

Social conditions in Poland—a letter from a reader

8 June 2005

The World Socialist Web Site received the following letter from a reader in Poland following publication February 3 and 4 of a two-part report on social conditions in the country, “Part 1: social misery in Silesia” and “Part 2: the Opel factory in Gliwice”

Warmest Greetings!

It's true. Unemployment figures are being suppressed in Poland. Strangely, the official level of unemployment is always 17 percent. In reality, it is certainly double that figure. Every day, we hear about another workplace or factory closing down, but the unemployment figures always remain the same.

I live in Walbrzych, [a town near Breslau/Wroclaw]. I worked for 35 years in the health service sector. I had to wait 20 years for my “dream” flat. During the time of the so-called “Commune” [Polish slang for communism] I managed to get a few sticks of furniture and so make the flat reasonably comfortable, but now.....

Every knock on the front door sets my heart pounding. The post always brings bad tidings: A rental demand (350 zloty), the telephone bill (two bills are outstanding, each one about 250 zloty because Internet charges are included). The electricity bill is still unpaid, I don't go to the dentist because I can't afford it. This daily nightmare and feeling of insecurity is the reality for most people in Poland today. What is so unfair and hurtful is that others are so disgustingly rich. How can it be that some people earn umpteen times more than the lowest paid in the country? Who allowed this to happen?

It is disgusting the way people are humiliated by having to take charitable donations for basic necessities that keep you alive but are insufficient for a proper life. This robs people of their dignity. And the churches are also getting involved as they work out ways to “help the poor get on their feet.” It's as if they give the

jobless worker a pole and say, “Go fish for yourselves,” when what the worker needs is a proper job.

I happened to watch a TV debate recently on the theme “What would you choose? A black market job paying 1,800 zloty or a legal job paying 1,000 zloty?” The presumption is one can find a black market job and earn 1,800 zloty [430 euros]. (I ask myself, where?) I would be only too glad to find a legal job paying 1,000 zloty [240 euros]. And then a woman from some personnel counselling centre said it was not true that there are no jobs—whoever really wants to can find one.

I was infuriated by these comments from people who paint a picture of unemployed people as scroungers because they register as unemployed and without income, claim unemployment benefit (e.g., 34 zloty for three months), and yet take up jobs in the black economy for 1,800 zloty. It doesn't matter if the jobs are legal or illegal, the main thing is you have to earn something!

Why aren't there any TV debates about the scandalous salary levels of company directors, government administrators or whoever else makes up our leadership? That is what is more disgraceful!

If the economic difficulties are really so great, then everyone must be told about it, and our government leaders should themselves also lower their incomes temporarily, for the sake of our children and grandchildren.

At the moment, I am working as a volunteer for a foundation. I give legal advice and help people with special needs prepare their legal paperwork, because such people can't understand the content of legal forms and documents.

But I have to live on something, pay my bills and pay off my debts! But here in this TV debate they talk about the greediness of workers who work for 1,800 zloty in

the black labour market. Because I have lots of contact with people, I know exactly how much people *really* earn in illegal jobs, and exactly how they are tricked and exploited.

The presenter on the telly should try working for a whole month without getting pay. Then she wouldn't be so smug!

JC



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