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Social Inequalities in 20th Century Poland *)

Janusz Żarnowski

Scholars conducting research into social inequality encounter serious theoretical and practical difficulties which are frequently as great for historians as for sociologists. To what extent do inequalities correspond to the functional structure of society and which differences can be called inequalities? Do inequalities lie on one plane or can they be reduced to a single hierarchy? Can social inequalities be examined solely on the basis of quantitative indices, which usually refer to occupation and education, or should one also use factors which cannot be presented in figures ¹⁾? These are but a few of the problems encountered in research on this topic.

In spite of such obstacles the quantitative approach to the history of social inequalities seems to be absolutely essential. It is beyond any doubt that this aspect of historical development contains at least some measurable elements. This is the reason for debating the history of social inequality at the meeting of the International Commission for the Application of Quantitative Methods in History. The Polish case can be instructive, although it introduces some complications to the scheme of evolution of inequality proposed in other papers presented at this session. Its development cannot follow the same sequence in an early industrialized country and in an only partly industrialized one. Since Polish society belonged to the latter category, all comparisons pertain only to the groups living in centers and areas covered by industrial civilization. The coexistence of two different social and economic structures within Polish society modified to some extent the process of industrialization in Poland. Nevertheless, this transformation as well as that of social inequality bears some resemblance to the development of Western European societies in the late XIXth century and in the XXth century.

Research into social inequalities can be conducted with reference to practically the entire history of Poland. I will deal here only with the 20th century. However, even if we confine our research to such a historically short period, we

*) I am going to deal with questions which have been for some time the subject of intensive sociological studies in contemporary Poland but which have not been examined from the historical point of view. This will therefore be a provisional, preliminary study.

1) In his book "Industrialisierung und soziale Ungleichheit. Europa im 19. Jahrhundert. Eine Bilanz" (Göttingen, 1983), Hartmut K a e l b l e enumerates some factors of social inequality: "die Verteilung etwa von Vermögen, von Einkommen, von Qualität der Arbeitsbedingungen, von Bildung, von Wohnungsqualität, von Gesundheitschancen und medizinischer Versorgung, von Erholungsmöglichkeiten und Freizeit, von Rechtssicherheit, von Chancen autonomer Gestaltung der eigenen Lebenssituation und Bewältigung kritischer Lebenssituation, von Ansehen und sozialen Kontaktmöglichkeiten, von Mobilitätschancen" (pp. 13 - 14).

shall come across difficulties which are specific to Poland, the most banal being the lack of detailed information, especially of exact figures. An even more difficult problem is the question: Is it possible to compare social inequalities under different socio-economic and political systems 2)? It would be wrong to give up comparisons, for even an incomplete study can be of great scientific and practical importance. It is worth pointing out in this connection that comparisons of societies living under different social systems have already been made by sociologists 3).

Before the problem of inequalities is examined by quantitative methods it must first be considered from the subjective point of view. Systems of values lie at the root of every socio-occupational hierarchy. In the case of Polish society, we come across the interaction of social hierarchies based on different systems of values. Up to 1939 (or 1944), in addition to the industrial structure, there existed in Poland a pre-capitalist social structure characterized by a comparatively primitive agriculture with many remains of natural economy and relics of traditional peasant culture. At the other end of the scale were large landed estates which were organized mostly according to pre-capitalist principles. The peasants and the semifeudal landowners formed a specific social hierarchy. To this can be added the majority of the petty bourgeoisie, whose commerce and production were largely pre-capitalist in character. In view of the fact that the petty bourgeoisie consisted mainly of Jews, structural inequalities were compounded by cultural and ethnic differences. People under the influence of urban-industrial civilization formed another structure. According to my estimates, modern economy and civilization embraced a minority of the population of the pre-war Polish state (which at that time had large territories in the east inhabited mostly by a non-Polish population) 4).

A practical result of this interaction was, for instance, the high rank assigned in social hierarchy to owners of large landed estates, a rank which frequently was not justified by income (the situation of big landowners was very difficult during a considerable part of the inter-war period). Another result was the dichotomous concept of social hierarchy in traditional peasant culture (the peasants and the "lords" being its main components). What was specifically Polish was the position of the intelligentsia, which in the 19th century was defined in very broad terms. In this group the discrepancy between individual status factors was probably the greatest (especially between education and position in society

2) To be more exact, they have discussed questions of social mobility, closely connected with the problem of inequality: Max H a l l e r and Bogdan W. M a c h, *Structural Changes and Mobility in Capitalist and Socialist Society. A Comparison of Men in Austria and Poland* (VASMA Projekt, November 1981); E. A l l a r t and W. W e s o ł o w s k i, *Social Structure and Change, Finland-Poland, Comparative Perspective*, (Warszawa, 1978).

