

Moralities of Consumption in Poland across the Short Twentieth Century

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During the hunger years [of World War I], smugglers and profiteers of different kinds were a salvation! By exposing themselves to fines and imprisonment they stole out from under the occupier everything that could be taken and hidden—flour, fat, eggs. They dictated high prices, but rescued part of the food that was supposed to be removed by the German occupier's grasp and held it in the homeland, surely not in the name of patriotism, but for their own profit. An odd salvation! The salvation that would soon become a social disaster...The German rule [in the Polish territories] is over now. But its heavy legacy has remained.¹

In the first half of the twentieth century the ambiguity of unconstrained profit-making during a transition from war to peace preoccupied many consumer activists. The author of these words, Ludwik Krzywicki, was one of the Polish cooperative movement leaders of the interwar era. In his booklet about life under inflated prices, written soon after the end of World War I, in 1921, he warned against the profiteering that could save consumers' lives in times of food shortages and hunger, while also exploiting them economically. The specter of profiteering—hyperinflation—had shaken many post-1918 European democracies and exposed them to radical right- and left-wing ideologies.² Taking this lesson into account, during, and most of all, after the Second World War, many European nation-states introduced food rationing and price controls that would protect consumer citizens' purchasing power from price speculation and the state from social upheaval and economic disequilibrium.³ However, in the occupied territories of East Central

1. Ludwik Krzywicki, *Drożyzna, sekwestr i waluta* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Wydziału Propagandy Związku Polskich Stowarzyszeń Spożywczych, 1921), 5.

2. Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 3-41.

3. Frank Trentmann, "Introduction," in *Food and Conflict in Europe in the Age of the Two World Wars*, eds. Frank Trentmann and Flemming Just (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 1-12, especially 3-4; Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, Rachel Duffett, and Alain Drouard, eds., *Food and War in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011). For a recent overview of the history of consumption, including that of the twentieth-century, see Marie-Emmanuelle Chessel, *Histoire de la consommation* (Paris: La Décou-

Europe, where the predatory extraction of human and material resources, along with war violence, led to mass starvation on a much greater scale than in the West, profiteering was indeed a salvation from the occupier's "state intervention."⁴

Krzywicki's concern with social inequalities caused by price speculation anticipated how important the issue of social justice would become in attempts to impose state-centered social welfare over profit-oriented self-welfare⁵ in twentieth-century Poland. He also indicated that the transition from wartime self-welfare to a relatively balanced postwar economy was a complex operation involving high political risks. Profiteering was a popular and morally ambiguous form of self-welfare during wartime hunger and postwar food penury. Many consumers were themselves occasional petty traders and bought foodstuffs on the black market. This, in turn, bred all kinds of middlemen living off of price speculation and widened the gap between the rich and the poor. Krzywicki, who fiercely advocated for an egalitarian regime of consumption in interwar Poland, was well aware that profiteering was both beneficial and exploitative for the consumers. Therefore, he observed social anger towards the profiteering practices with caution, warning against the quick moral judgment of these activities that would lead to criminalizing occasional profit-seekers. In his writings for the cooperative movement he justified speculation on the grounds that it was run *en masse* by the impoverished working class,

verte, 2012). International aspects of recovery after 1945 have been problematized in Mark Mazower, Jessica Reinisch, and David Feldman, eds., "Post-War Reconstruction of Europe: International Perspectives, 1945-1949," supplement, *Past and Present* 210, no. S6 (2011), particularly Mazower, "Reconstruction: The Historiographical Issues," 17-28.

4. While I agree with Tony Judt that the emergence of welfare states constituted a shared European experience after 1945, I would stress that the Nazi and Soviet occupation of East Central Europe in addition to the establishment of Communist rule in the region resulted in a different experience of governmental power and therefore a specific context for development of the state-led regime of consumption after 1945. While Frank Trentmann's argument that the emergence of a "fair shares" consumer policy established a "new social contract between civilians and the state" in twentieth-century Europe takes into account the diversity of European regimes of consumption and consumer welfare, his use of Western notions of "civil society" and "consumer citizen" are problematic with regard to 1939-1989 East Central European regimes of occupation and dictatorship. See: Frank Trentmann, "Introduction," in *The Making of the Consumer: Knowledge, Power and Identity in the Modern World*, ed. Frank Trentmann (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 1-30; Trentmann, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). For commonalities between Eastern and Western Europe with regard to economic and social policies, see Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005). For the fundamental differences between Western and Eastern European historical experience and memory, see Timothy Snyder, "The Historical Reality of Eastern Europe," *East European Politics and Societies* 23, no. 1 (2009): 7-12.

5. I first wrote about the term "self-welfare," which was coined via a translation by Jie-Hyun Lim, in my essay "From Welfare-State to Self-Welfare: Everyday Opposition Among Textile Female Workers, Łódź 1971-1981," in *Gender Politics and Mass Dictatorship: Global Perspectives*, ed. Jie-Hyun Lim and Karen Petrone (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 278-300.

mostly by poor female smugglers, out of wartime necessity. For a period of the post-1918 recovery he proposed that the logics of profit making should be replaced by consumer self-organization, rather than by repressive measures.⁶

The process of leveling social inequalities after the wartime state of emergency on Polish lands is part of the broader European history of mobilization for egalitarian regimes of consumption.⁷ Yet each European nation-state faced postwar reconstruction in radically different social and political settings. In the case of wartime Great Britain, for example, the success of the politics of “fair shares” and flat-rate rationing became a founding myth of the post-1945 welfare state.⁸ But even there, the idea that state intervention increased social fairness had its limits. In the face of the Nazi threat, food controls in Great Britain forged national cohesion by leveling the most striking social inequalities. In peacetime, however, the continuing austerity measures led to the demise of the Labour government.⁹ In East Central Europe consumer self-welfare undermined the Communist project of the welfare state well beyond the period of postwar reconstruction. As the food shortages dragged on in the Soviet Bloc countries, despite their multiple attempts to buy social peace through pro-consumer policies, petty profiteering continued to be part of the everyday consumer experience. This happened not only because of the flaws of the planned economy, but also because the Communist officials continuously restrained and criminalized market mechanisms as illegal profiteering in order to maintain their power. State Socialism fought “speculation” as much as it reproduced it.

In post-1945 Poland, with its lands and population deeply devastated by the overlapping Nazi and Soviet occupations, the figure of the profiteer became instrumental to political struggles over food provisioning and debates on state interventionism. Initially the idea of egalitarian consumption, linking food provisioning with considerations of social justice and the national welfare state, helped to pave the way to the establishment of Communist rule. In the following years, the anti-profiteering edge of egalitarian consumption coincided with the moral economy of male working-class productivism.¹⁰ This anti-profiteering egalitarianism would regulate not only ideological debates, but also the state Socialist

6. Krzywicki, *Drożyzna*, 20.

7. The term “egalitarian regime of consumption” has not necessarily been used as an analytical concept in the secondary literature. However, the historical notion of “fair shares” and consumer social justice has been broadly addressed in: Trentmann, “Introduction,” *Food and Conflict*, 3-4; Matthew Hilton, *Prosperity For All: Consumer Activism in an Era of Globalization* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

8. Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, “Fair Shares? The Limits of Food Policy in Britain During the Second World War,” in Zweiniger-Bargielowska et al., *Food and War*, 125-38; Mark Roodhouse, “Popular Morality and the Black Market in Britain, 1939-1955,” in Trentmann, *Food and Conflict*, 243-65.

9. Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls, and Consumption, 1939-1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

10. Mark Pittaway, *Eastern Europe 1939-2000* (London: Arnold, 2004), 90. See also Pittaway’s concretization of this argument in *The Workers’ State: Industrial Labor and the Making of Socialist Hungary, 1944-1958* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012).

economies. By contrast, consumer self-welfare, especially when it contributed to development of black markets, went against the official repudiation of profit-oriented circulation of goods.

This article explores the shifting meanings of egalitarian moralities of consumption in the specific case of Poland across the twentieth century, from the interwar period to the 1980s. It reveals how consumers, state officials, the party-state, and ultimately consumer movements like *Solidarność*, politicized food conflicts to define the role of the collective welfare state and individual self-welfare. During the interwar period and the four decades of state Socialism the meaning of profiteering changed significantly. While food conflicts in the interwar period and World War II were organized along ethnic lines, by the beginning of the postwar era the notion of the profit-oriented middleman was organized around the category of class as well as ethnicity. In the 1950s and the 1960s, I argue, anti-profiteering rhetoric became increasingly gendered, as the food conflicts moved from an ideological crusade against private trade to everyday confrontations between the consumers and shop assistants in the state-led retail sector. Ultimately, when the Soviet Bloc ran into deep crisis in the 1970s and 1980s, the grounds upon which conflicts over food provisioning took place changed once again as Polish consumers accused the party-state of exacerbating social inequalities and privatizing the common welfare. As a result, self-welfare and family-centered resourcefulness resurfaced as legitimate norms of distributive justice. Ironically, then, the tables had turned completely, as the opposition returned to early postwar discourses of social justice to critique the dominance of the party-state over the consumers that the Communist regime had created; rather than abolishing the paternalist privileges of the party-state and contributing to greater social equality, the practices of self-provisioning helped dismantle the Socialist welfare state altogether. The morality of consumption based on anti-profiteering resentment and a politics of fair prices lost its political and symbolic sense for consumers, just as workerist rhetoric lost relevance for ordinary workers.¹¹ Thus, Poland's postwar history of profiteering uncovers the crooked trajectory of an egalitarian regime of consumption that, until its final demise, was marked by the unresolved tension between individual self-provision and the collective promise of social justice.

