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**Political Refugees or Economic Migrants:  
The Case of Polish Professionals, 1980-86**

by

**John Bisping**

A thesis submitted to the  
School of Graduate Studies and Research  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the  
Master's Degree in Sociology.



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## **Abstract**

This thesis searches for the presence of economic motives in professionals, who left Poland circa 1980-81. Through this case study of so-called "political refugees", the wider goal is to examine the dichotomy between political flight and economic migration. At issue is the depoliticization of poverty in the Third World, as well as the effect of the cold war on immigration policy in Canada. The results indicate that economic factors constituted important motives for departure in our target population. It is suggested that members of the latter were therefore *not* political refugees by UN-defined standards.

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## **Introduction**

As countries of the former East Bloc continue to democratize their institutions and move towards market economies, the whole nature of the East-West relationship is being redefined. In the Balkans, borders are being redrawn, while the great struggle between the USSR's past and its future continues to unfold. It can be difficult to keep up with the changes, let alone to predict the paths they will follow. While these transformations do seem to indicate a withering away of the cold war, the latter deeply influenced various aspects of Canadian politics since World War II, affecting both policy decisions and the public opinion which they often reflected. Immigration policy was no exception. How did our geopolitical alignment affect our government's approach to immigration? What biases, if any, did it lead to? We shall address this general issue by focusing on a special kind of migrant to Canada – Polish refugees of the 1980s.

Within that general framework, this thesis addresses the phenomenon of Polish professionals fleeing their homeland in 1980-81. The question of refugees in general has not been absent from the Canadian political agenda in recent years. But questions centering on admittance policies have been raised more often in the context of public pressure for or against the acceptance of refugees than on issues relating to the nature and meaning of these population flows. To what extent did the various people who came to Canada in the 1980s, often by *ad hoc* means, genuinely flee persecution in their home countries? Could they in fact have been seeking a better material life for themselves? If we are to shed some light on one specific population movement, can we do it in a systematic and verifiable way? Not a simple proposition. For even when

permission for passage to Canada is now to be secured at a Canadian post abroad, the following question still remains: Is any given applicant "only" trying to better an economic situation? Politically active people may seek to better social conditions (in fact, quite often, the *economic* conditions of specific social classes) in their respective societies, an often perilous undertaking. They can be very committed to their cause and might flee only when in immediate danger of death or in the aftermath of a violent change of government, as in the case of the 1973 coup in Chile, for example.<sup>1</sup> Without denying the deep links which exist between politics and economics, the economic climate in a given country can deteriorate with a coup; that may in itself create an impetus for emigration in members of, say, a small, literate but silent middle class. Political upheaval can bring about a high turnover in elite groups on either side of the political spectrum. Thereafter, different motives for leaving can become quite intertwined, and ultimately difficult to distinguish in reliable fashion. One of the aims of this thesis is to study this sort of population movement by examining one of its manifestations, i.e., the departure of Polish professionals from their homeland more or less during the political turmoil surrounding the emergence of *Solidarnosc* at the beginning of the last decade.

A wider context of worldwide professional migration also exists, and this will not be overlooked in the theoretical approach to the problem. But the members of various social classes of both Eastern Europe and many Third World countries have come knocking on Canada's doors - they coexist along that controversial migratory axis which contains both political flight and economic

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<sup>1</sup>Danger of premature death is a daily reality in some places. Last year there were 304 political murders of civilians and 233 disappearances in Guatemala alone, according to that country's official ombudsman for human rights. (The Economist 20.VII.91:46)

emigration, sometimes as motivational components within the same individuals. Although East Bloc democratization renders "political flight" a less tenable claim for these Europeans, this was not the case at the time our target group left Poland.<sup>1</sup>

Between 1981 and 1986, Canada admitted 30,573 Poles as landed immigrants; some two thirds, or 19,303, were classified as refugees (Employment and Immigration Canada 1987). In like fashion, Canada accepted over 37,000 Hungarians in 1956-57, while in 1968-69, close to 12,000 Czechoslovakians were taken in (In Billard 1987:21). These waves of East Europeans coincided with political crises in their respective countries, crises which were followed closely in the West, being met with great emotional upheaval in public opinion. It would be implied, in the media, that these countries were spiritual brethren, of sorts, undergoing cruel and unusual punishment in their quest for freedom and democracy. It is important to note that unlike the two preceding waves out of Eastern Europe, the people leaving Poland in 1980-81 did not do so *in the wake* of any military intervention, but rather in the midst of an ebullient social and political climate coupled with a serious economic downturn and a liberalization of travel restrictions.

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<sup>1</sup> The emotional reactions amongst Polish expatriates vis-à-vis this potential for greater entry restrictions into Canada could seem somewhat indicative of their reasons for having left their homeland, since they would understand at once their own "luck" at having gotten out in time (i.e., as "refugees"), and the greater difficulty friends and/or non-immediate family members might experience if and when they seek to join them in the West. This emphasizes the contradictions stemming from no-exit policies. As soon as East Europeans *could* leave, they wouldn't be that welcome in the West anymore, since the latter's 'open arms' policy would be suddenly meaningless, ideologically speaking. As long as they trickled out, they could be showcased as people fleeing a strictly political reality. But from the moment they could actually leave, they would be seen much more as individuals fleeing an economic reality. This artificial separation was a consequence of the cold war. It impacted negatively on anyone trying to leave a Third World country in that it disallowed any political reading of that migration, unless it was absolutely unavoidable. We further explore this issue in chapter 1.

In the United States, certainly an influential player in defining the ideological climate in North America and elsewhere, press campaigns preceded the mass admission of Hungarian "freedom-fighters" and, more recently, anti-Castro Cubans or pro-U.S. Vietnamese. On the other hand, 12,000 Salvadorans were denied asylum and deported from the United States in 1980 (Moskowitz 1986:11). In the following decade, some 70,000 Salvadorans were to die in that country's civil war.<sup>1</sup> The U.S. granted asylum to fewer than 60 of the 20,000 Haitians who sought entry after 1981, returning them on the grounds that they were economic, not political refugees, neatly separating two dimensions more obviously linked in Haiti than in many other countries (Stewart 1989:20). According to Moskowitz (*ibidem*), the rather unequal treatment of petitioners to his country hinged on the East-West propaganda war:

It has been easy to convince both Democratic and Republican Administrations that an applicant for asylum from a Communist country is making a political choice and is therefore a true refugee. The same officials have been almost unassailably suspicious that someone trying to quit a pro-American country, even one ruled by a dictator, is merely trying to better his [or her] economic lot and is not worthy of the special consideration given refugees.

Canada's political agenda, at times subservient to Washington, at times more flexible and less clear-cut than the American one, has followed a pattern that echoes their bias.<sup>2</sup> As recently as October 1989 Canada lifted a moratorium on the deportation of "illegal" Haitians, invoking a similar

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<sup>1</sup> Reuter's, *Le Devoir*, 4.1.1990:5.

<sup>2</sup> A bias which has tended to benefit both migrants and receiving countries at different levels: for the former, the promise of an improved quality of life; for the latter, ideological points scored against the East *plus*, quite often, skilled workers at a bargain!

conceptual separation between politically and economically motivated flight. Inasmuch as many Polish professionals from the same outgoing wave of 1980-81 were also taken in as political refugees by the U.S., our two countries put into practice a similar political predisposition. The issue at hand is central to our thesis. To what extent was the refugee admittance policy biased along ideological lines? By examining a specific wave of refugees which benefitted from this bias, we can attempt an answer to this question. *We hypothesize that in fact, they were "economic" refugees, (to borrow, in all fairness, the unfortunate if not imprecise term used in the West, i.e., the North, to reject such applicants from the South<sup>1</sup>), that they had much more in common with economic migrants than with bona fide political refugees.* This doesn't mean that some would not or could not have been accepted into Canada in accordance with the immigration laws in force at the time. But at least then they would have been accepted explicitly as *economic* refugees, if not economic (im)migrants, period. The potential benefits of this thesis, more symbolic than concrete, would accrue to political refugees from across the so-called economic divide, the oft-eclipsed North-South one.<sup>2</sup>

Why would professionals leave Poland in 1980-81? We have chosen a specific segment of the departed population: of 30, 573 arrivals in Canada between 1981 and 1986, 5,574 were professionals<sup>3</sup>, which includes the

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<sup>1</sup> A hybrid category which Bohning (1981:29) calls an "artefact", one which blurs the distinctions existing in reality between refugees and international migrants.

<sup>2</sup> Has Canada's membership in the O.A.S., for instance, increased pressure on us to justify some of our present policies?

<sup>3</sup> These figure suggest that Canada's national interests and economy weren't so badly served by its refugee policy vis-à-vis Poland. One in 5 of these "refugees" was an experienced professional, while many others were skilled workers. Mr Jean-Marie Lafortune, director of the Service d'accueil aux réfugiés at the ministère des Communautés culturelles et de l'Immigration (Québec) confirmed that most refugees from Eastern Europe had had more than 16 years of schooling (in de Sève 1991:31).

following categories: managerial/administrative; natural sciences, engineering, and mathematics; social sciences; teaching; and medicine/health (Canada, Employment and Immigration 1978a). We focus on working professionals, individuals supposedly enjoying the most of what their social system could offer intellectual workers.

Although many professionals did wind up in Canada, whether it be by choice or by default, this fact does not interest us as much as why they would have decided to leave, in the first place. Some kind of migratory selection was operating in Poland. Unfortunately, there are no reliable statistics on the characteristics of the primary refugee population. In addition, some kind of destination self-selection, however random, must have occurred in West European refugee camps, and the number of professionals that decided to come to Canada might not be representative of the total number of professionals in the exodus population. In other words, we cannot say how many professionals actually left Poland. This is why the issue of "brain drain" is difficult to address. As Grubel (in Gollin 1966:16) has noted, an adequate measure of this phenomenon should compare the percentage of professionals in the overall emigration with their proportion in the general population of the sending country. Moreover, that does not touch upon the question of their relative scarcity or abundance in the social and economic structure of either country.

Our goal in this thesis is not to ascertain the components of migratory selection, i.e. what social classes or age groups were over- or under-represented in the original refugee population. We are at the wrong end of the journey to attempt this. Many professionals left. It is irrelevant, for our purposes, to try and ascertain why some left while others chose to stay. Why

*would have* those that left done so, given the opportunity? Why would they have *wanted* to leave? Moreover, inasmuch as we are addressing two components of an issue, that is, on the one hand, Canada's cold war bias in de facto immigration policy decisions, and, on the other hand, the presence or absence of explicitly economic factors predisposing Polish professionals (and potentially the larger population flow in which they found themselves) to leave their homeland *en masse* in 1980-81, then we are not really interested in why some of them would choose to come to Canada, as opposed to some other country. Thus research on Polish refugees' values and aspirations conducted outside Canada is relevant to our study, not to mention surveys of attitudes and beliefs conducted in Poland itself before and during the departure window.

In Chapter 1 we delve into the history and evolution of the refugee concept, situating it in the Canadian context. Chapter 2 explores migration theory, in a search for a framework useful for our research needs. We finally opt for a double approach to our subject matter, proposing to integrate objective and subjective data. Since we are attempting qualitative rather than quantitative research, context takes on a much greater importance. Chapter 3 therefore takes a look at Poland's past, explores its position on the economic periphery of Europe, and shows it to be a historical source of migrants to the West. Chapter 4 examines some of the objective and subjective factors which could indicate an economic component in decisions taken by Polish professionals to emigrate in the early 1980s. The intention is to gain some insight into the pertinent social and political context in Poland and the personal values of professionals living in that specific geo-political space, in that specific time-frame, in order to enrich our grasp of their wider, collective experience. The conclusion contains a discussion of the hypothesis in light of the preceding chapters and a survey of recent events in Eastern

Europe. One appendix contains the English translation of a political poem published in Poland in 1955, while a historical map of consecutive Polish borders constitutes another. A bibliography completes the whole.



## Chapter 1

# Refugees: The Canadian Context

Although refugees constitute a pervasive presence in the contemporary world, much more attention has been given by social theorists to the processes that produce economic migrants. Yet if these processes reflect the economic structure of the "international system", flows of refugees largely reflect the political structure of the same system (Zolberg 1981:19). But refugees are elusive, statistically speaking, since they constitute a sort of international political currency: "countries of origin and of destination, as well as international organizations, conspire in some sense to reduce the body count" (Ibidem). The concept of a refugee "status", however, is quite well established. It arose after World War I, when Fridtjof Nansen, High Commissioner of the League of Nations, concentrated his efforts on Armenians fleeing Turkey, and Russians fleeing the Revolution. Present-day administrative definitions, however, were established by the UN after the Second World War.

### 1.1 Definition

In 1951 the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) was set up as an international agency with a narrowly restricted mandate: to assist persons who did not want to "return" to their country because of *actual or feared racial, religious or political persecution*. Nonetheless, in practice, the

agency has also responded with material assistance to "uprooted people" for whom individual determination of refugee status was seen as impracticable due to the size of a group, its rate of growth, or the urgency of its needs (UNHCR 1987:4).<sup>1</sup>

The 1951 UN Convention, together with the 1967 UN Protocol still constitute the international legal instruments which regulate the status of refugees, providing contracting States with a uniform basis for the treatment of persons or groups eligible for protection. A refugee is thus

...any person who, owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear or *for reasons other than personal convenience*, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality *and* being outside the country of his formal habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear or for reasons other than personal convenience, is unwilling to return to it (UNHCR 1987:4).<sup>2</sup>

## 1.2 The Canadian Context

In Canada, a formal procedure for the determination of refugee status was established with the 1976 Immigration Act. The preceding law only contained the general "refugee" category; the new one established the

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<sup>1</sup> Would the "uprooted" category include both flight for life itself, as the result of war or famine, for instance, and flight in search of a better *quality* of life? How to define the conceptual boundaries?

<sup>2</sup> Our emphasis.

distinction between individual, Convention refugees, and "Designated Class" refugees. If a large stream of applicants materialized somewhere, presenting the government with a sort of *fait accompli*, the Minister of Employment and Immigration could confer the latter status to a whole group at a time, on the basis of "humanitarian assistance".<sup>1</sup> The Act underwent review by the 1980 Task Force on Immigration Practices and Procedures. Guidelines were thus announced that widened the meaning of "persecution" so that it might comprise

...deprivation of means of livelihood or of work commensurate with training or qualifications; relegation to substandard dwellings; surveillance or pressure to inform; lack of protection by government agencies, or fear of becoming a victim of government terrorist activities (Goodwin-Gill 1987:27).

Individuals could thus claim to be Convention refugees, or base themselves on less strict Canadian standards, which incorporated and widened the scope of the UN 'status', changing *de facto* practice into official Canadian procedure. According to these, an individual didn't need to be singled out for persecution, and claims were not to be necessarily rejected because large numbers of others were similarly affected (*Ibidem*). The Guidelines formally recognized that applicants were to receive the benefit of the doubt; that inconsistency, misrepresentation or concealment were to be disregarded if immaterial to the claim.

In other words, Canada was to accept people either under the 1951 Convention / 1967 Protocol or under its own guidelines, which could fit into the

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<sup>1</sup> We leave the case of inland claimants aside, since separate statistics on them are not available.

needs of nationally framed objectives related to *ad hoc* humanitarian programs. And yet, it seems that the spirit of the Canadian approach was still influenced by the UNHCR Statute when faced with the application to individual cases of the notions of "being outside one's country *due* to fear of persecution" or "being unwilling to return to it owing to such fear or for reasons other than *personal convenience*" (UNHCR 1987:4).<sup>1</sup>

The 1980 withdrawal of the previous requirement to be "singled out" for persecution to occur is noteworthy. Could an entire social class conceivably be "relegated" to substandard dwellings? The notion of our government judging a foreign one as having "chosen" to do so, of having chosen to thus "relegate" its citizens, is interesting. How then would discrimination-cum-persecution be understood? What, if not personal convenience, would justify flight from such conditions? In fact, at what level of personal *discomfort* does persecution begin? Where is the threshold? There is some doubt as to what the standard which is referred to by the use of the term "substandard" might be. Was a Polish standard to be judged by West European ones, and a Third World one on its own merits? (Or lack thereof? Do not those authoritarian states in the Third World, who actively promote concentration of wealth, also "relegate" their citizens to substandard dwellings?) Furthermore, 'relegation' carries with it a political connotation, as if, in a situation of full or partial availability of "standard" dwellings a specific category ("dissidents", no less?) if not specific people were persecuted by being relegated to other, substandard dwellings. As for the case of Poland, *we suggest that in fact personal convenience did constitute an important component of the motivational forces for "migration" in established*

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<sup>1</sup> Our emphasis.

*professionals*. This is not to their discredit – voluntary migration is based on personal convenience! Conversely, it has little to do with political flight.

It is important to note that up to the period which interests us most, "open" emigration was not allowed from Poland, in the sense that we understand it in the West.<sup>1</sup> But a certain de facto liberalization of this policy occurred after August 1980, and continued during the 16-month Solidarity era (Matejko 1984:253). Could the 1980-81 refugee stream be composed, if not in its entirety, then in a large proportion of those individuals who would have had the highest propensity to leave as economic emigrants if regular outmigration were possible?<sup>2</sup> Zolberg (1980:21) has reflected on the paradox of no-exit policies as regards international migration.

With respect to authoritarian regimes, refugees are created by voluntary exile, escape (under conditions of no-exit) or flight from certain dangerous conditions created, tolerated or merely uncontrolled by such regimes. In some cases, expulsion occurs as well. Although this much is obvious, the implications of the general observation are not. To start with, there is the obvious paradox that the same category of regime which produces refugees also prevents many who would wish to leave in response to political or economic conditions from doing so, i.e., they simultaneously increase international migrations above the level produced by economic causes, and depress them below what they would be in the event of free exit

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<sup>1</sup> A policy which was instrumental in allowing us to proclaim an open door policy... There are now three such "Designated Classes": Indochinese; Political Prisoners and Oppressed Persons (Latin America), and Self-Exiled Persons (Eastern Europe excluding Yugoslavia (Canadian Almanac 1991:115).

<sup>2</sup> How to define "large proportion"? We must admit the possible existence of "political" refugees in the exodus population. We cannot know of them statistically, and our research won't "prove" that n% of Poles admitted here weren't being persecuted... but we will argue that most weren't, and we will further argue that a lot of professionals had ample economic reasons to leave...

(assuming, for the time being, the possibility of entry elsewhere).