3) It amounted to about 10 million, out of a total population of 32 million in 1931.

4) K a e l b l e, *Industrialisierung, alone N. 1.*

on the one hand and income on the other). The post World War I period has witnessed a process of far-reaching social integration, as a result of which the different and divergent social hierarchies have been largely merged.

Social Inequalities before World War I

We know much about the general aspect of inequalities before the First World War, and there are many narrative sources dealing with this subject. The situation is worse in regard to detailed, especially statistical, data, but not all research possibilities have yet been exhausted. To keep our reflections in order let us use the scheme applied by Kaelble in one of his books⁵⁾. He examines social inequalities in regard to income, position in the work place, education, housing, illness and death, and considers the same questions from the point of view of class division. Not all these aspects are known to us.

The process of industrialization brought enormous changes in income and prosperity to Poland. It was in the 19th century that large bourgeois fortunes were created in this country. In Poland this was the only period of boom for a sizeable group of millionaires - like the famous Kronenbergs and Blochs - who were mostly of Jewish or German origin; this was an additional obstacle to the consolidation of the bourgeoisie and the rallying of the enlightened classes behind it. The bourgeoisie emerged mainly in the Congress Kingdom, which was under Russian rule. There was practically no big Polish bourgeoisie in the Austrian and Prussian parts of Poland. In the early years of the 20th century individualistic capitalism declined, and Poland saw the appearance of anonymous joint-stock companies and foreign capital in a new role (with directing centres abroad). The concentration of wealth and income increased in the first 15 years of the 20th century, and turnover and capital became increasingly large. The bourgeoisie's share of social income and assets must have also risen, but the bourgeois class lost its individualistic character. Its lower ranks, that is the middle bourgeoisie, just managed to keep its head above water, while the petty bourgeoisie was slowly entering a period of crisis, which strongly affected this social group in Poland in later years. This is, however, only a hypothetical sketch of the situation.

At the other end of the scale was the working class, whose standard of living was, on the whole, extremely low⁶⁾, but whose situation gradually improved.

5) Average yearly wages of textile workers in 1894 in roubles: USA 1300, Great Britain 936, Germany 707, Congress Kingdom 427, Russia 350. For more details see: E. K a - c z y ń s k a, in: *Polska klasa robotnicza, Zarys dziejów* (The Polish Working Class, An Outline of Its History), vol. I, part 2, (Warszawa, 1978), pp. 274 - 308.

6) I have presented a preliminary analysis of the social hierarchy and inequalities in inter-war Poland in my book *Spółczesność Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej 1918 - 1939* (Polish Society 1918 - 1939), (Warszawa, 1973), Chapter X. Most of the data referring to the years 1918 - 1939 comes from this book.

We do not know to what extent this improvement was due to general economic development - this must have been the most important factor - and to what extent it resulted from a change in the distribution of national income in favour of the working class. We know more about the evolution of income within this class. The initial gap between skilled factory "artisans" and the badly paid unskilled workers was bridged by many intermediate rungs which finally produced a continuum. However, the difference between the top and the bottom of this ladder, far from decreasing, was becoming ever greater; the highest wages, which were at first 2-4 times as high as the lowest, were often 7-10 times higher than the lowest wages on the eve of World War I. The top limit of the highest wages was raised, but the bottom limit rose much more slowly. On the whole, the situation in the Congress Kingdom did not differ much from that in the Polish territories under Prussia (Upper Silesia, Poznan region, Pomerania), where the rise in wages was quite considerable, especially in the case of skilled workers, or from the situation in Teschen Silesia (Austria).

We know less about handicrafts and small-scale industry. In these occupations the differences in wages were not so great and were mostly connected with traditional occupational categories (journeyman - apprentice). In any case, the wages of workers employed in large factories were higher than the pay of those working in small establishments.

We do not have enough data to present a synthesis of the inequalities in income within the group of non-manual workers (called brain workers in Poland) or the difference between the pay of manual and non-manual workers. In Poland the term "non-manual worker" referred to a social group, the intelligentsia, which enjoyed great social prestige. This fact might have had an influence on the evaluation of work and even on the salaries of this category of people. In any case, there were sharp differences in factories between the wages of workers and the pay of salaried personnel and technical supervisory staffs. Within the group of non-manual workers the differences in income were extremely great. Professional people or factory directors enjoyed much greater prosperity and a higher social status than civil servants of lower ranks, post-office clerks and clerical workers. The differences within this group were much greater than between workers. The salaries of at least a half of the non-manual workers were not higher than a worker's wage.

In towns and the industrial sector, there is no doubt that although the type of production remained capitalist, the former gross and brutal inequalities within the workplace diminished at the beginning of the 20th century. This applies, among other things, to relations between owners, managers and supervisory staffs on the one hand, and workers on the other. These changes were linked to the growth of democratic customs resulting from the weakening of sharp archaic divisions between the individual estates, as well as to the influence of the 1905 revolution, which raised the prestige of the working class.