Conflicts over Food Provisioning before the Emergence of the Welfare State

Until the emergence of the postwar welfare states, the issue of food provisioning was fought out, rather than negotiated: the politics of food provisioning achieved its most radical and brutal form during World War II, when it was transformed into an explicit policy of annihilation. Poland's twentieth-century history of profiteering proves the importance of violence and conflict in relations between consumers

and states. Carried out mostly by women consumers, the “moral economy” of urban protests from 1914-1918 in Germany and France resembled the mass attacks against middlemen and profiteers that had shaken Europe since the early modern period.¹² German housewives in World War I Berlin directed their anger at Jews. In occupied France shopkeepers were named “*les bofs*” for their illicit trade in butter, eggs and cheese (*beurre, œufs, fromage*).¹³ The emergence of new consumer moralities was thus underpinned by hatred towards certain ethnic groups and went hand in hand with the crisis of democracy in interwar Europe.

In response to the demands for more equal food distribution, post-1918 European political regimes criminalized endemic profiteering and usury, which were now seen as a threat to peacetime political order and economy. For the new Polish Socialist government, which came to power in 1918, right after Poland had regained independence from the Russian, German, and Austrian empires, the fight against inflated prices and blatant social inequalities was high on the political agenda.¹⁴ The Anti-Speculation Office, set up in January 1919, stated that the “millions gained by the profiteers must be returned to the state budget, alleviate the pains of war orphans and widows and support those who starve.”¹⁵ Krzywicki’s pamphlet of 1921, on the problem of profiteering-driven social inequalities, addressed not only class anger, but also ethnic discrimination against non-Polish middlemen. Some other supporters of the cooperative movement also believed that repressive measures and administrative controls toward wartime profiteers would sooner or later open up a space for settling scores between shopkeepers from different ethnic groups, without actually solving the problem of inflated prices.

Indeed, in the period between 1918 and 1939 conflicts over food distribution were often fought along ethnic lines to the detriment of national minorities. Jews, who constituted the majority of small-scale businessmen across the country, were the main target. Towards the end of the 1930s violent consumer boycotts of Jewish shops and trade stalls became commonplace.¹⁶ Poland’s interwar government,

12. Thierry Bonzon, “Consumption and Total Warfare in Paris (1914-1918),” in Trentmann, *Food and Conflict*, 49-64; Belinda J. Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

13. Kenneth Mouré, “*Réalités cruelles*: State Controls and the Black Market for Food in Occupied France,” in Zweiniger-Bargielowska et al., *Food and War*, 169-82.

14. Zbigniew Landau and Jerzy Tomaszewski, *The Polish Economy in the Twentieth Century*, trans. Wojciech Roszkowski (London: St. Martin’s Press, 1985); Zbigniew Landau and Jerzy Tomaszewski, *Polska w Europie i świecie, 1918-1939* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2005), 180-94.

15. Central Archives of Modern Records, Warsaw (Archiwum Akt Nowych, hereafter “AAN”), I/243, Ministerstwo Aprowizacji (1918-1939), Urząd do Walki z Lichwą i Spekulacją, Wycinki i komunikaty prawne dotyczące Urzędu do Walki z Lichwą i Spekulacją 1918-1939, n.p.

16. AAN, I/284, Ministerstwo Aprowizacji (1918-1939), Urząd do Walki z Lichwą i Spekulacją, Korespondencja dotyczące interpelacji Narodowego Klubu Żydowskiego Posłów Sejmowych. On the boycott of Jewish businesses in interwar Poland, see also: Antony Polonsky, ed., “The Sixty-Fifth Anniversary of Events in Przytyk: A Debate,”

especially during the Great Depression, encouraged Polish peasant cooperatives to bypass, unofficially, Jewish middlemen.¹⁷ This policy, based on the government's assumption that small traders and stallholders represented unproductive occupations, led to the gradual impoverishment of the Jewish community, in which unemployment reached 34.4 percent in the 1930s.¹⁸ Krzywicki and other interwar Socialists claimed that ethnic differences were secondary in relation to capitalist logics of profit making. One cooperative movement activist explained that "our 'Christian' merchants, who keep pictures of the Heavenly Mother in their shops, discriminate against Jewish merchants by means of the anti-speculation offices. The only difference between the two groups is that Jews ripped off consumers without having the picture of the Heavenly Mother on the wall."¹⁹ The leftist conviction about the dominance of class over ethnicity in the politics of anti-profiteering was proven wrong with the outbreak of World War II.

During World War II ethnicity and race became the sole and explicit criteria for differentiating consumers. The Nazi and Soviet occupations of East Central Europe led to a spillover of black market activities and a deliberate politics of starvation that went along ethnic and racial lines. Under the *Generalgouvernement*, civilians—most of all the Jews herded into ghettos—depended on illicit trade, self-aid or simple theft to a much greater degree than in Western Europe. In wartime Poland, where black market activities were formally liable to the death penalty, they constituted the majority of all economic transactions.²⁰ The politics of annihilation unleashed by the two totalitarian regimes were aggravated by a series of civil wars that were not halted by the "brutal peace" of 1943-1949.²¹ During the alternating occupations of Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, the Baltic states and the western parts of the Soviet Union, approximately fourteen million civilians and prisoners of war were killed or starved to death.²² Although some residual race-specific rationing systems existed in the bloodlands, to use the term coined by Timothy Snyder, they aimed to keep populations below or just at the level of survival. It is then no surprise that black markets and smuggling became an inevitable part of everyday life under Nazi occupation and continued into the chaotic aftermath of the war.

part 4 of "The Shtetl: Myth and Reality", special issue, *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 17 (2004): 385-406; Joshua Rothenberg, "The Przytyk Pogrom," *Soviet Jewish Affairs* 16, no. 2 (1986): 29-46.

17. Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia 1914 to 2008* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2012), 3:95.

18. *Ibid.*, 3:105.

19. Jan Hempel, *Jedyny środek na paskarstwo* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Związku Robotniczych Stowarzyszeń Spółdzielczych, 1921), 10.

20. Czesław Madajczyk, *Die Okkupationspolitik Nazideutschlands in Polen 1939-1945* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1987); Tomasz Szarota, *Okupowanej Warszawy dzień powszedni. Studium historyczne* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1983); Waclaw Jastrzębowski, *Gospodarka niemiecka w Polsce 1939-1944* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1946).

21. Mazower, *Dark Continent*, 219.

22. Timothy Snyder, "Preface," in *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (London: Vintage Books, 2010), vii-xix, here viii.

“Profiteering” and the Postwar Mono-Ethnic State in Poland

In Poland, conflict and physical violence shaped the confrontations over profiteering well into the postwar era. World War II was a revolution that completely transformed the ethnic and demographic fabric of society. As a result, the lasting preeminence of the black market throughout the forties was accompanied by a deep reconfiguration of the country’s social and political landscape.²³ Hitler’s vision of “a feudal, ethnically purified farming belt” was executed in a rather contingent and chaotic manner. Nevertheless, the more or less systematic transfer of populations and property continued into the late forties. The postwar part of this decade-long transformation (1939-1949) took place under the banner of ethnic purges of Germans, Ukrainians, and mass emigration of Polish Jewry. On a socio-economic plane, it was carried out through the distribution of land, the nationalization and expansion of industry and a politics of full employment that aimed to integrate landless peasants and women into an industrial workforce. The homogeneity and social advancement of the masses that aimed to form a society based on productive labor were crystallized through both state destruction and state building.

The Polish Socialist welfare state profited politically from the social revolution brought on by the war and pragmatically accepted that, for many, social consumer justice often meant retributive justice.²⁴ The early Communist regime recognized the unintended consequences of the Nazi occupation, such as ethnic cleansing and social leveling, and used them to conduct its own politics of reconstruction. The latter thus emerged from the wartime realities, rather than simply replacing them. The Communists were reluctant to target ordinary property owners and petty speculators, who swept through the newly acquired Western territories and depopulated *shtetls* in great number, precisely because their regime itself grew out of the confiscation of non-Polish and class-enemy property. Disrespect for property rights was commonplace and looting was rife. Shady dealings or outright plunder of various kinds were widespread, from the Red Army conducting raids in civil households and farms to the guerilla forces hiding in the forest, and from ordinary people, grabbing German and Jewish property, to party and state apparatuses.

