

**LABOURING ALONG:
INDUSTRIAL WORKERS AND THE MAKING OF POSTWAR ROMANIA
(1944-1958)**

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History

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ABSTRACT

Products of war rather than revolution, the socialist regimes of Eastern Europe established themselves in a global conjuncture defined by the aftermath of the Second World War. In this sense, coping with the far reaching consequences of the war as they affected various domains of social life while building socialism constituted entangled processes of postwar transformation. How did these regimes manage to end the postwar by overcoming the domestic impact of the Second World War? Taking Romania as a case-study and industrial workers in metal industries and mining as objects of analysis, this dissertation argues that in the realm of labour relations the major paradigm for ending the postwar was the “politics of productivity”: a complex, always conflicting set of policies, plans and strategies designed to recover the efficiency of industrial production and gear it towards stable, long-term growth. The politics of productivity, I contend, structured the transition from the period of postwar reconstruction to the take-off of industrial development during the late 1950s, thus mediating the transformation of the war economy bequeathed by the Second World War into a socialist command economy tailored to national circumstances.

Conceived as (1) pacification of labour relations, (2) the recovery of managerial authority, (3) monetarization of everyday life, (4) rationalization and (5) austerity, the politics of productivity provides a comprehensive conceptual framework for grasping together the end of the postwar period and the building of state socialism in Eastern Europe. By revealing how the social consequences of the Second World War were absorbed in the transition to authoritarian state socialism in the age of the rolling steel mill, this dissertation carries implications for the way in

which we may think about the aftermath of wars, reconstruction and development during the second half of the twentieth century.

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List of abbreviations

- ANR:** Arhivele Naționale Române (Romanian National Archives)
- ANCS:** Arhivele Județene Caraș-Severin (County Archives of Caraș-Severin)
- AMB:** Arhivele Municipale București (Municipal Archives of Bucharest)
- BNR:** Banca Națională a României (The National Bank of Romania)
- CC al PCR:** Comitetul Central al PCR (The Central Committee of PCR).
- CGM:** Confederația Generală a Muncii (The General Confederacy of Labour)
- CML:** Corpul Muncitoresc Legionar (Legionary Workers' Corp)
- DAR:** Deutschen Arbeiterschaft Rumäniens (German Workers of Romania)
- DGP:** Direcția Generală a Poliției (Police General Agency)
- FUM:** Frontul Unic Muncitoresc (The Only Workers' Front)
- GEG:** Grupul Etnic German (The German Ethnic Group)
- MM:** Ministerul Muncii (The Ministry of Labour)
- MO:** Monitorul Oficial (The Official Monitor)
- PCR:** Partidul Comunist Român (The Romanian Communist Party)
- PNT:** Partidul Național Țărănesc (The National Peasant Party)
- PSD:** Partidul Social Democrat (The Social Democratic Party)
- UDR:** Uzinele și Domeniile Reșița (The Plants and Domains Reșița)
- UGIR:** Uniunea Generală a Industriașilor Români (The General Union of Romanian Industrialists)

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Introduction

On August 18, 1945, nearly one year after Romania declared war on Germany, its former ally, and roughly six months after the Romanian Communist Party was entrusted by the Soviets to form a coalition government in Bucharest, the Politburo met to take stock of the state of Romanian industrial production. The picture was predictably grim. The production of coal and steel dropped dramatically throughout the first half of 1945 although the total number of employees in these core industries remained the same as during their peak year of 1943. Party leaders had been paying particular attention the southwestern town of Reșița, where the country's largest integrated steel mill was located, because steelworkers had supposedly formulated innumerable demands even though "you can clearly see entire workshops laying idle for the whole day."¹ In southern Transylvania and Bucharest, where some of the manufacturing industry was clustered, the situation was no different; and so too across the oilfields north of the capital city and in the mining region of the Jiu Valley. The steel, coal and oil that fueled the war economy, enabling Romania's national railway company to transport military troops, ammunition, Jews and Gypsies eastward into the occupied lands of the Soviet Union was now required to satisfy peace-time needs. After years of record-breaking production in the service of destruction, tens of thousands of steelworkers, machine operators and miners had to be mobilized yet again to support the battle for postwar reconstruction.

¹ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămară, 70/1945, p. 3.

The meeting, therefore, abounded in plans for the immediate future. Arriving from Moscow, where she had spent the war, party boss Ana Pauker looked with admiration at “capitalist America” for its ability to rely on “native capitalists” for reconstruction, and to neighboring Bulgaria for its capacity to deploy the state bureaucracy to “end the difficult circumstances after the war”.² Out of prison, where he had served eleven years for being involved in a strike in 1933, party boss Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej justified giving miners “substantial food” on the following grounds:

If we
strengthen
their physical
shape, we
increase the
efficiency of
their work.
What we
spend on this
food we get
back twofold



Party boss Gheorghiu-Dej (left) celebrating with Stakhanovite miners, June 1952;
Source: Fototeca online a comunismului românesc, 72/1952.

or threefold through the boost in coal output. We also establish wage and provisioning systems that will make mining a sought after job. We will create all the conditions for people to stop running away from mining; we will make it very attractive, a sort of California where the daring and the decided will rush in to grab the abundant coal.³

² IBIDEM, p. 15.

³ IBIDEM, p. 39.

Coal and steel were indeed precious commodities after the war, yet no region of Romania ended up “a sort of California”. Instead of experiencing the thrills of a new gold rush, Romanian workers found themselves drifting towards the Soviet Union, summoned to rebuild their country after the Second World War and carry it further into socialism. This dissertation asks how, in Pauker’s words, the “difficult circumstances after the war” were put an end to and how workers in metal industries and mining were made to cast iron and ferret out coal in the service of reconstruction and socialism. Stated differently, how were the social consequences of the Second World War in the sphere of labour relations mastered and overcome, and how was industrial production steered out of postwar idleness and geared towards growth?

These questions invite us to consider “the postwar” as a self-standing historical period characterized by accelerated social and economic change that deeply affected working-class communities. In this context, industrial workers mattered not simply because the Second World War was fought on the homefront as much as on the frontline or because the emerging state socialist system after 1948 was a political project grounded in the Bolshevik affirmation of a particular vision of proletarian modernity.⁴ Industrial workers mattered because the string of dictatorships of the Right and of the Left that succeeded themselves in Romania beginning with the late 1930s were eminently participatory, demanding proofs of commitment in addition to muted consent from their subjects.⁵ In an overwhelmingly agrarian country such as Romania,

⁴ Jeffrey Fear, “War of the Factories”, in Michael Geyer and Adam Tooze (eds.) *The Cambridge History of the Second World War. Volume III. Total War: Economy, Society and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 94-121.

⁵ Alf Lüdtke, “Ordinary People, Self-Energizing, and Room for Manoeuvring: Examples from 20th Century Europe”, in Alf Lüdtke (ed.) *Everyday Life in Mass Dictatorships: Collusion and Evasion* (London: Palgrave, 2016), 13-34. For the panoply of rightwing dictatorships in Romania before and during the Second World War, see Constantin Iordachi, “A Continuum of Dictatorships: Hybrid Totalitarian Experiments in Romania, 1937-44”, in A. Costa Pinto and A. Kallis (eds.) *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe* (London: Palgrave, 2014), 233-271.

industrial workers were a prized minority valued for its symbolic visibility and strategic availability. Moreover, steelworkers and miners mattered because the type of economy mobilized during the war, reconstructed after 1945 and streamlined on Soviet planning principles during the 1950s revolved around the steel mill, the universal symbol of industrial progress across the globe during the middle decades of the twentieth century.⁶

Placed in the context of mass dictatorship and an economy driven by steel output, this dissertation offers the first social history of industrial workers in Romania between mid-1940s and mid-1950s, a historical conjuncture I refer to as “the postwar”.⁷ By closely examining workers’ social universe in and outside of the factory, notably the ways in which everyday life in industrial milieux came to be transformed after 1945, I aim to show how the social consequences of the Second World War were absorbed into the transition to state socialism. I argue that in the sphere of labour relations - the bundle of relations between workers, management, trade-unions, political parties and state bureaucracies - overcoming the impact of the war was achieved through the “politics of productivity”. In what follows I proceed in four steps. Firstly, I explain what I mean by the politics of productivity and how this conceptual framework can enrich current historiographies devoted to the postwar period in East Central Europe and state socialism more broadly. Secondly, I critically locate my own research in the emerging field of social and cultural

⁶ For the fascination with the integrated steel mill across the globe, see Charles S. Maier, “Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era”, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 105, No. 3, 2000, 822.

⁷ For an outline of the “mass dictatorship” paradigm of research, see Jie-Hyun Lim, “Mapping Mass Dictatorship: Towards a Transnational History of Twentieth Century Dictatorship”, in Jie-Hyun Lim and Karen Petrone (eds.) *Gender Politics and Mass Dictatorships: Global Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011), 1-22. For steel output as a measure of economic performance after 1945 see Charles S. Maier, “The World Economy and the Cold War in the Middle of the Twentieth Century”, in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (eds.) *The Cambridge History of the Cold War. Volume I. Origins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 48-52.

history of industrial workers under state socialism. Thirdly, I provide a discussion of historical method, the use of archives and the relevance of my case study for a comparative analysis of the postwar period in mid-twentieth century Europe. Finally, I end with a general outline of the five chapters of the dissertation.

Periodizing the Postwar

“Is ‘postwar’ a period or a concept?” asks Dan Stone in a recent handbook devoted to “historicizing” Eastern and Western European history after 1945.⁸ Thus framed, the question begs not so much an answer as an analytical clarification for it points to the uneasiness historians face in extending this temporal category across the European continent. While it is well established that Western Europe had a postwar period marked by liberation, reconstruction, political stability and unparalleled economic growth stretching from the onset of the Cold War to the crisis of the early 1970s - Eric Hobsbawm’s “golden age”, it is less clear whether the same applies to Europe’s Eastern half.⁹ Indeed, to dub the postwar period a “golden age” (1947-1973) may appear unwarranted, particularly in view of the trajectory of East European countries, many of which might have experienced comparable annual rates of growth only to see their sovereign territory occupied by Soviet troops, their civil societies incapacitated through police terror and their political systems monopolized by communist parties under Moscow’s hegemony.¹⁰ How, then,

⁸ Dan Stone, “Postwar Europe as History”, in Dan Stone (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Postwar European History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 7.

⁹ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes. The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 1995), 225-402. Recent bestsellers on the postwar period include Ian Buruma, *Year Zero: A History of 1945* (London: Penguin, 2014) and Victor Sebestyen, *1946: The Making of the Modern World* (London: Macmillan, 2014).

¹⁰ I summarize here the objection raised to Hobsbawm’s periodization of the postwar by Krzysztof Pomian, “Quel XXe siècle?”, *Le Débat*, No. 93, 1997, 3-5. According to Pomian, a less parochial temporal category that might account for the experience of Eastern Europe after 1945 while remaining faithful to Hobsbawm’s criteria might simply be called “the age of growth” (*l’âge de la croissance*).

should the East European ‘postwar’ be periodized? Moreover, what would be the conceptual value of thinking about post-1945 Eastern Europe in terms of a postwar period? What social processes would this periodization reveal?

Note, to begin with, the narrative strategy employed by Tony Judt in his *summa* of recent European history. Rather than lumping together a whole epoch of economic growth, Judt distinguishes between the postwar proper (1945-1953) and a subsequent time frame entitled “prosperity and its discontents” (1953-1971). The scope of this periodization, while allowing for Western and Eastern Europe to be analyzed in terms of economic reconstruction, is primarily contrastive. Its rationale is to underline the distinctive path undertaken by the communist regimes of the East:

Seen in this light, the economic history of eastern Europe after 1945 bears a passing resemblance to the pattern of West European recovery in the same years. In western Europe, too, investment in productivity and growth was given priority over the provision of consumer goods and services, though the Marshall Plan softened the pain of this strategy. In Western Europe, too, certain industrial sectors and regions took off from low starting points, and a dramatic transition from countryside to town took place in the course of the 1950s in Italy and France in particular. But there the similarity ends. The distinctive feature of the economic history of communist eastern Europe is that, in addition to coal, steel, factories and apartment blocks, first-generation Soviet industrialization produced grotesque distortions and contradictions, more so even than in the USSR itself.¹¹

For Judt, what barred Eastern Europe entry into the age of “prosperity and its discontents” was Sovietization, a process triggered in the immediate postwar period which led to “a winter of inertia and resignation, punctuated by cycles of protest and subjugation, that would

¹¹ Tony Judt, *Postwar. A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2005), 170-171.

last for nearly four decades.”¹² Two objections can be raised to this view. The first is that on Judt’s understanding, Eastern Europe’s postwar period is subsumed under a teleological scheme, whereby the outcomes of industrial development are taken as its causes: the “grotesque distortions” were there from the very beginning.¹³ The second is that “the passing resemblance” between the recovery plans on the two sides of the continent ought to be taken seriously as a criterion for periodization rather than as a fact of economic history. Indeed, as Mark Mazower argued, historians of the postwar period should account for the apparent similarity between Eastern and Western Europe:

Economically, both halves of Europe saw high savings and investment ratios, austerity programs, and heavy investment in capital goods industries as means of moving from immediate postwar reconstruction to longer-term development in ways that - despite international transfers through Marshall Plan - were fundamentally based upon internally generated sources of funds organized by national governments in closed economies.¹⁴

To periodize “the postwar” starting from the closed nature of the economy - the “internally generated” drives for rationalization and productivity campaigns, the structure of investments, wage systems, and austerity - might indeed reveal a set of structural factors, social processes and industrial policies that undergirded the transition out of the war economy both in the East and the West. This conceptual operation, while retaining as obvious the fundamental difference between

¹² IBIDEM, 195.

¹³ I do not dispute the fact that Soviet-style industrialization was replete with contradictions or that, on the long run, it proved a failure. I merely point out that Judt’s assessment is teleological to the extent it benefits from the hindsight of the transformations the global economy underwent during the second half of the twentieth century, which retrospectively showed Soviet-style industrialization obsolete. For the postwar period, labour intensive development seemed plausible, particularly in countries such as Romania, where capital was unavailable and labour plentiful. For this argument, see Mark Mazower, *The Dark Continent. Europe’s Twentieth Century* (London: Penguin, 1998), 272.

¹⁴ Mark Mazower, “Changing Trends in the Historiography of Postwar Europe, East and West”, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 58, 2000, 280-281.

the Soviet-type “command economy” and capitalist economies, would rather seek to explain the ways in which both reconstruction and longer-term development were pursued in widely different national contexts affected by the Second World War. Moreover, this perspective would discard the all-encompassing notion of industrialization to focus instead on the dynamics of its constituent parts - capital and labour - particularly as these dynamics came to determine the transformation of labour relations.

The framework advocated here opens up for historical interpretation three interrelated fields of investigation. Firstly, to think in terms of “the postwar” in Eastern Europe requires close attention to the impact of the war in various domains of social life, from the change in popular attitudes and the destruction of the built environment to the organization of food provisioning and the collapse of the national currency. Secondly, in this view Sovietization would necessarily be grounded not just in high politics (and geopolitics) but also in everyday life as more and more people were called upon to participate in the process of overcoming the social consequences of the war. Finally, giving Eastern Europe its own postwar period responds to Holly Case’s recent call to interrogate the existence of “global trends at work in the immediate postwar period in terms of economic planning ideas and practices, raw materials and labour issues” that might broaden the scope of comparison beyond Western Europe to incorporate other parts of the world.¹⁵ Let me expand on these suggestions.

Nearly three decades ago, Jan T. Gross urged historians of twentieth century Eastern Europe to study the impact of the Second World War on these societies as if they were mapping a

¹⁵ Holly Case, “Reconstruction in East-Central Europe: Clearing the Rubble of Cold War Politics”, *Past & Present*, Supplement 6, 2011, 101-102.

genuine social revolution. What Gross meant in outlining this research agenda was the following: without a proper appreciation of the social changes induced by German occupation and hegemony, the war economy, the expropriation and murder of the Jews, mass mobilization and the extension of the role of the state, the nature of the postwar period would be fundamentally misunderstood. In Gross's periodization "the Nazi-instigated war and the Communist-driven postwar takeovers constituted one integral period."¹⁶ Moreover, explored with the help of social rather than political history, the emergence of state socialism in Eastern Europe might be shown to have benefitted from a number of significant continuities with the war period, rather than institute a "drastic rupture" with the past as communist apologists and historians of high politics were keen on emphasizing.¹⁷ The social consequences of the war, therefore, of which Gross underlined economic growth, etatization and ethnic homogeneity, deeply structured the postwar societies across the region.¹⁸

This dissertation picks up Gross's argument in order to examine the manner in which the reassembling of labour relations on the homefront between 1940 and 1945 shaped the postwar period. Much like in other countries involved in the conflict, core parts of Romanian industry were militarized beginning with 1941 to serve the war effort, a policy which effectively resulted in

¹⁶ Jan T. Gross, "Themes for a Social History of War Experience and Collaboration", in 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), 31.

¹⁷ "The conclusion emerges that for adequate conceptualization of communist takeovers in East Central Europe we must change the periodization and begin the analysis with the outbreak of the Second World War.", Jan T. Gross, "Social Consequences of War: Preliminaries to the Study of Imposition of Communist Regimes in East Central Europe", *Eastern European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1989, 205.

¹⁸ For an elaboration of Gross's research agenda on the social consequences of the war, see Bradley F. Abrams, "The Second World War and the East European Revolution", *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 2002, 623-664.

increased surveillance of militant workers and the brutalization of everyday interactions at the factory level. Coupled with the dismantlement of trade-unions in late 1940 and state control over wage increases and labour disputes, the wartime labour regime that resulted from these changes worsened working conditions and alienated workers. At the same time, however, the total number of workers in industry almost doubled as many Romanians took up industrial jobs not only to eschew the draft but also to benefit from preferential provisioning and food rations secured through the place of employment. Some factory owners were expropriated, notably of Jewish origin, while German capital and German industrial experts took over key positions in the domestic industry, especially in oil and armament production.¹⁹ Bucharest's largest industrial plant - Malaxa Works - was taken over by the Romanian state in 1941 and rented out to a joint stock company controlled by German business. Later than year, the Nazi conglomerate Reichswerke Hermann Göring took over Romania's largest steel mill - Uzinele și Domeniile Statului Reșița (U.D.R.), owning enough shares in the company to be able to appoint a new board of administrators. Such transformations of the structure of ownership rights were typical of German dominance over its satellites in Eastern Europe and would continue into the postwar period as well, this time with the Soviets taking over German capital via joint stock companies.²⁰ The war economy, moreover, saw an unprecedented extension of the state in the sphere of labour relations, both as a repressive apparatus policing

¹⁹ On the oil industry, see Maurice Pearton, *Oil and the Romanian State, 1895-1948* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); on the crucial role played by Romanian oilfields in the transnational German war economy, see Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction. The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), 309, 381 *et passim*.

²⁰ For the larger context see Richard Overy, "Business in the Grossraumwirtschaft: Eastern Europe, 1938-1945", in Harold James and Jakob Tanner (eds.), *Enterprise in the Period of Fascism in Europe* (London: Ashgate, 2002), 151-178.

industrial milieux and as a legal mediator, most often ruling in favor of the workers in labour disputes.²¹

Combining violence and relative privilege, oppression and a modicum of welfare, the wartime labour regime prepared the ground for the wave of popular radicalism that ensued in late 1944. The downfall of the military dictatorship in late August 1944 allowed Romania to switch sides in the war and to turn against Germany, followed up by the revival of political pluralism and the reemergence of the trade-union movement.²² Between September 1944 and March 1945, three coalition government brigading the main political parties and headed by military prime-ministers run the country on the brink of civil war. Mounting Soviet pressure successfully installed a communist dominated government in early March 1945 under an umbrella coalition gathering the political forces of the Left and various sympathetic political entrepreneurs.²³ Reconfirmed by the admittedly rigged elections of November 1946, this governing coalition was slowly eaten up by the Romanian Communist Party, a process which ended the brief experiment with “popular democracy”, forcing the King to abdicate in December 1947, and instituting the Popular Republic of Romania.²⁴

²¹ In stressing wartime oppression and violence, official communist historiography completely ignored the fact that industrial employment on the homefront brought a certain degree of material security to the workers; see N. N. Constantinescu and Tudor Paul, “Aspecte ale situației clasei muncitoare din România în perioada 1941 - august 1944”, *Analele Institutului de istorie a Partidului de pe lângă C.C. al P.M.R.*, No. 5, 1962, 61-88.

²² On the events of the *coup* of late August 1944, see Dennis Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally. Ion Antonescu and His Regime, Romania 1940-44* (London: Palgrave, 2006), 230-245.

²³ For the appointment of the Petru Groza Cabinet in March 1945, see the classic account of Alfred J. Rieber, “The Crack in the Plaster: Crisis in Romania and the Origins of the Cold War”, *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 76, no. 1, 2004, 62-106.

²⁴ The best concise account is still Bela Vago, “Romania”, in Martin McCauley (ed.) *Communist Power in Europe, 1944-1949* (London: Macmillan, 1977), 111-132. On the elections of November 1946, see Virgil Țârău, *Alegeri fără opțiuni. Primele alegeri parlamentare din centrul și estul Europei după Încheierea celui de-al doilea război mondial* (Cluj: Eikon, 2005).

Two interrelated notions organized historians' efforts to make sense of this series of political events: "communist takeover" and "Sovietization". The first notion is employed to narrate the manifold tactics employed by the communist parties and their Soviet patrons in pursuit of political supremacy between 1945 and 1947²⁵; the second notion is broadened to include the epoch opened up after 1948, one characterized by the domestication of a Soviet blueprint in all spheres of social life from the collectivization of agriculture and the erection of a police state to the nationalization of industry and the remaking of the educational system.²⁶ The two notions often work in tandem, with the "takeover" preceding and foreshadowing the process of Sovietization, and the establishment of the Communist Information Bureau in September 1947 as the key event that confirmed "Stalin's growing conviction that the East European states must conform to his own harsh methods of dictatorial rule."²⁷ Grounded in high politics - i.e. the domain of elite struggle

²⁵ Works on the "communist takeover" include Karel Kaplan, *The Short March. The Communist Takeover in Czechoslovakia, 1945-1948* (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1987); Krystyna Kersten, *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland, 1943-1948* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991); Peter Kenez, *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets: The Establishment of the Communist Regime in Hungary, 1944-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany. A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

²⁶ For a summary of the literature, see E. A. Rees, "The Sovietization of Eastern Europe", in Balázs Apór, Péter Apór and E.A. Rees (eds.) *The Sovietization of Eastern Europe. New Perspectives on the Postwar Period* (Washington: New Academia Publishing, 2008), 2-28; for a comparative analysis of a specific topic, see John Connelly, *Captive University. The Sovietization of East German, Czech, and Polish Higher Education, 1945-1956* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000); for a broad comparative grasp of Sovietization, see Anne Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956* (London: Anchor, 2013).

²⁷ Mark Kramer, "Stalin, Soviet Policy, and the Establishment of a Communist Bloc in Eastern Europe, 1941-1948", in Timothy Snyder and Ray Brandon (eds.) *Stalin and Europe: Imitation and Domination, 1928-1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 286. Recent scholarship on the relationships between the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe after 1945 agrees that Stalin had "not even a road map" for Sovietization but rather reacted to developments occurring in the West, Norman M. Naimark, "Stalin and Europe in the Postwar Period, 1945-53: Issues and Problems", *Journal of Modern European History*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2004, 36.

over public resources - the periodization that informs both these notions is crafted to reveal changing power dynamics at the level of the state.²⁸

While not ignoring high politics altogether, this dissertation examines primarily the transformation of everyday politics within Romanian factories between mid-1940s and late 1950s. This shift of perspective, I argue, sheds a more nuanced light on the process of Sovietization. Understood as the realm of obstinate self-assertion of needs, interests and desires, everyday politics turns the limelight on ordinary workers and the manner in which they appropriated, contested and negotiated the conditions under which they lived and worked.²⁹ Not only does everyday politics open up the question of postwar popular radicalism and the strategies through which communist parties in power came to contain it, it also takes seriously industrial policy making and workers reaction to it. This is particularly timely since both popular radicalism and industrial policy making have been misread by the “communist takeover” historiography of Romania. Take the case of Ghiță Ionescu, an exiled Romanian political scientist and the author of *Communism in Romania, 1944-1962*, a remarkable analysis given the paucity of sources the author worked with.³⁰ In arguing the situation in postwar Romania resembled the Vichy regime in France, Ionescu introduced moral categories to evaluate the range of attitudes Romanians adopted vis-à-vis the new communist

²⁸ Norman M. Naimark, “The Sovietization of Eastern Europe, 1944-1953”, in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (eds.) *The Cambridge History of the Cold War. Volume I. Origins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 195-197.

²⁹ For a conceptual history of “everyday politics” as a category of analysis, see Frank Trentmann, “The Politics of Everyday Life”, in Frank Trentmann (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 522-547.

³⁰ Proof of the lasting influence of Ionescu’s study on Romanian historiography is that some of the best researched works to emerge after the opening of the archives in the 1990s did not dispute any of the claims Ionescu advanced in the early 1960s. See the articles collected in Șerban Papacostea (ed.) *6 martie 1945: începuturile comunizării României* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1995) and more recently Dumitru Șandru, *Comunizarea societății românești în anii 1944-1947* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2007).

authorities, distinguishing between a minority of opportunists and a passive majority that seldom engaged in acts of open resistance. Ghiță Ionescu did not exclude genuine feelings of support for the communist party, but assigned them to the divisive role the party assumed. Characteristically, the key industrial policy of the postwar period, namely the signing of collective labour contracts in 1946 appeared as “another gambit designed to cause distrust between management and workers.”³¹

This dissertation proposes a different interpretation of these phenomena. Rather than advancing an image of a divided postwar society further cleaved by industrial policies, I argue that workers had their own politics which sometimes aligned them with the communist party, yet most times went beyond the moderate approach encouraged by party bosses and trade-union leaders.³² Purges of compromised engineers and managers, wildcat strikes, food riots and spontaneous collective gestures of violence undertaken by radicalized workers were frowned upon as expressions of political “backwardness” that discredited the party’s commitment to reconstruction. Moreover, because popular radicalism was judged to impede production by undermining factory hierarchy, the communist party, far from causing distrust between management and workers as Ionescu claimed, looked to strengthen the authority of the first often at the expense of its own constituency. Rather than a moral trait of the majority, passivity was a political passion of the

³¹ Ghiță Ionescu, *Communism in Romania, 1944-1962* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 101. For the Vichy metaphor see page 97.

³² The best analysis of the moderate position of the communist parties in relation to workers’ radicalism across postwar Eastern Europe is Mark Pittaway, “Making Postwar Communism”, in Dan Stone (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Postwar European History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 267-269.

multitude as it grappled with the social consequences of the war and navigated the pressure of reconstruction, stubbornly keeping aloof of calls to sacrifice, thrift and hard work.³³

The question of the collective labour contracts brings me to the politics of productivity. Whereas Jan T. Gross's research agenda is useful for grasping how the experience of the homefront and the transformations of the economy and the state that took place during the first half of the 1940s shaped both reconstruction and Sovietization; and the focus on everyday politics complicates the binary moral framework through which historians have long read the establishment of state socialism in Eastern Europe, the politics of productivity indicates a temporal arch that delineates the postwar period. By the politics of productivity, I understand a comprehensive if contradictory set of policies and plans undertaken by the Romanian Communist Party, often on the advice of Soviet experts, to recover, consolidate, and boost the efficiency of industrial production. The politics of productivity undergirded both postwar reconstruction before 1948 and the building of socialism that came after, blurring the lines between the two as the party sought to overcome the social consequences of the war and implement Soviet production techniques in the sphere of labour relations.

The signing of collective labour contracts in 1946 was but one example of this process. Collective labour contracts already regulated labour relations in the interwar period, serving as a common ground between trade-unions and management for bargaining over wages, working conditions and benefits. During the war economy, as trade-unions were abolished and the state

³³ For the argument that "apathy and indifference" made Sovietization (and Stalinism) appealing for communist party bosses in postwar Eastern Europe as a way of forcing people to participate in reconstruction, see Norman M. Naimark, "Revolution and Counterrevolution in Eastern Europe", in Christiane Lemke and Gary Marks (eds.) *The Crisis of Socialism in Europe* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 77.

acquired control over wage increases in order to hold inflation in check, collective labour contracts gradually ceased to play a role in bargaining procedures. The first postwar collective labour contracts, while keeping wages off the bargaining table for the same anti-inflationary reasons, brought back negotiations between unions and management on issues of provisioning and benefits, which in turn fed myriad instances of violent protest. Under the influence of Soviet labour law, beginning with 1949 collective labour contracts were rewritten to include productivity indicators whereby workers' access to benefits was made dependent not on collective bargaining but rather on output figures.

The same transition towards productivity can be detected if we examine the trajectory of the industrial wage scale. To compensate for the impact of inflation on workers' purchasing power, the war economy inaugurated indexing mechanisms whereby the quantum of the wages was determined by living standards, with higher wages paid to urban workers on the grounds they were less self-sufficient than rural workers owning a plot of land. This mechanism was slightly altered after 1945, with a so-called "expensiveness bonus" (*bonus de scumpete*) added to residence as a criterion for deciding the value of wages. According to communist party bosses, the side effect of indexing wages was a decoupling of pay from performance and a certain "levelling" of remuneration across industries. Therefore, efforts to halt inflation after 1947 also entailed the remaking of the wage scale by abandoning indexing and pushing for piece-rate payment schemes based on productivity.

None of these policies were typical of postwar Eastern Europe only. Indeed, according to Charles Maier, transitions to productivity characterized much of postwar Western Europe and

Japan under US hegemony.³⁴ The Marshall Plan in particular was informed by an American version of the politics of productivity as industrial experts pushed for the remaking of wage scales, the rationalization of the labour process, the recovery of managerial authority and workers' discipline.³⁵ Discursively, the emphasis on productivity served mainly the twin purposes of, on the one hand, linking questions of redistribution such as wage increases to output figures thus silencing trade-union demands for larger shares of the profit; and on the other hand, justifying the deferment of immediate gratification, thereby allowing for investment funds to be poured into technological upgrading and capital accumulation rather than consumption. Or, as historian Victoria de Grazia argued:

Though often regarded as the starting point for western Europe's postwar boom, the Marshall Plan was not at all conceived to create a consumer's Europe. [...] Consequently, the first priority of aid was to boost productivity by investing in industrial retooling and infrastructure such as power stations, electric grids, port facilities, and railroad bridges. For the time being, national levels of consumption were not to exceed the

³⁴ The classical account is Charles S. Maier, "The Politics of Productivity: Foundations of American International Economic Policy after World War II", *In Search of Stability. Explorations in Historical Political Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 121-153.

³⁵ I am simplifying the findings of a rich research tradition; for the remaking of wage scales in the context of the postwar monetary reforms, see Charles S. Maier, *Among Empires. American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 204-217. For individual case studies of the politics of productivity touching on many of these issues, see Kurt K. Tweraser, "The Politics of Productivity and Corporatism: The Late Marshall Plan in Austria, 1950-1954", in Günter Bischof, Anton Pelinka, Rolf Steininger (eds.) *Contemporary Austrian Studies*, Vol. 3, Austria in the 1950s (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1995), 91-115; Vibeke Sørensen, *Denmark's Social Democratic Government and the Marshall Plan, 1947-1950* (Aarhus: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2001), 76-113 and Andrew Gordon, "Contests for the Workplace", in Andrew Gordon (ed.) *Postwar Japan as History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 373-394. Gordon devoted a whole book to the politics of productivity in postwar Japan, *The Wages of Affluence: Labor and Management in Postwar Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

prewar benchmark of 1938. Accordingly, no aid was to be released to refurbish ragged wardrobes, replenish war-ravaged homes with household crockery and furnishings, pay for pensions, much less raise wages.³⁶

To be sure, under Soviet hegemony, Eastern Europe hardly received any aid for reconstruction and development, apart from Moscow's symbolic reduction of the payments due as war reparations. And yet, even in the absence of such aid, communist party bosses, industrial planners, Soviet advisors, and managers were equally enthralled by the promises of productivity. Taken over from Soviet industrial practice, where the term had made a comeback immediately after the war ended to guide the recovery of production in such places as the steel town of Magnitogorsk, productivity in postwar Romania quickly became the rallying cry of the communist party.³⁷ For over a decade and a half after the end of the Second World War, productivity served to mute wage demands and legitimize performance wages, justified austerity and consumers' sacrifice, informed successive rationalization attempts of the labour process and structured investment priorities. The politics associated with raising productivity, first to reach prewar output levels and then to confirm the efficiency of state socialism, defined an entire historical epoch, mediating the transition out of the war economy and setting the trajectory of growth for much of the 1950s.

³⁶ Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire. America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 346.

³⁷ Joon-Seo Song, "The Legacy of World War II on the Stalinist Home Front: Magnitogorsk, 1941-1953", (PhD Dissertation: Michigan State University, 2007), 122-179. For the making of Magnitogorsk, the classic account is Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

Industrial Workers and State Socialism

No other working class has been invested with so much hope during the twentieth century as the one emerging under state socialist regimes, first in the Soviet Union and then, after 1945, across Eastern Europe and Asia. The rulers of those regimes hoped for the working class to provide unconditional support and looked forward to an epoch when, having been guided by the communist party through the maze of catch-up industrialization, workers could finally enjoy the spoils of communism. Critics of state socialism hoped the working class could prove to be the gravedigger of those regimes, frustrated by the failure of communism to keep up with the ever changing needs and desires of its workers.³⁸ Both views were fundamentally informed by a historicist reading of historical development, not unlike the one articulated in *Capital* where Marx analyzed the trajectory of the “working day” in order to point out the indeterminate nature of labour under emergent capitalism.³⁹ Because under state socialism, too, the length of the working day or the cost of labour were subject to negotiation, struggle and change, the needs and desires of workers were also likely to evolve, shaping their self-understanding over time.⁴⁰ In the end, socialist industrialization, urbanization and literacy produced a working class animated by myriad dreams and expectations, many of which arguably helped to push those very regimes into crisis and

³⁸ For an attempt to determine the potential for oppositional sentiment among Eastern European workers following the economic crisis of the 1970s, see Jan F. Triska and Charles Gati (eds.) *Blue-Collar Workers in Eastern Europe* (Boston: George Allen and Unwin, 1981).

³⁹ I follow the interpretation proposed in Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination. A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 317.

⁴⁰ The indeterminate value of labour is often referred to as commodified labour. For an analysis of how labour was commodified under state socialism and the types of imaginaries it brought about among workers of various backgrounds, see Martha Lampland, *The Object of Labour: Commodification in Socialist Hungary* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) and Martha Lampland, *The Value of Labor: The Science of Commodification in Hungary, 1920-1956* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2016).

collapse.⁴¹ Small wonder that the popular (in both senses of the term) critique of state socialism, before and after 1989, was often rooted in ordinary people's unfulfilled consumer desires and the "greyness" of everyday life, a culture of complaint that would have been unthinkable for the generation of the 1950s.⁴²

To be sure, there was much irony to the story. One sociologist researching Hungarian steelworkers in the 1980s found state socialism much more politically friable than capitalism because "workers all over the country define themselves in relation to a common exploiter", namely the workers' state.⁴³ Nevertheless, both the rulers of state socialism and their Cold War critics had good reasons to hold to their beliefs. In Eastern Europe, industrial workers obliged in showing support for the regime during years of modest consumerism under Kádár or Honecker, just like a generation earlier they had rebelled against plummeting living standards. Whereas critics of state socialism praised workers for their involvement in the Hungarian revolution of 1956 and Solidarność, communist party leaders must have felt reassured at the sight of tens of thousands of workers driving their Škodas, Dacias and Trabbis to the sunny beaches of the Black Sea, the Baltic or the Adriatic.⁴⁴ In this context, questions of legitimacy, stability, contestation, support, repression

⁴¹ For a recent restatement of this argument, see Don Kalb, "'Worthless Poles' and Other Disposessions. Toward an Anthropology of Labor in Post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe", in Sharryn Kasmir and August Carbonella (eds.) *Blood and Fire. Toward a Global Anthropology of Labor* (New York: Berghahn, 2014), 258. For a critique of the assumption that consumer desire under state socialism entails a political logic of its own, see Krisztina Fehérváry, "Goods and States: The Political Logic of State-Socialist Material Culture", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 51, No. 2, 2009, 426-459.

⁴² For a recent sample of such critiques of the communist past in Romania, see Ioana Pârvulescu (ed.) *Și eu am trăit în comunism* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2015). Many if not all of the contributors to this volume recall the material shortages of the 1980s and contrast them with the alleged abundance of the "West" rather than with the modest consumerism of the 1970s and late 1960s in Romania, decades which made available the very objects of criticism in the first place (i.e. central heating, televised popular entertainment, mass produced food etc).

⁴³ Michael Burawoy, "Reflections on the Class Consciousness of Hungarian Steelworkers", *Politics and Society*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 1989, 20.

⁴⁴ It is telling that my own childhood photo album is made up of colored pictures taken on the Black Sea seaside during the late 1980s, a period marked by one of the most brutal, self-imposed austerity programs in the history of the

and accommodation have naturally migrated to the historiographical field, both before and after the fall of state socialism in 1989/1991.

Similar questions have been first taken up and, to the extent evidence allowed it, answered by historians of the Soviet Union, particularly those among them researching the Russian Revolution and the coming of Stalinism. To interrogate the degree of support Bolsheviks enjoyed among workers in Moscow and Saint Petersburg or the manner in which the drive for industrialization launched by Stalin after 1928 dislocated vast pools of labour from the countryside were sensible ways of advancing our knowledge of the Soviet Union. Histories of metalworkers, printers and textile workers revealed a social universe punctuated by strikes, violence, slowdowns and riots, with workers amending or appropriating many of the industrial policies tried out during the interwar period.⁴⁵ If these forms of protest stood for something, however, it was not the power of workers but rather their collective weakness vis-à-vis overwhelming managerial, police and trade-union bureaucracies. Indeed, as two distinguished practitioners of the field concluded in a summary of decades of research, studies of Soviet workers contributed to a heightened sense of the “irony of Soviet history”, namely “that workers in an ostensibly ‘Marxist’ state were more alienated than empowered”, all leading to “the degeneration of the promises of social liberation

twentieth century. Comprising food rationing, cuts in electricity and heat, austerity served the Ceaușescu regime in paying the foreign debt accumulated during the 1970s, see Cornel Ban, “Sovereign Debt, Austerity, and Regime Change: The Case of Nicolae Ceaușescu’s Romania”, *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 26, No. 4, 2012, 743-767.