Another question is inequality in access to education. The majority of industrial workers in the Congress Kingdom were illiterate. Although illiteracy was decreasing and on the eve of World War I more than a half of all workers (not only in industry) could read and write (Polish education existed only in the Austrian part of Poland; in the rest of the country instruction was given in Russian or in German), worker's access to education was still restricted. In this respect the disproportions increased. The level of general and vocational education of skilled workers was rising, while the masses of unskilled workers remained illiterate. Illiteracy was rare in the Polish territories under Prussia; the situation was worse in Galicia and the worst in the Russian-ruled Congress Kingdom. In view of the denationalization policy conducted by Prussia and Russia, even the enlightened classes of Polish society had difficulties in gaining access to secondary schools and, especially, universities, but this did not apply to Galicia. In sum, the inequalities in access to education slightly diminished before 1914.

There were gross inequalities in housing. In industrial centers the overcrowding in workers' flats was simply unbelievable (3-4 persons, sometimes even more than 10, per room); a large number of workers lived in uninhabitable quarters, some in peasant-type cottages. In contrast, the bourgeoisie usually had large flats, though many of them were old fashioned and lacked modern conveniences. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, the situation of factory workers improved a little owing to the growth of housebuilding and the construction of workers' flats by many factories. However, since the technical standards of apartments for the prosperous classes rose steadily, inequality in this respect probably did not lessen.

There were also great inequalities in health care. For lack of space I cannot present them in detail, but the general picture was similar to the housing situation: inequalities in health care rose to a new level, so to speak, in view of a certain improvement in the situation of the lower social strata (among other things, thanks to medical care in factories) and a simultaneous improvement in the standards of medical care for the prosperous classes.

In the countryside, especially in the territories under Russia and Austria, an archaic socio-economic structure predominated. The inequalities were institutionalized, their antagonistic embodiments being the big landowner and the peasant. Although there were great differences in the income of peasants, the main inequality was between the manor house and the peasant cottage. It concerned land ownership (a large landed estate was several score or several hundred times as big as a peasant holding) and of course also income. The housing conditions of the two groups could not even be compared and are best reflected in the words "manor house" and "cottage". The situation was similar in regard to educational chances. Illiteracy prevailed in the villages of the Congress Kingdom, was quite large in Galicia, and small in the Prussian part of Poland. There were also glaring inequalities in health care. The rural semi-proletariat and prole-

tariat lived on an even lower level than the peasants. Other inequalities and a different hierarchy existed on manorial farms employing agricultural laborers. With the passage of time, however, the economic and cultural level of a considerable part of peasant stratum improved and thus the inequality in the countryside possibly decreased somewhat.

Social inequalities corresponded to class divisions; at one end of the scale were capitalists and land-owners, at the opposite end, workers and peasants. The middle rungs of the social ladder presented a more complex picture, since the most characteristic part of non-manual workers, namely the intelligentsia, occupied a high rung as far as prestige and education were concerned, but held varied positions in regard to income and living standards; the lower ranks of this group did not differ much from the lower social strata while its highest ranks enjoyed a position similar to that of the privileged classes. The position of the petty bourgeoisie was also ambiguous; a part of this group did not differ from the proletariat; the rest (with the exception of the Poznan region) did not enjoy respect, and had a modest standard of living.

Generally speaking, the inequality curve within the part of Polish society living in industrialized areas followed an incomplete inverted U pattern. Since the process of industrialization began in Poland in 1860 (earlier in Silesia), this concerns only the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. By an incomplete inverted U I mean the fact that the rise of inequality at the beginning of the process was far more rapid and pronounced than the decrease at its end.

The inter-war period

Let me state at the beginning that the First World War disordered or even abolished many of the old hierarchies and inequalities. Its natural result was a change in mutual relations and in the evaluation of manual and non-manual work. War-time conditions favoured the owners of goods. From the material point of view the hardest blow was dealt to the intelligentsia and non-manual workers and also to workers in large industrial centers. At the end of the war and after its conclusion the difference between the pay of manual and non-manual workers was much smaller than before, and so were the differences between the wages of various groups of manual workers. It seems that the reduction of the gap between the wages of manual and non-manual workers has become a permanent feature.

Inter-war Poland experienced a relatively rapid integration of society and a reduction of differences between the systems of social distances which had existed in the three parts of the partitioned country. However, as late as 1939, the differences between the territories which had been under Prussia and those under Russia and Austria were still considerable. Another feature of Polish inter-war society was the continued existence of pre-capitalist structures along-

side a modern industrial sector, although this dichotomy was somewhat lessened. An acute economic crisis affected the developments of Polish society, and many of the features characteristic of the pre-war period were still apparent in the years 1918 - 1939. I shall deal here only with the changes which took place in the new period 7).

