain time"<sup>55</sup>.

This conclusion expressed quite clearly the philosophy of the policy of Edward Gierek's ruling team. Because of withholding difficult economic decisions in the face of an expected social conflict, the shortage of food products was exacerbated. Seeking the solution of these difficulties by making unpopular decisions on the rise in the prices of some kinds of meat and its products was one of the causes of the July and August 1980 strikes<sup>56</sup> and the emergence of "Solidarity".

The new political team, headed by Wojciech Jaruzelski, carried out a drastic rise in food prices in conditions created by the rigour of martial law when the possibilities of expressing a social protest against those decisions were strongly limited. This, however, did not change the essence of the conflict between the authorities and society, aroused by the rise in food prices: the reasons of the state-governed economy were as a rule difficult to reconcile with the reasons of a considerable majority of society.

### 3. Punishing

In the conditions of permanent shortage, the management of meat was throughout the period under discussion the field of criminality and abuses.

In the Stalinist period the combat against this pathology was carried out, apart from lawcourts, mainly by the Special Commission for Combating Economic Abuses and Sabotage, which operated in the years 1945-1954. It was entitled to sentence a person guilty of a deed qualified as speculation to up to two years' time in a labour camp and/or a fine calculated on the basis of the act of 2 June 1947 about the combat against the rising cost of living and excessive profits in commercial turnover<sup>57</sup>.

<sup>55</sup> AAN, KC PZPR, micr. 2912 (call N° 1802), Minutes N° 85 of the Politburo session of 13 December 1977. Report on the work of party-government problem teams appointed by the IV Plenum of KC PZPR, Warszawa January 1978, l. 210.

<sup>56</sup> J. Holzer, "Solidarność" 1980-1981. *Geneza i historia* ("Solidarity" 1980-1981. *Origin and History*), Paryż 1984, Instytut Literacki, p. 89.

<sup>57</sup> Dz.U. N° 43, item 218.

The records of the Special Commission do not contain any data that would allow to answer the question how many people were punished for the offences connected with the management of meat. We only know that the number of verdicts of the Commission concerning sending to a labour camp for illegal slaughter of livestock amounted in 1948 to 314 (6.1% of the total of verdicts), in 1949 — 2,119 (23.1%), in 1951 — 2,094 (19.8%), 1952 — 3,741 (16.7%), and in 1953 — 742 (3.9%). Fines as the principal penalty in the cases of secret slaughter were administered in 1951 in 2,335 cases (7.7%), and in 1952 — in 8,200 (18.5%)<sup>58</sup>.

A certain liberalization of the economic system in Poland after October 1956, including a growth in the number of private enterprises and shops with meat products, given the extremely scanty pool of meat that they were allowed to process, created an additional field for abuse. The data that were discovered show that only in the period from 1 September till 31 October 1959 4,947 investigations were instituted in the field of meat management<sup>59</sup>.

The beginning of the 1960s was a period when the communist authorities made an extensive use in their propaganda of the motif of economic abuses (called "affairs") as an important element of explaining the causes of market shortages.

A most resounding "meat affair" was doubtless that which took place in Warsaw<sup>60</sup>. In the investigation of the "Warsaw affair" the proofs of the criminal activity of 914 people were discovered until 8 September 1964, 326 of whom were presented with accusations and at the same time 246 were arrested. The prosecutors' findings show that in November 1964 bribes were handed in to the directors of the Warsaw enterprises of Municipal Meat Trade (MHM) and to other persons by 436 managers of meat shops in Warsaw as against their total number of 467, that is as many as 93%!<sup>61</sup> At the same time suspicion fell on all the owners of

<sup>58</sup> *Komisja Specjalna do Walki z Nadużyciami i Szkodnictwem Gospodarczym (1945–1954) (Special Commission for Combat Against Economic Abuses and Sabotage, 1945–1954. Selection of Sources)*, comp. D. Jarosz, T. Wolsza, Warszawa 1995 p. 9, tab. 3.

<sup>59</sup> AAN, KC PZPR, 237/VII-144, Bulletin of the KC Secretariat Bureau N° 77, 15 December 1959.

<sup>60</sup> More extensively — see: D. Jarosz, M. Pasztor, *Afera mięsna: fakty i konteksty (The Meat Affair: Facts and Contexts)*, Toruń 2004.

private butcheries in the capital<sup>62</sup>. It seems that in this situation we can formulate the conclusion that corruption in the meat market in Warsaw was a universal phenomenon.

The most renowned effect of disclosing these abuses was a lawsuit where, after consultations made by the prosecutors with the party functionaries of PUWP Central Committee, among those accused were found: Stanisław Wawrzecki, from 1957 till March 1964 head of the State *MHM* Enterprises in Warsaw–North, Warsaw–City and Warsaw–Praga; Henryk Marian Gradowski, from August 1960 till March 1964 head of *MHM* Warsaw–West, and later Warsaw–North; Tadeusz Skowroński, from October 1959 till the end of 1963 head of the Capital's Trust of Food Product Trading Enterprises; Mieczysław Fabisiak, from 1957 till the spring of 1964 head of the inspection of meat trading of the Capital's Inspectorate of State Trade Inspection; the managers of *MHM* shops: Adam Stokłosiński, Aleksander Woźnica, Władysław Walendziuk and Ludwika Balczarek as well as the owner of a private butcher's shop in Warsaw Antoni Zawadzki.

The lawcourt pronounced its sentences on 2 February 1965<sup>63</sup>. The judgements were very severe. H. Gradowski, K. Witowski, T. Skowroński and M. Fabisiak received life sentences, A. Stokłosiński — 9 years' imprisonment, A. Woźnica and W. Walendziuk — 10 years each, L. Balczarek — 11 years and A. Zawadzki — 12 years. The most tragic figure among the condemned was S. Wawrzecki who was sentenced to death. On 18 March 1965 the State's Council rejected his plea for pardon<sup>64</sup>. On the next day he was hanged<sup>65</sup>.

It is worth recalling that the "Warsaw affair", although the biggest and most exploited in propaganda, was not the only one that was "tackled" at that time. Until 1 July 1965 penal prosecution agencies outside the Warsaw voivodeship conducted 137

<sup>61</sup> AAN, General Prosecutor of People's Poland, 1/29, Note by E. Kostro on some of the main data on the results of the investigation of abuses in meat economy in Warsaw, Warszawa 11 November 1964, l. 227.

<sup>62</sup> B. Central Archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration (henceforward: *b.CAMSWiA*), KG MO, 35/1384, Minutes N° 14 of the session of the Staff appointed by MSW regulation N° 057/64 of 18 September 1964, l. 92.

<sup>63</sup> Archives of the District Court in Warsaw (henceforward: ASO), IV K 155/64, vol. III, sentence of the verdict, 2 February 1965.

<sup>64</sup> ASO, IV K 155/64, vol. III, Decision of the State Council of 18 March 1965 concerning S. Wawrzecki, l. 425.

<sup>65</sup> ASO, IV K 155/64, vol. III, Information of a prisoner's death, Warszawa 19 March 1965, l. 457.

investigations of cases concerning irregularities in meat management against 809 people. All in all 74 acts of indictment against 440 people had been brought to the lawcourts till that time<sup>66</sup>.

However, despite this Draconian sentence, the so-called "Wawrzecki's affair" was not able to restrain criminality in meat management to a considerable extent. This is shown, at least, by the findings of the General Public Prosecutor's Office of People's Poland concerning the results of the preparatory proceedings in "meat cases" which were concluded by acts of indictment in the years 1964–1969, where abuses amounted to over 200 thousand zlotys. They show that in 1968 the value of property fraudulently seized by the accused in these cases (197 million zlotys) surpassed that of 1965 (about 43 million zlotys)<sup>67</sup>.

It requires further research to answer the question about the scale of abuses in meat management in subsequent years. From time to time, the so-called "meat affairs" were certainly the subject of interest of various organs of justice. As soon as 1971 abuses were discovered in the meat processing industry in Piotrków Trybunalski. Between 15 February and 23 March 1973 penal proceedings were conducted by the Voivodeship Lawcourt in Łódź against the first group of the offenders. Several people were sentenced (among them the ex-manager of a butcher's shop in Piotrków to 25 years' imprisonment)<sup>68</sup> That year over 100 investigations and inquiries concerning meat-processing industry were instituted or continued (if started earlier) and embraced about 1000 suspects, 700 of whom were arrested<sup>69</sup>.

A considerable exacerbation of the methods of combat against abuses in the production and distribution of goods, including food products, took place in the years 1981–1982. This combat became easier due to the creation in 1981 of the Central

<sup>66</sup> AAN, General Prosecutor of People's Poland, 1/29, Informational note presenting synthetically the scope of the prosecution of crime in meat economy according to the state of 1 July 1965, l. 265.

<sup>67</sup> AAN, General Prosecutor of People's Poland, 1/43, Information on the results of the prosecution in cases of the gravest abuses in meat economy, carried out in the years 1963–1969, prepared by the deputy Prosecutor General, B. Jodelis, Warszawa 5 January 1970, l. 126.

<sup>68</sup> J. Kierlik, *On criminality in meat processing*, MSW Department of Occupational Training and Improvement, Warszawa 1974, ll. 7–19.

<sup>69</sup> AAN, KC PZPR, micr. 2932 (call N° 1763), The state of order in the country with special account taken of the protection of industrial works and social discipline of production, Warszawa November 1972, Administrative Department of KC PZPR and MSW, ll. 391–402.

