

95th Year, No. 167

MONTREAL, THURSDAY, JULY 18, 1963

• • • PRICE FIVE CENTS

## Free Enterprise Flourishes

Marxism Stops Short  
Of Poland's FarmsBy PETER DESBARATS  
(Fourth of a Series)

There are various methods of fighting Communism. One is to sit smugly in North America and make loud noises about the Red menace. Another and more effective way is to sit on a farm in Poland, behind the Iron Curtain, and mind your own business.

This is what millions of Polish farmers have been doing since 1945, when Communists took over the government of their country with the support of Russian troops. More than 15 years later, almost 90 per cent of Poland's agricultural produce still comes from privately owned farms. In no other Soviet

bloc nation has Communism's traditional farm policy made so little progress.

Today, state farms account for only 11 per cent of Poland's agricultural land. About 2,000 co-operative farms occupy only a little more than one per cent of the land. Roughly 87 per cent of all land in agricultural use is privately owned and cultivated by individual farmers.

Coupled to this fact is another, even more embarrassing to doctrinaire Marxists: free-enterprise agriculture in Poland works. It produces quality products which are exported to countries on both sides of the Curtain. While the Soviet Union still has

major problems with collectivized agriculture, farm productivity in Poland on the whole is probably higher than in any other Soviet bloc nation.

Certainly it enables the average Pole to boast, as he frequently does: "We may not eat luxuriously, but we eat a lot." He consumes mountains of meat, usually fried veal or pork, awesome quantities of potatoes, huge salads with sour cream dressing, thick slices of heavy rye bread and oceans of some of the best beer in Europe. Then he sits back with a satisfied expression and says, "Even the Russians don't eat like that."

Not everything on the food front, of course, is perfect. Housewives are still plagued by sporadic shortages, particularly of meat and dairy products. Butcher shops everywhere, at all hours of the day, have lines of tired-looking shoppers standing outside their doors. This is a real hardship for women who usually have spent a full day in the office or factory, from 7 a.m. until 3 p.m., before doing their shopping. When they finally reach the counter, there is a good chance that the product they want is unavailable. One week, beef is in short supply. The next week, beef is everywhere but butter is difficult to find.

Good restaurants and the dining-rooms of tourist hotels boast substantial if unimaginative cuisines but they are, by Polish standards, expensive. Even in the best, service is slapdash and impossibly slow. It is not unusual for a simple lunch in a first-class restaurant to occupy more than two hours. Tipping is officially frowned upon by the Polish government and most Poles seem to abide by the rule.

Regardless of Communist achievements in other fields, state ownership of restaurants is a ghastly mistake.

The average Polish farmer cultivates a small plot of land as if it were a prize-winning rose garden. Large estates owned by the aristocracy were broken up in 1945 and distributed among the peasants so that most of the farms in Poland today are small by Canadian standards. More than half of them range in size from one acre to less than 15 acres. On this land, the average farmer will raise a mixed crop of grain and vegetables supplemented by a small production of dairy products, beef, pork and poultry. The symbol of Polish agriculture, for the tourist, is a single cow grazing on a strip of grass between two cultivated plots, watched over by an old peasant or a young child. In Poland, either every cow owns an old woman or every old woman has a cow. When it rains, the cows and their companions simply turn their backs to the wind



Staff Photos by Peter Desbarats

Efficient, large-scale agriculture on state farms in Poland has failed to impress most Polish farmers, who cling stubbornly to their own land. This photo was taken on a state-operated cattle farm near Zimnice, in

southern Poland. Martin Lipok, left, manager of the farm, talks with Zdzislaw Mujstra, a state agricultural economist from nearby Opole, a highly industrialized city of about 70,000 persons.

and continue gazing into eternity.

Although the government is making every effort to mechanize farms, much of the work is still done by hand. In many parts of the country, I saw hay being cut with the scythe — only a tintype memory for most Canadians. Horses remain useful animals. Heavy peasant wagons with booted drivers fill rural highways and lumber along even the busy streets of Warsaw.

When their drivers fall asleep, the horses find their own way home, regardless of intervening traffic lights, pedestrians and taxis.