Regarding living standards and incomes in 1918 - 1939, as well as many other questions, the sources at our disposal are more abundant than for earlier panels, but are, unfortunately, only fragmentary. Attempts were made during those years to present a general picture of social inequalities in Poland, and I shall make use of these data here. On the basis of estimates of national income and its distribution, Michał Kalecki and Ludwik Landau, two distinguished economists, calculated the monthly expenditure of four-person families of various socio-occupational groups in 1929 and 1933 8) (the exchange rate of the dollar was 8,90 zlotys in 1929, 7,20 in 1933 before its devaluation, and 5,30 in 1935).

Table 1

Classes and strata	Expenditure in zlotys	
	1929	1933 a)
Persons living on profit and professional people	1,300	800
Non-manual workers	640	445
Petty bourgeoisie	345	185
Manual workers	265	135
Peasants	175	73 - 151 b)

a) wages and prices dropped in the years 1929 - 1933

b) my own estimates. Kalecki and Landau have not given figures for peasants in 1933.

Expenditures do not, of course, reflect the structure of incomes, which differed much more. I have distinguished the following levels of income and consumption in the years 1918 - 1939 in my book: 1) the financial elite, aristocracy, big bourgeoisie (several thousand families), 2) the prosperous bourgeoisie, landowners, senior civil servants (several hundred thousand persons), 3) the typical level of the intelligentsia: clerical workers, less prosperous representatives of the professions, secondary school teachers, prosperous petty bourge-

7) Cf. footnote 6.

8) Michał Kalecki and Ludwik Landau, *Szacunek dochodu społecznego w 1929 r.* (An Estimate of the Social Income in 1929) (Warszawa, 1934); by the same authors: *Dochód społeczny w 1933 i podstawy badań periodycznych nad zmianami dochodu* (The Social Income in 1933 and Foundations of Periodic Research into Changes in Income), (Warszawa, 1935).

oisie (over a million people), 4) clerical workers of lower ranks, the working class elite, petty bourgeoisie (3,5 million), 5) unskilled workers, proletarian artisans (5 - 6 million), 6) peasants (a variegated group of 15 million), 7) rural semi-proletariat, the poorest urban strata, persons permanently unemployed during the crisis (4 million).

Kalecki and Landau also estimated the distribution of Poland's national income. They put the national income in 1929 at 26.000 million zlotys and the income of hired labour at about 8.000 million (of which non-manual workers earned 2.500 million, manual workers 4.300 million, and agricultural labourers 1.600 million zlotys). The petty bourgeoisie obtained 3.500 million, small holders 8.700 million, the propertied classes and professional people 2.200 million. These figures give some idea of the proportions in the distribution of the national income. The estimates for 1933 reflect changes brought by the crisis, which was the most important event in this respect in the years 1918 - 1939. According to the authors' estimates, the real income of non-manual workers rose as a result of the Depression (it reached an index of 104) while the income of manual workers dropped (78); the incomes of the petty bourgeoisie also dropped (81), and there was a slight decrease in the income of the bourgeoisie and professional people (95). The industrial goods consumption index was 47 (!) for peasants and agricultural labourers, and 85 for big landowners. Generally speaking, the changes indicated by these figures meant a growth of social inequalities at the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s. Unfortunately there are no estimates for other years. In the last few years before the war, the working class might have slightly increased its share of the national income, but this is only a hypothesis.

Hanna Jędruszczak analyses in detail the share and differentiations of workers' wages in the years 1924 - 1939⁹). She estimates that in 1937 the share of wages (of manual and non-manual workers) in the national income was about 20 per cent higher than in 1928, and 50 per cent higher than in 1933, which was the worst year. I will not deal here with the large fluctuations in relative wages in the years 1918 - 1928, since this is of little importance for our question. A number of studies published before and after World War II give quite an exact picture of the situation. There is also a large amount of information on differences in workers' wages. There is no point in discussing this data in detail, since no comparisons can be made, in view of the lack of information on the period preceding World War I. However, it is worth pointing out that the differences dependent on region, branch of industry and the size of work places were no smaller than the differences between the wages of skilled and unskilled workers. According to Landau, in 1929 the average monthly wage of workers

⁹) Hanna Jędruszczak, *Płace robotników w Polsce 1924 - 1939 (Workers' Wages in Poland 1924 - 1929)* (Warszawa, 1963), p. 300.

employed in sawmills was two-and-a-half times lower than in fertilizer factories. In the same year industrial workers in the lowest wage bracket (6 per cent of the total) earned 8 - 10 times less than workers belonging to the best paid group (12 per cent). Wages in small factories were frequently no more than a half of what was paid for similar jobs in large factories. It is quite difficult to ascertain wage differences resulting from qualifications, there being no uniform criteria of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled work. According to comparative studies these differences are said to have been relatively large in Poland, but factors other than qualifications frequently led to even greater differences in wages.