Commission for Combat Against Speculation and its regional counterparts. The main "attack" was directed at the markets. It has not been possible to establish what part of disclosed speculation offences concerned food products, including meat. We know, however, that according to the information of the police (MO) the number of disclosed speculation cases in 1981 amounted to 6 646, in 1982 — 12 374, in 1983 — 10,860, in 1984 — 14,972, and in 1985 (nine months) — 11,647. While in the first years minor offences dominated, later the number of serious ones was growing, committed in an organized way or such where the value of goods subject to speculation surpassed the value which qualified the deed as crime<sup>70</sup>.

According to the information of the Central Commission for Combat Against Speculation, in the years 1981–1985 the police organs disclosed almost 60 thousand speculation offences. At that time regional lawcourts pronounced their judgements on almost 53 thousand people, and sentenced almost 46 thousand. In 1985 police organs instituted over 87 thousand preparatory proceedings concerning these offences<sup>71</sup>.

In the 1980s, just as before, abuses in meat business caused many lawsuits. Indeed, the system of state control favoured the rise of new forms of abuses. It is worth pointing out at least the frauds and thefts discovered in the Meat Works in Jelenia Góra in 1984. In the course of the investigation it was established that about 70 up to 120 kilogrammes of meat were "economized" there illegally every month. In the lawsuit conducted in this connection before the local Voivodeship Court, 14 people were sentenced to from one to four years of imprisonment<sup>72</sup>.

Obviously, what was disclosed in the course of the above-mentioned and other trials for abuse in meat business is only a minor part of the "obscure number" of actually committed

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<sup>70</sup> AAN, The Cabinet Office (*Urząd Rady Ministrów* — henceforward URM), 32/182, Information on the combat against speculation in the years 1981–1985 and the results obtained by the Police (*Milicja Obywatelska* — henceforward MO), Warszawa 10 October 1985, ll. 100–101.

<sup>71</sup> AAN, URM, 1. 5/43, Central Commission for Combat Against Speculation attached to the Cabinet, Bulletin of VI National Anti-speculation Debate of 20 February 1986 at the URM, ll. 289–291.

<sup>72</sup> AAN, General Prosecutor of People's Poland, 16/151, Copy of the act of indictment directed to the lawcourt by the Regional Prosecutor in Jelenia Góra concerning the criminal seizure of meat mass in the Meat Processing Works in Jelenia Góra, Jelenia Góra 1 July 1985, ll. 8–27.

offences. It seems that of really mass character were principally cases of small theft of social property (in this case meat from processing factories and shops) which met, as results of sociological research show, with much more connivance than cases of stealing private property. The initial analysis of this phenomenon makes us pose a more general thesis that small theft of social property represented a pathological, to a large extent socially tolerated and massively practised strategy of getting adjusted to the economy marked by shortage; meat business — because of its role in this economic system — was the area where this strategy was practised especially often.

## II. Meat and Society

The shortage of supply, queues and ration cards, were doubtless those elements of the Polish post-war reality which became a universal social experience of the years 1945–1989. Generally, one can say that after World War II the demand for food had considerably grown. The causes for this state of affairs consisted not only of population growth and migrations from the countryside to the towns, but also the levelling in the distribution of income. Apart from that, the factor that largely increased the consumption of food was the small competitiveness of industrial articles and services. What was the behaviour of Poles in this situation? What were their reactions to the shortage of meat?

Before we try to answer these questions, it should be said at the outset that purchase of food was one of the most important problems in the everyday life of Polish families.

In research into the quality of life and the material situation of Polish families, the level of satisfaction of nutritional needs is usually treated as an important indicator of poverty (or wealth) of society and its particular groups. The opinions on this subject are usually formed on the basis of the analyses of family budgets. In the case of Poland after World War II these analyses may be used only to a limited extent, since in the years 1952–1955 the formal statistics of these matters were no longer continued. The analyses of family budgets were resumed on a larger scale only in 1957<sup>73</sup>.

<sup>73</sup> A. Luszniewicz, *O metodach badań budżetów rodzinnych w Polsce w latach 1920–1957 (Szkielet historyczny) (On the Methodology of Research into the Family Budgets in Poland in the years 1920–1957. A Historical Outline*, Warszawa 1959, pp. 60–77.

After the war, the first analyses of the family budgets of industrial workers in Poland come from November 1947. They show that food expenses consumed on average 50.6% (depending on the income bracket from 68.1% to 43.7%) of their budgets. The diet consisted mainly of potatoes and bread, which constituted 65% (29.3 kg) of the food consumed, and articles considered luxurious, such as meat and its products, fats, sugar and sweets, were eaten sporadically<sup>74</sup>.

According to various estimates the food expenses in the households of blue-collar workers amounted in 1950 to 69.2%, in 1957 to 50.9% (miners), 55.6% (textile workers), in 1959 to 56.4% and in the households of white-collar workers in 1950 to about 50%, and in 1959 to 53.2%. In 1962 food expenses in blue-collar workers' families amounted to 45.9%, in white-collar workers' families to 40.7% (those on meat, poultry and their products respectively to 12.7% and 10.6%). Similar research in the 1970s and 1980s shows that in the structure of expenses of employees' households food expenses constituted about 40%. This index was relatively the lowest in the first half of the 1970s (in 1974 41.3%, 12.4% being spent on meat, offal and their products). As the economic situation deteriorated, this index grew (45.8% in 1980, 48.0% in 1982, 45.8% in 1989), especially in blue-collar workers' households. In the latter, food expenses made up over 50% in 1982, and in 1983 — 48.4% of their budgets (in the households of other people, respectively 44.9%, and 42.6%)<sup>75</sup>. The economic crisis of the 1980s, however, affected most severely the households of pensioners. In 1982 and 1989 they spent on food over 58% of their income (in 1980 over 49%, and in 1988 — 49.8%)<sup>76</sup>.

<sup>74</sup> J. Chumiński, *Ruch zawodowy w Polsce w warunkach kształtującego się systemu totalitarnego 1944–1956 (Trade Union Movement in Poland under the Conditions of the Totalitarian System 1944–1956)*, Wrocław 1999, pp. 132–133.

<sup>75</sup> J. Kordos, A. Kubiczek, *Warunki bytu rodzin robotniczych w latach 1980–1983 (The Conditions of Life of Working Class Families in the Years 1980–1983)*, in: *Warunki bytu robotników*, ed. P. Wójcik, Warszawa 1984, p. 149.

<sup>76</sup> M. Strzelecka, *Zmiany w konsumpcji gospodarstw domowych w latach 1980–1983 (Changes in the Consumption of Households in the Years 1980–1983)*, Warszawa 1984, p. 22, tab. 5; Z. Niedziałek, W. Sekuła, *Spożycie żywności w gospodarstwach domowych (The Consumption of Food in the Households)*, in: *Polskie gospodarstwa domowe. życie codzienne w kryzysie*. Collective work ed. by Teresa Pałaszewska-Reindl, Warszawa 1986, pp. 113–118; B. Gulbicka, *Zmiany w spożyciu żywności w grupach społeczno-ekonomicznych gospodarstw domowych w latach 1981–1990 (Changes in Food Consumption in Socio-economic Groups of Households in the Years 1981–1990)*, Warszawa 1991, pp. 8–10.

According to the data of the Chief Statistical Office the consumption of meat and of corn products in Poland in the period between 1938 and 1989 underwent a characteristic fluctuation (table 1).

Table 1. The consumption of meat and of corn products in Poland in the years 1949–1989 calculated per capita in kilogrammes

Year	1938	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954
Meat	26	28.0	36.5	36.7	32.7	35.2	36.2
Corn products	163	166	160	161	163	166	171
Year	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961
Meat	37.7	41.0	43.9	45.3	44.1	42.5	45.2
Corn products	151	154	142	144	145	147	147
Year	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968
Meat	45.8	46.3	47.1	49.2	51.0	52.3	52.2
Corn products	148	143	141	141	137	136	133
Year	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975
Meat	52.6	52.6	56.1	59.3	62.1	65.6	70.3
Corn products	132	132	128.0	127.0	125.0	123.0	120.0
Year	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982
Meat	70.0	69.1	70.6	73.0	74.0	65.0	58.5
Corn products	122.0	122.0	121.0	120.0	120.0	127.0	121.0
Year	1983	1985	1989				
Meat	58.3	60.0	68.6				
Corn products	119.0	122.0	118				

Source: *Rocznik statystyczny 1967 (Statistical Yearbook 1967)*, Warszawa 1967, pp. 46–47; Cz. Bywałec, *Wzrost gospodarczy a przemiany poziomu życia społeczeństwa polskiego w latach 1945–1980 (Economic Growth and the Changes in the Standard of Living of Polish Society in the Years 1945–1980)*, Kraków 1986, p. 119; W. Życki, *Spożycie artykułów żywnościowych w Polsce. Przemiany w latach 1945–1966 (The Consumption of Food Products in Poland. Changes in the Years 1945–1966)*, Warszawa 1970, p. 39, tab. 17.

The researchers who on this basis interpreted the development of consumption and the standard of living in Poland, usually say that in the period between 1945 and 1949/50 there was a quantitative growth in consumption. The growing income was in the first place assigned for food and other necessities of life. The actual standard of food prices was continually dropping until 1949. The period between 1945 and 1949 had not been in this respect repeated in the history of People's Poland, since given the highest average annual rate of growth in food consumption in the history of People's Poland (13% in blue-collar workers' households), the share of food in consumption was nevertheless growing. At the same time the standard of need satisfaction was low (the consumption of potatoes and corn products was growing considerably). This stage lasted much shorter in the households of white-collar workers<sup>77</sup>.

In the area of consumption of food products the period of special deterioration was that of 1952–1953. If we judge by the consumption of meat, this deterioration starts after 1951 and reaches the lowest level in 1952, while the level of 1951 was surpassed only in 1955. The years 1955–1958 were marked by an improvement; the consumption of food was then also growing; this tendency had been broken only by the crisis of 1952–1954. In that period Poland experienced the phenomenon of exchange of “products for the poor” (potatoes, corn), into “products for the wealthy” (meat, eggs, fats). The year 1958 is a distinct turning-point that closed that period; the consumption of meat, butter, and animal fats was then at its height (for meat this was a “local maximum”), while that of corn products — at its lowest level.

