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UNEMPLOYMENT AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE LIQUIDATION OF STATE AGRICULTURAL FARMS IN 1991–2003

Abstract: State Agricultural Farms (SAF) were liquidated on the basis of an act adopted in 1991. During the work on the act, the focus was exclusively on issues related to ownership and economic transformations, while the social consequences were not taken into account. SAF employees, especially agricultural workers, constituted a specific, historically shaped socio-professional group characterized by relatively low education and narrow professional qualifications. The aim of article is to identify the genesis of social problems in post-statehood areas, especially unemployment and its regional variation. The source base of the study is mainly the Reports of the Agricultural Property Agency of the State Treasury and sociological research reports carried out in post-statehood areas. The main finding of the research is that policy decisions to abolish state farms were made without taking into account their specific characteristics and territorial distribution. Their mentality was shaped by the nature of work and everyday life, which was entirely connected with the workplace. The workplace organized most of the living and social matters for employees and their families. After the liquidation of the State Agricultural Farms, employees were unable to find their place on the labour market. Large-area farms established on the basis of the former SAFs radically limited employment, and the lack of appropriate skills and limited demand for labour outside agriculture worsened the situation of blue collar workers in particular. Regional differences were of particular importance for the scale of unemployment – where SAFs dominated, the unemployment problem persists even three decades after their liquidation, although it no longer concerns only former SAF employees, but all residents of former SAF areas.

Keywords: unemployment, SAFs, economic transformation, former State Agricultural Farm areas

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INTRODUCTION

State Agricultural Farms (SAFs) were established in 1949 and, together with the production cooperatives that were being established at the time, were to lead to the social and economic reconstruction of the Polish countryside. The attempt at collectivization did not bring the results expected by the government and was suspended in 1956, while the state agricultural sector developed systematically over the following decades. It was not until 1991 that a decision was made to liquidate SAFs, but the consequences of their long presence in the Polish countryside are still visible, including in the form of social problems occurring in the areas of the former SAFs.

From the very beginning, employees of SAFs were presented by the propaganda of the Polish People's Republic as the avant-garde of systemic changes in the countryside. They stood out from the rural community, creating a specific socio-professional group. Compared to individual farmers, they were privileged in many respects – although their occupations were agricultural in nature, working time and remuneration were regulated by appropriate collective agreements, they had social insurance, including health insurance, and were entitled to a package of social benefits. The privileged right to a company apartment should also be considered as a privilege, which was of great importance in the Polish People's Republic. In towns where SAFs operated, there was a much better developed social infrastructure than in typically agricultural villages. The first ones to be organized there were health centres, community centres, shops and schools. Despite the state's preferences for the state agricultural sector, the salaries of its employees, especially agricultural workers, were much lower than those in other sectors of the economy until the 1970s. They were partially compensated by in-kind remuneration and social privileges. In addition to cash wages, employees also received allowances. These were nothing exceptional in the socialist economic system (workers at industrial plants also received similar ones). In the case of employees of the SAFs, however, the scope of these benefits was much wider, because allowances were a type of remuneration in kind and were intended to compensate for low wages.

It was not until the 1970s that a rapid increase in salaries occurred, which coincided with the period of intensive development of housing construction in SAFs. Their employees therefore became the first benefici-

aries of such amenities as water and sewage systems, and new apartments increasingly often had city standards (including bathrooms). Those employed in the SAFs were also usually the first in the village to own such goods as motorcycles, washing machines or televisions.

Despite increasingly higher wages and better living conditions for employees and their families, society maintained a negative opinion of SAFs employees, especially agricultural workers, as evidenced by the fact that in repeated studies of social prestige, agricultural workers in SAFs regularly ranked last (Domański, 2010: 86). This was a consequence of historical conditions, because even before World War II, farm workers (with the exception of Wielkopolska) did not enjoy high social prestige. However, much more important was the negative assessment of the functioning of SAFs. Despite high financial outlays and preferences from the state, they achieved much lower production results than peasant farms. This situation was the result of systemic errors, poor management at various levels, but also poor quality of work and low qualifications of employees. The level of qualifications was systematically improving. This resulted from the growth in the level of education of the entire society and from the growing requirements placed on employees in connection with the modernization of the agricultural production process. It was not until the 1980s that the level of education of employees of the SAFs approached the level of education of those employed in industry (Dzun, 1987: 21–22). Many unfavourable phenomena in personnel policy were a consequence of negative selection during employment, which in turn resulted from a constant staff deficit.