Other studies have shown that the differences between the incomes of manual and non-manual workers were not very great. Table 1 gives some idea of the differences in wages and expenditures between manual and non-manual workers. In 1929 the situation was as follows:

Table 2

Monthly wage	Percentage of manual workers	Percentage of non-manual workers
up to 150 zlotys	49	17
150 - 300 zlotys	39	39
over 300 zlotys	12	44
Total	100	100

Source: L. Landau, see fn. 10, pp. 245 - 246.

It seems that the difference in the income of manual and non-manual workers, after being reduced during World War I, began to increase again during the economic crisis. This was probably due to the fact that a large proportion of non-manual workers were civil servants. As is known, their salaries and employment tend to be stable.

The inter-war period did not bring major changes in the position of the different categories of people in the work place, but the status of the working class as a whole rose as a result of the democratization of customs and the activity of the working class and trade union movements. This had an impact on relations in work places. Moreover, there appeared a category of manual workers employed in state institutions - state monopolies, railways, post-office - who earned well, enjoyed prestige and could expect social promotion, at least for their children. During the crisis which affected Poland at the end of the 1920s

10) The data come from the study: Ludwik Landau, *Place w Polsce w związku z rozwojem gospodarczym* (The Connection between Wages and Economic Development in Poland) (Warszawa, 1935), repr.: L. Landau, *Wybor pism* (Selected Works) (Warszawa, 1957).

and the beginning of the 1930s, a sharp dividing line began to separate workers with guaranteed employment from a new group of those permanently unemployed.

Let us now examine the educational chances of various social groups. In 1937, Marian Falski published an interesting and well documented book concerning the social background of school pupils and students.

Table 3

Number of children reaching the last grade of secondary school and the first year of university study out of 100 children of a given group who attended the first grade of a primary school. The data refer to 1935/1936.

Occupational groups	Last grade of secondary school (12th year of schooling)	First year of university study.
Big businessmen	40.6	29.1
Big landowners	39.5	26.4
Professional people	74.1	53.6
Civil servants	33.9	23.6
Small businessmen	4.8	1.8
Small holders	1.0	0.4
Rural semi-proletariat	0.5	0.2
State officials of lower ranks	6.0	1.7
Domestic servants	1.7	0.7
Workers employed in commerce and industry	1.3	0.4
Agricultural labourers	0.2	0.1
Rentiers	48.5	24.0

Source: M. Falski, *Środowisko społeczne młodzieży a jej wykształcenie* (The Social Differentiation of Youth and its Education) (Warszawa, 1937), p. 62.

We know that the opportunities of peasant children decreased during the interwar period because of a permanent agrarian crisis. According to Stanisław Rychliński, an eminent social researcher, the stagnation of the economy halted upward social mobility, and this in turn hampered the democratization of culture in Poland.

We also have information on inequalities in housing. I shall confine myself to the percentage of persons of each social group who lived in dwellings with a lower density of occupation than two persons per room, which was then regarded as the tolerable minimum condition. This density was enjoyed by 77 per cent of the members of the propertied classes and professional people, 78 per cent of non-manual workers, 44 per cent of small-scale producers and shopkeepers, 29 per cent of manual workers and labourers, and 19 per cent of peasants. Once again the inequalities in housing, as in other fields, were on the whole linked to class divisions.

For lack of space I cannot present a detailed picture of inequalities in the field of medical care, but it seems that on the whole they did not change much compared with the period preceding World War I. The health service for hired labor covered about one-sixth of Polish society (not all manual workers had the right to social insurance), but financial difficulties (the crisis) put medical care out of the reach of a large part of the peasantry. A considerable part of the intelligentsia benefited from progress in medicine, and this had a positive effect on the health of the younger generation, but it also increased inequality in this respect. These are however only hypotheses.

This short survey shows that compared with pre-war times, social inequalities did not undergo any radical change during the inter-war period; what changed was their distribution, e. g. non-manual workers employed in state institutions improved their position, and a change could be noticed in access to education (elementary schooling embraced practically the entire younger generation as a result of which illiteracy decreased).