23. For examples of literature on this topic, see: Jan T. Gross, *Revolution From Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland’s Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Mark Mazower, *Hitler’s Empire: How the Nazis Ruled Europe* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), especially 78-101; and Snyder, *Bloodlands*. The Holocaust and the Jewish experience in Poland has mostly been analyzed from the point of view of Polish-Jewish relations. See Annette Wiewiorka and Jean-Charles Szurek, eds., *Juifs et Polonais 1939-2008* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2009); Jean-Charles Szurek, *La Pologne, les Juifs et le communisme* (Paris: Michel Houdiard, 2010).

24. István Deák, Jan T. Gross, and Tony Judt, eds., *The Politics of Retribution in Europe: World War II and Its Aftermath* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Constantin Goschler and Philipp Ther, eds., *Raub und Restitution: “Arisierung” und Rückerstattung des jüdischen Eigentums in Europa* (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003); Włodzimierz Borodziej and Hans Lemberg, eds., *Die Deutschen östlich von Oder und Neisse, 1945-1950: Dokumente aus polnischen Archiven* (Marburg: Verlag Herder-Institut, 2000-2004).

For many members of the Polish *intelligentsia*, leveling of social inequalities seemed to be the right way out of the “demoralization” triggered by prewar capitalism, the Nazi occupation and postwar misery. The next left-wing generation after Krzywicki imagined a postwar Socialist state as a means of mass emancipation from the prewar hierarchies, and this vision was supported by the radical socio-economic revolution of the forties.²⁵ However, in 1945 the general mood suggested that the path towards a more egalitarian regime of consumption would require national homogenization rather than a class-based revolution. In fact, there was an unspoken consensus between large segments of Polish society and the Communists that social justice should be guaranteed by a mono-ethnic state without Germans and Jews. By exploiting a high demand for social justice, the Communists used it initially as a cover for more practical concerns. In Poland, similarly to other East Central European countries, the party-state tried to impose its own morality of consumption through fighting the black market and turning a blind eye to the appropriation of German and Jewish property. Indeed, the looting frenzy in former Jewish sites and the so-called *szaber* trips to the western and northern territories were primarily associated with hunting for treasures and evoked more the pride and thrill of adventure than shame.²⁶

The unregulated economic activities constituted the first and, in fact, welcome signs of postwar recovery. The small-scale profiteering was simply taken into account. For many, the flourishing informal and non-state economy represented a general desire to rebuild the country after the desolation caused by the war. In the popular imagination, Krzywicki’s petty profiteer was still perceived more as a bold war survivor than a symbol of wartime demoralization. In 1945 Warsaw, as in many European cities of the time, a female street vendor symbolized the rebirth of life amidst ruins and rubble.²⁷ A typical scene from a city center’s market: “The wind brought russet dust from ruins onto bread, sausages, fruits, and made street vendors wipe the foodstuff with a suspiciously dirty piece of rag.”²⁸ Of course, from the point of view of the Communist regime, the main enemy of the politics of reconstruction was the unruliness, fear and widespread cynicism rampant in Polish society. As Marcin Zaremba accurately observed in his book on postwar Poland: “Although stabilization was the main wish, chaos reigned everywhere, from which some

25. Jaff Schatz, *The Generation: The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Communists of Poland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Marci Shore, *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation’s Life and Death in Marxism, 1918-1968* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006). On the reactions of the Polish intellectual elites to the postwar looting of Jewish property and anti-Semitic acts of violence, see Jan T. Gross, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland After Auschwitz. An Essay in Historical Interpretation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

26. Marcin Zaremba, “Gorączka szabru,” *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 5 (2009): 193-220.

27. Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann and Martin Kohlrausch, “Introduction,” in “Post-Catastrophic Cities,” special issue, *Journal of Modern European History* 9, no. 3 (2011): 308-13.

28. Marcin Zaremba, *Wielka Trwoga, Polska 1944-1947: Ludowa reakcja na kryzys* (Kracow: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2012), 256.

people learned to make profit. Perhaps it is for this reason that profiteers irritated Polish Communists so much. This was a struggle between the planned utopia and the chaos of a bazaar.”²⁹

The first official steps towards a more egalitarian regime of food provisioning came with the introduction of rationing schemes in 1944-1945. Still, the distribution of food cards was limited to urban consumers. Among them, only workers in the key industrial sectors and employees of the state institutions could count on full access to rationing schemes. Others were thrown back on to their own resources, which worked primarily in favor of private vendors and profit-seekers. Due to economic devastation and lack of transport infrastructure, the rationing schemes remained limited and inefficient. Foreign aid, provided by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), prevented starvation, but many of the UNRRA goods were sold on the free market.³⁰ Unlike other European countries, such as Great Britain,³¹ Poland made free circulation of consumer goods and money an important part of its overall economic exchange. According to the official estimations from February and March 1946, 80 to 90 percent of trade was in private hands.³²

“Hit the middle class, but don’t kill it,” went the Communist motto one year after the war.³³ Like other East Central European countries, the early postwar Communist regime in Poland opted for a mixed-economy model and did not intend to liquidate private trade, at least at the outset.³⁴ From 1944 to 1947, Polish officials and economic experts were more preoccupied by postwar inflation and the technical question of directing “hot money” (a “surplus” of cash circulating on the market that fueled inflation)—which a new middle class possessed thanks to appropriation of German and Jewish property and other profitable activities—to the state budget. According to a tacit agreement between Socialists and Communists, the withdrawal of “hot money” from free circulation aimed to strengthen the state and social groups serving it, not to transfer it immediately back to the poorest consumers. Czesław Bobrowski, the author of the three-year recovery plan for 1947-1949, who received his mandate from the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), and Hilary Minc, the Communist minister of industry and number three in the Central Committee of the Polish Workers’ Party (PPR), collaborated closely on that issue despite

29. *Ibid.*, 257.

30. Jessica Reinisch, “‘We Shall Rebuild Anew a Powerful Nation’: UNRRA, Internationalism and National Reconstruction in Poland,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, no. 3 (2008), 451-76; Reinisch, “Internationalism in Relief: The Birth (and Death) of UNRRA,” in Mazower, Reinisch, and Feldman, “Post-War Reconstruction of Europe,” 258-89.

31. Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*.

32. AAN, Komisja Specjalna do Walki z Nadużyciami i Szkodnictwem Gospodarczym 1945-1955, 10, *Odprawy przewodniczących delegatur*, vol. 1, February-March 1946, n.p.

33. “Protokół nr 29 z posiedzenia Sekretariatu KC PPR, 9.11.1946,” in *Protokoły posiedzeń Sekretariatu KC PPR 1945-1946*, ed. Aleksander Kochoński (Warsaw: ISP PAN, 2001), 422.

34. Pittaway, *Eastern Europe*, 48; Jerzy Kochanowski, *Tylnymi drzwiami. “Czarny rynek” w Polsce 1944-1989* (Warsaw: Neriton, 2010).

significant political disagreements.³⁵ Other economic experts, including a top-rank advisor of the United Nations, Michał Kalecki,³⁶ shared the pragmatic line of privileging state-building over the humanitarian policy of relief.

Communist Campaigns against Profiteering and Speculation

While the experts' discussions centered on fiscal matters, the official goals of anti-profiteering were political and aimed to integrate working-class consumers into their state-rebuilding agenda. Since the Communists believed that an egalitarian morality of consumption would attract more popular support for the political regime than anything else, they attempted to place social justice at the heart of the new regime's discourse.³⁷ In that context, the anti-profiteering measures translated an idea of social justice into a language of everyday consumer concerns. They also promised a political order that would bring a new morality and new social norms to the fragmented and disintegrated postwar society. After all, profiteering was blamed on a "moral epidemic, worse than the harm done to the Polish nation by the Nazi occupier."³⁸ The political response to this "demoralization," according to the Socialists and Communists, needed to be radical and free from the legalistic procedures of bourgeois democracy.

In September 1945, the Central Committee of the PPR created the Special Commission for the Fight against Economic Embezzlements (*Komisja Specjalna do Walki z Nadużyciami i Szkodnictwem Gospodarczym*), a penal and political body tasked with fulfilling these goals of a radical egalitarian morality of consumption. Roman Zambrowski, one of the most powerful Communist *apparatchiks*, became its head.³⁹ The main task of the Special Commission, the "punishing hand of the working class," was to politically secure the authority of the party-state vis-à-vis postwar provisioning chaos. First, it focused on spectacular cases, mostly white-collar crimes, such as financial embezzlement and corruption. The fight against speculation and profiteering was carried out in places where inflated prices provoked anger and mass

35. Czesław Bobrowski, *Wspomnienia ze stulecia* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Lubelskie, 1985), 168-87.

36. Michał Kalecki, "Uwagi o racjonowaniu i systemie cen," in Michał Kalecki, *Dziela*, vol. 3, *Socjalizm. Funkcjonowanie i wieloletnie planowanie*, ed. Jerzy Osiatyński (Warsaw: PWE, 1982), 25-33. An English edition was later published: Jerzy Osiatyński, ed., *Collected Works of Michał Kalecki*, vol. 3, *Socialism: Functioning and Long-Run Planning*, trans. Bohdan Jung (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

37. "Protokół nr 31 z posiedzenia Sekretariatu PPR z 15.11.1946," in Kochański, *Protokoly posiedzeń Sekretariatu*, 424.