However, the work performed by agricultural workers was not appreciated by society, mainly because for most of the period when the SAFs were operating, it was hard, physical, poorly paid, and also ineffective (which was related to the assessment of the entire SAF economy). For the peasants, the fact that it was performed on land that was not theirs was also important. What distinguished SAF employees from other villagers and at the same time created distance was also the fact that they constituted a specific, closed community operating on different principles than the traditional village (Piotrowski, 1973: 6; Giza-Poleszczuk and Kościeszajaworski, 2008: 3). It was united by joint work on a given farm, often performed by several family members (SAFs were often the only socialized workplace in the area, which encouraged the employment of adult family members – mainly employees' wives – and later also children.), as well as joint residence in the company estate. The SAF housing estates varied in

terms of location. Most of them were located in the immediate vicinity, often at a considerable distance from the nearest town. Since the end of the 1960s, some of the estates were located in small towns or towns that were the seats of communes. There were also towns where the housing estates of SAF employees were located among peasant buildings. The location of these estates had a significant impact on the relations between SAF employees and the inhabitants of the villages, and after the liquidation of the SAF, the inhabitants of estates located far from larger towns had greater difficulties than others in finding new job (Tomaszewska, 2001: 111). This specificity of the SAF community meant that, on the one hand, its members aroused envy among other villagers, and on the other hand, reluctance and contempt (Giza-Poleszczuk and Kościesz-Jaworski, 2008: 6).

This unfavourable image of an agricultural worker, but also of an employee of SAFs in general, turned out to be permanent in Polish society (Domański, 2010: 94; Giza-Poleszczuk and Kościesz-Jaworski, 2008: 6). This was one of the reasons why in the discussions on the future of SAFs at the beginning of the systemic transformation, the focus was on ownership, economic issues or improving the agrarian structure of Polish agriculture through the use of land of former SAFs. The fate of employees of liquidated farms did not arouse interest of either decision-makers or public opinion at that time. Only after the transformation of the state agricultural sector began, when the scale of problems related to unemployment and the pauperization of former employees of SAFs became apparent, did the state begin to implement support programs. However, their impact was not wide, and the funds allocated for them were insufficient (Giza-Poleszczuk and Kościesz-Jaworski, 2008: 30–31).

The aim of the article is to indicate the origins of social problems in former SAF areas, and especially unemployment and its regional differentiation. The source base of the study is mainly the Reports of the State Treasury Agricultural Property Agency, which systematically reported on the employment status in farms taken over and remaining under administration. The reports provided only estimated data on employment on large-area farms leased, and did not include those employed on large-area farms owned by private individuals. Statistical yearbooks, however, provided aggregate data on employment in agriculture and forestry.

The second type of sources used in the study are published reports from sociological studies conducted in former SAF areas (Dziubińska-Michalewicz, 2004; Giza-Poleszczuk and Kościesz-Jaworski, 2008). The issue of unemployment caused by the economic transformation of SAFs

is still relevant and is of interest to, among others, researchers of rural areas (e.g. Zgliński, 2008), sociologists (e.g. Pyrgies and Szyndler, 2013; Tarkowska, 2010), and occasionally politicians (e.g.: Sługocki, 2021). The article uses the caesuras of 1991–2003. The first date is related to the adoption of the act on the liquidation of SAFs, while the second is the last year before Poland's accession to the European Union, which had a significant impact on the conditions shaping a number of economic and social processes in the countryside. The reports of the APAST, taking into account changes in employment in farms established on the basis of SAF data, also end in 2003 (in July 2003, the APAST was transformed into the Agricultural Property Agency).