Social changes resulting from the war and the revolution

The war was not only a cataclysm and a break in the normal development of Polish society, but also a factor leading to major changes in social structure. These transformations have been discussed by Waclaw Długoborski¹¹⁾. For lack of space I cannot repeat his conclusions. Let me only point out that the extermination of Jews meant the liquidation of the majority of the petty bourgeoisie and of a half of the bourgeoisie. On the whole, the partial destruction of the old social structures (especially in the territories incorporated into the Reich) facilitated the introduction of social reforms after 1944. The occupation of the country led to the extermination of a part of the propertied classes and of the intelligentsia, and to the degradation of a part of the working class (forced labour) and of the peasantry (mass evictions). This policy of extermination and persecution blurred social inequalities among a large part of Polish society. The mass deportations of Poles from the eastern territories in the years 1939 - 1941

11) Waclaw Długoborski, "Die deutsche Besatzungspolitik und die Veränderungen der sozialen Struktur Polens 1939 - 1945" in: W. Długoborski, ed., *Zweiter Weltkrieg und sozialer Wandel* (Göttingen, 1981).

also levelled social differences. However, some of these changes were transitory, and many people regained their previous social status after the war. The Nazi socio-national hierarchy, composed of all the ranks from *Reichsbürger* down to the inmates of ghettos and concentration camps, was of course only temporary.

The changes made in the years 1945 - 1985 have led to the liquidation of the uppermost rung of the old socio-occupational hierarchy. In practice, however, the majority of the propertied classes and of the petty bourgeoisie was either physically or economically destroyed during the war. The remaining components of the social structure are: workers, peasants - farmers (the short period of forcible collectivisation in the years 1950 - 1955 failed to eliminate this group), the intelligentsia (a group which according to a new definition now comprises only people with a university education), clerical workers, and owners of commercial and industrial establishments (the so-called private sector, mostly small-scale producers and shopkeepers). The large-scale industrialization launched in the late 1940s has resulted in great structural mobility. Millions of peasants have come to towns and found employment in industry, hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people from working class and peasant families have taken up non-manual jobs or joined the group of the intelligentsia, and the country has undergone a process of intensive urbanization. Between 1938 and 1983 the social structure changed as follows:

Table 4

Year	Workers and other manual employees	Farmers	Non-manual workers	Others	Total	Town	Country	Total
1938	30	50	6	14	100	30	70	100
1983	44	27	23	6	100	60	40	100

Efforts have been made to give people of working class and peasant origin greater access to posts of authority, to the intelligentsia, to secondary and university schools. Changes in the social structure were the quickest in the 1950s; later on they lost momentum, and in the 1970s some symptoms of ossification could be noticed¹²). The introduction of the new political and economic system has created structures providing ground for privileges and preferences which

¹² Melanie Tatur, *Arbeitssituation und Arbeiterschaft in Polen 1970 - 1980* (Frankfurt, 1983), pp. 32, 83, 93; Maria Jarosz, *Nierówności społeczne* (Social Inequalities) (Warszawa, 1984).

are an important element of inequality, although they can hardly be put in figures.

In analysing the hierarchy of social inequalities we cannot disregard its ideological background in a socialist state. The ideological principles envisage equality of chances and assign the main and decisive social and political role to the working class. Inequality is to be abolished at a higher stage of development while at present there may be inequality resulting from differences in the input of work. These official principles do not differ much from the views expressed in various opinion polls. Egalitarianism is the dominant ideology of Polish society, which theoretically recognizes the right to a better remuneration for better work. This is the ideological background, so to speak, of present-day inequalities.

Major changes have taken place in the structure of income in post-war Poland. The distance between manual and non-manual work has in practice been eliminated. Some kinds of non-manual work have been degraded to a level below certain manual jobs. In public opinion, as well as in sociological and statistical studies, clerical workers are a separate group whose incomes are lower than those of skilled workers. In this respect the situation in Poland does not differ from that in other countries. Before the war the ratio of white-collar to blue-collar workers was 1:5; it is now 1:2. However, even some categories of professional people and university men receive lower salaries than skilled and even semi-skilled workers. At the top of the social ladder are representatives of the private sector (private commerce, industry and gardening) and the most prosperous peasants. Opinions differ about the ratio between the incomes of farmers and the incomes of persons employed in non-agricultural branches of the economy, but it is certain that farmers occupy a relatively high position in the hierarchy, much higher than before. Certain groups of workers whose work is now the main prop of the economy (coal miners) also belong to the elite as far as incomes are concerned.

These remarks seem to indicate that class division is no longer the main cause of social inequality, at least in regard to income. Some corrections must however be made in this general picture in view of the high income of a part of the private sector and the privileges enjoyed by the political-administrative elite (opportunities of buying goods at reduced prices and purchasing unobtainable commodities, access to services in short supply, etc.). This is naturally not reflected in statistics.