Again, the comparison with asylum seekers from Third World countries (witness the spontaneous arrival of relatively large groups from different countries: Sri Lanka, India, Turkey) must be brought forward: they contributed to a backlog of over 20,000 cases before Canadian authorities as of February 1987 (UNHCR 1987:17).<sup>1</sup> This situation exacerbated the problem of concept applicability across such immense chasms of economic and social inequality. Inasmuch as local poverty in a refugee-stream generating country was depoliticized in the framing of our refugee policy, then strictly politically dislocated populations took precedence over voluntarily departed ones. But how did one define, where did one place that cutting edge of political flight? What if political flight stemmed from activism which arose out of legitimate economic aspirations? And then, at the time, what was legitimate for Eastern Europe, where for 45 years the sole economic actor also represented the political center of power and repression? And what then of Latin America? What relative level of economic well-being and/or political quality of life did we posit for Poland as against Chile? And El Salvador? What aspect of their respective social systems did we find abhorrent, that is, from which flight seemed all too political? What was considered "natural", or acceptable, as far as injustice goes? For what reasons? It is difficult to separate political from other forms of oppression, and of separating economic distress from the often political conditions that produce them.

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<sup>1</sup> Soon thereafter, a requirement for an entrance visa into Canada from some of these countries did stem the flow somewhat, although it did give rise to drastic and farfetched schemes in order to land on Canadian shores.

By Canadian standards, then, could any Pole have been a refugee, but not, say, any Sri Lankan? And if Sri Lankans, departing voluntarily, were seeking better economic conditions, to what extent was this not a component of Polish departures, which, in an overwhelming proportion, were also voluntary, in 1980-81? By voluntary we mean based on a decision-making process in which none of the Convention terms applied. If 20,000 economic(?) migrants at the door represented an abuse of the system, as it has already been implied, why didn't 20,000 Poles passing through the same doors also represent abuse of the system? <sup>1</sup>

Let us take a hypothetical look at straightforward, economic migrants from Poland and from, say, Turkey, circa 1980. Up to the point in time at which they crossed their respective borders, these departees could have, hypothetically, some parallels in their motivational structures. Once across, however, the situation changed somewhat, since even the strict Convention definition (not to speak of the wider Canadian definition) could be applied much more easily to the Poles than to the Turks. <sup>2</sup> This was so because getting out of Poland wasn't mostly a matter of economic means, but more one of political means, that is, of a politically administered set of bureaucratic impediments and constraints. Bypassing these would leave one open to sanctions upon one's hypothetical return – was this really being considered as persecution? The fear of sanctions was perhaps justified, but was this fear part of the conditions obtaining at or preceding departure? Why were Poles so much more believable as refugees than Salvadorans were, or Haitians? Conversely, can we deny the historical economic underdevelopment of Poland? The blanket attribution of

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<sup>1</sup> See the UNHCR publication *Refugees* (February 1987), p.17.

<sup>2</sup> In fact, the Canadian definition (see above) seems to describe the conditions obtaining in Poland more so than anywhere else. It is suggestive of a pro-East European bias in Canadian policy.

refugee status to Poles pre-empts the issue of their economic emigration. Yet issues of "simple" economic emigration arise again and again when dealing with asylum seekers from the Third World, no matter the often vastly superior number of political deaths occurring in many places in the 1980s, when compared with Eastern Europe. <sup>1</sup>

We can take a simple look at some Canadian statistics to further illustrate this point. Out of a total of 33,673 refugees admitted to Canada from five East Bloc countries between 1980 and 1986, 94.56% were accepted through the Designated Class status. Out of a total of 13,021 refugees admitted from five Latin American countries over the same time period, only 23.7% received that same status. (All statistics: Canada 1987b). <sup>2</sup> This means that only 5.44% of refugees from Eastern Europe actually qualified for Convention status, whereas 70.4% of the Latin Americans qualified. The implication is that Canada admitted a lot of people from Eastern Europe who did not fit the UN definition of a refugee and might just have been economic migrants receiving *de facto* special treatment. One wonders how widely such "humanitarian" assistance (as in the conferral of a Designated Class status) was offered, and to whom. Did we have a standing invitation to anyone crossing the border to the "West"? And a

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<sup>1</sup> Death, certainly an unquestioned epitome of persecution – also a tool of heightened terror when preceded by torture. Although Argentina and Chile had many people "disappear" during recent regimes of terror, in some Central American countries it was and remains all too common for people's bodies to show up by the roadside, along with severed body parts, or showing other obvious signs of torture and disfigurement. Yet a much more subtle, and all too easily ignored form of death and thus a diffuse (and widespread) form of persecution(?) can be said to exist in less-developed societies. Simple facts of life attest to this: Average lifetime in the Third World is some 42-odd years. In the Developed World, 71 years (Honderich 1980:19) Compare this with average life expectancy in Poland, in 1989: 70 years (Canadian Almanach 1990:229).

<sup>2</sup> In order of decreasing inflow: Poland, Czechoslovakia, USSR, Romania, Hungary; El Salvador, Guatemala, Chile, Argentina, Honduras (Canada 1987b).

closed door policy towards anyone crossing the border to the "North"? (Unless they were first "taken in" by the UN ?) <sup>1</sup>

We have before us concepts which are somewhat at odds, at least in official usage. As defined by the UN population and statistical commissions, the concept of "migration" excludes refugee movements, since the latter fall outside "the migratory movements of normal times" (in Petersen 1975:312). There is, however, no requirement for us to abide by this definition, and, furthermore, statistics gathered under such an arbitrary delimitation are misleading and ultimately unusable.

We do not, *a priori*, refuse to see the Polish exodus as partaking of some aspects of refugee movements.<sup>2</sup> But we equally reject the vision according to which Polish migrants were "strictly refugees". It is impossible to accept as a sole and adequate framework of apprehension, capable of and actually corresponding fully, concept to reality, to the actual social phenomenon at hand.

When trying to conceive of post-1980 departures from Poland as a form of mass (e)migration, therefore, our research goals and limitations must be ascertained, in order to narrow down the number of appropriate theoretical constructs. Moreover, if we want to put into question the dichotomy of political flight and emigration we must speak of the latter in more depth, since the problems of distinguishing the two have not been fully studied. Moreover, there aren't really any theories concerning refugee movements per

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<sup>1</sup> Could it have been that simple? That people fighting "Communism" were simply more welcome than people fighting "Capitalism"? (Or is it fleeing?) Or is it just that there were far fewer of the former anyhow?

<sup>2</sup> Estimates vary, but Matejko (1984:253), basing himself on Polish statistics, mentions that in 1980-81, the outflow going West surpassed the inflow by 490,000 individuals.

se, because flight as such is perceived as a discrete, near-involuntary phenomenon. One doesn't really think of asking war, flood or famine victims what their motives for fleeing are. A Venn diagram depicting refugees as one circle and migrants as a second one would have an elusive grey area of conceptual intersection of keen interest to us. With these concerns in mind, we therefore turn to a selective overview of the existing body of migration theory.



## Chapter 2

# Migration Theory

Various theories have been put forward to explain the movement of human populations through space and time, but many have been more descriptive than explanatory. We first take a look at the functionalist and conflict schools of thought, searching for a suitable framework of analysis, before exploring some alternatives. Can we find appropriate theoretical tools in the existing body of work so as to arrive at a suitable conceptual framework? What is appropriate theory?

...[a] theory should encompass the entire phenomenon under inquiry and spell out its essential elements and relationships, while it should also indicate the relationships between the phenomena in question and other relevant social phenomena (Majava 1978:9).

Since it would be utopian to aim at a single, 'best' theory of migration, internal and international, which would apply equally in the First, Second and Third Worlds<sup>1</sup> (Pryor 1981:114), one solution is to integrate aspects of existing theories, the more so when exploring relatively uncharted waters.

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<sup>1</sup> We situate ourselves in 1980-81, when one could still speak of three distinct geopolitical categories.

## 2.1 Introduction

If a theory is a set of interrelated concepts, definitions and propositions which seek to explain and predict certain phenomena, it is understandable that in the academic literature, generalizations about migration appear under various, less ambitious headings. They've alternately been conceived of as hypotheses, as models or, still, been ordered about into typologies. Attempts at a 'General Theory', whatever the ideological perspective, have either been tentative, e.g., "Notes towards a general theory of migration in late capitalism" (Nikolanikos 1975), or self-doubting: "Towards a general theory of migration?" (Woods 1985). So many conceptual schemes have come to grace the pages of learned journals that they defy a unified classification. One author even hinted at a paradigm crisis, writing that

there are many problems of theory formulation in current migration research, including the identification of the major purpose(s) of migration theory; the levels of abstraction and reality at which theory is to apply; the specification of what is to be explained; and the temporal scale of our theorizing (i.e., on what grounds should long- and short-term migrations be distinguished?) (Pryor 1981:111).

Myriad other writers have also indulged in criticism of their own field. One thing is clear: theorizing has been attempted more often concerning *intra-national* population movements than *international* ones. Although related, the two phenomena are clearly separate for Zolberg (1980:4), since

...it is the political organization of contemporary world space into mutually exclusive and legally sovereign

territorial states which delineates the specificity of international migration as a distinctive process and hence as an object of theoretical reflection.

Seeking to transfer some of the insights of internal migration work to international migration theory, Pryor has proposed an integrated classification of theories from both fields, grouping them by the variables which they address. If we exclude the more recent Systems Theories, which we will come back to later, the schools of thinking to which a great number of other theorists belong to are either the classical-functionalist or the conflict one. Moreover, and this may seem paradoxical, given their apparently conflicting worldviews, the categories proposed are not all that mutually exclusive, some studies having used constructs which were the fruits of conceptual cross-fertilization. Taking Pryor's schema as our starting point, we thereafter explore the theoretical traditions of each school in turn, before turning to alternative approaches.

**Table 2.1**      **Classification of Migration Theories**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Classical Theories</b>	<b>Conflict Theories</b>
Freedom of Mobility	Relatively free, voluntary	Forced; residence/work constraints
Nature of decision-making	Rational; balancing costs & benefits	Coerced; economic & political pressure
Direction and causation	— From less to more developed areas —	
	Push greater than pull	Pull greater than push
Outcome at destination	Assimilation or integration within dominant value system	Competition, segregation, discrimination
Social mobility or stratification	Economic and social mobility	Stratification crystallized; alienation
Resultant opportunities	Equality, independence, scope for betterment	Segmentation, exploitation, dependency
Economic structure/employment	Unemployment: temporary aberration	Marginality: structural characteristic
Resource orientation	Utilization of available resources	Neo-colonialism, internal colonialism
Examples	Ravenstein (1885) Petersen (1969) Lee (1969) Price (1969)	Marx (1853) Nikolaiukos (1975) Castles & Kosack (1973) Rex (1973)

Source: Adapted from Pryor, R.J. in Kritiz, M.M., Keely, C.B. and Tomasi, S.M., 1981:118-119.

## 2.2 Classical Approaches

Approaches related to the functionalist school of thought tend to delve into individual migratory behaviour, seeing it as essentially voluntary and rational in nature.<sup>1</sup> As a rule, movement is seen to occur from less to more developed areas. Classic economic theories have proposed that rational attempts to maximize benefits and minimize costs can explain spatial movements (Thomas 1954). Sociological theories have sought to understand the ebb and flow of migration by addressing the issues of migratory direction and volume. Their strength has been to concentrate on the forces impinging on the individual migrant and the selection which occurs by different categories (age, sex, etc.).

One of the first "theorists" in this school is E.G. Ravenstein. His groundbreaking paper, "The Laws of Migration" (1885), was based on an analysis of the British Census of 1881. A second version drew on data from over 20 countries (1889). In all, he proposed seven 'laws' (1-5, 1885:199; 6 & 7, 1889:288 & 280):

1. There is an inverse relationship between migration volume and distance.
2. Migration occurs by stages.
3. A current of migration produces a counter-current

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<sup>1</sup>It seems that refugees would certainly be acting rationally in fleeing a dangerous situation...

4. Rurals migrate more than urban folk.
5. Women predominate among short-distance migrants.
6. Migration increases with the development of transportation technology and industrialization.
7. The economic motive is a dominant one.

The last law was based on the author's observation that the largest migration currents were those which arose from the "desire inherent in most men to 'better' themselves in material respects" (Ibidem: 286).

The term 'law', unfortunately, is not quite appropriate, since it doesn't recognize the historical specificity of the data. The 19th century movement of Europeans from the countryside into towns (the local movement that is alluded to in the fifth 'law'), for instance, was made up in large part of young farm girls responding to the demand for domestic servants in the homes of the urban middle class. Men, on the other hand, would more often go abroad as pioneers, responding to a different demand (Petersen 1975: 289). Even if Ravenstein's laws were but adequate generalizations, it is nevertheless undeniable that he did much to define the overall *problématique*. In a way, he laid the foundations for a whole school of migration research. Many decades passed and thousands of studies were conducted, but few additional generalizations were advanced, especially on migration volume or motivation (Lee 1966:48). One that did establish itself quite early concerned the age of migrants: in both internal and

international movements, young adults were shown to predominate. This seems to have remained a constant, for, as Shryrock (1964:30-31) wrote,

Age is such an important discriminant for mobility status that we need to be sure that a difference in, for example, the migration rates of two social-economic groups is not simply attributable to differences in age composition of these groups. In many of the available statistics, however, there is no cross-classification by age, and recourse must be made to an analysis by indirect methods.<sup>1</sup>

One recurring strategy in numerous studies is the application of what is variously known as the push-pull hypothesis or, still, the socio-economic push-pull theory. It has grown to be one of the most widely diffused "theories", reappearing explicitly or implicitly in myriad attempts aimed at explaining and predicting migration (Maamary 1976:7). It uses concepts so basic as to transcend ideologies, namely "forces which repel", or *push* people to leave their environment, and "forces which attract", or *pull* them to a destination. Although valuable as an empirical model when applied to international migration, migrants can quickly step from the pull to the push category, or vice versa, making the polar distinction rather blurred (Woods 1978:153). When a dissatisfaction with local conditions is matched with the crucial awareness of advantageous conditions elsewhere, one has the basic push-pull axis. It is generally hypothesized that migration tends to proceed from less to more "developed" areas, i.e., that migration is due to socio-economic imbalance

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<sup>1</sup>If age has to be accounted for when studying voluntary migration, it could well be that its importance as a factor changes when it comes to political flight.

between regions.<sup>1</sup> In fact, most classical attempts to analyze migration are based on the premise that in various ways one *area* is more attractive than another.

Another line of thrust has been to relate migration to distance, trying to fit these variables into equations. Stouffer's (1940:854) much talked about theory of intervening opportunities, for example, states that

The number of persons going a given distance is directly proportional to the number of opportunities at that distance and inversely proportional to the number of intervening opportunities.

A more comprehensive theoretical effort came from Everett Lee (1966), who strove to incorporate a number of accumulated insights into his "multifactor" theory. The push-pull hypothesis was being criticized as an oversimplification, and he sought to refine it.

Defining migration broadly as any permanent or semipermanent change of residence, Lee started out with a basic hypothesis specifying that factors at origin and at destination could attract, repel or have a neutral effect on people. He then added the concepts of "intervening obstacles", and "personal factors". These all entered into the decision to migrate and the process of migration (Lee 1966:49-50). He admitted, however, that that which held and attracted or repelled people was "precisely understood neither by the social scientist nor the persons directly affected" (Ibidem:50). This lack of understanding certainly

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<sup>1</sup> Baucic (1973), interestingly enough, showed that international migrants tended to originate from a country's most highly developed region, yet come from its *least* developed part.

wasn't helped by the fact that Lee, after having posited migration in terms of the positive and negative attributes of origins and destinations, left these attributes largely unspecified (Woods 1985:2). He did formulate, however, a series of hypotheses about the volume of migration, stream and counter-stream, and the characteristics of migrants. A relevant excerpt:

A person who has once migrated is more likely to migrate again.

Migrants proceed along well-defined routes, and the overcoming of a set of obstacles by early migrants lessens the difficulty of passage for later migrants, since 'pathways' are created.

Migrants are not a random sample of the population at origin, since they can and do respond differentially (by sex, education, etc.) to all factors, i.e., migration is selective.

Migrants who respond to a strong set of pull factors tend to be of high quality – well educated people who are comfortably situated migrate because they receive better offers elsewhere. Professional and managerial people are highly mobile, often because migration means advancement.

The heightened propensity to migrate at certain stages of the life cycle is important in the selection of migrants.

The characteristics of migrants tend to be intermediate between the characteristics of the population at origin and the population at destination. It is because they are already to some degree like the population at destination that they find certain positive factors there... (Lee 1966:54-7)

Finally, for this author, a coalescence of factors in favor of a move could overcome a natural inertia which always existed. The researcher didn't work with these factors *per se* as much as his subjects' *perceptions* of them – that's what, ultimately, resulted in migration. Often knowledge of the situation at destination wasn't generally available. It would have been acquired through informal networks based on personal (including family) and/or professional contacts. But a decision to migrate was never completely rational – some personalities thrived on change, whereas others craved stability. All of this had to be taken into account in social analysis (Ibidem: 51).

After Lee, William Petersen merits some attention, inasmuch as his work constitutes a major contribution to the classical school of thought. He differed with Lee on a number of points, even on the definition of migration. More than a change of residence, it had to involve a change of community, of social framework (Petersen 1975:280). Nonetheless, the two authors were in substantial agreement on many points. Petersen also faulted the basic push-pull hypothesis for implying a universal sedentary quality. He did add, however, that as an analytical tool, it couldn't account for differential behavior, since it focused on external factors. It thus failed to distinguish between personal priorities and social forces, overlooking "underlying causes, facilitative environments, precipitants and motives" of migratory behavior (Ibidem: 318). One of these precipitants, for instance, was brought to the fore when migration was understood as a group process, rather than as a sum of individual events. Under similar social and economic conditions, some individuals left while others stayed – a self-selection by age, sex family status and occupation occurred. The individual irrationality of migration decisions was due in part to an effect of social contagion, where a stream of migration, once started, developed its own momentum (Ibidem: 315). Petersen

based his generalization about social contagion on economically-motivated migration, and within this view, we could expect to find economic factors at play in the Polish exodus.

Finally rejecting the search for one theory as futile, Petersen suggested that the ultimate generalization possible was a typology which would associate the various settings of migration with their probable effects. As Lee before him, he ended up basing himself on a refined push-pull polarity, which he formulated in his own way. Two important, extra elements were to be taken into account: Migrants' level of aspiration, and whether or not the geographical move was meant to preserve a way of life or to change it (conservative vs. innovative migration).

Petersen (1975: 325) devised a typology of migration made up of ideal-types, or

Analytical constructs derived from historical examples but stripped of accidental, specific features in order to make them of more general significance.

**Table 2.2**      **General Typology of Migration**

Type of Interaction	Migratory Force	Class of Migration	Type of Migration	
			CONSERVATIVE	INNOVATING
Nature and individuals	Ecological push	Primitive	Wandering   Ranging	Flight from the land
State (or equivalent) and individuals	Migration	Impelled   Forced	Flight   Displacement	Coolie trade   Slave trade
Individuals and their norms	Higher aspirations	Free	Group	Pioneer
Collective behavior	Social momentum	Mass	Settlement	Urban growth

Source: adapted from Petersen 1975: 325.