⁴⁵ For a concise stock taking of this literature, see Stephen Kotkin, “A Future for Labor under Communism”, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 50, 1996, 1-8. For more recent developments, see David Shearer, “Workers, Revolution, and Stalinism”, *Kritika. Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2011, 227-248. For a general survey that includes Asia as well, see Tuong Vu, “Workers under Communism: Romance and Reality”, in Stephen A. Smith (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 471-485.

and the apotheosis of a new form of tyranny over the very people in whose name the system was created.”⁴⁶

Compared to other traditions of research in labour history, three specificities of this body of scholarship stand out.⁴⁷ Firstly, efforts to go beyond the focus on classical male workers were rare; and so to were attempts to abandon the shopfloor as the paradigmatic social space for locating the meaning of workers’ everyday life. Precarious work, rural labour, and the wide array of places where work was performed in the shadows of the standard employment relationship (from the household to collective farms) attracted little attention. Secondly, in contradistinction with much of the labour history produced over the last decades on Latin America, the African continent or even Western European countries, studies of Soviet industrial workers rarely abandoned grand narratives, shifting between analyses of proletarianization and similar processes of class formation to fitting workers’ lives into straightjacket theories of state socialism and modernity. Finally, with a few notable exceptions, labour historians of the Soviet Union were tempted to discard the relevance of official scripted languages as a medium that structured workers’ emotions, beliefs and attitudes.⁴⁸

Unencumbered by the existence of any genuine tradition of research in labour history, historians of Eastern Europe owed a great deal to the debates and methodologies generated in the

⁴⁶ Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Ronald Grigor Suny, “Class Backwards? In Search of the Soviet Working Class”, in Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Ronald Grigor Suny (eds.) *Soviet Workers. Power, Class, and Identity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 24.

⁴⁷ I follow here the critique proposed by Lewis H. Siegelbaum, “The Late Romance of the Soviet Worker in Western Historiography”, *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 51, 2006, 463-481.

⁴⁸ See the discussion in Igal Halfin and Jochen Hellbeck, “Rethinking the Stalinist Subject: Stephen Kotkin's “Magnetic Mountain” and the State of Soviet Historical Studies”, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Vol. 44, No. 3, 1996, 456-463.

field of Soviet history.⁴⁹ In the introduction to a pathbreaking special issue devoted to workers in postwar Eastern Europe and published by one of the field's leading academic journal, Mark Pittaway underlined the need to explore issues of consent, conflict and accommodation much like labour historians of the Soviet Union did before. Pittaway, however, went further by asking historians not only to take communism seriously as a "social experience" but also to carefully explore working class cultures and the way in which workers' durable dispositions shaped the emergence of state socialism after 1945. This was a methodological injunction that departed in two significant ways from the literature on the Soviet Union. First, it posited the legitimacy, stability and overall nature of the East European socialist state as something to be explained through the analytical priority accorded to social context in illuminating the trajectory of policies and politics at large.⁵⁰ Second, it grounded social context in workers' everyday lives, both within and outside of the factory, with the ambition to produce social histories that detail how communist authorities "attempt[ed] to reform working class cultures and the values and expectations that were rooted in such cultures across the region."⁵¹

⁴⁹ This was valid not just for labour history but for many other branches of the discipline; see, for instance, Lewis H. Siegelbaum, "Historicizing Everyday Life under Communism: The USSR and the GDR, Potsdam, 8-10 June 2000", *Social History*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 2001, 72-79. For lack of space I cannot discuss here the burgeoning literature on workers in the GDR. For a recent synthesis that incorporates much of the literature published in German, see Christoph Klessmann, *Arbeiter im "Arbeiterstaat" DDR. Deutsche Traditionen, sowjetisches Modell, westdeutsches Magnetfeld (1945 bis 1971)*, (Bonn: Dietz, 2007).

⁵⁰ For the primacy of social context as the defining ambition of social history, notably as it seeks to explain the trajectory of politics on different scales, see Geoff Eley and Keith Nield (eds.) *The Future of Class in History. What's Left of the Social?* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2007), 19 *et passim*. For an early Marxian attempt in this vein, see Jon Bloomfield, *Passive Revolution: Politics and the Czechoslovak Working Class, 1945-1948* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979).

⁵¹ Mark Pittaway, "Workers and Socialist States in Postwar Central and Eastern Europe", *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 68, 2005, 7. The special issue contains articles on Romania (Jack Friedman), Hungary (Eszter Zsófia Tóth and Sándor Horváth) and Czechoslovakia (Peter Heumos).

An early example of this manner of practicing labour history was Padraic Kenney's study of postwar Polish workers of Wrocław and Łódź, two contrasting urban settings displaying two very different working class communities.⁵² Covering the first five years after the end of the Second World War, Kenney's study showed how communist authorities managed to gain workers' support in Wrocław, a former German city quickly filled with Polish rural migrants in search of work, and encountered stiff opposition among textile workers in Łódź, one of Poland's traditional industrial enclaves. The absence of a working class culture in Wrocław or, later on in the steel town of Nowa Huta, accounted for the ability of the emergent socialist state to integrate the workers in relative tranquility.⁵³ By contrast, the cluster of shopfloor solidarities and well-trodden work routines, embedded in neighborhood moral communities explained the resilience of Łódź's workers to withstand through striking and rioting activity the pressure of productivity campaigns launched by the communists.⁵⁴

In her own history of Polish workers after 1945, Małgorzata Fidelis adopted a similar strategy by comparing the experience of women entering industrial employment in three different locations exhibiting contrasting working class cultures: the textile industries of Żyrardów, the coal

⁵² Padraic Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland: Workers and Communists, 1945-1950* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); see also Padraic Kenney, "The Gender of Resistance in Communist Poland", *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 104, No. 2, 1999, 399-425.

⁵³ On Nowa Huta, see Katherine Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia. Nowa Huta, Stalinism and Polish Society, 1949-1956* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), particularly 44-97. As Lebow shows, although young Polish men of rural stock seemed to embrace intensified rhythms of work in, for instance, youth brigades, they were less compliant outside of the factories where a culture of rebellion, promiscuity, "hooliganism" and cosmopolitanism prevailed among the same workers. See also Katherine Lebow, "'We are Building a Common Home': The Moral Economy of Citizenship in Postwar Poland", in Frank Biess and Robert G. Moeller (eds.) *Histories of the Aftermath. The Legacies of the Second World War in Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 215-230.

⁵⁴ Padraic Kenney, "Working Class Community and Resistance in Pre-Stalinist Poland: The Pozański Textile Strike, Łódź, September 1947", *Social History*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 1993, 31-51. On the longer history of Łódź as the "Polish Manchester", see Kacper Pobłocki, "The Cunning of Class. Urbanization of Inequality in Postwar Poland", (PhD Dissertation, Central European University, Budapest, 2010).

mines of Katowice and the cotton factories of Zambrów, the latter a product of socialist industrialization during the mid-1950s. These sites allowed Fidelis to show how notions of gender remained key structuring structures for local power hierarchies and inequalities, sometimes in spite of official plans to absorb women into the workforce and liberate them from inherited forms of oppression.⁵⁵ Similarly, in his social history of postwar Hungarian workers, Mark Pittaway chose to explore comparatively the rural oil workers of the Zala County, the mining colony of Tatabánya and Budapest's industrial district of Újpest in order to show how "the regime established legitimacy, haltingly; how it maintained it tentatively; and how it lost it entirely in 1956, before compromising with a rather different kind of legitimacy".⁵⁶ What, then, is the main thrust of this literature?

Primo, these studies are inherently comparative, avoiding the pitfalls of methodological nationalism and underscoring the sheer diversity of local and regional industrial and working class traditions. *Secundo*, the penchant for abstraction and theorizing that dominated much of Soviet labour history is severely blunted and overtaken by grounded attempts to explain specific phenomena. If theory creeps into the narrative it does so less to delineate "systemic" features of state socialism and more as a sharpening tool for better construing objects of analysis such as the state, culture, everyday life etc. *Tertio*, this scholarship shows the degree to which politics in state socialism took the form of a pervasive conflict of varying intensity between the imperatives of running the economy and workers' aspirations of wielding some control over the conditions under

⁵⁵ Małgorzata Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁵⁶ Mark Pittaway, *The Workers' State. Industrial Labor and the Making of Socialist Hungary, 1944-1958* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), VIII. The quote comes from Nigel Swain's introduction to the volume.

which they worked and lived.⁵⁷ In this view, workers' culture appeared as the ritualized expression of this generalized struggle, a resource at once material and symbolic to be mobilized in everyday politics at the point of production and beyond.

This dissertation engages critically many of the arguments listed above and retains the comparative framework by focusing on two contrasting industrial sites: the steel town of Reșița where Romania's largest and oldest integrated steel mill was located; and the industrial belt of the capital city Bucharest, where I look primarily at two metal factories, Malaxa Works and Laromet. Located in a mountainous area in southwestern Romania (Banat), Reșița was the hometown of UDR, a multinational company that managed the steel mill, various connected workshops for manufacturing bridges, armament, locomotives and railcars, a vast forestry domain and a string of surrounding coalmines. Founded in mid-19th century, the steel mill only took off during the first two decades of the 20th century, when the province was still part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, with a local population speaking German, Hungarian, Serbian, Czech and Romanian. Following the First World War, UDR became the pillar of the nascent Romanian heavy industry as the province was incorporated into an enlarged Romanian state.⁵⁸

Up until the mid-1930s, the majority of local steelworkers and miners in and around Reșița had been long associated with the social-democratic movement. The rise of Nazism in Germany and of domestic fascism in Romania saw the workforce split along ethnic and political lines, with

⁵⁷ This is one of the main arguments in Andrew Port, *Conflict and Stability in the German Democratic Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁵⁸ Rudolf Gräf, *Domeniul băcănean al StEG, 1855-1920* (Reșița: Editura Banatica, 1997); Radu Voinesco, *Une grande entreprise roumaine intégrée. Les aciéries et domaines de Reșița. Etude économique* (Bucharest: Marvan, 1937); and the general overview of David Turnock, "The Reșița Industrial Complex: Perspectives in Historical Geography", *GeoJournal*, Vol. 29, No. 1, 1993, 83-102.

Nazi and fascist organizations competing to replace the old trade-union movement. By contrast, the metal industry of Bucharest was a product of the post-Great Depression era when the Romanian state sheltered the birth of a national manufacturing industry to service the needs of the economy and the military.⁵⁹ Unlike in the former provinces of the Dual Monarchy, the steelworkers of Bucharest were less politically active, mostly of rural and migrant background and hardly unionized. Yet here, too, workers shifted to the extreme right during the late 1930s, with the homegrown fascists entrenching themselves in the city's major factories.

The Question of Archives

Important as these developments were for the unfolding of the postwar period, this dissertation is less a history of industry in Reșița or Bucharest and more one of larger social process reflected in these two specific locations. This perspective has implications for the way in which I opted to gather, select and make use of my archival material. Many details of local history in Bucharest and Reșița pertaining to the *longue durée* political, economic and social dynamics of these localities have been purposefully left out of the narrative. The lack of reliable secondary literature, particularly on Romanian regional history pushed me to outline larger contexts only to the extent they were strictly related to my case studies. Marked by unemployment and strikes in the early 1930s, recovery and growth after the Great Depression, the interwar period will be omitted. Equally, I will have little to say about the structures of capital ownership and big business during those years.⁶⁰ Because this dissertation covers roughly the period between the early 1940s

⁵⁹ For a general overview, see Constantin Herbst, *Geografia industriei municipiului București* (PhD Dissertation, University of Bucharest, 1971).

⁶⁰ On these topics, see N.N. Constantinescu, V. Axenciuc, *Capitalismul monopolist în România* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1962). On the question of unemployment and strikes in the interwar period, rich in details but written from

and the late 1950s, much of my empirical material comes from three main sources: company and factory records; ministerial and police documents; and the archives produced after 1945 by the communist party at various levels, from the high offices of the Central Committee to the paperwork left behind by party organizations at regional, local and factory levels. Occasionally, I have also used the archives of the Romanian National Bank, mostly for reports on the state of the postwar economy.

It is worth mentioning at this point several obstacles research in Romanian archives presents to the labour historian. Unlike the case of the former GDR, where the disappearance of the socialist state through unification opened up its archives shortly after 1990, many Romanian archives produced between 1950 and 1989 still operate under arcane rules of secrecy, notably in the case of documents generated by the so-called Council of Ministers (*Consiliul de Miniștri*), the equivalent of the government.⁶¹ For example, folders detailing the role Soviet industrial experts played in various wage reforms, evaluations of prices for basic commodities on peasant markets during the 1950s, standard of living statistics for the same period or issues of forced military labour are not available to the public. That these rules of secrecy still conceal pieces of otherwise trivial information of interest only to the specialized historian is due to the fact that the current Romanian state acknowledges and upholds a continuity of sovereignty with the socialist state of the pre-1989

the standpoint of the communist party see the studies collected in N.N. Constantinescu (ed.) *Situația clasei muncitoare din România, 1914-1944* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1966).

⁶¹ Alf Lüdtke “La République démocratique allemande comme histoire. Réflexions historiographiques”, *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, Vol. 53, No. 1, 1998, 3.

epoch.⁶² If these documents were understandably kept secret by the state socialist dictatorship, there is no reason for them to still be so today.

Moreover, state secrecy is doubled by state poverty in the sense that the archives of public institutions for the period after 1948/1950 have not yet been processed and are therefore also not open to the public. Due to massive underfinancing of the National Archives, the records of key institutions such as the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Industry and Finance stop short of 1948. With few exceptions, the same applies to the majority of factory archives after 1950, which have either been destroyed or find themselves in such a poor condition that it is unlikely they will ever enter the public domain. Equally discouraging for the labour historian of postwar Romania is the complete absence of trade-union archives after 1945, which are either lost or have never been archived in the first place.⁶³ It is only in county archives that some fragmentary evidence on trade-unions covering the late 1940s and early 1950s may be uncovered.

These obstacles are only partly remedied by the total availability of the archives of the communist party and the near complete collections of factory newspapers hosted by the Academy Library in Bucharest. However, in spite of the party's ambition to control as many aspects of social life as possible, the great bulk of this party archive is not about the governing of society as such but rather about the inner machinery of the communist party governing over its own members.

⁶² On the relationship between sovereignty, secrecy and state archives, see Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain. Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Commonsense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 25-28.

⁶³ This is a peculiarity of Romania rather than of other former state socialist countries in Eastern Europe. In Hungary, for instance, researchers can access not only the archives of trade-unions after 1945 but also the archives of women's trade-unions. I thank Professor Susan Zimmermann for bringing this matter to my attention. For the Hungarian context, see Mark Pittaway, "Research in Hungarian Archives on Post-1945 History", in his *From the Vanguard to the Margins, Workers in Hungary, 1939 to the Present* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 215-221.

This mammoth archive, therefore, cannot be entirely taken as a proxy for the missing archives of state institutions, factories or trade-unions. Nor should it be taken as the repository of esoteric knowledge collected for purposes of domination. From the early 1950s onwards, during party meetings or in reports to the higher echelons, ordinary party members already spoke the codified language of the newspapers, in a conspicuous effort to screen their own mishaps, show conformity, and please their superiors.

In order to keep under control the double bias of my evidence, one resulting from my relying excessively on party archives and from the fact that most of my sources were archived during state socialism, I adopted two strategies of narration and research. Firstly, I considered it necessary to make the history of my evidence transparent by integrating it into the larger history that this dissertation aims to tell. This allowed me moments of authorial self-reflexivity during which I reflect on the nature of the sources by revealing the archival processes behind them and underlining the often intricate trajectories through which particular documents become sources in the first place. Secondly, I borrowed the so-called “*ricerca micronominativa*” from Italian debates on early modern history.⁶⁴ This method starts out with a proper name that pops up randomly in a document and proceeds to build up fragmented biographies around it, crosschecking other archival sources, adding visual and literary material for thickening particular social contexts, all in order to grasp how seemingly disparate social processes converge even in the lives of the most anonymous of historical actors. “*Ricerca micronominativa*” allowed me to organize my material in a puzzle-

⁶⁴ Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni, “Il nome e il come: Scambio ineguale e mercato storiografico”, *Quaderni Storici*, Vol. 14, No. 40, 1979, 186. For puzzle-solving as the bread and butter of the historian, see Mary Fulbrook, *Historical Theory* (London: Routledge, 2002), 53-73.

solving manner and construct plots of varying coherence out of overwhelmingly one-sided evidence.

There is a drawback to both these strategies. Their combined effect at times makes the evidence seem impressionistic, a potpourri of cascading vignettes, glued together only by the overarching narrative framework of the individual chapters. Be that as it may, what I hope to achieve through my constant questioning of the archive and my concern with following up proper names along the paper trail is a genre of history writing that might be called ethnographic in the sense that it focuses at the same time on the “research object” and the “researching subject”.⁶⁵ This approach to the written record of the past has the merit of locating the meaning of a preserved document not just in its actual content but also in the bureaucratic practices that led to its preservation. In historical contexts in which the vast majority of surviving documents were produced by and for those in power, historians can hardly afford to ignore the multiple contexts that generated the sources and circumscribed their meaning.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter I “Reassembling Labour Relations on the Homefront (1941-1945)” examines the making of the wartime labour regime in order to determine the origins of workers’ radicalism and the transformation of industrial policy brought about by the Second World War. Throughout the chapter I move between Reșița and Bucharest in an effort to compare, contrast and evaluate how steelworkers and miners in both locations experienced work and life on the homefront and how

⁶⁵ Sebastian Jobs and Alf Lüdtke, “Unsettling History: Introduction”, in Sebastian Jobs and Alf Lüdtke (eds.) *Unsettling History. Archiving and Narrating in Historiography* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2010), 21.

the requirements of the war economy restructured collective bargaining, factory paternalism and workers' own politics. I follow the development of the wartime labour regime on two levels. On the one hand, I explore the changes that affected wage policy and the expansion of state regulatory institutions in the sphere of labour relations. On the other hand, I look at the increased policing of industrial milieux and the brutalization of everyday interactions on the shopfloor as a consequence of militarization.

Wage policy was radically transformed during the war through the introduction of so-called “wage regions”, state monopoly over wage increases and the central role assigned to labour inspectors in monitoring working conditions and assessing labour disputes. The combined effect of these policies was to redirect collective bargaining away from wage concerns and refocus it on issues of food provisioning and other benefits workers could legally aspire to. Moreover, trade-unions being disbanded ever since late 1940, the practice of collective bargaining was itself severely curtailed, surviving only in places such as Reșița where an informal arrangement of workers' representation based on “men of trust” was an integral part of factory paternalism. In most other localities, workers struggled to have labour inspectors rule in their favor. These changes were accompanied by constant policing of allegedly “communist agitators” and the imposition of military discipline inside factories, including corporal punishment and imprisonment. The wartime labour regime, I argue, was successful in controlling workers through a mix of repression and welfare.

Siding with the Allies against Germany in late August 1944 allowed Romania's political parties to reemerge after half a decade of dictatorship and led to the reconstitution of the trade-union movement under the joint effort of the communist and the social-democratic parties.

Although an organization of small numbers, the communists were able to enlist the support of some of the workers, both in Bucharest and in Reșița, by framing purges of compromised managers in what I call “the vernacular of everyday struggle”, a language that denounced the humiliation and violence experienced during the previous years without, however, addressing the question of wages. Because state control over wages and the parcelization of the national territory into “wage regions” were unanimously considered sensible policies to combat runaway inflation, securing workers’ allegiance solely on matters of retribution proved difficult. The chapter details the extent to which workers, while willing to commit acts of revenge in order to redress wartime injustices, radicalized against the retention of these policies or became disillusioned by the prospect of joining trade-unions that could hardly push for their more immediate concerns.

Chapter II “Strategies of Containment (1945-1947)” further explores the question of workers’ radicalism by analyzing a number of wildcat strikes. Once a party of government after March 1945, the Romanian Communist Party faced the challenging task of expanding its ranks by attracting new members from working class constituencies and managing a collapsing economy, mass displacement, famine and other social consequences of the war. This chapter asks how the party managed to appeal to the workers while at the same time suppressing strikes and silencing wage demands and looks closely at the role factory committees (and trade-unions more generally) played in the party’s pursuit of industrial peace.

The wave of labour unrest that spread across the country during the first two postwar years cannot be understood without reference to the cluster of industrial policies that marked the period: subsidized consumption at the point of production, the “winter aid” and the collective labour contracts. Legislated in May 1945, the first was a way of organizing the provisioning of basic

consumer items to workers by obliging employers to set up retail stores inside the factories and supply them with goods. The “winter aid” was a sum of money employers had to pay to their workers in addition to their wages. Finally, the first postwar collective labour contracts signed in early 1946 abolished many features of the wartime labour regime such as “wage regions” and encouraged workers to aspire to a whole range of benefits. These policies composed the so-called “social wage” (*salariu social*) that was supposed to allow the government to keep nominal wages frozen and workers’ purchasing power at bay by placing the burden of securing their survival on employers’ financial resources.

The chapter examines in detail three episodes of violent unrest: the coalminers’ strike of October 1945 in Anina, the steelworkers’ rebellion that shook the town of Reșița in September 1946 and, for purposes of illustration, a riot among textile workers in the western city of Arad that took place in April 1947. In grappling with such events, the communist party resorted to what I call following William H. Sewell Jr. the “organizing of difference”: part disciplinarian technique geared towards soliciting the conformity of its own members, part discursive frame for redescribing the evidence of labour discontent as proof of workers’ cultural inferiority and political enmity. Communist party members or union delegates who supported or were even involved in strikes were accused by their own superiors of anarcho-syndicalism, a combination of organizational nescience and indiscipline; workers asking for higher wages were castigated as “backward”, unruly individuals lacking “class consciousness”.

This semantic repertoire was essential for the communist party as it bulked up to over half a million members by 1947 because party-making and the pursuit of industrial peace were entangled, mutually reinforcing processes. To understand how these processes worked in tandem,

this chapter focuses on physical violence as a defining characteristic of postwar workers' radicalism. Both labour unrest and the strategies used to contain it were often very violent, with party and union bosses at the factory level beating up unruly workers and workers in turn punishing managers, scabs, police agents, engineers, and conformist party and union bosses. I argue that brawls, attacks, mutilations and other expressions of close range rage emerged in a particular historical conjuncture in which it became possible for relationships of mutual dependence, deference and hostility inside factories to be turned into claims for rights. Equally important for the argument developed in this chapter is to show how collective protest emerged out of the temporary conversion of the industrial workplace into a nodal point of subsidized consumption via collective labour contracts.

Chapter III “The Monetarized Everyday (1947-1949)” covers the crucial years between the currency reform of August 1947 and the first comprehensive wage reform of February 1949. This period effectively marked the transition out of the war economy and the immediate postwar collapse and brought about the first concerted steps towards recovering and overcoming pre-war productivity levels. In the realm of labour relations, the period saw a swift overturning of many of the industrial policies inherited from the war economy as well as of those enacted shortly after March 1945. Subsidized consumption via factory retail stores was ended, the “winter aid” was abolished and the collective labour contracts were rewritten in accordance with Soviet labour law. These measures were supposed to alter the meaning and reshape the content of the “social wage” and encourage the takeoff of industrial production by freeing employers from burdensome spending on their workforce.

By early 1947 Romania was facing a double crisis: severe drought in the countryside and war reparations paid to the Soviet Union caused massive food scarcity and the collapse of the national currency, the consequence of which was hyperinflation, food riots and the near total breakdown of industrial production. For much of 1946 already, the vast majority of industrial workers lived on debt, receiving close to no cash on payday. With their cash wages being quickly melted by the rapid devaluation of the currency, workers often took on loans from their factories' credit associations to be able to eke out a living. In this context, industrial jobs were valued not for the money they brought to working class households but rather for securing access to scarce goods distributed at the point of production. Debt, payment in kind, and subsidized consumption were seen as obstacles to economic recovery because barely monetarized wages could hardly act as a stimulus for workers to increase their performance on the shopfloor and the chain of factory stores that supplied them with goods at non-market prices turned into a financial black hole, depleting employers' resources.

This chapter proceeds chronologically. First, I examine the bundle of monetary stabilization policies enacted over the summer of 1947 to contain inflation and restore the value of cash money. Stabilization policies, however, extended well beyond currency conversions typical of postwar Europe. They also involved the remaking of the food rationing system, selective unemployment through organized lay-offs, mass savings campaigns and a brief experiment with mutualist employees' cooperatives. These policies, I argue, were intended to recreate a monetarized everyday that would allow workers, factory managers and planners to adequately factor in the value of wages and investments. Secondly, I explore the turn to productivity wages in early 1949. The wage system inherited from the war economy and modified during the first two postwar years was premised on indexing mechanisms designed to correlate workers' income with

market prices through bonuses and standard of living calculations. Here, the goals of monetarization were twofold: on the one hand, it was a way of reestablishing hierarchical wage scales after a period in which wage differentials were chipped away at by inflation, debts and subsidies; on the other hand, monetarization was a way of extracting out of the wage relationship any kind of bonuses such as the family allowance or the seniority bonus supposedly not immediately relevant to increased work performance. Equally important, the recovery of the value of cash wages allowed for the extension of Soviet piece-rate remuneration schemes across industries.

Chapter IV “People’s Capital (1948-1956)” tackles the issue of managerial authority in the context of “nationalization” i.e. the transfer of ownership rights from private individuals and corporate persons to the state. One of the defining characteristics of Soviet-style economies, state ownership of the “means of production” in Romania was achieved in June 1948 through the forced dispossession of the owners of capital and the consequent appointment of new general managers of working class pedigree to run the people’s factories. Hailed as “the revolutionary act of nationalization” this event posed the question of whether former workers turned managers would be able to wield enough authority over their workmates in order to raise output and increase productivity. This chapter compares UDR Reșița, Malaxa Works and Laromet in order to detail empirically how nationalization took place in these three different contexts and follows up closely the personal trajectories of the new managers appointed in June 1948 as they tried to win, secure and reinforce their authority.

Managerial authority had been constantly tested and significantly weakened not merely as a consequence of the purges, strikes and revolts that took place over the previous years, but also

due to the expansion of communist party and trade-union organizations at the factory level, where party and union bosses would often find themselves competing with hence challenging the decisions of management, engineers and workshop supervisors. While a certain ambiguity around the issue of leadership within factories was encouraged by the communist party up until June 11 1948, after that date murky lines of command and fractured, overlapping hierarchies were virulently denounced for hindering the smooth run of production. The effort to reestablish managerial authority, however, produced a complex ritual of suspicion between the party, trade-unions and management, replete with mutual accusations of embezzlement and libelous campaigns in the factory newspapers. The ensuing competition for authority, I argue, occasioned the emergence of a new form of (often gendered) struggle over factories' financial resources and investment priorities.

Nationalization, I conclude, was a necessarily ambiguous event resulting from its seemingly contradictory objectives. For communist party leaders, the passage to public ownership was a way of injecting some efficiency back into industrial production, after a postwar period marked by idleness, underutilization and waste. At the same time, however, the very same passage to public ownership was synonymous with the advent of socialism and had to be presented as a form of empowerment for the workers who were now designated masters of their own factories. The tension that emerged out of these two objectives informed both the narrative that framed nationalization for its contemporaries and the struggles over managerial authority and factory welfare in which they were involved.

Chapter V "The Politics of Productivity (1950-1958)" explores the unfolding of productivity campaigns during the 1950s at the junction of two interlocking social processes: the

rationalization of the labour process and austerity. Against historiographical interpretations that view the decade as one of “forced industrialization”, this chapter argues for an understanding of the 1950s as a period in which rationalization and austerity rather than high rates of investment in industry structured both the options available to policy makers and the experience of industrial work. By freeing foodstuff and raw materials for export, austerity allowed the government to import capital goods and push for the reconstruction, modernization and diversification of domestic industrial production: comprehensive rationing was disbanded only in December 1954; investments in infrastructure, housing and services were minimal while the wage system inaugurated in February 1949 produced a vast mass of cheap labour surviving on well below minimum wages. Wartime consumer sacrifice and the scarcity of the immediate postwar years accustomed workers to austerity, arguably making it more tolerable than it might have otherwise been the case.

Rationalization served a double purpose. On the one hand, it was a way of dealing with the social consequences of the war in the sphere of labour relations by overcoming idled machinery, broken chains of supply and workers’ artisanal routines on the shopfloor. On the other hand, the impossibility of keeping a steady inflow of technological upgrade meant that boosting productivity could only mean squeezing existing industrial equipment and machinery, undertaking factory redesign, and imposing allegedly superior Soviet work methods. Fraught with tension, the relationship between rationalization and austerity led to the second major wage reform in 1957 which partially ended piece-rate remuneration schemes and significantly increased average wages across industries.

In this last chapter I provide a contextual reading of the productivity discourse of the 1950s as it was articulated in scholarly publications, brochures, speeches and the popular press. I then go on to analyze the combined impact austerity and rationalization had on the ability of workers in Reșița and Bucharest to retain some control over the labour process. For much of the 1950s, I contend, austerity fundamentally frustrated rationalization by blocking any attempt to buy productivity gains with higher average wages, whereby an expanded national market in consumer goods could ideally compensate for increased managerial control of the labour process. At the same time, however, given the social composition of the Romanian working class of the period and the nature of the wage system, austerity also blocked the possibility for collective protest by softening the drive for higher productivity. Moreover, unlike in the GDR or Czechoslovakia, due to their low wages the vast majority of Romanian workers were less dependent on the purchase of primary goods in state retail shops or peasant markets. Finally, the chapter questions accounts framed in terms of working class traditions for explaining workers' quiescence in early state socialist Romania.

Chapter I

Reassembling Labour Relations on the Homefront (1941-1945)

Visible Consensus

“November 7 1944: the day of the Russian Revolution. I cancelled out the workday because workers would have left their factories anyway; they now put the Russian celebrations before our very own”, General Sănătescu jotted down in his diary.⁶⁶ The note summed up Sănătescu’s bitter experience as head of the new Romanian government convened in late August 1944: over two months during which workers in Bucharest regularly abandoned their workplaces, flooded the city and pushed for a change of government. If workers mobbed the streets, squares and stadiums of Bucharest, the General inferred, this was due to fear, the primary feeling triggered by the threats that communists perpetrated on the shopfloors.



ANEF Stadium Mass Rally in Bucharest, September 24 1944; the center placard reads “C.F.R. Grivița: We Want Wages to be Increased” Source: Fototeca online a comunismului românesc, 110/1944.

The banners workers paraded reminded Sănătescu of the

Moscow he briefly visited in the fall of 1940, while leading the Romanian delegation entrusted to negotiate the Eastern border settlement with the Soviet Union. General Sănătescu’s gaze, however, neither breached factory walls, nor did it pay minute attention to the range of slogans workers took

⁶⁶ Simona Ghițescu-Sănătescu (ed.), *Jurnalul Generalului Sănătescu*, (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1993), 179.

to their public gatherings. For it is highly doubtful that in the Red Square of the time, amidst glorifying words to Stalin, one might have dared flaunt a placard asking for higher wages.

Less visible to the prime-minister's gaze were also those public institutions such as the Bucharest Labour Inspectorate around which workers, apprentices and private functionaries clustered *en masse* on a daily basis. There, an overburdened office clerk noted with some relief in late October that the salaried finally accepted to limit their claims to "professional demands" which eased considerably the mediation of labour conflicts the Inspectorate was obliged to undertake.⁶⁷ Similarly invisible for Sănătescu remained those workers' delegates travelling from the provinces that inevitably ended up queuing in front of the Ministry of Labour to have their petitions registered and their voices recorded. The trip to Bucharest was often motivated by the failure to have their wages raised at the local level where they were told by managers and regional labour inspectors alike that wages were set by legal decrees adopted in the capital city.

Hidden from sight behind factory walls, as one foreman from Malaxa Works recalled, in late 1944 "life was hot as fire".⁶⁸ "Industries today - read the memo addressed by U.G.I.R. to the government in mid-October 1944 - are assaulted by myriad demands formulated by the union committees that organized themselves everywhere."⁶⁹ Yet while the industrialists' organization was ready to consent to many of those demands, it also warily noted that some of them infringe on the rule of law (*regim de drept*) under which business operated. Laws might be altered in those

⁶⁷ ANR, MM, 1081/1943, p. 489.

⁶⁸ Alexandru Săsăreanu, "Noi muncim, vedem ce-o fi...", in Zoltán Rostás, *Chipurile oraşului. Istorii de viaţă în Bucureşti. Secolul XX* (Iaşi: Polirom, 2002), 325.

⁶⁹ "Memoriul U.G.I.R. adresat Guvernului [U.G.I.R.'s Memo to the Government]", *Curierul Uniunii Generale a Industriaşilor din România*, No. 15, October, 1944, p. 1. U.G.I.R. stands for The General Union of Romanian Industrialists.

cases in which workers' claims could be met, U.G.I.R. argued, but the competent authorities must necessarily intervene to discourage committees to take up demands that go against the country's best interests. U.G.I.R. ended its memo by urging the government to legislate the formation of an all-encompassing national trade-union that could be negotiated with and that might, as a result, help keep in check those "overzealous elements" among the workers that disturbed, through unreasonable demands, the industrial peace that benefited all: the state, wage earners and business.

U.G.I.R.'s public statement was issued in the context of the mushrooming of factory committees across the whole of industry and the subsequent revival of local trade-unions. As such, the memo purported to make visible the contours of a possible consensus on the limits of collective bargaining and wage policy. The call for a trade-union law spoke not merely to the debates carried out amongst the four political parties represented in Sănătescu's Cabinet; it equally addressed the tensions that accompanied the emergence of the Commission for the Organization of Trade-Unions within the Left coalition. For even though the Commission encouraged factory committees to strengthen their authority on the shopfloor by striving to formulate demands on behalf of workers, it also conceded that there were "delicate" situations in which claim-making ought not be rushed.⁷⁰

The emphasis on "overzealous elements" advancing overblown requests mirrored the immediate concerns leaders of the Communist Party expressed on the travails of unionization. "Another important phenomenon is the radicalization of the masses" Constantin Pârvulescu noted in his report on the state of trade-unions in late September 1944. "Our party's catchwords - he went on to conclude - are widely accepted by the popular masses, but they often prove insufficient.

⁷⁰ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 133/1944, p. 55.

We have to struggle against the demagogy and the ‘revolutionary’ phraseology used by the social-democrats to deceive the working masses and lure them in their party.”⁷¹ Finally, U.G.I.R.’s reference to the rule of law might have appealed to the institutional routine of the labour inspectorates, now faced with the task of screening out “professional demands” from the otherwise bewildering lists of claims put forward by factory committees. More importantly, however, it evoked the parallel attempts of the General Commissariat for Prices to retain its legal attribute to plan industrial wages in order to prevent an inflationary snowball effect. Policy papers circulated between various ministries and the National Bank in the fall of 1944 warned about giving in to wage increases and called upon trade-unions to rally behind the state’s effort to freeze salaries: “rulers and ruled, everybody must support the government of the country and the state authorities in the thrust to solve our most fundamental problems: preserving the state’s being (*ființa statului*) and avoiding the collapse of the economy and of the public administration.”⁷²

This chapter explores the ways in which labour relations were reassembled on the home-front between October 1940 and March 1945. **Part I** traces how labour conflicts came to be regulated during Ion Antonescu’s military dictatorship. The dismemberment of organized labour in late 1940 not only enhanced the role of the state bureaucracy in mediating labour disputes, it also reinforced paternalistic forms of workers’ representation that varied greatly from factory to factory. The first four years of the war saw workers’ delegates submitting petitions to the Ministry of Labour, seeking out legal counseling from the Labour Chambers and even benefiting from the verdicts ruled by Arbitrage Commissions. Moreover, the wage policy formulated between 1942

⁷¹ ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 114/1944, p. 44.

⁷² BNR, Fond Studii, 1/1945, p. 233.

and 1945 across industries laid the groundwork for the postwar governments' approach to wage freezes, sectoral wage scales, wage differentials and the type of benefits covered by the social wage. It is against this background that I locate the reemergence of unionization and the ensuing upsurge in labour unrest that momentarily challenged the established pattern of determining wage policies and restructured collective bargaining after September 1944.

Part II turns to the arena of everyday politics by focusing on action situations and social spaces that occasioned expressions of discontent over wartime working and living conditions.⁷³ Retrieving the multilayered experience of work on the home-front requires us to bracket the perennial, almost obsessive interest historians share with police agents for uncovering forms of workers' opposition. Rather, I prefer to retain the inherent ambivalence of workers' grievances in order to map out the culturally and politically distant, seemingly alien working-class social universe. Gendered violence, trivial shopfloor rivalries, humiliation, respectability, occasional outbursts of joy and passing gestures of solidarity were all part of locally embedded vernaculars of everyday struggle through which the small stakes of factory work were articulated. The reemergence of organized labour in late 1944 revealed the extent to which militant practices came to rely on the embodied experiences of work hierarchy and subjection at the point of production. But while factory committees and union leaders could draw on accumulated adverse feelings towards management and military commanders, workers' allegiance proved difficult to secure.

Part III narrows the analysis developed in Part II to two key events occasioned by the transformations discussed in Part I. I first discuss the purging of military commanders and

⁷³ For the notion of "action situations" see William M. Reddy, "The Logic of Action: Indeterminacy, Emotion, and Historical Narrative", *History and Theory*, Vol. 40, 2001, 14-32.

allegedly compromised factory managers that took place in Reșița in early January 1945 - an event during which the audience's curiosity, awe and muted resent were appropriated by a militant minority for a public display of festive violence. I then move on to narrate the equally violent elections for the factory committee held at Malaxa Works in late February 1945. On the secluded industrial outskirts of Bucharest active passivity proved as important as casting a ballot or pulling the trigger for determining the immediate outcome as well as the controversial posterity of the elections. The aim of this last section is to show how the intensification of feelings within the narrow confines of the industrial plant tended to coagulate not just in moments of collective action, but also in willed apathy and other exercises in self-restraint on the shopfloor. Collective inaction, mediated by perceptions of powerlessness or by a sense of the futility of certain goals proclaimed by trade-union leaders, did not exclude moments of engaged spectatorship.