The distribution of the national income was as follows in 1983 (in thousand million zlotys):

Table 5

Wages and salaries	1.730,8	29,2
Other incomes	92,8	1,6
Net income of farmers	709,8	11,9
Net income of owners of non-agricultural business	154,9	2,6
Social insurance contributions and other payments	1.527,1	25,8
Taxes	400,0	6,8
Profits and losses (balances)	+ 1.308,6	22,1
Total	5.924,0	100,0

Source: *Rocznik Statystyczny 1984* (Statistical Yearbook, 1984) Central Statistical Office.

Note: Depreciation has been deducted from the national income.

These figures cannot be compared with the pre-war estimates made by Kalecki and Landau in view of differences in the meaning of the term "national income" and in the methods used in calculations. It seems that the share of wages is similar, but there has been a drop in the share of businessmen (but their number has decreased too).

Table 6

Groups of population	Ratio of incomes		
	1975	1980	1981
Years			
Hired labour	1.18	1.09	1.03
of which			
senior officials of economic administration			
social and political organizations, other			
state functionaries	2.26	2.05	1.78
Other groups of hired labour	1.08	1.01	0.95
Farmers	0.79	0.99	1.25
Pensioners	0.61	0.70	0.68
Persons living on social assistance	0.21	0.25	0.24
Total	1.00	1.00	1.00

Source: M. Jarosz, *Nierówności społeczne* (Social Inequalities), p. 87.

The table shows the extent of differences as well as a trend towards their reduction, typical of periods of crisis. I have already said that the position of farmers has improved. According to Jarosz, the differences in the incomes of hired labour have been reduced since 1982. This has been confirmed by the results of the latest research (not yet published) conducted by the Institute of Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, which, moreover, indicates that the highest position is held by owners of commercial and industrial establishments (the private sector). Jarosz has not taken this sector into account; if she had, the inequalities would have been greater. The index for senior officials has been calculated only on the basis of their salaries and other forms of monetary remuneration¹³).

There is much information on differences in wages and incomes in the earlier periods of the 40 post-war years. It would be a laborious task to analyse trends in the development of inequalities during that time. I shall confine myself to the last few years. The average monthly remuneration of manual and non-manual workers changed as follows:

Table 7

Year	1978	1980	1981	1982	1983
Manual workers	4.565	5.762	7.388	11.158	14.124
Non-manual workers	4.931	5.843	7.353	11.099	13.667

Source: *Rocznik Statystyczny* (Statistical Yearbook, 1984), p. 156.

In addition to a rise in nominal wages (inflation), the table shows a clear change in proportions between the wages of blue-collar and white-collar workers. According to other data, the difference between the average wage of unskilled workers and the salary of specialists with university education (the two extreme rungs of the social hierarchy) was approximately 1:2 previously (e. g. in the 1960s), which is a moderate difference¹⁴). However, these average figures conceal great differences. Let us have a look at incomes per household member in 1980 (Table 6). The picture presented in Table 6 is of course influenced by family structure (especially the number of children).

In an analysis of wages, the group of hired labour can now be taken as a whole

13) There is yet another, specific factor of prosperity in Poland, namely, contacts with western countries (relatives, parcels, work) owing to the extremely high black-market (semilegal) rate of exchange of convertible currencies.

14) For instance, *Zróżnicowanie społeczne* (Social Differences), ed. W. Wesołowski (Warszawa, 1974), pp. 159 - 160. But the differences in total incomes (not only wages and salaries) were greater.

since the incomes of manual and non-manual workers do not differ much. The differences between them are now much smaller than before the war (research into this question has been conducted by M. Kalecki and L. Beskid), especially if we exclude miners, who for some time past have been an exceptionally privileged group. However, there are still considerable differences within the group of hired labour. In 1983, the highest pay of the lowest income bracket (up to 6.000 zlotys a month), which embraces 1.6 per cent of all persons employed, was five times lower than the lowest pay of the highest income bracket (30.000 zlotys and more a month) embracing 2.4 per cent of all employed people. On the whole, egalitarian trends have been strong and are now dominant, but there are also opposite trends which, though weaker, lead to a differentiation of wages. Class division is the basis of inequality mainly in the highest income bracket (owners of private businesses) and the lowest one (unskilled workers). In the middle of the scale class division no longer exerts an influence on income.

Table 8

Households with a monthly income per person of:	Manual workers	Non-manual workers	Peasants
(in 1980)	100.0	100.0	100.0
less than 1.500 zlotys	4.7	1.2	14.3
1.500 - 2.000 zlotys	10.8	5.4	13.3
2.000 - 2.500 "	16.4	9.0	17.2
2.500 - 3.000 "	17.6	14.6	14.4
3.000 - 4.000 "	26.7	26.4	17.2
4.000 - 5.000 "	13.9	20.0	9.7
more than 5.000 zlotys	9.9	23.4	13.9

Source: M. Jarosz, *Nierówności społeczne*, p. 94.