In the years 1959–1961 we could observe a halt in the tendency to growth. The consumption of meat fluctuates and in 1962 it is only slightly higher than the level of 1958. At the same time the consumption of low-value articles (corn products) grew considerably<sup>78</sup>.

The highest growth in meat consumption in People's Poland came in 1970–1975, when it grew by over 17 kg per head. This tendency breaks down for a short time in 1976 and 1977 (69.1

<sup>77</sup> *Ekonomiczne i społeczne problemy spożycia (Economic and Social Problems of Consumption)*, collective work ed. by L. Beskid and Z. Sufin, Ossolinum, Wrocław, Warszawa, Kraków, Gdańsk 1976, pp. 98–102.

<sup>78</sup> B. Brodziński, *Stopa życiowa w Polsce w latach 1945–1963 (The Standard of Living in Poland in the Years 1945–1963)*, Londyn 1965, ll. 43–44.

kg and 70.6 kg). In 1980 an average Pole ate over 21 kg more meat than in 1970. A more durable break in the tendency to growth started in 1981 and in 1983 reached a level close to that of 1972. In the years 1981–1982 the nutritional and calorific value of consumed food dropped to the level of the 1950s. However, as soon as the next year, improvement could be observed due to which in the middle 1980s the level of nutrition returned to that of the late 1970s<sup>79</sup>.

Does this mean that the level of food consumption achieved in People's Poland was estimated as satisfactory?

The research carried out quite systematically since the end of the 1950s<sup>80</sup> by sociologists and economists testifies that — regardless of periodical differences — the Poles spent a lot on food, and wanted to spend even more on meat and its products, and were very critical of their supply. They appealed for more meat in word and deed. How did they do it? Being aware of the impossibility of answering this question, in the further part of this article I should like to indicate some forms of social consciousness, attitudes and behaviour shaped by the sense of unsatisfied needs in this respect.

### 1. Complaints to the highest authorities

The Poles gave vent to their dissatisfaction with supply shortages by writing. This is in the first place corroborated by letters—complaints written mainly to the highest authorities.

The problems of material living conditions, including the difficulties in buying food, were a frequent subject of the correspondence coming to the Letters and Inspection Bureau of the PUWP Central Committee as early as the Stalinist period. One of the major waves of negative reactions was aroused by the articles

<sup>79</sup> Cz. Bywalec, *Wzrost gospodarczy a poziom życia społeczeństwa polskiego (Economic Growth and the Standard of Living of Polish Society)*, Warszawa 1991, pp. 88–89.

<sup>80</sup> See: K. Zagórski, *Obraz poziomu stopy życiowej w badaniach OBOP-u (The Picture of the Standard of Living in the Research of the Centre of Public Opinion Studies)*, Warszawa 1964; Z. Zekoński, *Struktura żywienia ludności miast. Wyniki badań ankietowych (The Structure of the Feeding of Urban Population. Results of Questionnaire Research)*, Warszawa 1961; J. Sikorska, *Hierarchie wydatków ludność pracowniczej w 1971 r. (The Hierarchies of the Expenditures of the Working Population in 1971)*, in: *Ekonomiczne i społeczne problemy spożycia*, pp. 168–186; S. Szostkiewicz, *Zaopatrzenie w żywność w opinii społecznej (The Social Opinion of Food Supply)*, Warszawa 1974; L. Beskid, *Sytuacja materialna i potrzeby robotników w 1983 r., wyniki badania ankietowego (The Material Situation and the Needs of the Workers in 1983. Results of Questionnaire Research)*, in: *Położenie klasy robotniczej w Polsce*, vol. 3 *Warunki bytu robotników*, Warszawa 1984, pp. 284–286.

published at the beginning of 1956 in "Trybuna Ludu" and "Życie Warszawy" that tried to prove that the real pay during the six-year plan rose on average by 26–27%. An anonymous letter addressed on this occasion to the Central Committee said: "The series of articles [...] in «Życie Warszawy» and the article in «Trybuna Ludu» on the rise in real pay became the subject of a new wave of vituperations and mockery. «Do you know how to keep alive on 1.20 zlotys a day?» — people ask one another. «You buy two rolls 50 groszy each and a newspaper for 20 groszy. You will quench your hunger with the rolls, and you will find everything else in the newspaper»"<sup>81</sup>.

Also in Gomułka's time, the question of material difficulties, including those connected with poor supply of food, was one of the main subjects of correspondence coming to the central state and party institutions. The number of letters on that subject usually increased on the occasion of the changes in prices (usually rises), of food — and less frequently — industrial products, carriers of energy and public transport fares, carried out openly or without publicity<sup>82</sup>. In a large majority of these comments a conviction dominated of a gradual deterioration in the standard of living.

From the point of view of the analysis of the letters (frequently anonymous) that described material destitution, of great importance were the conclusions drawn by their authors. In many of those documents the bodies blamed for the deterioration in material conditions were "They": the government, party and authorities at large. The guilt "They" were accused of in the first place was that of deceiving society. Besides, the authorities were in these opinions presented as devoid of honour. The author of a letter criticising the rise in the prices of some food products said: "The most vulgar words come to my mind, but I suppress them, for there is no way of dealing with you; if somebody has no honour he has no mercy either, and can't be persuaded of anything. You may be awoken only by another Poznań [events of 1956], I think it must come to that again. Without it you won't

<sup>81</sup> The articles in question are those by R. F. *On the Development of Real Pay of Working People During the 6-Year Plan* ("Trybuna Ludu" 1956, N° 33) and W. Brus in "Życie Warszawy" (1956, N° 27, N° 28, N° 30, N° 31 and N° 32). AAN, 237/XXV-17, Biuletyn N° 8/119, 3 March 1956, ll. 121-125.

<sup>82</sup> AAN, KC PZPR, 1738 (micr. 2896), Note of the Ministry of Food Industry and Purchasing and the State Price Commission on retail prices of meat, animal and meat products, Warszawa 20 October 1967, ll. 191-202.

realize anything, for you are deaf"<sup>83</sup>. The socio-economic policy of the authorities of People's Poland was accused above all of not putting into practice the principles of social justice and equality that it officially declared.

In 1959, in the period of growing supply difficulties, the senders of correspondence to the radio also frequently formulated the opinion, typical also of the later years that "only the «chosen» communists fare well in this country; honest people in this system are almost reduced to starvation"<sup>84</sup>.

The sense of poverty also influenced the critical opinions on the part played by Poland in international politics. The letters frequently expressed the opinion that the bad material situation, and especially food supply difficulties in Poland are the result of the dependence on and exploitation by her eastern neighbour. In the years 1966–1967 the feeling prevailed that the rises in prices in Poland were connected with the war in Vietnam and the necessity to help the Arabic countries.

The motif of the shortage of goods, including that of food products and their prices, appeared as a steady subject of complaints addressed to central state and party institutions also in the later period. In the second half of the 1970s the letters concerning agricultural production and nutrition problems made up more than ten per cent of the total correspondence coming to the Central Committee of the PUWP. In the second half of 1976 criticism concerned mainly the shortage of meat and its products, sugar (until the introduction of ration cards), groats, noodles, butter, margarine and other fats, as well as many industrial products of daily use. These shortages sometimes served as the background for very sharp criticism of the problem of "quiet" rises in the prices<sup>85</sup>.

<sup>83</sup> Documentation Department of the Polish Radio and Television (henceforward: DDA), 1050/23, *Biuletyn Biura Listów Komitetu do Spraw Radiofonii "Polskie Radio"* (*Bulletin of the Bureau of Letters of the Broadcasting Committee "Polish Radio"*), N° 50, 25 July 1958.

<sup>84</sup> DDA, 1050/34, 20 February 1959. Public Feeling and Postulates in the Letters of Listeners to the Polish Radio.

<sup>85</sup> AAN, KC PZPR, micr. 2909 (call N° 1797), The appraisal of the letters and ways of solving the problems raised by the population in 1976, Office of Letters and Inspections (henceforward BLiI), l. 245; AAN, KC PZPR, micr. 2978 (call N° 1809), Information on the problems resulting from letters, complaints and interventions with KC PZPR and party bodies in 1978, l. 77; AAN KC PZPR, micr. B 2983 (call N° 1814), Information on the problems resulting from letters, complaints and interventions directed to party bodies in 1979, l. 596; AAN, MHWIU, 15/1, Statistical List of the Influx and Ways of Solving Complaints (motions) from 1 January 1971 to 31 December 1971, l. 113.

Complaints about speculation in food products, their high prices and shortages were also a steady subject of correspondence addressed to the central authorities in the 1980s<sup>86</sup>. The paucity of the supply of food products was especially passionately attacked in the letters that came to the Central Committee at the end of 1980 and in 1981<sup>87</sup>.

## 2. Other forms of written appeals

The critical opinion of the food supply situation in Poland was contained not only in letters. It was also expressed by various types of graffiti, leaflets and other forms of written "hostile propaganda".

In the surviving records of the questions examined by the Special Commission for Combat Against Economic Abuses and Sabotage we find information about leaflets (and also their originals), where critical comments were expressed concerning material conditions, including shortages of food supply. These difficulties found their expression in "hostile inscriptions" that usually appeared with various frequency on the walls surrounding industrial works or other buildings of public use. Although the word "meat" did not appear in them, the appeal for "bread" was the symbol of the demands for improvement in material conditions in general<sup>88</sup>.