Part I

Varieties of Paternalism

The industrial complex that engineer Nicolae Malaxa erected in the Eastern district of Bucharest was rightly perceived as something of a wonder. It quadrupled its workforce between 1936 and 1938, expanded and diversified its production in the last two years of that decade and reached an impressive contingent of roughly 11000 employees in early 1941.⁷⁴ The engineer himself was a controversial figure: a captain of industry whose extraordinary trajectory during the

⁷⁴ “Uzinele Malaxa”, *Natura. Revistă pentru raspândirea științei*, XXVIII, No. 7, July 15 1939, 314-315; Ion Gancea “Din istoricul uzinelor ‘23 august’”, *Studii. Revistă de istorie*, Vol. 20, No. 4, 1967, 743-764.

1930s was associated with corruption scandals, murky state sponsorships and political networking at the very top. On the eve of the war Malaxa's factories manufactured drilling machines for the national oil industry, locomotives for the state railway company (CFR) and a vast array of weaponry for the Romanian Army. The plant, much like Malaxa's public persona, deeply fascinated engineers, journalists, writers and politicians.⁷⁵ Its industrial architecture mesmerized even the incredulous: "[...] offices are located at one end of the foundry section. The hall itself is so high that office desks are layered on three floors. The wall that separates them is made entirely out of glass so that engineers can supervise workers at all times."⁷⁶ Showcased at various continental industrial expositions in late 1930s, the plant nurtured the sentiment - as one of its employees recalled - that Romanians have finally "entered Europe as industrialists."⁷⁷

The enchantment with the plant, however, seldom filtered down to the shopfloors during the boom period. Between January 1938 and October 1940 the workday was constantly stretched well beyond the 8-hour legal norm, overtime was rarely if ever remunerated, Sunday work became customary and the right to paid holidays melted into thin air. These harsh working conditions were finally brought before the Arbitrage Commission in 1942 when over 2000 workers were granted compensatory pay.⁷⁸ But why did workers' demands for retroactive wage calculation stop in October 1940? Documents generated around this labour dispute provide no clues to an answer. Neither the workers' petition, nor the files of the labour inspectors and not even the final report issued by the accountant who reviewed the payrolls give any indication to this effect. And yet, the

⁷⁵ For a vivid portrait of Nicolae Malaxa at his apogee, see Petre Pandrea, *Garda de Fier: Jurnal de filozofie politică, memorii penitenciare* (Bucharest: Vremea, 2001), 263-270.

⁷⁶ M. Dragomir, "Uzinele Malaxa", *Gazeta municipală*, X, No. 462, March 9 1941.

⁷⁷ Engineer Henry Holban quoted in Costin Diaconescu (ed.) *Uzinele Malaxa – 23 August – Faur. Un arc peste timp: 1921-1999* (Bucharest: CD Press, 2007), 26.

⁷⁸ ANR, MM, 780/1942, pp. 2-202.

date marked a crucial moment in the transformation of wage policy and collective bargaining across the Romanian manufacturing sector. For Nicolae Malaxa's own metallurgical empire, which by that time comprised Reșița's integrated steel mill as well, October 1940 brought a sudden challenge to the established patterns of settling wage claims. Moreover, the subsequent dissolution of the guilds (*bresle*) in November 1940 revealed polarized ways of securing workers' co-option and exposed two varieties of paternalist managerial regimes in play within the same metal industry.⁷⁹

The Legionary Movement's accession to government positions turned industrial milieux into key sites of recruitment and self-promotion. Shortly after the proclamation of the National Legionary State in September 1940, the leader of the Legionary Movement Horia Sima visited Nicolae Malaxa's factory office to "negotiate with him a number of demands his workers had formulated."⁸⁰ Accompanied by a legionary delegation that professed to represent all employees, Sima convinced an apparently reluctant Malaxa to accept not only wage increases but also the setting up of a canteen. He then toured the plant to be acclaimed by the workers themselves who were quickly informed about their new wages: "it was the first victory the Romanian working class won without strikes and other disorders."⁸¹ Sima's memoirs contain several such episodes: in early October he doubled wages at the MICA mining company during a stopover in Southern Transylvania; later that month Sima readily accepted an 8-12% raise demanded by a group of miners from Petroșani, allegedly in order to avoid a strike. This haphazard campaign petered out

⁷⁹ *Bresle* (guilds) were mock trade-unions legislated in October 1938 under the royal dictatorship of King Carol II to replace the labour movement and align workers to a corporatist model similar to the one of fascist Italy; for the text of the law No. 3499, see MO, No. 237, October 12 1938.

⁸⁰ Horia Sima, *Era libertății. Statul Național Legionar* (Timișoara : Editura Gordian, 1995), Vol. I, 203.

⁸¹ *IBIDEM*.

in November 1940 when the legionary Minister of Labour set a new threshold for minimum wages. Sima's interventions were unprecedented in Romanian industry and must have shocked engineer Malaxa. The last attempt of workers at his plant to engage in collective bargaining under the more traditional form of unionization dated back to 1936 and was abruptly halted by arrests and lay-offs.⁸² Indeed, it seems highly improbable that from that moment onwards Nicolae Malaxa ever allowed his workers a say in matters of wage settlement.

In the political climate of the late 1940 wage concessions were increasingly hard to resist by managers, particularly in large scale factories. Nicolae Malaxa, however, was quick to adapt. On October 4, 1940, UDR's metalworkers downed tools and called in a strike. Two days earlier, UDR's mining division had been seized by a wave of strikes as miners from Anina, Doman, Secul and Ocna de Fier demanded a renegotiation of the collective labour contract, higher wages and better provisioning. Consequently, UDR's Bucharest Headquarters decided to send a delegation in order to appease what threatened to spark conflicts across the Bergland. Picked by Malaxa himself, the members of the delegation descended upon Reșița in legionary uniform, rounded up workers' delegates and announced the doubling of wages for daily workers (*salahori*), an increase of the "expensiveness bonus" (*adaos de scumpete*) for all employees, a reduction in working hours and the removal of two local engineers suspected of opposing the Movement.⁸³ The event astounded Reșița's local managerial team to such a degree that in February 1941 the newly appointed Military Commander of UDR - Colonel Boitan - described it as a "quasi Soviet" affair.⁸⁴ The subsequent

⁸² Simion Rusu, "Mișcarea muncitorilor metalurgiști dela fabrica Malaxa", *Lumea Nouă*, XXX, No. 30, July 26 1936.

⁸³ One of the members of the delegation, engineer Petre Bârsu, left a detail account, see ANR, UDR, 32/1941, pp. 5-8.

⁸⁴ ANR, MM, 282/1941, p. 147.

regulation of minimum wages in November 1940 only reinforced this decision by solidifying the lowest pay an unskilled worker took home to around 150 *lei*, nearly a 100% increase compared to September 1940. Unsurprisingly, Boitan drew the conclusion that “this was a legionary initiative to attract the masses to their ideology, in utter disregard of its consequences for the present and the future.”⁸⁵

There is little doubt that higher wages brought some relief for thousands of metalworkers and miners in Bucharest and Reșița. But one would be hard pressed to read the new payrolls as evidence of straightforward allegiance or even sympathy for the Legionary Movement. Wage concessions happened in a force-field defined by factory hierarchy, conflictual political loyalties, ethnic tensions, and gender relations. Workers themselves had their own politics. The mapping of this force-field, therefore, requires social context and a taste of the thickness of the everyday in which workers’ politics took place.⁸⁶ The October 4 strike in Reșița was reportedly declared by socialists only to be suppressed, two hours later, with the help of legionary and national-socialist workers. The Bucharest delegation, however, invited three representatives from each of these political camps to break the good news. The meeting itself was held in the Workers’ House, a large building inaugurated in February 1936, owned by UDR’s metalworkers as shareholders and run on the basis of an *Aktiengesellschaft*. The House’s main hall accommodated 888 seats, an oblique hint to the local history of struggle for an equitable division of the day into 8 hours of work, 8 of

⁸⁵ IBIDEM, p. 137.

⁸⁶ For the injunction to grasp the thickness of the social context in which resistance or its lack thereof takes place, see Sherry B. Ortner, “Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographical Refusal”, in her *Anthropology and Social Theory. Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

leisure and 8 of rest.⁸⁷ The workers' representatives were so-called "men of trust" (*bărbați de încredere*): a group of quintessential workers elected by each section of the plant and approved by management. The typical "man of trust" (*Vertrauensmann*) had to be male, skilled, married, senior, settled in the town, "always honest and cordial" even when his political views were not shared by his workmates.⁸⁸ This more or less informal structure of representation was the pillar of UDR's paternalism: it cut across trade-union membership, party affiliation and ethnic fault lines to provide management with a representative, authoritative and legitimate partner for discussing collective labour contracts, wage claims and shopfloor discipline.

The political identities of the "men of trust" were already in flux in Reșița and became even more



Workers' House, Reșița, cc. 1940; Source: Postcard

liquid after the banning of the guilds in November 1940. Introduced in late 1938, guilds had been professional corporate bodies that severely restricted trade-union rights but retained their

⁸⁷ Hans Wania, Franz Konrad Schlotter, "Das Arbeiterheim in Reschitz. Entstehung, Bedeutung, Erinnerungen", *Banater Berglanddeutsche*, 18, Vol. 107, 2002. The symbolism of the Workers' House is also mentioned by Dan D. Farcaș, *Hoinărind prin Reșița pierdută* (Reșița: TIM, 2008), 21-22.

⁸⁸ Description offered by Anton Ferenschütz, *Wahn und Wirklichkeit. Erzählung* (Reșița: Verlag Banatul Montan, 2006), 95. Ferenschütz was very likely characterizing his own father. On the notion of "quintessential worker", see Sonya O. Rose, "Class Formation and the Quintessential Worker", in John R. Hall (ed.) *Reworking Class* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 133-166.

entitlement to pursue collective bargaining and accumulate patrimony.⁸⁹ The last elections for the Metalworkers Guild in Reșița, held in March 1940, were won by socialist workers. Out of a total of 25, no less than 13 new members of the Executive Committee were already under police surveillance for their long standing involvement with the left movement.⁹⁰ Take, for instance, the case of Ioan Haudek, an ethnic German worker whom police records described as “ardently communist, intelligent and trusted by the masses.”⁹¹ During the late 1930s, Haudek had been the secretary of the local branch of the Social-Democratic Party, a “man of trust” and one of the more influential top members of the Metalworkers Guild. In the aftermath of the October 4 strike he was briefly arrested by the legionary police following a major crackdown on Reșița’s socialist workers that ended up with the confiscation of the guild’s library collection. Upon his release and not without some hesitation, Haudek joined the German Ethnic Group (GEG), was soon thereafter appointed leader of the Deutschen Arbeiterschaft Rumäniens (DAR) and entrusted to represent the national-socialist workers before UDR’s management. During Haudek’s tenure DAR gained control of the Workers’ House by imposing itself as the natural heir of the guild’s assets under the justification that the majority of its shareholders were ethnically German.⁹²

Haudek’s biography was far from exceptional. We might get a better sense of the claustrophobic context in which political allegiances shifted among Reșița’s “men of trust” from Anton Breitenhofer’s autobiographical fiction *Der Fünfzehnte*.⁹³ There is no evidence that

⁸⁹ Eftimie Gherman, “Conducătorii muncitorilor au cuvântul. Efectele legii breslelor”, *Lumea Nouă*, XXXII, No. 18, April 30 1939.

⁹⁰ ANR, Fond 50, 3080, pp. 3-6.

⁹¹ IBIDEM, p. 5.

⁹² ANCS, PSD Caraș, 1/1944, pp. 105-106. This biographical note is authored by an anonymous fellow social-democrat in May 1945, possibly Carol Lindner, and ends in regret: “we expected him not to join or at least not to take up leading positions.” Ioan Haudek was deported to the Soviet Union in January 1945.

⁹³ Anton Breitenhofer, “Der Fünfzehnte”, *Banater Schrifttum*, No. 2, 1954, 5-15.

Breitenhofer - a lathe operator in his 20s at the time - was ever a “man of trust”, though he numbered himself among the 13 socialist workers elected to the Executive Committee of the Metalworkers Guild in March 1940. *Der Fünfzehnte* tells the story of Wilhelm, an ethnic German worker at UDR’s rolling mill. More interested in family matters than politics, Wilhelm was appointed a “man of trust” by his colleagues in early 1940. In the fall of that year, he was summoned at the Workers’ House to take part in a meeting of the “men of trust”. Two police officers were seated in the back of the room, quietly jotting down the names of the workers as they arrived. The meeting was presided over by Cojocar - a man Wilhelm knew intimately, a trusted senior with whom he used to read newspapers, buy books from and confide in. Wilhelm could not quite believe his ears as he heard Cojocar explain that with Poland and France conquered, Russia stood no chance and the future belonged to Germany. The thirty “men of trust” present in the room had to choose their sides once and for all, vote their agreement by hand raising and return straight home to their families. Cojocar first invited ethnically Romanian workers to join the Legionary Movement and then asked the Germans to do the same for DAR. One worker who accused Cojocar of enforcing terror was immediately arrested by the police and swiftly removed from the room. Voting went on. Flabbergasted by Cojocar’s metamorphosis Wilhelm decided to keep aloof. Remaining neutral, however, is hardly an option amidst staring eyes, and little does it matter whether colleagues glare at you in anger, resignation or hope. Wilhelm’s arm, the fifteenth, had to be lifted.

The rules of fiction writing and the politics of memory of the 1950s might have distorted Breitenhofer’s grasp of the situation.⁹⁴ *Der Fünfzehnte* recounts, after all, an episode of political

⁹⁴ Would it be farfetched to imagine Haudek in the role of Cojocar?

résistance to peer pressure at the end of which the hero discovers that anti-fascists and communists were bound to share the same prison cell. No scene remotely similar by any stretch of the imagination could have taken place at Malaxa Works in Bucharest in the late 1940. The institution of the “men of trust”, the close-knit space of the Workers’ House, and the recent past of guild membership were all absent. The diverging history of these two industrial plants during the 1930s is still visible today in the sort of archival material each left behind. The content of factory archives depends to a very large degree on the manner in which management conceives of its employees. Differently put, the range of documents compiled and preserved within factories is necessarily related to managerial strategies devised to (re)produce the workforce.⁹⁵ The anatomy of the factory archive is thus a key to the type of paternalism that shaped it. From this perspective, the social role assumed by Malaxa Works in reproducing its workers outside the plant over the interwar period seems feeble indeed. The great bulk of its archive runs from the late 1920s up to 1949 and is composed of papers covering mostly juridical, technical and commercial aspects. Unlike UDR’s archives for the same span of time, there is no trace of collective labour contracts having been discussed with workers’ delegates. Moreover, whereas for the case of Reșița I found myself parsing through piles of dossiers pertaining to pension funds, the standard of living, food provisioning, commuting subsidies, marriage bonuses, credit and housing issues, Malaxa Works’ archives display a remarkable paucity of information on the mundane lives of its workers.⁹⁶ War time destruction and the archival processing practices of the socialist state alone do not explain the

⁹⁵ I draw here on Alain Touraine’s analysis of the Renault Archives in his correspondence with Charles Braibant, director of the French National Archives in *L’évolution du travail ouvrier aux Usines Renault* (Paris: CNRS, 1955), 184-185.

⁹⁶ The first collective labour contract between UDR and its organized metalworkers was signed in 1921; see Georg Hromadka, *Kleine Chronik des Banater Berglands* (München: Verlag Südostdeutsches Kulturwerk, 1993), 85-86.

contrast between Malaxa Works and UDR Reșița - arguably the two largest factory archives available in Romania for the first half of the twentieth century. This difference is to be identified at the level of their paternalist managerial regimes.

Historians tend to agree that in large metallurgical company paternalism unfolded as a cluster of factory-based policies set in place in response to labour shortages. These managerial strategies aimed to ease workers' exclusive reliance on cash wages, secure their stability and reinforce their commitment to the company.⁹⁷ Similarly to other family-owned firms and unlike joint-stock companies such as UDR, however, the role of the *patron* was paramount at Malaxa Works. In this sense, engineer Malaxa's presence in factory life was comparable to that of the owners of medium size companies in Romania, particularly in the textile and footwear industries.⁹⁸ Furthermore, personnel records and oral testimonies confirm that a significant number of workers, notably among the highly skilled, were recruited from across the country and had to be supported to settle in Bucharest.⁹⁹ Factory welfare institutions were therefore not totally absent. *Uzinele Malaxa*, a short documentary realized in late 1939 captured on film the medical cabinet of the plant and a number of other facilities such as shower cabins freely offered to employees.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ The scholarly literature on paternalism is vast. For paternalism as a response to workers' evasion (*dérobade*) in French metallurgy, see Gérard Noiriel, "Du 'patronage' au 'paternalisme'. La restructuration des formes de domination de la main-d'œuvre ouvrière dans l'industrie métallurgique française", in his *État, nation et immigration. Vers une histoire du pouvoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 248-265. For factory welfare (*freiwillige soziale Leistungen*) in German heavy industry, see Rüdiger Hachtmann, "Beschäftigungslage und Lohnentwicklung in der Deutschen Metallindustrie 1933-1949", *Historische Sozialforschung*, No. 19, 1981, 42-68. The best literary treatment of the topic remains Jean-Paul Goux's *Mémoires de l'enclave. Récits d'industrie* (Paris : Actes Sud, 2003).

⁹⁸ As late as 1943, in Bucharest largest footwear factory women workers would customarily address Dumitru Mociorniță, the owner, as follows: "Dear Mr. Father [părinte] Mociorniță" or "Father, I remain your faithful servant [servitor]", see AMB, Fabrica Dumitru Mociorniță, 26/1943, pp. 1-2.

⁹⁹ AMB, Fondul S.A.R. Malaxa, 16/1937, 17/1937. Following his employment in 1935, one worker, himself a native of Transylvania, recalls being trained by two foremen - Szabo and Farcaș - hailing from Brașov, Alexandru Săsăreanu, "Noi muncim, vedem ce-o fi..." in Zoltán Rostás, *Chipurile orașului. Istorii de viață în București. Secolul XX* (Iași: Polirom, 2002), 322.

¹⁰⁰ *Uzinele Malaxa* (1940: ONC, directed by Paul Călinescu).

Moreover, it is reasonable to suppose that engineer Malaxa financed the building of an orthodox parish church as well, possibly the very same one that calls itself Saint Nicholas Malaxa today. But paternalism cannot be reduced to social control and the



Overseeing at Malaxa Munitions Factory, February 1 1940, photo by Margaret Bourke-White; Source: The LIFE Picture Collection, Getty Images

planned reproduction of labour power. In large scale metal industries, as Donald Reid put it, “paternalist management involved control of the discretionary powers exercised by shopfloor supervisors.”¹⁰¹ Indeed, the legionary delegation engineer Malaxa dispatched to Reșița to contain the strikes of early October 1940 arrived with wage bonuses already set in Bucharest “in Mr. Malaxa’s own office.” UDR’s local management upgraded wages on the basis of the fluctuation of local prices which they monitored through “mixed commissions” formed by technical supervisors and “men of trust”. Moreover, workers’ delegates in Reșița often forced their own

¹⁰¹ Donald Reid, “Industrial Paternalism: Discourse and Practice in Nineteenth-Century French Mining and Metallurgy”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 27, No. 4, 1985, 584.

calculations of the standard of living on management during negotiations over collective labour contracts.

If Malaxa Works' archives retain no protocols on subsidizes, benefits and the host of other welfare facilities it provided, this might be because such issues were not subjected to collective bargaining and remained solely in the realm of patronage and occasional philanthropy i.e. a mere offshoot of managerial planning rather than the outcome of power-sharing along the lines of factory hierarchy. Engineer Malaxa's discretionary power was checked neither by an informal arrangement of workers' representation, nor by organized labour under the guild system and not even by the rulings of the Board of Administrators, the members of which the patron appointed himself anyway. Factory hierarchy had a different dynamic at Malaxa Works as it spiraled downwards, unencumbered, from the main office. It is this fluent chain of command that molded shopfloor supervision and provided the density of the social context in which workers' political identities shifted under the National Legionary State.

Malaxa Works was well known to police agents for encouraging the presence among its employees of a group of engineers, foremen and skilled workers associated with the Legionary Workers' Corps (CML).¹⁰² It seems likely, as Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu noted at the time, that engineer Malaxa used the CML for gathering shopfloor information on subversive, nay socialist and communist workers that might have attempted to organize themselves during the late 1930s.¹⁰³ Pătrășcanu - a contemporary Marxist intellectual and communist party member - made this observation under the distress of having witnessed dozens of forgers, mechanics, lathe operators

¹⁰² ANR, MI, Diverse, 7/1937.

¹⁰³ Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, *Sub trei dictaturi* (Bucharest: FORUM, 1945), 202.

and welders from Malaxa Works taking part in the armed rebellion and the pogrom of January 1941. During those days, the plant stopped production as some of its skilled workers took to the streets of Bucharest to fight the army and loot Jewish neighborhoods.¹⁰⁴ Kun Endre, a Hungarian Jewish Romanian citizen who lived in walking distance of the Rolling Pipes Factory, recalled escaping death at the hands of Malaxa's workers by hiding in the city.¹⁰⁵ Even though details on individual workers who participated in the rebellion are hard to amass, the fact that Malaxa Works become a stronghold of CML in the fall of 1940 is beyond doubt. To explain it by invoking preferential hiring, as Pătrășcanu finally did, seems questionable in view of the sheer size of the plant. And yet, we might get a sense of how CML inserted itself in the logic of Malaxa's paternalism, reinforced factory hierarchy and recruited new members if we briefly look at its attempt to set up a canteen in Bucharest's largest metallurgical factory.

Framed in the language of industrial peace, the CML's campaign for cheap, hot meals during long workdays banked not only on workers' expectations but also on feelings of deep adversity metalworkers had accumulated against so-called creditors, "ruddy, healthy, well fed and well dressed" restaurant owners who flocked around factory gates on payday to collect workers' debts.¹⁰⁶ Factory canteens were not a novelty in interwar Bucharest, but they were first made available to the employees of the state railway company and the municipal public transportation

¹⁰⁴ I was unable to find eyewitness accounts of this event as it unfolded inside Malaxa Works. One report forwarded to the police in February 1941 by two of the plant's engineers was strangely missing from its dossier, ANR, MI, Diverse 30/1933, p. 115. For instance, one engineer dressed in military garb took out a tank from the factory and drove it to the city, ANR, MI, Diverse, 77/1941, p. 159.

¹⁰⁵ Endre Kun, "N-ar fi păcat să lăsăm aici petuniile astea?" in Zoltán Rostás, *Chipurile oraşului. Istorii de viaţă în Bucureşti. Secolul XX* (Iaşi: Polirom, 2002), 226-229.

¹⁰⁶ Şomer, "Cum trăiesc metalurgiştii bucureşteni", *Lumea Nouă*, XXX, No. 52, December 20 1937.

firm (STB).¹⁰⁷ In metallurgic factories, canteens were open as early as the 1920s, but only as a privilege offered to engineers and the higher managerial staff.¹⁰⁸ It is in this context that CML advertised the setting up of a canteen at Malaxa Works in October 1940.¹⁰⁹

Workers, however, might be forgiven for having had to continue bringing their food packed from home and nibble at watermelon slices, grapes and apples during work. In August 1941 they still complained that while the upper personnel had their own canteen (*popotă*), workers were ruthlessly exploited by the owners of nearby restaurants.¹¹⁰ Workers' grievances about not having their own canteen amplified throughout 1941. War penury and surging prices pushed management to finance the building of a "grandiose hall" fitted with top-notch cooking equipment acquired from Germany.¹¹¹ The workers' canteen finally opened in 1942 during Easter Holidays and could indeed provide meals for 5000 persons in two successive lunch break shifts. Was CML's canteen then a mere figment of fascist imagination, as we might infer from archival sources? It seems more plausible to argue that an annex of the engineers' old canteen was hastily made to accommodate lower supervisory personnel as well, notably legionary workshop overseers.

It was the workshop overseer (*șef de atelier*) who played the main role of recruiting agent for the Legionary Movement at Malaxa Works. Structured by factory hierarchy, routine and double

¹⁰⁷ CFR Grivița - the largest railway repair shop in Bucharest closed down its canteen for one month following the Legionary Rebellion, see Ilarion Țiu, *Mișcarea legionară după Corneliu Codreanu, Vol. II. Regimul Antonescu (ianuarie 1941-august 1944)*, (Bucharest: Editura Vremea, 2007), 81. STB organized its workers' canteen only in September 1939, ANR, MM, 1188/1941, p. 4.

¹⁰⁸ Vulcan, a smaller metallurgical factory in Bucharest, opened its canteen for functionaries in 1925, a dining room for apprentices in October 1940 and a workers' canteen in February 1941, ANR, MM, 1192/1941, p. 11.

¹⁰⁹ *Muncitorul legionar*, I, No. 2, November 25 1940.

¹¹⁰ AMB, *Legiunea de jandarmi București*, 62/1941.

¹¹¹ ANR, MI, 25/1937, 18/1940. This model canteen was presented in *Muncitorul român*, VI, No. 5, September 1943. The article could not reveal the factory's name for strategic reasons but there is little doubt that the pictures were taken at Malaxa Works.

talk, the shopfloor allowed none of the mock plebiscitary atmosphere UDR's "men of trust" had to go through in the meeting room of the Workers' House. The higher one was within the factory hierarchy, the harder it became to refuse enlisting. In the words of a worker: "Then a nasty shopfloor supervisor came, I don't remember his name, and forced us to join. But I did not join. They caught Damian, who was a foreman (*maistru*), and he was afraid that they will fire him as a foreman, and they grabbed him. And he became a legionary, but I stayed out. They assigned me crappy tasks, to take out the iron from underneath the benches, to the put it all back, and then they would ask me why I don't join. I told them my father was not involved in politics, I don't do politics, and things settled; they left me out."¹¹² Invitations to join the Legionary Movement came from above and were wontedly issued in the bossy tone of an injunction. Standoffish behavior backed by claims to neutrality was nonetheless rare, especially among workers with a personal history of militancy. Petru, a locksmith employed by Malaxa Rolling Pipes Factory in 1938, described his experience in the following way: "In 1940 when the legionaries came to power headed by Antonescu, I remember that everybody enrolled in the Legion. I myself was repeatedly teased (*bâzâit*) to do so. I was at the time talking with comrade Boris Musurschi, whom I knew to be a man devoted to the working class, and he told me to join, and we did so together."¹¹³

To question whether Boris, a man with communist sympathies, acted on discarded faith or out of principled opportunism would trivialize the ambiguous violence, physical and symbolic, constitutive of factory hierarchy. In early 1948, a newspaper reporter who visited the Rolling Pipes

¹¹² Alexandru Săsăreanu, "Noi muncim, vedem ce-o fi..." in Zoltán Rostás, *Chipurile oraşului. Istorii de viaţă în Bucureşti. Secolul XX* (Iaşi: Polirom, 2002), 323.

¹¹³ ANCS, Comitetul judeţean PMR Reşiţa, 12/1949, p. 59. Petru was recruited from Reşiţa in 1938 together with a team of skilled metalworkers to be employed at Malaxa's newly opened Rolling Pipes Factory.

Factory learned about a man suffering from heart problems who disregarded the doctor's advice to take time off. It was Musurschi: "I could not stay home; I could not allow myself not to see how the machine works."¹¹⁴ The article presented a short biography of this working class hero: "comrade Boris suffered a lot but he always stayed put. A member of the communist party in 1941, he was arrested in 1943 and sent to the internment camp. He returned to Malaxa Works after his release and actively contributed to keeping the factory afloat. He became a foreman, and he now works hard to promote new cadres among the workers. This intense activity ruined his health."¹¹⁵ The details of this résumé blurred historical causality by inserting bodily illness into a structuring narrative of grand political transformation and everyday personal résistance. Party archives, however, show that Boris was not a member of the communist party in 1941. He was arrested in 1943 simply because he had spoken with a communist agitator nicknamed Titu.¹¹⁶ Moreover, Boris was foreman of the Rolling Pipes Factory well before his imprisonment, possibly as early as 1940 and regained his position immediately after prison release in August 1944, in addition to becoming secretary of the factory committee.¹¹⁷ Just like the other foremen employed at the Rolling Pipes Factory, Boris was in the habit of using "command methods [...] before and after August 23", often beating up subordinate workers even when they shared his political views.¹¹⁸ Expelled from the communist party in 1949, comrade Musurschi not only retained his job but received praise in

¹¹⁴ Paul Fayon, "Producția noastră, mândria noastră", *Revista muncii*, III, No. 26, March 20, 1948, 20-22.

¹¹⁵ IBIDEM.

¹¹⁶ AMB, PCR București, 4/1945, p. 7. Titu was the nickname of Alexandru Șiperco. I make use of his recollections in part II of this chapter.

¹¹⁷ The Rolling Pipes Factory was dismembered and carried to the Soviet Union in late 1944 only to be rebuilt with Soviet help in 1947. It is very likely therefore that Musurschi was reassigned to a different section of the plant during this interval.

¹¹⁸ ANR, Comisia Centrală de Verificare a Membrilor de Partid, 35/1949, p. 123.

the factory gazette for quality work.¹¹⁹ Workers' shifting involvements under the successive dictatorial regimes of mid-twentieth century Romania, therefore, cannot be detached from the embodied history of work hierarchies. As I argue below, stories about workers' political choices can reveal the implicit stakes subjection generates at the point of production.

Wages of War

The defeat of the Legionary Movement in late January 1941 and its subsequent outlawing led to the establishment of a military dictatorship under the sole leadership of Ion Antonescu. Political and labour organizations remained banned save for the German Ethnic Group and the Deutschen Arbeiterschaft Rumäniens, both of which were allowed to freely enroll the German minority, collect membership fees and legally represent their constituency in various instances of civil life. In February 1941 better than half of the Romanian industry was militarized and redeployed in the service of the war, often under the coordination of Germany's war economy. Malaxa Works, for instance, was taken over by the state, nationalized and rented out to a joint-stock company by the name of ROGIFER. The militarization of factory life entailed a significant transformation of workers' routines. High-ranked military officers were appointed commanders for each factory in order to enforce discipline and set up surveillance networks on the shopfloors. Deemed "soldiers of the home-front", workers were now required to wear arm badges for easy identification, and were always liable to be sent to the front if they misbehaved. Strolling,

¹¹⁹ *Viața Uzinei, Organ al Comitetului de Partid și al Comitetului Sindical – Uzinele "23 August"*, I, No. 3, June 1 1949, p. 4.

daydreaming and chatting during worktime were considered grave offences.¹²⁰ Factory gates were soon guarded by gendarmes, factory surroundings patrolled by police agents and working-class neighborhoods planted with informants. Militarization was followed in October 1941 by a law that placed factory work under exceptional conditions and stipulated the institutional framework through which labour disputes could be pursued.¹²¹

Throughout 1941, however, the militarization of factory life neither affected factories' prerogatives to devise their own wage policy, nor did it alter the language of industrial peace inherited from the Legionary Movement. Romania's entry in the Second World War was explained by the editor-in-chief of the Labour Ministry's official magazine as a campaign waged against "Soviet state capitalism": "Minimal wages, paid holidays, 8 hour workday etc. etc. (sic!) are just the beginning of this new epoch, whereby the state provides excellent conditions for work, which would have never been possible under the free relation between capital and labour or under the slavery of Judaic Marxism."¹²² Propaganda aside, the outset of the war did increase the role of the bureaucracy in regulating working conditions, setting wages and mediating labour conflicts. But rather than marking a clear break with the past, the protracted emergence of the wartime labour regime had to rely on established varieties of paternalism, lobbying, and the conflictual interplay between the institutions called upon to coordinate industrial production. Yet it was this fragile and contradictory wartime labour regime that came to structure collective bargaining during the whole of the 1940s. The core parameters of the wage policy arrived at between 1942 and 1944 in

¹²⁰ For a sample of the military rules at UDR, see Ovidiu Bozu, "Măsuri represive adoptate împotriva muncitorilor în perioada militarizării Uzinelor Reșita", *Banatica*, 1975, 277-282. For ROGIFER, see AMB, Legiunea de Jandarmi București, 1932-1949, 64/1941.

¹²¹ Law No. 864, published in MO, CIX, No. 233, October 2 1941, 5836-5940.

¹²² Nicu Porsenna, "Capitalist, muncitor și stat", *Muncitorul național român*, No. 1, June, 1941.

metalworking industries laid the groundwork for the postwar governments' approach to wage freezes, sectoral wage scales, wage differentials and the type of benefits covered by the social wage. The development of the wartime wage policy, therefore, occasioned the first major experiment in planning.

In January 1941, UDR's ethnic German "men of trust" addressed management in the name of all the metalworkers enrolled in DAR, revoked the collective labour contract and asked for an increase of their wages by 37.59%. Valid for one year, UDR's collective labour contract could be revoked or "denounced" by workers' representatives two months before it expired, a gesture that effectively signaled the beginning of a complex process of negotiation over wages and the array of benefits, bonuses and subsidies to be included in the agreement. The percentage might seem striking, but it represented the standard of living calculated by the "men of trust" themselves for a family of four on the basis of the evolution of prices for primary goods, including footwear and clothing items, on Reșița' local market. The negotiations, which could last for weeks in a row, required the presence of a labour inspector, often travelling on request from the nearby city of Timișoara. The whole process ended with a new contract being signed by the three parties involved and sanctioned by Timișoara's Arbitrage Commission. In February 1941, miners' ethnic German "men of trust" also revoked their own collective contract. Lower paid by company tradition, miners joined the negotiations to demand their wages reach the same level as that of the metalworkers. The most precarious group of workers, some 4000 woodsmen, seasonal lumberjacks and sawmill operators active on UDR's countywide forestry domains were not employed on the basis of a collective labour contract, had no representatives and were excluded from negotiations. Their

relation to the company, as one local social-democrat activist recalled, was reduced to one between master and servant (*slugă*).¹²³

Negotiations proceeded at a slow pace. Fearing reprisal for their involvement with the Legionary Movement, ethnic Romanian “men of trust” initially avoided voicing their own claims. Management, however, encouraged the election of three Romanian delegates according to the “old norms”, and postponed negotiations until late February.¹²⁴ By April that year, it agreed to a wage increase of 25% for metalworks and 10% for miners and accepted a clause that allowed workers to demand new wage bonuses every four months. Following a protest staged by the miners’ wives in Anina, management also conceded to include into the contract its obligation to buy pigs and supply miners with the bedrock of their daily diet, the expensive pork fat. Metalworkers’ “men of trust” were granted supervisory powers over the hiring process and the right to participate in the commission that distributed lodging facilities to employees in the town.¹²⁵ In August 1941, as prices kept surging during the early summer, workers’ delegates requested yet another 10% increase of their wages to compensate for the sudden drop in the living standard. This time around, management resorted to lobbying the Labour Ministry in order to prolong as much as possible the intervention of the labour inspector from Timișoara. They also asked for the standard of living to be revised for “times of scarcity” and be periodically recalculated directly by the Ministry, rather than at the factory level, a demand that anticipated by a couple of weeks what became official state policy in October 1941.¹²⁶

¹²³ Traian Cercega quoted in Eusebiu-Marcel Narai, *Situația politică, economică și socială a județelor Caraș și Severin, August 1944-Iunie 1948* (PhD Dissertation, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Vol. I, 2007), 260.

¹²⁴ ANR, MM, 73/1941, p. 133.

¹²⁵ ANR, UDR, 101/1941, pp. 6-15.

¹²⁶ ANR, UDR, 145/1941, pp. 1-66.

UDR's management was thus very likely knocking on an open door. By the fall of 1941 the Ministry of Labour, the General Commissariat for Prices and the Ministry of the National Economy were all busily looking for ways to stabilize wages. The "men of trust" soon found out the hard way that their wages were no longer up for negotiation. When the collective labour contract was revoked in January 1942, workers' delegates obtained a favorable ruling from the Arbitrage Commission for a 10% wage increase and even convinced the labour inspector to threaten management with sabotage if the verdict was disregarded. Backed by the Ministry of the National Economy, UDR's management took the legal dispute to the Supreme Arbitrage Commission in Bucharest which overruled the decision and made clear that only the General Commissariat for Prices had the right to set industrial wages. The support of the labour inspector and the conflictual overlap between the regional Arbitrage Commission and the General Commissariat for Prices left some room for maneuver and kept hopes alive. In July 1942 the "men of trust" expressed their intention to resign because workers accused them of having given up on their duties as representatives. This desperate move paid off and wage bonuses were finally annexed to the contract, as the Military Commander quickly acknowledged, because the company could not afford to have the authority of the "men of trust" undermined. But this was the last time wages were upgraded collectively at the factory level through contentious negotiations.

The year 1942 saw factories deprived of control over wage policy. Wages were now set by a central state agency - the General Commissariat for Prices - which issued regularly minimum and maximum quotas for each industry. The Commissariat parceled the national territory in three distinct "wage regions" (*regiuni de salarizare*) according to their estimated cost of living. The first region grouped major urban centers such as Bucharest, Braşov, Ploieşti and Timișoara and had the highest wages; the second region lumped together smaller cities and industrial localities - Arad,

Petroșani, Reșița, and Hunedoara - where wages were lower by an average of 10%; the lowest industrial wages were reserved for those regions regarded as rural. This wage scale was then segmented by skill, gender and age. Children between the ages of 14 and 18, for instance, could not earn below 50% of the wage of an unskilled adult male worker employed in the same craft within the same “wage region”. To a certain extent this scheme drew upon the way in which the interwar Romanian state had customarily paid its public functionaries, but it was also grounded in a renewed effort to make sovereign space legible along the lines of a simplified view of proletarianization.¹²⁷ The Commissariat classified industrial workers in relation to their proximity and access to land.¹²⁸ In this view, urban dwellers had to rely solely on their wages for survival, whereas the industrialized peasants could compensate for lower pay with the agricultural products of their own plots. For the same reason, markets in food items could be expected to be cheaper outside large cities.

The abstract categories of rural and urban came to inform not only the industrial wage policy but also the plan of distributing land to the workers. Formulated by the Work and Light section of the Ministry of Labour, this project aimed to encourage workers with large families to grow their own vegetable gardens.¹²⁹ By 1943 it was reported that 3,289,580 square meters waited

¹²⁷ Legibility and simplification should be understood here as categories of bureaucratic practice, James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State. How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (London: Yale University Press, 1998), 11-52.