THE ORIGINS OF THE UNEMPLOYMENT PROBLEM IN FORMER SAF AREAS

SAFs initially began to be established on the basis of estates excluded from the division carried out under the decree on agricultural reform (Dz.U. 1944, No. 4, item 17). After the Polish state took over the former German lands east of the Oder and Lusatian Neisse, the development of the numerous large-scale estates in these areas turned out to be a major challenge. This task was first carried out by State Land Estates, specially established for this purpose, and after their liquidation in 1949 by SAFs, modelled on sovkhoses.

SAFs operated throughout the country – in 1990, the share of SAFs in the country's agricultural land was 19%. However, they held the most land in the western and northern territories. The former German lands were dominated by large landed estates. After they were taken over by the Polish state, only some of them were parcelled out (there was a lack of willing people, and besides, large estates were difficult to parcel out). The rest was managed by the State Landed Estates (1946–1949), and then State Agricultural Farms (more in: Machalek, 2012: 274–330).

The typical "SAF" voivodeships were especially the Koszalin, Słupsk and Szczecin voivodeships, where the share of PGRs in land use was over 50% of the total area of agricultural land. A slightly lower share, ranging from 40 to 50% of agricultural land, was observed in the Olsztyn, Elbląg and Gorzów voivodeships. The lowest indicators of agricultural land managed by SAFs were found in voivodeships such as Kielce, Lublin, Nowy

Sącz, Ostrołęka, Radom, Rzeszów, Siedlce, Sieradz and Tarnobrzeg. The share of SAFs in agricultural land use was below 2% there. In the remaining area of the country, SAFs held between 10 and 40% of the total agricultural land (Dzun, 1991: 45–46). This regional differentiation resulted in the scale and persistence of unemployment that occurred in the 1990s and later in the former SAF areas.

Another important premise of later unemployment in the former SAF areas is the high employment in the SAFs (Dzun, 1985: 46; 1991: 52). It occurred throughout the period of their operation and was caused by a relatively low level of production mechanization and administrative overgrowth. At least until the end of the 1960s, the vast majority of work, both in animal and plant production, was performed manually or using simple machines and tools. Although the level of mechanization in the SAFs was relatively high compared to the permanently underinvested and state-discriminated individual agriculture, if compared to the equipment of large-area farms in countries with a market economy, the backwardness was significant. In the conditions of the socialist economy, in which the paradigm of full employment was in force, hiring workers who actually had work only for part of the year was not perceived as a problem. However, when the economic system changed, overemployment (and the related social obligations) became one of the greatest obstacles to reforming the SAFs. The employment status in SAFs is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of people employed in SAFs in the years 1950–1990

Year	Total in hundreds	Employment per 100 ha of agricultural land
1950	276.3	15.1
1956	443.0	17.2
1960	339.3	14.0
1965	362.2	13.6
1970	391.4	13.6
1975	432.0	13.1
1980	490.3	13.3
1983	481.6	13.6

Table 1. (cont.)

Year	Total in hundreds	Employment per 100 ha of agricultural land
1989	435.0	13.0
1990	395.0	12.1

Source: Dzun, 1985: 46; Bukraba-Rylska, 2008: 347.

The highest level of employment in the SAF sector was recorded in 1981 – it was almost 500 thousand people, who together with their families created a community of about 2 million people. In the 1980s, employment dropped slightly, but still remained at a high level. A clear decline occurred only in the period immediately preceding the liquidation of the SAFs and was caused by the deteriorating economic situation of the SAFs. However, even then it was three times higher than the level of employment in large-area farms in economically developed countries (Zgliński, 1997: 32). In 1990, employment in the SAFs amounted to 394.8 thousand people and decreased by as much as 8.2% compared to the previous year (Table 1).

The low level of mechanization generated not only high employment, but also a high demand for low-skilled workers. In 1958, as many as 64.1% of employees in the SAFs had not completed primary school, 30.3% had completed primary school, and only 5.6% had vocational, secondary or higher education. The corresponding data for 1980 were much better. At that time, 9.8% of employees had not completed primary school, 56.3% had completed primary school, and 33.3% had completed vocational, secondary or higher school. The lowest level of education was characteristic of the largest group of employees, i.e. agricultural workers (Table 2).