Zolberg (1981:3) dismisses this "microanalytic theory" as "little more than a formal model of voluntary individual movement in response to unevenly distributed opportunities". The criticism most frequently leveled at classical theories, however, addresses their 'unrealistic' vision of human motivation and action. Their emphasis on purposive-rational behavior in individual migrants is

said to presuppose an analysis of human motivation in terms of a "kind of mechanical balance of external and impersonal forces" (Taylor 1969: 99). For Woods (1985:4), it seems obvious that

...rational [people] exist only in theories and that access to information, which will be imperfect in any case, is restricted. Potential migrants neither fully understand those aspects of their own 'structural contexts' which should influence their decisions nor do they respond in ways intended to meet objectives that are specific and constant.

Inasmuch as conflict theories allow for an element of individual decision-making, they share elements of classical approaches to migration. Their overall thrust is much more structural, however, and they approach migration from an economically deterministic angle, proceeding as they do from another perspective on society, inspired from the outset by Karl Marx.

## 2.3 Conflict Approaches

In his historical analysis of the emergence of early capitalism out of feudalism, Marx (1853, 1972) referred to the economically forced migration of peasants to cities. He remarked that various means had been used to expropriate rurals and more or less herd them into manufacturing towns. That was for internal migration. Industry, however, with its high levels of productivity due to technological advances, couldn't support them all, and famine drove the surplus away. Thus did he account for international migration. Marx stressed the essentially *coercive* nature of a system which

led to the departure of more than 1.5 million Irish in only 5 years, between 1847 and 1852, writing of the "compulsory emigration produced by landlordism" (1972:56). <sup>1</sup>Although the application of science to production was a silent revolution which Society had to submit to, it was only a "woeful transitory state" which would be followed by the "real revulsion of modern society" in the form of the coming workers' revolution (Marx 1972: 57).<sup>2</sup>

After quoting a passage from the London *Economist* to the effect that the necessary departure of a population rendered redundant by the breakdown of traditional small holdings did not diminish National Revenue, Marx (1972: 55) summarized the capitalist ethic subsuming this emigration:

Begin by pauperizing the inhabitants of a country, and when there is no more profit to be ground out of them, when they have grown a burden to the Revenue, drive them away and sum up your Net Revenue!

This general approach was to set the scene for many later conflict theories on emigration. Many variants would be based, explicitly or implicitly, on analyses such as Wallerstein's (1974a, 1974b), in which the international economic structure constituted a world system generated by the birth and subsequent globalization of capitalism, with the concomitant processes of uneven exchanges between core and periphery and an international division of

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<sup>1</sup>Marx addressed the oppression experienced by people being exploited and the choices confronting them: stay oppressed, revolt, or leave. Indeed, from an individual point of view, departing would seem to follow the path of least resistance. Could this be helpful in understanding the case of our Polish migrants?

<sup>2</sup>Lawrence Wechsler (1987:17) on the revolution: "I sometimes think that the one thing Marx failed to take into account in his prophecies about History was the existence of America. Had industrializing Europe been a closed system, the intolerable conditions might indeed have compelled the workers to unite and seize their history."

labour. A danger of rendering the economic structure the sole determinant of migratory flows in this global labour market, however, was that it omitted the socialist enclaves and the issue of politically-motivated entry and exit controls. This was an important omission for Zolberg (1981:10), the more so when these states had grown so powerful, playing an important role in shaping migratory flows.<sup>1</sup> But theory can be reformulated to account for such factors:

Différentes sociétés ne sont pas seulement différentes, mais elles sont reliées par des rapports sociaux politiques et économiques asymétriques. La mobilité spatiale épouse ce système asymétrique. (Bassand and Brulhard 1983:51)

Other variants dealt with different empirical situations, such as the "guestworker" phenomenon in Western Europe. For Marx, a fully grown bourgeois society achieved the enslavement of labor by capital. But capitalism required a "reserve army of the unemployed", and neo-marxists, writing on migration, returned to this theme. Nikolankos (1975), for one, has interpreted the movements of workers from less developed regions to Western Europe and elsewhere as a further stage in the exploitation of labor.<sup>2</sup> A new division of labor arose with neo-colonialism (easy access to cheap labor, cheap raw

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<sup>1</sup> Political boundaries act to distort migration patterns which in a "free movement" situation might be more amenable to economic and social determinants.

<sup>2</sup> "By the end of the 1960s, nearly one out of every six workers in Western Europe was an 'immigrant' " (McClean Petras 1981:62). Many were from North Africa and the Middle East. If Eastern Europe had allowed its workers to thus migrate, the results might have been quite interesting, culturally, economically and politically. In fact, such a phenomenon would have been quite in keeping with past historical trends, at least as regards Poland. This is an important point. Chapter 3 explores it somewhat.

materials), sustaining levels of economic growth and standards of living in the industrialized countries (Castles and Kosack 1973).<sup>1</sup>

A number of authors have addressed the issue of emigration from a similar perspective. If classical theories recognized the dominance of the economic factor, they nevertheless approached it from the individuals' point of view, as a *motive*, with society (whatever its economic structure) a neutral given. Conflict theories, on the other hand, have tended to subsume an economic determinism at the level of forces and structural factors impinging on a whole social class within a distinct and unequal economic system, i.e., Capitalism. A prime example of the latter is Nikolinakos' "Notes Towards a General Theory of Migration in Late Capitalism" (1975).

Nikolinakos (1975:6) points to the fact that explaining migration by the law of supply and demand invokes the classic and neoclassic theories according to which economic laws create a harmonious, optimal world economy. How then to account for polarized development and the contrast between center and periphery?<sup>2</sup> Such an ahistoric, abstract approach, according to him, obscures economic history and the social relations of production. Historically, postwar capital accumulation in Europe led to structural changes in the economy, opening gaps in the domestic labour market which were filled by foreign workers. The migratory mechanism and the internationalization of labour which it represented perpetuated the dependency

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<sup>1</sup> Marx's perspective, however, would seem to contradict Pryor's classification (Table 2.1) on at least one point: clearly Marx viewed the Irish emigration as a case of stronger push than pull, what with the serious deterioration in living conditions experienced by the Irish.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, while Western Europe went through the industrial revolution, during the 19th century, Poland was politically dismembered, remaining on the sidelines with its primitive rural economy (see historical map, Appendix 2). Again, chapter 3 includes a brief discussion of this economic underdevelopment and its migratory consequences.

relationship first established in the colonial era. The difference was that now the capital stayed closer to home, while the human resources were imported, within the context of an international division of labour. It was simply a further stage in the exploitation of labour. The positive consequences for emigrant countries lay in the export of potential social disturbances arising from unemployment, thus stabilizing a number of societies on the periphery and securing the political and economic position of their respective oligarchies (1975:11). For the class of migrants, however (it was, moreover, a clear *class* phenomenon), there was nothing but the "insecurity of a proletariat wholly dependent on – and subservient to – the process of accumulation" (1975:14).<sup>1</sup> Internal migration was exposed to the same laws as international migration, with the capital relationship changing very little: for Nikolinos, "The Sicilian is just as alienated in Milan as in West Germany" (1975:14).

Another example of the application of conflict theory to migration is Christian Mercier's *Les Déracinés du Capital* (1977), the subtitle of which is *Immigration et accumulation*, with the original doctoral thesis title being the most descriptive: *Les migrations transnationales de travailleurs*.

In both functionalist and conflict approaches, migration is seen as a movement from less to more developed areas, with immigrants entering the labour market at the bottom rung (Richmond and Verma 1978:8). Where a

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<sup>1</sup> In this perspective, the Polish government, as the effective owner of the national means of production, including workers, could not permit movements of the population across economic and ideological borders. The population therefore became subservient to the same process of "national" accumulation. The political and the economic dimensions of social reality couldn't easily become more clearly enmeshed than in this specific and rather idiosyncratic mode of production.

functionalist would foresee assimilation, integration and enfranchisement of new arrivals, Mercier (1977:221), basing himself on an analysis of the French labor market, attempted to show how the condition of dependency and exploitation could continue, with the relegation of migrants to seasonal, menial work being accompanied by a residential ghettoization (as with most European *gastarbeitern*):

Les conditions d'exploitation de la force de travail immigrée sont particulières, en liaison avec son insertion sectorielle spécifique: on assiste à une usure intensifiée, sous des formes diverses, d'une force de travail simple.

Symétriquement, le jeu de multiples discriminations sociales permet et entérine une reproduction peu onéreuse de la force de travail simple.

Mercier examined the situation of immigrants in France collectively, examining their social origins and destinations within the respective countries' class structures, combining this with a study of national economies. In this way, migratory flows were analyzed within the context of national *and* international divisions of labor (1977:220):

Fruit de la conjonction d'une capacité d'émigration ici et d'un besoin d'immigration ailleurs, le flux migratoire international est néanmoins dépendant, dans son rythme, des fluctuations courtes et longues de l'activité économique dans le pays d'arrivée. L'accumulation du capital dans ce pays, ses difficultés, contradictions et besoins déterminent finalement le fait migratoire.

A powerful, convincing and necessary socioeconomic analysis, it nevertheless tends to forego the individual-as-social-actor, placing him or her in a somewhat deterministic conceptual framework.

Both of the preceding schools of thought arose in response to specific, historic migrations, and therein lies a problem:

While the classical model may have fitted the case of immigrants to the United States at the turn of the century and the neo-Marxian model the experience of guest-workers in Europe, a more comprehensive theoretical model is required to explain other examples of external and internal migration in the world today (Richmond and Verma 1978:25).

This is especially true in the case of Polish professionals, who left in unique historical circumstances, probably never intending to return.

## **2.4 Alternative Approaches**

### **2.4.1 Systems Theory**

The theory of societal systems is the fruit of attempts to arrive at a general theory applicable to many different fields of social reality. By applying it to migration, Richmond and Verma (1978) as well as Hoffman-Nowotny (1981), among others, sought to explain population movements without recourse to middle-range theories.

In one author's formulation (Hoffman-Nowotny 1981), its central concept is the "societal unit". The latter can in fact be a whole system, or elements of systems (even individuals), with culture and structure being the interactive dimensions defining relationships between units.<sup>1</sup> Structure is defined as a set of interrelated social positions, whereas culture is defined as a set of interrelated symbols. In this context, power refers to the capacity to maintain or improve a position in a given system (at the individual level or higher), whereas prestige refers to the degree to which power is legitimated by elements of culture. The distribution and configuration of power and prestige in a society largely determine social processes – when the two do not coincide, structural tensions arise and in turn, generate anomic tensions at the level of the individual, of a class or of a collectivity. Dynamic processes of change in the structure and culture of a system may then crystalize.

Power and prestige coincide if the amount of power of a certain position is equivalent to the amount of prestige related to that position. A divergence (or a disequilibrium) might for example exist if a person who has certain occupational skills is in a position in which the salary received is lower than the person thinks s/he ought to receive. Such a configuration can be a determinant of migration. (Hoffman-Nowotny 1981:66)

To this systems theorist, then, migration results from structural and anomic tensions. It is "the consequence of a tension difference, in other words, a development difference between the immigration and emigration system" (Ibid:73). Originally meant to reduce these tensions, it constitutes a process which transforms and transfers them. On a societal level, migrants can be

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<sup>1</sup> This discussion is largely based on Hoffman-Nowotny (1981).

viewed as items of exchange between two systems and migration as one aspect of a tension management policy whose global effect is to maintain a certain status quo. Mobility is thus seen as an adaptation to socioeconomic change. A complete analysis, however, requires looking at the individuals and the systems they belong to as well as the global society into which the societal systems are integrated.

In his classification of migration theories, Pryor (1981:118-119) sets out some relevant points of systems analysis. Although mobility is seen as an adaptation to socioeconomic change, decision-making remains complex and relatively stressful. Overall, population movement is from less to more developed areas, as in other major theories.<sup>1</sup> The direction and causes of migratory flows are an expression of the principles of diffusion, adjustment and adaptation.

There are some problems with the systems approach to migration. In Hoffman-Nowotny's application, anyhow, it seems that the theoretical innovations lie mostly in the language – no new ground is effectively broken. What does seem to emerge, apart from a depoliticization of inequality, is a relabeling of known social phenomena in which a new vocabulary is applied in a one-to-one mapping process, this in lieu of hypothesis generation on causal relationships. An example, followed by a plain-English version:

However, anomic tension connected with immigration is not restricted to the level of immigrant and indigenous units. It is to be assumed on the contrary that the level of the system does not remain untouched. The failure to

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<sup>1</sup> As in reality, we daresay!

develop new status lines, mentioned above, and the policy of maintaining the internal status quo set a relatively narrow limit to the mobility of the system in the external system, so that in the long run at least a relative descent seems probable, which may provide the basis for stimulating new anomic tensions. (1978:74)

Translation: the development difference between rich and poor countries will likely increase, and this may result in an ongoing pressure to migrate from underdeveloped to developed countries.

When Richmond and Verma (1978:25) reject classical and neo-Marxian migration work as empirically irrelevant, it is to call for a more comprehensive theoretical model able to explain contemporary examples of external and internal migration. Their "Systems Model of Population Dynamics and Migration", a sort of conceptual map to help fathom the complexity of population movements is in fact a listing of 21 factors which influence migration, variously linked amongst themselves by 45 "positive influences" and 31 "negative" ones. It constitutes neither a model nor a theory. Hoffman-Nowotny (1978:83) does mention, even if at the very end of his text, that the application of systems theory is restricted mainly to modern mass migration from less to more developed contexts. That's all very well, but perhaps a more focussed approach would be more appropriate as a framework for studying Polish refugees. It could be added that at least one insight of the systems theorists, once distilled, is valuable. The sociological importance of taking all possible dimensions of any migratory phenomenon into account, for instance, cannot be overemphasized. But this idea has also been put forward elsewhere, perhaps in more useful terms.

## 2.4.2 Integrated Approaches

The fact that an ordered theoretical model of migration has been, and remains, elusive is in large measure due to the central role of the migrant in the framework of social analysis... (Jackson 1969:8) .

Although written some time ago, that still rings true. In practical terms, sociologists interested in understanding motives for a migration are confronted by three choices, according to one author:

Either we accept the migrant's own statement of motives, or we infer motives from a study of objective structural determinants and then impute these motives to migrants. The third possibility is that we combine the migrants' subjective account of motives with our own account based on objective inference (Taylor 1969:99).

This third venue touches upon the nature of the link between the micro-level of human interaction and the macro-level of institutions and social classes. Bassand and Brulhard (1983:50) have stressed the importance of examining both of these dimensions:

Il faut reconnaître à la mobilité spatiale deux niveaux irréductibles: le niveau macro-social est celui des structures, des institutions et des organisations. Le second concerne les acteurs qui communiquent, prennent des décisions, s'influencent, se déplacent, etc. Les acteurs ont des pratiques dans des champs de contraintes structurelles, institutionnelles et organisationnelles... du point de vue de l'acteur, la mobilité spatiale implique donc un jugement sur la

société et reflète sa volonté de s'y forger un rôle et une position sociale.<sup>1</sup>

Sacks (1985:121) has alluded to these two universes of discourse as the formal and the phenomenal – the first dealing with questions of structure, the second with those qualities that institute a 'world'. Different authors refer to these two broad levels of analysis. Woods (1985) has proposed a framework to integrate them.

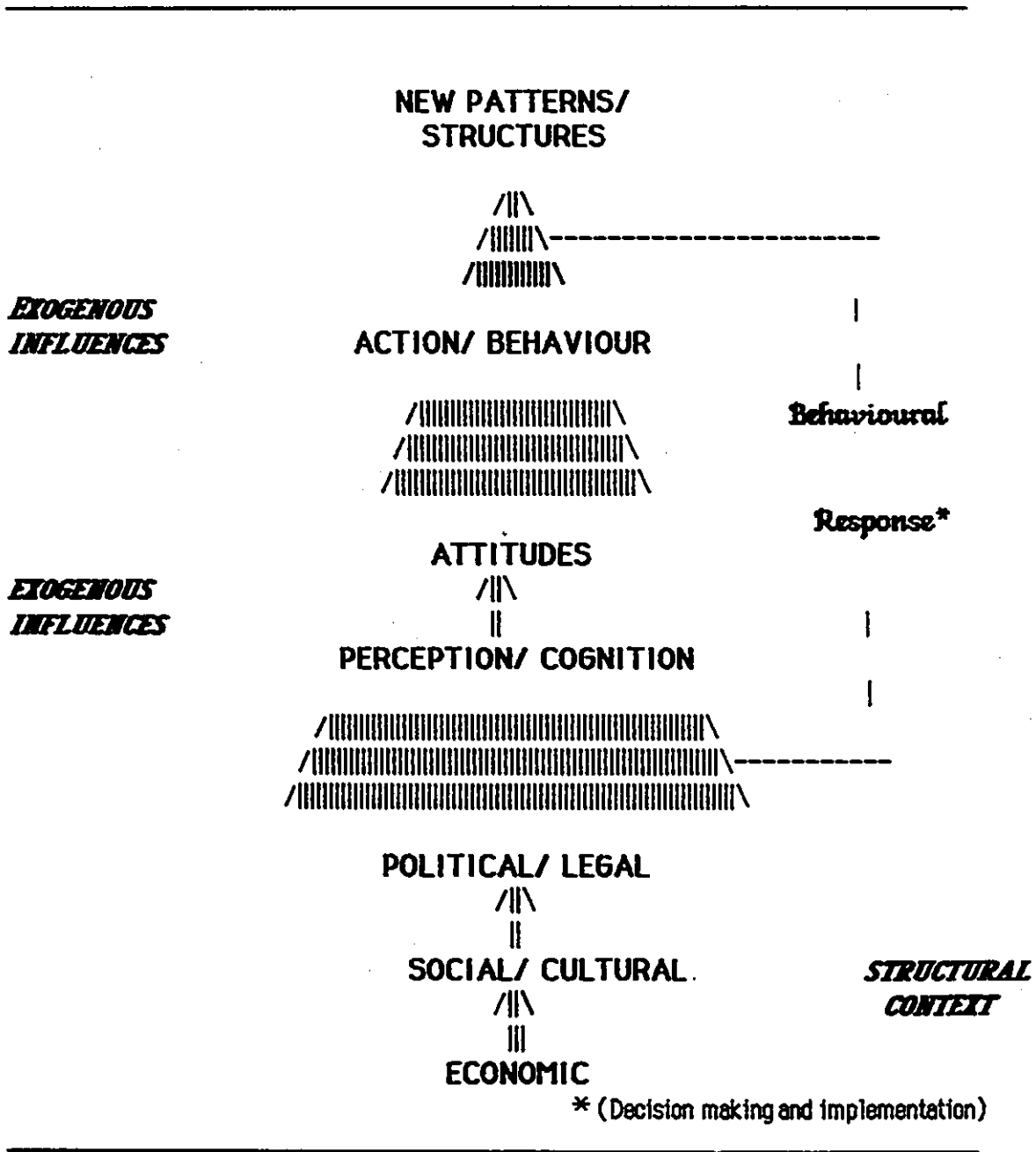
The author combines Marx's concepts of structure and superstructure insofar as he proposes the existence of a conditioning relationship between the various layers of his model. The behavioural response, for instance, is thus conditioned, but not determined, by the structural context (Woods: Ibidem). The major problem, for this author, with any theory of motivation and decision making is the 'rationality and perfect knowledge problem'. Real-life decisions are made with imperfect knowledge; their consequences are unknown to the migrant, as are the consequent actions (1985:4):

Behaviour cannot be predicted from an understanding of individual ideals and objectives since they may be unrealizable as such, nor can it be predicted from an appreciation of the 'structural context' in which potential migrants exist, since they may react to it in non-rational ways. However, it is the case that the 'selectively' or 'boundedly' rational will, in aggregate, respond in ways that create readily identifiable patterns and relationships.