38. "Fragment sprawozdania stenograficznego z 11. sesji Komitetu Rady Narodowej dotyczący dyskusji nad zatwierdzeniem dekretu RJN z dnia 14 maja 1946 r. o utworzeniu i zakresie działania Komisji Specjalnej do Walki z Nadużyciami i Szkodnictwem Gospodarczym," in *Komisja Specjalna do Walki z Nadużyciami i Szkodnictwem Gospodarczym 1945-1947. Wybór dokumentów*, ed. Dariusz Jarosz and Tadeusz Wolsza (Warsaw: GKZPNP Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej, 1995), 26-37, here 31.

39. Jarosz and Wolsza, *Komisja Specjalna*, 5-7.

demonstrations of urban consumers. The Commission also focused on price controls of bread, butter, or sugar in selected sites of urban concentration. Therefore, its actions were limited in scope, and never reached the countryside, where a political struggle against better-off peasants took on different forms and was fought separately from urban conflicts over access to affordable consumption.⁴⁰

The accused, ranging from corrupt state officials to street vendors, were subject to a political rather than legal prosecution. The bench of this quasi-court consisted of non-professional judges nominated by the Communists and Socialists. In the years 1946-1954, they sentenced nearly ninety thousand people, who were accused of speculation, theft, cross-border smuggling and other illegal economic activities, to work camps, and confiscated the property of many more.⁴¹ The political opposition, until it was dissolved in 1947-48,⁴² questioned the semi-legal procedure, but tolerated it. Socialist members of the Polish postwar parliament claimed that “the existence of the Special Commission is necessary provided the extraordinary circumstances of the postwar recovery.”⁴³ Verdicts of the Special Commission provoked fear and strong anti-Communist resentment, but its bad reputation had more to do with arbitrariness and lack of professionalism on the part of its agents than with the severity of the law. In general, in pre-Cold War Europe the prosecution of illegal profit-makers was commonplace and sometimes involved much stricter countermeasures than in Communist Poland. For example, in France, where the early postwar system of rationing failed to work, large-scale profiteering became subject to the death penalty (*la loi Farge* of October 2, 1946). It was only in 1947 that Leon Blum’s government rejected these punitive legal measures in favor of anti-inflation policies.⁴⁴

The “Battle over Trade” in Łódź: Social Justice and Postwar Anti-Semitism

A place of great social contrasts, Łódź became a city where the symbolic and political struggle against profiteering was particularly intense and politically relevant for the establishment of Communist rule. The long and rich tradition of capitalist entrepreneurship and proletarian protest in Łódź influenced notions of social justice and formed a deeply embedded political language of revindication.⁴⁵

40. Jerzy Tepicht, *Marxisme et agriculture. Le paysan polonais* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1973); Dariusz Jarosz, *Polityka władz komunistycznych w Polsce w latach 1948-1956 a chłopi* (Warsaw: DiG, 1998).

41. Jarosz and Wolsza, *Komisja Specjalna*, 3-11.

42. On the political history of the early postwar period in Poland, see Krystyna Kersten, *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland, 1943-1948*, trans. John Micgiel and Michael H. Bernhard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

43. “Fragment sprawozdania stenograficznego z 11,” 26.

44. Fabrice Grenard, *Le marché noir en France 1940-1949* (Paris: Payot, 2008).

45. Padraic Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland: Workers and Communists, 1945-1950* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 74-134.

Not destroyed during the war, Łódź remained vibrant and the second biggest working class community in Poland despite the loss of 43 percent of its prewar population—which counted 627,000 inhabitants in the late thirties—almost all of them Jews and Germans, who constituted respectively 34 percent and 9 percent of the city’s population before 1939.⁴⁶

Still, in the immediate aftermath of the war, Łódź retained some characteristics of a prewar multi-cultural industrial city. Every tenth inhabitant of the city was non-Polish.⁴⁷ In the years 1945-1950, Łódź was the major urban center of the Jewish population in Poland.⁴⁸ Most of them were not original *Lodzer Yidn*, but Holocaust survivors and Jews who had fled the war in the Soviet Union. The city offered them relative safety and a bustling urban life full of opportunities that were hard to find in other parts of the country. During the summer of 1946 the Jewish population reached thirty thousand out of an overall city population of half a million. Łódź became an unofficial center of Jewish life in Poland and a contact site for survivors, who temporarily inhabited the city before *Brihah*, the clandestine mass flight of Jews from Eastern Europe.⁴⁹ For these reasons, Jewish Łódź was economically and socially extremely fluid, and led its postwar life in the shadow of postwar anxieties, uncertainties, and, last but not least, anti-Semitism. Polish Łódź, in contrast, was predominantly proletarian and stable. With its cultivation of “Polishness” and working-class traditions, Polish Łódź, rather than multi-ethnic co-existence, became a new official emblem of the city. It is therefore unsurprising that in Łódź the food conflicts ran exactly along class and ethnic lines. Workers versus small-scale tradesmen and the new “red bourgeoisie,” female Polish consumers against Jewish street vendors: this was an urban culture that resembled most other modern European cities of the first half of the twentieth century. The food protests, too, seemed to be an echo of women workers’ experiences from prewar Berlin or Paris.

Exhausted by the poor food supplies and hard working conditions, the Łódź working class often directed its anger towards Holocaust survivors, who came there to set up businesses after the war. Embittered women workers complained during mass strikes that their children lacked milk, because the Jews were allegedly given priority access to the basic foodstuffs.⁵⁰ Some workers claimed that there were twenty thousand Jews in the city, but nobody saw them working at the looms. Did they all spend time speculating in the streets or living from charity? people asked.⁵¹ Indeed, anti-Semitism was a firm component of local strikes that combined ethnic hatred with consumer anger and other social issues. Polish Łódź generated many

46. Krzysztof Lesiakowski, *Strajki robotnicze w Łodzi 1945-1976* (Łódź: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2008), 40-45.

47. Shimon Redlich, *Life in Transit: Jews in Postwar Lodz, 1945-1950* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2010), 34.

48. *Ibid.*, ix.

49. *Ibid.*, 34.

50. Lesiakowski, *Strajki robotnicze*, 31-32.

51. *Ibid.*, 31.

suspicious, fears, and accusations towards Jewish Łódź: the latter was mostly associated with profit making and money.⁵²

In Łódź, class and ethnicity overlapped in a striking manner. As in other parts of Poland, here the profiteer was identified with the Jew.⁵³ “It’s not that a Jew was perceived as an enemy, rather, every enemy was taken for a Jew,” the popular logic went.⁵⁴ Thus, if the profiteer was a public enemy, ergo, he or she must be Jewish. Local branches of the Special Commission against Economic Embezzlements and Speculation had to face these perverse equations in their daily activities. In Łódź, persecution of Jewish “profiteers” by the Special Commission raised controversies from the very beginning. Already in January 1946 the Commission was accused of deliberately choosing Jewish traders as the main target of its anti-profiteering crusade.⁵⁵ The sources prove that extended detention in police custody and overestimated fees for Jewish suspects were commonplace in Łódź as well as in other cities. In August 1946, the local rabbinate in Łódź decided to intervene and asked authorities to “stop sentencing Jews to a work camp penalty due to their experiences of the Nazi occupation.”⁵⁶

Jewish shopkeepers and vendors claimed quite rightly that anti-profiteering measures against them were based on anti-Semitism. In 1949, Załma Gerber, a butcher sentenced to a fine of five hundred thousand zlotys (or a two-year work camp imprisonment) for overcharging, wrote in his appeal to the Special Commission: “I find it unjustified that I was sentenced on the basis of an accusation by one single client. After all, everyone knows that Jewish shops are not welcome by the local society. ... What makes the amount of the penalty so unfair is the fact that I have already lost my life’s work because of the war and my stays in concentration camps.”⁵⁷ Faced with a sentence—further fiscal persecution or a two-year imprisonment in a work camp—Załma Gerber decided to leave Poland. There were clearly plenty of other reasons pushing Jews toward emigration. Yet it seems that the new politics of consumption discriminating against private trade and individual profit-making deprived many of them of basic income and precipitated their decisions about emigration.

Another story by a Polish-Jewish writer, Henryk Grynberg, explains the lived experience of those accused of profiteering in early postwar Łódź from the point of view of the Holocaust survivors. Grynberg’s mother and stepfather had a textile

52. Maria Kamińska, “Reference to Polish-Jewish Coexistence in the Memoirs of Łódź Workers: A Linguistic Analysis,” in “Jews in Łódź, 1820-1939,” special issue, *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 6 (1991): 207-22.

53. Zaremba, *Wielka Trwoga*, 247.

54. Lesiakowski, *Strajki robotnicze*, 30.

55. AAN, 89, Komisja Specjalna. Działalność Delegatury w Łodzi w związku z nadużyciami w Centrali Tekstylniej i stosunkiem do spekulantów-Żydów, 1946, n.p.