¹²⁸ The General Commissariat for Prices’s assumptions about wage-dependence, local market prices, and access to agricultural land officially mapped and reordered the national territory and industrial workers in terms of rural and urban. This makes it a typical case of the state making itself through state-making, Pierre Bourdieu, *Sur l’état. Cours au Collège de France, 1989-1990* (Paris: Seuil, 2013), 197 *et passim*.

¹²⁹ “Grădini muncitorești pe lângă întreprinderi”, *Carașul*, No. 12, March, 1942 quoted in Petru Călin, “Problematica muncitorească reflectată în periodicele reșitene din perioada interbelică. Aspecte social-democrate”, in *Fenomenul muncitoresc și social-democrat din România. Secolele 18-20. Lucrări prezentate la simpozionul de la Reșița, 23-25 mai 1997* (Reșița : InterGraf, 1997), 44.

to be rented out across the country.¹³⁰ This astronomical figure, much like the plan which it endorsed, was probably no more than a bureaucratic proposal, one arguably influenced by conspicuous changes in the social composition of employment brought about by the war. Large contingents of peasants did take up jobs in industry in order to avoid being recruited in the army, leaving their household behind to be manned by women and children. This mobile and apparently self-reliant workforce even pushed the Labour Ministry to consider the introduction of the work booklet (*carte de muncă*) in October 1943. War production required “knowledge of the current labour market” and the ability of the state to prevent labour shortages in key armament industries.¹³¹ UDR’s management, for example, tolerated longer absences from work during spring and autumn from its rural workers (*flotanți*) because “the fields cannot remain idle.”



UDR’s Marghițaș Farm, cca. 1943, Source: Private Collection

Location in the villages, however, did not necessarily make workers less dependent on cash wages as the legibility principle of the “wage regions” assumed. Take this aphorism jotted down by UDR’s Military Commander in late 1943: “the villages need more light.” Colonel Boitan was

¹³⁰ ANR, MM, 92/1942, p. 175.

¹³¹ ANR, MM, 53/1943, p. 160. The implementation of the work booklet was demanded by the Army but could not be met by the Labour Ministry due to its lack of infrastructure, particularly trained personnel and office space.

not discussing electrification, as one might be tempted to believe at a first glance. He was merely criticizing in the language of the Enlightenment a widespread, rather irrational practice among Reșița's metalworkers: "I noticed that some workers try to sell their sugar ration at inflated prices. This greed for money goes against the best of their interests, against their own health and that of their families, and it is typical of those workers coming from rural areas, gripped as they still are by the power of darkness (*stăpâniți de puterea întunericului*)."

The relatively autonomous rural worker was but a codified expression of state simplification. Isolated in a mountainous region, Reșița's local market was one of the most expensive in the country. Transportation costs were not the only cause. Metalworkers' households depended on bi-weekly markets organized by traveling peasant entrepreneurs. This turned them into a captive mass of consumers whose steady wages could be counted upon even during more inflationary periods. Workers' habit to come up with their own standard of living originated in these circumstances, and so did their own private cooperative called "Munca". Organized during the slump of the early 1930s by unionized metalworkers to countervail the fluctuation of prices, the cooperative, just like the Workers' House, was run as an *Aktiengesellschaft*. It acquired various primary goods on the cheaper markets of Timișoara or straight from the villages and helped keep prices down.

Equally secluded in their hilly villages of Steierdorf and Anina, miners were even more dependent on what they could buy from itinerant peasants. As Virgil Birou noted in his ethnography of the region, in Anina "[T]he rich have only one cow. The poor miner's cow is the

goat.”¹³² Supposedly, goats were less pretentious creatures who could easily roam surrounding orchards, often accompanied by the miners’ wives in their daily search for edible mushrooms. Cows needed pastures, the vast majority of which were enclosed on the company’s forestry domains. Locals knew well that “those who have two cows must give one for free in trespassing fines to UDR to feed the other one.”¹³³ Sometimes miners bartered by exchanging stolen dynamite for flour, which peasants used for blast fishing back home. When pork fat was missing, milk was the only source of calories. This explains why UDR’s management decided to open a farm with 40 milk cows in late 1942 only for the miners.

The development of provisioning facilities by industrial plants was the immediate consequence of the scarcity and inflation unleashed by the war economy throughout Europe.¹³⁴ Irrespective of their positioning in the rural/urban continuum, Romanian factories bought land, cattle, pigs and poultry in order to supply their workers. Some of these goods made their way to the newly opened factory canteens; others were distributed to workers during the winter season. By 1944 Malaxa Works had its own vegetable glass house, cow farm, hay barns and 110 hectares of arable land near Bucharest, and so did even the smaller metal factories of the capital city. With wages fixed by the General Commissariat for Prices and wage increases excised from collective bargaining, management found itself more and more pressured to secure affordable provisioning.

¹³² Virgil Birou, *Oameni și locuri din Caraș. Cu 48 de fotografii făcute de autor* (Timișoara : Editura Astrei Bănățene, 1940), 67. The book received praise from one local engineer for its superb depiction of the miners’ daily life, ANR, UDR, 106/1944, p. 44.

¹³³ “UDR: Balaurul cu o mie de capete”, *Luptătorul Bănățean*, III, No. 585, August 24 1946.

¹³⁴ For Italy, see Ferruccio Ricciardi, “La cantine au prisme du paternalisme industriel. Alimentation et consentement à l’usine de Dalmine (Lombardie) entre fascisme et république”, *Le mouvement social*, No. 247, 2014, 110. For a comparative assessment of the changes in factory provisioning triggered by the two world wars in Europe, see Stéphane Gacon, “Cantines et alimentation au travail: une approche comparée, du milieu du XIXe siècle à nos jours”, *Le mouvement social*, No. 247, 2014, 3-25.

To make sure workers will pay back, Malaxa Works and UDR Reșița set up credit funds and encouraged workers to repay their debts in long term installments.¹³⁵ In Reșița, “men of trust” kept compiling graphs, statistics and price lists, but as they were told by the labour inspector in February 1943, all these figures had only an informative value and no direct bearing on wage policy.¹³⁶ Negotiations over collective labour contracts continued in 1944 as well, but were predictably reduced to the amount and quality of food, clothing, and footwear items which UDR was entitled to make available.¹³⁷ Intense lobbying in Bucharest finally upgraded the town of Reșița to the first “wage region”, though not UDR’s mines which remained trapped in the state’s initial legibility scheme.¹³⁸

There was another element of the wartime wage policy which underpinned the state’s attempt to keep industrial wages as flat as possible. The Commissariat demanded factories to undertake yearly reevaluations of their internal labour markets (*reîncadrări*). By turning unskilled into skilled workers, promoting foremen to shopfloor overseers or simply by redistributing personnel between the various sections of the plant, reevaluations could bring better pay to some workers at the expense of others. Job promotion criteria were decided by management alone, even when it had to rely on some input from the shopfloors. This policy was initially regarded with utter suspicion by UDR’s management because it went against the company’s commitment to apprenticeship and craft mastery. Reevaluations also threatened to undermine the principle of workers’ representation, one premised on striking a balance between the interests of the skilled

¹³⁵ ANR, MM, 631/1944, 203-205 and ANR, UDR, 264/1943, p. 251. At Malaxa Works, credit was premised on letters of recommendation from workshop overseers and foremen.

¹³⁶ ANR, DGP, 42/1943, p. 36.

¹³⁷ For these reasons, by 1944 many factories considered collective labour contracts pointless, for example ANR, MM, 599/1944, pp. 4-6.

¹³⁸ ANR, MM, 1143/1943, p. 111.

ethnically German workers and those of the less skilled Romanians. In April 1943, for example, metalworkers were evaluated according to skill, difficulty of work, seniority and family standing. But this only revealed the necessity, amidst grievances galore, of yet another reevaluation based on aptitude, perseverance and proper behavior. This last set of criteria ended up marking workers as excellent, very good, good, mediocre and bad, all arbitrary categories which allowed UDR's management to keep the internal labour market rigid by translating the priority given to experience over ethnicity in the language of meritocracy.

Reevaluations took place in a different conjuncture at Malaxa Works. The plant's whopping expansion during the late 1930s made its internal labour market more flexible and more dependent on the lower factory hierarchy. Workshop overseers competed to recruit reliable workers, build up solid workteams and attract more tasks within the section. When German management took over the plant in October 1941, it was puzzled to notice the extent of the complicities between the supervisory personnel and the workers (*Angestellten und Arbeitern*). Foremen usually increased payment for their teams by 20%.¹³⁹ In April 1942, skilled and unskilled workers were requested to sign a paper through which they accepted to be relocated to other sections if upper management considered it necessary.¹⁴⁰ The yearly reevaluations brought endless complaints: management was accused of favoring ethnically Hungarian and German (*săși/Saxons*) workers; functionaries threatened to send a letter to Marshall Antonescu; police arrested workers suspected of bribing the Bucharest Labour Chamber to release them skill certificates (*cărți de meșteri*); poor quality work was explained by the workers themselves as a result of promoting

¹³⁹ "Niederschrift betreffend die von rumänischer Seite gegen HGW erhobenen Vorwürfe hinsichtlich Geschäftsführung in der ROGIFER", BNR, Fond Secretariat, 67/1941, 124.

¹⁴⁰ AMB, Legiunea de Jandarmi Bucuresti, 1932-1949, 76/1942, p. 36.

inexperienced foremen¹⁴¹; foundry workers could not understand why welders were pushed to a different wage category and received better pay. This atmosphere of suspicion and discontent, as I show below, was pervaded by violence, particularly against women workers. One investigation conducted by a labour inspector in March 1944 took the grumble seriously only to dismiss it: “The factory proceeded with the reevaluation of skilled and unskilled workers on the basis of seniority and efficiency, criteria which are proposed by the workshop overseers and the foremen. It is thus highly unlikely that mistakes have been committed.”¹⁴² It recommended that each workshop display in plain sight its wage differentials and have the components of the wage workers received detailed on their pay envelopes.¹⁴³ In reply, the workers’ delegates of Bucharest metal industries demanded the elimination of the payment-by-result system which in their view was used to buttress the minimum wage. What was needed according to their petition forwarded to the Labour Ministry was a flat hourly wage that would collapse the difference between maximum and minimum wages set by the General Commissariat for Prices.¹⁴⁴

The end of the military dictatorship in late August 1944 brought a momentary challenge to the wartime labour regime as wage increases quickly became the central rallying cry behind the effort to organize workers in factory committees and trade-unions. During a general meeting in September 1944 Malaxa workers were told by a communist union organizer that the Central Commissariat for Prices was about to double wages for metalworkers. This was old news. By that time, the Commissariat had already published its decision to increase wages in all industries.

¹⁴¹ ANR, MM, 371/1942, p. 201.

¹⁴² ANR, MM, 1189/1943, p. 6.

¹⁴³ ANR, MM, 1069/1943, pp. 19-21.

¹⁴⁴ ANR, MM, 609/1944, pp. 78-82.

Consequently, Malaxa workers asked for an additional 100% wage bonus only to be informed by management that wages cannot be touched at the factory level. During another general meeting held in October 1944, the same communist union organizer told the audience that it was now possible for workers to abolish the law on which the management's answer relied. Following a session of negotiation that lasted for seven hours, in early November the factory committee convinced management to provide the equivalent of one month's pay as "winter benefits". This was already a significant gain in comparison to 1943, when the end of the year wage bonus amounted to less than a full week's pay. In late November, the factory committee supported the nomination of a new general manager in the person of Nicolae Korcinschi, a communist party member and one of the engineers of the plant.¹⁴⁵ Korcinschi soon found out, however, that it was not possible to raise wages singlehandedly without breaking the law. Even though higher wages were paid in December 1944, this only happened in slight anticipation of the General Commissariat for Prices's decision to yet again boost wages across all industrial branches.

The example of Malaxa Works was exceptional. In no other large plant were the factory committees successful in forcing the appointment of a benevolent general manager so quickly, and no other factory committee was able to mobilize so successfully in order to help bend the official wage policy. In most cases, the emergent factory committees' wage claims were met with refusal and workers' delegates were instructed to direct their attention to legal entitlements such as provisioning, reevaluations and the payment of overtime. The case of Malaxa Works is more indicative of the ambivalence the communist party displayed in relation to the wartime wage

¹⁴⁵ Nicolae Korcinschi was hired by Malaxa Works in 1937 as a construction engineer, ANR, CC/PCR, Economică, Dosare Anexe, 70/1954, pp. 41-42.

policy. As I show in detail below, during the fall of 1944 myriad communist organizers appropriated demands, hopes and desires that were already articulated by the workers themselves in their endless stream of complaints to the Labour Inspectorates, the Labour Chamber or the Ministry of Labour. Wage claims, purges and workers' control over factory facilities were initially framed in the vernacular of everyday struggle at the factory level. By December 1944, however, the leadership of the communist party openly acknowledged the dangers of not addressing the workers in the language of industrial peace. In Bucharest, one party secretary admitted that purging "drifted towards leftism" because "the whole party organization misunderstood the party's line and ended up wanting to take over the factory, that is to say socialization [...] where workers attempted to oust management because it did not satisfy their [wage] claims."¹⁴⁶ In another factory of the capital city, newly organized workers demanded ownership of the stocks of the company. "They wanted to be the first socialist factory in Romania" party boss Ana Pauker explained: "they wanted ever more shares, they wanted socialism. [...] Our luck is that the Red Army will remain here for a longer period of time."¹⁴⁷ These were not so much words of panic as of contempt for a rabble that misread the signs of the present. The point was to pursue the same goal as the one formulated by the workers who dared ask for socialism but, as Pauker duly emphasized, "from an absolutely different standpoint".

The Romanian Communist Party's disdain for workers' radicalism was an expression of the bureaucratized Stalinism of the late 1930s exported beyond Soviet borders.¹⁴⁸ But it was also a

¹⁴⁶ ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 26/1944, p. 21.

¹⁴⁷ IBIDEM, p. 62.

¹⁴⁸ Mark Pittaway, "Making Postwar Communism" in Dan Stone (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Postwar European History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 268.

plea for safeguarding the wartime wage policy and an explicit commitment to the infrastructural continuity of a state form premised on cutting back the living standard to the absolute minimum.¹⁴⁹ Backed by the industrialists' association (UGIR) and the General Confederacy of Labour (Confederația Generală a Muncii/CGM), the state retained its monopoly over the legitimate planning of industrial wages. By early 1945 the General Commissariat for Prices was relieved to note that once more "the working class has to participate in the war effort and the reconstruction of the country by giving up a part of its theoretical rights (*drepturile ei teoretice*)."¹⁵⁰ The communist-dominated government appointed in March 1945 through Soviet intervention undertook to freeze wages, encouraged unions and management to sign collective labour contracts, legislated provisioning under the form of factory stores (*economate*) and expanded the logic of the "wage regions". Indeed, the novelty of the wage policy adopted in early May 1945 was the extension of the Commissariat's legibility scheme to both family allowance and the so-called "monthly expensiveness bonus".¹⁵¹ The family allowance was introduced during the early stages of the war as part of a nationally uniform social wage: factories were required to pay a modest sum of money to their employees with children irrespective of their location on the urban/rural continuum. This was no longer the case in 1945 when workers in large cities received a higher family allowance than the rest. The "monthly expensiveness bonus" was an indexing mechanism through which real wages retained, at least in principle, a modicum of purchasing power in the

¹⁴⁹ The retention of the wartime wage policy was not specific to Romania. Postwar French governments took over the wage policy established under Vichy according to locality, skill and gender, see Kathryn E. Amdur, "Paternalism, Productivism, Collaborationism: Employers and Society in Interwar and Vichy France", *International Labour and Working-Class History*, No. 53, 1998, 148. For the case of Germany, see the discussion of the preservation of Nazi wage policy in the Federal Republic in Mary Nolan, "Rationalization, Racism, and Resistenz: Recent Studies of Work and the Working Class in Nazi Germany", *International Labour and Working-Class History*, No. 48, 1995, 140-142.

¹⁵⁰ BNR, Fond Studii, 1/1945, p. 267.

¹⁵¹ Law No. 348, published in MO, CXIII, No. 101, May 3 1945, 3625-3627.

face of runaway prices. In Bucharest, workers were given monthly bonuses 25% higher than in the other large cities and almost double in comparison to allegedly rural localities.

The wartime labour regime rested on a centralized wage policy, consumers' sacrifice and a legal framework through which workers could channel their professional demands in the absence of organized labour. This arrangement, however, was undergirded by extensive surveillance. Everyday policing of the home-front was supposed to ensure that workers did not fall under the influence of the invisible, deceiving, and resilient figure of the "political agitator". Policing factory life, therefore, became a matter of assigning agency to fictitious characters in order to interpret, and often mute workers' grievances. It is to this police hermeneutic that I now turn.

Part II

Policing Factory Life

It is not a coincidence that many of the questions currently asked about the successive dictatorships of mid-twentieth-century East Central Europe had been previously raised, in one way or another, by those regimes own policing institutions. Labour historians in particular share an interest in matters of workers' opposition, resistance, or collaboration with the myriad political policing institutions erected in the aftermath of the First World War to survey the global spillover of the October Revolution. The consolidation of the Soviet Union and the emergence of Comintern in the early 1920s laid the ground for the redeployment of mass surveillance on issues of domestic public opinion, notably for the case of industrial workers. In the words of Mark Mazower, throughout Europe: "the fear of communism prompted secret police to move away from counter-

espionage, which had been at the center of much pre-1914 activity to the monitoring of subversives.”¹⁵² Fashioned within an explicit anti-communist agenda in interwar Romania, the allegedly subversive “political agitator” was nonetheless a global figure invoked everywhere from Bombay to Anina to explain the causes and curtail the manifestations of industrial conflict.¹⁵³ Political policing, therefore, was imbued with assumptions about what triggered labour unrest and operated with an understanding of workers’ politics that revolved around identifying the hidden tutelage agitators could establish over workers’ immature minds. Take the following description of the Bucharest Labour Chamber provided in late 1941 by its president, architect Mucichescu-Tunari:

The Labour Chamber became a state institution with elegant but cold offices, which the worker visited only once in a life time when he needed to pick up the skill certificate. At that moment, due to a lack of sensibility on the part of the office clerks, the worker got the impression that the Labour Chamber was an instrument of torture. This situation was carefully exploited by those who enjoyed themselves from the shadows. Workers’ grievances hardly ever reached the ears of government. Labour organizations being banned, workers had nobody to complain to. If some people were reasonable enough to take the workers by hand and help them unlock doors, they were called ‘communists’. What a mistake! Those who proffer such insults ought to know that a communist never acts out in the open; rather he hides in the dark, from where he influences the naïve mass.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Mark Mazower, “The Policing of Politics in Historical Perspective”, in Mark Mazower (ed.) *The Policing of Politics in the Twentieth Century. Historical Perspectives* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1997), 247.

¹⁵³ On Bombay see Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, “Workers’ Politics and the Mill Districts in Bombay between the War”, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 1981, 604. On Anina see Lotar Rădăceanu, “Învățămintele de la Anina”, *Lumea Nouă*, No. 8, February 24 1935.

¹⁵⁴ “Camera de muncă, precursora a marilor reforme muncitorești”, *Buletinul Camerei de Muncă București*, VIII, December 1941, 348.

The Labour Chambers had been up by the Romanian state in the aftermath of the economic crisis of the early 1930s in order to mediate labour disputes without appealing to a court of law. In addition, the Chambers were entrusted to organize aptitude tests and offer workers diplomas that attested their skill levels. Their importance grew significantly in the context of the early 1940s. With guilds disbanded and the yearly reevaluations underway, more and more workers turned towards the Labour Chambers to voice their complaints. In Bucharest, the Labour Chamber was arguably the only acceptable place where workers could congregate in larger numbers to discuss a whole array of work related issues. This made the Labour Chambers prime targets of surveillance and policing. Following one such meeting in early 1942 when roughly 800 workers from Malaxa Works flocked unannounced at the Bucharest Labour Chamber, police agents arrested three workers for no other reason than the suspicion of having masterminded the gathering.¹⁵⁵ Hosted by the meeting rooms of the Chamber, such gatherings could indeed erupt into outbursts of heated debate, though they seldom went beyond the expected deferential attitude. In March 1942 around 300 metalworkers turned up at an evening meeting with the officials of the Ministry of Labour. During the proceedings, one worker from Malaxa explained that ill-intentioned shopfloor informants spread rumors about the presence of communist agitators within the factory. If some workers were denounced as communist, he continued, this was only out of personal revenge and petty rivalry. This explanation pushed the other Malaxa workers present to shout that managers should be sent to the internment camps as well.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ ANR, Ministerul de Interne, Diverse, 25/1937 Vol. I, p. 46.

¹⁵⁶ IBIDEM, 18/1940, p. 318.

Such arguments could hardly convince Mucichescu-Tunari who put an end to the discussion by reminding workers of the dangers of falling for communist agitators' rhetoric. Police reports about Malaxa Works continued to point out the infiltration of communist agitators amidst workers. Most complaints workers raised about wages, overtime or paid holidays were immediately suspected of, and sometimes directly attributed to, the shadowy influence of communists. In the eyes of the police, these agitators moved between factories with great ease, changed their names and profession frequently and even accepted lesser paid jobs in order to subvert production and "Bolshevize" the workers. Once inside the factory, the agitator would evaluate the "state of mind" (*starea de spirit*) of the workers, distribute leaflets about the Eastern Front, convert workmates and organize sabotage actions.¹⁵⁷ Broken machines, missing tools and fake bomb alerts were also considered to be contrived by agitators. So-called communists, however omnipresent, were not the only targets of surveillance. Following the Legionary Rebellion of January 1941, political policing institutions were instructed to monitor the activity of the legionaries as well. It should not come as a surprise, therefore, that police reports often conflated the two under the same umbrella: communists and legionaries shared the propensity to undertake subversive action against the state.¹⁵⁸ How, then, should these surveillance reports be interpreted?

One interpretative strategy, developed for researching the Stalinist period of the Soviet Union, would be to assess surveillance reports not for their capacity to reflect reality but rather for their "truth-producing effects."¹⁵⁹ In this view, wartime political policing reports in Romania could

¹⁵⁷ ANR, DGP, 20/1943, pp. 20-22.

¹⁵⁸ AMB, Inspectoratul de Jandarmi Bucuresti, 46/1942, p. 70.

¹⁵⁹ Jan Plamper, "Beyond Binaries: Popular Opinion in Stalinism" in Paul Corner (ed.) *Popular Opinion in Totalitarian Regimes. Fascism, Nazism, Communism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 71-72.

be read for identifying the type of collective actors they manufactured. The narrative entity dubbed “communist”, however fictive, did shape the lives of thousands of workers, who were either arrested or brutally silenced in their attempts to express mundane grievances. Moreover, the category of the communist agitator was endowed by political policing with a degree of intentionality it could have otherwise never gained. The archives of the wartime political policing, in point of fact, would later become indispensable for the making of the official communist historiography. Party historians writing in the 1960s or 1970s could freely quote from surveillance reports in support of the argument that the communist party was the vanguard of wartime *résistance*.¹⁶⁰ This historiography cannot simply be accused of distorting historical evidence since “communist” was already framed as a coherent narrative entity with unlimited agency in the very same archival records. The epistemological complicity between the archives of wartime political policing and party historiography was also made possible by their similar understanding of workers’ politics. In conferring the role of ideological tutor to the agitator they both posited a moody if rather naive ordinary worker whose expectations were liable to be hijacked for higher political purposes.¹⁶¹ This explains, for instance, the practice of ascribing leadership qualities to those workers political police suspected of communism in terms of intelligence, trustworthiness, loyalty etc.

Whatever its merits or shortcomings, such a perspective would necessarily end up mapping the bureaucratic field within which these narrative entities were produced and circulated. Thus, it

¹⁶⁰ Revelant for my case is Ecaterina Cimponeriu, *Reșita luptătoare. Din istoria mișcării muncitorești reșitene în perioada dintre cele două războaie mondiale* (Bucharest, Editura Științifică, 1965), 254.

¹⁶¹ For a similar effort to examine the ways in which official communist historiography imagined the agency of the working-class in a different context, see Alf Lüdtke, “Wer handelt? Die Akteure der Geschichte. Zur DDR-Geschichtsschreibung über Arbeiterklasse und Faschismus”, *Historische Zeitschrift*, Vol. 27, 1998, 369-410.

would more likely direct the analysis towards grasping the institutional logic of political policing rather than the everyday dynamics of workers' politics. One way out of this conundrum would be to read sources reporting workers' unrest not as evidence of unmediated opposition or *résistance*, but rather as oblique portrayals of necessarily indeterminate action situations. This analytical move would require an explicit refusal to "make causes of briefly described intentions"¹⁶², and a sensitive eye for the complexity of workers' everyday as it unfolded in specific social spaces. Moreover, the emphasis on indeterminacy would make visible the gap between the small stakes of the shopfloor and the common temptation of police agents and historians to judge workers' discontent against the yardstick of opposition or its lack thereof. Equally, taking seriously the inherent ambiguity of workers' grievances would require a different, less normative understanding of everyday politics. It is here that Alf Lüdtke's conceptualization of politics as a "constantly realizable 'compression' or 'intensification' of feeling" is useful.¹⁶³ This notion suggests a way of connecting workers' experience of work hierarchy, ethnic tensions and masculinity to the shared meanings and emotional investments subjection generates at the point of production. In their apparent shortsightedness, workers' complaints about humiliation, gendered violence, exhaustion or unfairness reveal a range of concerns, feelings and motivations that effectively structured the arena of everyday politics at the factory level.

Let us now walk the road to Malaxa Works in the footsteps of Alexandru Șiperco - a genuine communist agitator who went by the nickname of Titu. On the eve of the war, Șiperco -

¹⁶² William M. Reddy, "The Logic of Action: Indeterminacy, Emotion, and Historical Narrative", *History and Theory*, Vol. 40, 2001, 31.

¹⁶³ Alf Lüdtke, "Polymorphous Synchrony: German Industrial Workers and the Politics of Everyday Life", *International Review of Social History*, No. 38, 1993, 67-68.

the son of a middle-class family - was a sophomore student of the Bucharest Polytechnic University and a recent member of the underground communist youth organization. In late 1941, he was entrusted with the mission of reestablishing ties with Malaxa metalworkers, ties which had been broken during the period of the National Legionary State.

I found myself before a task for which I had no experience at all. The world of the workers was radically different from that of the students. Factory relations, workers' economic and social problems, and their way of approaching political topics - everything was new to me.¹⁶⁴

It was hard for Șiperco to even start a conversation let alone to get to know personally some workers. Metalworkers were silent on the road and avoided talking to strangers. They risked arrest under the accusation of subversive activities or they could simply receive corporal punishment from the plant's military commander. Șiperco himself was equally fearful because "in those conditions one never knew who was an anti-fascist and who just pretended to be one."¹⁶⁵ There was not much an agitator could do. Befriending some local youngsters on the football pitch was one option, perhaps with the hope that some of Malaxa's metalworkers might enjoy the game as well. Distributing propaganda leaflets hidden in rolled newspapers early in the morning was the other, arguably more reasonable option. In his memoirs, Șiperco remembers having done just that on the tramline that connected Malaxa Works to the tram stop called Bariera Vergului.

¹⁶⁴ Alexandru Șiperco, "Amintiri din ilegalitate", *Viața românească*, March, 1972, 45.

¹⁶⁵ IBIDEM, p. 47.

May we doubt the accuracy of this last recollection? The road to Malaxa Works was serviced from the late 1930s up until April 1949 by the bus line 50N. Known as the “red bus” for its color, 50N could either be a Chevrolet model 1935 or a Renault A-12, both able to take on board at most 50 sardined workers. The first tramline was inaugurated with great enthusiasm only in 1949 on Labour Day when people from the district gathered to celebrate tram 23, a symbolic number if there ever was one in the imaginary of the Romanian Communist Party.¹⁶⁶ Tram 23 circulated on what was then rebaptized the “Work Boulevard”, a road less than 4 kilometers in

length that linked the city to the plant (itself renamed “23rd of August”). Șiperco’s parapraxis is therefore indicative not merely of the lack of experience of the agitator but also of his ignorance of the social universe of the



Malaxa Works’ Main Gates, cca. 1940, Source: ANR

metalworkers. For it is not implausible to suppose that Șiperco witnessed hundreds of workers marching to the factory. One coppersmith, for instance, remembered the grueling hour long daily walk: “groping through ankle high dusk in the summer, mud and puddles during autumn and snow drifts in the winter only to reach the workshop dead tired.”¹⁶⁷ Following a snowy week in January

¹⁶⁶ For a description of this event by an eyewitness, see Gheorghe Parusi, *Bariera Vergului. Viața unui băiat de București* (Bucharest: Editura Compania, 2009), 87-88.

¹⁶⁷ *Muncitorul ITB*, XI, No. 225, September 15 1959, p. 4

1942, Malaxa metalworkers staged a protest and proposed to take a few days off until buses could run again. The Military Commander of the plant was soon informed by police agents that the workers' gesture was motivated not so much by their inability to walk 4 kilometers through deep snow, but rather by their desire to stop production in order to commemorate the Legionary Rebellion. Consequently, Colonel Gorescu summoned the municipal public transportation company to supplement the number of buses and personally supervised the clearing of the road.

The experience of waking up in the middle of the night, walking for hours, waiting for and cramming into the bus was certainly frustrating and extenuating.¹⁶⁸ It might have been perceived as an unjust form of work in itself, neatly separated from the proper beginning of the workday by the sound of the factory siren. However, it was also a collective experience packed with feelings of togetherness, if not with a sense of solidarity. The emotional grip of this practice on workers' recollections remains striking to this day. Nicolae Breban, a young welder who entered Malaxa Works in the early 1950s and later became a well-known novelist, devoted only one paragraph of his four volume memoirs to his early years as a metalworker. And yet, Breban chose to remember precisely the nerve-wracking routine of waking up early, changing several tramlines and entering “shortly before 7” and “together with hundreds of individuals, through the gates of the great plant.”¹⁶⁹ Serge Moscovici, another young man who joined the ranks of Malaxa's metalworkers in late 1944 and later on became a distinguished French psychologist recalled his first encounter with the utterly alien (*totalelement étranger*) world of the workers (*monde ouvrier*) in similar terms:

¹⁶⁸ Walking to the factory might have induced feelings of sadness (*tristesse*) as well, particularly during the winter when “it was dark in the morning when [we] entered and dark in the evening when [we] left”, George Navel, *Travaux* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), 65-66. Navel described his experience as a metalworker of the French Berliet factories at Vénissieux in the 1920s.

¹⁶⁹ Nicolae Breban, *Sensul vieții. Volume I* (Iași: Polirom, 2003), 221.

“Early in the morning we entered the factory surrounded by a wave of men and women who pushed themselves silently through the open gates towards a number of buildings which were not without some beauty. Nothing ruined my mood so much as the roaring noise of the siren which suddenly shivered my still sleepy nerves.”¹⁷⁰ By contrast, the call of the siren at UDR did not mark the start of the workday. Called “Duda”, Reșița’s Werksirene was loud enough to reach all the way to nearby villages in order to wake up workers one hour before the beginning of the next shift.¹⁷¹ It was a type of clock attuned to bodily rhythms rather than to alienated worktime.

Moods were most ruined, however, by shopfloor violence, a pervasive practice at Malaxa Works. In April 1942, workers put together a petition and mailed it to Marshall Antonescu. It ended predictably on a reverent yet puzzling tone:

With tears in our eyes we beg you, Mr. Marshall, to authorize an investigation which would inquire about and listen to our grievances and toils. The investigation should be undertaken neither by factory personnel, nor by our officers, but by foreign persons who fear God and treasure justice. Let them ask women, children and functionaries how they live. We beg you to make our lives a bit better or else please let us join you and our comrades on the battlefield out of love for the country.¹⁷²

The last sentence seems to suggest that combat was preferable to factory life. Read carefully, however, it shows that the authors were addressing the head of state as male workers on behalf of the victims of shopfloor violence for only men could offer themselves for the battlefield.

¹⁷⁰ Serge Moscovici, *Chronique des années égarées. Récit autobiographique* (Paris : Les Éditions Stock, 1997), 295-296. Moscovici emigrated to France in 1947 where he became a distinguished social psychologist .

¹⁷¹ Dan D. Farcaș, *Hoinărind prin Reșița pierdută* (Reșița: TIM, 2008), 21. The siren had the same awakening function in mining areas as well. There, however, this maddening acoustics triggered miners’ own specific class sound: coughing. Take Geo Bogza’s description of the Jiu Valley’s miners walking early in the morning to their pits: “one might even believe they were not human beings, save for one characteristic they all shared which integrated them back into humanity: they coughed. You can always hear in the dark their short dry cough filing up the air, slowly overtaking the sound of their marching boots”, *Oameni și cărbuni în Valea Jiului* (Bucharest: Editura de Stat, 1947), 45.

¹⁷² ANR, MM, 881/1942, p. 54.

Indeed, the first case of violence singled out in the petition made it clear that male workers were husbands and fathers of the victims: “Our girls and wives were hit with a stick by Mr. Popescu, a former captain, and nobody took any measures.”¹⁷³ Many of the women who entered Malaxa Works during the war were relatives of the male workers already employed while others might have become family members after being hired. Women were not beaten up and insulted only by military personnel, but also by engineers, overseers and foremen. There was not much one could do against this behavior. Workshop overseers could at most be fined, which in turn unleashed more brutality. The factory gendarmes were notorious for strangling one worker to death and papering over the incident to look like a suicide. Apprentices were equally targeted. In one case, a shopfloor overseer punched a young worker so hard that his glass eye popped out, a sure sign of a previous work accident. Swollen heads (*capete umflate*) went hand in hand with sexual innuendoes. Women would often take sides with the apprentices, as Moscovici recalled, out of a shared sense of decency (*pudeur*):

They saw we treated them with a bit more consideration and we listened politely when they opened up about their lives. Moreover, when they bent over, kneeling with their skirts lifted up their thighs, we did not put our hands on their breasts. We also did not utter those rude words they were hearing day in and day out all year long. It seemed to me we kindled their daydreams, entrapped as they were behind tired eyes and mutilated bodies from work and from the vigilance required against brutality. They defended us when a fight broke out in the workshop. And there were all those small gestures and complicities that made life sweeter during hard work, even though men kept to their dirty jokes.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ IBIDEM.

¹⁷⁴ Serge Moscovici, *Chronique des années égarées. Récit autobiographique* (Paris : Les Éditions Stock, 1997), 297.

The Military Commander issued orders regularly to denounce cases of aggression but with no tangible effect. What then explains this widespread violence that seemingly permeated work relationships at Malaxa Works and erupted during the war? The variant of paternalism inherited from the late 1930s and the leeway workshop overseers and foremen enjoyed is certainly one reason. The labour inspector that investigated the complaint noticed that “for a factory with such a large number of employees, many leaders do not have the habit of engaging the workers justly.”

Shopfloor violence

was embedded in factory hierarchy to such a degree that the Military Commander saw fit to set up prison cells only in February 1944. Many other militarized industrial plants, including UDR,



Performance by a Nazi dance group at Malaxa/Rogifer in July 1942; author: Willy Pragher; Source: Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg

installed lockup facilities to punish disobedient workers as early as 1941. For the first three years of the war, however, there was no need for such punitive devices at Malaxa Works. Exemplary punishment makes little sense in an environment in which, as the workers put it, “we are treated

worse than animals.”¹⁷⁵ If shopfloor violence was finally protested against, this happened not simply because women were conspicuously abused, but rather because “our girls and wives” came to be humiliated indiscriminately.

Nothing hiked workers’ discontent more than the sight of wasted money. The onset of the war launched various campaigns to collect funds for the so-called National Defense Loan and countless other solidarity causes. In June 1941 Bucharest’s metalworks responded positively to the Labour Chamber’s call to donate a part of their wages in support of the soldiers’ families.¹⁷⁶ Monetary contributions from the workers, however, were also partly financing expenditures undertaken by the Ministry of Labour in view of organizing educational activities within factories. The Work and Light section in particular used workers’ contributions to buy books and brochures, sponsor theatre performances and pay up invited lecturers. The spending of this money was taken seriously by workers, arguably because they felt some control over the content of their spare time was necessary. In October 1943 Malaxa metalworkers wrote a petition to express their grievances over the buying of too many useless books. The investigation, ordered by Marshall Antonescu himself, revealed the hidden cause of the protest to be different. It was not the books themselves that triggered adverse feelings, the labour inspector argued, but rather a misplaced object laying around idle on the shopfloor. It turned out that several months before, the Work and Light section had bought a movie projector: “during all this time, the projector sat unused and workers, emotionally unstable (*instabili sufletește*) as all industrial workers are, started to suspected

¹⁷⁵ For the use of the “animal” metaphor to describe horrendous working conditions during the war in Turkey, see Can Nacar, ““Our Lives Were Not as Valuable as an Animal”: Workers in State-Run Industries in World-War-II Turkey”, *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 54, No. S17, 2009, 143-166.

¹⁷⁶ ANR, MM, 77/1942, p. 209.

something was wrong.”¹⁷⁷ Indeed, the canteen could not be used as a cinema hall because it lacked adequate camouflage and risked making the whole plant into a target for aerial bombing.

Inadvertently, this case showed to the officials in charge of Work and Light that workers filtered out entertainment from the panoply of war propaganda they were bombarded with. Movies, battlefield newsreels and theatre were equally saturated with nationalist rhetoric, anti-Semitic and anti-communist symbols, but at least one could derive a certain amount of amusement from watching them collectively. Books and lectures, the latter given by uptight men who called themselves “professor”, “doctor” or “colonel” were a bore, particularly when workers were compelled to attend out of good manners and patriotism.¹⁷⁸ As the director of Work and Light noted with some alarm in the aftermath of the investigation



Malaxa/Rogifer workers attending the dance show; author: Willy Pragher;
Source: Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg

conducted at Malaxa Works: “it is not enough to bring in anti-Bolshevik brochures or to put banners with similar messages in the factories in order to secure workers’ emotional equilibrium, obedience, and the sacrifice Motherland requires of them.”¹⁷⁹ Nor was it very cunning for the Work

¹⁷⁷ ANR, MM, 53/1943, p. 215.