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<sup>1</sup> Ou bien de s'y soustraire entièrement, pour aller s'établir ailleurs – ce qui ne contredit nullement une volonté de se forger une position sociale, bien sûr.

**Table 2.3 Framework for a general theory of migration**



Source: Woods, R. 1985:3.

Woods sees his work as contributing to the development of a general theory of migration. In his view, an attempt at the latter would have to treat both the 'position' and the 'personality' of actors within a framework specifically designed to deal with motivations as well as their ultimate causes and expressions.

It seems fair to conclude that the general theory that could be applied to migrants isn't really ready yet. In those circumstances, the best alternative would probably be to follow Taylor's (1969:99) third option, that is, to combine subjective elements of understanding with an account based on objective inference.

One final note. As remarked earlier, a "brain drain" analysis is not really possible. Nonetheless, some concepts surrounding the emigration of skilled personnel might be useful:

1. The most mobile sections of the population in less-developed countries are those with the higher education, professional or technical skills, since these continue to be in demand in "post-industrial" societies (Richmond and Verma 1978:32).

2. International inequality and the awareness thereof acts to build pressure toward emigration in less developed regions (Petersen 1975:294). Again, the more education one has received, the more one is aware, all other things remaining equal, of the world outside one's borders.

In this chapter we have shown that classic and conflict approaches are too bound to their respective empirical spawning grounds to be exclusively applied in our study. In the case of our political-cum-economic refugees, both the Polish structural context and personal responses to it will be examined, using an integrated approach, in order to gain a fuller understanding of the specificity of that migratory flow (Taylor 1969, Bassand and Brulhard 1983, Sacks 1985, Woods 1985). According to our hypothesis, professionals leaving Poland in 1980-81 had important economic reasons to do so. The next chapter is an exploration of Poland's history with a view to ascertaining the political and economic context of past migrations to the West.



## Chapter 3

# The Historical Context

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the reader to the historical Polish context and to describe the geo-political reality of the country as it has influenced migration in the past. It establishes the character of Poland as a migrant-generating country, one with a long tradition of outmigration and a large expatriate community – a constant reminder to nationals that Poles can “succeed” elsewhere, i.e., in the “West”.<sup>1</sup> It is in part due to this specific history that Poles’ “awareness space”, as Pryor (1976) would call it, has progressively expanded over the centuries.<sup>2</sup> A concise history of Poland is thus followed by an overview of emigration till 1939.

### 3.1 Introduction

It is between the Odra and the Wisla<sup>3</sup> rivers that one branch of the Western Slavs, the *Polanie*, or people of the open fields, first established itself in the 7th and 8th centuries. And indeed, that spatial nucleus forms the heartland of modern Poland, situated as it is in the middle of the North European Plain (Davies 1982a:23). Bound by natural frontiers North (the Baltic) and South (the Carpathian Mountains), their absence, East and West, has marked much of the country’s recorded history, now in its second millennium. The lack

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<sup>1</sup> The size of this community has been privately estimated at some 15 million people worldwide.

<sup>2</sup> In this we subscribe to Lee’s (1966:54-57) hypothesis that “pathways” of migration, once established, facilitate future mobility.

<sup>3</sup> VEECE-WA

has meant that variations in the balance of power have led to vast territorial changes. Its surface area has acted as a sort of barometer of the nation's political fortunes. It went from over a million km<sup>2</sup> in 1492 to nothing at all in 1795. Today it ranks sixth in Europe with its 312,677 km<sup>2</sup>. For a thousand years not a single generation of Poles has lived without either a war, an uprising, or a rebellion of some sort (Bloch 1982:8). The established political order has been overturned often, and there is no dearth of imagery used to convey this. Poland has variously been seen as the "disputed bride" of numerous shotgun weddings, both to Russia and to Germany, or as the proud, unruly romantic at the center of a stormy historical triangle. Prussian historians coined an expression which is telling, if prosaic - for them, Poland was a *Saisonstaat*, that is, a "seasonal state" (Davies 1982a:23). In the following pages, we briefly outline that history.

### 3.2 The Historical Background

In 966 Prince Mieszko, ruler of the largest independent principedom, received baptism, thus pre-empting any religion-sanctioned military move eastward by the knights of the contiguous Holy Roman Empire. That date marks the official recognition of Poland as an entity, subservient only technically to the Emperor of the German nation, who all too often acted as the secular power of the pope in Europe. Mieszko built up the framework of a Polish State. He strove for a measure of political homogeneity, with a monarch to whom feudal princes would be required to pay allegiance as the central authority (Radecki and Heydenkorn 1976:5). If the Western frontier was thus stabilized,

the Eastern one fluctuated somewhat over the next centuries. At the close of the Middle Ages the Poles administered a sprawling commonwealth which reached from the Baltic to the Black Sea. The tendency to expand into sparsely populated territories further East was checked by marauding bands of Tartars and Cossacks, the military forces of the Mongol hordes, or the organized armies of the principality of Muscovy. From the 17th century onwards, the latter became the unified Russian Empire, and subsequently the Soviet Union. The historical instability of the Eastern frontier is demonstrated by the recency of the last adjustment to it – 1970! (Bloch 1982: 8).

Until the 16th century the country was known as the Confederation of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. It was the outcome of a 1386 marriage, a union which provided Poland with its strongest and last royal dynasty, the Jagellonians. In 1569 the Union of Lublin established the "Noble Republic of Poland and Lithuania", a multinational state politically and culturally dominated by the Poles.

What followed was not the gradual rise of absolutism, as in France, Spain or Russia, or the appearance of a constitutional monarchy, as in England or Sweden. These processes were impeded by the numerical and political strength of the nobility, or *Szlachta*. The latter were different from the Western European aristocracy. As a social class they most resembled the Spanish *Hidalgos* (Bloch 1982:23). In the 16th century, for example, they represented some 6.6% of the Polish population, rising to 8% in the 17th and 18th centuries. In France and England, the corresponding class never rose above a proportion of 2% of the population (Davies 1982a:215). These "nobles", many of them landed, some landless, were dominated by a small number of magnates,

whose economic and military power was unrivalled, and who were opposed to the growth of royal power. When the last Jagiello died in 1572, the *Szlachta* instituted an elective monarchy within the framework of the Republic. Representatives of the nobles would gather at a Coronation Congress, in a huge field, where pretenders to the throne would compete with each other in the scope of concessions they would grant. Thus, no one individual could establish the foundations for a strong centralized authority and still count on electoral victory. In fact the process was more of a compromise between the magnates than the expression of a collective will. It could go off smoothly, but it tended to be rather chaotic. The last election, in 1764, for instance, was viewed as a particularly calm one, since only thirteen electors were killed. At other times, lack of compromise led to two Kings being elected, with the divisive issues to be resolved by civil war (Davies 1982a:332). A kind of President-for-life, the King would carry out the policies of the Diet, which from 1652 onwards was subject to the principle of *liberum veto*. A single vote against an otherwise unanimous decision would prevent the motion from being carried. When that wouldn't suffice to keep all interests satisfied, whole regions of Poland would constitute "confederations", for or against the King. This political system worked as long as the magnates were strong enough to guarantee an era of "golden freedom" for the gentry, and, not incidentally, one of "hell" for the serfs, according to contemporaneous accounts (Potel 1983:245).

Indeed, from the very beginning of the Republic, the *Szlachta*, which was the most recent estate to emerge on the historical canvas, proceeded to enshrine its oppressive social position. It went about perfecting the laws and institutions which were to characterize its supremacy. In 1574, for example, it obtained official rights of life and death over the serfs (Davies 1982a:206).

Although a distinct social hierarchy persisted throughout the life of that first Republic (1569 on), the balance between certain groups within estates and between the various estates themselves shifted around. There was a significant increase in the rural population. The proportion of serfs (and especially noble-owned ones) to peasants grew, as did the number of landless nobles to landed ones. Overall, there was an increase in the degree of social pauperization.

The internal political role which the nobility carved out for itself was to prove counterproductive from an external point of view. In the 18th century, as the territorial ambitions of the empires surrounding Poland grew, they started using this system to their advantage, forming lobbies in the Diet, bribing delegates to obstruct proceedings with their veto, etc.

**Table 3.1      Social Composition of Polish-Lithuanian Society in 1791**

Serfs	60 %
Peasants	13 %
Jews	10 %
Nobility	8 %
Burghers	6 %
Others *	2 %
Clergy	1 %

(n=8.53 million)      \* Tartars, Old Believers, etc.

Sources: Tazibr and Rostworowski 1968:344 and Davies 1982a: 215.

By 1764, when the last King was elected, the country was completely dominated by Russian and Prussian policies. In 1772, Frederick the Great engineered a first partition of Poland, between Prussia, Russia and Austria. It involved half the population and a third of its territory. A major shock, it led to a new movement for reform aimed at converting Poland into a more "progressive" society (Szczepanski 1970:12). It finally crystallized in the Constitution of 1791, which contained sweeping changes. A hereditary monarchy with ministerial responsibility was established. The veto was abolished. Towns were given new constitutions, burghers gained legal access to political office and acquired the right to possess land. The constitution protected peasants and mitigated their serfdom. It was conceived by members of the intelligentsia who had come from the ranks of the nobility and of the enlightened clergy. Unfortunately, not much was to come of these efforts. Most of the *Szlachta*, including some of the most powerful magnates, were opposed to it. Russian allies quickly materialized. After the 1792 war of intervention, the Tsar imposed a second partition in 1793. The failure of the insurrection led by Kosciuszko brought on a final partition in 1795.<sup>1</sup> Our history of emigration from Poland begins at this point in time. It coincides with the beginning of emigration proper, as distinguished from the colonization of neighboring territories (Zubrzycki 1953:248-9).

Poland ceased to exist as a sovereign entity. It was partitioned into three sections, each of which was incorporated into the corresponding foreign state, with its foreign administrative and economic structure (Bobinska 1975:15). This situation came to play an important role in shaping population

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<sup>1</sup> KOH-SH-'CHEW-SH-KOE.

movements. On the one hand, political instability was intensified. Uprisings in one or more of the three partitions punctuated a whole century: 1830, 1846, 1848, 1863, and 1905 (Szczepanski 1970:17). On the other hand, capitalism crept in through conservative, partial reforms, and in the context of an underdeveloped industrial base, a demographic explosion pushed recently freed serfs out onto the world labour market. But to study Polish history as it relates to migratory patterns occurring between 1795 and 1918, when the country regained its independence, is to encounter a number of obstacles relating to events, to basic terminology, and to source materials. The latter are discontinuous and tend to be unreliable, made up as they are of the remnants of bureaucratic detail left off by the occupying powers. The data are often indirect and allow for only approximate deductions. In some cases their validity is questionable. It was a matter of national policy, in Germany, to deliberately understate figures concerning emigration from Poland (Janowska 1975:124). Quite often there is no information at all, since at various times emigration was made illegal and individuals would bypass those procedures and registrations which later became documental sources.

Indigenous material, when it does exist, makes specific assumptions about reality. Individuals moving from one partition to another don't show up because they are seen as internal migrants. If they move outside of "historical Poland", i.e. across the 1772 boundaries, they are seen as emigrants, and their movements recorded as those of people having abandoned national territory. The opposite assumption holds sway in the official statistics (Bobinska 1975: 15). Thus Poles moving from Warsaw to Krakow at the end of the century were in fact going from Russia to Austria, and were duly noted by the respective administrative authorities as having crossed national boundaries. Poles moving

from Warsaw to Moscow or from Krakow to Vienna, on the other hand, were simply internal migrants and would only show up, if at all, in Polish sources. This brings to the fore the issue of seasonal migration. The latter interrelates with permanent emigration, continental or transatlantic, often preceding it in a given number of emigrants' lives. Of a temporary, employment-seeking nature at the outset, it slowly grew to encompass more time spent working away from the village than in the village itself. From a personal, experiential standpoint, it could lay the groundwork for permanent emigration.

Employment-seeking emigrations have been the focus of most of the academic work done on Polish migrations, since they represent by far the heaviest volume, involve host countries, and remain the most far-reaching movements as far as social, economic, and demographic issues are concerned. As far as their overseas component goes, research has relied in part on departure lists from European ports as well as passenger and arrival ones. In general, these were based on information provided by the individuals themselves. This led to spurious classifications. Numerous unilingual, illiterate Polish peasants would mention, quite correctly, as their country of origin, one of the occupying powers. Furthermore, the heading, in Canadian and American statistics, of 'racial origin', increased the inaccuracy of the data (Bobinska 1975:12).

The overall phenomenon of 19th century Polish emigration can be read into a general typology, but the latter's validity is marred by intertwining population movements. Indeed various kinds of forced relocations took place within this time frame, as well as voluntary and semi-voluntary political mass emigrations. The people involved in these could, through subsequent re-

migration, leave Europe through the same channels as voluntary, work-seeking waves. If these categories have, at times, been lumped together, it is partly due to the fact that it

...is difficult to calculate to what extent emigration from an oppressed country is engendered by political oppression, and to what extent by poverty and unemployment, ... because political emigrations both enter the work market in target countries and merge there with the work emigration. (Bobinska 1975:11)

If these difficulties have hindered social research to today's standards, a sizeable body of academic work has nevertheless accumulated in this field.

### **3.3 Political Emigration Before World War I**

The first Polish emigrants were chiefly soldiers who sought refuge in Austria, Italy, Turkey and France after Kosciuszko's defeat in 1795. A Polish legion, numbering some 6,000 officers and men, was formed in Lombardy. France was then the greatest foe of Poland's occupiers, and they fought under Napoleon during the Second Coalition War (Zubrzycki 1953:248). The Emperor restored a Polish State, in the form of a Warsaw Duchy, which lasted from 1806 to 1813. After the Congress of Vienna, in 1815, the Duchy was replaced by a "Congress Kingdom", making it part of the Russian Empire.

Throughout the 1800's, many Poles got involved in struggles aimed at reuniting the shattered fragments of their State. A major uprising arose in 1830 and its subsequent failure, marked by the fall of Warsaw in 1831, led to the departure of about 9,000 political refugees to asylum in the West. This

general movement, which eventually spanned some 40-odd years, came to be called the "Great Emigration".<sup>1</sup> At the outset, it was primarily a self-imposed exile of members of the revolutionary government and Diet of 1830-31. These left, uneasily, out of fear but also with the conviction that they could better serve their homeland by fleeing, by seeking moral support abroad if not actual, armed allies. They cherished thoughts of an early return, perhaps in a Polish legion, like in Napoleon's day. They wanted to keep the cause of Poland alive, and they belonged to both ends of the political spectrum. If some strove for a restoration of aristocracy under monarchical rule, others planned to fight an uprising based on the masses and aimed towards social revolution. The former sought help from friendly governments and knocked on numerous gilded doors; the latter expected spontaneous uprisings of sympathetic populations. Both carried out limited public relations campaigns in the press organs of the day. But their's was to be a "long and inglorious exile" (Coleman 1951:320). Paris, where many based themselves, was too volatile, politically, for their activities, and the French government dispersed these politicized Poles throughout smaller, regional cities as early as 1832 (Ibidem:314). As one author comments, rationalizing political defeat like many Poles did, "neither the politicians nor the secret agents nor the diplomats of the Emigration... saved Poland, but the poets" (Ibidem:320). The latter recuperated the 1831 loss, interpreting it within a meaningful context as a confirmation of Poland's historic *right* to exist.

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<sup>1</sup>A sort of community living abroad, its ranks were periodically strengthened by new arrivals in waves corresponding to periods of political upheaval, that is, 7,000 in 1848, 10,000 more in 1864 (Basinski 1974: 134ff).

For Adam Mickiewicz (Ibidem:321ff), Poland was a martyr-nation, the Christ of the world, suffering because of its faith and idealism, and bound to resurrect. The country would rise through the instrumentality of the men and women who discipline themselves to live nobly for their country, whether in exile or not. Slowacki was disappointed in his generation, concluding that it must die and be forgotten before anything was to be remedied. The real saviours of Poland were the people who *did not* emigrate, those who stayed and made it their credo. Indeed, his espousal of a more literal martyrdom inspired the insurrectionists of 1863. Krasinski, on the other hand, saw reality in the luster of a romantic ecstasy which saw individuals choose martyrdom in preference to realistic living. All in all, the idea of a resurrection of Poland was kept alive in the intelligentsia (Ibidem:323). This discourse, however eclectic, was to form some of the basic canons of 20th century attitudes towards the "nation". For history, the importance of this "Wielka Emigracja" lay in the impact of its cultural production on national symbolism.

### **3.4 Economic Migration Before World War I**

The demographic and political significance of the preceding emigration was to be dwarfed by the mass economic emigration which would follow. The latter began more or less in the 1860's, peaked towards the end of the century and, after an interruption due to WW I, came to an end in 1939. It was composed mainly of "landless peasants and agricultural labourers with a small admixture of landed peasants and later – in the early 20th century – unemployed city workers" (Zubrzycki 1979:651). In the second half of the century Poles started to be referred to as emigrants and not as refugees or

exiles anymore. They joined in the tremendous population movements sweeping across the whole European continent at the time.

Permanent emigration developed from the practice of seasonal migration and kept some of its characteristics. One of the prime enabling factors at the very base of migration as a phenomenon was emancipation. Although it occurred at varying rates over some sixty years, and for different reasons in the three partitions, Davies (1982a:192) has outlined the general consequences which flowed from its appearance on the historical scene:

Henceforth the peasants were free to move where they wished, to seek new employment, to make contracts, to buy and sell, to send their children to school, to organize themselves politically. Almost all the outstanding social developments of the last hundred years, from industrialization and scientific agriculture to mass education and mass politics, could not have happened if a class, which in 1900 still included 82% of the total population of the Polish lands, had not first been freed from the chains of serfdom. Emancipation spelled the end of estate-based society and gave a major boost to social mobility. Seen in a wider perspective, it was the fundamental precondition for the full exploitation of new economic conditions and for the formation of new social classes.

One of the major sources of economic tension was the interminable lag between emancipation and impropropriation.

At first, demand for labour on Prussian estates, and later in the mines and factories of Silesia, Saxony or Westphalia attracted Polish peasants from the other partitions. This was the famous *ostflucht*, or 'flight from the East'.