Table 2. Education of agricultural workers in SAFs

Year	Number of workers	Secondary/higher	Basic vocational	Primary	Uncompleted primary
1958	224.5	0.1	1.0	27.5	71.4
1989	332.6	4.1	18.3	65.8	11.8

Source: Dzun, 1985: 97.

It is also interesting to compare the level of education of workers employed in SAFs to that of all those employed in the basic sectors of the economy (Table 3).

Table 3. Education of persons employed in selected sectors of the economy in 1982

Education	industry	construction	SAF
	employment in %		
Higher	5.3	7.9	3.6
Secondary vocational	18.2	18.8	18.0
Secondary general	4.2	4.3	2.6
Basic vocational	33.1	31.5	24.0
Secondary total	60.8	62.5	48.2
Primary	39.2	37.5	50.0
Uncompleted primary	0	0	6.9

Source: Dzun, 1985: 111.

The above list shows that even in the 1980s, i.e. during the period of increasing education levels of the entire society, the education of employees in SAFs was much lower than in other sectors. This factor was also significant during the period of economic transformation, as it affected the possibilities of retraining employees dismissed from work in the state agricultural sector.

UNEMPLOYMENT AS A RESULT OF THE LIQUIDATION OF SAFS

Unemployment, which occurred in the areas of former SAFs, is identified as a direct result of the liquidation of SAFs. In reality, the mechanisms that led to it were more complex and were related to the situation in the entire economy. It should also be noted that the process of reducing employment in the state-owned agricultural sector began even before the beginning of ownership transformations and was a consequence

of the difficulties experienced by SAFs as a result of the departure from the command-and-distribution economy initiated in 1989. This caused a number of changes that turned out to be particularly painful for the entire agriculture. The liberalization of agricultural product prices, the opening of the Polish market to cheap imported food, and above all, the withdrawal of the state from subsidies for agricultural production were a shock for the entire agriculture, but especially for SAFs. Only some of the management staff and employees, and rather few at that, tried to take grassroots actions to adapt their farms to the rules of the free market economy (Grala, 2010). Expensive loans, growing debt and rising prices of means of production, however, greatly limited the room for manoeuvre. One of the consequences of the collapse in which the SAFs found themselves was the increasing number of employee layoffs. In December 1991, the number of employees was only 326.7 thousand, which was about 100 thousand less than two years earlier. An even stronger decline was visible in the first half of 1992. In June, when the process of liquidation of the SAFs began, only 261 thousand people worked in them (*Raport z działalności...*, 1992: 7). This means that over the course of just two years, over 170 thousand people lost their jobs. Considering the economic situation in the country at that time, it should be assumed that the vast majority of those laid off had no chance of finding any job and joined the ranks of the unemployed.

The liquidation of SAFs based on the 1991 Act was of an administrative and obligatory nature. The APAST was established to carry out the liquidation process, followed by restructuring and privatization. The property taken over by it was, in accordance with the regulations, distributed through sale, free transfer to authorized entities, contribution in kind to commercial law companies, lease, transfer for management or perpetual usufruct (Dz.U. 1991, No 107, item 464). These changes resulted in a sharp decline in employment in liquidated and privatized farms, but also in other sectors of the economy associated with the SAFs.

The layoffs resulting from the above changes were spread over time. Several months passed from the entry into force of the act until the start of the takeover of farms by APAST (Agricultural Property Agency of the State Treasury; the start of the takeover of farms by the Agency was mid-1992). The next step was the gradual takeover of farms, completed in 1994 (in 1992, 539 SAFs were taken over, in 1993 – 811, in 1994 – 308, the last 8 farms were taken over in 1995; in total, APAST took over 1,666 SAFs; Machałek, 2022: 280). This was followed by the implemen-