I have devoted so much space to inequalities in income that there is not much left for other kinds of inequality. Differences in housing correspond to the division into classes, but they are not sharp.

Table 9

Housing Conditions in 1980

Specification	Working class families	Families of non-manual workers	Peasant
Average living space in square metres	47.7	49.9	61.3
Average number of rooms per dwelling	2.9	3.2	3.2
Average living space per person in square metres	13.0	15.8	16.6
Average number of persons per room	1.2	1.0	1.1

Source: J. Jarosz, *Nierówności społeczne*, p. 111.

In view of the specific features of certain occupations (intellectuals, producers working at home etc.), the differences are not significant. But these figures, as well as other data used by myself, do not embrace members of the most prosperous social groups who refuse to fill in questionnaires. If they were included, the inequalities would be much sharper.

The data on inequality in educational chances are extremely interesting. The general level of education has greatly risen since pre-war times. During the last 40 years the authorities have unchangingly aimed at ensuring equal chances in education, even by giving preferential status to working class and peasant youths in admission to the higher levels of education, especially to universities. Great successes were achieved in this respect during the stormy period of social changes in the early 1950s. But since then working class and peasant youth has been more and more underrepresented at the higher levels of the educational system, while young people from the families of white-collar workers have been overrepresented.

Table 10
 Graduation Levels according to Social Origin
 during the 1979 - 1980 School Year

Type of school	Years of schooling	Blue-collar workers	Peasants	White-collar workers	Artisans	Others	Total
Elementary	1-8	51.9	24.3	18.1	1.8	3.9	100.0
Primary vocational	9-10/11	59.8	28.6	7.2	1.9	2.5	100.0
Lycées	9-12	37.4	10.5	47.6	2.5	2.0	100.0
University schools	13-16/18	32.4	10.9	52.2	2.1	2.4	100.0

Source: M. Jarosz, *Nierówności społeczne*, pp. 137 - 150.

Note: Evening schools and correspondence courses have not been taken into consideration. They would have rectified the picture in favor of working class and peasant youth, but they are considered to be on a lower level than their counterparts.

One can say that two models of education have come into being: a model typical of working class and peasant youth (primary vocational schools) and another type for children of white-collar workers (lycées ending with matriculation). The problem is all the more important as education is the main channel facilitating social mobility. On the other hand, the fact that the income of blue-collar workers is now the same or even higher than those of white-collar workers has eliminated one of the incentives of social mobility, and makes it difficult to determine its direction (upward or downward). As a result, social positions and even some professions (e. g. that of physicians) are becoming hereditary to some extent.

It is difficult to define the post-war changes in the system of social inequalities unequivocally because of their multidirectional character. Besides, I have disregarded some important aspects of the problem, e. g. inequality in work places, where great changes have also taken place¹⁵). Compared with previous periods, important changes have been made to level differences (changed proportions in the remuneration of manual and clerical workers, much easier access to secondary and university schools for the previously unprivileged classes, elimination of the old propertied classes). However, not all inequalities have been removed, and new sources of wealth and prosperity have appeared (new categories of privileged persons, new types of wealth and prosperity in the case

15) The position of workers has certainly improved and that of lower-rank clerical workers has deteriorated. An analysis of workers' pronouncements (1956, 1970, 1980) shows that inequalities and conflicts between workers and managers have not been removed.

of the private sector and persons who have relatives or jobs abroad). The ideology of egalitarianism has gained wide popularity. The last ten years have witnessed a partial disintegration of the old class inequalities between workers, peasants and salaried employees as well as symptoms of an ossification of social positions and structures and a reduction of social mobility. One can also notice an undesirable accumulation of negative social factors in certain groups, and this has led to the emergence of new unprivileged groups. One can say that on the whole social differences are sharper than one would assume on the basis of statistical data.

The conclusion that can be drawn from this survey is that the evolution of social inequalities in Poland can be divided into two main periods separated by World War II. A characteristic feature of the system of social inequalities up to 1939 was the parallel existence of structures typical of the capitalist system and of considerable relics of the pre-capitalist pattern. The developing capitalist-urban society generated sharp inequalities that slightly relaxed since the late 19th century. Inequalities within rural society slightly decreased up to 1939 as well. During the last 40 years many old inequalities have been eliminated, especially those connected with the big industrial and landed property and with the differences between wage earners and salaried. However, new inequalities have appeared. They result from the privileged position of superior state and party officials and similar groups and from the existence of a private sector of the economy offering possibilities of getting rich. It is difficult to state whether new inequalities are more or less considerable than the old ones were. In my opinion, however, the top (private big business, big landed property) and bottom (lowest categories of journeymen, unemployed) of the old hierarchy have been cut and therefore the new inequalities, though important, are less sharp than the former ones. So the process of attenuating inequalities goes on.