At the outset, they would come for the harvest, or for a spell of industrial work in the winter, after completing the year's work on their farms.<sup>3</sup> Later, they travelled further afield, to France and to Belgium, before finally going overseas to North and South America. These movements were facilitated by the rapid development of a steam transportation network on both land and sea (Stankiewicz 1975:28). They stayed for ever longer periods of time, but they kept in touch with their kin, sent money home and hoped to return as soon as circumstances would allow. Originally, emigration to the West was treated by the overwhelming majority of departees as temporary. Their goal was to earn a certain sum of money to aid them in purchasing land back home. Quite often, return proved impossible, whether it be for lack of funds or because the village lands had been urbanized. The progressively larger percentage of women and children leaving attests to these changes (Galos-Wajda 1975:68). Indeed, as the century progressed, domestic conditions worsened. The competitive entry of American, Canadian, Argentinean and Australian grain and cattle production on the world market precipitated the agrarian crisis of 1870-1880 (Stankiewicz 1975:52). Economic development was stifled by the politics of annexation. Domestic industry, behind in comparison to the West, and belatedly undergoing an incomplete technical revolution, could not assure employment to ever larger masses of work candidates who were systematically ejected from the village (Ibidem:51).

Increasing numbers left without looking back. These economic migrants differed from their political counterparts in that they were poor and largely

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<sup>3</sup> In discrete, temporal lurches, millions of serfs joined the ranks of this peasantry – individuals who had lived largely outside the money economy became suddenly totally dependent on it. Freedom did not bring prosperity with it. It did bring forced conscription, however, and a whole set of other problems (Davies 1981b:94).

illiterate, with nothing to lose by leaving, and thus understandably devoid of passion for Polish cultural and political traditions of which they had known only the underside, poverty and oppression. They were to know two realities, that of their village in Poland and wherever else they wound up in order to survive, whether it be a mine in the *Artois*, a factory in the *Ruhr*, or a farm in Kansas. Between 1870 and 1914, over 3.5 million Poles left: 1.2 million from Prussia, 1.25 million from the Congress Kingdom, and another 1.05 million from Austrian Galicia (Zubrzycki 1953:259). As to destinations, available figures suggest the pattern in table 3.2.

**Table 3.2**      **Permanent Settlement of Poles (1939)**

Germany	2,000,000
USA	1,500,000
France	450,000
Canada	250,000
Brazil	195,000
	4,395,000

Source: Davies 1982a:279.

We have spoken of the confusing array of migration statistics which exist and the reasons behind this state of affairs. Similar problems arise with demographics. From 1815 to 1918, for example, there was only one population census held in the Congress Kingdom – in 1897. In Galicia, a census was held in 1857, and decennially from 1880 to 1910. In Prussia, the first one took place

in 1861 and was repeated every five years from 1895 on (Daszynska-Golinska 1933:116). From these, and from estimates based on various other sources of data compiled by statistical departments and committees, it is possible to ascertain that the population of the three partitions passed from 8.3 million in 1820 to 23.7 million in 1914. But the rate of increase was highest in the second half of the century. From 1857 to 1900, it increased by 105% (179.4% in the Congress Kingdom vs 52% in the Prussian sector). At the close of the century, a high average birth rate of 43.5 per 1,000 was offset by an unusually high death rate of 26 per 1,000. The latter was to fall, by 1910, to 19.3 per 1,000 in the Congress Kingdom, and to 24.1 per 1,000 in the Prussian part (Rutkowski 1950:229). Material conditions of life barely kept pace with the pressures of the population explosion. Average life expectancy didn't exceed 40 years in this predominantly rural society. Table 3.3 shows how this predominance evolved over 150 years.

**Table 3.3**      **Polish Rural Population**

	(% of $\pi$ )
1795	90.0
1900	82.0
1931	72.6
1946	68.2

Source: Davies 1982b:181.

### 3.4.1 Seasonal Emigration

These population movements were mostly from Galicia and the Congress Kingdom Westward, into Prussia and Saxony, where agricultural demand was high. It was increased even further by the introduction of labor-intensive sugar-beet farming in the 1850s (Janowska 1975:123). Local German laborers, on the other hand, had already migrated West inside Germany, in search of higher paid industrial work. Economic conditions in these two partitions played an important role, as they did in permanent emigrations, since unemployment and low wages in the agricultural sector only heightened the need for cash with which to acquire more land. Many went to learn new agricultural techniques. Industrial underdevelopment made it impossible for cities to absorb the extra rural workers in the off-season. They would therefore lengthen their stay by engaging in industry in their host country, coming back to Poland only for the harvest, when work was certain. Seasonal migration came to be accepted as a permanent element in the lives of a considerable proportion of men; if they stayed in Poland, as some would, they continued to migrate throughout their productive lives, whereas women stopped at marriage (Murdzek 1977:141). A specific type of economic activity, it acted to broaden the intellectual horizons of previously village-bound peasants, bringing them into contact with an outside world for the first time, and laying the bases for eventual permanent migration.

Seasonal emigration from the Congress Kingdom to all destinations represented some 3 million people from 1900 to 1913, while the figure for Galicia stands at about 2.4 million (Zubrzycki 1953:259). There was a marked tendency towards group emigration. This was encouraged by the Catholic clergy

and the intelligentsia, since villagers who stuck together could bargain for work terms, live more cheaply and were less prone to assimilation. Sometimes travelling middlemen would strike bargains between a group of Polish laborers and a German employer.

### 3.4.2 Permanent Emigration

Despite the particular identities of each of the partitions, all could validly be termed depressed areas, insufficient to support their masses of population. When the demographic pressures found outlets abroad, all contributed to the growing tide of emigration from that general area of *Mitteleuropa* (Murdzek 1977:164).

#### 3.4.2.1 Russian Poland

This part of Poland experienced a rapid economic growth in the second half of the 19th century. In Lodz, a strong textile industry took root and the city's population exploded, suggesting a dramatic rural exodus: from 28,000 in 1860 to 325,000 in 1900, while Warsaw went from 175,000 to 730,000 people (Bujak 1926: 48-9). Coal, iron and leather industries developed as railway lines to Russia and Germany were built. The year 1864 brought emancipation to the serfs, but less than half of the farmland actually passed into peasant hands, and over the next 30 years the number of landless peasants quadrupled (Davies 1982a:188). By the 1880's, the pressure of rural population in the 'Kingdom' was forcing an increasing volume of peasants beyond the Urals

(Librowicz 1884:265). An illustration of the acuteness of land deprivation is the famous 'Brazilian fever' of 1892, when in the wake of an explicit open-door policy promulgated by Rio de Janeiro some 100,000 Poles left in a couple of months (Murdzek 1977:134). In 1904, farms under 2 ha still represented 25% of holdings (Stankiewicz 1975:31).

Some of the landless were absorbed into the rising industrial centers, but many started migrating to Germany and other European countries on a temporary basis. From 1890 to 1912 seasonal migration from the Congress Kingdom to Germany rose 18.5 times (*ibidem*). Then came the crisis of 1901-03, followed by Russia's defeat at the hands of the Japanese and the Revolution of 1905. Economic growth was interrupted, worsening pressure on the land. The volume of permanent emigration suddenly increased. From some 9,000/year in the last decade of the century it rose to 90,000/year by 1910 (Rutkowski 1950:233). Over one fourth of the birth rate was absorbed by the emigration, and just prior to World War I, almost one half (Stankiewicz 1975:32).

Some of the psychological incentives which could sway an individual to leave were letters from kin describing life in the West, at times written and read through third parties. The role of these letters was especially important, obviously, when they were accompanied by 'prepaids', i.e. the requisite funds and steamship tickets for departure. In fact many such letters were motivated by a promised commission from the steamship line or a favour from the employer (Murdzek 1977:164). Excluding some Jewish emigrants, the bulk of departees was composed of landless peasants and agricultural laborers (Zubrzycki 1953:252).

### 3.4.2.2 Austrian Poland

Ruled directly from Vienna until 1867, Galicia thereafter enjoyed provincial autonomy, which implied a wide margin of freedom for national cultural development. At the same time, it led to the adoption of reactionary policies by a provincial government completely controlled by the *Szlachta*, who followed a program calculated to perpetuate their privilege and status as an agricultural ruling class. In fact, Galicia had an extensive type of agricultural economy which could only exist by utilizing a very low-paid work force, a labor supply totally dependent on the manor (Murdzek 1977:79,81). The rural economy was extremely weak, and Galician society was unbalanced in the extreme. An estimated 50,000 people were dying each year as a result of near-starvation conditions, and for many peasant families, emigration offered the only chance for survival (Szczepanowski 1888:218). This author remarked that "each Galician produces the equivalent of half a person" (in Murdzek 1977:140). In his 1902 study of a rural community, Bujak concluded that of 236 family units, 130 could not possibly sustain themselves at a minimum standard of living (ibidem:141).

In Austria, personal freedom and possession of the land were granted to peasants outright in 1848. Within nine years, over half a million Galician estates were transformed. But rural poverty remained widespread (Davies 1982b:181). It was in no small part due to an intensive parcelization of the land, which tended to reduce individual lots down to a size at which they were unviable. In 1859, 60% of holdings were under 5 hectares. By 1902, that figure

had jumped to 80% of 1.3 million holdings (Grabski 1923:48). Below 5 ha, a family could not maintain itself without resort to seasonal employment elsewhere (Zubrzycki 1953:254). And yet, at the same time, farms of over 100 ha gobbled up 40% of the land (Pilch 1975:82). Not only were the lots too small, but they were often scattered about in strips, up to 20 or 30 strips at a time, on the average, and this impeded attempts aimed at raising productivity levels. High levels of illiteracy (67.7% in 1900) also hindered the rise in the standard of farming culture (Ibidem). Land hunger among the agricultural population was acute. With very few domestic opportunities for industrial employment, many agricultural laborers had to seek them outside. Bujak, writing in 1902, estimated the number of superfluous agricultural laborers at some 1.2 million (in Zubrzycki 1953:254). When railways were built in the early seventies, upsetting the rural economy with the introduction of manufactured goods from distant factories while providing easier means to leave, Galicia started losing her population – Over a million from 1871 to 1913, with a high annual average of 50,000 from 1906 to 1910 (Fogelson 1937:130).

### 3.4.2.3 Prussian Poland

Poles living in this partition enjoyed the fruits of the relatively healthy German economy.<sup>1</sup> Emancipation was a drawn-out process, starting with an 1811 Royal Prussian edict permitting the impropropriation of state peasants and ending in 1850 when the last group of serfs (those working on private estates under 6.4 ha) were released from their obligations. As elsewhere, the class of landless agricultural laborers multiplied rapidly (Davies 1982b:187). But they were absorbed by sugar beet factories, agricultural implement factories as well as by a powerful iron and steel industry in Upper Silesia (Zubrzycki 1953:255). Politics were a major factor in encouraging emigration. From 1871 on, as the government of Prussia was overlaid by the confederative machinery of the German Empire under Bismarck, discriminatory policies aimed at germanizing Polish territories were implemented (the so-called *Kulturkampf*). Since 1860, the Polish population had been growing faster than the German one, due to a higher birth rate, a greater rate of German emigration, and the polonization of many Germans living there (Murdzek 1977:22). Henceforth, Polish was to be banned even as a foreign language. Government inspectors began to interfere with religious instruction. In 1876, German was made compulsory in all courts, and in all government offices. The Catholic Church was seen as a Polish bulwark against German culture, and many priests were arrested. All state funding to the Church was withheld. From 1886 on a campaign against Polish landownership went into effect, but with little success. In this "struggle for soil", some 70,000 German colonists settled on lands bought up by the Colonization Commission, thus depriving the farm help,

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<sup>1</sup>Here, for clarity, we refer to a territorial Germany, even if it only arose as an Empire with unification under Bismarck, in 1871.

mainly Poles, of work (Galos-Wajda 1975:58). But these policies only succeeded in stimulating vehement national feelings. If they proved to be counterproductive in the long run, many Polish intellectuals nevertheless moved to Galicia, while many others moved West, departing from Polish lands entirely.

In summary, the thousands of peasants who did leave Prussian Poland didn't lack an economic grounding for their decision, but they were also strongly conscious of the politics involved. Changes in the volume of emigration correlate with changes in anti-Polish policies. From 1872 to 1913 over 1.2 million left, with a peak of 368,000 for the 1881-1890 decade. Over 62% of the total number settled in western Germany, chiefly Westphalia (Fogelson 1937:129-30).

### **3.5 The Inter-War Period**

When world War I broke out, it breathed fresh life into the "Polish Question". For the first time in 152 years, Berlin was at war with St. Petersburg. The solidarity of the partitioning powers was finally broken. With the Russian Revolution in 1917 and the collapse of the Central Powers in 1918, the power vacuum in Polish territories was complete. Six concurrent wars were fought in 1918-1920, as the young Republic struggled to define its borders. Over a million people were repatriated (Zubrzycki 1953:260). Table 3.4 offers a glimpse of Polish society at the dawn of a new era.

**Table 3.4** Polish Occupational Structure, 1921 Census

Peasants	64 %
Agricultural laborers	10 %
Industrial workers	17 %
Professions and Intelligentsia	5 %
Entrepreneurs	2 %
Landowners	1 %

Source: Davies 1982b:406.

With the proclamation of independence, Poles worldwide became enthusiastic. Many planned to return, and some did, but eventually most resigned themselves to lives in their new societies: their homeland was in a shambles (Basinski 1975:142). The population, institutions and traditions of the three partitions had to be brought back into a common fold. Problems to be resolved included six currencies, five separate regional administrations, four languages of command in the army, three legal codes and two railway gauges: eighteen political parties vied for State power. Two thirds of the population was engaged in subsistence agriculture and one third consisted of national minorities (Davies 1982b:410).

Three attempts at land Reform eventually led to the diminishment, over 20 years, of more than 20% of the landed estates of State, Church and private landowners. 734,000 new holdings were created (Davies 1982b:411). But conditions in the countryside continued to deteriorate, and the pressure on the

land grew, as did rural poverty and unemployment. A soaring birth rate pushed the Republic's population from 26.3 million in 1919 to 34.8 million in 1939 (Ibidem:426). Agrarian reform lost momentum while industry wasn't given much chance to develop. The old infrastructure was inadequate and past markets were lost, the huge Russian one seemingly for good.<sup>1</sup> The Polish population, in 1929, was less industrialized than that of the former Congress Kingdom. In terms of a Gross Industrial Production Index (1913=100), the country's performance in 1938 was 98.7 (Ibidem:417). Industrialization did continue, but on a limited scale, and it followed pre-independence patterns. Internal capital accumulation was weak, and Poland's low credit rating deterred foreign investment. After March 1936, State planning was introduced, and it decidedly improved the economic recovery. Official records showed industrial unemployment at a 1936 high of 10% of the labor force, or 446,800 workers (Ibidem). In these general social and economic conditions which followed the War, it is understandable that emigration should resume.

Between 1919 and 1938, over 1,485,000 people left, while 348,000 returned, leaving a net balance of permanent emigration of 1,137,400 (Zubrzycki 1953:260). The lack of knowledge about work opportunities abroad and the general chaos in postwar Europe did act as curbing factors in the early years of this period. A peak of intensity in migratory movement was reached in the years 1926-30, followed of course by a decline during the depression years. Overall, transatlantic emigration never reached its pre-war proportions. Its composition shifted, in step with the population: If workers and skilled craftsmen had represented about 4% of pre-war departures, they now rose to

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<sup>1</sup> Seems like some parallels could be drawn with today's situation, in which the USSR is not buying nearly as much from its previously socialist 'bretheren' as before, while the West European countries argue over terms of trade with the emerging democracies, fearful of their more cheaply produced goods in these recessionary times.

some 10% (Janowska 1975:131). France replaced the USA as the prime destination, owing in great part to restrictive American legislation establishing quotas in the early 1920's (Dillingham Bill, 1921; Johnson Bill, 1924). The French working class was decimated in the war, and when the eight-hour day was established, shortly after the Armistice, the demand for labor became acute (Ibidem). At the outset, the Polish government tried to encourage emigration, since the high level of unemployment was radicalizing workers and thus represented a potential threat to its tenuous hold on power (Landau 1975:106). It is an interesting historical coincidence that migration volume peaked after 1926, the year which saw a military coup topple the elected government.

Seasonal emigration also resumed after the war, but again, on a smaller scale than before. Most of the flow was to Germany (80.7%) and Latvia (18.3%), and it was regulated by treaties (Zubrzycki 1953:264). During the period 1927-38, the great majority of seasonal migrants were agricultural laborers travelling on their own, whereas permanent emigrants tended to leave with their families, and only one third was employed in agriculture (Ibidem).

After a brief review of national history, this chapter has gone over some of the political, economic and social realities that characterised Poland before the outbreak of the Second World War. In reviewing the resulting migration trends, the groundwork has been laid for a deeper understanding of the Polish context and of the history which nationals would be aware of, a knowledge which would constitute a potential element of professionals' consciousness and inform their worldview. Accordingly, after a short summary of post-war developments, the next chapter closes in on the

1970s, a time frame which is of more specific interest to us, in order to delve into some of the structural and economic factors as well as the subjective mindsets which could have predisposed some professionals to leave, come the opportunity in 1980-81.



## **Chapter 4**

# **The People's Republic of Poland**

In this chapter a brief overview of the post-World War II years leads into the 1970s. A closer look at the decade that preceded the emergence of Solidarity will help establish the social and economic context in which to situate the events of 1980-81, as well as the population flow which interests us.

### **4.1 Introduction: Postwar Emigration**

The Second World War provoked many population displacements, both while it lasted and in its aftermath. It is difficult to speak of migration, voluntary or otherwise, under such circumstances. It is just as difficult to find reliable statistics. Many of the immigrants to Canada in the postwar years were from countries that were heavily affected by that conflict. Many of the Poles were war refugees and demobilized personnel migrating to North America from outside the borders of the new "People's Republic". As the political situation consolidated in Eastern Europe, no-exit policy measures were more and more strictly enforced. The statistics on in-flow we use are Canadian government ones. They serve only as indirect and imperfect indicators of population outflow from Poland and its fluctuations. Moreover,

once the war-related migration waves subsided, outflow measurement from Poland still presents a problem, difficult to assess when migrants regularly bypassed Polish officials. The latter, in turn, could not be expected to release statistics compiled on a politically sensitive issue.