It cannot be ruled out that economic demands were frequently articulated in this way due to the influence of the watchwords formulated by the workers of Poznań in June 1956. It was precisely the words "Freedom!" and "Bread!"<sup>89</sup> that figured on the tables hung by the nurse Stefania Goćwińska in the building of the PUWP Voivodeship Committee in Poznań occupied by the demonstrators on 28 June 1956. As Paweł Machcewicz

<sup>86</sup> See: AAN, KC PZPR, XI/1066, Information N° 39/XII/86 on the contents of the letters directed to KC PZPR, BLiI of KC, Warszawa, January 1987, l. 4; *ibidem*, Information on the contents of letters relating to the problems of prices, BLiI, Warszawa 19 January 1987, l. 22.

<sup>87</sup> AAN, KC PZPR, XI/1065, Selection of letters N° 71, Warszawa May 1981, BLiI KC PZPR. Topics: Opinions, remarks, proposals concerning the supply of food to the market and state control of food products, l. 169.

<sup>88</sup> This is confirmed by the records of discussions, debates and teleconferences with the participation of the Secretaries of PZPR Voivodeship Committees of 1980–1981. See: *Narady i telekonferencje kierownictwa PZPR w latach 1980–1981* (The Debates and Teleconferences of PZPR Leadership in the Years 1980–1981). Compiled, selected and prepared for print by M. Jabłonowski, W. Janowski, W. Władyka, Warszawa 2004, pp. 1101, 1180–1181.

<sup>89</sup> *Poznański Czerwiec 1956 (June 1956 in Poznań)*, ed. J. Maciejewski and Z. Trojanowiczowa, 2nd ed., Poznań 1990, pp. 74 and 79.

rightly argues, the sense of material destitution side by side with other factors was at the root of the decision to go on strike in Poznań's Cegielski Works (then Stalin Works)<sup>90</sup>. From that moment onwards graffiti and leaflets protesting against the material conditions of life appeared also in other localities<sup>90a</sup>. In Warsaw, as early as 28 June 1956 the inscription appeared on the wall of the Office of the City of Warsaw: "We want bread! Down with the commune!"<sup>91</sup>

This type of inscriptions, signifying dissatisfaction with the material situation as well as putting forward political demands appeared also later. For example, in 1967 in the "Wałbrzych" mine the appeal appeared on the vans with coal "Give us meat, or we go on strike!"<sup>92</sup> The then political authorities considered it a hostile activity when on 1 May 1963 in Myślubórz leaflets were pasted up, one of which said: "Lenin fed the hungry and clad the naked, and what are you doing?"<sup>93</sup> In 1967 in Łódź, 35 leaflets were scattered saying: "Down with communist louts. Give us more meat and better wages!"<sup>94</sup>

The lack of detailed studies makes it difficult to answer the question about the scale and dynamic of the phenomenon under discussion in later years. The examples I have given testify, however, that inscriptions and leaflets expressing dissatisfaction with the food supply were a constant element of everyday life in Poland.

### 3. Rumours, opinions voiced at meetings, political jokes

The fact that problems of food supply played a very important role in the then current opinion is also testified by the contents of rumours repeated in Poland since the 1940s. The majority of them were full of pessimism, linked to the current and expected material situation of large social groups. Especially strongly it was manifested in the Stalinist period, and it should be associated with the model of economic development accepted at that

<sup>90</sup> Cit. from: P. Machcewicz, *Polski rok 1956 (The Year 1956 in Poland)*, Warszawa 1993, p. 81.

<sup>90a</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>91</sup> P. Machcewicz, *op. cit.*, pp. 112–117.

<sup>92</sup> AAN, General Prosecutor of People's Poland, 1/13, Informational note, 22 November 1967, l. 5.

<sup>93</sup> AAN, KC PZPR, 237/VII–3971, Information N° 38/A/3887, 1 May 1963, l. 104.

<sup>94</sup> AAN, General Prosecutor of People's Poland, 1/13, *op. cit.*, l. 5.

time, with its preference for the development of heavy industry and collectivization of farming. The shortages on the food market that periodically grew more acute provided an additional impulse for this pessimism.

As early as 1945–1948 the element of deterioration in the material conditions of life, including food supply, was expressed in many current opinions concerning the events of the internal policy and in the international arena, both those which actually took place and those that were only expected. Let us present some of them.

In October 1946 the rumour circulating in the Warsaw voivodeship said that following the suspension of UNRRA's relief action a terrible famine would break out in Poland and "the Government of National Unity will not be able to cope with the task of feeding all the nation"<sup>95</sup>. In May 1947 in one of the communes of the Mińsk Mazowiecki district the peasants spoke of a pending outbreak of a Soviet–Turkish war, "and since Poland signed a treaty of mutual aid with the Soviet Union, the grain stored by state institutions is transported to Soviet stores"<sup>96</sup>.

The thread of material detriment to Poles was also strongly connected with many rumours of an anti-Semitic character spread at that time. The age-long motif of using the blood of Christian children for the production of the matzoh was then intensified. In May 1947 information came to the Ministry of Public Security of horrible rumours about the murders committed by the Jews. One of them said that "in Chorzów numerous murders were perpetrated on both adults and infants. People are blood-thirsty and murder to satisfy both their own needs and those of others". In Toruń — another record said: "old female thieves walk about the town and steal children which they slaughter to turn them into soap, preserves and sausages. The police has discovered some of such gangs. One of these days a Jewish woman was caught with two children"<sup>97</sup>. In Wrocław a slaughter-house was said to be discovered "where the Jews killed children and sold their meat"<sup>97a</sup>.

<sup>95</sup> *Biuletyny Informacyjne Ministerstwa Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego 1946 (Information Bulletins of the Ministry of Public Security 1946)*, Warszawa 1946, p. 61.

<sup>96</sup> *Biuletyny Informacyjne Ministerstwa Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego 1947*, vol. I, Warszawa 1993, p. 69.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 82.

<sup>97a</sup> *Ibidem*.

Rumours foretelling difficulties in buying food or downright famine mushroomed especially in connection with the decision to collectivize the countryside and farming made in the summer of 1948. Among the images of the future co-operative economy reminding many millions of Poles their eastern experiences, the fear of "common cauldrons" as the form of "collective dining" loomed large, clearly reminiscent of labour-camps<sup>98</sup>.

From time to time a wave of rumours swept across Poland telling of the impending rises in the prices of basic food products. These as a rule triggered off a massive buying up of these articles.

The post-October changes for a short time strengthened the hopes for improvement in material situation, which found their reflection in rumours. However, at least from the end of 1957 onwards there were more and more opinions that envisaged a deterioration in the living standard of Poles.

According to Marcin Zarembe's findings<sup>99</sup>, in the 1960s the matters of food supply from time to time triggered off new waves of rumours. For example in July 1960 those about a rise in the price of bread, sugar and oil circulated in Szczecin. A big wave of such current opinions swept over Poland in May 1963. It predicted a rise in the prices of food products and the exchange of money. Similar rumours were noted in many regions of Poland in 1967.

The lack of detailed research in the 1970s and 1980s makes it difficult to indicate the "food supply" contexts of the rumours of those years. We know, however, that the authorities continued to be perceived as responsible for market shortages, and this feeling grew stronger in 1981, at the time of the collapse of the internal market. It was then that a rumour appeared, and not by accident, that state authorities were deliberately storing food in order to make the nation starve. It concealed the conviction about society and authorities as two separate subjects of social processes with different aims, which was characteristic also of other current opinions<sup>100</sup>.

<sup>98</sup> See: D. Jarosz, M. Pasztor, *W krzywym zwierciadle. Polityka władz komunistycznych w Polsce w świetle plotek i pogłosek z lat 1949-1956* (In a Distorted Mirror. The Policy of the Communist Authorities in Poland in the Light of Gossip and Rumour of 1949-1956), Warszawa 1995, p. 45, note 15.

<sup>99</sup> M. Zarembe, *Spótczerstwo polskie lat sześćdziesiątych*, op. cit., pp. 31-48.

<sup>100</sup> P. Łukasiewicz, *Pogłoska i dowcip polityczny w PRL* (Rumour and Political Joke in People's Poland), Warszawa 1987, p. 17.

The attitude of various social groups to supply shortages in Poland found expression not only in rumours but also other oral opinions. Their forums were various kinds of meetings and conferences. Their contents are partly known not only due to reports prepared by secret agents and informers but also to those created by the employees of other state and party institutions.

An important source of such opinions is represented by the records of the above-mentioned Special Commission for Combat Against Abuses and Economic Sabotage. They show that the difficulties in food supply considerably influenced the tension of conflict between urban workers and those who lived in the countryside (farmer-workers). The same conclusions were reached by historians and sociologists on the basis of their research. Błażej Brzostek, for example, found out that in November 1951 the deputy director of one of the factories in the Bródno district of Warsaw said at the Basic Party Cell meeting that the shortage of meat was due to the fact that "there are no more swineherds, since they all had gone to study at the Technical University"<sup>101</sup>.

A similar manifestation of the conflict between urban and country workers was found by sociologists Danuta Markowska and Zbigniew Sufin who in 1960 studied the labour ethic in the Waryński Institute of Construction of Industrial Installations in Warsaw. "The workers coming from the country and still relying on its products", the authors of research wrote, "were called «pudges» in the factory (since they generally looked well)"<sup>102</sup>.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that a very interesting source, though requiring a deeper methodological reflection, expressing a critical attitude to the difficulties in food supply was the political joke<sup>103</sup>. Meat as a subject appeared relatively frequently both in

<sup>101</sup> B. Brzostek, *Robotnicy Warszawy. Konflikty codzienne, 1950–1954 (The Workers of Warsaw. Everyday Conflicts, 1950–1954)*, Warszawa 2002, p. 76.

