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AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVES - FROM ASSOCIATION TO ENTERPRISE

The Polish agriculture has a specific character in the block of socialist countries. A predominant form of agricultural production are individual agricultural farms while agricultural production cooperatives are the least numerous form. Their share in the overall acreage of arable land amounted to 3.7 per cent in 1981. At the same time, individual farms accounted for 69.9 per cent and state agricultural farms for 18.8 per cent of all farms. The share of agricultural production cooperatives accounted for 4.2 per cent of the total national agricultural production, and that of the private sector for 79.2 per cent. State agricultural farms turned out 16.1 per cent of total agricultural production. These proportions are almost reversed when compared with such countries as the GDR, Hungary, Bulgaria, Rumania, and Czechoslovakia in which mass organization of production cooperatives was a final effect of the collectivization process. While pointing at this historical fact in the introduction to my paper I am not going to analyze the causes of such situation in its further part. The aim of this paper is to show how in the Polish conditions there has been changing the character of the socialized form of the economy represented by agricultural production cooperatives.

The cooperative movement in Poland, like in other socialist countries, had begun even before collectivization was announ-

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ced. Agricultural labourers unable to divide the property of big former landed estates, and especially buildings and major machines and equipment, and being unaccustomed to running private farms began to organize production-settlement cooperatives spontaneously in the years 1946-1948. These cooperatives were a new socio-economic form of collective agricultural farms i.e. jointly run by a bigger or smaller number of families. A part of them was transformed later on into general supply and marketing cooperatives or into service-type cooperatives, another part of them was dissolved once the private farms (created by division of former landed estates) became economically strong, while yet another part of them survived to meet the collectivization process becoming pioneers in the agricultural cooperative movement.

Although different cooperative units existed already in the interwar period, new conditions after 1945 connected with development and consolidation of socialist social relations excluded, as a rule, adoption of any traditional forms. New organizational and statutory principles were elaborated for the cooperative movement based on formal regulations stipulated in the act on cooperatives from 1920. However, since the only available experience was that of very few cooperatives created on the divided large landholdings, there were for the most part employed models and experience of the Soviet agricultural artel and the land cultivation association, which were next, to some degree, altered to adapt them to different conditions. The first agricultural cooperatives with quite diversified organizational forms, and with a bigger or smaller scope of collective farming were established in 1949. Due to a considerable differentiation of the agrarian structure and big diversity as regards types of peasant farms in particular regions of Poland, there were drafted exemplary statutes for four types of cooperatives. One of them envisaged simple forms of cooperation between peasant farms, the next - partial socialization of production means, while the remaining two full socialization of agricultural production.

The first two types were to promote establishment of cooperative farms by inherited farms with long traditions of private production situated in "old villages" in Central Poland. The

last two types were to group mainly the former landless and petty farmers, who had obtained land from the agrarian reform as well as new settlers and agricultural labourers. It was believed that the statutory principles of cooperatives with full socialization of production means would be most convincing for them.

In 1955, when the greatest number of cooperatives were operating, only about 22 per cent of them were based on statutory principles of cooperatives of lower types. It was, on the one hand, a result of activities of the authorities, which wished to ensure socialist transformations in the Polish village on the way of collectivization of agriculture soonest possible (lower types of cooperatives were considered to reflect the trend towards consolidation of private farming). On the other hand, it was due to lack of interest as displayed by private farmers with long traditions in the cooperative form of production accompanied by embarking upon collective forms of agricultural production by agricultural labourers and petty farmers.

In the first relatively short stage of collectivization peasants themselves revealed big initiative in establishing agricultural cooperatives. At that time, like other agricultural organizations of cooperative type, they assumed a character of voluntary associations with quite a big independence in the area of choosing forms of collective production. At that time, cooperatives were a simple sum of private peasant farms. A farmer joining a cooperative was becoming its co-owner and participated in all decisions concerning directions of its development. He carried joint responsibility for its economic performance. Organization of work and division of labour were relatively simple due to more or less uniform production line of its members (animal breeding was carried mainly on small farms belonging to members of a cooperative). The activities to be performed by them were simple and did not require special qualifications. This made possible mutual replacement of employees on different jobs. There were absent permanent work groups or teams, hierarchical relationships of members, administrative employees working full time or division into managerial personnel and other members. Any differences in the position held by particular members within a cooperative ensued from the fact whether a given farmer had

his own farm before joining a cooperative (input of land by a member) or not. In agricultural cooperatives, which were formed from former big landholdings (where the land was allotted from the State Land Fund) there was absent even this factor differentiating the community of members.