From 1946 to 1955, 104,450 immigrants were taken into Canada as citizens from Poland, of which 61,578 declared themselves ethnic Poles. From 1956 to 1961, this went down to 17,842 individuals (based on ethnicity), decreasing to 15,327 between 1962 and 1972 (Government of Canada: Various years). The suggestion that these numbers should have been higher, even taking into account the progressive decrease in the decades after the war, that they demonstrate the progressive effect of Poland's no-exit policies, can perhaps be enhanced by comparing them with those of a less involved European war participant, Portugal. The outflow trends, surmised from Canadian inflow trends, seem to be inversely proportional.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> With the recent suppression of the no-exit policy, however, it would seem that Poland's character as a "natural" migrant-generating country has come back to the fore, at least as regards Canada. From January to September 1990, Poland was the second major source country (\*1 being Hong Kong), with 13,431 immigrants arriving here. Portugal was 8th on the list, with 6,354... (Employment and Immigration Canada, Quarterly statistics:1990)

**Table 4.1 Immigration to Canada, 1946-1972**

	<u>Poland</u>	<u>Portugal</u>
1946-1955	61,578*	3,986
1956-1961	17,842	21,484
1962-1972	15,327	76,117

\* All based on ethnic origin, not country of citizenship.<sup>1</sup>

Source: Government of Canada, *Ibidem*.

It is course undeniable that the War brought much turmoil to Poland. In its aftermath arose the People's Republic of Poland, quite an upheaval in itself.

## 4.2 The People's Republic of Poland, 1945-1970

Once political power was consolidated (after some years of heavy – yet often covert – repression), once basic postwar reconstruction was sufficiently advanced, the new "People's Republic" sought to develop the country according to Joseph Stalin's precepts. The industrialization imperatives of the 1950s and 1960s sought to transform Poland from a rural agrarian society into a modern industrial nation. Production rose dramatically in many regards. But dislocations were generated by the overcentralized economic management system, compounding economic difficulties arising out of erroneous policies in

<sup>1</sup> Where possible we use citizenship or country of last permanent residence but for sake of uniformity we have used ethnic origin in Table 3.5, based on the availability of statistics.

trade, investment, agriculture, and planning. Trade, for instance, was seen as "a source of spontaneity inimical to a planned economy" (Farell 1981:304).

Relations between the state and society came to be characterized by paternalism, manipulation and selective intolerance by the former and inefficacy, frustration and apathy by the latter (Taras 1986:183). Authorities repeatedly deflected demands for political reform by turning to economic determinism to explain the crises of 1956, 1968 and 1970. Challenges to the system were interpreted as dissatisfaction not with socialism but with the functioning of the economy, which determined "in the last instance" the political, institutional and ideological superstructure of the Republic. Therefore reform of the economic base could, by itself, improve the performance of unreformed political, institutional, and ideological practices (Ibidem: 96). This explanatory model conveniently served a leadership intent on keeping absolute power in the hands of a single organization, the Polish United Workers' Party (PUWP). By 1968, a third effort at reform was still far from the ideas being put forward by economists such as Włodzimierz Brus, to the effect that the

[...] unmodified Stalinist steering system was no longer appropriate for the stage of economic development the country had reached in that decade. State preferences – more precisely, those of the bureaucratic elite – were at odds with public preferences. (in Taras 1986:103)

While a democratized political system could have made possible societal control over the means of production, the Gomułka administration sought only to improve the methods by which central objectives were reconciled with decentralized implementation, never questioning the role of the central

economic authorities in defining strategic growth targets. Surveys made during the 1950s and the 1960s indicated the growth of a social apathy related to the absence of social and political institutions with which people could identify, through which they could hope to influence decision-making on major social issues (In de Weydenthal et al. 1983:22).

### **4.3 Polish Society in the 1970s**

The political crisis which rocked the Baltic cities of Gdansk, Gdynia and Sopot in 1970 resulted in the fall of Gomulka, in power since the Poznan crisis of 1956. It heralded a new period in the People's Republic of Poland, its last 20 years... yet two very different decades. Under Gierek, the new technocratic leader, government attempts to re-establish legitimacy became more explicitly economic. Administrative effectiveness, and *not* the "nomenklatura", were to broaden public support for the regime (Smolar 1983:45).

A number of policy changes reflected these priorities. International trade was to become an integral part of "mature" socialism. The instability inherent in a greater interdependency was now seen as an unavoidable cost of progress.

Early in the decade, import-led growth, dependent on massive Western credits, was to spur economic modernization and expand Polish presence in export markets. In the first five years, imports went up 24%, exports 19%, while the total value of credits obtained from the West over the next decade

represented \$38.6 billion.<sup>1</sup> Output, consumption, investment and foreign trade all accelerated sharply. By the end of 1975, the capital stock in state industry stood at 167% of the 1970 level, while the average wage was 33% higher (Farell 1981:299). Internal demand for consumer goods was to stimulate the light industry sector of the Polish economy (Brus 1983:37). *Consumers did experience an unprecedented increase in material living standards.* In fact the engine of growth was to be consumption, and consumption was to be the ultimate objective of economic activity. Gomulka's previous price hikes on basic foodstuffs were rescinded, and then prices were frozen. Agricultural policy was, however, more in keeping with the assumptions of the past, i.e., that more extensive socialization of land would solve structural and production problems. The share of investment credit disbursed to private agriculture thus fell from 88% in 1970 to 27% in 1980, while cooperative and state farms benefitted from increased funds; if national production increased somewhat during the decade, the private sector's net marketed production per acre was nevertheless 14% higher than that of the socialized sector in the first quinquennium, and 23% higher in the second one (in Taras 1986:115).

Gierek opted for a "Westernization" of Poland, but wound up with a neo-colonial economy in deep trouble. When boom would turn to bust, his "enrich yourselves" policies of the early 1970s would contribute to the moral and social malaise that underlay the 1980 crisis. Although he tried to rationalize the traditional system, his reforms in fact reinvigorated central control by introducing indirect methods to complement direct ones. By 1975, the old ways managed to "seep" back into the bureaucracy, which reverted to familiar, top-heavy control mechanisms (Ibidem:105). Gierek's "premature consumerism"

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<sup>1</sup> With 26 billion of those owing at the end of 1981 (Taras 1986:105).

almost worked – incomes and consumption actually increased, for a while (Pravda 1983:69). Yet various problems were to overwhelm his efforts: bad planning and structural inadequacies couldn't sustain an unjustifiably broad investment front and the excessive imports of capital goods. His modernization program overemphasized heavy industry, chemicals and electronics, while failing to upgrade production in other areas (Kanet 1981:391). While the regime ploughed investment into non profit-generating sectors of industry, *the awakening of mass consumption aspirations*, combined with the recession in the West, kept export earnings from taking off. Meanwhile, the demand for Polish coal fell, oil prices rose, and by 1979 the country had become a net energy importer (Taras 1986:120). These factors stopped the massive investment program in its tracks and *strained the food subsidy program*. Popular discontent grew. Various opinion polls conducted throughout the period indicate a steady deterioration in public satisfaction with living standards. This included an increasing political irritation at the operational deficiencies of the system (de Weydenthal et al., 1983:22).

By the second half of the decade, wages had outstripped cost-of-living adjustments. Yet consumer goods were relatively scarce, and for political considerations, government stores sold non-durables below production costs. An excess money supply led to excess demand pressures, which provoked an explosion in black market activities. One of the de facto results of a burgeoning "second economy" was the accentuation of social inequalities. A new petty bourgeoisie of entrepreneurs appeared, who serviced the lucrative black market, and "often leapfrogged employees of the state sector in terms of living standards and material wealth" (Taras 1986: 110). A new middle class of non-party consumers also materialized, at the growing expense of the many

segments of the working class (Sanford 1983:34). Professionals belonged to this class. A 1978 study showed that an average of 11.2% of Poles felt that their living standards had improved considerably, but once the figure is broken down, we find that 16.8% of the intelligentsia vs 6.6% of workers shared that perception (in Pravda 1983:72). The former weren't doing too badly, and yet, an obstacle hampered their quest for materially-based prestige: institutional bureaucratization (Novak 1980:14). Vavakova (1984:57) refers to their frustration over the fact that the way up was blocked by the high moral price to be paid: joining the Party.

In fact, that was but one aspect of the problems facing professionals, perhaps the most obvious one in terms of subjective experience. One study of less-developed countries suggested that efforts to accelerate economic development could lead to an overproduction of graduates in relation to structural needs:

Our model showed that, in the country of emigration, public subsidizing of the production of general skills together with administered salary levels in the public sector tended to increase the outflow [of talent] (Thomas 1973:329).

This seems to correspond to what a Canadian sociologist (Matejko 1972:90) wrote about Poland even at the outset of the decade:

Polish institutions of higher education produce every year new caches of professionals. The economic development of the country is structurally very retarded in relation to the advance in education, and this imposes limitations on prospects of promotion and professional stabilization.

Moreover, this could be apt to frustrate individuals in Poland more than in the West, certainly because of the no-exit policies, of course, but also, and perhaps in a more subtle way, because it would run counter to the widely inculcated Marxist ideology of the regime, promoting work as a key social value:

Work is one of the highest values connected with the socialist system. The socialist ideology stresses its great importance both for the society as a whole and for every individual... it is postulated in the socialist society that every man should regard work as something valuable, not only as life necessity or way of earning his living but also as a way of developing one's gifts and skills, as a means of creative expression and of attaining social goals. (Dobrowolska quoted by Simon 1981: 54)

All this could certainly exacerbate the problems faced by Polish professionals. Other studies, carried out in the 1970s, show them from a different angle. Novak (1980:15) discovered that the higher one had climbed the "stratification ladder" the more democratic but less egalitarian one became. So, when the workers' egalitarian demands became widely publicized through the dissemination of the Gdansk Agreement early in the fall of 1980, they could have been perceived by some professionals as a potential threat to their privileges (Sanford 1983:34). At the same time, those individuals with international skill-sets, like engineers or architects, for example, would be aware of the ease of integration and of the material benefits accruing to their socio-professional category in the capitalist countries. Foreign travel did go up in the seventies, and many had direct contact with a Western society during private or professional trips. Brus (1983:37) speaks of a traditional pro-

Western bias in the Polish intelligentsia. At a crucial juncture these factors could act in synergistic fashion to lessen the resistance to mobility.

As the 1970s advanced, the supply of foodstuffs and small consumer goods worsened. The 1976 strikes imposed a virtual price freeze on meat prices. Inflation worsened, with a growing divergence between free market and state store food prices, an unusually large increase in the official consumer price index, and an "improbably high growth rate of private savings" (Farrell 1981:299). As the public slowly lost its temper, Gierek opted for greater political freedom. This strategy was not unknown to his regime, as Bielasiak (1981:127) has noted:

The 1970s, in fact, witnessed the proliferation of consultative meetings, regularized meetings of state and party organs, and national debates on major social and economic issues. The leadership style of the Gierek government, therefore, had a definite inclusionary dimension and sought to restructure polity-society relations by the introduction of new modes of representation and consultation, regulation and information diversification, as well as the abandonment of command politics in favor of the politics of persuasion and manipulation.

Public expectations about an improvement in conditions, after a period of relatively high optimism (60%± in polls for 1973-1975), plummeted to 30% in 1976, and stabilized at about 39% during 1978-79 (Wojciechowska 1980:34). Dissident activities mushroomed, and were tolerated as a way of buying social peace. Finally, the long hot summer of 1980 came to pass, and the events of August were to seriously alter the political landscape in Poland over the next 16 months, and beyond.

Economic performance, which had been defined as the ideological *basis* of the regime, had become abysmal. National income targets were not reached in 1979, 1980 or 1981, and industrial and agricultural production were declining. Yet as political legitimacy went, Gierek had been pushing Poland closer to the West, that is, further away from an explicitly ideological symbolism. Galbraith's (1987:55) insight is noteworthy in that he suggested that West European living standards were becoming, "relentlessly and inescapably, the test of East bloc performance".<sup>1</sup> But economic needs grew "more frustrating than ever" *after* Solidarity appeared on the scene (Novak 1981:53). One series of polls showed that from February to mid-September 1980, negative public assessment of the economic situation of the country went from 46% to 86% (in Pravda 1983:73). The strong buying power of the population became more obvious to it after August 1980, when people were confronted with excess cash chasing increasingly rare goods on the market, which could only lead to rising inflation (de Weydenthal et al.1983:54). The economic deterioration that occurred between 1979 and 1982 shows that the economic crisis was *at its worst* during the Solidarity period, with the average Pole experiencing a drop in living standards that could even reach, in some cases, the level recorded in 1972 (Taras 1986:112).<sup>2</sup> Parallel to this, independent political activities, which had become a political safety valve in the late seventies, as Gierek had foreseen, came to the surface. There was a powerful growth of social activism following the August-September agreements. Many saw the emergence of Solidarity and its activities as

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<sup>1</sup> In hindsight, it would seem that the '70s *did* help to lay the groundwork for 1989's thaw.

<sup>2</sup> This fact was used by the regime in a facile propaganda campaign aimed at discrediting the trade union.

developments heralding possible changes in the character of public life as a whole. The volume of information and its content increased dramatically in the months following the signing of the August social accords. People previously active in dissident activities channeled their energies into the *now more open public sphere*.<sup>1</sup> The national mood became very upbeat.

The crucial difference between the 1980-81 explosion of social activism and its precursors was that, as a result of the emergence and the institutionalization of the new social organizations, the public became more confident and consequently more determined to effect a lasting change in the operations of the system. [...] ...the public continued to distrust the party and the government; no official explanations or arguments were likely to alter that. The commonly held conviction that the authorities were unwilling to accept changes merely reinforced popular pressure for their implementation, with or without official support. Public resolve therefore mounted, and the system gradually crumbled. (de Weydenthal et al. 1983: 25)

The tension within the party and the strain between the party and society were so strong that no single element, even an explicit indication of Soviet preference, could mitigate them. The crisis intensified, largely because of the deterioration of organizational conditions in the party itself.<sup>2</sup> If the public played a central role in the conflict between state and polity, shaping its evolution and defining its character, it was still deprived of clearly

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<sup>1</sup> Various sources refer to the exciting political atmosphere which existed in Poland during Solidarity's 16-month legal existence. This could suggest that departees of this period would tend to be rather non-political in their lifestyle, with a heightened degree of preoccupation with their material conditions.

<sup>2</sup> It must be remembered that as of mid-January 1981, every sixth member of Solidarity belonged to the Party, and that six months later, a poll revealed that the PUWP had the lowest ranking in confidence expressed by the public towards 15 different public institutions - 15% (in Weydenthal 1983:23).

established channels through which to actually influence the system's operations. Meanwhile, the government tried to ride out its problems with a strategic mixture of procrastination and appeasement. Significantly, for instance, tourist travel to various Western countries ceased to be a nightmare of red tape for the first time in decades, and more and more people were able to get passports *without difficulty* (de Weydenthal et al.1983:24). In the context of the social turmoil prevalent in Polish society at that time, in the context of the economic crisis which seemed to be deepening, to what extent did the regime foresee, or rather intentionally hope for, specific results of that de facto policy switch on so-called tourism, which, in many cases, was to turn into actual migration, if not outright "emigration"? <sup>1</sup> How intentional was it? Solidarity was seen by the public as the most important symbol of national aspirations. The phenomenal growth in the union's membership (up to 10 million) and the degree of public confidence in it confirmed that. Everything thus far points to a cultural, political and socio-economic situation after August 1980 quite apt to produce a substantial migration stream, yet one not easily attributable to strictly political persecution per se. Why *did* they decide to leave Poland? Wasn't there an overwhelming personal, economic component to their departures? In the next section we explore subjective research data on this issue and others relevant to it.

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<sup>1</sup> That is, a "skimming" of the most dissatisfied elements in the public at large...

#### 4.4 Subjective Research Data

A number of studies have assessed the *Weltanschauungen* of Poles. Three of these are of more specific interest to us. In a Scientific American article entitled "Values and Attitudes of the Polish People", Novak (1981:45) illuminates the Solidarity era of 1980-81 by examining 25 years of social research in Poland. He shows that the events didn't as much stem from a change in values but from a demand for social institutions more in accord with values consistently held:

Observation of everyday life in Poland in the past few months indicates that much of the interpersonal irritation and aggressiveness has disappeared. [...] If the elimination of the symptoms of frustration and aggression is confirmed by systematic surveys, it will be shown that essential needs of the people are being satisfied. Since the needs cannot be economic ones (in this respect the people are now more frustrated than ever), we must look for another explanation. In the end it may be found in the reintegration of our atomized society, in the elimination of the feeling of powerlessness and in the restoration of people's dignity. (Nowak 1981: 53)

In 1985, in Washington D.C., Strmiska presented the preliminary results of a research project which had examined the attitudes held by Polish refugees living in France to better understand their worldviews and their reasons for leaving.<sup>1</sup> Finally, in *L'échappée vers l'Ouest*, de Sève (1991) interviewed Polish refugees living mostly in Canada with much the same goal in mind. We present some of the findings of these studies, relying more specifically on the latter

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<sup>1</sup> "La recherche porte sur les orientations de valeur des acteurs, leur perception de la réalité, leurs représentations, aspirations, considérations normatives, leurs attentes." (Strmiska et al.1985a:4)

two.<sup>1</sup> It may be useful to recall our hypothesis, so that the following data can be read in its context :

*As for the case of Poland, we suggest that in fact personal convenience did constitute an important component of the motivational forces for "migration" in established professionals. This is not to their discredit – voluntary migration is based on personal convenience! Conversely, it has little to do with political flight.*

*We hypothesize that in fact, if anything, they were "economic" refugees [again, perhaps a misnomer of sorts], that in fact they had much more in common with economic migrants than with bona fide political refugees.*

#### 4.4.1 The Strmiska et al. Study<sup>2</sup>

As soon as one delves into the actual experience of informants having lived in Poland, new dimensions come to the surface, ones not readily obvious from an objective analysis of socioeconomic circumstances, yet on the basis of which one can propose more complete objective descriptions of a given

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<sup>1</sup> Although some informants were bound to have left Poland during the 16 months of Solidarity, i.e., from August 1980 to December 1981, in the 450,000-strong wave of refugees that we've alluded to previously, these two studies do not mention precise departure dates, except to speak of a relative recency of their subjects' arrival in the host country. We would surmise that some would have left during that period since both studies were carried out in the early and mid-eighties, and relatively few people left after martial law was declared at the end of 1981. We do not believe this lack of absolute certainty to be a major impediment to the use of the data, however, since Novak (1981:51) has shown through a repeat study (1958 and 1978) that there was (and probably still is) a remarkable stability in the Polish value system over time. These research projects were qualitative in nature, relying on in-depth interviews, using random samples of East European refugees from Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

<sup>2</sup> We used a version of this study meant for conference distribution and comprising a number of papers. Small case letters refer to them separately; their individual headings are in the bibliography. The authors, concentrating on people having left for "political" reasons, had a sample of 40 refugees from Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary primarily composed of professionals: "intellectuels, employés supérieurs, cadres de la production" (Strmiska et al.1985:6).

social reality, showing to what extent the subjective experience of objective processes is part and parcel of reality, and how its study opens a window on the true complexity of reality. Strmiska (1985a:10) thus sheds some light on the societal forces that shaped Polish attitudes:

...le développement des orientations des membres des STS [société de type soviétique] se trouve fortement influencé par certains éléments constitutifs du projet de société ayant cours dans les pays en question: concentration unilatérale de toute l'attention sur les inégalités économiques, et avant tout sur celles qui sont liées aux formes institutionnalisées de propriété; sous-estimation des inégalités dans les rapports de pouvoir en tant que source virtuelle de nouvelles contradictions structurales; scientisme et technologisme minimisant l'autonomie considérable du développement des rapports sociaux et des orientations culturelles à l'égard des sciences et des techniques; représentations mécanistes et organicistes de la relation individus-société qui tendent à réduire toute société moderne à un seul sujet collectif (en fait, aux instances de direction politique) et niant la nécessité d'assurer les échanges entre une pluralité irréductible de sujets individuels et collectifs; surestimation des rapports de force, de la force pure et de la violence comme moyens permettant de réaliser les transformations sociales projetées; importance exagérée accordée aux activités instrumentales et incompréhension des besoins affectifs et spirituels des hommes, vision simplifiée des transformations sociales qui exigent, en fait, non seulement des "négations", mais l'invention de solutions nouvelles, etc. [...]