<sup>102</sup> Taylor Nelson Sofres Archives of the Centre of Public Opinion Studies (henceforward: ATNS OBOP), 9. 36. D. Markowska, Z. Sufin, *Labour Ethic and the Attendant Phenomena in an Industrial Works (report on monographic research in the Ludwik Waryński Institute of Construction of Industrial Installations in Warsaw)*.

<sup>103</sup> P. Łukasiewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 27; T. Szarota, *Śmiech zakazany — kawał (dowcip) polityczny jako informacja o postrzeganiu peerelowskiej rzeczywistości (Forbidden Laughter — Political Joke as Information on the Perception of the Reality of People's Poland)*, "Polska 1944/45–1989. Studia i materiały" 2001, vol. V, p. 213; N. Wójtowicz, *Dowcip polityczny w Polsce Ludowej w latach 1944–1956 (Political Joke in People's Poland in the Years 1944–1956)*, in: *Studia i materiały z dziejów opozycji i oporu społecznego*, ed. Ł. Kamiński, vol. I, Wrocław 1998, pp. 74–75.

the published anthologies of political jokes of People's Poland and in archival documents. Of course, the mockery focused mainly on meat shortage. One of the jokes, from the period between 1945 and 1956, went like this: "The only commodity brought to a meat-shop was swineheads. Mrs. Kowalski bought one. But, on leaving the shop, she started boxing it.

«What are you doing?» — asked the policeman going by.

«I am boxing this head to tell me where its bottom is»<sup>104</sup>.

The subject of many jokes arising throughout this period, was the queue of those waiting for meat. In 1963 the ironical answer to the question: "What is the long, twisted, colourful thing that eats mainly dairy products?" was to run: "It is the queue in front of a meat-shop"<sup>105</sup>. In another joke, the queue was something at least 30 metres long, with "many legs; it is carnivorous, but must usually be satisfied with potatoes"<sup>106</sup>.

Political jokes concerning the shortage of meat and its products were also current in Poland in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1974 one of them was noted, which said that "in Warsaw a gang of adolescent drug-addicts" was discovered "who hid in the allotment gardens, in the gates of houses, in the bystreets, and smelled... ham"<sup>107</sup>. In 1975 the well-known motif of queues emerged e.g. in a joke about one of the western leaders who visited Poland and grew interested in the queues in front of meat-shops. His question met with a nonchalant comment of the "leader of the Polish nation" who accompanied him: "This is a marginal phenomenon, the queues appear only sporadically, exclusively when meat is available"<sup>108</sup>.

The political jokes concerned with food supply were frequently enriched by an additional, but important motif of malicious comments about the eastern neighbour. Many jokes as well as rumours, unambiguously and tellingly associated the supply difficulties in Poland with the export of food products to the USSR. Sometimes they contained other references to the Soviet reality

<sup>104</sup> *Dowcip surowo wzbroniony. Antologia polskiego dowcipu politycznego (Strictly Forbidden Joke. An Anthology of Polish Political Joke)*, vol. 2, Toruń 1991, p. 12.

<sup>105</sup> *Nie tylko do śmiechu (Not Only for a Laugh)*, p. 66.

<sup>106</sup> A. Rosenbusch, *Śmiech zakazany. Antologia dowcipu politycznego Polski Ludowej (Forbidden Laughter. An Anthology of Political Jokes in People's Poland)*, Melbourne 1987, p. 63.

<sup>107</sup> *Nie tylko do śmiechu...*, p. 121.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 129–130.

with its prominent figures — personality models — forcefully propagated on the Vistula. According to this scheme the Soviet “magician of orchards” — Ivan Michurin — was said to inter-breed a giraffe with a cow, so that it “might graze in Poland and be milked in Russia”. In another version a swine was inter-bred with a wood-lice, so that the Poles might have a unique chance of buying ham before Easter<sup>109</sup>. A similar motif was used in the joke noted in 1977 about the three most difficult problems of People’s Poland and their solutions: “1. The production of food — closing the eastern border; 2. the housing problem — opening the western border; 3. devotion — hanging the portraits of Brezhnev in the naves of all the churches”<sup>110</sup>. It seems, however, that political jokes in those times ever more often testified to the conviction that meat was exported not only to the East, but also to the West. For example, in 1977 a joke appeared saying that meat shortage was the result of a new way of swine slaughtering which consisted in putting the charges of trotyl under the porkers. After the blow-up “everything happens automatically. One half goes to the East, the other to the West, and millions of Polish consumers flooded with blood start seeing red”<sup>111</sup>.

The “supply motif” under analysis was present throughout the period of People’s Poland in anonymous Polish poetry and ballads sung to the melodies of well-known songs.

As early as December 1970 in the songs of the strikers one of the main topics was hunger, which functioned — just as bread — rather as a figure of speech. This thesis is best exemplified by a fragment of the text of the anonymous song sung at that time in Gdańsk. “Gomułka always has everything/And who will give bread to us, poor hungerlings/ We know what hunger is”. In another fragment of an anonymous worker’s rhyme of that time its author clearly pointed out who made the workers starve. Those responsible were the authorities who acted in the name of magnificent slogans and socialist ideas: “Are not the class ideas more important things than bacon, headcheese and sausages?”<sup>112</sup>.

<sup>109</sup> J. Bingen M. A., *Warszawski dowcip. Kawał Warszawy 1945–1968 (The Joke of Warsaw. 1945–1968)*, Toronto 1980, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>110</sup> *Nie tylko do śmiechu...*, pp. 145–146.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 148.

<sup>112</sup> A. Błaszkiwicz, *Prawda i konwencja. Analiza poezji robotniczej okresu napięć społecznych, grudzień 1970 i sierpień 1980 (Truth and Convention. An Analysis of the Workers’ Poetry of the Periods of Social Tension, December 1970 and August 1980)*, in: *Studia nad ruchami społecznymi*, ed. E. Lewicka-Banaszek, P. Marciniak and W. Modzelewski, Warszawa 1987, pp. 210–211.

Similar problems appeared in the songs of the strikers in August 1980<sup>113</sup>.

These and other elements of political folklore, omitted for the lack of space, are additional proof of the large deprivation in the sphere of supply suffered and manifested by the workers.

#### 4. The strategies of adjustment to supply shortages

The difficulties in food supply in post-war Poland took an especially sharp form in the years 1944/45–1956. As is shown by the results of earlier cited research, the drastic limitations of the consumption of food products and the halt in the tendency to growth in this respect were characteristic of the Stalinist period. This was the result of the accepted model of economic development, including the growing pressure on collectivization, accompanied by imposing on the farmers (in the years 1951–52) compulsory levies (at fixed prices) of potatoes, milk, grain and livestock.

This met with the opposition of the farmers, who frequently paid for it with arrest, fines or even imprisonment<sup>114</sup>. However, more frequently they tried to adjust their behaviour to the changing everyday realities.

One of such strategies adopted by the peasants in order to cope with the hostile reality was illegal slaughter of livestock. In a situation where the compulsory levies in fact fulfilled the function of additional tax and were compared to war-time levies, the farmers showed great ingenuity in finding the ways of such a sale of their products which would be more remunerable. Relatively substantial income was ensured by the sale on the free market. The problem was that, in accordance with the regulations in force, such sale of products subject to compulsory levies was possible only when the levy has been delivered. In the case of livestock their slaughter for the farmers' own needs required the consent of the headmen. However, in practice this prohibition — despite the repressive actions of the Ministry of Public Security — was in many ways by-passed. The most frequent practice was “persuading” the local authorities with the help of bribes<sup>115</sup>.

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 30.

<sup>114</sup> AAN, KC PZPR, 1678A (micr. 2829), Information on the influence of penal-administrative arbitration on the implementation of the plans of compulsory levies, pp. 72–74.

<sup>115</sup> AAN, Central Purchasing and Contracting Office (henceforward: CUSiK), 7, Minutes of the debate of field activists, 30 August 1952, pp. 16–18.

Due to the food supply difficulties in the towns, there developed the forms of sale that were illegal from the point of view of the then law. At the round-ups of animals, in the purchasing centres, "speculators" appeared who, condemned by the authorities, bought some of the livestock brought there by the farmers.

In January 1949 the report of the Politico-Educational Board of Army Division II drew attention to massive departures of the inhabitants of Szczecin in order to buy meat and fats in "the less densely populated centres"<sup>116</sup>. This testifies to the presence of a broader phenomenon that consisted in the rise of rural centres of "illegal slaughter", especially in the vicinity of big towns. In the case of Warsaw, this role was played by the villages near Karczew.

Sometimes even the post was engaged in such business: in the Łódź voivodeship, before Easter 1949 a rapid growth in the number of parcels was noted, among which there were many with meat<sup>117</sup>. One of the butchers accused by the Poznań delegation of the Special Commission, sent to Wrocław parcels the total weight of which was estimated at about seven tonnes<sup>118</sup>.

Among these ways of coping with meat shortage one can hardly overlook the pathological practices resulting from the wish to by-pass the food supply control regulations. Interesting information on this subject can be found in the records of the Central Commission for Combat Against Speculation active in the 1980s. They show that those most inclined to that kind of practices were such "deficit disposers", as the managements of Meat Processing Works. Such actions were usually taken in the name of a specifically understood benefit of their staff. Thus the inspection of the Meat Processing Works in Dębica showed that in the period between April 1 and July 31, 1984, the food allowances for employees embraced by 7,113 kg more "meat mass" than was allowed by the prescribed limits. In the shop attached to the Works the cases were discovered of selling goods to recipients with whom a secret deal was previously arranged, with the omission of the institution to which cash and delivery documents

<sup>116</sup> Central Military Archives, Chief Politico-Educational Board of the Polish Army, IV. 502. 1. 218, Informational report on the politico-educational work of the Army Section II (OW II) for January 1949, p. 60.