Social relationships between insignificantly differentiated communities resembled relationships within a peasant family. This facilitated autonomous decision-making at general meetings of members, which at that time represented a real and not only a formal power in cooperatives.

The period during which the initiative of establishing cooperatives was springing from farmers themselves was relatively short and after about two years the process was checked. In order to accelerate and stimulate the process of socialization in agriculture, the state launched an appropriate policy of exerting administrative-economic pressure on individual farmers to induce them to establish agricultural cooperatives or join the already existing collective farms.

The conditions faced by private farms were considerably aggravated by freezing of state purchasing prices within the framework of compulsory deliveries, impairing the position held by big farms (progressive taxation), restricting provision of production means, and increasing the level of taxes paid to the state. Simultaneously, cooperatives of lower type were charged with additional burdens. However, these different instruments employed to discourage private farming were not accompanied by instruments, which would signify a real protectionist policy towards agricultural cooperatives.

A further rapid quantitative growth of cooperatives followed. Over the years 1952-1953, the biggest number of such cooperatives was established (ca. 5000). They no longer possessed characteristics of voluntary action and independence - moreover they were gradually losing their self-managing powers. Often-time they were created under administrative and economic pressure without any regard paid to regional specific characteristics of a given administrative province. Members of a given cooperative were no longer free to decide what kind of cooperative to choose. A cooperative had at its disposal the hith-

erto possessed simple production factors such as land, unskilled labour, buildings, simple machines and equipment, a part of transport means, and livestock. On the other hand, means of modern technique, specialist and technical cadres were concentrated in state agricultural machinery stations, which became an instrument of the influence exerted by the state on agricultural cooperatives. Most economic decisions were made outside cooperatives although their members carried full economic risk of these decisions. The distributed income was constituted by an amount obtained from production revenues after subtracting costs and commitments towards the state and write-offs for accumulation. There were growing contradictions between the need to intensify agricultural production and desire to obtain profitability, and between accumulation and consumption. There were no incentives stimulating improvement of labour productivity and personal interest of members in economic effects of collective agricultural production.

By 1956 over 10 000 agricultural cooperatives were set up. They grouped 202 000 members and about 10 per cent of peasant land was socialized. Ineffectiveness of the applied methods of collectivization and a change in the state agricultural policy in favour of private farming led to dissolving of cooperatives on a mass scale. Between October 1956 and March 1957 82.8 per cent of existing cooperatives were dissolved. The number of families associated within cooperatives declined by 87.6 per cent and the acreage of collectively-owned land by 87.2 per cent. The greatest number of cooperatives which survived were those based on simple cooperation forms (type Ia) - 54.1 per cent, and with partial socialization of production means (type Ib) - 32.6 per cent i.e. those which were mainly established in villages formerly belonging to great landholdings.

Over the sixties, a trend appeared towards gradual consolidation and economic stabilization of existing cooperatives and their development. At that time, the number of cooperatives dropped to 1106 but the number of their members grew by 10 000 (to reach 38 000) while their total acreage grew from 167 000 to 281 000 ha. Numerous fundamental changes of organizational and economic nature were introduced within cooperatives accompanied by certain benefits and aid extended by the state.

After 1957, agricultural cooperatives were to conduct also nonagricultural (plants of agricultural-processing industry) and auxiliary production (mills, processing and repair plants). It paved the way for better utilization of labour force during the whole year and for higher incomes of cooperatives. The aggregation of members of cooperatives was differentiated, labour division deepened due to expansion of their activity range (diversified production) and new system of work organization. There were introduced work posts, which demanded specific professional skills and qualifications, created work teams and groups, and employed hired labour. A substantial group of employees was employed on full-time basis:

- those with high qualifications constituting the managerial cadre in cooperative,
- employees in administrative bodies and those representing intermediate links between all members and the managerial cadre,
- seasonal or permanently hired labour.

In this way, there was gradually created a formal structure based on criteria similar to those adopted by enterprises. Employees and members of cooperatives would hold different posts in hierarchy of cooperatives according to their various functions, position held, position in the production process, authority enjoyed by them.