56. State Archive in Łódź (Archiwum Państwowe m. Łodzi, hereafter “APŁ”), 5654, Komisja Specjalna. Delegatura w Łodzi, Sprawozdanie Delegatury Komisji Specjalnej za m-c sierpień 1946 r. według obowiązującego schematu, September 14, 1946, 42-43.

57. AAN, 1119, Komisja Specjalna. Podanie Zemły Gerbera o uchylenie postanowienia o wymierzeniu grzywny w wysokości 500 000 zł, March 17, 1949, n.p.

stall in Łódź, in the Green Market. They collected dollars to buy passports, tickets, and visas for Palestine. For the local working class they might have appeared as typical profiteers, because they had a private stall and regularly converted their daily profits into dollars and gold.⁵⁸

Dollars were expensive and passports were not really legal, so one had to pay well. And travel expenses? We also needed some money to live abroad, in those remote lands, where we did not know anyone and where maybe nobody really needed us. People were so fearful. That was the reason why they tried to collect as much money and buy as many dollars as possible. ... People who inherited property from their relatives were in the best situation. They sold everything and went away. In big cities, in particular, people were not afraid to ask for their property. Others emigrated because they did not own anything or saw no way to earn money. ... People like us, the Nusen, Majnemer or Fryd families, stayed the longest. And meanwhile, dollars got more expensive and it was forbidden to raise prices. Inspections and controls started and after the inspections came sheer blackmailing.⁵⁹

Indeed, Jewish migrants' individual strategies of self-welfare collided with the consumer concerns and political interests of the Communist state. Moreover, when Communists forged the election results in 1947 and started to implement a more radical ideological project of state-led industrialization, the private sector was vehemently attacked. In June 1947, the Special Commission and other political institutions under Communist control launched a countrywide campaign under cover of the fight against inflated prices. Until the end of the year, the political campaign, dubbed by the Communist propaganda the "battle over trade," mobilized 70,000 professional and voluntary controllers—in 1948 their number rose to 153,000—who inspected nearly 455,400 shops and other retail sites.⁶⁰

The coercion and the zeal accompanying the action foreshadowed the liquidation of all cooperative and private trade.⁶¹ In the next couple of years the "battle over trade" succeeded in eliminating political and economic actors who hampered the full nationalization of the Polish economy. Similar developments took place in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, where campaigns against the "hoarding of goods" and "speculation" immediately preceded the political crisis of February 1948.⁶² Now it was clear that the rhetoric of social justice served entirely one political vision: the creation of the Communist party-state that would fully control both economy and society and transform them according to productivist, labor-oriented patterns. The way to achieve this led initially through the sphere of consumption,

58. Henryk Grynberg, "Zwycięstwo," in *Żydowska wojna i Zwycięstwo* (Volovec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2001), 144.

59. *Ibid.*, 164-65.

60. Kochanowski, *Tylnymi drzwiami*, 59-60.

61. Tadeusz Kowalik, *Spory o ustrój społeczno-gospodarczy w Polsce: lata 1944-1948* (Warsaw: INE PAN, 2006); Janusz Kaliński, *Bitwa o handel, 1947-1948* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1971); and Kochanowski, *Tylnymi drzwiami*, 58-61.

62. Pittaway, *Eastern Europe*, 54.

while its first and most striking side effect in a city like Łódź was not so much the elimination of profiteering and informal economy from social life, but rather the further disappearance of Jews and Jewish trade from Polish streets, and therefore the disappearance of the ethnic question from the politics of anti-profiteering.

Stalinist Politics of Provisioning

While ethnically-based conflicts over food distribution became less and less frequent towards the end of the 1940s, the class struggle continued. Stalinism turned the private vendor into the black marketeer. Yet at the beginning of the Polish Six-Year Plan (1949-55), the postwar middle class was still very active and the battle over trade was far from over. In 1949 there were ninety-nine thousand private groceries, whose turnover made up 44 percent of the overall retail sales: two times less than in the immediate wartime period.⁶³ The ambitious goal of the Communist regime aimed at reducing this number to zero.

The rhetoric of egalitarian morality of consumption changed as well. Under the motto “each according to one’s work” the Communists rejected the idea of social justice relying on satisfaction of consumers’ needs and introduced the politics of privileging certain consumer groups over others, depending on their contribution and role in fulfilling the Six-Year Plan. In Poland, Stalinism started with the withdrawal of rationing that had hitherto affected 90 percent of urban consumers. The time of immediate postwar recovery was officially over: common sacrifice in the name of building Socialism was now the new slogan of the consolidated party-state. Under pressure from the Cold War confrontation, the Communists were building another war economy that required the mass mobilization of key industrial sectors and their employees. Stalinist politics of food provisioning in Poland, like other spheres of public life of the time, emulated the Soviet model.⁶⁴ Its main elements—emergency rationing instead of universal food distribution, politics of provisioning based on hierarchy, consumer privileges as well as a widespread informal economy resulting from the reduction of individual incomes—caught on very fast.

What was the impact of the Stalinist experiment on the notion of social justice? The most immediate effect was declining living standards and attempts by the state to further reduce the purchasing power of the population in the name of forced industrialization. On the level of language and meanings, development of state-controlled trade forced party-state officials to redefine the notion of profiteering. In the state-Socialist context *spekulacja* was used to denote all activities that allegedly caused shortages.

63. Mariusz Jastrząb, *Puste półki. Problem zaopatrzenia ludności w artykuły powszechnego użytku w Polsce w latach 1949-1956* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo WSPiZ im. Leona Koźmińskiego, 2004), 26.

64. On the Soviet regime of trade under Stalinism, see Julie Hessler, *A Social History of Soviet Trade: Trade Policy, Retail Practices, and Consumption, 1917-1953* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 310-11.

As Mark Pittaway and other historians have observed, the Stalinist politics of consumer provisioning caused a breach between the state and the working class that changed the trajectory of the Communist project in East Central Europe for the years to come.⁶⁵ The economic planning that prioritized production over consumption, which changed the whole economic system into an unbalanced shortage economy, fostered a different sense of injustice that was directed against the central power. Paradoxically, while society became more equal and homogeneous, consumer practices and informal ways of coping with shortages created new inequalities among consumers. For the new generation who grew up after the war, in particular, these social inequalities undermined the legitimacy of the party-state. In the long run, however, the Communist party-state had a leveling effect, as the labor market opened up to women and the young unskilled population, many of them from the countryside, and offered them social advancement.⁶⁶ In this context, Stalinist representations of state-Socialist justice continued to fight the wartime legacy of lawlessness and private entrepreneurship by contrasting the dubious figure of the profiteer with the icon of the hard-working female proletarian.

Politicization of Social Inequalities during and after the “Thaw”

Many self-welfare activities that went underground during the Stalinist period remained an inherent and stable part of the Polish economy during and after the political and economic liberalization of 1956. Mostly in reaction to mass working-class protest in Poznan in June 1956 and in Hungary later that year, Communist regimes in East Central Europe decided to buy so-called “industrial peace” with increases in living standards and consumer-oriented policies.⁶⁷ Between 1956 and 1960 in Poland the real incomes of those living from wages rose by 4.9 percent per year. At the time, hunger for consumer goods was enormous, and even more so for jewelry, hard currency, and gold. The rush to accumulate commoditized wealth came mainly from fear of losing savings and from general distrust towards the monetary policy of the state. This generalized anxiety stemmed from the fact that two countrywide money exchange operations, one conducted in 1945, the other in 1950, took away nearly two-thirds of the population’s savings as part of the anti-profiteering and anti-inflationary measures.⁶⁸ In the late 1950s and the early 1960s many people still had this firmly in their minds. The retreat from a cash economy

65. Pittaway, *Eastern Europe*, 60.

66. Małgorzata Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

67. This well-known argument is best described in Pittaway, *Eastern Europe*, 63-68.

68. Kochanowski, *Tylnymi drzewiami*, 69.

also manifested itself through fear of war and shopping panics that remained widespread in Polish society.⁶⁹

To satisfy this frantic and expanding consumer demand, the reestablished private trade sector, together with the official retail system, often resorted to informal sources of supply. The promise of easy profit-making was all too tempting, even if for many at the time private trade was nothing but the “legalized form of speculation” and endangered the incomes of the working class.⁷⁰ In 1957, the number of private trade enterprises reached 190,000. The so-called “anti-profiteering allergy” of postwar Polish society did not prevent the informal economy from growing further. In 1956-1957, and later on, clashes between private profit-makers and anti-speculation control squads were indeed Pyrrhic victories for the party-state and the trade reappeared immediately after inspectors had left. According to the unpublished party-state inquiries, profit-makers consequently developed better logistics and more complex conspiracy networks that informally privatized parts of the national economy.⁷¹ Elsewhere in Socialist Eastern Europe, too, developments in the sphere of consumption proved that “confounding binaries of ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ were in many respects far more complex than under capitalism, and certainly more overtly political.”⁷² In the 1960s, official statistics pointed at the apparent decline of private trade in Poland. Still, this did not eliminate informal profiteering that continued to put the egalitarian regime of consumption at risk.