<sup>117</sup> J. Kochanowski, *Do uboju (For Slaughter)*, "Polityka" 2002, № 33, p. 64.

<sup>118</sup> AAN, Special Commission for Combat Against Economic Abuses and Sabotage (henceforward: KS), 1464, Poznań Delegation to Special Commission in Warsaw, Poznań 26 October 1948, l. 2.

had been sent. Meat was also resold, with the managers' acceptance, to "various institutions" outside the obligatory system of distribution, in return for the services rendered to the employees of these Works. Among other things, 593 kg of offal products was sent to the health resort Busko-Zdrój in return for placing some employees of the Works in its sanatorium<sup>119</sup>.

The abuses connected with the system of meat supply also consisted of scheming concerned with the issue of ration cards. Additional cards happened to be acquired due to the inclusion of "dead souls" in the lists of those entitled to such cards prepared in the Works. In 1983 the press informed that one of female employees was accused of acquiring in this way 3,000 cards!<sup>120</sup>

An important strategy of adjustment, although very difficult to examine systematically, was the above-mentioned search for alternative sources of food supply outside the shops. It is not accidental that — according to the findings of the Chief Statistical Office — during the crisis of the 1980s a great intensification could be observed in the horticultural production of the employees' allotment gardens and in livestock breeding attached to the homesteads. As a result the incomes derived from this activity were growing (in the years 1974–1984 they grew over ninefold in the employees' households, and over twentyfold in the households of pensioners) and its share in the satisfaction of the alimentary needs also grew substantially (in 1984 it amounted to 13% in pensioners' households, and to 6% in those of the employees)<sup>121</sup>.

The above-mentioned practices show the great social ingenuity in coping with the unfriendly reality. By making the shortage economy more "tractable" the participants in this specific

<sup>119</sup> AAN, URM, 32/75, Materials for the Session of the Central Commission for Combat Against Speculation of 2 May 1985 concerning the state of the implementation of motions and decisions made by the Central Commission on 6 June 1983 and on 27 September 1984 concerning complete distribution of meat mass and protection of the meat market, Warszawa April 1985, pp. 66–94.

<sup>120</sup> See M. F u s z a r a, *Patologia systemu reglamentacji (The Pathology of the State Food Control System)*, in: *Umowa o kartki...*, p. 187. On the falsification of ration cards — see also: *Stan wojenny w Polsce 1981–1983 (Martial Law in Poland 1981–1983)*, ed. A. D u d e k, Warszawa 2003, pp. 345 and 759.

<sup>121</sup> R. M i l l i c - C z e r n i a k, *Adaptacja konsumentów do warunków kryzysu ekonomiczno-społecznego w pierwszej połowie lat osiemdziesiątych (The Adaptation of Consumers to the Conditions of the Socio-economic Crisis in the First Half of the 1980s)*, in: *Warunki i sposób życia — zachowania przystosowawcze w kryzysie*. Collective work ed. L. B e s k i d, Warszawa 1989, p. 104.

“game” with the authorities showed its weaknesses, the ineffectiveness of the administrative control and the force of the spontaneous socio-economic processes even in the conditions of the state-directed economy of People’s Poland.

### 5. The queue

The obvious testimony to supply difficulties in Polish towns were the queues in front of the shops selling the basic food products, including meat. This phenomenon took on an especially dramatic character in the Stalinist period, and strongly affected the public feeling and behaviour at the places of work. It concerned especially women, who traditionally took care of purchasing food for their families.

In the summer of 1951 in Warsaw people gathered in front of the shops in the evening in order to wait for the morning delivery. The fact that the products which could replace meat were soon bought up resulted in the disappearance of the fish, cheeses and eggs. The authorities reacted to these difficulties by sending to the queues party agitators who were to explain the causes of shortages. These functionaries only aroused more anger<sup>122</sup>.

It seems that after 1956 the first cumulation of supply difficulties and the resultant queues came in 1959. Another piling up of these problems took place in 1963. It was then that in many voivodship towns people formed queues waiting even for milk from the early hours.

The queues happened to be the scene not only of the clashes of words. In 1947 it was not accidentally that the reporter of “Trybuna Dolnośląska” wrote: “a kilogramme of meat costs four knocked out teeth and one black eye”<sup>123</sup>. In Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski a woman queuing for meat even suffered death (probably by stifling)<sup>124</sup>. In October 1959 an inhabitant of Świebodzice informed the Polish Radio: “From 3 o’clock in the morning people are queuing for meat. And what do they deliver at noon? —

<sup>122</sup> AAN, PKPG 5478, Note of the Commission appointed by KC PZPR for matters of supply of pork meat and fats for ration cards, submitted to vice-premier H. Minc on 27 September 1951, ll. 1–2.

<sup>123</sup> Cit. from: J. Chumiński, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

<sup>124</sup> R. Kwiecień, The Kielce Delegation of the Special Commission for Combat Against Economic Abuses and Sabotage (1946–1954), typescript of a master’s thesis written for the Institute of History of the Akademia Świętokrzyska in Kielce, Kielce 2003, p. 29.

mutton, goat's meat and horse meat. There's not enough of it for everybody. Pork and beef are a rarity. People fight in the queues. They queue all day long and often return home empty-handed<sup>125</sup>. In 1967 in several shops in Lublin there came to scrambling and fighting for meat<sup>126</sup>.

Similar scenes characteristic of queuing also took place later, especially at the times of accumulation of supply difficulties. This happened, e.g. on the occasion of buying such meat products as headcheese, black pudding and liver sausage the sale of which was not subject to state control in the period of martial law in 1982<sup>127</sup>. It was then that women happened to devote to queuing their free days during their leave from work<sup>128</sup>.

The queue was not, however, only the "battlefield", but also the place of unfavourable comments about the authorities, and rumours which spread from mouth to mouth. The fact that we know them from written sources also testifies to another function of the queue: it was "the place of work" of many party informers and the security apparatus.

## 6. Supply difficulties and the discipline of work

The above findings show that supply difficulties bore negatively upon the quality and discipline of work in Polish enterprises. In May 1951 a larger number of late arrivals was noted in the work places of Łódź, which the female workers explained by the necessity of queuing<sup>129</sup>. On 18 August 1951 the Voivodeship Office of Public Security in Łódź reported to the headquarters in Warsaw that "the workers declare that they won't work any longer without meat". On the eves of feast days people took leave from work in order to queue for meat<sup>130</sup>. In connection with supply difficulties on 18 August 1981 in the factory of artificial silk in Chodaków some female workers refused to stay overhours (which they earlier obliged themselves to do), declaring that they had to

<sup>125</sup> DDA, 1050/29, *Biuletyn Biura Listów Komitetu do Spraw Radiofonii "Polskie Radio" N° 50, 17 October 1959.*

<sup>126</sup> M. Z a r e m b a, *Spoleczeństwo polskie...*, p. 46.

<sup>127</sup> See e.g. T. R u z i k o w s k i, *Mazowsze, Warmia, Mazury (Mazovia, Warmia, Masuria)*, in: *Stan wojenny w Polsce*, p. 343.

<sup>128</sup> J. N e j a, *Górny Śląsk, Podbeskidzie, Ziemia Częstochowska (Upper Silesia, The Beskid Foothills, The Częstochowa Region)*, in: *Stan wojenny w Polsce*, p. 149.

<sup>129</sup> B.CMSWiA, 41/470 (565), *Biuletyn dzienny (Daily Bulletin)*, N° 112, 16 May 1951, l. 61.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibidem*, *Biuletyn dzienny*, N° 191/51, 18 August 1951, l. 359.

go queuing for meat. After some talks they all, with the exception of three, resumed their work<sup>131</sup>. In August 1951 in Warsaw there were cases noted of halting the tramways, because the conductors went to join the queues for meat<sup>132</sup>. The sources that describe the situation of the workers in the Stalinist period also show other types of behaviour, caused by malnutrition. There were some cases of fainting and breaks in work for this reason<sup>133</sup>.

More research is required to prove the influence of supply difficulties on the discipline of work in the later period. The authors of the letters coming to the PUWP Central Committee in the 1970s complained about the phenomenon of leaving work in order to join a queue for meat<sup>134</sup>. In 1977 a railwayman from Wrocław wrote: "There is now a widespread custom of leaving work in order to wait in a queue"<sup>135</sup>. Another correspondent wrote at that time: "Things are going bad in our town of Lubartów. Only those who have connections in the shops and various kinds of louts who walk about the town looking for the shop where some scrap of flesh has been delivered have a chance to buy a piece of meat. Working people must rely on carbohydrates and dairy products. No wonder that people fall ill, that there are more absences from work and that the time destined for production is spent by the workers on "hunting" for a piece of meat"<sup>136</sup>. Similar practice was noted in the sources of 1982<sup>137</sup>. It seems that this situation accompanied Poles with various intensity until 1989.

## 7. Strikes, manifestations, riots

Social dissatisfaction in the face of supply shortages was also manifested in a much more open way.

Lukasz Kamiński's findings concerning the years 1945–1948 show that the majority of strikes (84%) broke out at that

<sup>131</sup> *Ibidem*, Biuletyn dzienny, N° 192/51, 20 August 1951, l. 361.

<sup>132</sup> B. Brzostek, *op. cit.*, pp. 136, 142, 144, 157; B.CAMSWIA, MBP 41/471, Biuletyn dzienny, N° 209/51, 8 September 1951.

<sup>133</sup> B.CAMSWIA, 41/470 (565), Biuletyn dzienny, N° 197/51, 25 August 1951, l. 377.

<sup>134</sup> AAN, KC PZPR, micr. 2978 (call N° 1809), Information on the problems emerging from letters, complaints and interventions with KC PZPR and party bodies in 1978, l. 77.