Ensemble, ces aspects de l'idéologie institutionnalisée ouvrent la voie au développement de tendances monocratiques, car les membres des STS ne peuvent guère leur échapper: ils les intériorisent, souvent malgré eux, en raison de pesanteurs sociologiques et nombre d'entre eux s'en trouvent encore marqués comme "en creux" alors même qu'ils cherchent des solutions de rechange et des satisfactions de compensation dans le cadre du système, toutes formes

de comportement plus libre demeurant interdites dans la situation qui est la leur.

These are some of the research findings of the Strmiska et al. interviews:

- ➔ 61% of Poles left their country without the permission of the authorities. (1985b:12)
- ➔ The most negative judgement on societal capacity for need satisfaction came from the Polish informants: 85% felt that their society had been unable to satisfy their needs, versus an average of 45% for the three countries combined. (1985b:19)
- ➔ 57% of subjects categorically rejected the STS [soviet type society] system, but Poles were the most adamant, at 77%. (1985b: 27)
- ➔ Attitudes towards socio-cultural movements revealed an acute sensitivity vis-à-vis freedom of expression, with 69.2% of Poles believing that there never was enough freedom. If this result is linked to the oft-repeated statement that "one must accept [others' ideas], even if one doesn't agree with their content", then the contours of a powerful consensus appear, shared by 92,2% of Poles. (1985c: 6)
- ➔ Poles had a tendency to attribute all the faults of social life in their country to the characteristics, to the very nature of the social system. (1985c: 7)
- ➔ *Compared with their counterparts, Poles most often expressed the desire for a greater salary range (i.e., greater distance between top and bottom remuneration levels.)*<sup>1</sup> (1985d: 4)

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<sup>1</sup> **Italics in this section have been added for emphasis.**

- ➔ *Many interviewees mentioned numerous problems with the supply of goods as a major source of daily difficulties in their countries: 20% of Hungarians, 33% of Czechs but 100% of Poles felt that the problems linked to supplies had been 'very serious':*<sup>1</sup> (1985d: 6)
- ➔ The highest proportion, although not representing the majority of the subjects (42%), believed that major inequalities in their countries of origin were political in nature, but inequalities arising from economic or socio-economic causes were also mentioned frequently (27%). The Poles stressed the weight of political inequalities as a first factor. (1985e:10)
- ➔ The Poles were the ones who condemned State property the most virulently. (1985d:1)
- ➔ The interviewees' assessment of their experiences in their native countries contained contradictory elements; their assessment of their personal lives was for the most part positive, whereas their assessment of political life was negative, or at best reserved... [...] Primordial to the Poles [...] was ending dependency on the Soviet Union. (1985g:1,2)
- ➔ The professional status and material well-being of the majority of the interviewees was equivalent or virtually equivalent (17.5+45 = 62.5%) to what they had known in their countries of origin.
- ➔ 75% of all informants left for reasons that related in some way to the socio-political system. 37% left because of an explicit rejection of the political regime in place (the most

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<sup>1</sup> Some subjects had a tendency to minimize the problems they had experienced with the supply of consumer goods. Strmiska et al. thus explain this 'surprising' attitude: since their arrival in the West, many of them came to understand that these difficulties had not been independent ones, ones isolated from a larger reality; that they were corollary aspects of the regimes they had lived under. In this sense, the researcher could concentrate on the critique the informants addressed to the political system in general rather than its distinct effects: in fact, notes the author, that's how most interviewees' thoughts and comments proceeded.

frequently cited reason). Others mentioned, as specific reasons for leaving, problems that arose as consequences of the political system: some mentioned restrictions in the professional sphere (5%); the impossibility of either practicing their profession or of practicing it in appropriate conditions; the difficulties of daily life, restrictions on communications and in cultural life in general, the impediments to travel abroad, etc. Migration was quite often motivated by the desire to insure a better future for their children (10%). In some cases (10%), a set of various reasons formed the basis of the decision to leave. (1985b:11)

- ➔ *Only 15% of subjects had been political "activists" in Eastern Europe. (1985b:7)*
- ➔ Amongst various motives, it seemed that the "flight from a specific reality" [push factor] was encountered more frequently than "a search for a new life" [pull factor], that is, at least among the individuals who left for "political" reasons. [according to their own assessments] (1985b:12)
- ➔ *Among the refugee 'ideal types' that arose out of the study, one was a composite of individuals for whom departure was seen as a first political act. These people had been politically passive, back home, repressing their critical attitudes, or... to see them gradually crystallize after they left Eastern Europe. (1985b:14)*
- ➔ Attitudes towards the native country were not always stable. They followed a trend in which the tendency toward more critical assessments was much stronger than the reverse (30% vs 7.5%); this was true above all for the Poles (46%) ... (1985f: 5)

#### 4.4.2 The de Sève Study <sup>1</sup>

Available in a more finished form than the Strmiska study, de Sève's results form the basis of L'échappée vers l'Ouest (1991, 254 p.). Hers is more of a qualitative (and rather descriptive) study in that no statistical trends are fleshed out of her sample.<sup>2</sup> The author summarizes her research results in an essay covering various themes, while the second half of the volume is given over to edited transcripts of interviews with six of her informants, three of which are from Poland. The book offers an interesting glimpse at the mindset of refugees from Eastern Europe. Most of her subjects were university graduates and had "succeeded", so to speak, in the Polish People's Republic. From the outset, it would seem that she addresses our hypothesis directly:

Au cours de ces entrevues, les contours d'une société fortement hiéarchisée et infiniment plus inégalitaire que je ne le croyais se sont dessinés sous mes yeux. *En ce sens, les motivations économiques sont bel et bien présentes au nombre des motivations qui poussent à l'exil.* (de Sève 1991:8) <sup>3</sup>

How could economic motives be absent from people deciding to leave behind the difficult material life one lived in the People's Republic of Poland?

Quarante ans et plus de régime communiste [n'ont] pas effacé les inégalités sociales mais creusé l'écart entre

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<sup>1</sup> The author interviewed 67 refugees ("exilés volontaires") from the same three countries as Strmiska et al., between the summer of 1987 and the winter of 1988. They had to be in the West since at least three years. Again, knowing that not many people left Poland after martial law was declared in 1981, we surmise that a good number in this sample left Poland during the "porous border" period of liberalized travel, i.e. during the Solidarity era.

<sup>2</sup> Although a disproportionate importance shouldn't be given to statistical analysis when doing qualitative research, the author could have brought to light any differences amongst her informants attributable to national origin, as was done in the Strmiska et al. study.

<sup>3</sup> Again, italics in this section have been added for emphasis.

une couche dirigeante engoncée dans ses privilèges et une masse de gens obsédés par la difficulté croissante de remplir leur filet de provision ou de trouver un logement. (de Sève 1991:93)

The author is quick to note, however, that the weight of economic motives for departure was inversely proportional to the social standing of the refugees.<sup>1</sup> If the salary of a skilled worker was often higher than that of a professional, the latter, by virtue of a university education and the networks which that allowed, had a much better overall standard of living, the latter being in large part based on non-monetary privileges. (de Sève 1991:9) The author goes on to suggest, perhaps rather implicitly, that economic issues were present in professionals' motivational makeup, part of their aspirations already in Poland, if one were to judge by their career choices and life cycle pattern in "exile":

Règle générale, je pourrai constater que quelques années après leur arrivée, la plupart ont réussi à se refaire une situation confortable sur le plan économique même s'il leur aura fallu retourner provisoirement aux études ou renoncer à leurs années d'ancienneté pour repartir au bas de l'échelle dans leur profession ou une autre. (Ibid.)

The author goes on to place the economic factor motivating the decisions of her informants to leave Eastern Europe in the context of a wider rejection of the social systems in place there:

Ce qui frappe, c'est que pour [les professionnels], l'exil repose sur des facteurs autrement plus décisifs que

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<sup>1</sup> We're not too sure how de Sève reaches this conclusion, since by her own admission most of her informants were university graduates. Relying on their potentially biased assessment of the correlation between social standing and the strength of the economic motives for departure seems, to us, somewhat open to question.

l'attrait du niveau de vie à l'Occident. *Quoique la tentation à ce niveau soit forte quelle que soit l'origine sociale*. [...] Si jeunes ou vieux, des hommes et des femmes de toutes les couches sociales [sont partis], *c'est qu'ils voulaient échapper à la pauvreté certes mais surtout, que le socialisme réel leur était devenu intenable au point d'accepter l'idée pénible entre toutes d'abandonner leur pays sans espoir de retour...* (Ibid.)

In this sense, the psychological and material malaise experienced by informants would be perceived as interconnected dimensions of their state-run societies, and in that context, economic flight could be seen as a political act:

Comment survivre sans compromis honteux dans un environnement où les biens les plus élémentaires – un logement par exemple – ou les plus précieux – un permis de voyage ou un emploi intéressant – peuvent faire l'objet de chantage? *En ce sens, même les motivations économiques prennent un sens politique.* (de Sève 1991:15)

Although the informants had obtained refugee status, few of them had been politically active in any way, back home. Most of them would follow events from afar, commenting on them amongst friends in private and shying away from the public arena. More often than not, these men and women say that they decided to leave Eastern Europe because they wanted to be able to live lives in accordance with their convictions, because they wanted to "live normal lives in normal countries" (de Sève 1985: 15).<sup>1</sup> Thus dissidents were but the tip of the iceberg of general social dissatisfaction, which migrants acted on by leaving. If comparisons help foster discontent, the fact of frequent previous

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<sup>1</sup> Our translation; "qui entendaient mener une vie normale dans un pays normal".

trips to the West mentioned by Polish informants is certainly noteworthy (Ibid.: 81). Such trips could be the basis for a more subtle understanding by informants of the relative merits of each system:

Le paradoxe, c'est que les réfugiés de l'Est soient à la fois très conscients des limites de la société de consommation mais comprennent mieux que personne comment le chantage à la pénurie peut réduire à merci une population civile atteinte dans sa dignité faute de conditions de vie décentes. (de Sève 1991:116)

Finally, de Sève (1991:116) offers this prognosis for the difficult times of transition to a more efficient economy:

La tentation du départ sera moins forte, l'espoir renaissant d'un changement à moyen terme, *mais les demandes d'immigration sous la pression des contraintes matérielles pendant la dure période de transition succéderont aux demandes classiques de refuge à l'Ouest.*

In this chapter we have presented some subjective data on Polish refugees after having outlined some of the relevant objective circumstances surrounding their departure from Poland in the early 1980s. In the next part we conclude the thesis with a discussion of these issues in the context of our hypothesis and in the framework of our wider research aims.

## Conclusion

We now set this thesis off against its stated aims and verify if the case presented tends to confirm or falsify the hypothesis.<sup>1</sup> Other, relevant issues can be addressed thereafter. We refer to a passage from the introduction which specifies some of our intentions. Among other things, we sought answers to the following questions:

*Why would have those Poles that left done so, given the opportunity? Why would they have wanted to leave? We are addressing the issue of the presence or absence of explicitly economic factors predisposing Polish professionals (and potentially the larger population flow in which they found themselves) to leave their homeland en masse in 1980-81...*

And, again, the hypothesis:

*As for the case of Poland, we suggest that in fact personal convenience did constitute an important component of the motivational forces for "migration" in established professionals.<sup>2</sup> We hypothesize that in fact they had much more in common with economic migrants than with bona fide political refugees.*

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<sup>1</sup> "Tends" to confirm? Is this too prudent, too non-committal? If enough evidence has accumulated confirming our hypothesis, and it will be our contention that this is indeed so, then that hypothesis can be deemed to aptly reflect reality. Popper (1959) has suggested that a hypothesis is scientific only if it can specify the results that would show it to be false. In our case, a consistent and repeated absence of economic motives for migration in our target population would provide adequate grounds for falsification. A small number of facts running counter to the hypothesis, largely outweighed by others confirming it, may not suffice to falsify it. Hence, such data would "tend" to confirm the hypothesis.

<sup>2</sup> "Personal convenience" refers to economically-motivated migration. It is to be contrasted with "personal danger", which is central to political flight and the subsequent search for asylum as a refugee.

In the introduction we expressed concern about the overt bias in Canada and other Western countries against so-called "economic refugees" (mostly from the Third World). They were often refused asylum because they were not deemed to be "political" refugees. In seeking to establish the presence of clear economic motives for departure in Polish professionals, in showing that they were, on the whole, politically inactive, and thus not subjected to persecution, we sought to right the ideological imbalance created by a cold war logic.

From an objective standpoint, there were indeed ample *economic* reasons for professionals to leave Poland at the beginning of the 1980s. In Chapter 4, it was shown that a shift away from ideological politics towards an economic approach to political legitimacy led to the premature consumerism and heightened popular expectations of the early 1970s. This was followed by a massive economic slowdown, fostering the widespread social frustration which reached an acme *during* the Solidarity era, precisely when the regime relaxed its no-exit policy.<sup>1</sup> It was suggested that Solidarity's aims, based at the outset on workers' demands, could have been slightly alienating to the less egalitarian professionals, who sought more social differentiation within an internalized, prestige-based value structure aspiring to the Western model. This tension could have been compounded by career problems experienced by professionals within the skewed structure of the national labour market and the economic crisis at hand. Chapter 2 listed a number of hypotheses about migration, among

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<sup>1</sup> Not a coincidence, it would seem, in hindsight. Yet also a factor making departure (more or less permitted, in 1980-81) slightly *less* political, if by political we have in mind some necessary – albeit not sufficient in *our* view – conditions: that is, would be deemed political any and all flight from a country *enforcing* a no-exit policy.

which the following one seems appropriate to recall in the context of Polish professionals:

The characteristics of migrants tend to be intermediate between the characteristics of the population at origin and the population at destination. It is because they are already to some degree like the population at destination that they find certain positive factors there. (Lee 1966:54)

Another hypothesis also bears repeating:

Migrants proceed along well-defined routes, and the overcoming of a set of obstacles by early migrants lessens the difficulty of passage for later migrants, since 'pathways' are created. (Ibid.)

In Chapter 3, Poland was shown to be an economically peripheral nation in Europe, and a major historical migrant-generating country, with the psychological and physical pathways to permanent departure having been well-trodden by members of all social classes over many generations.<sup>1</sup> A widely-known consequence: resourceful Polish communities established worldwide, estimated as totaling 15 million people, many of the latter in touch with the home country through personal contacts. This fact would enhance the international "awareness space" of Poles in general, somewhat reducing the anxiety of a decision to leave. Professionals would have an expanded "awareness

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<sup>1</sup> In this perspective, seeing flight from Poland as a purely *political* phenomenon, as flight from communism, from a totalitarian regime which restricted freedoms, as another manifestation of the cold war seems, all of a sudden, to be rather ahistorical. If we were to set aside the command economy and the "dictatorship", we would still have a Poland that was on the periphery of the European economy, and thus apt to produce a steady flow of economic outmigration, perhaps akin to a country like Portugal, to reiterate a point raised earlier in the thesis.

space", over and above that, thanks in part to their higher education and frequent foreign travel.

As we move closer to the subjective arena covered in the second part of Chapter 4, a pattern reminiscent of economic migration seems to continue. From a subjective point of view, and strictly in the context of our hypothesis, it should suffice to show that economic reasons for leaving Poland in the early 1980s were clearly present in the wider motivational structure of professionals choosing to leave Poland. The research results suggest that this is indeed true:<sup>1</sup>

...les motivations économiques sont bel et bien présentes au nombre des motivations qui poussent à l'exil. (de Sève 1991:8)

...l'attrait du niveau de vie à l'Occident [représente une tentation] forte quelle que soit l'origine sociale. (Ibid.: 9)

[Si beaucoup ont rêvé d'émigrer] au Canada, c'est qu'ils voulaient échapper à la pauvreté ... (Ibid.)

Moving on to some political considerations, it would seem that professionals interviewed in both of the research projects, that is, refugees who had sought and received political asylum in the West, had only rarely if at all been involved in the kinds of politics that one could be persecuted for in Poland, i.e., "dissident" activism. For many, *leaving* was their *first* so-called

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<sup>1</sup> Perhaps economic motives *were* higher in workers than in professionals, as reported by de Sève, but this is a relative notion, and they were not absent from the hearts and minds of professionals. In fact, if the latter were not the subjects objectively most apt to have experienced economic motives for emigration, then the presence of such motives in professionals could conceivably bolster our hypothesis.

'political' act. In the Introduction we asked the following questions:

To what extent did the various people who came to Canada in the 1980s, often by *ad hoc* means, genuinely flee persecution in their home countries? Could they in fact have been seeking a better material life for themselves?

In the 1980s, increasing numbers of economic migrants circumvented overseas selection by coming to Canada and falsely claiming refugee status. Poles were "self-exiled persons" (a type of "Designated Class", as described in Chapter 1), that is, individuals in a "refugee-like" situation in need of resettlement. Yet we discovered that, barring exceptions unmentioned in the research data, Polish professionals were not victims of political persecution and that, by and large, they *were* seeking a better material life for themselves by freely choosing to flee Poland in the early eighties.<sup>1</sup>

We have presented many different elements that suggest this to be true. But a thorny issue remains: in view of the fact that the official Polish economy was totally controlled by the state, and therefore by politically appointed

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, the only politically active informant referred to by de Sève (1991: 199-208), and one of the three Polish subjects whose edited interviews are included in her book was, oddly enough, not a professional at all but a skilled worker. Moreover, he adamantly refused to leave Poland, although he had been interned for six months during martial law. He only agreed to leave after being harassed by the authorities and pressured by his own friends and family to do so:

Il faut tricher en Pologne pour vivre. Il faut faire du travail au noir. Avec la police derrière soi, c'est impossible. [...] Moi, je n'ai jamais été d'accord pour sortir de la Pologne. Trois amis, avec ma femme, ont tout organisé derrière mon dos. Une fois, on a fait une soirée entre amis. Tout le monde était d'accord sauf moi. J'ai parlementé avec eux toute la nuit. Je ne sais pas pourquoi j'ai accepté. Je le regrette. [...] Il y a trente-six millions de personnes qui vivent là-bas. J'ai quatre frères là-bas, mes amis, tout le monde vit là-bas. Pourquoi est-ce que moi, je suis ici? (in de Sève 1991:205)

personnel, with economic decisions being taken for political reasons, then would not economic hardship constitute a form of political persecution? <sup>1</sup>

If we do accept that economic motives for departure did exist, are we denying their political nature? Are we also implying that other, existential – and therefore political – motives didn't exist?<sup>2</sup> That economic motives were necessary *and sufficient* to provoke outmigration? No. Much has been written on the wrenching moral and psychological traumas that a Soviet-style regime imposes on its citizenry, in a thousand different ways, large and small:

The normal political lie leaves the distinction between truth and falsity intact... unlike the modern totalitarian lie, of which the ultimate goal is the total mental and moral expropriation of people. (Kolakowski 1984:128)

It is in fact very difficult to get an adequate idea of the effects of such a political regime on the human psyche, and that is why we have included Adam Wazyk's remarkable Poem for Adults in an appendix. It gives substance to the despair felt by many living behind the Iron Curtain before it was raised in 1989. It brings to light the duplicity required of people, the falseness of the public front to be kept up at all times. In general terms, the resultant stress could have predisposed some candidates towards emigration, while economic frustration would have pushed some of them over the threshold of a decision to leave when the opportunity presented itself. But that is not really the issue here. We are fully conscious of the pain and contradictions of life in the

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<sup>1</sup> Are there no politically-motivated economic decisions taken in Canada? Decisions that regularly bypass both the principles of economic efficiency *and* the mechanisms of democracy?