The emergence of *nouveaux riches* was a ticking political time bomb, as individual incomes stagnated towards the end of the sixties. The socio-economic discrepancies in Poland became all the more striking in comparison with other countries of the region. While Socialist consumerism had transformed the daily life of most ordinary Hungarians or citizens of Yugoslavia by the end of the decade, Polish consumers had to deal with relatively modest wage increases (2 percent annually between 1955 and 1970).

In the context of rising political discontent with Władysław Gomułka’s regime, spurred by the Polish intellectual “revisionists,” the trials against profiteering aimed to shift political tensions from ideological struggles over Socialism to an everyday morality of consumption. In the mid 1960s, Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski,

69. Marcin Zaremba, “Społeczeństwo polskie lat sześćdziesiątych-między ‘małą stabilizacją’ a ‘małą destabilizacją,’” in *Oblicza Marca 1968*, ed. Konrad Rokicki and Sławomir Stępień (Warsaw: IPN KŚZPNP, 2004), 24-51.

70. Zdzisław Broncel, “Październik i dolary,” *Kultura* 116 (1957), 39-40.

71. Dariusz Jarosz and Maria Pasztor, *Afera mięsna: fakty i konteksty* (Toruń: CEE, 2004), 326-32; Michał Kalecki, “Próba wyjaśnienia zjawiska przestępczości gospodarczej,” *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* 6, no. 3 (1962): 73-77. On the sociology of organized economic crime in the post-Stalinist era, see: Jerzy Kochanowski, “Szara strefa Października. ‘Notatka’ o nielegalnych dochodach w Polsce 1956-1957,” *Przegląd Historyczny* 95, no. 1 (2004): 77-96; Maciej Tymiński, “Malwersacje w przedsiębiorstwach socjalistycznych w Polsce (1950-1970),” *Dzieje Najnowsze* 34, no. 4 (2002): 109-31, especially 97-113.

72. Paulina Bren and Mary Neuburger, “Introduction,” in *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe*, ed. Paulina Bren and Mary Neuburger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3-19, especially 5.

two dissidents-to-be, distributed their famous “Open Letter to the Party” and accused the Communist *nomenklatura* of exploiting the working class for the sake of their own enrichment.⁷³ For Gomułka, this critique from within the party blaming the *nomenklatura* for betraying the egalitarian consensus was politically more dangerous than popular grumbling about unjust food distribution. Therefore, the first party secretary attempted to present social inequalities resulting from the shortage economy as a pathology of the retail sector. He also aimed to separate popular discontent from the general critique vis-à-vis the ruling party elite. For that reason precisely, Gomułka appropriated the anti-profiteering rhetoric to preserve the popular legitimacy of his power. In a 1965 scandal that uncovered a countrywide network of shop managers involved in the illegal sale of meat, Gomułka made the political decision to sentence the defendant to the death penalty.⁷⁴

Middlemen in the Socialist Economy and Gender

In the 1960s, the state-imposed morality of consumption became increasingly gendered. This is not to say that gender did not previously play a role in conflicts over food provision. However, by shifting the political crusade against private trade to everyday confrontations between consumers and retail personnel, dishonest female shop assistants became the main target of the anti-profiteering measures and an iconic enemy of the egalitarian morality of consumption. They made up an overwhelming majority of retail staff and, statistically, committed most of the offences against consumers. At the time, the new middlemen of the 1960s recruited mostly from the ranks of managers and employees of the state-led retail sector, where boundaries between private profiteering and official wage employment remained blurred.⁷⁵

By the end of the 1960s, feminization of the rank-and-file trade personnel was complete. In the food sector in particular, women shop assistants accounted for up to 90 percent (in Upper Silesia, up to 94-95 percent) of employees.⁷⁶ This was enabled, to a great extent, by the post-Stalinist backlash against gender egalitarianism in the labor sphere. Regendering and segregating the job market according to sex during the “Thaw” led to the unemployment of many women, who had entered traditionally male jobs in the Stalinist era.⁷⁷ As a result, many female industrial workers, who were made redundant by the end of the Six Year Plan (1949-1955), and young women, who were just entering the job market, were now redirected to public services and trade. Within a couple of years, the Socialist sphere of consumption and distribution turned into a workplace for a cheap and low-skilled female proletariat.⁷⁸

73. Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski, *List otwarty do partii* (Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1966).

74. Jarosz and Pasztor, *Afera mięsna*, 77-98.

75. Kochanowski, *Tylnymi drzwiami*, 65.

76. *Rocznik Statystyczny Handlu Wewnętrznego 1947-1967* (Warsaw: Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 1969), 187.

77. Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization*, 203-237.

78. Małgorzata Mazurek, *Spółczesność kolejki. O doświadczeniach niedoboru 1945-1989* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2010), 71-106.

In Poland, as elsewhere in the Soviet Bloc countries, shop assistants were subject to a new wave of legislation that severely criminalized hiding consumer goods under the counter and the theft of goods on sale or cash from the shop register.⁷⁹ By so doing, the party-state officials attempted to shift moral and financial responsibility for insufficient supply of consumer goods onto employees of Socialist commerce. This strategy turned out to be quite effective. Indeed, large segments of society believed—it must be said, not entirely without reason—that dishonest shop assistants used the state-sponsored workplace for personal profit.

Cash deficits (*manko*) in the Socialist retail sector represented then a specific and gendered form of individual self-welfare.⁸⁰ In the 1950s and 1960s, stealing money from the cash register or “borrowing” goods for sale became commonplace among, mostly female, shop personnel. Sociological surveys of the time reported that female sellers in one of the Warsaw shopping centers brought new dresses home and exchanged them among girlfriends.⁸¹ Another example from a small town in northern Poland described a female shop clerk accused of causing cash deficits: “The person—according to some witnesses—had a tough life with her husband and financed his addiction to vodka.”⁸² Nationwide, the accused were said to live a life of luxury: going to restaurants, spending holidays in the best resorts, or traveling abroad. In Gomułka’s Poland, where society was still relatively poor and spent half of its income on basic foodstuffs, such reports fueled popular anger, which then was channeled politically. Most of these statements, released in the popular press, reproduced common gossip and stereotypes and had quite limited documentary value. However, by stressing the profit-oriented self-interest of the dishonest shop assistants, these accusations confirmed the principal value of the egalitarian regime of consumption both for the party-state and for the consumers.

Countrywide, female shop assistants were notoriously blamed for the poor functioning of state-led trade and unsatisfactory provisioning.⁸³ And it worked: in the mid-1970s nearly 95 percent of women working in trade were persuaded that their occupation was not socially accepted.⁸⁴ According to psychological surveys, 60 percent of them suffered from neurosis.⁸⁵ A deep sense of insecurity and fear

79. Tadeusz Cyprian, *Przestępstwa gospodarcze* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1960).

80. Jacek Marecki, “Przestępczość gospodarcza: mechanizm i środki zaradcze,” *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* 6, no. 3 (1962): 57-72, here 61; Kalecki, “Próba wyjaśnienia.”

81. Andrzej K. Koźmiński, “Dom towarowy jako środowisko pracy zawodowej,” in *Socjologia handlu: Wybrane zagadnienia*, ed. Andrzej K. Koźmiński and Adam Sarapata (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne, 1972), 315-331, here 321.

82. Zygmunt Kossut, *Ekonomiczna i socjologiczna analiza mank w spółdzielczości zaopatrzenia i zbytu województwa gdańskiego* (Warsaw: Zakład Wydawnictw CRS, 1968), 74.

83. Aleksy Wakar, ed., *Teoria handlu socjalistycznego* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1966).

84. Lidia Mikuła, “Z badań nad psychiczną uciążliwością pracy w handlu,” *Wewnętrzny* 22, no. 4 (1976): 67-73, here 70; Jerzy Altkorn, “Stosunek pracowników handlu do zawodu,” in Koźmiński and Sarapata, *Socjologia handlu*, 245-46.

85. Elżbieta Paszkiewicz, “Wpływ sytuacji zawodowej pracowników handlu na powstawanie i rozwój nerwicy,” in Koźmiński and Sarapata, *Socjologia handlu*, 332-47.

of being accused of dishonest behavior were diagnosed as main sources of anxiety. The neurosis was also accompanied by a sense of shame and guilt. Two-thirds of Warsaw women shop assistants who participated in another research study confessed that “they preferred to work far away from home, because they felt ashamed of their job.”⁸⁶ One of them said: “I am ashamed to say that I work in trade. In a sports club which I attend, my girlfriends stopped talking to me when they discovered I was a shop assistant. They told me that we [shop assistants] were all thieves.”⁸⁷

For an average consumer, in turn, a dishonest and unfriendly shop assistant embodied the everyday experience of shortages and the emotional stress connected to it. Tensions on both sides of the counter, provoked by the arbitrary power of the shop assistants over the consumers and long waits in lines, led to a growing feeling of helplessness and humiliation.⁸⁸ As long as the conflicts over equal and fair access to consumption took place in the microcosm of groceries and shopping queues, they did not endanger the authority of the party-state. By making shop assistants materially and symbolically responsible for consumer shortages, the conflicts over consumer provision remained depoliticized.