¹⁷⁸ In Reșița, metalworkers were reluctant to engage in the activities organized by *Work and Light* because the institution was run by “domni” (gentlemen) rather than by themselves, ANR, UDR, 183/1944, p. 120. On the other hand, they were more willing to take part in the cultural activities of the local *Kraft durch Freude* simply because it was not run by state authorities.

¹⁷⁹ ANR, MM, 53/1943, p. 215.

and Light officials to set up anti-communist exhibitions on the shopfloor only to accuse workers who cared not to visit of communist sympathies.

Workers' perceptions of wasted money were different in Reșița. In addition to the monetary contribution due to the war effort, UDR's metalworkers were obliged by management to pay for the construction of an Orthodox church in the town. The building of the church was undertaken by the company in the 1930s as part of a wider plan to prepare the "Romanianization" of the workforce.¹⁸⁰ In September 1943 workers refused to continue to finance the church whose construction seemed to them to go on indefinitely.¹⁸¹ Financing the Orthodox Church made little sense: the vast majority of the town's residents, particularly ethnically German metalworkers were Roman-Catholic while the Romanian workers mostly lived in the surrounding villages and consequently had their own local parishes. The church, however, was not their only concern. Throughout 1943 UDR's "men of trust" undertook many travels to Bucharest to complain about the poor conditions of the local hospital. The hospital was enlarged in the early 1940s in order to service roughly 24000 employees of the company but as the delegates argued, workers' social security contributions were not reflected in the medical facilities made available. Police reported that workers refused to donate money for the construction of yet another public building, a so-called House for the Disabled (*palatul invalizilor*) and asked instead that their money be used to pay a more numerous medical staff. Similar perceptions of wasted money loomed behind workers' blunt refusal, in June 1944, to pay 2% of their monthly wages for the Red Cross.

¹⁸⁰ Karl Ludwig Lupșiasca, *Höhepunkt ihrer Geschichte: eine Geschichte des Banater Berglands in der Zeitspanne 1920-1948* (Reschitz: Banatul Montan, 2006), 61-62.

¹⁸¹ ANR, DGP, 42/1943, p. 144.

Public transportation, violence, boredom, futile spending and decency - all taken together - made up the texture of the workers' everyday and each of them, in one way or another, could and did become bones of contention and grounds for transitory solidarity. Some of the action situations I have described above solicited intense emotional investment on the part of the workers and occasioned episodes of contentious grappling with the stakes implicit in the functioning of factory hierarchy and paternalism. Yet none can be subsumed under the rubric of opposition to the wartime labour regime. What these outbursts of dissatisfaction do show, however, is that workers tried to appropriate and perhaps even to exert a modicum of control over the conditions under which they worked and lived. Higher wages, fairer reevaluations and better provisioning were part of the same mundane struggle at the factory level, but these demands alone did not exhaust the range of interests and motivations that pushed metalworkers in Bucharest and the Bergland to act on their discontent. The dynamic of these struggles, their rootedness in local configurations of power as well as their wider implications for specific communities remained alien both to the apparatus of political policing and to the few communist agitators who endeavored to backpack through industrial landscapes during the war.

Let us accompany for the last time a communist agitator who tried to lecture Malaxa metalworkers in October or November 1944. By that point in time, as a member of the communist youth organization, Paul Cornea had already served the party as a newspaper boy on the streets of Bucharest. During those tumultuous weeks, he was entrusted to approach industrial workers and inform them about the new political context:

I have to confess it was not a simple task. In many places we bumped into trouble. Sometimes we were not allowed to enter factories; the owner's right-hand men obstructed us and even when we managed to talk to a

small group of workers we were unable to inspire enthusiasm through our speeches. In addition, we did not know ‘what’ exactly to tell them and ‘how’ precisely to express ourselves to be persuasive.¹⁸²

This initial uneasiness, according to Cornea, slowly petered out as the communist party’s campaign against the government turned more and more vehement. What contributed to the loosening up of the discipline enforced in the factories was the fact that unions and factory committees were permitted to organize. Unionization in itself, however, did not significantly increase the appeal of the communist party within factories. As Cornea found out during a visit at Malaxa Works, workers were sensitive to the bodily presence as well as the political language in which they were addressed:

A meeting was organized in which I was supposed to explain to the young workers why they should enroll in the communist party. They were waiting for me in silence in the canteen room, which had been cleaned up for the occasion. They seated me to a table in front of them and they asked me to talk. Unfortunately, as I was not used to speak in public, I messed up the words and forgot the whole speech I had prepared by myself in a popular form. I had to improvise and then I told them whatever crossed my mind in a disorderly fashion, with breaks between the sentences and babbling. At one point, covered in sweat and feeling that my audience is thinking about something else, I stopped. The youngsters did not look particularly impressed. They did not make fun of me and they did not feel bad for me. For some seconds, which seemed to me an eternity, they stood speechless. A tall bony guy stood up and told me with a hoarse voice: ‘Is this all that you wanted to tell us?’ I nodded, what was I supposed to do? He looked at me in all seriousness, headed straight to the door and whispered “Well, good luck then...” And he left followed by the others.¹⁸³

¹⁸² *Ce a fost - cum a fost. Paul Cornea de vorbă cu Daniel Cristea-Enache* (Iași : Polirom, 2013), 79. Paul Cornea became one of Romania’s more notable literary historians.

¹⁸³ *IBIDEM*, 80.

The social universe of metalworkers remained culturally distant and politically incomprehensible even when one entered the factory as a mere worker rather than as a militant. Serge Moscovici too became a member of the underground communist youth organization during the war, but unlike Paul Cornea, he was less connected to party politics and was able to take up a job at Malaxa Works in the fall of 1944 to make some money and to get to know first-hand the industrial proletariat. It was not hard for Moscovici to learn how to temper the monotony of work through strolling, chatting, fooling around, and enjoying “milk time” to the full.¹⁸⁴ It was all part of the game and the foreman went along with it. Nor was it difficult for Moscovici to join his workmates at the end of the day for a drink even though “they understood I did not belong to their world because I lacked the endurance and physical robustness that each of them displayed. I also lacked the slow, calculated gestures that we admire in peasants.” Workers sensed that for Moscovici the job was a passing fancy (*tocade*) and yet some of them invited him to visit their homes on the periphery of Bucharest and remained in contact up until Moscovici left for France in 1947. Discussing politics, however, was a different kettle of fish altogether:

An old worker, one of the few communists in the factory, told me one day: ‘You are not of working class stock. Yes, we fight against the same enemy, but I know this enemy from father to son. You don’t’. Anyway, the unionized or communist workers were discrete, the others did their job without ambition or project (*sans ambition ni projet*). They were more satisfied with the lives they were living, with their work, their food and their wives on whom they passed all the burdens of the household and the family. A thing was sure: me and my comrade, we were both strangers and we could not count on their support, not to mention their goodwill. Not that they were hostile, they were simply entrenched in their own world and sealed off to compassion.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Metalworkers customarily had milk during the workday and often took pauses to drink or mimic drinking it.

¹⁸⁵ Serge Moscovici, *Chronique des années égarées. Récit autobiographique* (Paris : Les Éditions Stock, 1997), 296-297.

Moscovici's grasp of the situation might be questioned. The so-called unionized or communist workers were not one and the same nor were they particularly discrete. The other workers' attitude might indeed seem to resemble indifference, but it could as well have been a political act of self-distancing in reaction to the unfolding of unionization at the factory level. The split between these two categories of workers Moscovici recalled observing at Malaxa Works was the consequence rather than the prerequisite of the emergence of factory committees. It is to this process that I now turn.

Vernaculars of Everyday Struggle

The westward advancement of the Red Army over the summer of 1944 unleashed a shockwave of rumors about the emergence of militant practices among Romanian industrial workers. In July 1944 the gendarmerie asked for intelligence to be gathered on the formation of so-called "action committees" in the major factories of Bucharest. Grass root informants were instructed to pay close attention to the demands that could be formulated by workers: no fines, less overtime, no solitary confinement, no beatings, no night shifts for women, higher wages, no piecework, etc. Even though by August 1944 reports compiled in Bucharest denied the existence of such initiatives, a two-page propaganda leaflet was prepared by the War Propaganda Department in order to counter the subversive rumors that allegedly circulated within factories.¹⁸⁶ The leaflet reaffirmed the importance workers had in the war effort and criticized the Labour Chambers for their "bureaucracy". It also sought to single out a number of demands workers were entitled to hope for once the war was over: hygienic lodging in cities, land in the countryside, a

¹⁸⁶ AMB, *Legiunea de Jandarmi Bucuresti, 1932-1949*, 128/1944, p. 6.

stable currency and affordable provisioning through factory stores and cooperatives.¹⁸⁷ During the summer of 1944 officials of the Ministry of Labour crisscrossed the country in a belated attempt to address workers' most pressing needs. In early June 1944 the Secretary General of the Ministry of Labour, one Mr. Enescu, arrived in Resita and called in a meeting with the "men of trust". It was not without some surprise that Enescu realized the meeting room of the Workers' House was full of impatient workers. One of the "men of trust", Ilie Fărcășescu, took the floor and asked for the authorities to crack down on profiteers who speculate prices for consumer goods. He also demanded higher wages for metalworkers and suggested that UDR's Romanian workers be allowed to form their own trade-union. Ion Langhardt, the representative of the ethnically German workers, reinforced these claims and added that once the Bolsheviks set their foot on Romanian soil there will be many "social reactionaries" popping up. In this new political context, Langhardt concluded, the mass of workers could no longer be controlled.

Mr. Enescu would have none of it: "In fact, workers do not need their own organization; they are represented directly by the Ministry of Labour." UDR's metalworkers, he explained, do not even deserve such an organization because they never showed acquiescence (*cumințenie*) in the past. In a reference to the local history of militancy, the Secretary General reminded those present that the guilds only made some union leaders rich and did not defend workers' professional interests. Police accounts of the meeting show workers leaving the Workers' House in a state of general disgruntlement. Some of them were caught chatting about what they had heard, and reportedly felt deeply offended by the humiliating attitude and the stiff tone Enescu had employed. Ethnically Romanian workers in particular thought they were discriminated because their German

¹⁸⁷ *Muncitorul [Foaie de revendicări muncitorești]*, ANR, DGP, 46/1944, pp. 15-16.

peers were still able to make use of the DAR in pursuit of their demands. Many were also disappointed because Enescu did not discuss the doubling of prices for flour and tobacco during the preceding months, nor did he mention that taxes were raised and wages for metalworkers lagged behind other industries. The atmosphere of heightened tension in the town of Reșița was further aggravated by mischievous gossip about workers plotting to go on strike. In early August, however, UDR's "men of trust" decided instead to travel to Bucharest and lobby personally the Minister of Labour for a wage increase.¹⁸⁸ Meanwhile, according to a survey of the secret police, Bucharest metalworkers were themselves complaining that the government's wage policy created disparities to the disadvantage of heavy industry.¹⁸⁹ In Anina, on the other hand, police observed in early August 1944 that miners' "spirits were highly agitated" because pork fat and meat rations were insufficient.¹⁹⁰

In spite of the fear authorities openly manifested, none of these expressions of discontent can be taken as evidence of radicalization. They do not depart from the range of claims and the modalities of peaceful protest metalworkers and miners exhibited during the previous war years. With minor exceptions - always ineffectual and short-lived outbursts of work refusal - the first three years of the war saw no contentious collective action on the part of metalworkers in Bucharest or Reșița. The experience of the home-front did not make workers more prone to rebel, nor did it facilitate a boost of sympathy for communist discourse. The removal of Marshall Antonescu from

¹⁸⁸ The Military Commander of UDR reported that during August 1944 "men of trust", rather than plotting a strike, have "studied the prices on the market and compiled standard of living charts for a family composed of husband, wife and child with the aim of proving the inadequacy of the current wage.", ANR, UDR, 183/1944, pp. 114-115.

¹⁸⁹ ANR, MM, 609/1944, p. 120. Metalworkers could compare their wages by reading the main economic newspaper of the period *Argus*, where the General Commissariat for Prices regularly published its decisions to increase wages. UDR's metalworkers, for instance, felt offended that workers in textile and paper industries, whom they knew to be either unskilled or women workers, at one point earned slightly more than they did.

¹⁹⁰ IBIDEM, p. 170 and 226.

power on August 23 1944 and Romania's subsequent switch of sides in the war restored the freedom of association within factories and made possible the emergence of organized labour in the form of factory committees. Colonel Boitan, for instance, was shocked to observe that shortly after the radio broadcast that announced the armistice, UDR's metalworkers freely manifested their beliefs and organized themselves in several political camps: communists, social-democrats, liberals and national-peasants. What, then, explains this sudden, seemingly overnight resurfacing of political identities? Moreover, how should we grasp industrial workers' turn to militancy starting with September 1944? I would like to suggest that far from being an outgrowth of war deprivation and plummeting living standards, metalworkers' and miners' radicalism was a consequence of the mushrooming of factory committees and trade-unions during the fall of 1944. Differently put, workers' radicalization happened *with* but also *against* unionization and was carried out in the vernacular of everyday struggle rather than in the more abstract vocabulary of class identity and anti-fascism.

The vernacular of everyday struggle was rooted not only in the shared experience of work under brutalized war conditions but also in the personalized relations of domination embedded in factory hierarchy. On November 22, 1944, a delegation of workers from the Transylvanian town of Făgăraș visited the central leadership of the communist party in Bucharest. Claiming to represent some 3800 employees of an explosives manufacturing plant, the delegates complained that soon after August 23 their factory slowed down production and sent home a large number of workers. The general manager, one delegate argued, bears a Romanian name but is married to an Austrian woman and always speaks German: "let me ask you this question: how is it possible that up until August 23 we had a lot of work while now, when we are still at war, we are suddenly out

of work?”¹⁹¹. The manager was predictably accused of sabotage and denounced for being a “hitlerite”, but this was hardly comforting since workers were expecting advice and instruction. “We need to publish some articles in the press to support our actions” one delegate alleged. Publicity, party boss Ana Pauker remarked, was necessary but not sufficient:

Just look what they accomplished at Malaxa Works. They decided that apart from the saboteurs in the factory, there are roughly 100 people earning big wages and who were never seen there. They made up a list, gathered the whole factory and asked: Look, brothers, what should we do with them? Do you agree or not? The workers agreed. Then they put out a note in the workshops, went to management and told them to get lost, otherwise some nasty things will happen. They were not even allowed to take their belongings and were swiftly kicked out.¹⁹²

In order to understand how Malaxa Works became an early model of unionization it is instructive to read carefully the articles published by the communist daily press together with the reports compiled by the district police. One of the first general meetings convened by Malaxa’s factory committee took place in the canteen in mid-September 1944 in the presence of roughly 300 workers and functionaries. The president of the committee, one Vasile Mauriciu, addressed the audience and demanded that those among the upper management known to have oppressed workers ought to be purged immediately. No proper names were called out. The meeting ended with a list of demands that specified, among others, that the factory committee should be consulted in case of lay-offs; that wages should reflect the evolution of market prices; that management should distribute firewood, pay overtime and give wage bonuses to married workers; that a tramline was needed to connect the city to the factory and finally that fascists should be removed.

¹⁹¹ ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 24/1944, p. 3.

¹⁹² IBIDEM, p. 5.

Ten days after this event, the communist newspaper *Luptătorul* (The Fighter) published an article entitled “Nazi Agents at Malaxa Works. Arrest Fascist Engineer Petre Carp!” The article portrayed the engineer’s biography as a life of crime, corruption and collaboration. In the late 1930s, Carp was supposedly convicted of fraud to five years of hard labour, was pulled out of prison during the National Legionary State and employed as technical advisor at Malaxa Works. Moreover, under German management, Carp was promoted and ended up general manager of the plant in 1943. Finally, he was accused of rejecting the demands formulated by the factory committee strictly on political grounds. The engineer’s troubled political trajectory was well known in the factory. There was, however, a more recent incident that might have justified the purging of Petre Carp in the eyes of most workers. In March 1944, a police note reported that a technical supervisor by the name of Radu Vereş, allegedly a former member of the Legionary Movement, was entrusted to select a team of workers from the ammunition factory and transfer them to the mechanics section of the plant. In this way, some privileged workers got to remain in Bucharest while the ammunition factory was dismembered and relocated to a different region of the country. These appointments, according to the police, were approved by Carp himself because they were based on political loyalties, and worried profoundly the mass of peaceful workers (*muncitori paşnici*).

It is worth pausing for a moment on the collective figure of these so-called “peaceful workers” because they formed the bulk of the audience before which the members of the factory committee acted. Many of them became union members during the fall of 1944 under the encouragement of the factory committee. By late September there were over 370 factory committees in Bucharest alone, with the local branch of the Metal-Chemic trade-union numbering

around 17000 members.¹⁹³ Malaxa Works' committee was composed of 10 to 15 delegates assigned by each sections of the plant and was supposed to represent before management all workers irrespective of their profession. We know close to nothing about who these delegates were and how they came together to form the committee in early September 1944. Their knowledge of factory life and their grasp of the small stakes and rivalries of the shopfloor, however, point to the fact that they had been employed at Malaxa Works for a longer period of time. Moreover, they were clearly able to speak fluently the vernacular of everyday struggle as it was structured at the factory level over the previous war years and invest it with an emotional undertone that could only make sense and appeal to the employees of Malaxa Works. Let us take a number of examples from the pages of the communist party's main newspaper *Scântea*.

An early article that purported to uncover a number of legionaries among the workers insisted on the arbitrary process of reevaluation. These allegedly fascist workers benefited unjustly from preferential promotion: Cuțar was a grocer (*zarzavagiu*) suddenly made foreman; Peters Peter changed his name to Petrică Petre, lacked serious technical expertise for his position and still became foreman etc.¹⁹⁴ Another article retrieved a sense of tabloid intimacy in denouncing the boss of the military canteen, one Florea, for beating up women. He was nicknamed “the eater of workers” (*mâncătorul de muncitori*).¹⁹⁵ Violence and opulence coalesced in the figure of the

¹⁹³ ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 114/1944, p. 29. By late September 1944, there were 20 trade-unions in Bucharest with a membership of roughly 100000 strong. The Metal-Chemic was by far the largest union, followed by the railroad union (14000) and the textile (11000). These figures, however, should be taken with a grain of salt because they cannot be verified from other sources apart from the archives of the Romanian Communist Party.

¹⁹⁴ “Legionarii de la Malaxa, *Scântea*, I, No. 8, September 28 1944.

¹⁹⁵ “Femeile de la Malaxa sunt terorizate, *Scântea*, I, No. 9, September 29 1944. Police reports on workers' grievances at Malaxa Works often mistook the boss of the military canteen for the administrator of the workers' canteen, an engineer. Labour inspectors themselves were equally confused and had to inquire about the difference between the two canteens, see ANR, MM, 631/1944, p. 205. The difference was significant because managerial personnel and

torturer (*călău*).¹⁹⁶ While many of the engineers and foremen tortured workers on the shopfloor, it was claimed, the general manager Carp was partying and planning to fly to Germany with his own private plane. Meanwhile, Carp's protégée Radu Vereş had just bought himself a 3 million lei worth of a car and walked in the factory all dressed up "in shirts made of genuine silk".¹⁹⁷ Managers were further accused of stealing workers' food, particularly good quality meat so that they only received leftover bones, cheese and marmalade. Several months before, a labour inspector investigated the quality of the canteen food following a complaint from the workers, but dismissed it after he tasted meat in the green beans dish he was served.¹⁹⁸ One article claimed the chef of the canteen and his wife opened up their own private restaurant with cutlery stolen from the factory.¹⁹⁹ In November 1944, *Scânteia* accused Malaxa Works' management of using skilled workers for unskilled work, forcing them to fill up the holes left behind by aerial bombardment raids. It was in this context that the factory committee undertook to single out "100 parasites" who could not justify their wages: "there are entire families registered on the payrolls doing nothing. There are foremen without workshops and managers without offices."²⁰⁰

If police reports are to be trusted, by early October 1944, Malaxa workers were disappointed with the fact that the factory committee was not delivering on its promises. Deferred for a couple of weeks, the purge finally took place in November and was approved by the

officers ate only at the military canteen (*popotă*). This explains why Florea Dumitru was suspected by workers of ripping off their canteen of its better produce such as meat.

¹⁹⁶ "Călăul de la Malaxa", *Scânteia*, I, No. 12 October 2 1944.

¹⁹⁷ "Furturi, jafuri și escrocherii la Malaxa", *Scânteia*, I, No. 15, October 15 1944. The price of the car was not terribly high given that a pair of shoes could cost around 20000 lei in November 1944; the gesture of buying a car amidst general scarcity was nonetheless unabashedly provocative in the eyes of the workers.

¹⁹⁸ ANR, MM, 609/1944, p. 90.

¹⁹⁹ For a similar accusation at Vulcan Metalworks in Bucharest, see ANR, MM, 597/1944, p. 8.

²⁰⁰ "Muncitorimea înlătură pe sabotori", *Scânteia*, I, No. 65, November 25 1944.

representatives of the Romanian Army. With some exceptions, many of those denied access into the factory were either foremen or part of the managerial personnel, including the heads of the recruitment office and a number of lawyers. They were still portrayed as legionaries and supporters of Hitler, but time and again during factory meetings, the members of the committee kept reminding their audience that these “fascists” maltreated, tortured and beat up men and women alike. The district police, on the other hand, tended to agree that some of these accusations held water, but suspected that the purge was motivated by revenge and the true cause of workers’ discontent was the question of wages. Feelings of revenge and the pursuit of higher wages, however, complemented each other. The newspaper articles drew on workers’ discontent to present the people purged not simply as war collaborators, but equally as undeserving, brutal, lavish and privileged fellow employees of distinctively vile character. The attributes were not merely rhetorical; rather, they were plausibly describing the multilayered experience of work hierarchy while activating memories of abuse and the feelings of humiliation many workers had to cope with on a daily basis. The purge did not presuppose the participation of the large majority of “peaceful workers”, but it did require for the factory committee to validate its actions and to secure a sort of active passivity from them. Yet, as I argue in the last section of this chapter, it did not take long for the vernacular of everyday struggle to be mobilized against the factory committee itself.

Unionization in Reșița took a slightly different path than in most other industrial localities. On a number of occasions during the preceding war years, UDR’s management and “men of trust” tried (and failed) to convince the Labour Ministry to approve the formation of a local trade-union that would brigade workers irrespective of their ethnicity. In June 1943, ethnically Romanian delegates presented the Ministry with a draft project of a union that could replace DAR and bring

together all the workers. This union would extend membership to employees of both sexes from the time of apprenticeship, would negotiate collective labour contracts, organize cultural activities, compile statistics on its membership, provide burial assistance and inherit the properties of the former guild.²⁰¹ By late 1944 it was not ethnic tensions that concerned management the most, but rather its ability to preserve the structure of paternalism embedded in the institution of the “men of trust” once DAR was banned and factory committees emerged. Therefore, in September 1944 “men of trust” representing all political hues were called upon by the Military Commander and entrusted to organize workers in accordance with “UDR’s own norms.”²⁰² What those norms were exactly remained unspecified and it is highly unlikely they were observed to the letter. For the first time in the history of the company, for instance, forestry workers were integrated into organized labour.²⁰³ By November 1944 management could note that many of its upper personnel did not understand how to react to the demands formulated by the workers. The committee and the local union were still not sufficiently welded (*sudate*) to management, nor was it very clear what their attributes were. In this context, and as long as Reșița remained “the most expensive town in the country”, one could expect social turmoil.²⁰⁴ Hotly debated at the time by the major political parties, a trade union law could hardly solve the problem UDR’s management was facing. Management’s answer was, naturally, its own local variant of paternalism: UDR’s organized workers, read a note by the general manager, have a tradition that goes back over 40 years during

²⁰¹ ANR, DGP, 42/1943, p. 122.

²⁰² ANR, UDR, 46/1944, p. 2 *et passim*.

²⁰³ ANR, UDR, 16/1944, p. 306.

²⁰⁴ “Scumpetea din Reșița”, *Stavila*, I, No. 1, November 18 1944.

which “we achieved a level of education [...] which cannot be expressed by a law or by the collective labour contracts.”²⁰⁵

The archives of the local metalworkers’ union reveal that at least three of its appointed leaders had acted as “men of trust” during the past several years. The other members of the presidium, however, were freshly released from prison where they had served sentences accused of subversive activities. Not all of them were communists and only a few joined the communist party.²⁰⁶ The early meetings of the union that took place in September and early October 1944 never mention purging; but focus instead on day-to-day issues pertaining to provisioning, working conditions, wages and the logistics of rebuilding the organization. October 12, therefore, came as a shock to everybody, management and workers’ delegates alike. A couple of days before, one young worker by the name of Prică, known for heading the local communist youth organization, broke the glass of a factory notice board and displayed what looked like a manifesto. Like many of his age peers, Prică was not just an apprentice of the company but also a premilitary of the Romanian state. As a premilitary, he was taking part in weekly training sessions under the guidance of a military officer. This wartime institution was supposed to accustom young males to the drill and discipline of military life but was more likely a masked form of unpaid work. Mathematician Egon Balas, himself a member of the communist youth organization in wartime Kolozsvár, recalled his experience as premilitary of the equivalent Hungarian institution in the following terms:

²⁰⁵ ANR, UDR, 21/1943, p. 264.

²⁰⁶ ANCS, Sindicatul muncitorilor metalurgiști din Reșița, 16/1944, pp. 1-7. Iosif Mustețiu, Ilie Fărcășescu and Mihai Gemmel were all “men of trust”. Former political prisoners were: Ion Popeți, Josef Puvak, Anton Breitenhofer, Traian Cercega and Georg Hromadka; the latter two joined the Social-Democratic Party, as did Mustețiu and Fărcășescu.

We had to attend weekly ‘training’ or exercise sessions, which consisted of heavy work assignment like digging trenches, cutting wood, and building roads. There were several hundreds of us, under the command of a brutal, hostile commander called Bartha. The days we spent there were daunting and intensely disagreeable.²⁰⁷

Daunting and disagreeable as it may have been, the premilitary also forged a certain kind of solidarity among young men outside the workplace, undergirded by feelings of distaste for military authority. Called upon by UDR’s Military Commander to account for his gesture, Prică showed “unprecedented cheekiness”.²⁰⁸ On October 12 no less than 40 young workers took advantage of the fact that the plant’s prison cell was empty and unguarded and smashed it with hammers and iron bars. When Prică was arrested, he told the Military Commander that the new



Miner tortured by the Jiu Valley Military Commander showing his wounds, November 23 1944 Source: Fototeca online a comunismului românesc, 68/1944.

political regime would not be based on prison cells which were fascist and had to be destroyed.

²⁰⁷ Egon Balas, *Will to Freedom: A Perilous Journey through Fascism and Communism* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 43.

²⁰⁸ ANR, UDR, 46/1944, p. 18.

The following days another young worker was spotted selling the communist newspaper *Luptătorul Bănăţean* which allegedly contained an article about the irrelevance of factory military commanders. This event provided the opportunity for the communist press to launch a campaign against UDR's military commander, Colonel Boitan, as well as against his subordinate officer Major Staricu. What is remarkable about these accusatory newspaper articles is that while other characters of the plant were also mentioned, it was only Major Staricu that benefited from a portrait in the vernacular of everyday struggle. The others - Boitan and his wife, the general manager Popp and some engineers - were simply denounced for collaboration. Staricu, on the other hand, was nicknamed "Gorilla": a brutal, sadistic, the most hated and avoided man in the town, also known as "the Terror of Workers".²⁰⁹ In a typical display of locally flavored tabloid intimacy, Staricu was even accused of having stolen a bike from a family of workers to the benefit of his own daughter.²¹⁰

Just like in the case of Malaxa Works, the vernacular of everyday struggle was used for emphasizing acts of violence on the shopfloor and the arbitrariness of the process of reevaluation. During the election for the factory committee in late October 1944, workers asked for better working equipment and for the shopfloors to be properly floored and drained of water. But they also accused foremen Spineanu of forcing apprentices to do unskilled work and foreman Hübler for whimsically distributing wages to his workteam. Calls for purging these "undemocratic elements" were equally frequent as in Bucharest, but unlike Malaxa Works, few if any of the foremen and overseers singled out were removed from the factory. Engineer Sepi, for example, was constantly denounced for maltreating young workers as headmaster of the apprentices'

²⁰⁹ "30000 de muncitori de la UDR cer democratizarea uzinelor", *Luptătorul Bănăţean*, I, No. 41, November 3 1944.

²¹⁰ "Iarăşi Maiorul Staricu de la UDR... », *Luptătorul Bănăţean*, I, No. 91, December 29 1944.

dormitory, but his position was never put in question and survived the period unharmed. Much to the despair of the central leaders of the communist party who visited Reșița in early December 1944, the factory committee showed little interest in purging the plant. The main reason for this indifference was that a first round of police arrests targeting the leading figures of the Nazi local organizations already deprived the factory of some of its best workers. Moreover, the factory committee was dominated by venerable social-democrats such as Iosif Mustețiu and Carol Lindner who were much more inclined to formulating demands rather than drawing up lists of collaborators. An early communist party report on the travails of unionization in Reșița described the local social-democrat leaders as paradoxical “popular personalities”: “they come before the masses not with practical problems for realizing our common platform, but rather with a radicalism which does not belong to the present: ‘socialism’, ‘struggle against capitalists’ etc. We did our best to have a real collaboration with them.”²¹¹ On the other hand, this apparent radicalism did not alter the purpose of the local trade-union, quite the contrary: “we [i.e. communists] did not manage to impart the trade-union with sense of struggle. It retained its old preoccupation with petty factory interests (*interese mărunte de fabrică*)”.²¹²

What was paradoxical, however, was the communists’ condescension for petty factory interests, which happened to be petty mine interests as well. When a group of highly ranked communist party members from Bucharest visited UDR’s mines in early December 1944 they were presented by the workers with an incredibly detailed comparison between the living and working conditions in Anina/Steierdorf and the Jiu Valley mining region. The Anina mines, they

²¹¹ ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 101/1944, p. 116.

²¹² IBIDEM, p. 117.

argued, were 300 meters deeper than the ones in the Valley, which made exploitation extremely dangerous. UDR's miners further complained they still have to pay rent and electricity to the company unlike the Jiu Valley miners for whom such things were supposedly free of cost. Faced with this display of comparative thinking, comrade Silaghi replicated with his own spontaneous comparison by pointing out that just like the miners, the communist party too struggled for a long time in the underground. The remark must have sounded like a joke, perhaps not a very good one, to those workers' delegates who travelled to Bucharest a couple of weeks back to complain about not receiving enough firewood, about the absence of working clothes, and the low quantum of wages.²¹³ They also grumbled about coughing from tuberculosis, much like miners in the Jiu Valley. There was also a shortage of workers in the pits, they explained, because some 200 ethnically German miners retreated with the Wehrmacht.²¹⁴ Many of these demands had already been discussed with UDR's general manager Popp in late October and some of them were even accepted. That meeting, however, ended on a note of mutual distrust, with Popp asking the miners to formulate their grievances (*doleanțe*) in all sincerity and think twice before they undertake purges. The leader of the local union answered that violence will be met by violence.²¹⁵

It was only in December 1944 that Reșița's factory committee started compiling a list of personnel to be purged.²¹⁶ The evidence of the fired or arrested is scarce, however. The easiest target was the president of the local Labour Chamber, one Arcan, who was accused of being

²¹³ ANCS, UDR Caraș, 7/1944, pp. 91-101.

²¹⁴ The figure seems slightly exaggerated. In any case, some of the ethnically German workers returned to Anina during 1945 and resumed work in the mine or, as with women, found employment at UDR's local Marghițaș farm; see, for instance, the memoirs of Josef Franz Rusicska, "Erinnerungen an die Flucht aus Steierdorf im Herbst 1944", *Banater Berglanddeutsche*, 21, No. 124, 2005, 12-13.

²¹⁵ "La violență se va răspunde cu violență.", ANCS, UDR Caraș, 7/1944, p. 96.

²¹⁶ *Stavila*, I, No. 6, December 25 1944.

corrupt. According to a newspaper article, his removal from office gave satisfaction to the disgusted local public opinion who knew well that bribe money was given for the release of skill certificates and reevaluations.²¹⁷ In spite of these attempts, celebrated by the communist press, the committee remained concerned with petty factory interests.²¹⁸ This relative calmness seemed to be confirmed during a stopover in the town by the newly appointed Minister of Labour, social-democrat Lotar Rădăceanu. An ethnic German himself, Rădăceanu was able to address a part of the audience huddled in the Workers' House in their native language.²¹⁹ At the same time, he agreed that organized workers' should fight against profiteers who speculate prices for primary goods and took notice of the more pressing demands functionaries, male and women workers' had formulated in their memos. Moreover, the meeting resembled a typical local social-democratic gathering of the interwar period, with classical figures of the party such as Eftimie Gherman acknowledging the need for solidarity beyond ethnic identities.²²⁰

The emergence of organized labour and political pluralism during the fall of 1944 turned factories once again, nearly four years after the legionary experience, into key sites of recruitment and self-promotion for the major political parties. The context, however, was radically changed. Wages were now placed under state control; inflation was becoming ever more rampant while social provisioning was mostly allocated through the workplace rather than by the market. Much like its European counterparts, the Romanian Communist Party realigned itself in the early days

²¹⁷ *Stavila*, I, No. 7, December 31 1944.

²¹⁸ "Să fie scoși din Uzinele UDR dușmanii democrației", *Luptătorul Bănățean*, I, No. 79, December 14 1944.

²¹⁹ *Stavila*, I, No. 3, December 2 1944. Significantly, the communist press did not report on this meeting.

²²⁰ Eftimie Gherman was a social-democrat union leader during the interwar period with roots in the Bergland mining and metalworkers' communities. His name was almost always associated with the town of Reșița and its surroundings, for a self-portrait see Eftimie Gherman, *Memorii. Contributii la istoria miscarii socialiste* (Bucharest : Editura Fundatiei 'Constantin Titel Petrescu', 2000), 6-27.

of 1945 to a more moderate position in relation to collaborators. Factory committees, after a brief purging frenzy, were redirected towards supporting the war effort and encouraged to maintain industrial peace. But neither in Bucharest, nor in Reșița was organized labour able to bank on the allegiance of the rank-and-file. The last section of this chapter explains why Major Staricu was finally beaten up by URD's metalworkers and shows how Malaxa Works' factory committee became the victim of its own rhetoric.

Part III

Purging Rules

Carried out in the vernacular of everyday struggle, the purging of military officers and factory managers was arguably the only form of popular justice available to industrial workers during the turbulent fall of 1944. It could hardly have been otherwise. The category of war collaborator made little if any sense since Romania had neither been occupied by Nazi Germany nor liberated by the Soviet Army. Moreover, traditional political parties were unable to propose a language of anti-fascism, arguably because the campaign against the Soviet Union was unanimously regarded as a just war. Similarly, the communist party realized quickly that it cannot purge the legionaries *en masse* given that many ordinary workers had enrolled into the movement in late 1940, but should rather put the blame on its leadership. On a certain number of occasions, workers protested when some of them were labeled as legionaries and fired under such accusations. As Ana Pauker argued in front of a delegation of workers: "Those proven of not taking part in legionary activities in 1940 will be released. Many workers were indeed deceived. A legionary leader, however, remains dangerous even if he does not engage in politics for a period of ten

years.”²²¹ In this context, purging could seem arbitrary, something akin to an explosive outburst of resentment. On the oilfields north of Bucharest, two engineers were kicked out for supposedly exhibiting “bad faith and irony towards the workers’ movement.”²²² On close-up, however, it seems workers perceived purging as a proof of empowerment. In many cases, for instance, managers and military commanders were not simply denied access to their offices or thrown out the factory gates; they were replaced with trusted engineers proposed by workers themselves.²²³

By early 1945, the wave of purging that had seized factories across the country slowly petered out. The establishment of the General Confederacy of Labour (CGM) in late January that year made explicit the duty trade-unions had to support the war effort and uphold industrial peace. Containing acts of unruliness that might disrupt the smooth running of production became a test for factory committees’ ability to exercise control over workers. It is therefore instructive to look in detail at the purging of Major Staricu and Colonel Boitan that took place in the town of Reșița on January 5 1945 in order to try to understand the local dynamics of power between workers’ representatives and the mass of ordinary metalworkers. What this case shows is that the act of purging was far from just an orchestrated expression of passion; it equally obeyed certain rules pertaining to class respectability and proper moral conduct in an industrial setting. Moreover, the event reveals the ways in which workers were mobilized by union leaders and how they further mobilized themselves without these leaders. I will follow the unfolding of the event through the eyes of a by-stander rather than simply through the perspectives narrated by those directly involved. Thomas - the literary alter ego of Anton Ferenschütz - was an eighteenth years old

²²¹ ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 24/1944, p. 6.

²²² ANR, MM, 589/1944, p. 45.

²²³ See, for instance, ANR, DGP, 31/1944, p. 38 for the purging of Astra-Brașov.

apprentice turner, an ethnically German native of the town and a devoted Nazi.²²⁴ He witnessed the purge from the rooftop of a building in the company of tens of fellow spectators.

Everything started with a formal request. Early on a Friday morning, local union leaders asked Colonel Boitan to allow them to organize a meeting at noon inside the locomotive assembly hall. Duly accepted, the request was nonetheless exceptional for at least two reasons. Firstly, the place of the gathering was not the traditional Workers' House but the factory itself. This choice suggests that all workers, rather than just their "men of trust" were invited to participate. Secondly, workers were supposed to convene during the workday rather than in their spare time. For somebody such as Thomas accustomed only to UDR's paternalist regime, this was for the first time a "meeting" was called in and political activities were pursued during worktime (*Politik während der Arbeitszeit*). The shopfloor mobilization was done by foremen who were instructed to inform their workteams that those who will not show up will lose their pay for the day. Under the supervision of the foreman (*unter Aufsicht der Meister*) Thomas and his workmates marched towards the locomotive assembly hall shortly before 12 o'clock. Sources diverge significantly on the exact number of participants, which probably ranged between 3000 to roughly 8000 workers and functionaries.²²⁵

²²⁴ All references are to Anton Ferenschütz, *Wahn und Wirklichkeit. Erzählung* (Resita: Verlag Banatul Montan, 2006), 99-107. Ferenschütz was a devoted member of the local Nazi youth organization where he used to beat up Jews and Gypsies (see, in particular the scenes described at pages 43-46 and 48-49). As late as November 1944 he wrote slogans on the factory's walls such as "Nieder mit der Rote Armee!" He was deported to the Soviet Union in January 1945 from which he returned in 1948. He then trained as lathe operator and became a local celebrity handball player. He emigrated to the Federal Republic of Germany in 1971.