Speaking of traffic: Warsaw ranks with Montreal as a city where pedestrians and motor vehicles have failed completely to understand each other. For many years after 1945, the automobile was an object of rare curiosity in Poland and pedestrians ruled the road, with a certain amount of competition from horses and dilapidated electric trams. Today a growing number of well-to-do citizens, especially government officials, heads of state enterprises, intellectuals and professional men, own automobiles. Millions of workers have motorcycles. Everyone else seems to have a motor scooter or bicycle. But the pedestrian still lives under the happy illusion that the streets are for him. Traffic lights frequently are ignored. People cross the street wherever they want, preferably right in front of a panicky motorist.

Even a veteran Montreal jaywalker finds that a late-afternoon stroll through Warsaw demands his best.

Meanwhile, back on the farm: Free-enterprise agriculture poses some familiar problems. In Canada, the trend in

postwar years has been toward larger farms and specialized production. Many of our poultry farms today are nothing but chicken factories, owned by city businessmen and operating on an assembly-line basis. Food plants and others using special crops such as oil-bearing seeds often contract in advance for the entire production of individual farmers who devote most of their land to one crop. Wheat production, of course, is a carefully planned, large-scale mechanized operation in western Canada.

Canadian farm leaders have been deploring for years the trend toward "big business" in agriculture and the disappearance of what is lovingly called the "family farm." It is strange to discover that the "family farm" remains the basic unit in Communist Poland. When a state farm official in Poland criticizes the inefficiency of diversified small-farm production, he sounds very much like the head of a large canning factory in Canada arguing in favor of bigger and more specialized farms.

Many of the methods adopted by the Polish government to improve small-farm production are familiar to Canadians. An increasing number of agricultural experts are being stationed in farming regions to advise farmers on new fertilizers, machinery and more profitable crops. At least every second village now has an "agricultural circle," a form of co-operative to encourage farmers to pool their money and labor. These circles, with government assistance, buy farm machinery for common use, undertake drainage and irrigation schemes, sell high-quality seeds and channel technical advice to individual farmers.

Wladyslaw Gomulka, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish Communist Party, assured farmers in 1961 that efforts to promote "socialist development" in agriculture would be undertaken only with the "consent and free will" of the peasants.

"To change the forms of husbandry is a great and complex problem," he admitted. "Such problems are not solved by law. It is a problem of the social consciousness of the people, a problem of convincing the people, not only by word, but by practical deeds."

This go-slow policy has given Poland a healthy farm economy, although the 1962 harvest was poor and last winter's severe cold has further hindered production. But it has been implemented at the expense of the "system." It is impossible to create a highly regimented, organized and indoctrinated Communist nation when almost half the population consists of independent-minded farmers tied closely to their own land.

In the rich farming region near Opole, in the south of Poland, we stopped one afternoon to watch peasant women picking strawberries on a state farm. The "boss" of the group, Maria Czaja, a cheerful middle-aged woman, presented us with a box of strawberries. As we ate them (absolutely superb), she boasted about the yield from the plants, a new type imported from Germany. Then she pointed to a truck loaded with boxes and said, "Canada."

"She must mean that they are going to England," explained my interpreter.

Several days later, in Warsaw, I met a Toronto businessman. He was in . . . strawberries.

"You probably don't know it," he said, "but much of the Canadian jam you eat at home is based on strawberry pulp from Poland."

If the farmers of Poland keep the spirit of private enterprise alive at the base of Polish society, trade with Western countries guarantees continuing contact between Polish and Western businessmen and government officials and a constant exchange of information and ideas. About 40 per cent of Polish trade today is with countries on this side of the Curtain. The Soviet Union accounts for about 30 per cent of Poland's trade but Britain, the United States and West Germany are important customers.

Last year, Canada bought about \$5,000,000 worth of Polish goods, not a large amount but considerably higher than our \$600,000 of Polish imports in 1955. Goods purchased by Canada include vodka, ham and other foods, cotton goods, furs, bicycles, rubber footwear, glass, Christmas decorations, wire and nails. Poland buys substantial quantities of Canadian grain and such industrial raw materials as aluminum, copper, asbestos fibre, synthetic fibres, rubber and cattle hides. A small amount of Canadian machinery is exported to Poland, which last year ranked as the most important export market by far for Canadian goods in eastern Europe.

As usual, Canada exhibited at the international trade fair in Poznan last month and Poland participates regularly in the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto.