Some cooperatives introduced amendments to their statutes allowing to fix varied remuneration for work - according to monthly and hourly rates replacing the previously applied day's wages. While estimating the level of pay, allowances were made for specialist educational qualifications. Cooperatives were simultaneously expanding their acreage mainly by land allotted from the State Land Fund, and the number of their members was increasing. A growing part of all members was composed of those without their own farmland, who instead of their land input were contributing an appropriate financial input. For majority of them, a cooperative represented one of possible places of work, a plant in their place of dwelling with a more or less regulated working hours, a source of stable income. These values of cooperatives as a work place were enhanced in the early sixties

by regulations concerning welfare benefits granted to members and employees and guaranteeing medical aid, family allowances, sick benefits, paid leaves, maternity leaves, retirement benefits, disability pensions etc. At that time, these benefits were still less favourable than those granted to non-agricultural employees, but even as such they were placing members of cooperatives in a better situation than that of private farmers.

The new complex personnel situation of agricultural cooperatives caused that their management was passed to qualified and specialized experts. The true management is performed by a board of a cooperative and its chairman. The General Meeting of Members formally approves of their decisions, and plays a role similar to that of employees' self-management bodies in state enterprises, in which formerly the director had a decisive voice in all problems. Thus, the responsibility carried by employees for the economic performance of their cooperative was actually shifted to the management - chairman, board, and production managers.

The policy of promoting cooperative movement by the state authorities in the early seventies led to quite dynamic organizational and economic development of agricultural cooperatives. New cooperatives were set up while others expanded their land acreage or scope of activity. The process of production concentration was initiated by merging cooperatives into multi-plant enterprises. Cooperatives began to organize joint productive-service units, whose members might be other agricultural enterprises operating in a given area. Within their framework, there were established plants manufacturing building materials, providing construction services for associated cooperatives, and big repair workshops along with food-processing plants. The total number of productive-service cooperatives operating in Poland towards the end of 1976 amounted to only 12.

Another novel form became specialized agricultural cooperatives. They were organized according to a general principle of association of peasants to undertake activity complementing and not competing with activity of individual farmers associated in it, without imposing a duty of fusion of land and its joint utilization. This cooperation was to result ultimately in estab-

lishment of close ties within the entire agriculture and subordination of individual private farms to collective forms in the field of production, procurement, sales and organization of mechanization services.

Socialized farms employ a permanent personnel recruited from among families of members of cooperatives as well as employees from outside cooperatives. Members are not obliged to work in collective farms, and they are mainly employed on their own farms. The system of work organization and remuneration for work in a collective farm is based on commonly binding principles, and like in other socialized enterprises work is an element of costs. Specialized collective farms were to resemble modern enterprises with regard to their equipment and internal organization. Specialists employed by them and managing a collective farm were to provide advisory services concerning production in farms of its members. A principle of economic ties between members and collective activity of a cooperative was to be of decisive importance with benefits derived mutually from joint undertakings. General principles according to which specialist production cooperatives were to be set up (there were 74 of them in 1975) afforded chances (not utilized in practice) of reconciling basic features of association (its voluntary and self-management character accompanied by co-determination and joint responsibility of members for success or failure of a cooperative) with features of a modern agricultural enterprise.

The period of 1971-1975 witnessed quite favourable financial, credit and procurement conditions for intensification of production and modernization of productive base in cooperatives. A stimulus for organization of cooperatives was provided by the principle of equipping newly-established units, for the first time at the state's cost, in agricultural machinery, tractors, combines etc. All investment outlays were, to a big extent, financed by the state. On the one hand, that led to dynamic growth of global and commodity production, sharp growth of investments, increment in acreage (mainly from the State Land Fund) and number of cooperatives. On the other hand, a considerable part of all cooperatives were no longer self-financing themselves, and state subsidies followed. The situation resembled very much the activity of state agricultural farms.

In 1975, in the overall value of investment outlays, the own resources of cooperatives represented only 11 per cent, bank credits - 75 per cent, and budget subsidies - 14 per cent. In many cases, the state's assistance was not justified. After 1975, centralistic system of management of cooperatives was intensified which led to restricting their independence. A growing degree of interference in affairs of cooperatives was, among others, revealed in allocation of command-type tasks encompassing a growing number of indices implemented within the framework of the national socio-economic plan. They were allocated by formal channels through the Central Association of Agricultural Cooperatives to provincial associations and particular economic units. In this way, there was created a hierarchic system of management of cooperatives consolidating the supremacy of professional management over self-management organs. Chairmen of self-management organs were subordinated to provincial and central authorities, among others, through introducing an obligation of approving the level of their pay by the Provincial Association Board of Agricultural Cooperatives. For several months now (i.e. since September 1982) there have been in force the amended regulations of the act on cooperatives, which differ but a little from those hitherto in force. The further direction in development of agricultural cooperatives in Poland will depend, however, not only on effective application of these regulations but on a number of other decisions constituting jointly the so-called policy towards agriculture as a whole and its particular sectors in particular.