<sup>135</sup> AAN, KC PZPR XI/1063, Selection of letters N° 13 BLU KC PZPR, Warszawa September 1977, l. 255.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibidem*, l. 256.

<sup>137</sup> See e.g. T. Ruzikowski, *Mazowsze, Warmia, Mazury*, in: *Stan wojenny w Polsce*, p. 343.

time on economic grounds. In 1945 demands for better supply of food dominated among economic postulates. In the next years the workers more often called for a rise in their wages and for getting them on time<sup>138</sup>. The first wave of strikes aroused by supply difficulties broke out in the textile factories of Łódź as early as May 1945<sup>139</sup>.

In the Stalinist period the subsidence of the strike movement was in the first place the result of the aggravation of repressions directed by the authorities against such forms of protest. Nevertheless the shortages of meat — side by side with other reasons — were the cause of one of the larger waves of strikes that swept across Poland in the summer of 1951. The centre of the workers' protest was then Żyrardów. According to the information destined for the Ministry of Public Security it was the shortage of meat that triggered off several hours-long breaks in work in the spinning and weaving rooms of the local Żyrardów Works on August 16–17<sup>140</sup>. These strikes embraced also other industrial works. In connection with the shortage of meat short "breaks in work" also took place on October 20 in Warsaw's Clothing Factory and in the Transport Trust as well as in the State Cotton Industry Works at Pabianice<sup>141</sup>.

Information about the number and character of strikes that broke out in Poland in Gomułka's period is also far from complete. According to the unverified data presented by the Security Service, in 1963 in Poland 66 "breaks in work" were noted (in the fourth quarter of the year — 10) with the participation of 5,085 workers, and in 1964 — 37 with 2,087 participants (in the second quarter of the year — 14, in the fourth quarter — 10). The same institution assessed that they were deprived of a politically hostile character, but "were mainly a protest of the staff in face of the inhuman behaviour of the administration"<sup>142</sup>. In 1966 the num-

<sup>138</sup> Ł. Kamiński, *Strajki robotnicze w Polsce w latach 1945–1948 (Workers' Strikes in Poland in the Years 1945–1948)*, Wrocław 1999, pp. 114–115.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 7.

<sup>140</sup> B. CAMSWiA, 41/470 (565), Biuletyn dzienny, N° 191/51, 18 August 1951, l. 359.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibidem*, Biuletyn dzienny, N° 193/51, 21 August 1951, l. 365.

<sup>142</sup> Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance (henceforward — AIPN), MSW II, 3478. Theses for a national conference. Analysis of major forms of hostile activity in the country and the tasks resulting from it for Section III of Security Service for 1965, March 1965, ll. 220 ff.; AIPN, MSW II, 587, Information on the work of SB MSW for 2nd quarter of 1963; AIPN, MSW II, 600, Information on the work of SB MSW for 2nd quarter of 1964.

ber of “breaks in work” was to amount to 33 (2,832 participants) and from January to November 1967 — to 25<sup>143</sup>.

Because of the lack of adequate research it seems very difficult to draw conclusions about the character of strikes in Poland, especially after 1956. Our further analysis is based on our own conclusions we have drawn from incomplete archival materials that the Institute of National Remembrance (*IPN*) made accessible to us. We have found there mentions of almost 250 strikes in the years 1957–1967. This may be the basis for posing hypotheses which require verification in the course of further analyses.

The most characteristic aspect of those strikes from the point of view of our deliberations was the fact that the workers relatively rarely formulated openly their demands concerning food supply. Sometimes what they were after was improvement in canteen menu<sup>144</sup>, sometimes they complained about the shortage of meat on the market<sup>145</sup>.

Does this mean that food problems stopped playing an essential role as the cause of strikes in Poland? It seems that such a statement may give rise to doubt for several basic reasons. In the first place, we have very incomplete knowledge of the strikers' demands. Secondly, we have grounds to suppose that demands concerning food supply were not always formulated *expressis verbis*. It is not accidental that they appeared especially frequently in the years 1945–1946 and — as the case of Żyrardów shows — in the summer of 1951. These were periods when — for various reasons — food problems came to a head, and many Poles downright went hungry. They could not satisfy their nutritional needs not only because they had no money, but also (and perhaps chiefly) because of the shortage of basic food products. If in the middle 1940s this was mainly the economic effect of the war, in the early 1950s this was the result of the adopted model of socio-economic development. In Gomułka's Poland food supply difficulties from time to time accumulated, but were of a different

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<sup>143</sup> *AIPN, MSW II, 3478*, Theses for a national conference. Analysis of major forms of hostile activity in the country and the tasks resulting from it for Section III of Security Service for 1965, March 1965, ll. 218–220.

<sup>144</sup> *AIPN, MSW II, 1080*, Telephone message № 6266 to Deputy Director of *MSW* Secretariat, Szczecin 16 November 1960.

<sup>145</sup> *AIPN, MSW II, 1078 (121/13)*, *Komenda MO* (Police Station) in Łódź to Deputy Director of *MSW* Secretariat in Warsaw, Łódź 11 September 1959.

character. From time to time there was a shortage of meat and its products, but rarely — of corn products. Besides, the supply difficulties were partly relieved by the authorities' consent to a broader functioning of the free market for food products than it was under Stalinism.

In this situation the basic problem was frequently the shortage of cheaper varieties of meat or its products in the shops, but not their complete lack. For this reason, probably, demands in this sphere frequently appeared indirectly, disguised as those for higher pay. It was certainly not accidental that in the examined information of 250 strikes of 1957–1967, demands for higher pay appeared directly in at least 177.

The demands for a cut in the prices of food products, side by side with the rise in wages, appeared directly as an important element of strike postulates in December 1970. It was then that the rise in prices was one of the most essential direct causes of the social conflict the outcome of which was the tragic massacre of the workers in Gdańsk. Non-economic demands appeared much less frequently<sup>146</sup>.

These fragmentary and incomplete data contained in the documents produced by the structures of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the PUWP show that in the years 1956–1970, as well as most probably earlier on, the workers went on strike in the first place for economic reasons, including especially the problems of wages and prices. The matter in question was not only too low pay and the rises in the prices of articles of daily use, but also delays in the payment of wages and their changes resulting from the introduction of new production norms and assortments of articles etc.

Are such conclusions also valid for the later period? The lack of deeper studies of the strike movement in the 1970s makes it difficult to answer such a question. Nevertheless we know that the largest wave of strikes in that period was triggered off by the so-called price-operation of June 1976 which consisted in the rise in the prices of food products. The numbers of the workers

<sup>146</sup> B. Danowska, *Grudzień 1970 roku na Wybrzeżu Gdańskim (December 1970 in the Gdańsk Region)*, Pelplin 2000, pp. 114–120; *Postulaty 1970–71 i 1980. Materiały źródłowe do dziejów wystąpień pracowniczych w latach 1970–1971 i 1980, Gdańsk i Szczecin (The 1970–71 and 1980 Postulates. Source materials for the history of the workers' protests in the years 1970–1971 and 1980, Gdańsk and Szczecin)*. Collected and prepared by B. Chmiel and E. Kaczyńska, Warszawa 1998, pp. 24–86.

who joined the protest at that time are estimated at from 55 thousand to 71 thousand people<sup>147</sup>.

Food supply difficulties also became the cause of strikes in July 1980. The direct impulse was the concealed rise in the prices of meat introduced by the state authorities, consisting in shifting some varieties of meat and its products from normal to the so-called "commercial" shops and raising their prices in delicatessen shops, canteens and buffets at the places of work. As the students of these problems — J. Drażkiewicz and A. Rychard — contend, these protests should not be treated only as a simple reaction to the concrete action of changing the wages and prices. On the factual plane the causes of strikes resided in the very low standard of living of many groups of workers. The above-mentioned scholars also draw attention to one aspect of the strikes of July and the first half of 1980, which was extremely important to the context of the present deliberations. They contend that due to the experiences of 1970 and 1976 "the strikes against the rise in the prices of meat gained some kind of legitimation on the part of the state authorities. These were the only strikes in the most recent history of People's Poland that were publicly and officially (regardless of consistent unofficial repressions) recognized by the state authorities as justified. This was certainly not without consequence to the strikes of 1980 — both to the moment of their outbreak and the demands that were formulated then. The awareness that a strike against the rise in the prices of meat was "legal" helped to overcome the workers' fear, and encouraged them to making the first step. On the other hand this "quasi-legality" made the authorities constrain their first reactions and enter negotiations with the strikers"<sup>148</sup>. The demands of the strikers in the summer of 1980 very often called for better food supply and the closing down of the so-called "special" and "commercial" shops<sup>149</sup>. As a result of these de-

<sup>147</sup> *Czerwiec 1976 w materiałach archiwalnych (June 1976 in Archival Materials)*. Selection, introduction and edition J. Eisler, Warszawa 2001, p. 51.

<sup>148</sup> J. Drażkiewicz, A. Rychard, *Strajki w regionie warszawskim w lecie 1980 r. (Strikes in the Warsaw Region in the Summer of 1980)*, in: *Studia nad ruchami społecznymi*, ed. by J. Kulpińska, vol. IV, Warszawa 1990, p. 12.