tation of restructuring programs in the taken over farms. Only farms prepared in this way were sent for further development by tenants or new farmers. The transformation that the liquidated SAFs underwent was aimed at rationalising agricultural production, liquidating non-production activities, including all functions of a social and living nature, and above all at optimising employment. Given the still existing staff overcapacities, it was obvious that the changes would entail mass layoffs. Initially, however, the issue of social costs related to the liquidation of the SAFs was not at the centre of political discussions. The only action that, at least theoretically, was supposed to protect employees was the statutory obligation imposed on the Agency to create new jobs for those laid off. In reality, however, the Agency's fulfilment of this task was in contradiction with other actions aimed at restructuring the liquidated farms. The situation was further aggravated by the fact that the change in farming conditions affected not only the farms taken over by the APAST, but also the entire agricultural environment. Initially, therefore, the only specific action taken by the Agency in favour of employees was to oblige tenants to maintain their previous employment status, usually for two years. This was a transfer of the problem to the lessees, which additionally worsened their starting conditions (Giza-Poleszczuk and Kościeszka-Jaworski, 2008: 27). The consequence of this solution was a rapid reduction in employment after the time specified in the agreement had elapsed.

The spreading of the entire transformation process over time meant that farms waiting for liquidation underwent various economic processes (including phasing out production, selling off property), which also resulted in a reduction in employment. Some employees retired and received disability pensions, others went to work in other sectors of the economy (although this direction of change was quite limited). On the other hand, some farms that quickly underwent the restructuring process were leased, and the workers found employment with new employers. Data on changes in employment that were a consequence of the above-mentioned processes are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Changes in employment in SAFs taken over by the Agricultural Property Resources of the State Treasury (1992–1994)

Status as of	Employment status in the SAFs taken over by APAST	Number of			
		employed on State Treasury farms	employed by new owners and leaseholders	people who retired and received pensions	dismissed
31.12.1992	90 412	83 024	1 917	915	4 536
31.07.1993	158 871	117 995	15 757	3 757	22 212
31.12.1993	174 515	106 566	27 650	5 819	34 480
31.06.1994	191 446	85 945	50 427	8 817	49 146
31.12.1994	192 519	69 966	72 896	10 000	40 000

Source: own study based on *Raport z działalności...*, 1993; 1994; 1995.

The above list does not reflect the situation of all employees of SAFs (New owners of farms established on the basis of former State Agricultural Farms were not obliged to provide APAST with employment data). However, a large decrease in employment is clearly visible, although a large part of the dismissed employees, especially in the initial period, found employment on large-area farms established on the basis of former SAFs (Table 5). In subsequent years, as the area of land managed by the APAST decreased, the number of people employed by it also systematically decreased. Also, leaseholders and owners of large-area farms gradually reduced employment, which was a consequence of striving to optimize costs and modifications in the profile and methods of production (including limiting animal production, abandoning the cultivation of part of the land, modernization of the machinery park; Dryll, 2008: 94). These changes are illustrated in Table 5. These farms employ ten times fewer workers than the former SAFs.

Table 5. Employment on farms of former SAFs (1994–2003)

Status as of	Number of		Employed in total
	employed on State Treasury farms	employed on leaseholders' farms*	
1994	37 552	72.9 k	142.8 k
1995	46 506	76.8 k	123.0 k
1996	38 918	87.5 k	126.4 k
1997	36 159	99.2 k	135.0 k
1998	31 668	90.8 k	122.5 k
1999	24 662	70.5 k	95.2 k
2000	15 933	62.3 k	78.3 k
2001	12 919	59.9 k	72.9 k
2002	11 302	58.3 k	70.0 k
2003	8 523	53.2 k	62.0 k

*estimated data collected by the Agency from leaseholders

Source: Own study based on *Raport z działalności...*, 1993; 1994; 1995.