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ROLNICZE SPÓDZIELNIE PRODUKCYJNE - EWOLUCJA OD ZRZESZENIA
W KIERUNKU PRZEDSIĘBIORSTWA PAŃSTWOWEGO

Pierwsze rolnicze spółdzielnie produkcyjne w Polsce powstały w 1949 r. Organizowano je opierając się na jednym z czterech wzorów statutowych: typ Ia - proste formy kooperacji między gospodarstwami chłopskimi, typ Ib - częściowe uspołecznienie środków

produkcji, typ II i III - pełne uspołecznienie gospodarki rolnej. W początkowym okresie tworzenia (1949-1951) spółdzielnie były dobrowolnymi zrzeszeniami, stosunkowo samodzielny w wyborze formy gospodarowania i profilu produkcji. Były one wówczas prostą sumą wielu indywidualnych gospodarstw chłopskich. Członkowie byli faktycznymi współgospodarzami i współdecydentami o kierunkach rozwoju spółdzielni, z poczuciem odpowiedzialności za wyniki produkcyjne i ekonomiczne. Społeczne stosunki w mało zróżnicowanych niewielkich grupach spółdzielców podobne były do układu stosunków w rodzinie chłopskiej. Możliwość podejmowania samorządnych decyzji na walnych zgromadzeniach członków czyniła z tego ciała faktyczną władzę spółdzielni. Wprowadzenie jednorodnej zespołowej produkcji roślinnej nie wymagało specjalnych kwalifikacji i umożliwiała wzajemną zastępowalność pracowników w różnych pracach. Prosta organizacja i podział pracy nie wymagał zespołów i brygad, hierarchicznych zależności służbowych pomiędzy członkami. Różnice w ich pozycji powstawały wówczas, gdy zbiorowość składała się z rolników z wkładem ziemi i bez tego wkładu. Z biegiem lat, wskutek różnych czynników tkwiących głównie w ogólnych kierunkach i instrumentach polityki państwa, rolnicze spółdzielnie produkcyjne tracą cechy pełnej dobrowolności, samodzielności, także samorządności.

Nieco inne instrumenty kształtują ten proces w latach pięćdziesiątych, a inne - w sześćdziesiątych czy siedemdziesiątych. Lata sześćdziesiąte zapoczątkują cykl świadczeń społecznych na rzecz spółdzielców ze strony państwa, a także szereg istotnych zmian organizacyjno-ekonomicznych. Rolnicze spółdzielnie produkcyjne prowadzić mogą produkcję pozarolniczą i pomocniczą. W latach siedemdziesiątych spółdzielnie łączą się w przedsiębiorstwa wieloobektowe, organizują wspólne spółdzielnie wytwórczo-usługowe. Tworzy się nowa forma - specjalistyczne spółdzielnie produkcyjne. Zbiorowość spółdzielców zaczyna różnicować się. Wśród przyczyn ważny jest poszerzony zakres działalności instytucji, nowy system organizacji pracy, wprowadzenie brygad, kadry kwalifikowanych fachowców, specjalistów, aparatu administracyjnego, robotników najemnych. Ich sytuacja pracy zbliżona jest do sytuacji pracowników innych jednostek państwowych. Zasady zarządzania spółdzielnią upodabniają się do zasad obowiązujących w przedsiębiorstwach państwowych. Władzę przejmuje etatowa fachowa kadra kierownicza. Samorządowe ciało (walne zgromadzenie członków) przestaje być decydującym. Poczucie odpowiedzialności za rozwój spółdzielni przesuwa się z członków na kadrę kierowniczą. Tworzy się coraz bardziej skomplikowana organizacja formalna. Hierarchicznie ustalone stanowiska pracy powodują osłabienie więzi członkowskiej, występującej w zrzeszeniach typu wspólnoty grupowej, gdzie dominowały nieformalne stosunki i prosty podział pracy.