²²⁵ The local gendarmerie gives the figure of 6000, ANRCS, Legiunea de Jandarmi Caraş, 3/1945, p. 14. There was an estimated 15000 workers living in the town.

A couple of days before the meeting, the local metalworkers' union petitioned UDR's management in an effort to have 3 workers' delegates represented in the administrative bodies of the company. Met with reluctance by management, this demand figured at the top of the list of issues to be discussed at the meeting.²²⁶ But



Reșița's Industrial Landscape, Painting by M. H. Maxy 1942; Source: Wikiart.org

there were other claims as well, apart from shared workers' management (*conducere muncitorească*): provisioning, public safety, prices for primary goods, the scarcity of working clothes etc. Thomas could hardly recognize the men addressing the audience from the presidium. As most UDR's metalworkers, he must have known Iosif Mustețiu, who was now acting president of the local trade-union. The others were new faces not because they were foreigners in the town, as he believed, but because they were communists who had spent most of the war in prison. Thomas certainly did not know Mișa, a Romanian soldier of the Tudor Vladimirescu Division who was seated alongside the union leaders at the presidium.²²⁷ Speeches rolled on. After one hour, a memo containing workers' demands was formulated and submitted to crowd approval. As the meeting was drawing to a close, some workers proposed to purge the military commander of the

²²⁶ ANRCS, Prefectura Caraș, 52/1944, p. 5.

²²⁷ Mișa was the nickname of Mihai Asotii, a Romanian soldier originally from the town of Târgu-Neamț. The Tudor Vladimirescu Division was formed in 1943 within the Soviet Army from Romanian POW.

plant. Miša allegedly cried out “Enough with the words, time has come to take action!”²²⁸ Some one hundred hot-headed workers (*Hitzköpfe*) started to walk towards the management’s building, followed by a larger group of curious onlookers (*Schaulustige*), while the vast majority of workers returned to their sections disgusted (*angewidert*). The range of attitudes Thomas recorded - excitement, rubbernecking, disapproval - ought to be taken seriously as both reasons for and performative enactments of action.²²⁹

We will never know what made the vast majority of workers dismiss the “take action” injunction and go back to their workplaces. Was it perhaps an expression of what Simone Weil called workers’ “moral death” (*mort morale*)²³⁰: a mix of feelings denoting resignation, gloom and ennui drilled in through subjection at the point of production that customarily secures social tranquility? It seems more reasonable to suppose that this kind of mass passivity was not merely the opposite of participation but rather its necessary political complement: disgusted self-restraint from the majority was what allowed for an energized minority of likeminded workers to coagulate in anger. Yet we will never know what pushed spirits up and convinced dozens of workers to risk life, limb and the loss of one day’s pay in order to assault the military commander’s office. In so doing, they were equally disregarding the advice of the union leaders who demanded from them to head back to their sections. Had Thomas joined one of these two camps rather than pursue his desire for peeping and spectacle, we might have had a better ground for speculation. Without

²²⁸ ANR, DGP, 42/1943, 241.

²²⁹ Alexander Kluge, “The Political Intensity of Everyday Feelings”, *Cultural Critique*, No. 4, 1986, 125-126.

²³⁰ Simone Weil, *La condition ouvrière* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), 411-416. Weil discusses the role of emotions (*souffrances morales*), particularly boredom and humiliation in relation to subjection at the point of production and trade-union politics based on her experience as a worker in French industry during the 1930s.

privileged access to workers' inner motives, the historian, much like Thomas himself, is bound to contemplate the purging scene from afar, in this case from a nearby rooftop.

In the space of a few minutes, the mob (*die Meute*) composed of men and women arrived in front of a three stories high building situated on a mountain slope.²³¹ There were two soldiers guarding the entrance and some more inside. Workers were halted at gun point. Colonel Boitan glimpsed the mob from the second floor: a rather chubby old gentleman with white hair and a down-to-earth aura. Soldiers were asked not to shoot and they complied, halfheartedly. Boitan soon faced the mob amidst booing and curses (*Buhrufe und Schimpfworte*). Still, he kept a straight face and his head up as he descended among the workers who were apparently so shocked by this posture they let him pass along. Concomitantly an officer everybody knew well was tumbling down the stairs in a pool of blood. This was indeed Major Staricu: a man in his early 50s, broad-shouldered, stocky, with dark eyebrows and long, apelike arms (*affenartige Arme*). Staricu's most notorious skill was slapping, which he enjoyed executing twice. Now he was covered in blows and laid groggy on the ground as one woman kept whooping him with a shoe. He had been previously hit with a vase as he pulled the gun on the workers who hammered at his office door. Neither the soldiers nor one Captain Radu were harmed, though they had to be immobilized.

Workers dragged Major Staricu to a Soviet military unit stationed in the town. There, however, Russian soldiers dispersed the mob and told workers they have nothing to do with their purge. Slightly disappointed, workers then went to a local barbershop, got out a pair of scissors and cut off Staricu's hair. This was an extreme gesture that might cast some light on the cultural

²³¹ Police reported no more than 30 persons. In his fictionalized memoirs Ferenschütz recalled that the mob was composed of more than one hundred persons. ANR, DGP, 42/1943, 242.

norms Staricu had violated. We find a good description of the importance of hair (and possibly hairstyles) for Reșița's young male metalworkers in Josef Puvak's novella *Morgendämmerung*. Born in 1913 in Reșița, Puvak was a German speaking ethnic Slovak who became an apprentice at UDR's rolling mill at the age of 15. His militant career was forged in the local catholic, socialist and finally communist youth organizations throughout the 1930s. In 1941 he infiltrated the DAR in order to win over German workers; was arrested and jailed in 1942 and subsequently expelled from the communist party for treason.²³² In January 1945 Puvak was a trade-union activist, arguably with social-democrat sympathies, though it is not clear whether he took part in the purge.

Much like Anton Breitenhofer's short story discussed above, *Morgendämmerung* recalls the adventures of a young metalworker turned communist. The main character - Franz Percsek - joined the rolling mill (*Walzwerk*) in his teens as he inherited from his father a pair of shoes and one of trousers. Franz's foreman rented him one room in his house, with the plan of having him marry his daughter. But as friendship between the two youngsters turned into courtship, Franz - now also a student of the local technical school - experienced the trauma of his life. The headmaster decided to have all boys' hair cut: "How could one humiliate more deeply a seventeen years old youngster than by robbing him of his hair."²³³ This decision, apparently, made the students organize a 3-day strike, an action during which they received significant support from the underground communist youth organization. Fiction aside, Staricu was no stranger to this punitive ritual that frustrated many young workers attempts to engage in romantic affairs. Might we not

²³² Josef Puvak rejoined the communist party in October 1947. He was appointed manager in Reșița and Bucharest. In old age, he wrote a number of stories inspired by his own biography. See ANR, CC/PCR, Economică, Dosare Anexe, 70/1954, pp. 26-27.

²³³ Josef Puvak, "Morgendämmerung" in his *Die Flucht* (Timișoara: Facla Verlag, 1976), 40. The German original reads: "Wie konnte man einen siebzehnjährigen Jungen tiefer demütigen, als daß man ihn seines Haarschmuckes beraubte."

infer that many of those workers who took revenge on Major Staricu had been previously abused either during premilitary training or directly on the shopfloor? It is this muted history of slapping, bodily dispossession and mortification that singled out Staricu for retributive justice.

The Major was finally saved by a Soviet officer who took him to the factory's medical cabinet. Predictably, the violent nature and celebratory tones of the event did not make the pages of the communist press. On the contrary: newspapers wrote that workers followed the advice of the local communist party secretary and "did overtime so that the hours wasted during the meeting would not impede production."²³⁴ Police, on the other hand, noted that workers went straight home. Moreover, the newspaper mentioned neither the blood nor the cutting of the hair, leaving the impression that the purge carried no festive meaning at all. The following day, union leaders went to apologize in person to Colonel Boitan claiming that everything happened without their approval because workers believed the military commandment was a symbol of dictatorship. Union leaders also explained the urge to purge surfaced spontaneously during the meeting and could not be contained. They blamed Mişa the soldier for encouraging the initiative and thanked Boitan for not ordering his soldiers to open fire. The immediate outcome of the purge was obvious enough: the military drill scheduled on January 7 1945 for the 400 premilitary young workers never took place. Both Staricu and Boitan left the plant, the latter not before informing the central authorities that his stay would only make matters worse because "workers' delegates cannot guarantee similar events won't repeat themselves."²³⁵ The most conspicuous consequence, one arguably not foreseen

²³⁴ *Luptătorul Bănăţean*, II, No. 100, January 11 1945, p. 1.

²³⁵ ANR, MM, 988/1945, p. 7.

at that point in time, was that the issue of shared workers' management never popped up again in the town.

The union leaders' excuses as well as their explanation of how an unknown soldier who happened to utter extraordinarily moving words influenced the decision to purge were open acknowledgements of a lack of mastery over workers. Just like the disgust showed by the majority of workers ought not to be interpreted as evidence of conformity to trade-union directives, so too the violence displayed against Major Staricu ought not to be taken as proof of manipulation. There was reason, desire, scope and pleasure behind both attitudes as well as a local history of specific class injuries against specific groups of workers. And there was awe and enjoyment for those climbed on rooftops.²³⁶ By comparison, the next purge that took place in April 1945 was a mere bureaucratic procedure that ended up with some local ethnically German citizens arrested and one engineer fired.²³⁷ The gap between organized labour intentions and workers' aspirations, however, was not only a matter of control; it was also one of support. In such cases, trade-union leaders were not excusing themselves for being unable to extinguish workers' feelings, but rather for their inability to ignite workers' passions. In the final section of this chapter I examine the ways in which Malaxa Works' factory committee coped with the willed apathy of the workers during a round of union elections.

²³⁶ Needless to say, the cutting of Staricu's hair was markedly different from the similar punitive measures perpetrated across the continent against allegedly compromised women; for a good analysis see Anette Warring, "Intimate and Sexual Relations", in Robert Gildea, Olivier Wieviorka and Anette Warring (eds.) *Surviving Hitler and Mussolini. Daily Life in Occupied Europe* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 88-128.

²³⁷ "Muncitorii din Reșița hotărâți să lichideze resturile fasciste", *Luptătorul Bănățean*, II, No. 171, April 2 1945, p. 3. Josef Puvak was a member of the purging committee; see ANR, UDR, 93/1944, p. 25.

Terror Rules

“The second day I was sent to explain to the workers of the Bucharest Communal Factories (UCB) what had happened that very morning at Malaxa Works, where reactionaries killed some of our comrades and badly injured Gheorghe Apostol, the president of the General Confederacy of Labour. I spoke with a pathetic voice, but the audience did not even grumble at my calls for workers’ unity. Moreover, during the following speeches they even showed solidarity with the aggressors from Malaxa Works. I was stunned: what are these proletarians thinking? I tried to comfort myself by saying one cannot expect genuine class consciousness from these garbagemen employed by UCB who work isolated one from the other and are always prone to receiving tips.”²³⁸

The author of these recollections, Gheorghe Brătescu, was dispatched by the communist youth organization on February 20, 1945, to gain the support of the waste collectors of Bucharest. Much like his fellow communist activists discussed above, Brătescu discovered an unfathomable social universe which he attempted to grasp with the help of a moralizing Marxist vulgata. He too descended from the ranks of the Romanian urban bourgeoisie and acted as a militant within Bucharest’s student milieu, for who but a bourgeois student could possibly make the argument that in receiving tips garbagemen lack genuine class consciousness? The event Brătescu was supposed to explicate to the so-called proletarians, however, was an authentic display of workers’ solidarity, though neither the communists nor their adversaries understood much of it. What had happened at Malaxa Works in late February 1945?

²³⁸ Gheorghe Brătescu, *Ce-a fost să fie. Notății autobiografice* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2003), 135-136.

On February 19 at half past 3 in the afternoon, the factory committee of Malaxa Works called in a general meeting. This was the third general meeting convened since the beginning of the year. The first meeting took place in mid-January and managed to squeeze in the canteen room some 5000 workers, the vast majority of which were already union members. By that point in time the plant was owned once again by Nicolae Malaxa, who had received his company from the Romanian state. In that context, it was important for the factory committee to underline that it was not the owner but the workers themselves who must increase production for the war effort. The second meeting took place in early February and was much more openly propagandistic in tone: workers were demanded to give their support to the Left Coalition to bring down the government and a number of accusations were brought against leading political figures. The third meeting must have had the same initial goal. As the 5000 workers filled in the room, some of them took the floor and asked to be granted the liberty of speech in accordance with the prescriptions of the Soviet constitution in order to hold elections for the factory committee.²³⁹ Brawls ensued. Soviet soldiers started to shoot in the air. Many workers fled in fear. The communist members of the factory committee were beaten up and sequestered. At around 6 o'clock in the evening, the gendarmerie restored order and elections were finally held. Soon afterwards, a delegation of the Ministry of Labour arrived at the plant only to be met with gun fire.

The following day, February 20, was a bit bloodier. Yet another delegation purporting this time to represent the General Confederacy of Labour showed up at the factory gates early in the morning, only to be predictably denied access. Headed by Gheorghe Apostol, the delegation returned a couple of hours later accompanied by a significant number of workers assembled from

²³⁹ ANR, CC/PCR, 368/1945, p. 1.

other factories in Bucharest. We know close to nothing about how these workers were mobilized. Police sources identify them as mostly employees of the national railway company and of smaller metallurgical factories of the capital city. Be that as it may, the delegation managed to force its way in and veered towards the assembly hall in order to free up the sequestered members of the factory committee. Gun fights between the two groups broke out. Caught in the crossfire, Apostol fell victim to a bullet that pierced his abdomen: “how is it possible that after so many years spent in jail, I now die like a fool.”²⁴⁰ Apostol was lucky enough to survive two weeks of coma and recover thereafter. There were other victims as well, some badly injured and one shot dead. It did not take long for the delegation to free the factory committee and arrest in turn a number of over 150 workers judged to have masterminded the rebellion. However, who exactly pulled the trigger is bound to remain a *policier* mystery. Eyewitness only to his own wound, for instance, Apostol would latter put the blame on a fellow communist party member by the name of Pătrașcu rather than on the legionaries. Similarly, the dead worker was claimed by the communists as well as by their adversaries. For the communist newspapers the dead was a comrade locksmith: “a poor and honest” man in his mid-30s born in a village in the vicinity of Bucharest, a husband and a father who lived modestly with his family in a rented room on the periphery.²⁴¹ For the newspapers associated with the national-peasant party (PNȚ), the dead worker was a member of their political party.²⁴²

²⁴⁰ Gheorghe Apostol, *Eu și Gheorghiu-Dej* (Bucharest: Asociația militanților pentru pace, 2011), 80.

²⁴¹ *Scânteia*, II, No. 147, February 22 1945.

²⁴² Dinu C. Giurăscu, *Guvernarea Nicolae Rădescu* (București: ALL, 1996), 203-204. The author relies on *Dreptatea*, the official newspaper of PNȚ.

These games of competitive claim-making and identification with the victims were played out in polemical leaflets, memoirs, virulent newspaper articles, confessions, and subsequent partisan historiography. Surprisingly, both narratives insisted on terror. In a broadsheet allegedly issued by the defeated workers, “Trotskyist agitators” were accused of hooliganism and manipulation:

We protest most strongly at the terror tactics which irresponsible persons from outside the factory are employing at Malaxa Works in support of the committee of dishonorable agitators which has been kept in place against the workers’ will. [...] We want free elections and a secret ballot. We want trade-unions based on professions and not politically manipulated hordes.²⁴³

The same rhetoric was used by the national-peasant party in a leaflet issued shortly after the event and signed by Ilie Lazăr. It was made clear that “a bunch of assassins” attacked workers who stood for the nation and the king. The communist henchmen apparently lost the elections for the factory committee and resorted to guns, shooting randomly: “the spontaneous gesture of raising the Romanian flag on the walls of Malaxa Works and singing the Royal hymn while the assassins opened fire is proof of your commitment to fight under your national symbol [...] Go forward with God!”²⁴⁴ Lazăr was an important figure in the national-peasant party, not least because in January 1945 he was entrusted to set up a workers’ section within the party.²⁴⁵ This decision reflected a new political context in which the ability to mobilize urban workers for marches and mass

²⁴³ Quoted in Dennis Deletant, *Communist Terror in Romania: Gheorghiu-Dej and the Police State, 1948-1965* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1999), 65. Note that Deletant does not provide the archival source for this broadsheet which is likely to have been taken over, without acknowledgment, from Gheorghe Onişoru, *România în anii 1944-1948. Transformări economice şi realităţi sociale* (Bucharest: Fundaţia Academia Civică, 1998), 84, footnote 11.

²⁴⁴ ANR, DGP, 17/1945, p. 296.

²⁴⁵ For more on this, see Andrea Dobeş, *Ilie Lazăr. Consecvenţa unui ideal politic* (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2006), 134-175. Lazăr gave up the project of organizing a workers’ section within PNT in late February 1945, allegedly for medical reasons.

demonstrations suddenly became paramount for all political parties irrespective of their traditional constituencies. In organizing workers in Bucharest, Lazăr enlisted the support of former legionaries who pretended to know a thing or two about how to approach factories. One of these organizers, Horațiu Comaniciu, recalled in some detail the way in which workers used to visit the headquarters of PNT: “They listened to Ilie Lazăr’s speeches. We talked with them. We asked about the situation in each and every factory. We urged them to organize. We prepared them for elections for factory committees, for street clashes and later for other conflicts.”²⁴⁶

Top leaders of the communist party also appealed to terror as the main independent variable of the conflict. In their view, terror was less a character trait of the members of the factory committee as much as a failure to secure the allegiance of the vast majority of workers employed by Malaxa Works. Here is party boss Vasile Luca drawing some lessons nine months after the event: “Take the case of Malaxa Works: the factory committee had no clue what had been prepared. Its overthrowing came out of the blue. This was the situation. The factory committee did not know how to relate to the workers and wanted to rule through terror.”²⁴⁷ Luca further explained that terror was indicative of “police mentality”: “because backed by the Red Army and with the influence of the party ever growing people feel powerful.”²⁴⁸ Rather than obtaining their support, Luca concluded, the factory committee at Malaxa Works endeavored to purge workers. The motif of the Red Army was first and foremost invoked by the rank-and-file members of PNT. In a private meeting recorded by a police informant in March 1945, national-peasant militants were convinced

²⁴⁶ Horațiu Comaniciu, *În lupta neamului (Amintiri)*, (Freiburg : Coresi, 198 ?), 129.

²⁴⁷ ANR, CC/PCR, 95/1945, p. 21.

²⁴⁸ IBIDEM.

that the newly appointed Groza government would surely collapse because: “it is not based on the masses, but rather on the support of the army and the Jews.”²⁴⁹

For all its explanatory potential, terror was a misnomer for an array of attitudes that ranged from disgusted indifference to willed apathy. It is therefore instructive to turn to the heated debates that took place between the members of the factory committee in the aftermath of the event. This discussion revolved around the burning question of support: why didn’t the vast majority of workers defend the factory committee when it was attacked?²⁵⁰ Thus formulated, the question only begged a most necessary dialectical twist: what did the members of the factory committee do wrong in their relations with the workers on the shopfloor? The answers were framed in the vernacular of everyday struggle. Many members of the committee took up jobs in the provisioning department of the plant, including the manning of the canteen and the acquisition of firewood. The delegate responsible for the canteen was spotted on several occasions eating his meals alone, secluded from the rest of the workers, a gesture which bred a good deal of suspicion: did he secure better food for himself or were his former workmates all of a sudden not worthy of his company anymore? Other members gave up on their regular jobs and traipsed the shopfloors selling newspapers or talked on the phone in the management’s offices. Small wonder workers believed the purge was a mere maneuver to cover up the promotion of the communists: “Rather than working side by side with the workers they showed off (*s-au ținut mari*). Even overseers feared

²⁴⁹ ANR, DGP, 17/1945, p. 187. During the same meeting, PNT members argued that Marshall Antonescu was not a war criminal, but a hero because he fought against communism.

²⁵⁰ AMB, Comitetul Municipal PCR București, Comitetul Sectorului 23 August (Malaxa) al PCR, 1/1945, p. 1. The same document can also be found at ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 12/1945. Throughout this chapter I will refer to the first.

them. I spoke with an overseer and he told me: what can I do? My hands are tied. The committee won't let me do anything.”²⁵¹

This ostentatious behavior was doubled by crass ideological nescience. Members of the committee proudly carried their hammer and sickle badges but were incapable of responding to workers' inquiries about the meaning of socialism. Nor were they able to provide any kind of free of charge informative material such as brochures or booklets. It often happened that the acoustics of the canteen was inadequate for setting up longer, loquacious, morale boosting gatherings: “we pursue the politicization of the masses during meetings; those who sit in the front hear us, while those seated in the back don't.”²⁵² The first meeting organized outside of the canteen took place in early March 1945 when the factory committee improvised a podium out of a train locomotive. During these meetings, Nicolae Malaxa was never openly criticized because “this was the General Confederacy of Labour's directive. Still, he harked back to his own habit of being an autocrat master of the plant.”²⁵³ Indeed, engineer Malaxa was freely reactivating his own variety of paternalism in a context in which the factory committee posed as an alternative form of management. It is reasonable to suppose that for many workers this return to a well-trodden manner of enforcing factory hierarchy was perceived as a flagrant contradiction which needed some accounting for in plain, ordinary language. Yet no such explanation was ever provided due to the trade-union's policy of supporting the war effort. It all seemed a masquerade.

²⁵¹ IBIDEM, p. 6.

²⁵² IBIDEM, p. 2.

²⁵³ IBIDEM, p. 7.

The idea of workers' management was further compromised by the fact that workers were hesitant to accept the justification put forward by the factory committee after the last official wage increase in December 1944, namely that there was no more money and wages were regulated by the state anyway. Workers asked instead for engineer Malaxa to be permitted to pay higher wages out of his own pocket, even though such a promise was likely never made and probably reflected a mix of sarcasm and despair. Money was the main topic of debate when workers met at the pub. Police informants recorded one meeting that took place in late January 1945 at the Dumitrică Pub, a well-known gathering place for metalworkers residing in the nearby neighborhood of Pantelimon. One smelter, allegedly a PNT sympathizer, spoke vehemently against the factory committee, accusing its members of having collected money from the workers in order to give parties and gormandize themselves (*îmbuimându-se*). He also accused communist fellow traveler and future prime-minister Petru Groza of owning a fortune of millions and the communist Minister of Justice Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu of embezzlement (*l-a prins la butoiul cu miere*).²⁵⁴ Moreover, the smelter deplored the state of those purged who were left with no income over the winter.

It was not only the purged who were facing unemployment during the winter, but also the roughly 800 employees of the Rolling Pipes Factory. On December 19, 1944, at 4 o'clock in the afternoon workers of this particular subsection of Malaxa Works were summoned in haste to the canteen. Few knew what to expect. They were welcomed by one comrade Pătrașcu, a leading member of the Central Union Commission who informed them their factory will be dismantled and shipped to the Soviet Union.²⁵⁵ Pătrașcu was asked to provide an explanation for letting

²⁵⁴ ANR, DGP, 17/1945, pp. 26-27.

²⁵⁵ This is the same Pătrașcu that allegedly shot Gheorghe Apostol. For a short biography of the man, see Ștefan Bosomitu, *Miron Constantinescu. O biografie* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2014), chapter 6.

hundreds of workers without any means of subsistence just before Christmas. The Rolling Pipes, Pătrașcu argued, was importing expensive raw materials from abroad and was consequently forced to produce overpriced goods by exploiting workers and keeping their wages down. There were, however, plenty of raw materials in the Soviet Union to justify the relocation of the factory there, which solved both the problem of overpriced goods and that of exploitation. Otherwise, Pătrașcu concluded, the factory would have been closed down anyway, which would only deprive the war effort of important resources. Workers left the canteen in deep silence, conceivably *bouche bée* and unquestionably humiliated by what they had just witnessed: a conceited exercise in collective lay-offs couched in vulgar Marxist acrobatics.²⁵⁶ Asked many years later why the factory committee could not bank on the support of the workers in late February 1945, the then general manager Korcinschi admitted they were “too offended by the dismantlement of the Rolling Pipes Factory and its subsequent shipping to the USSR.”²⁵⁷

What can be detected behind this range of attitudes and accusations was a form of solidarity against the role assumed by Malaxa Works’ factory committee and the rules of shopfloor respectability infringed upon by its communist members. It was not terror that kept the vast majority of workers glued to their tools during the brawls and shootings of February 1945, but phlegm and callosity for people who elbowed their way to positions of power and authority inside the factory. It was the sight of wasted money, the smell of unabashed arrogance, and the hearing of endless bragging that was met with aloofness and active passivity. This kind of solidarity

²⁵⁶ ANR, DGP, 31/1944, p. 65. For how factory dismantlement undertaken by the Red Army pushed former members of the Arrow Cross to join the social-democrats in Budapest’s United Lighting and Electrics Factory, see Mark Pittaway, “Workers in Hungary”, in Eleonore Breuning, Jill Lewis and Gareth Pritchard (eds.), *Power and the People. A Social History of Central European Politics, 1945-56* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 57-79.

²⁵⁷ Nicolae Korcinschi quoted in Costin Diaconescu (ed.) *Uzinele Malaxa – 23 August – Faur. Un arc peste timp: 1921-1999* (Bucharest: CD Press, 2007), 125. The interview was conducted in 1993, shortly before Korcinschi’s death.

manifested itself in gossipy whispers (*șușoteli*) and a muted stubbornness to keep working amidst flying bullets. One of the injured members of the factory committee recalled that “a large part of the workers who took part were legionaries, or influenced by them, but the rest of the workers stood put, they did not come out, and they minded their own business.”²⁵⁸ Workers had all the reasons to stay put and mind their own business even though many might have entertained the belief that a newly elected factory committee was justified. The question of support for the factory committee, much like the question of control over the workers, was mediated by workers own perceptions of the futility of unionization under given circumstances and by the experience of humiliation and disappointment that came with it. The next chapter takes on the question of support by examining how the factory committees turned into springboards for workers’ radicalism between 1945 and early 1947.

²⁵⁸ AMB, Comitetul Municipal PCR București, Comitetul Sectorului 23 August (Malaxa) al PCR, 1/1945, p. 3.

Chapter II

Strategies of Containment (1945-1947)

The Filling Function

It was highly unlikely that another football match between Laromet's team and the Soviet Artillery Brigade stationed in the vicinity of Bucharest could have been successfully organized on the factory's pitch in the summer of 1946. One year earlier, on a hot Friday afternoon in June, Laromet's communist-run factory committee was able to bank on the cooperation of the workers to attend a sporting event of such caliber and on the physical fitness of the football team to run dozens of minutes in pursuit of a spectacular win against a bunch of Soviet soldiers who "haven't touched the ball for four years in a row".²⁵⁹ By June 1946, the atmosphere in the factory had changed dramatically. During a meeting held in April 1946, some workers complained they could no longer carry the weight of their bodies to their workbenches. Malnutrition and



Party leaders (right), the factory's manager (center) and Soviet officers (left) watching the football match in one of Laromet's bleachers; June 1 1945. Source: Fototeca online a comunismului românesc, 187/1944.

profound anemia were the two key conditions workers worried most about in-between attempts to down tools in May of that year. In the following weeks, some of them started to accuse the government of being "incapable", some distributed the Opposition's leaflets, yet others read loudly

²⁵⁹ *Scântea*, II, No. 242, June 4, 1945. Tellingly, the match was only advertised on the very same day on which it took place, *Scântea*, II, No. 239, June 1, 1945.

anti-communist pamphlets; few joined rival political parties and one even dirtied the factory's walls with anti-government slogans.²⁶⁰

Laromet's workers were indeed restless, a police informant noted in July 1946, "but this is not due to the ill will of the management, it is simply because the market is way too expensive and workers have no purchasing power."²⁶¹ Obvious enough to those concerned, this serene justification could bring little comfort and no consolation to the workers themselves, who went on strike in late September 1946 and pressured management to upgrade their wages so as to cover the bare minimum for survival. Nor could the justification - no matter how well informed the police informer had been - provide the slightest tactical alibi for the communist members of the factory committee. A few days before the strike, they had failed to persuade the workers to donate a small sum of money in support of the drought-stricken regions of the country as part of the government's national hunger relief campaign.²⁶² It was this call to solidarity with the starving peasants of Moldavia that added the last drop to the workers' cup of desperation. Having lost their "tight grip" over Laromet's employees, the factory committee finally resorted to petitioning the Central Committee in order to denounce comrade Constantin Vârcol - the delegated manager (*administrator delegat*) of the factory.

A few months earlier, shortly after Vârcol's appointment in January 1946, the factory committee had summoned the new manager to the regional party organization: "we did not know whether he was a party member, but we had an open discussion and we decided to form a collective

²⁶⁰ ANR, DGP, 123/1946, pp. 30-33, 36.

²⁶¹ IBIDEM, p. 37 In July 1946, the average monthly salary paid by Laromet equaled 20 kilograms of fresh tomatoes.

²⁶² More on the general context of the postwar famine that affected Southern and Eastern Romania in 1946 and early 1947 in Chapter III below.

of communists that would work closely with the delegated manager.”²⁶³ Yet, in spite of the committee’s hopes to collectively administer factory life, Vârcol soon proved “sectarian”: he ignored decisions taken in common, curtailed the initiative of the best among the employees, killed their work enthusiasm, assumed full responsibility, disregarded the daycare, pig farm, vegetable garden, showed no concern to supply the factory store and failed to take care of the apprentices’ dormitory. Vârcol’s attitude, the petitioners concluded, “created a difficult situation for the party organization which had the task of supporting the delegated administrator” because he “lost the sympathy and trust of the employees.”²⁶⁴

There might be many shades of exaggeration in these accusations. Laromet’s archives show a diligent, often dutiful Vârcol painstakingly annotating each and every protest memo forwarded to him by the factory committee, particularly in the aftermath of the September strike.²⁶⁵ In November 1946, Vârcol even authorized the financing of a mutual savings and credit fund to enable Laromet’s employees to get through the winter and serve as their safety net on the longer run. But his reluctance to share power and responsibility with the factory committee, far from being a proof of managerial defiance, was an act of *rappel à l’ordre* in line with the Communist Party’s instructions. The concern that factory committees - even those “tightly” run by gifted communist rank-and-file - would take over the attributes of the management, was widespread among the party’s leadership. As Vasile Luca explained during a turbulent early meeting of the Left Coalition in May 1945, the autonomy of the factory committees should be suppressed and so

²⁶³ ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 131/1946, p. 1.

²⁶⁴ IBIDEM, p. 2.

²⁶⁵ For a sample of these protest memos with Vârcol’s own handwritten comments, see AMB, Laromet, 8/1946, pp. 75-100.

should their tendency to become “bureaucratic organs” eager to replace the authority of the state as well as that of the owner (*patron*).²⁶⁶

This chapter examines the conflicting relationship between the consolidation of organized labour, the nitty-gritty of everyday politics at the factory level and the government’s policy agenda concerning prices and wages. I argue that it was at the intersection of these three axes that “communism” emerged as a signifier without a signified: an essentially contested, ambiguous term whose meaning was to be “filled in” and cemented amidst strikes, molecular outbursts of cruelty against workmates, engineers and directors or, more often, against the background of mundane forms of collective bargaining.²⁶⁷ The various strategies the Communist Party devised to contain labour unrest between 1945 and early 1947 sparked myriad instances of articulation through which “communism” gradually came to stand for the state’s authoritarian pursuit of industrial peace. The escalating tensions between Vârcol and Laromet’s factory committee was but one of the symptoms of this process. The carrying out of the “filling function”, however, involved not merely a reconsideration of the role workers’ control had to play in relation to both factory management and the General Confederacy of Labour, it also required a case-by-case redescription of the daily ethics communist members of the factory committees had to practice vis-à-vis their fellow workers.

Part I details the fate of engineer Constantin Aman during a wildcat strike that took place at the Anina mines in late October 1945. Aman was a devoted lecturer at the newly opened party

²⁶⁶ ANR, CC/PCR, Cămară, 41/1945, p. 25.

²⁶⁷ Ernesto Laclau, “Why do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics?” in his *Emancipation(s)*, (London: Verso, 2007 [1996]), 36-46.

school for local communist activists and a respected member of the technical staff of UDR's mining division. His participation in the strike shows - in exemplary fashion - the ways in which solidarity, workers' demands and moral leadership were articulated with respect to organized labour and party membership. Aman's trajectory before and during the coalminers' strike offers a textbook case for what party cadres learned to identify, dread and condemn as "leftism" and contemporary archivists mistook for "populism".

Part II moves to the higher terrain of the Central Committee in order to illuminate the manner in which the communist party bosses crafted their "anti-worker workerist"²⁶⁸ phraseology in the context of the government's economic policies. It was mostly during meetings within the Left Coalition that communist leaders assembled an adequate vocabulary to classify the evidence of unruliness generated in the factories. "Legionaries", "fascists", "corruption", "anarcho-syndicalism" and "backwardness" composed a limited, yet flexible discursive repertoire nourished by a mix of local historical experience and Third International Marxism.

Part III refocuses the analysis on two events, namely the attack on one of UDR managers that took place in Reșița in September 1946 and the attempt of textile workers in Arad to organize a general strike in April 1947. Exploring the dynamics of the crowd during these violent episodes of labour unrest reveals the evanescent form workers' mobilization assumed under increasingly repressive circumstances. But these events also make clear how "hooliganism" and "peasant mentality" came to be used to redescribe wage demands, while "Bolshevik" turned into the

²⁶⁸ I borrow this expression from Andrea Graziosi, "Stalin's Antiworker 'Workerism', 1924-1931", *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 40, No. 2, 1995, 223-258.

appropriate label for a factory manager who refused to pay winter benefits in agreed upon cash money. I end with a brief reflection on the nature of industrial violence in postwar Romania.

Part I

Prelude to a Wildcat Strike

Constantin Aman stood out from the other 1388 names listed in catalogue “A” - one of the several archival indexes that organizes alphabetically the documentary evidence left behind by the Central Party College. Set up in late 1945, this particular institution was entrusted to review the biographical trajectory, moral profile and political conformity of those party members singled out for expulsion or considered for readmission into the party ranks. To date, the entire archive consists of tens of thousands of individual dossiers spanning a period of nearly half a century. Alongside the name, each entry in the indexing catalogue shows the year in which the person underwent evaluation and is accompanied by a short, descriptive paragraph that details the alleged transgression the respective party member was found guilty of. The accusations range widely: from adulterous relationships, violent behavior, embezzlement and other infringements of “socialist morality” to compromising class background, “revisionism”, espionage and an array of suspicious political commitments, including Zionism and fascism. Aman’s catalogue entry reads differently:

Party member excluded in November 1945 for instigating a strike, supporting its organizers, criticizing and badmouthing the director of the Anina mines and populism.

What is striking in this description is the use of the term “populism” (*populism*). Unlike all the other accusations which were transcribed verbatim from the files that make up Aman’s dossier, “populism” is nowhere to be found in the very same files, nor was the term part of the semantic universe of the communist party.²⁶⁹ Moreover, “populism” was never used again to describe any other case listed in the catalogues. How should one then account for the singular occurrence of this conspicuous anachronism? The indexing catalogues of the Central Party College’s archive were only recently created by the personnel of the Romanian National Archives. It is therefore very likely that the archivist who parsed the textual material in order to summarize the content of the dossier took the liberty of inserting a word from her own current political vocabulary to describe an action that might be intuitively labeled “populism”. Indeed, it is probable the said archivist first came across the following sentence about Aman: “he sought to use the strike to strengthen his own personal prestige”.²⁷⁰ She might have then coupled this assessment with the fact that following the arrest of some of the supposed strike organizers, Aman visited the headquarters of the local gendarmerie office where he brought food paid out of his own pocket and attempted to force the release of the jailed workers. Finally, the archivist might have took a quick look at the final verdict delivered on Constantin Aman by the Center Party College according to which “ [he] achieved cheap popularity by presenting himself as a supporter of those who went on strike who also called him their director.”²⁷¹ Confronted with such a potpourri of facts and judgments, the term “populism” could have suggested itself naturally to the contemporary archivist as a shorthand for a set of attitudes loosely related to the pursuit of popular sympathies by presumably deceptive,

²⁶⁹ Characteristically, the word does not appear in Romanian language dictionaries published before the regime change of 1989.

²⁷⁰ ANR, CC/PCR, Colegiul Central de Partid, A/392, p. 6.

²⁷¹ IBIDEM, p. 7.

crowd-pleasing means. The archivist might have even felt a certain degree of professional accomplishment given that by inferring “populism” from the files she managed to compress in a single, familiar yet highly evocative word a number of paragraphs replete with trivia about the circumstances of an obscure event.²⁷²

The temptation to use the word “populism”, however understandable, is an error of comprehension. This misnomer reveals - as all anachronisms do - the sheer inadequacy of recently globalized political categories to portray and classify situated actions of the past. Whatever its provenance, the error is nonetheless meaningful in that it could indeed serve as a “slender clue” to the ways in which the Romanian Communist Party came to interpret, contain and suppress in the aftermath of March 6 1945 the highest form of industrial conflict, namely the wildcat strike.²⁷³ For why would the Romanian Communist Party endeavor to condemn and subsequently expel one of its members - Constantin Aman - who offered to support miners during a strike, in a language vaguely reminiscent of present-day populism? Why would a communist party member be accused of purposefully banking on a strike to reap the benefits of “cheap popularity” and enhance his “personal prestige”? And if Aman did not stand accused of “populism”, what was so manifestly wrong in the eyes of the party with his participating in the event? To begin to answer some these

²⁷² For the de-contextualizing logic of the archiving process see Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain. Thinking Through Colonial Ontologies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 23 *et passim*.