To summarize, from the beginning of the transformation period until the end of the process of liquidation of SAFs, approximately 226 thousand people lost their jobs, for whom the last place of work was a SAF or a farm established on the basis of the liquidated SAF (from 469 thousand in 1989 to 143 thousand in 1994). In reality, the number of such people could have been much higher than indicated by official statistics concerning former SAF employees (Pyrgies and Szyndler, 2013: 70). The effects of the liquidation of SAFs were felt not only by them, but also by those employed in plants cooperating with SAFs. Reduction of employment on such a large scale in a relatively short time became the cause of high unemployment among former SAF employees. According to the Agency's calculations, the highest level of unemployment among people previously employed in SAFs was recorded in 1994 and amounted to 99 thousand. At the end of 1996, it was about 54.5 thousand people (*Raport z działalności...*, 1997: 37; *Rocznik statystyczny...*, 1997: 146). This means that a significant number of former employees of SAFs retired or found employment in agriculture or

outside it. If they later lost their jobs, they were no longer listed in the statistics as former employees of SAFs. It should also be remembered that the process of layoffs in this sector did not end in 1994. In subsequent years, employees of farms administered by the APAST and large-area farms established after former SAFs were also laid off.

UNEMPLOYMENT AS A LONG-TERM SOCIAL PROBLEM IN THE FORMER SAF AREAS

The liquidation of SAFs contributed to the deterioration of living conditions and the collapse of the previous way of life of former employees and their families. Previously, the SAFs had provided them not only with a workplace, free housing and a range of social and living benefits, but also organised most of their non-professional life. In settlements located far from larger towns, the SAFs were responsible for daily supplies, health care, and transporting children to schools. This situation gave rise to a kind of paternalism in the relations between employees and employers and reinforced the former's passivity in life (Ignar, 1974: 78; Halamska, 1999: 34). The SAFs also contributed to the costs of expanding and maintaining local commercial and communication infrastructure, which was used by all residents of a given commune. After the liquidation of the SAFs, access to basic goods and services became a problem; most of the rural infrastructure, e.g. kindergartens, community centres, shops and even going to the doctor, ceased to function. Particularly painful, both for the living conditions and for the professional mobility of former employees of the SAFs, was the communication breakdown caused not only by the collapse of the SAFs, but also by the nearby workplaces. The scale of these problems varied regionally and largely depended on the location of a given former SAF estate.

Given the difficulties on the housing market that Poles experienced throughout the post-war period, the possibility of obtaining an apartment was often the main motivation to take up work at the SAFs. An additional benefit was the fact that most of the costs related to the maintenance and renovation of the apartments were borne by the SAFs. After 1991, the apartments, together with all the property of the SAFs, were taken over by the Agency, for which, however, they constituted unnecessary economic ballast. They were therefore quickly and on preferential terms sold to

the previous tenants, which, however, turned out to be a trap for them in the long run. From now on, residents not only had to bear all the maintenance costs of the purchased premises (previously, the maintenance costs were covered by the SAF), but also became less mobile in their search for work – selling the flat was out of the question due to the lack of potential buyers. The most difficult situation was faced by residents of estates located far from larger economic centres, for whom commuting to work was impossible due to the lack of bus connections and a limited labour market (Sztanderska and Giza-Poleszczuk, 2008: 32). Thus, the isolation of SAF estates and their location in areas with low economic potential ruled out the prospects for changing their professional and life situation. The situation of former SAF employees in former SAF areas located in small towns and near larger cities was much better. These differences are visible in research conducted by sociologists (Giza-Poleszczuk and Kościeszajaworski, 2008).

In addition to regional differentiation and the location of the former SAF estate, the situation of former SAF employees was also influenced by other factors, such as education, job market offer or readiness to change place of residence or work. Based on research conducted by sociologists (Sztanderska and Giza-Poleszczuk, 2008; Giza-Poleszczuk and Kościeszajaworski, 2008; Dziubińska-Michalewicz, 2004), several groups can be distinguished whose fates after the collapse of the SAFs took different turns.

One of the groups is a part of the former management staff. Many of them became “new managers” of farms established after the former SAFs, found employment in companies or farms administered by the Agency or in institutions operating in the agricultural sector. Mainly from this group were recruited tenants of large-area farms established on the basis of liquidated SAFs. The factor that determined the possibility of taking up a new job in their case was their education and experience in managing a large-scale farm. Representatives of this group were less likely to become owners of privatized farms, which resulted from the lack of appropriate capital. These employees were characterized by a relatively high education – higher or secondary – and a high openness to change.