Shop assistants had no real influence over the malfunctioning of the distribution system, although their individual acts of self-welfare added up to an impressive grey zone of illegal circulation of goods. Like other citizens, their economic agency was reduced to individual resourcefulness that, in the long run, antagonized consumers. Still, the shortage economy gave shop assistants elements of power over consumers and forced them to make a choice whether to profit from it or not. The party-state attempted to demonize these daily choices as offences against the egalitarian morality of consumption. Nevertheless, many shop assistants and the consumers within their close circles favored the pragmatism of self-welfare over the morality of the Socialist welfare state. Many consumers, however, who felt excluded from these profitable exchanges, morally condemned these practices of self-welfare and kept looking for solutions elsewhere, in the promise of the egalitarian, Socialist welfare state.

Demand for State-Guaranteed Consumption

The Socialist welfare state represented the best leveling measure against the politically subversive social divide that resulted from the persistence of the informal and shortage economy. In February 1971, mass strikes of female textile workers in Łódź demonstrated, however, that egalitarian social policies were more a question of theory than practice. In particular, consumer dissatisfaction was acutely felt

86. Stefan Kwiatkowski, “Sylwetki zawodowe sprzedawców,” in Koźmiński and Sarapata, *Socjologia handlu*, 230. See also Błażej Brzostek, *Za progiem. Codziennosc w przestrzeni publicznej Warszawy lat 1955-1970* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2007), 347.

87. Urszula Ciosek, “Warunki pracy kobiet w handlu w grupie wieku 25-44 lata (na przykładzie DT ‘Wola’)” (Warsaw: Warsaw School of Planning and Statistics, 1977), 46.

88. Mazurek, *Spoleczeństwo kolejki*, 217-23.

among the unprivileged urban consumers, who had neither access to individual self-welfare, nor connections to the countryside, where basic foodstuffs were easily available. For Łódź women textile workers, who often lived on the verge of subsistence (40-50 percent of them were receiving allowances for low-income employees), self-welfare provisioning on the private market was hardly affordable.⁸⁹ Furthermore, the Polish postwar textile industry was the most labor-intensive sector of the country's economy. It operated according to the three-shifts system, which left little time for social networking and time-consuming chasing after scarce goods.

Social anger among female workers persisted in Łódź long after the ethnically and class-oriented anti-profiteering campaigns of the early postwar regime were over. The Communist party-state failed to provide social services at their workplace that would help them navigate their daily lives as mothers, consumers, and industrial workers. A potential welfare state solution—collective consumption at the workplace—was basically non-existent in the state-Socialist Łódź. While in the GDR 40 percent of employees ate meals in their company workplace—30 percent in Czechoslovakia and Hungary, and 70 percent in the Soviet Union—in Łódź industry only 3 percent of employees used factory canteens.⁹⁰ The Polish postwar model of consumption remained the domain of individual households. It relied almost completely on the time and monetary resources of individual families. This, in turn, led to a strict separation of labor from the fulfillment of consumer needs.

In February 1971, Łódź women workers tried to negotiate a minimal social welfare state: more collective meals at the workplace so that they would be less exposed to a profit-oriented informal economy and the trouble of daily queuing and waiting. Yet the outbreak of the economic crisis in the mid 1970s made clear that the Socialist welfare state was unable to keep to its promises. The introduction of rationing in 1976 aimed to limit food conflicts by guaranteeing equal access to sugar and other shortage goods, but it failed to do so.⁹¹ The economic slump revealed the limitations of the state-imposed egalitarian morality of consumption, as the retreat to an informal economy became once again a question of sheer necessity, rather than of moral choice.

But it was only in 1980-1981, during the revolution of the "Solidarność" mass trade union movement, that the tension between self-welfare and the state-sponsored regime of consumption burst into an open confrontation between the consumers and the party-state. Again, the most intense and spectacular protests

89. Fundacja Dokumentacji PRL unclassified acts, Sprawozdanie zespołu badającego problemy społeczno-ekonomiczne m. Łodzi. Raport dla członków Biura Politycznego i Komitetu Centralnego PZPR, 8.04.1971, manuscript, 3-4. On the living conditions of female textile workers in 1960s and 1970s Łódź, see Stefania Dziecielska-Machnikowska and Grzegorz Matuszak, *Czternaście łódzkich miesięcy: studia socjologiczne, sierpień 1980-wrzesień 1981* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, 1984).

90. Jerzy Dietl and Teresa Jaworska, *Kierunki rozwoju i usprawnienia gastronomii, w świetle doświadczeń w kraju i za granicą* (Łódź: Uniwersytet Łódzki, 1978), 54.

91. Andrzej Paczkowski, *The Spring Will Be Ours: Poland and the Poles from Occupation to Freedom*, trans. Jane Cane (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003); Paweł Sasanka, *Czerwiec 1976: geneza-przebieg-konsekwencje* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2006).

came from the Łódź milieu of female textile workers. In late June 1981, with some help from local *Solidarność* units, fifty thousand women gathered in a hunger march against bad food provisioning and an unjust rationing system.⁹² They called for the same consumer privileges that were available to stronger and male-dominated occupational groups like miners. By so doing, they unmasked the hypocrisy of the state-Socialist “egalitarianism” that only paid lip service to the demand for social justice through its numerous campaigns against profiteering.

The strikers realized that state-regulated social welfare, just like other goods in the shortage economy, was subject to selective distribution and led to the creation of islands of relative social privilege as much as social deprivation. A big part of the collective welfare state was rationed by means of paternalistic control and surveillance. Other areas of Socialist welfare were attained in response to workers’ unrest in the late 1940s, 1956, 1970-71, and in 1980-81. Łódź women workers advocated for a more balanced and more active welfare state, not for more self-welfare that would force them to spend even more time on food provisioning and everyday finagling. For them, the absence of Socialist welfare and the failures of the official egalitarian regime of consumption were as immoral as profit-oriented self-welfare.

Party-State Consumer Politics: Toward Self-Welfare in the 1970s and 1980s

Polish consumers accused the party-state of exacerbating social inequalities and privatizing common welfare. In the early 1980s such moral claims were formulated everywhere in the urban strongholds of the *Solidarność* movement, not only in circles of dissident intellectuals. Yet behind the frontline of political battles between *Solidarność* and the party-state, which ran across working-class Łódź, a parallel process of privatizing the Socialist economy took place. Slowly, but surely, self-welfare and family-centered resourcefulness resurfaced as legitimate norms of distributive justice. This happened when the economic crisis of the late 1970s and early 1980s undermined the very foundations of the centrally planned economy. In consumers’ everyday lives, the morality of consumption based on anti-profiteering resentment and politics of fair prices lost its political and symbolic sense, as much as workerist rhetoric lost relevance to ordinary workers.⁹³

Individual self-welfare got the upper hand over officially and collectively organized provisioning, partly thanks to deliberate politics of the Communist regime. Edward Gierek, the first Communist Party secretary, who replaced Władysław Gomułka in December 1970, attempted to introduce consumer-oriented economic

92. Zbigniew M. Kowalewski, *Rendez-nous nos usines! Solidarność dans le combat pour l'autogestion ouvrière*, trans. Jacqueline Allio (Montreuil: PEC, 1985); Padraic Kenney, “The Gender of Resistance in Communist Poland,” *American Historical Review* 104, no. 2 (1999): 399-425; Klaus Pumberger, *Solidarität im Streik: politische Krise, sozialer Protest und Machtfrage in Polen 1980/1981* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1989).

93. Pittaway, *Eastern Europe*, 184.

policies by allowing Polish citizens to buy shortage goods abroad. In the early 1970s the new party leadership spent a lot of (mainly borrowed) money on importing many desired consumer goods through official channels. Still, a large part of the consumer goods that came to Poland from abroad in the 1970s was brought by individual consumers, who went on private shopping trips and smuggled goods across national borders. In 1972 Gierek signed international agreements that enabled Polish consumers to travel without visas to East Central European countries, first to East Germany, and then in 1977 to all other countries of the Soviet Bloc. In this way, millions of Poles and other East Central Europeans were given a chance to be involved in individual, semi-formal economic activities on a transnational scale.⁹⁴ Unintentionally, this became a first mass experience of legally allowed profit-making after the “battle over trade” of 1947.