<sup>2</sup> It may be that "existential" problems are political in nature in a totalitarian system. Yet to be rigorous, to avoid being ahistorical, isn't that also true under capitalism?

Republic of Poland. But the oft-expressed salience of this intimate relationship between economics and politics under "communism" only brings to mind more forcefully the false inconspicuousness of such links under "capitalism", their constructed independence, especially in regard to the Third World. The intellectual omissions necessary to sustain this separation, at best less intentional than the result of a natural discomfort with cognitive dissonance, are no less immoral for being practised on a grand scale. They allow governments and people in the West to perceive asylum-seekers from Third World countries as merely seeking "material" improvement, thus remaining decidedly and comfortably blind to the grievous and *active* political persecution which horrendous inequality represents. In which, to some extent, we participate. By demonstrating the strong economic basis for emigration from Poland, by showing that a large proportion of those individuals that left would have had a high propensity to leave as economic emigrants if regular outmigration were possible, we have put the so-called "political" nature of their flight in a more stringent, international perspective.

While Poland was enacting a no-exit policy – which was, true enough, a political choice – then *exit* became a political transgression, akin to crossing the Berlin Wall. But it's only in the crossing of that line that a political act was committed... more than one informant mentioned that *leaving* Poland was in fact their *very first* political act! Couldn't it be the same with an individual leaving an even *more* impoverished country? Poland's economy was a shambles. The supply of goods was extremely disorganized. Political life was monopolized. The rules of survival were very particular. The West would indeed seem very attractive to Poles. But why would they be more credible refugees than people from the Third World? After all, their life expectancy at birth in

1989 was 66 years for males, 74 for females (Canadian Almanac 1991:229). Does this seem like a non-sequitur? It might cease to when we ask the following question: Again, why is flight from dire poverty – poverty created and maintained by political choices, by an unequal distribution of power and wealth – not perceived as a political act? Why was the Soviet model of totalitarianism worse than the Latin American dictatorship? It would certainly seem that in recent times, terror was much more widely practiced in the latter.

Political liberties now abound in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Yet the abolition of no-exit policies unleashed a flood of... *political* refugees! The transparency of this ideological cover became obvious. The number of foreigners seeking political *asylum* in Western Europe rose from 70,000 in 1983 to 442,000 in 1990, with the vast majority of recent arrivals being from the East Bloc (Chua-Eoan 1991:19). What was the nature of persecution in 1990? In unemployment lines? The previously powerful economic motives to leave Eastern Europe became more pressing than ever. But the end of the cold war has seen the end of the ideological sparring between East and West. The result: new anti-immigration laws started springing up all over Europe. As one author put it, "It would be a cruel irony if the end of the cold war saw a new Iron Curtain built by the West" (Ibid.:24). Another author has also captured the irony in all this:

For years we've been pressing these countries to open up and adopt freer immigration [i.e., emigration!] policies. Now that they are doing that and the way is open, there will be a backlash if we erect laws of our own. That won't be acceptable. (Loescher quoted in Ibid.)

W. Gunther Plaut (1985), in his report to the Minister of Employment and Immigration, examined how claims were being handled and why serious backlogs existed. It was important to improve the refugee determination process while safeguarding principles of justice, fairness and humaneness (1985:4). Yet he concluded somewhat disingenuously by quoting the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, who emphasized the key role which public opinion could play in the fate of refugees. If States were not responding positively to refugee situations, it was due to an unfavourable climate of public opinion (in Plaut 1985:178). The dominant discourse of cold war rhetoric propounded by States in the West and its influence on the regnant ideological climate was somehow transformed into an autonomous entity, i.e., "public opinion". The High Commissioner was distressed because there had been

...increasing evidence in recent years of confusion in the public mind between the very special situation of refugees and that of the many millions of other aliens who are endeavouring to gain entry into countries other than their own. This confusion has been to the detriment of refugees and has tended to impede a sympathetic approach to refugees at the official level.<sup>1</sup>

Inasmuch as immigration policy in Canada as well as elsewhere in the West has been susceptible to the vicissitudes of cold war ideology, it has simply not been in tune with actual human needs. In a world of limited resources, preferential treatment of any group bypasses the principles of fair

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<sup>1</sup> The key is not to keep out bona fide refugees, but to keep economic refugees equal *among themselves...* to disadvantage no individual petitioners unduly simply because of their *country's standing* in our "public opinion". Moreover, if government policy was confused every time public opinion was divided, one could wonder if a certain *électoralisme* hadn't won out over political courage in our parliamentary democracy. Policy makers should operate under the principle of "the buck stops here", and government reports have no business *concluding* with such inanities.

and equal treatment, and the cost is borne by other groups. Plaut closed with a statement by Ambassador J. Alan Beesley (Ibid.:1985:179):

Let me say without reservation that there will be no retreat from the high standard of protection Canada has achieved in the past.

Our thesis has shown the bias in Canada's past refugee admittance practice, one which calls for vigilance in the future, when the end of the East-West conflict may bring the North-South one to the fore. Let us hope that Canada not only protects itself in the multipolar world of tomorrow, in the difficult years of transition to come.



## Appendix 1

### Poem for Adults 1

Adam Wazyk

1

I jumped by mistake on the wrong bus;  
 people sat as usual returning from work.  
 The bus swept down a strange road,  
 through Holy Cross Street. You are no longer a Holy Cross!  
 Where are your antique shops, your bookstalls and students?  
 Where are you, the dead?  
 Even your memory fades.

Then the bus stopped  
 at a little square which had been dug up.  
 The back of an old four-story house  
 stood waiting its fate.

I got off at the little square  
 in a working class quarter,  
 with memories shimmering from the grey walls.

People were hurrying home  
 and I dared not ask where I was.  
 Was I not here as a child, visiting the chemist?

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<sup>1</sup> The original appeared in Nowa Kultura (VI-Aug) 1955. Lucjan Blit's translation was published in Partisan Review (Dec) 1957:129-137, after having appeared in the British monthly, The Twentieth Century. We have slightly adapted the translation. This poem does not paint a very rosy picture of life behind the Iron Curtain. Yet this has never been put into question. But what makes life so much more attractive in the Third World? One can contrast two kinds of freedom, and weigh their relative merits as well as the costs of pursuing one to the detriment of the other: the freedom *to*, based on individual rights, and the freedom *from*, based on collective rights: freedom to speak out vs. freedom from famine, freedom to be mobile vs. freedom from terror. Perhaps this poem should have been followed by another one, to better emphasize the issue (perhaps in the Amnesty International style?).

I went home,  
like a man who had gone out to buy medicine,  
and returned twenty years later.

My wife asked: Where were you?  
The children asked: Where were you?  
I was silent, trembling like a mouse.

## 2

The squares, like cobras, hold their beauties high;  
The houses flaunt themselves like peacocks.  
Give me one fragment of old stone.  
Let me find myself back in Warsaw.

I stand like a mindless post  
under the lamps in the square,  
I praise, I wonder, I curse,  
with cobra, with abracadabra.

I let myself go, like a hero  
beneath the compassionate columns.  
What do I care for these Galluxa puppets  
painted as if for the coffin!

Here young people buy cones!  
Oh, here all are young,  
their memories hold only ruins;  
the girl will shortly give birth.

Here tawdriness goes hand in hand with compassion:  
what gas grown into stone will endure.  
Here you will learn your letters,  
future poet of Warsaw.

It is natural for you to love them.  
I loved other stones, grey and great  
ringing with memories.

The squares, like cobras, hold their beauties high;  
the houses flaunt themselves like peacocks.

Give me one fragment of old stone:  
let me find myself back in Warsaw.

## 3

"Today our skies are not empty" – *from a political speech*  
It was dawn. I heard the whistling of jets.  
They are expensive, and yet we must...  
When we no longer want to talk about the earth we know  
then we say: the sky is not empty.

A legion of boys releases doves.  
a girl knots a scarf...  
when we do not want to talk frankly about the earth,  
then we say: The sky is not empty.

## 4

From villages, from little towns, they go in wagons,  
to build a foundry, to conjure up a town,  
to dig out a new Eldorado.  
A pioneer army, a gathered mob.  
They crowd each other in barracks, in hostels, in huts.  
they plunge and whistle in the muddy streets:  
the great migration, dishevelled ambition,  
on their necks a little string – the Cross of Czestochowa.  
With a storehouse of oaths, with a little feather pillow,  
bestial with vodka, boasting of tarts,  
a distrusting soul – wrenched from the bonds,  
half-awake and half-mad,  
silent in words, singing snatches of song –  
is suddenly thrust out from mediaeval darkness.  
a migrating mass, this inhuman Poland,  
howling with boredom in December evenings...  
from rubbish baskets swinging on ropes  
boys run like cats on the walls;  
from the women's hostels, those lay monasteries,  
sounds of lust and travail. The duchesses  
will be rid of their issue – the Wisla flows near by.  
The great migration builds new industry,  
unknown to Poland but known to history,

is fed on great empty words, lives  
wildly from day to day in spite of preachers –  
smelted in this slow torture, amid coal fumes, is  
a working class.  
Much is wasted. As yet only dross.

## 5

And it happened this way: a brown column  
of smoke burst from a burning mine,  
a gallery is cut off; of the agony below  
no one will tell; the black tunnel is a coffin.  
the saboteur had blood, bones, hands.  
A hundred families mourn, two hundred families;  
they write in the papers, or they do not write.  
Only smoke wreathing the air hangs over all.

## 6

In the railway station  
Miss Jadzia behind the counter,  
so charming when she yawns,  
so charming when she pours...  
LOOK OUT! THE ENEMY OFFERS YOU VODKA !

Here you'll be poisoned for sure,  
Miss Jadzia'll make off with your boots,  
so charming when she yawns  
so charming when she pours...  
LOOK OUT! THE ENEMY OFFERS YOU VODKA !

Don't go, boy, to Nowa Huta,  
You will be poisoned on the way,  
be warned by this ominous poster,  
in your stomach you have a People's fish:  
LOOK OUT! THE ENEMY OFFERS YOU VODKA !

## 7

I will never believe, my dear, that a lion is a little lamb,  
I will never believe, my dear, that a little lamb is a lion!  
I will never believe, my dear, in a magic spell;  
I will never believe in minds kept under glass;  
but I believe that a table has only four legs,

but I believe that the fifth leg is a chimera,  
and when the chimeras rally, my dear,  
then one dies, slowly, of a worn-out heart.

## 8

It is true,  
when these farthing boredoms  
howl down the great aims of education,  
when the vultures of abstraction pick out your brains,  
when students are enclosed in text books without windows,  
when language is reduced to thirty incantations,  
when the lamp of imagination is extinguished,  
when good people from the moon deny us our taste,  
then truly  
oblivion is dangerously near.

## 9

A drowned man was fished out of the Wisla.  
A note was found in his pocket:  
'My sleeve is right,  
my button is wrong,  
my collar is wrong,  
but my belt is right.  
They buried him under a willow.

## 10

In the newly painted street of fresh built flats,  
mortar dust floats in the air, a cloud covers the sky,  
steamrollers flatten the road,  
transplanted chestnuts are greening, they rustle in the dusk.  
Under the chestnuts run children, big and small,  
from the half-demolished frames they take wood for cooking.  
Little fifteen-year-old whores go down the planks to the cellars,  
they have plaster smiles, they smell of mortar.  
Nearby the radio plays in the darkness, unearthly dance music.  
Night is coming, hooligans play as hooligans will.  
How difficult it is to fall asleep in the years of your childhood,  
    among the rustling chestnuts...  
Float away into darkness, you dissonance!

I wanted to find joy in the newness,  
 I wanted to tell of a young street, but not that one.  
 Have I lost the gift of seeing, or the gift of convenient blindness?  
 I am left with a short note, with these verses of a new grief.

## 11

Racketeers enticed her into a quiet hell  
 in a remote villa, out of town –  
 she escaped, and wandered through the night, drunk.  
 She lay on the pavement till morning.  
 She was thrown out of the Art School for want of a socialist  
 morality.  
 She poisoned herself once – they saved her.  
 She poisoned herself twice – they buried her.

It is all very old. Old are the twisters  
 of socialist morality.

The dreamer Fourier beautifully prophesied  
 that the sea would flow with lemonade.  
 And does it not flow?

They drink sea-water,  
 and cry –  
 Lemonade!  
 they return quietly home  
 to vomit  
 to vomit.

## 12

They ran to us, shouting:  
 A communist does not die.  
 Only the memory abides.  
 The worthier the man,  
 the greater the pain.  
 They ran to us, shouting:  
 Under socialism  
 a cut finger does not hurt.

They cut their finger,  
they felt pain.  
They lost faith.

## 13

They cursed the routinists.  
They taught the routinists.  
They shamed the routinists.  
They called in literature to help –  
a five-year-old snotty-nosed child,  
who needs educating,  
who needs to educate others –  
Is this routinist an enemy?  
The routinist is not an enemy.  
A routinist should be taught.  
A routinist should be enlightened.  
A routinist should be shamed.  
A routinist should be convinced.  
He should be educated.

They turn people into feeding bottles.  
I heard a clever lecture:  
'Without appropriately distributed  
economic incentives  
we will not achieve technical progress.'  
These are the words of a Marxist.  
This is the knowledge of the law of realism.  
The end of utopia.

No story will be told of the routinist,  
but there will be novels about the troubles of the inventor,  
of the fears which disquiet us all.

This is a naked poem,  
before it is clothed  
with vexation, colours and the smells of this earth.

14

There are people overworked,  
 there are people from Nowa Huta  
 who have never been to a theater,  
 there are Polish apples which Polish children cannot reach,  
 there are boys forced to lie,  
 there are girls forced to lie,  
 there are old wives turned away from their homes by their husbands,  
 there are the wary dying of tired hearts,  
 there are people slandered, spat upon,  
 there are people stripped in the streets by common bandits,  
 for whom the authorities still seek a legal definition,  
 there are people who wait for documents,  
 there are people who wait for justice,  
 there are people who wait very long.

We make demands on this earth,  
 for the people who are overworked,  
 for keys to open doors,  
 for rooms with windows,  
 for walls which do not rot,

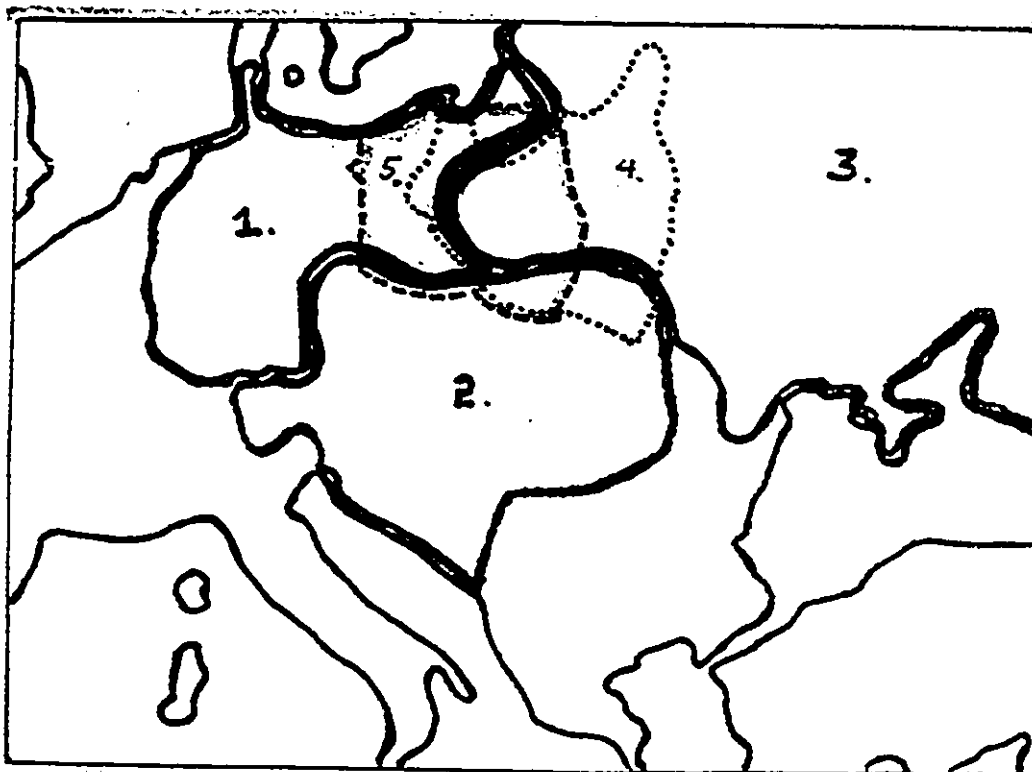
for hatred of little documents,  
 for holy human time,  
 for safe homecoming,  
 for a simple distinction between words and deeds.

We make demands on this earth,  
 for which we did not throw dice,  
 for which a million perished in battle:  
 for a clear truth,  
 for the bread of freedom,  
 for burning reason,  
 for burning reason.

We demand these every day.  
 We demand through the Party.

## Appendix 2

### Historical Map of Poland



Source: adapted from C. McEvedy 1985: 45, 65 & 89

1. German Empire, 1914 (Prussia)<sup>1</sup>
2. Austro-Hungarian Empire, 1914 (Galicia)
3. Russian Empire, 1914 (Congress Kingdom)
4. Polish Republic, 1921 <sup>2</sup>
5. People's Republic of Poland, 1945

<sup>1</sup> The name of the Polish area in each empire is noted in parentheses.

<sup>2</sup> First appearance of a Polish state since 1795.

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