<sup>149</sup> P. Marciniak, *Horyzont programowy strajków w 1980 r. (The Programme Horizon of the Strikes of 1980)*, in: *Studia nad ruchami społecznymi*, ed. P. Marciniak and W. Modzelewski, vol. II, Warszawa 1989, p. 160. Special shops were designed for the representatives of power. Commercial shops offered deficit goods at much higher prices than those in the "normal" network of shops.

mands a clause appeared in the text of agreements of 31 August 1980 between the Inter-Works Strike Committee (MKS) in the Gdańsk Shipyards and the Government Commission, promising "improvement in the supply of meat to the population until 31 December 1980 due to increasing the remunerability of agricultural production, limiting the export of meat to the indispensable minimum and additional import of meat". At the same time a programme was to be presented of improvement in meat supply to the population taking into account a possibility of introducing a rationing system. MKS put forward a motion to close down commercial shops, and set in order and standardize the prices of meat and meat products at the middle level<sup>150</sup>.

The strikes were certainly the most important but not the only form of active social resistance where participants expressed their dissatisfaction among other things with food supply shortages.

These types of demands also appeared in street manifestations continually present in the reality of People's Poland. According to Ł. Kamiński, as early as March 1945 in Ostrowiec, because of the shortage of food women organized a demonstration. The shouts "Give us bread!" were raised by a crowd of women demonstrating in front of the District Council in Wąbrzeźno on 16 May 1945. It was also women who demanded to be given ration-cards for bread during their manifestation in front of the City Council in Kościerzyn on 18 September 1945<sup>151</sup>. On 1 September 1951 in Dobrzyń on the Vistula (Bydgoszcz voivodeship) several score people (adults and children) turned out into the market square shouting: "Give us bread!" (the local shops ran out of it)<sup>152</sup>. On 8 January 1949 in the "Siemianowice" mine, because of the insufficient supply of meat by the local co-operative a "ferment" was noticed among the wives of the workers, demanding from the Works Council an increase in meat allowances, and they gained what they called for<sup>153</sup>. On 14 April 1949 in the "Bankowa" metalworks (Katowice), because the allowances of

<sup>150</sup> M. Fuszara, I. Jakubowska, J. Kurczewski, *Sprawiedliwość czasów reglamentacji (Justice at the Time of State Food Control)*, in: *Umowa o kartki*, ed. by J. Kurczewski, Warszawa 2004, p. 13.

<sup>151</sup> Ł. Kamiński, *Polacy wobec nowej...*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>152</sup> B.CAMSWIA, MBP, 41/471, *Biuletyn dzienny* (of the Secretariat of the Minister of Public Security, MBP) of 3 September 1951.

<sup>153</sup> B.CAMSWIA, 41/463 (558), *Biuletyn dzienny*, № 6, 10 Jan. 1949, l. 26.

meat were withheld, a demonstration of the workers' wives took place; they gathered in the main reception hall and declared they would not let their husbands go to work unless the sale of meat was resumed. The conflict was solved when the sale started immediately<sup>154</sup>. On 24 August 1951 in the morning in Oborniki, large groups of women went to the Head Office of Meat Management raising shouts: "Sell us meat!"<sup>155</sup>. The slogans "We are hungry!", "Give us bread!" were scanned in the streets of Poznań on 28 June 1956, and from the transmission car of the Polish Radio seized by the demonstrators, shouts were raised: "Our produce is continually exported abroad and our children have no bread!"<sup>156</sup>.

The changes of October 1956 were accompanied by a wave of meetings where various demands directed to the authorities were usually voiced spontaneously. The analysis of the records of these events shows that demands concerning better satisfaction of nutritional needs appeared on these occasions relatively rarely. Why? It seems that the development of events in Poland following the VIII Plenary Session of the PUWP Central Committee encouraged the formulation of much "braver" (as they were considered) demands of a political character. Those who took part in the meetings called for stopping Poland's dependence on Moscow, for freedom of speech, increasing the role of the Church in social life, restraining the activity of the apparatus of terror and repression, etc. The demands concerning food supply appeared rarely and they gained a political overtone. In fact, they were usually formulated in such a way that they at the same time expressed a critical attitude to the then apparatus of power. This is how we interpret the demands, appearing from time to time, to close down the shops "for the privileged" ("behind the yellow curtains")<sup>157</sup>.

Those participating in street demonstrations, sometimes (though not always) connected with strike actions, quite clearly gave expression to their dissatisfaction with their underprivileged position in respect of access to meat and other provisions in

<sup>154</sup> B.CAMSWiA, MBP 41/464, *Biuletyn dzienny*, N° 86, 15 Apr. 1949.

<sup>155</sup> B. CAMSWiA, 41/470 (565), *Biuletyn dzienny*, N° 200/51, 29 Aug. 1951, I. 386.

<sup>156</sup> P. Machcewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 157 and 167.

comparison to those in power. It is not accidental that the crowd which on 28 June 1956 stormed the building of the PUWP Voivodeship Committee in Poznań, was very interested in its canteen. As one of the leaders of this riot, Stanisław Matyja, recollected years later, "A group of people rushed into the Voivodeship Committee — no-one knows who they were — a moment later the windows were thrown open and shouts were heard: "Look, what kind of life they have here!" They exposed table services and meals, ham and vodka and other delicacies. People got excited, for they were struggling for bread, justified norms, human treatment, while here the representatives of the people's power rolled in everything up to the ears!"<sup>158</sup>.

A similar scenario, not accidentally, perhaps, recurred almost unchanged exactly 20 years later, on 25 June 1976 in Radom. As the memories and documents cited by Jerzy Eisler show, one of the groups of the enraged crowd that stormed then the building of the PUWP Voivodeship Committee reached the buffet where they found a store of tins with ham and other meat products that they had no chance to see in the town for ages. When they showed this to the meeting, shouts were heard: "Look, how these greedy-guts live! What about us?" One of the female employees of the Committee, while remembering this episode 20 years later also recollected how the building was entered by "young, gap-toothed females", with repulsive expression on their faces, coming from the local meat processing factory, who manifested their rage by throwing rotten bones, brought in containers, all over the place<sup>159</sup>. In both cases, for the participants in these riots meat ceased to be merely the object of unsatisfied desire. It became something more — a symbol of the injustice of the system of power, the essence of polarized social world divided into "Us" and "Them".

The manifestations of social dissatisfaction with food supply would not be presented in their full spectrum unless we mentioned another of its forms that appeared on a massive scale in 1981. These were the so-called "hunger marches", provoked by the decision of the minister of home trade of July that year, to

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<sup>158</sup> *Poznański Czerwiec 1956 (June 1956 in Poznań)*, ed. J. Maciejewski and Z. Trojanowiczowa, Poznań 1990, p. 239, see also: S. Jankowiak, E. Makowski, *Poznański Czerwiec 1956 w dokumentach (June 1956 in Poznań in Documents)*, Poznań 1995, p. 85.

<sup>159</sup> *Czerwiec 1976*, pp. 41–42.

reduce ration card allowances of meat; they started in the summer of that year in many Polish towns. The first of them took place in Kutno on July 25, 1981<sup>160</sup>. "Solidarity" members in Łódź reacted to the news of this reduction as soon as July 27. A cavalcade of a dozen-odd cars of the Urban Communication Enterprise (*MPK*), covered with posters, started moving in the direction of the Municipal Office. The banners said: "We are waiting in queues for 24 hrs a day!", "Our children are hungry!", "Give us our daily bread!", "The hungry people of all the countries, unite!", and "We will not agree to the reduction of food rations!". The next day the demonstrators in Piotrkowska street used *PKS* (State Bus Communication) coaches, on July 29 — lorries and cisterns. The most spectacular, however, was the hunger march of women on July 30. The procession formed in front of the building of the regional "Solidarity" Headquarters was headed by women with children in prams and in their arms. The banners showed similar slogans ("Give us bread!", "We want to eat!", "We want to live!"). Those taking part in the march were then addressed by Bishop Józef Rozwadowski and the head of the regional "Solidarity", Andrzej Słowik ("Let it be our black procession!"), and the *Rota*, and *God who saved Poland!* hymns were sung. On the next days similar marches, with similar slogans, took place among other places in Szczecin, Wrocław, Białystok, Tarnowskie Góry, Olsztyn, Bełchatów, Przemyśl, Cracow, Gdańsk, Nowy Sącz, Kutno, Piotrków Trybunalski, Częstochowa, Zduńska Wola, and Tomaszów Mazowiecki. On August 3 Warsaw saw a ride of the cars of the city transport enterprise that blocked the main streets of the town. The announcement of the reduction of meat allowances envisaged for ration cards also aroused local strikes and meetings<sup>161</sup>.

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The findings presented above show the importance of shortages of food, including meat, to the way of thinking and behaviour of the Poles, both those wielding the power and those who were "governed" in the years 1945–1989. This was sometimes the most important and frequently one of the many elements of the post-

<sup>160</sup> A. Dudek, T. Marszałkowski, *Walki uliczne w PRL 1956–1989 (Street Fighting in People's Poland 1956–1989)*, Kraków 1992, p. 158.

<sup>161</sup> See e.g. M. Bartyzel, *Na ulicach miast (On the Streets of Towns)*, "Tygodnik Solidarność" 1981, N° 19; *Obraz tygodnia (The Picture of the Week)*, "Tygodnik Powszechny" 1981, N° 32.

war everyday life which aroused various kinds of protests. The shortages of meat were criticised and derided. They also became the cause of big social conflicts (December 1970, June 1956, June 1976, August 1980). Sometimes they were the main causes of strikes and manifestations. In everyday life people tried to cope with supply shortages, by applying various kinds of strategies of adjustment. They resulted in undermining the discipline of work and engendered pathological types of behaviour. The way these shortages were commonly interpreted strengthened the symbolic division of the world into the bad, incompetent power and the society which was increasingly rebellious in the face of it. Meat supply also became an important cause of tensions within society. A detailed analysis of this multi-faceted issue seems to be not only an interesting intellectual challenge. Its most important value would be a possibility of approximating an answer to the question how the institutional system conventionally called "that of People's Poland" functioned in everyday life.

*(Translated by Agnieszka Kreczmar)*