Another group were employees who, thanks to their qualifications, found employment with new owners of large-scale farms. These were mainly people who had the skills necessary to operate modern agricultural equipment on large-scale farms. Initially, the number of these employees was relatively high, but as the machinery park was modernized and production directions changed (including the new owners limiting animal breeding), the number of employees systematically decreased (Table 5).

Another group were former employees of SAFs who took up non-agricultural jobs at home or elsewhere (Dziubińska-Michalewicz, 2004). Their success in searching for a job depended on the demand of the labour market for the qualifications possessed by a given person, and this was limited during the transformation period. It should also be remembered that former employees of SAFs constituted a fairly homogeneous group in terms of profession and industry, which is why the market was not able to absorb everyone (Giza-Poleszczuk and Kościesz-Jaworski, 2008).

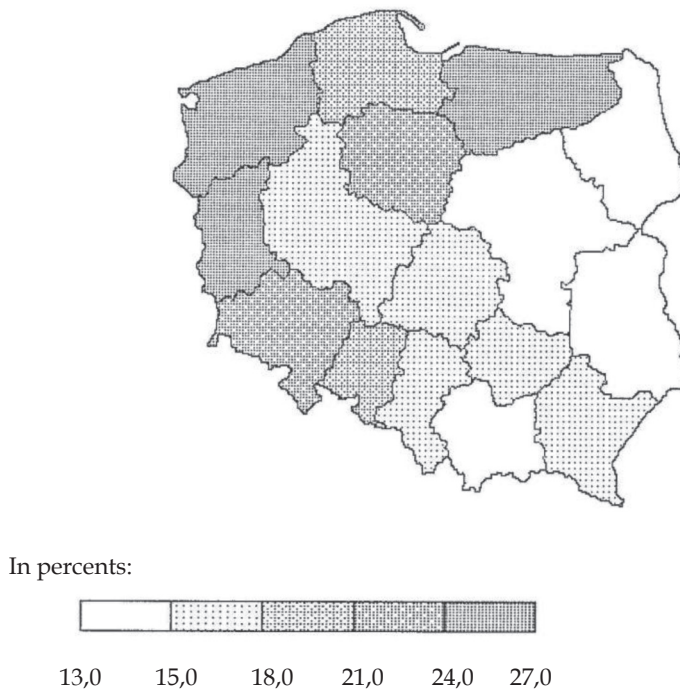
People who could retire (early retirement) or receive a disability pension at the time of liquidation of SAFs found themselves in a relatively favourable situation. This group of former employees systematically grew as they reached retirement age. Representatives of this group had a very low but stable income secured.

The last, but the most numerous and most visible group of former employees of SAFs were people characterised by a low level of education and narrow professional competences. Their situation was additionally worsened by living in former SAF estates located far from larger urban centres. The liquidation of the SAFs meant not only the liquidation of jobs for them, but also destroyed their entire previous world. The disappointment with the new reality that they experienced at that time resulted, according to some researchers, from the fact that during the Polish People's Republic, official propaganda instilled in them the belief in their exceptional role as SAFs (Dziubińska-Michalewicz, 2004: 5). According to E. Psyk-Piotrowska (2004), the mentality and attitudes of passivity that developed among those employed in SAFs during the Polish People's Republic were the main obstacle to adaptation to the new economic reality.

It was this group of former SAF employees who remained unemployed for a long time, becoming beneficiaries of the social welfare system and a symbol of the negative effects of the liquidation of SAFs. The consequence of permanent unemployment was the pauperization of entire families of former SAF employees, which was also passed on to subsequent generations (Dziubińska-Michalewicz, 2004: 27). It is also worth emphasizing that the scale and geographical distribution of post-SAF unemployment had a historical origin related to the very decision to establish SAFs, and later – to the specifics of their functioning (including overemployment, isolation of SAF estates and the extended caring role of the workplace) (Tarkowska, 1998: 94). In search of causes, one could go even deeper, to the period before World War II, when an agrarian structure based on a large number of large landed estates was formed in the western and northern territories. It was not possible to change it either immediately after World War

II or after the liquidation of SAFs, because large-area farms dominate in these areas today. A similar situation, although on a smaller scale, occurs in Wielkopolska and Gdańsk Pomerania. Unemployment enclaves occur there in some former SAF counties, especially those where the share of SAFs in land use was high and there were no stronger economic centres in the area. These differences meant that in some regions of the country the effects of the liquidation of SAFs in the form of unemployment were almost invisible, while in others, such as in the northern and western provinces, they were very visible and long-lasting. The map illustrates this problem.