Within just a couple of months, transborder shopping tourism turned into a mass phenomenon and one of the main forms of individual provisioning. In the first year alone of the visa-free traffic between Poland and the German Democratic Republic (GDR), nine million Poles went to East Germany.⁹⁵ Most of them brought back consumer goods that were not available on the domestic market or were cheap enough to be sold with some profit. At the end of 1972 the GDR authorities imposed the first duty restrictions on Polish tourists. They feared that Poles would buy out East German shops.⁹⁶ East German party-state civil servants and the local population openly accused Poles of profiteering, because many of them purchased heavily subsidized, and therefore cheap, GDR goods, and then sold them at home at a profit. Polish authorities turned a blind eye to these profit-oriented practices and, by so doing, took a much more liberal stance towards cross-border self-welfare than their East German neighbors.

The Polish Communist regime was, in fact, quite eager to tacitly accept transnational shopping tourism as a cheap solution to a shortage economy. The transborder trips around the Bloc constituted a form of foreign trade. From the party-state point of view this low-cost import policy paid off, because it satisfied

94. Włodzimierz Borodziej, Jerzy Kochanowski, and Joachim von Puttkammer, eds., “Hidden Paths Within Socialism,” special issue, *Journal of Modern European History* 8, no. 2 (2010); Christian Noack, “Von Wilden und anderen Touristen. Zur Geschichte des Massentourismus in der UdSSR,” *Werkstatt Geschichte* 36 (2004): 24–41; Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane Koenker, eds., *Tourism: The Russian and East European Tourist under Socialism and Capitalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); and Rainer Gries, “Konfrontationen im ‘Konsum.’ Einkaufserfahrungen in der Mangelgesellschaft des real existierenden Sozialismus,” *Historische Anthropologie* 14, no. 3 (2006): 370–90.

95. Jonathan R. Zatlin, “‘Polnische Wirtschaft, deutsche Ordnung?’ Der Umgang mit Polen in der DDR unter Honecker,” in *Ankunft-Alltag-Ausreise. Migration und interkulturelle Begegnungen in der DDR*, ed. Christian Müller and Patrice G. Poutrus (Cologne: Böhlau, 2005), 295–315.

96. Bundesarchiv, DL 203/20-00-01, Box 356, “Zollverwaltung der DDR. Zu Problemen des pass- und visafreien Reiseverkehrs zwischen der DDR und der VR Polen,” ca. November 1972, n.p. See also Jonathan R. Zatlin, “Scarcity and Resentment: Economic Sources of Xenophobia in the GDR, 1971–1989,” *Central European History* 40, no. 4 (2007): 683–720.

domestic demand without spending money on investments and costly international trade contracts. For instance, Polish peasants brought large amounts of scythes and other agricultural equipment from Berlin, Dresden, and Leipzig, because their production had been stopped in Poland.⁹⁷ Indeed, in the 1970s many state Socialist regimes, with Poland and Hungary in the lead, were ready to admit that self-welfare based on profit-making was not a criminal act. Rather, they argued, the second economy of everyday consumers formed a functional supplement to the official one. Poland and Hungary were the first to legalize self-welfare within the Socialist welfare state in order to satisfy domestic demand and find a way out of the deepening crisis of the centrally planned economy.⁹⁸

The success of transnational shopping tourism in the 1970s made citizen-consumers aware that the Socialist welfare state was heading towards deregulation. On the level of daily practices, the consumers played according to these new rules. Yet politically, many Poles still spoke out for more efficient social welfare and more egalitarian social justice. In 1980-1981, the mass movement of *Solidarność* took action demanding more political freedom and national sovereignty, but it was equally concerned with the issue of rising social inequalities. Workers and intelligentsia together designed new plans for a more equal and democratic order. In the sphere of consumption *Solidarność* initiated many grass-root social actions and campaigns and invited frustrated consumers to voice their discontent with the provisioning system. Its activists mediated food conflicts between shop assistants and angry consumers, who felt deprived of equal access to scarce goods. *Solidarność* also organized its own networks of food distribution for the most needy working class consumers.⁹⁹ In these efforts, the opposition looked for inspiration in the early postwar language of social justice. But now it was the party-state that was accused of large-scale profiteering and immoral exploitation of people's work, not the individuals. Thirty-five years after the war the tables had turned.

Solidarność, which was in fact the biggest consumer movement in postwar Poland,¹⁰⁰ wanted socio-economic resources to be distributed more evenly. Yet, bearing in mind the decay of the Socialist welfare state at the time, were consumer rights enforceable in practice? The answer seems to be complex. Łódź female workers were definitely successful in exposing the weaknesses of "actual" social

97. Andrzej Nałęcz-Jawecki, "Korespondencja z Lipska. Co tam drobiazgi!," *Rynek i Usługi* 16, no. 3, 7.

98. Elemér Hankiss, "The 'Second Society': Is There an Alternative Social Model Emerging in Contemporary Hungary?," *Social Research* 55, no. 1 (1988): 13-42; Steven L. Sampson, "The Second Economy of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 493, no. 1 (1987), 120-36; Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Janos Kenedi, *Do It Yourself: Hungary's Hidden Economy* (London: Pluto Press, 1981).

99. Mazurek, *Spoleczeństwo kolejki*, 143-216.

100. Małgorzata Mazurek and Matthew Hilton, "Consumerism, Solidarity and Communism: Consumer Protection and the Consumer Movement in Poland," *Journal of Contemporary History* 42, no. 2 (2007): 315-43.

welfare. The *Solidarność* movement also formed an extraordinary force of mass discontent. However, the scale of individual self-welfare practices connected to a shortage economy complicated the picture. In 1980-1981, everyday conflicts over food provisioning intensified rather than diminished and, on a daily basis, social cohesion among the working class did not work.¹⁰¹ In November 1981, for example, the shop assistants, who were unionized within *Solidarność*, organized a protest against being blamed for consumer shortages. They did not find popular support, even though their trade union colleagues attempted to convince the Polish consumers that “a shop counter should not divide society.”¹⁰² Thus, even if consumers expressed their anger towards the party-state jointly, they did not act in solidarity when it came to daily conflicts in a shortage economy.

Consumer practices of late Socialism proved that self-welfare won out eventually over state-centered and collectivist notions of social welfare. When the Communists crushed political opposition in December 1981, *Solidarność*'s claims went underground. The official program of the Socialist welfare state collapsed, too, when the economic crisis made the Polish planned economy completely insolvent. The Communist hardliners attempted to mobilize once again the old methods of regulating food conflicts. The official anti-profiteering press campaign, accompanied by the revival of anti-Semitic slogans, existed until the end of the 1980s. This time, however, the anti-profiteering measures were deprived of any political meaning and practical impact. It was now an open secret that the Communists had played a double game of tolerating and fighting the informal economy to navigate the political and economic challenges of their own ideological program.

Towards the end of the Communist regime, most Poles lived in self-contained worlds of family resourcefulness. On the level of popular attitudes, it seems, they continued to believe in the egalitarian project of social justice and wanted the state to fulfill such aspirations. Simultaneously, however, individual practices of self-welfare suggested quite a different image of Polish consumers. The “Polish crisis,” a period of economic slump in the late 1970s and 1980s, was a crisis of the centrally planned regime of consumption and top-down social policies. At the same time, the fragmentation of the Socialist welfare state revived other forms of provisioning and procuring goods that were organized by one's family and for one's family. What Janine Wedel dubbed a “familial society” was a consumer society in which family members formed a socio-economic unit structured around private arrangements in a semi-official economy.¹⁰³ In her anthropological study, she compared

101. Elżbieta Tarkowska, “Mała grupa w nieprzyjaznym społeczeństwie,” *Studia Socjologiczne* 111, no. 4 (1988): 229-36, especially 232-33.

102. “Komunikat z 19 listopada 1981,” November 21, 1981, in *Sprzężenie. Biuletyn Komisji Zakładowej NSZZ ‘Solidarność’ Stołecznego Przedsiębiorstwa Handlu Wewnętrzny i Usług 2*; Tadeusz M. Kozłowski, “Strach, gorycz i gniew. Po gotowości strajkowej w SPHW,” *Gazeta Handlowa*, December 16, 1981, 1.

103. Janine R. Wedel, *The Private Poland: An Anthropologist's Look at Everyday Life* (New York: Facts on File, 1986), 37.

“familial society” of the mid-1980s with the wartime and early postwar Polish patterns of consumer behavior.

At first glance, the 1980s “familial society” organized along the lines of self-welfare resembled Polish society under early postwar reconstruction. Both regimes of consumption were egalitarian in their political message. However, the main difference between postwar and late Socialist self-welfare lies in their justification. The former was said to be the result of wartime anomy as well as economic and physical violence. The latter developed in the context of the fragmented and deregulated welfare state. This happened despite party-state attempts to ethnicize and gender the costs of the postwar reconstruction and, later, of the deficiencies of the centrally planned economy. Ironically, after the demise of Communism, a new consensus between the old party-state *nomenklatura* and their political opponents emerged. Both sides saw individual self-welfare as a basis for a new economic order and they adopted its popular language. The popular terms of the 1980s—“resourcefulness” and “creativity”—replaced the old notion of “profiteering.” This semantic and political shift can explain why consumer self-welfare remained a meaningful social practice and narrative in the post-1989 period and why it legitimized a new regime of consumption by justifying rather than rejecting social inequalities.

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