

Weekend Symposium on Poland-Political, Economic and Cultural Perspectives for the 1990's

Chris Hann and Frances Pine

The following announcement was received from Chris Hann and Frances Pine a while ago. Though time is, a bit short we know the sessions remain open for interested parties.

Events in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union are currently moving so quickly that some journals are no longer accepting articles; editors feel that they will be out-of-date by the time they are published. Clearly, the academic as well as the political agenda is being transformed, and it would be foolhardy to predict what sort of society, political order, or economy we shall be discussing five or six months from now. It is apparent however that in Poland political change has overtaken economic reform. The current crisis in Poland is largely of a economic nature, and seems likely to persist. The sociocultural consequences of both political change and economic crisis will need careful examination. To this end, we are organising a multidisciplinary symposium to be held in Cambridge, in April/May 1990, to discuss the implications of the current crisis in Poland for various social groups, the types of responses which have occurred so far, and the prospects for the 1990s.

The symposium will focus on the current economic crisis, and the types of responses which are being or could be made to it. For example, In spite of the predictable emphasis in some Western circles on privatisation and private enterprise, there is evidence that some workers are leaving the state sector to set up "cooperatives;" this does not support the picture of outright rejection of socialism which some currently popular analysis suggests.

We hope that the conference papers and discussion will explore the roads open to specific sectors of the Polish population, such as peasants, industrial workers, women, ethnic and religious minorities, and the intelligentsia. Is Poland seeking a "third road," as many Eastern European intellectuals have advocated, or does the interest of the Adam Smith Institute and recent American aid to the private sector foreshadow a more complete commitment to the enterprise economy? To what extent will the path pursued by Poland have repercussions for the rest of Eastern Europe, and what reverberations will changes in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and the GDR produce in Poland? The division between East and West is becoming hazier by the

minute, and if the West is to make a contribution it is important that aid and advice should be offered with a full appreciation of social relations within the Eastern countries. This level of analysis is seldom attained by journalists, nor have conditions in the past been conducive to detailed social science research. Now however the research field has opened up and the symposium will offer an opportunity both for the presentation of recent research findings and for the more speculative definition of new research programs for the 1990s.

The primary emphasis of this symposium will be on economic and social processes from the perspective of social science. We believe that it is crucial, in this time of rapid change and upheaval, to develop a critical analysis of key processes as they occur, not only at the macro-level but also at the micro-level. In addition to papers exploring the concrete problems of particular groups, we hope other presentations would examine the most widespread symbols of authority and the most fundamental ideological conflicts. Papers dealing with more abstract questions will also be considered, as will papers which seek to illuminate the Polish present with reference to the Polish past.

With these points in mind, and emphasizing the provisional nature of any list of topics at this time, we would suggest the following themes as particularly suitable for empirical investigation: 1) the participation of different sectors of the population (peasants, urban workers etc.) in the informal economy; 2) the organization of work in the informal sector and the private sector (of course these sectoral divisions can themselves be radically questioned); 3) the growth of non-state cooperatives; 4) the role of the family and kin networks in economic organization; 5) the response of ethnic and religious minorities to the crisis; 6) the role of ideology and the use of symbols by the party, the new government, and various grass roots organizations and "social movements."

At a time when a great deal is being written and spoken about the process of political change at the national level, we hope that this workshop will contribute to our understanding of other aspects of the present day Polish society. We should also like to emphasize that while the symposium will be concerned specifically with Poland, we also welcome participation from those with comparative experience in other Eastern European countries.

If you are interested in participating in this meeting, or would like to give a paper, please let us know by the end of January 1990. Correspondence concerning the workshop, and provisional titles of papers, should be addressed to Dr. Frances Pine, Dept. of Social

Anthropology, Free School Lane, Cambridge CB2 3RF,,Telephone (0223) 333357. The likely timing is the weekend of April 21-22. A provisional programme will be sent out to all participants in February/March. Costs will be kept to a minimum, with meetings being held in the main seminar room of the Department of Social Anthropology. We are making enquiries at the ESRC and elsewhere about the possibility of financial support, but can offer no guarantee at this point; in this regard also it will obviously be a help if we hear from potential participants as early as possible.