²⁷³ For tracing “slender clues” as a way of getting at larger phenomena, see Carlo Ginzburg, “Clues: Roots for an Evidential Paradigm”, in his *Clues, Myths and the Historical Method* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 95-125. Ginzburg explored the emergence of the conjectural or semiotic paradigm across the humanities, the popular novel, psychoanalysis and state practices of population management during the late nineteenth century, but did not include one of the key institutions of the modern state, namely the national (or state) archive. Yet it can be argued that this archive, to the extent it is composed mostly from the already archived archives passed on by various public and private institutions, is itself deeply shaped by the “evidential paradigm”. Incidentally, this explains why so much archival-based historical research requires educated guesswork, a practice that ought to be acknowledged as such in historical writing.

questions we would have to know more about the stakes involved in the strike of late October 1945 as well as about the political and social changes that affected UDR's Anina mines throughout the better half of that year. We would do well to learn something about Aman himself along the way.

On January 5 1945, around the time Major Staricu was publicly molested by a crowd of excited workers in the town of Reșița, more than 1500 miners in Anina met to decide the best way to purge the chief manager of the mines, engineer Vasile Poboran and his second in command, engineer Marinescu. Much like in Reșița, here too unionized workers put forward a long list of demands that included, apart from the removal of top management, claims to better food provisioning, new work equipment (boots and clothes), firewood for both married and unmarried employees and for miners to receive their wages on the same day as the functionaries. Unlike in Reșița, however, the gathering in Anina did not burst into an episode of aggression. For reasons that remained opaque even to the local gendarmerie, on January 9 another meeting was called in during which the decision to purge Poboran was cancelled.²⁷⁴ It was unclear what Vasile Poboran could have been criticized for. The accusation of maltreating workers was not voiced, nor was Poboran singled out for having enjoyed an opulent lifestyle. More importantly, Poboran had no record of an active political past on the far right, was a respected university professor and served as dean of the School of Mines in the city of Timișoara. He was a member of the first ethnically Romanian generation of engineers to be employed by UDR after the First World War, where he steadily climbed up the managerial ladder to reach the position of director of the Anina mines in late 1930s.²⁷⁵ The vast majority of miners seemed uninterested in the purge or in any other kind of

²⁷⁴ ANCS, Legiunea de Jandarmi Caraș, 3/1945, 2-10.

²⁷⁵ In his ethnography of the Anina mines, Virgil Birou trumpets the appointment of an unnamed, "ethnically Romanian" director which is very likely Poboran; see *Oameni și locuri din Caraș. Cu 48 de fotografii făcute de autor*

drumbeat politics. Indeed, one rally convoked by the local communist party organization in late February 1945 saw no more than 100 people marching on the streets.

This atmosphere of general political insouciance should hardly surprise anyone. It certainly did not leave a mark on the communist activist who visited the mining settlement in the spring of 1945 and compiled a report for the Central Committee in Bucharest. What the activist was most struck by was the landscape of human misery he witnessed. Miners, he wrote, “[...] are all exhausted, hungry, naked, and barefooted; their faces sunken and of a greenish color. This is my own impression. Their families are also naked and live in utter poverty. [...] When we entered Anina, the streets were full of children running in front of our car, 90% of which were naked. Many children took part in our meeting and at the end, after we had spoken parents told us they cannot turn such kids into miners.”²⁷⁶ Granted, the activist also noted the potential for unionism (*spirit sindical*) among miners but only to add that according to regional lore the Anina mines are known to be a “slaughterhouse of people” and, given their depth of nearly 900 meters, produced by far the most difficult to obtain coal in the whole country. The sight of impoverished bodies pushed the activist to stop by the local hospital where he was informed children die by the day from scurvy, which he instinctively identified with starvation (*foamete*). Unbeknownst to the communist activist, the pale faces and asthenic bodies of adult male miners sheltered their very own disease, equally damaging to the physical state of the workforce though less obvious to the untrained eye. This was not a disease caused by food scarcity or deficiencies in Vitamin C but

(Timișoara : Editura Astei Bănățene, 1940). See also the brief recollections of Ion Păsărică who brags of being the first Romanian engineer hired by UDR after the Great War, *Reșița și frumusețea naturală a împrejurimilor* (Bucharest: Monitorul Oficial, 1935).

²⁷⁶ ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 89/1945, 4-5. The report is anonymous.

rather by poor working conditions and the lack of proper equipment. In early 1945 the vast majority of the miners in Anina were infected by hookworm parasites.

The detection of the hookworm epidemic (*ancylostomiasis duodenale*) was an accident.²⁷⁷ In 1942 the local medical doctor performed a series of laboratory tests on a sample of the mining workforce and discovered that many suffered from an infectious disease whose symptoms indicated the presence of the infamous hookworm parasite on a massive scale. This was a “traditional” miners’ disease known to the medical communities in Europe for being facilitated by humid, high temperature, often dark and poorly ventilated working environments.²⁷⁸ On the short term the hookworm drastically reduced the ability to work and caused nagging abdominal pains. Its consequences for the ill were severe as long-term anemia often lead to gradual disability, complications and early death. In the context of the war economy, the epidemic could not be tolerated because, as one UDR official alarmingly put it: “it threatens to depopulate the whole mining community.”²⁷⁹ Once discovered, the epidemic attracted an impressive amount of attention, with public hygienists rushing to the scene to investigate further and find ways to combat the parasite. There was little that could be done to extinguish the epidemic hotbed, particularly in view of the conclusions reached by another medical investigation conducted in April 1943 when it was

²⁷⁷ ANR, UDR, 182/1942, p. 51.

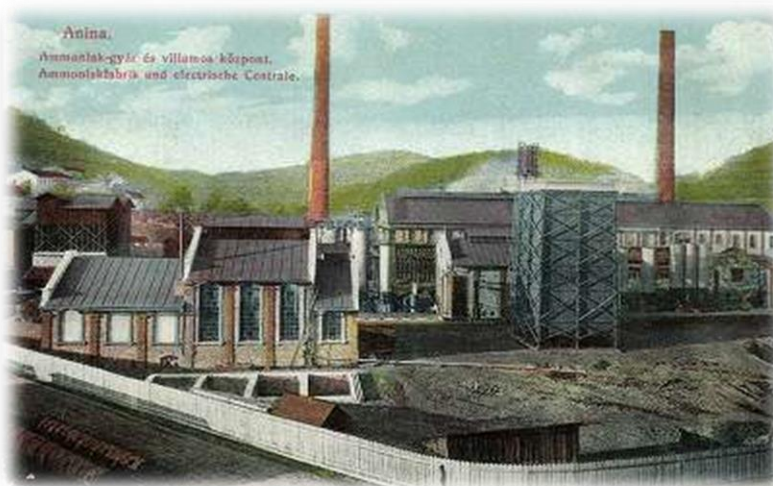
²⁷⁸ For a short history of the disease in Europe see Lars Bluma, “The Hygienic Movement and German Mining, 1890-1914”, *European Review of History*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 2013, 181-196. For the global ecology of the hookworm see the superb article by Steven Palmer, “Migrant Clinics and Hookworm Science: Peripheral Origins of International Health, 1840-1920”, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, Vol. 83, No. 4, 2009, 679-709. Before the Anina case, the hookworm was known to affect peasants and itinerant workers in the southern regions of Romania, Gheorghe Zotta, “Despre ankylostome și ankylostomiază”, *Revista Științelor Medicale*, Vol. 31, No. 1-2, 1942.

²⁷⁹ ANR, UDR, 122/1943, p. 4.

revealed that over 80% of the miners were affected and that the disease was hardly a recent phenomenon:

Following our investigation and on the basis of reading the source material (*izvoare*) that we could find, we are of the opinion the current hotbed of ancylostomiasis is not new; it is

rather a continuation of a hotbed that existed at the end of the last century when ancylostomiasis was booming in Anina.²⁸⁰



The electrical power plant in Anina; early twentieth century postcard;
Source: postcards.hungaricana.hu

Two complementary solutions were proposed. The first emphasized sanitary education, the enlargement of the local medical personnel, the introduction of mobile toilets, and the appointment of hygiene vigilantes selected from among the more responsible miners. The second aimed less to fight the parasite on the terrain of consciousness and more to strengthen the bodies of the workers by providing them regular hot meals, boots and working clothes. Both views were premised on the assumption that only the collaboration of “science, the state and the businessman” could yield the

²⁸⁰ Gheorghe Cădăriu and Sofia Cădăriu, *O nouă problemă socială în regiunile noastre miniere. Focarul de ankylostomiază din regiunea Anina-Reșița* (Cluj-Sibiu: Editat de Secția Biopolitică a Astrei și de Institutul de Igienă și Biopolitică, 1944), 62. Gheorghe Cădăriu kept fighting the hookworm in Anina well into the postwar epoch, ANR, UDR, 242/1943, p. 31 During the 1950s and 1960s he was instrumental in developing the field of work medicine; for a list of his studies covering mostly the heavy industry see *Activitatea științifică a Institutului de Igienă București 1927-1967* (Bucharest: Editura Medicală, 1968), 68-72.

desired outcomes.²⁸¹ However, of the two solutions the first proved impractical not merely because miners were rather ill inclined to change their working and living habits almost overnight but also because it was impossible for UDR to find medical doctors willing to relocate to the mining settlement. With most ethnically Romanian doctors conscripted, in 1943 two Jewish doctors were offered the position. They conditioned taking the job on receiving decent wages, a fully furnished house and free meals; demands which UDR found quite offensive.²⁸² It was therefore the merit of Poboran to have insisted on the second solution. In a series of petitions to the Ministry of the National Economy he repeatedly asked for supplementary food rations.²⁸³ In March 1944 Poboran managed to acquire clothes and over 2500 pairs of boots from the military. More importantly, however, he persuaded UDR's central management to subsidize a daily hot meal for all the miners: a cup of coffee, 50 grams of bread and an occasional soup was not much but it was arguably the only cooked food workers received.²⁸⁴

If Vasile Poboran was to be removed, the purge had to appeal to an altogether different experience of the homefront. On March 22 1945 the regional communist newspaper *Luptătorul Bănăţean* featured an article vehemently demanding for Poboran to be purged on the grounds he had collaborated with the retreating German troops in the fall of 1944 and was accordingly entertaining covert Nazi sympathies. The article was signed in the name of all the workers in Anina by engineer Constantin Aman - a man who had just celebrated his 30th anniversary and was now

²⁸¹ ANR, UDR, 122/1943, p. 26. According to one local historian the hookworm epidemic in the Anina mines was finally put out in 1957; see Cristian-Liviu Mosoroceanu, *Steierdorf-Anina. Minerul, într-al sorţii joc!* (Trustul de Presă Magazin), 23.

²⁸² IBIDEM, p. 21. UDR petitioned state authorities to force the Jewish doctors to accept the offer to no avail.

²⁸³ ANR, UDR, 1258/1943, p. 222.

²⁸⁴ ANR, UDR, 242/1943, p. 8. Cooked meals were rare simply because the vast majority of the miners, rather than commuting to their villages, preferred to live alone for extended periods of time in the mining colony.

threatening to resign his job in protest. Not yet a member of the communist party, Aman allegedly had a personal history of opposing the wartime dictatorship. He was arrested in 1943 for denigrating the German Army and Marshal Antonescu, underwent trial but was finally acquitted for lack of evidence. One year before this incident and following a brief stint on the Eastern Front, as a graduate of the Polytechnic School in Timișoara, Aman had found employment at UDR's Anina mines, an achievement that might have benefitted from the benevolence of his former professor, none other than Vasile Poboran.

The article caused a modicum of uproar among some workers because it was written on their behalf, particularly among the more militant social-democrats who rejected having authorized Aman to speak in their name.²⁸⁵ The accusations, however, were neither entirely fabricated nor completely accurate. Indeed, it was very much true that for over ten days in September 1944 the Anina mines were taken over by the retreating Wehrmacht which did transform the region into a battlefield between the Soviet, Romanian and German troops. In this context, UDR's management had decided to keep Poboran in place together with some of the workers in order to salvage the built environment: the buildings and housing stock but most notably the electrical power plant that supplied both the steel mill in Reșița and the local network of water pumps needed to constantly drain the underground. Conversely, it was not quite inexact that the preservation of this infrastructure implied a series of compromises with the occupying forces on the part of Poboran as the Germans required, requested and duly received food, gasoline, oil and sufficient manpower to dig defense trenches.²⁸⁶ Be that as it may, the accusations propounded by Aman had little to do

²⁸⁵ ANCS, PSD Caraș, 1/1944, p. 213.

²⁸⁶ For Poboran's version of the events see ANR, UDR, 1251/1943, pp. 10-25. The Wehrmacht took over the mines and the nearby village of Steierdorf on September 15 1944 with no more than 100 soldiers; the occupation lasted until

with truth or falsehood; their aim was not proving Poboran guilty of collaborationism by any rules of evidence but rather accustoming miners to a repertoire of contention seemingly alien to their established ways of voicing discontent.²⁸⁷

The purge followed suit. When the Minister of Labour, social-democrat Lotar Rădăceanu, visited Anina in early April 1945, he was presented with a memo demanding the immediate resignation of Poboran who stood accused, once again, of having willingly supplied provisions and manpower to the occupying German troops. Constantin Aman headed the list of signatories, which included, alongside the top members of the local United Workers' Trade-Union, also the president of the Anina communist organization, one Anton Raica. Even though the proposition to purge Poboran was outrightly rejected by the Minister, on April 4 1945, around 100 miners forced their way to Poboran's office, where they assaulted, threatened and threw out the director, all amidst incendiary speeches delivered by a fired-up Aman. Storming the management's building and purging the acting boss of the mines were both unprecedented gestures, and so too was the decision of the rebellious workers to appoint a new director nominated by themselves. The purge, then, began predictably with Poboran forced out of the mining settlement and ended with the venerable engineer Leonida Boicu fully in charge of UDR's Anina coalmines. Boicu was not a

September 26. According to Poboran, the sum total of resources given to the Germans was significantly lower than what the Romanian and Soviet troops demanded and received after the region came under their control. Moreover, the Romanians and the Soviets unleashed a looting campaign against the local ethnically German population that also included, on October 1 1944, the vandalizing of UDR's Măghitaş dairy farm which catered the mining community. For the extent of the damages suffered by the local population, see ANCS, Primăria Anina, 40/1944, pp. 1-400. This is but one of the many such dossiers that records losses each household incurred during the looting.

²⁸⁷ By repertoire of contention I understand the "whole set of means [a group] has for making claims of different types on different individuals", Charles Tilly, *The Contentious French* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 2. It is important to note at this point that narrated experiences of the homefront, framed in the vernacular of everyday struggle or simply recalled as "collaborationism" were the means through which *both* purges of managerial staff and claims to better provisioning and working conditions were pursued, often times in conjunction.

surprising choice: born in 1903 in Kishinev, the Tsarist Empire, he was educated in Czechoslovakia and graduated from the Austrian Leoben School of mining, arguably the most famous such institution in interwar Central Europe.²⁸⁸ Hired by UDR in 1928, Boicu's professional avoirdupois within the company was therefore comparable to Poboran's. Moreover, according to gossip collected by the local gendarmerie, he was known to be a man of the left, associated with the communist movement ever since his student days.²⁸⁹

The purge was a success, or so it seemed to the local communist party organization which prided itself with masterminding the whole event.²⁹⁰ It was certainly a launching pad for Constantin Aman's political career as he would soon join the communist party, though not before allegedly persuading the miners, as token of gratitude following Poboran's demise, to show their enthusiasm by committing to work a number of unpaid hours.²⁹¹ The allure of success was further enhanced by the signing of the collective labour contract across UDR's metal and mining divisions, followed in May 1945 by the confirmation of Boicu's appointment and the reshuffling of Poboran as technical advisor for all of UDR's mines. These were the very first collective negotiations in which the General Confederacy of Labour (CGM) delegates played a prominent role since the formation of the Confederation in late January 1945.²⁹² Finally, some success could also be gleaned from

²⁸⁸ For a portrait of Boicu, see *Viața Sindicală*, III, No. 213, May 20 1948.

²⁸⁹ ANCS, *Legiunea de Jandarmi Caraș*, 3/1945, p. 135. The gendarmerie also noted "unidentified sources" had Boicu a "Bessarabian Jew" and a communist party member since 1927.

²⁹⁰ ANCS, *PMR Caraș*, 24/1945, pp. 1-2.

²⁹¹ "Partidul Comunist, motorul producției în județul Caraș", *Luptătorul Bănățan*, III, No. 177, April 9, 1945, p. 1. The article stated: "After the purging of the fascist director Poboran and vice-director Marinescu, both of whom looked to sabotage production in Anina, the miners and the democratic engineers led by Boicu, Aman and Jianu decided to increase production by 70%."

²⁹² ANR, UDR, 31/1945, pp. 26-28, 36; ANR, UDR, 33/1943, p. 75. Workers gained among other benefits an Easter bonus equaling one monthly salary and a similar bonus for Christmas.

company records which showed coal extraction going up from 420/450 tons per day in March to 500 at the end of April.²⁹³

By July 1945, the tables had dramatically turned. Not only did production drop to a mere 300 tons/day, possibly the lowest point after the Great Depression, but the rumor of Poboran's arrest by the secret police revealed a deeply divided mining community or, as one newspaper article put it, a "crisis of management".²⁹⁴ Dispatched to Anina to inquire whether Poboran was removed with "the agreement of the majority of workers", one CGM representative, faced with overwhelming evidence, decided the purge had been legitimate. What counted as evidence in this case was a set of written confessions produced by workers about their experience under the occupation, all unfavorable to Poboran. Likewise, over 50 miners working under Aman's direct supervision at pit No. 2 put forward a collective letter of support for engineer Boicu. The plummeting of production, however, could not be entirely attributed to the change of management and the squirm of loyalties that ensued in the wake of the purge.²⁹⁵ As local communist party boss Raica explained, the mines had been confronted with a severe shortage of labour power:

²⁹³ ANR, UDR, 1251/1943, p. 28.

²⁹⁴ "Soluționarea crizei de Direcție de la minele Anina", *Luptătorul Bănățan*, II, No. 258, July 18 1945. Between 1928 and 1932 coal extraction plummeted by an estimated 80%; it recovered during the armament boom of the late 1930s, peaked under the war economy and dropped again after May 1945; see the figures in C. Feneșan *et alli*, *Din istoria cărbunelui. Anina 200* (Reșița: Muzeul de istorie al Județului Caraș-Severin, 1991), 113-117.

²⁹⁵ Poboran was arrested in late July 1945, imprisoned in Bucharest for a couple of weeks and then placed under house arrest. Following endless petitions from UDR's management, family members and groups of workers, he resumed his position as technical advisor of UDR's mining division in July 1946. ANR, UDR, 134/1944, p. 34. One such petition signed by a group of miners explained the purge through "personal hatred" between engineer Aman and Poboran and argued the latter "spoke kindly to workers", "built shower rooms, dispensaries, houses for workers and a butcher's shop" and concluded as follows: "we don't find him guilty, we saw him as a good Romanian; he always promoted Romanian supervisors, never Germans; this does not make him a Hitlerite, does it?", ANR, UDR, 189/1946, p. 1. Between 1948 and mid-1960s Poboran served as dean of the newly founded Coalmining Institute in the town of Petroșani.

After the war ended a good number of our men just left. Many others took holidays to harvest their crops, and we very well understand that each miner needs a holiday to get things done back home. In order to replace them, we were promised one thousand ethnic Germans from among those locals who departed with the Nazi troops and have now returned.²⁹⁶

The influx of forced labour might have indeed compensated for the temporary lack of sufficient workers, but it could do little to stave off the other burning problem the Anina mines were facing during the summer of 1945, namely the propensity of the remaining miners to constantly ask for higher wages and the always present prospect of their mounting a strike in order to obtain them.²⁹⁷ The same propensity was noticeable among Reșița's metalworkers too, but there communist union leaders could at least appeal to bombastic rhetoric, blaming "management's machinations", pointing out "who is really guilty" and explaining "why it is not fair to strike."²⁹⁸ By contrast, in Anina such justifications were not readily available. Here miners had developed a certain sense of entitlement vis-à-vis the new director, as they were repeatedly reminded engineer Boicu was appointed by workers themselves.²⁹⁹ Moreover, as the gendarmerie noted in July 1945 "the remaining workers are unhappy with the 150 union delegates who do not work but still get their full pay."³⁰⁰ The figure might have been well exaggerated but the discontent was real enough:

²⁹⁶ "Viața și lupta minerilor din Anina", *Luptătorul Bănățan*, II, No. 266, July 28 1945.

²⁹⁷ ANCS, PMR Caraș, 17/1945, p. 2-5.

²⁹⁸ ANCS, PMR Caraș, 2/1945, p. 2.

²⁹⁹ In April 1945 some miners seized Boicu's truck and used it for their own purpose; ANR, UDR, 134/1944, p. 12. This sense of entitlement was prone to cause disappointment because, as one labour inspector who visited the mines noted: "after the change of management, workers' state of mind (*situația morală*) improved [...] they started to formulate so many demands and quickly understood this improvement was a temporary sentiment, with no long-term consequence." It could also cause anger and unrest, as showed below. As for Poboran's removal, the labour inspector concluded on a sensible tone: "This was the fatal case of a boss ruling in a moment of social turmoil." in ANR, UDR, 200/1946, p. 57.

³⁰⁰ ANCS, Legiunea de Jandarmi Caraș, 3/1945, p. 40.

between July and early October 1945 miners attempted to organize strikes on five separate occasions. On the first such occasion, it was the local shopkeeper (*comerciant cu prăvălie*) and former mayor of Anina who was accused of encouraging workers to ask for higher wages:

[H]e did a number of things which go against union discipline; he argued for a wage increase and he also argued against the government, telling workers that goods do exist [on the market] and that, provided he gets the necessary papers, he can acquire them. He made it sound so that the government does not provide food and clothes to the workers. He managed to agitate the miners from pit No. 5 to such an extent they now speak of striking, which is completely forbidden now that we have our own government.³⁰¹

On another occasion, a union delegate stormed into management's office and, after asking to see the collective labour contract, complained about low wages and subsequently threatened to organize a strike, a gesture that earned him the reputation of being a "strike agitator".³⁰² Finally, on October 2 1945 miners called for a strike after a number of days during which they openly complained of being unable to survive on merely 12 kilos of corn flour and 500 grams of pork fat a month.³⁰³ Even though it was quickly defused by Boico, this last strike attempt was markedly different from previous events: this time around miners were demanding neither higher wages, nor were they disobeying union regulations; rather they simply wanted for the "winter aid" (*ajutorul de iarnă*) to be paid immediately. In so doing, workers were claiming what had already been promised, as reported in late September by *Scânteia* - the communist party's national daily - which read: "CGM insists all unions have the duty to instruct employees to demand the 'winter aid' by

³⁰¹ ANCS, PMR Caraş, 8/1945, p. 20. The shopkeeper was subsequently exposed for having beaten up women and for having collaborated with the Germans.

³⁰² IBIDEM, p. 77.

³⁰³ ANCS, Legiunea de Jandarmi Caraş, 3/1945, p. 70.

October 1; where they will be met with refusal by factory owners, unions should struggle in a just way for this right to be upheld.”³⁰⁴

The so-called “winter aid” was arguably the first major policy proposal put forward by CGM to address its contradictory insertion into the postwar field of labour relations: a national confederation of local and branch unions building itself up from scratch as a satellite of the governing Left Coalition while militating against wage increases and suppressing all conflicts between employers and employees. To add insult to injury, CGM pursued a virulent press campaign labeling “reactionary” and “saboteur” any factory owner or manager unwilling to withstand workers’ pressure for higher wages. Conversely, workers were instructed to “reject all wage bonuses offered by employers” in addition to those already granted by law in December 1944.³⁰⁵ In its commitment to forestall inflation by upholding price controls for industrial commodities and a general freeze of industrial wages, the Groza Cabinet called upon CGM to “build a wall around the new government”.³⁰⁶ This martial jargon was replicated by communist union leaders as well, one of whom explained in June 1945 that CGM considers workers “an army entrusted to accomplish the hard task of reconstruction”.³⁰⁷ These words bespeak of a wider containment strategy of industrial conflict in which CGM was assigned the role of patrolling into peacetime the stalemate between state, labour and capital reached during the war, at the risk of abandoning customary union prerogatives and alienating traditional working-class

³⁰⁴ “Pentru ajutorul de iarnă”, *Scântea*, III, No. 333, September 22 1945. The decision to implement the “winter aid” was first made public on September 17 in CGM’s official newspaper *Viața sindicală*.

³⁰⁵ “Legile economice”, *Scântea* I, No. 22, May 20 1945.

³⁰⁶ *Scântea*, II, No. 185, April 1, 1945.

³⁰⁷ ANR, MM, 1074/1945, p. 5.

constituencies.³⁰⁸ In this context, the “winter aid” might be seen as a timid concession to workers and a modest, an experimental fixed indexing mechanism sidestepping of the strict governmental anti-inflationary agenda: companies were now required to pay an additional wage bonus, the equivalent of a monthly salary, to all employees irrespective of family standing, workload or length in service which would allow workers in principle to get through the winter season.³⁰⁹ The policy was predictably met with protest by employers across the country and triggered an upsurge of workplace militancy during the whole month of October 1945. It is to this wave of unrest that I now turn by way of examining the strike that would earn engineer Constantin Aman, half a century later, the misleading epithet of “populism”.

The Question of the *Porte-Parole*

CGM’s unexpected decision to force the payment of an additional monthly wage under the name of “winter aid” caused a lot of confusion. UDR’s management initially argued the decision went against the law and claimed it fell only within the province of the General Commissariat for Prices to legislate additional wage increases.³¹⁰ This reasoning was legally sound but failed to appreciate the impact the decision would have on ordinary workers, many of whom were now

³⁰⁸ In the mining region of the Jiu Valley, for instance, local unions stopped organizing meetings in which workers’ demands were supposed to be discussed by July 1945, ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 61/1945, p. 24. This transformation of the trade-union movement during the better half of 1945 was later applauded in partisan historiography as proof of the willingness of the “masses” to “sacrifice” themselves in the name of “reconstruction”; the *locus classicus* is Trofin Hăgan, *Sindicatelor unite din România: 1944-1947* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1968). Covering Northern Transylvania and written from the standpoint of the communist party, Hăgan’s book remains the standard work on the topic, mostly because the author had access to currently lost trade-union archives. Hăgan was rightly criticized by another party historian for neglecting, among others, workers’ involvement in the purges; see Ioan Chiper’s review in *Studii. Revistă de Istorie*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 1969, 167-168.

³⁰⁹ “Ajutorul de iarnă este un drept al muncitorilor”, *Scânteia*, III, No. 340, September 30 1945.

³¹⁰ ANR, UDR, 93/1944, p. 33.

impatiently awaiting the promised money. Moreover, UDR invoked the mediation of the Arbitrage Commission, claiming this extra payment was already inscribed into the collective labour contract as a Christmas bonus and neither workers nor CGM had any right to ask for more. Even though the Ministry of Labour ruled in favor of the workers, UDR kept refusing to pay the “winter aid”.³¹¹ The tug-of-war carried out by UDR’s management not only postponed the delivery of the “winter aid” well beyond the deadline set by CGM but also embarrassed local union leaders in Reșița. On October 6 1945 one union representative already noted with some alarm that the trade-union was placed in a “compromising position before the wage-earners” which could lead to “more or less violent, spontaneous outbursts with severe consequences, just like it happened in the past when the masses were discontent.”³¹² What the “past” referred to in this particular sentence was made explicit on October 24 when union leaders met to discuss UDR’s last-minute proposal to pay the “winter aid” in two installments. Union leaders decided against the installments and pushed for the entire sum to be given to workers by November 1 1945. The gathering concluded with a warning to management: “workers in Reșița want to remind these saboteurs of a single name: Staricu!”³¹³ There could be no clearer allusion to the purge of January 1945.³¹⁴

Many other industrial communities across the country found such words of anger ineffective. In the Jiu Valley mining region, for example, disgruntled workers employed the term “saboteur” for a director unable to pay the “winter aid”, but they also attempted to arrest him and

³¹¹ For a taste of these negotiations, replete with threats, refusals and legal arguments see ANR, DGP, 42/1943, pp. 273-286.

³¹² ANCS, PMR Caraș, 31/1945, p. 13.

³¹³ IBIDEM, p. 9. The meeting took place one day after an aborted strike attempt in one section of the steel mill, ANCS, UDR Caraș, 11/1945, p. 1.

³¹⁴ For a detailed discussion of this purge, see Chapter I above.

ended up sequestering the man in his own house.³¹⁵ Closer to home, on October 17 the director of one of UDR's smaller coalmines - Sinersig - was physically abused and sequestered by three miners claiming they were communists and could therefore run the mine all by themselves.³¹⁶ Little did these poor, possibly inebriated workers know their irreverence to authority and jejune ambitions to self-management were exactly what leaders of the communist party deplored most. In late September 1945 party boss Chivu Stoica furiously explained that workers in the provinces misunderstood the party line, got too involved in union politics and in some places even went on to "sequester the owner and force him to pay immediately" the "winter aid".³¹⁷ This was a serious misunderstanding that stemmed, according to party boss and sociologist Miron Constantinescu, from the failure of the rank-and-file to acknowledge the switch in party tactics that occurred after the appointment of the Groza government. In this new political conjuncture, communists were no longer allowed to commit "leftist excesses" but were rather required to back up the government and in so doing to support "the capitalists". Confronted with puzzled party members and befuddled union leaders, Constantinescu was adamant in defending this position:

They [i.e. the capitalists] have to earn, otherwise we cannot count on them. This is the basic law of capitalism - profit. Within the prevailing conditions, we have to give them the opportunity to invest and to earn. They cannot simply invest for the sake of it and the sacrifice of the people.³¹⁸

Such tactical considerations travelled slowly and, even when they did reach the rank-and-file in the provinces, were very likely to fall on deaf ears. This was certainly the case in Anina.

³¹⁵ ANR, MM, 1042/1945, p. 734. In the mining town of Petrila dynamite was used to blow up the house of an allegedly hostile engineer.

³¹⁶ ANR, UDR, 252/1946, p. 1; also ANR, UDR, 151/1945, pp. 39-50.

³¹⁷ ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 46/1945, p. 4.

³¹⁸ ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 65/1945, p. 48.

Here, the party constituency had a much more personal, nay popular interpretation of “communism” and the duties of membership. One CGM delegate who visited the mining settlement in October 1945 noted local communists were highly interested in moving into the abandoned houses left behind by the dislocated ethnically German population. They were also showing eagerness to monopolize all union positions and successfully managed to force the resignation of the local gendarmerie officer-in-chief.³¹⁹ Matters of doctrine were obviously not totally ignored, but out of the 384 registered party members only 18 were regularly attending the weekly lectures on “Class and Class Consciousness” delivered by engineer Constantin Aman.³²⁰ When Aman was out of town, as it happened for one week in October, schooling was cancelled because nobody felt prepared to broach such an esoteric topic. Doctrinal teaching and party tactics, however, were far from convergent. This was the great lesson Constantin Aman along with some of the miners would learn in the aftermath of the strike, much to their surprise.

“Winter aid” money made it to Anina on October 27 1945. UDR’s accounting office in Reșița, knowing the difficult state of the road that linked the two localities, decided to send all the cash in one transport.³²¹ This amount of money would then be split in two installments, the first of which had to be allotted before November 1, the second only after November 15. The reason behind this method of payment was straightforward enough: paid by the hour (or more precisely by the number of “shifts” they put it) miners would customarily take a few days off after receiving similar wage bonuses in order to buy up provisions or simply carry the money back home to their

³¹⁹ ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 96/1945, p. 27.

³²⁰ ANCS, PMR Caraș, 24/1945, p. 3-5. By contrast, the local trade-union boasted 2425 members in October 1945, out of which 260 were women.

³²¹ ANR, UDR, 133/1945, pp. 26-39. The distance between the two localities was about 35 kilometers of rough country road.

needy families. To avoid a sudden drop in manpower, UDR's management understandably opted to divide the "winter aid", but since the whole amount was already in Anina, the final decision resided now with the local director. Well aware of this situation, on October 30 1945 in the afternoon the vast majority of the miners at the King Ferdinand pit went on strike. In a couple of hours, the total number of strikers reached 2070 strong. What they demanded was for the "winter aid" to be paid *in toto* on

the spot. Their request

was equally

straightforward: prices

for basic commodities,

mostly food items such

as wheat, corn and pork

fat, would likely spiral

upwards as the winter

season set in. The two

installments policy,

therefore, had to be overturned for miners to be able to make good use of the money at peasant markets.



The central square in Anina during an early twentieth century strike; Source: Colecția Cristian-Liviu Mosoroceanu

Engineer Aman learned about the strike on the very same day during a regular communist party meeting with some his subordinate miners. He was arguably the last of the engineers to do so, and as he arrived to the King Ferdinand pit to "break the strike" there was hardly anybody left there; miners were either home or gathered in the central square. By that point in time, a whole host of engineers headed by Boicu himself had tried and failed to persuade the strikers to resume

work. Many of these engineers appealed to the commonsense arguments, calling on miners to give up their protest because they hurt the company, the government, the country and finally themselves. Strikers replied on many voices with one word and one word only: “Money!” Nothing could seemingly deter the miners, not even the reference to the old-age custom of allowing some workers to enter the underground and monitor the functioning of the water pumps - possibly a tacit agreement that applied between striking workers and management in the past. When engineer Rădulescu raised this issue and offered himself for the task, miners were “impressed”, took a moment of silence and finally accepted the proposal grudgingly.³²² Engineer Aman met some miners late in the night and attempted once again to discourage them to continue: “they approved my opinions, but when it came down to it (*dar când era la adicătealea*), they refused to resume work.”³²³ The strike went on for another day.

On October 31 1945, miners were promised 90% of the “winter aid” by none other than Iosif Mustețiu, the leader of Reșița’s trade-union, who had hurriedly arrived in Anina during the early morning hours to disperse the strike. In rejecting this last offer, miners turned to matters of organization in a renewed effort to entirely paralyze the mining activity. On the previous day, a good portion of the roughly 200 ethnic German forced laborers was used to keep the mines running.³²⁴ Moreover, many miners under Aman’s supervision at pit No. 2 refused to join the strike and continued to work unabated. They were soon singled out as scabs, strikebreakers who needed to be punished for their lack of solidarity and open defiance of majority opinion.³²⁵ To be fair,

³²² IBIDEM, p. 46.

³²³ ANCS, PMR Caraș, 8/1945, p. 2.

³²⁴ ANCS, PMR Caraș, 31/1945, p. 7. Between July and October 1945, the Anina mines received over 800 forced workers of German origin, all of them Romanian citizens that escaped deportation to the Soviet Union in January 1945. By October 1945, the mines retained a contingent of 174 men and 36 women.

³²⁵ ANR, MM, 759/1945, 37.

miners at pit No. 2 did attempt to refuse work during the night and morning shifts on October 31, no doubt out of fear for reprisals from their peers, but they were convinced by Aman to enter the underground “on his own responsibility”. It did not take long for the strikers to make an appearance armed with “axes and cudgels”, take out the scabs by their moustaches (*trași de mustață*) and threaten to kill every single one if they did not stop working. Physical violence, however, was kept to a minimum due to Aman’s energetic intervention which avoided a massive brawl: “in one of my speeches I told them that if they don’t want to do it for the government, for UDR, for the trade-union, then they should do it for me and get back to work.”³²⁶ The appeal to trust and personal loyalty bounced back forcefully against Aman’s best intentions as strikers immediately asked the engineer to accompany them to the central square and confided in him their plan to shut down the electrical power plant and remove engineer Leonida Boicu from his position of acting boss of the Anina mines.³²⁷ Workers explained to Aman they no longer needed union delegates - “drunkards constantly asking for money” - or the trade-union itself, which had to be abolished together with the monthly union fee.³²⁸ On their way to the central square, strikers shouted: “Long live our new director, engineer Aman!”³²⁹

³²⁶ ANCS, PMR Caraș, 8/1945, p. 4.

³²⁷ The electrical power plant was a nodal point on UDR’s integrated production chain. As anthropologist Jonathan Parry noted with reference to a strike at the Bhilai Steel Plant in India “[...] strikers invaded the power plant and forced its shutdown. Power is a strategic target. Bhilai is an integrated plant: if production is disrupted at some point in the cycle, the whole plant grinds to a halt and major items of capital investment - like blast furnaces - are at serious risk.”, “‘Sociological Marxism’ in Central India. Polanyi, Gramsci, and the Case of the Unions”, in Chris Hann and Keith Hart (eds.) *Market and Society. The Great Transformation Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 188.

³²⁸ This anti-union stance makes the strike in Anina a wildcat strike. The question here is not whether it was planned or spontaneous, but rather whether it was carried out outside of the trade-union and without the involvement of consecrated union officials; Alvin W. Gouldner, *Wildcat Strike. A Study in Worker-Management Relationships* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 92-95. On this definition, all strikes of the postwar period were wildcat strikes.

³²⁹ ANCS, PMR Caraș, 8/1945, p. 4.

This eerily scene tragically reenacted miners' farcical involvement in the purging of Poboran in early April 1945. Now, however, there were over 2000 of them rather than merely 100 who wanted to appoint their own director by force of numbers, vox populi and majority will. Engineer Aman was subsequently asked to call the central management in Reșița, pass on their demands and start negotiations over the phone with one of UDR's bosses - Alexandru Vellan - for the payment of the "winter aid" in full. For a couple of hours, then, engineer Aman behaved as the strikers' legitimate representative: he felt deeply offended by the negative reply he got from Vellan and flattered by the confidence miners displayed towards him. Unsurprisingly, he also felt he could dominate the workers: "I was among them all the time; I was the one who controlled (*stăpâneam*) them; I was the one whom they blindly followed. I knew their psyche; I had them eating from the palm of my hand."³³⁰ This sense of mastery was reinforced by the strikers' blunt refusal to speak to anyone else: they brutally silenced Mustețiu, booed other engineers, ignored one labour inspector, disregarded local union leaders and bullied one UDR spokesperson. When late on October 31 the gendarmerie aided by local communists arrested 14 workers, it was the same sense of mastery over the striking miners that pushed Aman to militate for their release in order to avoid bloodshed. He argued the arrest was likely to prompt an attack on the gendarmerie office by the infuriated workers, followed by a manhunt of the communists because workers were punished by their "vanguard" and "will never forget this insult".³³¹ On the next morning engineer Aman brought them food, again with the aim to avoid further violence and to show to the rest of the workers that the arrested were taken care of.