Map 1. Unemployment rate in Poland by voivodeship (status as of 30.09.2003)



Source: Kozysa, 2005: 73.

An equally important factor of key importance for the level of unemployment in former SAF areas was the absorption capacity of the labour market. Most former SAF employees had a low level of education and qualifications in professions for which demand had drastically decreased. After the transformation, only a few had the opportunity to take up work in their previous professions. They were not prepared for the fundamen-

tal change of looking for work outside agriculture, and programmes supporting the acquisition of new qualifications were not implemented until 1993 (Zgliński, 1997: 36–39; Niedzielski, 2013: 61). In the first years after the liquidation of the SAFs, the situation on the labour market was difficult throughout the country, especially in rural areas, where unemployment remained at the level of 1.1–1.3 million people in the period under review (Dziubińska-Michalewicz, 2004: 2). The biggest problem, however, was the aforementioned geographical distribution of former SAF areas, which resulted in the highest unemployment rate in voivodeships such as the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship (28.9% in 2002 and 28.1% in 2003), the Lubuskie Voivodeship (26.0% in 2002 and 25.8% in 2003) and the West Pomeranian Voivodeship (26.6% in 2002 and 26.3% in 2003) (Dziubińska-Michalewicz, 2004: 2).

The areas where SAFs dominated were agricultural areas, which is why the recession caused by the economic transformation was particularly deep there, and unemployment took on a structural character. Currently, the problem concerns not only former employees of the SAF (due to the passage of time, most people employed in SAFs are retirees), but the entire rural population living in the areas of the former SAFs. Also those who entered the labour market after the collapse of the SAFs.

CONCLUSIONS

Unemployment and the pauperization of former SAF environments are the most frequently raised arguments by critics of the decision to liquidate and privatize SAFs (Leopold and Ziętara, 2003; Dzun, 2003). They point out that before the adoption of the act, no analysis was made of the effects of the transformation on SAF employees and their families, as well as on entire rural communities. The employees were not covered by any protective measures, were not enfranchised, nor did they receive compensation or shares in privatized SAFs (as was the case with industrial employees). As unemployed, they could only benefit from unemployment benefits, and older employees with appropriate length of service could retire early. Support programs were too few and their scale was too little (they were most often addressed to children and youth from former SAF environments) to improve the socio-economic situation of the unem-

ployed (Sztanderska and Giza-Poleszczuk, 2008: 19). The dispersion of individual SAFs and the low awareness of employees regarding the consequences of the transformation meant that SAF circles were unable to effectively lobby for their interests, either before the decision to liquidate SAFs or later.

Failure to take into account the effects of the liquidation of SAFs was a consequence of the doctrinal policy of the state, the aim of which was to carry out ownership transformations as quickly as possible. It was assumed at that time that the land from liquidated SAFs would be transferred to individual farms, contributing to the improvement of the agrarian structure in the country. However, this did not happen, as land surpluses were mainly revealed in regions where relatively few individual farmers interested in it lived. Part of the land therefore remained in the possession of the state, and the main form of its development became leasing. In 2003, 3 million ha remained in the APRST (out of the total of 4.7 million taken over; *Raport Agencji...*, 2004: XI). Twenty years later, it was 1.3 million ha (*Sprawozdanie...*, 2024: 23). The problem that was not given sufficient attention when designing the changes or during their implementation was the fate of former employees of SAFs. One of the most difficult consequences of such a state policy to solve was unemployment, which occurred in the former SAF areas at a higher level than in other regions of the country (Stanny, 2010: 59).

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