Poles traditionally have regarded themselves as the vanguard of Western civilization in eastern Europe. Their religion has been rooted firmly in Rome. Italian and French

architects executed most of their major cathedrals and palaces. Today, with the heavy Stalinist architecture mercifully a thing of the past, their designers are creating high-rise apartment blocks and office buildings with clean, light contours familiar to the American eye.

In the students' club in Warsaw, the walls are covered with Life-style photographs of Louis Armstrong, the jukebox is filled with American records and the student jazz group plays some of the best Dixieland on either side of New Orleans. British and American clothes are prized possessions. It is no longer dangerous to dress Western. Despite currency and passport problems, many Poles dream of visiting Western Europe, even North America.

They tell you that Poland sometimes is called "the America of eastern Europe."

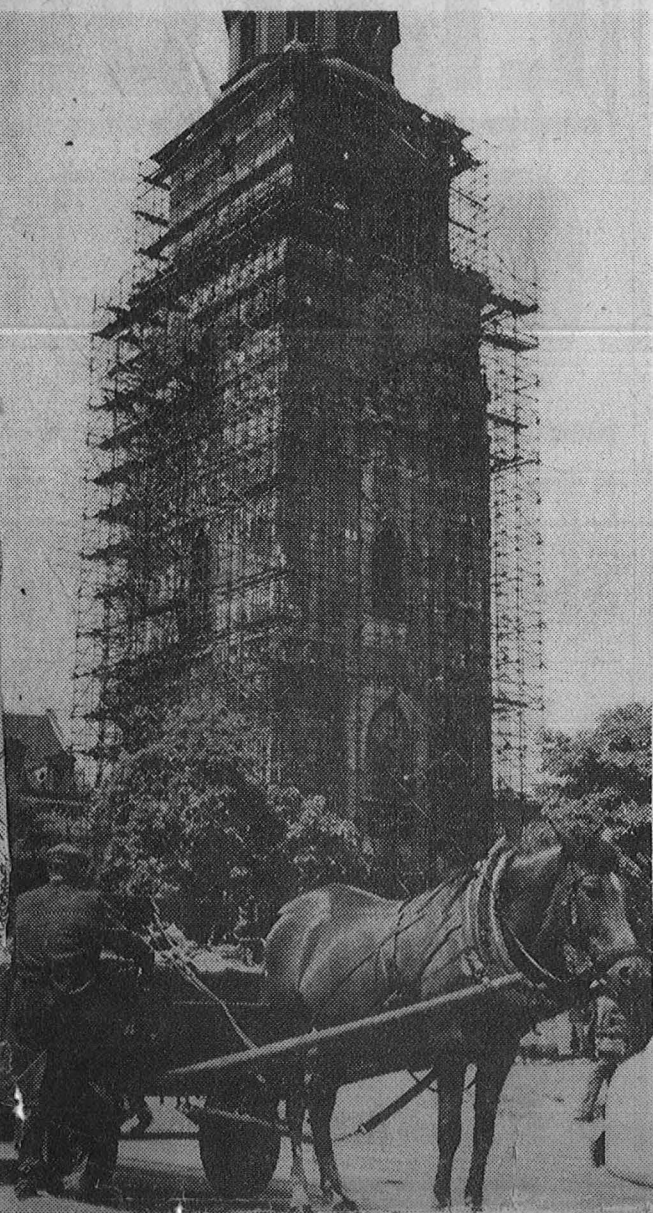
"When a Pole is in Moscow," they say, "people can tell that he isn't a Russian."

They tell you, in an admiring way, that North Americans walk with more "swagger" than eastern Europeans. Young men with money wear short American-style haircuts and tight, Madison Avenue-style suits.

But all this does not mean that the Poles are ready to leap into the Western camp at the earliest opportunity. Again and again they say that facts are facts and the inescapable fact today is Poland's economic, military and political alliance with Russia.

"For centuries, Poland had a sense of mission in eastern Europe," said a senior government official. "We fought the Turks, the Russians, the Finns, the Germans, everyone. What did it get us?"

"This isn't the time for crusades."



Horse-drawn traffic is common even in the main streets of Polish cities. Wagon was parked in the old market square of Krakow, a well preserved medieval city.