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NEWS

Art of 'Fixing' Helps Poles Cope With Shortages

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Warsaw

Constant shortages of goods and a powerful bureaucracy have turned Poland into a nation of experts in the social skills of exchanging favors to improve their lot.

Full-blown scandals publicized by the state-run media may involve only a small percentage of people, sociologists say, but many Poles engage in the art of "fixing" to get by.

At one extreme, corruption may involve Communist Party officials, factory bosses and vast sums of money while at the other end of the scale, "fixing" may mean swapping favors or gifts to get toilet paper or other essentials in short supply.

Among several big scandals reported by the official press this year, more than 100 people were embroiled in pilfering tons of meat from a factory in the southern town of Walbrzych.

Farther north, in Poznan, 10 bosses of state distilleries and four tax officials were accused of stealing 1600 gallons of pure alcohol.

Police in Wroclaw busted a "protection" racket run by taxmen which had earned them cars, jewelry and property valued at about \$1 million.

General Wojciech Jaruzelski, Poland's military leader, spearheading a campaign of party self-criticism, last month publicized corruption among officials in the village of Tyszowice. State machinery was used for private ends, equipment was sold at knockdown prices and local funds were misappropriated.

Further up in the hierarchy, party officials at the provincial level turned a blind eye to these irregularities until it came to the attention of the central apparatus in Warsaw.

So widespread is petty corruption in Poland that a Communist Party newspaper, Polityka, recently published a tongue-in-cheek article on the art of giving bribes.

Greasing palms, the weekly said, begins before you are even born, when your parents-to-be offer brandy to the head of the maternity ward to assure decent food and the admittance of visitors.

The process continues through life with bribes for a better job, an apartment, herrings (a favorite dish), toilet paper, almost anything. There also are gifts to doctors and, finally, to gravediggers and undertakers for a dignified funeral.

"Showing gratitude," to use one Polish euphemism, requires knowledge of what to give, how much and when.

Polityka advised readers to make a thorough assessment of the potential bribetaker. "We try to learn his habits, inclinations, interests and to determine his type," it said.

Dealing with an official over delicate matters may need the relaxed atmosphere of a weekend in your country cottage whereas chocolate, bananas or a turkey may do for lesser favors.

When handing over money, the newspaper suggested, try using a phrase like "You have forgotten your envelope. I found it among your papers."

Polityka finished by saying that bribery was a crime and that the article should be treated as a joke. Readers saw it as a witty but telling piece of social satire.

One member of the medical profession said: "It has got to the point where people really believe that they will not get proper treatment unless they give doctors gifts."

In "The Private Poland," **Janine Wedel**, an American anthropologist, wrote recently: "In order to get by under trying economic and political conditions . . . Poles have developed an uncanny ability not only to live with the contradictions of their society but also to manipulate them creatively."

"Zalatwic sprawy" and "zkombinowac" - to fix or arrange something - are everyday street phrases and date back at least to another time of crisis, when Poland was occupied by Germans during World War II.

Meat is mostly rationed but Poles, ardent party throwers, will always procure extra. Gasoline is restricted to about eight gallons a month but city streets are jammed with cars at rush hour.

Lawyers find it more profitable to drive taxis rather than practice law and some taxi drivers prefer to sell their ration of fuel on the black market rather than use their cars.

Wedel says "queue committees" are one method developed in an effort to maintain order and fair-play amid the chaos of shortages and long lines of consumers.

Supplies of washing machines, for example, are erratic, so people form informal committees to compile a list of prospective buyers and keep a rotating 24-hour vigil by the appropriate store to prevent others from line-jumping.

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