³³⁰ IBIDEM.

³³¹ IBIDEM.

By November 1 1945 the strike was over. Repression softened the strikers and made them reconsider the offer to have 90% of the “winter aid” paid on the spot. Investigations followed: no less than 50 workers were fined for insubordination; another 26 were fired for instigating the strike and so too was Constantin Aman for his “attitude during the strike, which constitute a serious breach of job obligations and a total disregard of trade-union authority.”³³² The engineer saw himself differently and could hardly accept this verdict: “as a communist party member I was glad to see workers in Anina begin to develop a modicum of class consciousness. They start to ask for their rights. This means they now realize they can contribute to civilization and humanity.”³³³ For local communist party boss Anton Raica, the young engineer contributed to the strike not only a rather significant sum of money for food, but also an unnerving sense of manly pride: “Aman always bragged about fearing no one because miners would never hurt him.”³³⁴ What engineer Aman brought to the strike, then, was respect and respectability, both rooted in a culture of manhood specific to mining communities around the world.³³⁵ It may be instructive here to crop out the portrait of an esteemed engineer from Virgil Birou’s masterpiece *Lume fără cer*, a novel set in Anina during the First World War. The novel excels in its depiction of masculinity: daily brawls, speaking back to foremen, violence towards bosses mixed with heavy drinking, swear words galore, acts of rape and domestic violence, the valuing of physical strength, hard work, and skill; dignity before death by mining accidents and the pride of facing risks in the underground.

³³² ANR, UDR, 133/1945, p. 61.

³³³ ANCS, PMR Caraș, 8/1945, p. 4

³³⁴ IBIDEM, p. 1.

³³⁵ For more on the masculine work culture of miners, see Thomas Miller Klubock, *Contested Communities: Class, Gender, and Politics in Chile’s El Teniente Copper Mine, 1904-1951* (Duke University Press, 1998), 127-154. The universalism this culture of manhood should not be underestimated. From the Bolivian tin mines to the gold mines of Nagybánya, male miners believed women entering the mines bring nothing but bad luck, a taboo worthy of structuralist anthropology.

In this context, young engineer Rot was respected because “his movements were reasoned, just like his words; never did miners hear him swear”; “his orders were clear, resembling more a kind advice, delivered with a warm voice”; “miners trusted him because whatever happened, when he descended among them, they calmed down”. Rot was a good professional, always the first to risk his life in the pit during occasional accidents, a man with an “open heart”: yet miners “did not love him, outside of work they would never get friendly, but he was seen as a man who would justly earn himself a nice future.”³³⁶

Judging by his professional credentials, wartime resistance and postwar political opinions, engineer Aman should have been able to look forward to a nice future, one shaped in equal measure by the respect he enjoyed from the miners and by his association with the communist party, the undisputed political force in Anina following the purge of Poboran. This double determination explains to a certain degree Aman’s position during the strike, to wit his ability and willingness to engage in a series of established practices in order to secure the end of the strike. Joining strikers in the central square, speaking on their behalf with management over the phone, impeding outbursts of violence, visiting the arrested bunch and buying food for them - all of these gestures seemed to Aman to prove his control over the situation and to precipitate its ending. Conversely, workers might have felt assured in having found a porte-parole for their cause, a respectable communist engineer with a noteworthy political pedigree ready to translate their grievances peacefully, one worthy even of being appointed the new director of the Anina mines if needed be. Similar fruitful mutual misunderstandings between engineers and workers formed the backbone

³³⁶ Virgil Birou, *Lume fără cer* (Timișoara: Editura Diacritic, 2011), 71-72. First published in 1947, the novel was most probably completed during the immediate postwar. Birou was himself a mining engineer, though a non-practicing one.

of striking activity in the past. Take, for instance, the story told by Carol Ardeleanu in his *Viermii pamântului* - a novel about the Anina mines first published in 1933. The plot revolves around one young engineer who ends up taking part in a violent ten-day strike not only out of his belief he could exert some control over the miners who expressed their desire to whack the director, but also because he had promised to the miners' wives to end the strike. The latter knew men were likely to die upon the intervention of the gendarmerie, and feared being widowed. Much like in October 1945, Ardeleanu makes the engineer give food to the strikers, exposes the deferent relationship between the two sides, and shows the main character finally proclaimed by the striking workers their rightful leader (*conducător*).³³⁷

What shattered Aman's "nice future" with the communist party and UDR was the subsequent reordering of these cultural practices into a consistent narrative structured by an underlining, highly individualizing plot. Investigators - an array of police officers, trade-union delegates and management representatives - opted to speak of workers as "instigators".³³⁸ So too did the communist party with reference to Aman. Many of the haphazard practices the engineer pursued in search of control were redescribed as building blocks to the edifice of personal popularity: respect appeared as prestige in need of enhancement, mastery over people as loyalty to the strikers, the avoidance of violence as "lack of principle" and opportunism. These are some of the ingredients that make up the recipe of populism, at least for contemporary sensibilities. For the

³³⁷ Carol Ardeleanu, *Viermii pamântului*, (Bucharest: Adevarul S.A., 1933), 127 *et passim*. The novel was ridiculed by literary critics for its lack of aesthetic value, and so too was Ardeleanu - a marginal leftwing writer - for his ambition to place his own picture dressed in mining clothes with his face covered in dirt on the front cover; see George Călinescu, "Carol Ardeleanu, romancier 'naturalist'", *Revista Fundațiilor Regale*, VI, No. 11, 1939, 396. However, Ardeleanu did research his novel on site, spending some time in Anina due to family connections; see George Călinescu, "Material documentar (Carol Ardeleanu)", *Studii și cercetări de istorie literară și folclor*, VIII, No. 1-2, 1959, 367-368.

³³⁸ ANR, MM, 988/1945, p. 225.

Central Party College there was little room for ambiguity or incoherence in what Aman did during the strike for at the end of the concatenation the engineer had to emerge as dishonestly on the side of the workers: “[he] achieved cheap popularity by presenting himself as a supporter of those who went on strike who also called him their director.”³³⁹ The mechanism at work here, one that would be constantly employed by the communist party in its encounter with varying cultural practices on the ground, aimed to order meaning out of what William Sewell called the “babble of cultural voices” or the “semiotic sprawl”.³⁴⁰

Sewell drew attention to the manifold ways in which large-scale cultural actors such as state institutions, political parties, churches or corporations - “even in powerful and would-be totalitarian states” - strive not for the direct imposition of cultural uniformity, but rather employ strategies of “organizing difference” whereby various cultural practices are marginalized, excluded or normalized with the goal of obtaining “a certain focus on the production and consumption of meaning.”³⁴¹ In this sense, ordering meaning implied less a conspicuous effort to impose a supposedly uniform “communist” code of conduct on the rank-and-file - an effort which would have been logistically impossible anyway in 1945 - but rather the attempt to marginalize or even criminalize industrial practices judged to be at odds with party tactics at any given point in time. Such was the case with the appointment of the director by the miners themselves: celebrated following the purge of Poboran as an achievement of the communist party, once reenacted by the miners themselves during the apex of the strike, the act was subsumed under the demeaning rubric

³³⁹ ANR, CC/PCR, Colegiul Central de Partid, A/392, p. 6.

³⁴⁰ William H. Sewell, Jr., “The Concept(s) of Culture”, in Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (eds.) *Beyond the Cultural Turn. New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 56-57.

³⁴¹ IBIDEM. Sewell’s comments can indeed be read, as he himself admits, as a down-to-earth gloss on the Gramscian notion of “hegemony”.

of “cheap popularity”. In the postwar field of labour relations, then, the codification of “communism” as a cluster of rules of identification and self-identification of the rank-and-file was premised on the redescription and reordering of myriad locally embedded cultural practices. Or to put it differently: because the meaning of “communism” was not textually given but rather socially mediated, every instance of labour unrest became a site of struggle over the politically accepted understanding of party membership. It is worth pursuing this line of reasoning a bit further into the aftermath of the strike.

Party leaders aligned the strike in Anina with three other “small strikes” that had a “rather symbolic character”.³⁴² What these events scattered across the country had in common from the standpoint of the party was the failure of ordinary communists to contain workers’ unrest. The failure was explained dialectically, as the combined outcome of two ostensibly incongruous attitudes displayed by the rank-and-file: sectarianism and leftism. The first implied their reluctance to attract new members and refusal to engage other workers; the latter signaled their willingness to get involved in open industrial conflict and mobilize workers to this purpose. Sectarianism and leftism - both terms with a venerable history in the global Bolshevik movement known as the Third International - were ideally suited to capture and release the tension accumulated within local party organizations, namely their double burden of recruiting working-class members while supporting business and repressing strikes. With the removal of engineer Aman from the local party organization, this double burden was placed squarely on the shoulders of comrade Anton Raica, the secretary of the communist party, vice-president of the local trade-union and a hardened miner. Raica behaved in an exemplary manner during the strike: not only did he avoid mingling with the

³⁴² ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 99/1945, p. 40.

strikes, but he also helped with their arrest and informed on Aman's maneuvers. Yet it took only three weeks after the end of the strike for Raica to come under the limelight for unruly commitments as a party member. In late November 1945, a delegate who stopped by in Anina remarked the situation was still "unhealthy":

Comrade Raica fell under the influence of some interested people from outside of our party; they look to use him for their own personal goals. We will have to either replace him or keep him under surveillance. And he keeps drinking, in spite of our repeated criticism.³⁴³

What falling "under the influence" meant in this mysterious observation would become clear in early January 1946 when Raica orchestrated a leaflet campaign calling for the removal of the head of the miners, engineer Boicu. Pressured by the rank-and-file and possibly by non-communist workers as well, Raica was tapping into the sense of entitlement the vast majority of miners still entertained vis-à-vis the management. He claimed Boicu was appointed director of the mines not because he was a communist as he himself believed, but rather because he was the only important engineer who expressed confidence in the triumph and legitimacy of purging Poboran. He further accused Boicu of "sabotage" and of disregarding the demands of the local trade-union. To his defense, Boicu appealed to his long-standing allegiance to the communist party, argued the local union did little to prevent the strike, complained of being exasperated by phone calls from Raica and condemned workers' habit of using the company's trucks as they pleased.³⁴⁴ By March 1946 it was obvious Raica ended up acting as a porte-parole of the workers against management

³⁴³ ANCS, PMR Caraș, 1/1945, p. 4.

³⁴⁴ ANCS, PMR Caraș, 31/1945, pp. 46-106. Trucks were used for, among other things, transporting wood stolen from UDR's forestry domains. During one such episode, workers led by Raica attacked UDR's rangers and burned their files which contained the names of the local population accused of stealing wood. ANCS, Parchetul Tribunalului Caraș, 426/1946, pp. 2-13.

thus bending the party line to the limit. In addition, he was personally involved in negotiating the comeback of the miners laid-off following the strike and never tired of accusing Boicu of sabotage.³⁴⁵ This conflict openly questioned political loyalties, union prerogatives and factory hierarchy since it took place concomitantly within the communist party, across the mining community and along UDR's chain of command. What drove and justified it was precisely the success of the purge, and the subsequent assertion that workers appointed their own director. Because the strike left this perception untouched, the repertoire of contention mobilized during the discharge of Poboran proved resilient enough to bring at loggerheads the two most prominent communists in Anina - Raica and Boicu - throughout much of 1946. To end the conflict, workers' sense of entitlement was framed by party delegates as an "abuse of libertinism" (*abuz de libertinism*), which might have denoted - *pace* the improper use of the word libertinism in this context - an abuse of liberty.³⁴⁶

The ability to decipher the meaning lodged behind such phrases takes us a step closer towards understanding what practices the communist party silenced and what those practices meant for workers in various contexts. This does not, however, quite explain why engineer Constantin Aman was expelled from the party. In order to solve this riddle, we need to return once more to the verdict delivered on him by the Central Party College. In his effort to avoid the spilling of blood after the arrest of the strikers, Aman not only visited the jailed and brought them food, but also "became an intermediary for the negotiations (*intermediar de tratative*) between the

³⁴⁵ ANR, UDR, 133/1945, pp. 8-13.

³⁴⁶ ANCS, PMR Caraş, 25/1945, p. 141. The conflict ended with the demotion of Raica and the resignation of Boicu, the latter moving to a management position with the Jiu Valley mining company in early 1947. The use of "libertinism" in this party document should not necessarily be seen just as another proof of low literacy levels among communist cadres, but rather as an expression of uneasiness before the task of naming "liberty" something which had to be repressed.

strikers and the [communist] party committee.”³⁴⁷ By assuming the position of the porte-parole in this way, the engineer involuntarily posed the fundamental political question of representation. Following Pierre Bourdieu, we may ground this question in the following antinomy: in order to constitute themselves into a group, to be visible, garner a voice and be listened to, the dominated must let themselves be dispossessed by the porte-parole, a process which is achieved through the act replete with theological niceties of delegation. The porte-parole, then, speaks for and instead of the group, a distinction blurred by the very logic of representation:

The spokesperson [porte-parole] appropriates not only the words of the group of non-professionals, that is, most of the time, its silence, but also the very power of that group, which he helps to produce by lending it a voice recognized as legitimate in the political field.³⁴⁸

Bourdieu further argued the antinomy was proper to the dominated, seldom to the dominant, with the only exception of “times of restoration which follow great crises”.³⁴⁹ It is perfectly reasonable to suppose Bourdieu might have imagined postwar France as an epoch of restoration, one in which the dominant had to openly compete for dispossession and appropriation with varying oppositional political forces emerging out of the Maquis such as the French Communist Party. Moreover, it is equally reasonable to suppose this bitter struggle left the rules of the French political field unaltered and led in the course of a decade to a thorough restoration.

³⁵⁰ Outside of these post-crisis epochs, during periods of secured legitimacy and comforting

³⁴⁷ ANR, CC/PCR, Colegiul Central de Partid, A/392, p. 7.

³⁴⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 190.

³⁴⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, “La délégation et le fétichisme politique”, *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, Vol. 52-53, 1984, 49.

³⁵⁰ This supposition speaks to the recent consensus in the historiography of postwar Western Europe, see Martin Conway, “The Rise and Fall of Western Europe’s Democratic Age, 1945-1973”, *Contemporary European History*, No. 1, 2004, 67-88. Conway argued the working-classes emerged severely weakened from the war, a fact which allowed for a swift restoration of the political order under the alliance of rural producers and middle-classes. The

stability (betokened here by the use of the word “silence”) the dominant may grant a margin of laissez-faire in matters of representation to the dominated, thus reinforcing the rules of the political field.

Transposed to postwar Eastern Europe, the antinomy reveals a patently different historical conjuncture: here national communist parties emerging out of geopolitical settlements changed the dynamic of the political field by their early control of the government without, however, having previously anchored themselves in working-class constituencies. This peculiarity of the postwar in Eastern Europe, one all the more striking in Romania, placed the antinomy firmly on the side of communist party bosses thus making the question of representation vital to the development of the communist party as simultaneously a party in power and a mass organization.³⁵¹ Who spoke for and instead of the workers was first and foremost a key issue of party-building since it was the dominant rather than simply the dominated that needed to constitute itself into a group and identify reliable spokespersons. The strike in Anina, then, was an instance of this intricate process that returned - fleetingly through the figure of Aman - the voice back to workers.

The “organizing of difference” and the “question of representation” help illuminate the development of the Romanian Communist Party in the postwar period from two congruent angles: firstly, it reveals the party as a meaning-making machine “in the making”, one which fed on and reordered existing cultural practices in a multiplicity of interconnected social spaces, from

argument originates in Martin Conway, *The Sorrows of Belgium. Liberation and Political Reconstruction, 1944-1947* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

³⁵¹ It was Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej who best formulated the antinomy of the dominant. He was often quoted for making it clear the mission of the communists is to “bridge the gap between political influence and organizational capacity; that is say to lift the party to the level of influence it already enjoyed.”; ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 105/1945, p. 3.

factories and industrial communities to villages and farms; secondly, it shows the party was liable to be dispossessed by its own rank-and-file, most commonly in episodes of labour unrest. This allows for grasping the development of the party both in its relation to the restructuring of the political field and the transformation of social life.³⁵² I shall now bring this perspective to bear on the greatest innovation in the field of postwar labour relations: the factory committee. The next section explores this pivotal institution which was supposed to streamline workers' politics at the point of production.

Part II

The Fear of the Masses

Meet Tudor Anton: this name makes an appearance in the archives of Radio Free Europe in a note headed “Communist Party: Inner Life” and based on scraps of information collected in 1951 from Romanian refugees arriving in a camp in Rome (Italy), allegedly “partly confirmed by other sources”. Let us read closely the entire note:

Tudor Anton, the president of the Labour Union of the ‘23rd August’ factory (ex-Malaxa) in Bucharest was purged in the summer of 1951. Tudor was too friendly with the workers with whom he used to mingle freely. For this overfriendliness he was accused at a union meeting of neglecting the duties entrusted to him by the Party. The accusation was made by the factory director Comrade Teodorescu who charged Tudor with being too friendly with the workers, drinking and taking motorcycle trips with them, thus wasting time that he might have used for the good of the Party. A group of workers protested against this accusation. They said

³⁵² By contrast, efforts to analyze the development of the communist party exclusively in terms of statistical categories such as “workers”, “peasants” or “intellectuals”, apart from reproducing the self-understanding of the party itself, end up proposing a history with both the people and their everyday politics left out. One such example is Cătălin Augustin Stoica, “Once Upon a Time There Was a Big Party: The Social Bases of the Romanian Communist Party (Part I)”, *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 2005, 686-716.

that if Tudor rode around on a motorcycle he was always less fortunate than those who are riding around in luxurious cars. The fact is that President Tudor Anton was dismissed from the factory even though he was a communist and had attended the Party's leaders' school for six months. As a consequence of Tudor's dismissal, Radovici Constantin of 'bourgeois' origin and protected by Tudor in the factory, was also purged. In July 1951 he was accompanied to the factory by a member of militia in order to pick up his belongings, which included a shop smock. Radovici was sent to Moldavia for a period of two months under the conditions of forced residence. In September 1951 he was officially dismissed from the factory.³⁵³

Note the involuntary tragic tone of this note: the dismissal of a highly trained communist from Bucharest's largest industrial plant could not have but involved some collateral damage, in this case the consequential purge of a "protected" yet stigmatized fellow worker holding tight to his shop smock at the hands of the police. It is as if the insertion of the "bourgeois" at the end of the story is meant to add depth and dignity to the already unfortunate fate of the union leader. Tudor Anton's circle of friends was not, as it were, limited to drinking and motorcycling proletarian lads but could very well encompass the truly *déclassée* - men such as Radovici - as long as they shared the space of the factory. This was a world turned upside down, or so it seemed from the shopfloor: a carnivalesque display of inequality whereby some rode around in luxurious cars; workers were forbidden to freely enjoy their leisure; union leaders were repressed for befriending workers; and the "bourgeois" was paying the price of class origin *malgré tout*. How, then, should we interpret the apparent contradiction between "overfriendliness", trade-union obligations and the duties placed upon communist party members?

³⁵³ "Purges of Union President in '23rd August' Factory Bucharest", 17 January 1952. HU OSA 300-1-2-14134; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: General Records: Information Items; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

We might proceed to unpack this conflictual triangle by way of retracing Tudor Anton's fragmented political biography, of which we will never know more than what has been preserved in the stream of paperwork issued by the communist party in and around Malaxa Works: a skilled coppersmith of the Locomotive section extolled for his craftsmanship in the pages of *Scânteia*, in September 1945 Tudor was one of the few secretaries of the communist party inside the plant: "devoted, determined, brave, and energetic, defined by a low political consciousness yet responsible, trustworthy; an activist, with a collectivist outlook."³⁵⁴ In October 1945 Tudor was also a delegate of the factory committee, somebody whom the party was in urgent need of unmasking and expelling. Faced with an upsurge in labour unrest, the party concluded that factory committee's delegates had lost their prestige and authority because workers understood they had no say in matters of wages and provisioning. In this context, some of the delegates became "vain" (*orgolioși*) and cut themselves off from the masses (*s-au desprins de mase*). Tudor Anton adopted the opposite attitude, one even more troublesome for the communist party: "there is an anarcho-syndicalist current of opinion in the Locomotive section where communist delegates place themselves at the forefront of the masses, lending their support to uncalculated initiatives and breaking both union and party discipline."³⁵⁵ Tudor was the "anarcho-syndicalist" delegate of the Locomotive section who rather than opting to seclude himself from the workers, identified completely with their demands.

³⁵⁴ AMB, Comitetul Municipal PCR București, Comitetul Sectorului 23 August (Malaxa) al PCR, 2/1945, p. 3. By September 1945, the communist party organization at Malaxa Works comprised 1631 members; less than 20% of the total number of employees.

³⁵⁵ AMB, Comitetul Municipal PCR București, Comitetul Sectorului 23 August (Malaxa) al PCR, 3/1945, pp. 6-7.

This was a risk inherent in the act of delegation: because the party claimed to represent the masses it opened itself to instances when the masses could represent themselves through the party. In such moments, communist delegates of the factory committee such as Tudor were forced to decide: they could either side with their workmates and be accused of “anarcho-syndicalism” or they could free themselves from ties of class and be accused of being “vain”. For instance, in February 1946, communist party members at Malaxa Works “let themselves get mobilized by the masses during an attempt to stop work. The moment they were enlightened (*lămuriri*) they adopted a just attitude and turned around the attempt to stop working into a demonstration of support for the factory committee and the Groza government.”³⁵⁶ The hijacking of factory committee’s delegates during protest outbursts was a permanent threat for the communist party. The preponderance of these actions at Malaxa Works throughout 1946 revealed how communist delegates “drink with the enemy” or how they feel “hated” (*dușmăniți*) by workmates who reproach them for having made a pact with management. The physical proximity to one’s co-workers and the duty to always confront their needs prompted violence, as was the case of comrade delegate Otto who “struggles against all the bandits [because] 240 men request his help on a daily basis. Fights break out when he is not there; he does organize meetings with these people, but it is all in vain: people are simpleminded, evil and drink. [...] [Comrade Otto] says beatings are good and that he was advised by the police to beat them up.”³⁵⁷ Such violence could not be tolerated and

³⁵⁶ AMB, Comitetul Municipal PCR București, Comitetul Sectorului 23 August (Malaxa) al PCR, 8/1945, p. 7.

³⁵⁷ IBIDEM, p. 107. “[...] was advised by the police to beat them up” should probably be understood as follows: as a member of the communist party and a delegate of the factory committee, Dumitru Otto was in the habit of hunting down fellow workers allegedly engaged in various kinds of work “on the side”: repairing objects for private customers, employing the tools of the workshop for personal gain, appropriating all sorts of used and unused materials for home use, pilfering etc. ANR, MM, 1044/1945, pp. 42-44; MM, 1033/1946, p. 450. Comrade Otto would regularly hand these workers to the district police where it is likely they were subjected to physical punishment. We might therefore suppose the police instructed Otto to beat them up on his own.

was castigated under the euphemistic label of “command methods”. In the words of one party official: “This is not why we are communists; we have forgotten the party line, we are governed by old ways, we refuse to collaborate with those at the bottom. In trade-union work we have to abolish command methods.”³⁵⁸

Drinking with your workmates, being detested by them, listening to their complaints, befriending some, beating up others - all made up the web of reciprocities in which the delegate was invariably tangled up on the shopfloor. This cluster of emotions and social relations - friendship and disgust, hatred and camaraderie - extended well beyond factory perimeters into a chain of interlocking social spaces: neighborhoods and villages, pubs and canteens, tramway stops and train stations, sport fields and church parishes. The delegate, then, took to the shopfloor a bag full of anxiety passed on by friends and foes at each and every juncture point on this chain. This anxiety of the delegate was dubbed in party reports “the fear of the masses”. Take, for example, the following description of the western city of Timișoara in March 1946:

[...] factory committees, made up of communist and social-democrat members became bureaucratized; a kind of fear of the masses trickles down from the county level party organization. Things went so far down the road that even the secretary of the Timiș-Torontal communist county organization, comrade Stanciu Emil, wants back on the production line, arguing he cannot deal any more with the problems of working for the party. This fear of the masses, this fear of the workers - who are all hot and bothered by the difficult state of the economy - is due to our lack of political work.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁸ IBIDEM, p. 101.

³⁵⁹ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 112/1946, pp. 22-23.

Or, take another party report detailing the situation in the southern Transylvanian town of Mediaș:

Workers see trade-unions as watch dogs (*cerberi*) of management. Our comrades in the unions speak a monotonous language, drafted on a single model. Everywhere we can see the same fear of the workers, who are furious because they lack all sort of things. On many occasions, our own comrades behave as if we were the ones responsible for current economic hardships. [...] The fear of masses paralyzes our initiative.³⁶⁰

The “fear of the masses” pushed many delegates back on the production line and made some of the communist rank-and-file reject positions in the factory committees or even higher up the trade-union hierarchy. In other cases, delegates bailed out by arguing they work and have no time for politics. This was Tudor Anton’s strategy as well. In early 1947 “he refused to observe the obligations he took on saying he works and has no time (with all our efforts we could not persuade him) thus showing a complete lack of discipline; he blames the party for not understanding him; we propose to replace him [...]”.³⁶¹ One year later, Tudor was no longer a delegate of the Locomotive section of Malaxa Works, but was a mere party instructor, a significantly less demanding task that allowed him to carry on with the job and keep a relatively low political profile.³⁶² It took over three years for Tudor Anton to reemerge as a representative of the workers. In March 1950 the president of the union was sacked on accusations of embezzlement.³⁶³ Several weeks later, Tudor Anton was elected president of the factory committee. The factory newspaper portrayed his orphaned childhood, his entering Malaxa Works

³⁶⁰ IBIDEM, p. 33.

³⁶¹ AMB, Comitetul Municipal PCR București, Comitetul Sectorului 23 August (Malaxa) al PCR, 11/1947, p. 1.

³⁶² AMB, Comitetul Municipal PCR București, Comitetul Sectorului 23 August (Malaxa) al PCR, 17/1948, p. 2.

³⁶³ AMB, Comitetul Municipal PCR București, Comitetul Sectorului 23 August (Malaxa) al PCR, 38/1950, p. 256.

during the economic boom of the late 1930s, and his early commitment to the communist party. In December 1950, he was also nominated to run for a seat in the local administration of a village near Bucharest.

Tudor's political career might have been cut short in the summer of 1951 as Radio Free Europe had it. Yet this was a trajectory intimately linked not merely with the communist party's "inner life" but also with the evolution of the institution of the factory committee both within Malaxa Works and within the national trade-union movement revived in the postwar period. This personal trajectory, as much as I could reconstruct it, shows the ways in which Tudor was simultaneously engaged in maneuvering the distance between himself, "the masses" and the party; abolishing it during worktime in October 1945 when he was accused of "anarcho-syndicalism"; lengthening it in 1947 when he accused the party of lacking understanding for his condition and abolishing it again in 1951 during spare time when he was accused of "overfriendliness". This play on distance allowed Tudor to cast his copper in relative tranquility and shelter himself from the combined claims put on him by his membership in the communist party and by the expectations of his workmates. It equally allowed him to take an active, though perhaps less anxious part in the activities organized by the party such as, for instance, guarding the main gates of the plant during a Labour Day parade in 1949.³⁶⁴ Tudor's constant negotiation of distance between peers and superiors in and out of the shopfloor and up and down union hierarchy; as well as his oscillating commitments between working one's copper and working one's way through the ranks of the communist party is what Alf Lüdtke called *Eigensinn*.

³⁶⁴ AMB, Comitetul Municipal PCR București, Comitetul Sectorului 23 August (Malaxa) al PCR, 29/1949, p. 80.

Defined as “the attempt to gain momentary distance from the expectations coming ‘from above’ and ‘from nearby’”, *Eigensinn* is a relational concept that cuts across homogenizing binaries (support/opposition; resistance/accommodation; solidarity/anomie) in order to reveal how everyday practices of distancing (*die Praktiken der Distanzierung*) might challenge, undermine, reproduce or consecrate patterns of domination and relations of power at the point of production and beyond.³⁶⁵ In this view, the search for distance from workmates and foremen, from managers and militants, or from the encroachment of trade-unionism and the burden of party membership might end up in acts of mobilization but might as well hinder or chip away at efforts toward collective expressions of dissent. For Lüdtkke, *Eigensinn* occurs at the interface between two entangled, mutually reinforcing historical processes: the politicization of the private and the privatization of politics. The first might be conceptualized as the expansion of organized mass politics, both at the level of the state (laws, policies, institutions etc.) and within the realm of civil society (political parties, unions, associations etc.). The latter falls within the purview of the localized, unregimented and frugal everyday and takes the form of relentless (re)appropriations of resources and opportunities made available or denied by the politicization of the private. Lüdtkke grounds this historical dialectic in an underspecified, scantily alluded to drive to secure (and boost) the efficiency (*Tauglichkeit*) of labor-power for generalized commodity production.³⁶⁶ *Eigensinn*,

³⁶⁵ Alf Lüdtkke, “Arbeit, Arbeitserfahrungen und Arbeiterpolitik. Zum Perspektivenwandel in der historischen Forschung”, in his *Eigen-Sinn. Fabrikalltag, Arbeitererfahrungen und Politik vom Kaiserreich bis in den Faschismus* (Hamburg: Ergebnisse Verlag, 1993), 377. (my translation) Parts of this essay were translated in English as Alf Lüdtkke, “Polymorphous Synchrony: German Industrial Workers and the Politics of Everyday Life”, *IRSH*, No. 38, 1993, 39-84. The English version, however, obliterates the reference to “distance”: “Eigensinn was the attempt to gain some welcome respite, at least for a few brief minutes, from unreasonable external (and shop floor) demands and pressures.”

³⁶⁶ Alf Lüdtkke, “Kolonisierung der Lebenswelten oder Geschichte als Einbahnstraße?”, *Das Argument*, vol. 140, 1983, 536-542. Note that for Lüdtkke the “everyday” is a historically specific category immanent to a commodity producing, labour-mediated social formation. It should not be confused with the “daily life” explored by the historiographies of the early modern, the medieval or the ancient. For a similar argument see Harry Harootunian, *History’s Disquiet*.

then, is not merely intended to map out disruptive practices in the social universe of industrial work - practices which might all too easily be miscataloged as *la perruque* - but rather to restore a degree of autonomy to the way in which workers make sense on their own of the multifarious, ever changing regime of compulsions they find themselves subjected to at any given time: managerial hierarchy and the price of bread, wage systems and party meetings, union fees and starving children, labour law and the cost of a tram ticket, worktime and household chores, ties of class and delegation, etc.³⁶⁷ Let us now turn to the question of the factory committee to see how workers understood this institution.

The emergence of factory committees across postwar East Central Europe was a remarkably uniform process, irrespective of these countries' trade-union traditions and their diverse experiences of the war. For each case, as the German war economy collapsed and the Wehrmacht retreated, workers were able to organize themselves at the point of production well before the constitution of trade-unions. Equally uniform was the initial reaction of the national communist parties who profited from the radicalism of the factory committees in their effort to expand their membership. It did not take long, however, for the same communist parties to launch an assault on the committees. By May 1945, Polish communists called for "the increased and strengthened authority of the director, engineer and foreman" and condemned the committees for their "anarcho-syndicalism".³⁶⁸ So too in Czechoslovakia: once the national trade-union was set

Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Question of Everyday Life (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 19, 53 *et passim*.

³⁶⁷ *La perruque*: established practices of the shopfloor through which workers' appropriate time, tools and industrial waste for profitless fun (or for the sake of it), often labeled as "theft" by those in power, be they managers, the police or latter day historians, Michel de Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien. 1. Arts de faire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 45-46.

³⁶⁸ Jaime Reynolds, "Communists, Socialists and Workers: Poland 1944-48", *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 4, 1978, 521.

up in late 1945, factory committees drew increased attention for their alleged “syndicalism”.³⁶⁹ In each of these countries, laws were passed to regulate the prerogatives of the committees in order to reestablish shopfloor hierarchy, limiting their power to matters of negotiations, banning all haphazard purges and dashing dreams of self-management, even in those enterprises abandoned by their former owners where workers kept production running on their own. While all these facts conjure a scenario of regional sameness, there were notable differences as well.

In postwar Romania, factory committees mushroomed throughout the fall of 1944 as an outcome of the wartime alliance between the communist and social-democratic parties known as *Frontul Unic Muncitoresc* or FUM (literally The Only Workers Front). From the onset, membership in the factory committee was premised on political allegiance rather than, as in Poland or Czechoslovakia, on lingering remnants of labour militancy from the interwar period. Established in April 1944, the FUM was supposed to monopolize all upcoming trade-union activity and run it on a parity principle.³⁷⁰ There were good reasons for this decision. Both parties had lost much of their working-class constituencies to native fascism during the late 1930s and both were in urgent need to reorganize themselves as mass parties from the ground up. Rebuilding the network of trade-unions and reorganizing the party required a conjoined effort, with the factory committee as the central pillar of this common platform. This strategy proved successful, at least for the first few months after the end of the war. By late 1945, one communist leader noted how the development of the trade-union movement radically changed the social basis of the party:

³⁶⁹ Karel Kovanda, “Works Councils in Czechoslovakia, 1945-47”, *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 1977, 255-269.

³⁷⁰ Ioan Chiper, “Oragnizarea comitetelor de fabrică (23 August – Octombrie 1944)”, *Studii. Revistă de istorie*, Vol. 17, No. 4, 1964, 809-834. For an informative political history of the FUM written from the standpoint of the communist party see Carol Niri, *Frontul unic muncitoresc în perioada 23 august 1944 - februarie 1948* (Bucharest: Academia de Științe Social-Politice ‘Ștefan Gheorghiu’, 1968).

“whereas in the past the vast majority of our members in Transylvania and Moldavia were non-Romanian petty bourgeois, today we have over 85% Romanian party members coming from heavy industry.”³⁷¹ This history of party enlargement was spectacular indeed, but it came at the price of *de facto* power-sharing within factories: enlargement spelled empowerment.

Much like in other East Central European countries, the Romanian trade-union law passed in late January 1945 specified that all employees could and ought to organize themselves in factory committees of no more than 30 members elected by secret ballot.³⁷² Each committee would then propose a representative for the local trade-union commission, which worked as an assembly of all the committees on a given territory. These commissions would then be affiliated with a national branch union such as the Metal-Chemical Trade-Union or the Mining Union which in turn would be controlled from above by the General Confederacy of Labour (CGM). The commanding heights on this string - from the lowest to the highest - were shared within the FUM: an equal number of communists and social-democrats would run the factory committees, the local trade-union commissions, the branch unions and finally the central leadership of CGM. What resulted was an entangled hierarchy of supervision in which it was all too common for the rank-and-file delegate to take union issues to party meetings and party problems to union gatherings. The same law

³⁷¹ ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 97/1945, p. 2.

³⁷² MO, CXIII, No. 17, January 21 1945, pp. 419-424. The Polish law is discussed by Christoph Kleßmann, “Betriebsräte, Gewerkschaften und Arbeiterselbstverwaltung in Polen (1944-1958)”, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 1981, 185-214; the Czechoslovak one by Peter Heumos, “Betriebsräte, Einheitsgewerkschaft und staatliche Unternehmensverwaltung: Anmerkungen zu einer Petition mährischer Arbeiter an die tschechoslowakische Regierung vom 8. Juni 1947”, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 1981, 215-245.

stipulated factory committees had no say in matters of administrative, technical or commercial undertakings, nor could they fire and hire on their own, all of which lay firmly with management. What they were allowed to do was to overview the “professional interests” of the workers, a vague phrase which pushed CGM to issue its own explanatory note restating the law in a comprehensible language.³⁷³ Yet it was precisely the explosive blend of party membership and union delegation that empowered the factory committees and turned them, in the derogatory words of a communist party boss, into a “master in the factory” (*stăpân în fabrică*).³⁷⁴

There was no shortage of deprecating terms to describe the power factory committees exercised within factories. Already in May 1945 - two months after the appointment of the Groza government - party boss Gheorghiu-Dej was fretting in a state of awe over the so-called



Factory Committee Meeting, Bucharest Public Transportation Company, late 1945; Source: ANR, CC/PCR, Cămară, 164/1945

“anarcho-syndicalist manifestations” of the committees: “They disregard the unions and the CGM. How should we explain that in so many factories they still push for wage increases against the line set by the Confederacy? How is it still possible they end up organizing strikes?”³⁷⁵ Nor was there a shortage of answers to this kind of puzzles. For party boss Vasile Luca, factory committees

³⁷³ For a case in point see ANR, MM, 986/1945, pp. 1-10.

³⁷⁴ ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 46/1945, p. 2.

³⁷⁵ ANR, CC/PCR, Cămară, 41/1945, p. 25.

became “surrogates of the owner” (*locțiitorii patronului*) and even “super-owners” (*supra-patroni*) because delegates hunted “fat” positions, indulged in “business” and singlehandedly managed the provisioning of factory stores and the canteens. In this context, many workers felt it was only normal to redirect their demands away from management toward the factory committee, a situation which put the party at risk. Luca noted this was a well-known set-up which communists should do well to remember: the desire to control factories happened in Germany and Austria following the First World War, a move he argued had been theorized by Karl Kautsky, and one that paved the way for fascism and Hitlerism. Linking social-democracy, the workers’ council movement in Central Europe and Nazism was an ingenious gloss on the theory of “social fascism” of the early Third International, of which Vasile Luca had been a venerable militant.³⁷⁶ This political imaginary allowed Luca to time and again make the argument that:

The origin of the conflict within factories has nothing to do with the fact that I do not love the social-democrats or that they don’t love the workers, but rather with the unhealthy struggle for positions which makes both the social-democrats and communists to take sides with one group (i.e. of workers) or with another [...] We have to take away from the factory committees the opportunity for corruption such as hiring and firing; they should not be able to do that; they should instead lead the struggle of the workers. We cannot pursue workers’ control [*control muncitoreasc*] within a capitalist society; do not forget the experience of the factory committees in Germany and Austria. These committees ended up the props the owners, and of fascism.³⁷⁷

³⁷⁶ On the original context in which the theory of “social fascism” was elaborated see Silvio Pons, *The Global Revolution. A History of International Communism, 1917-1991* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 69.

³⁷⁷ ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 113/1945, p. 24. See also IBIDEM, 94/1945, p. 21. Here Luca argued that “[w]e should not make the mistake of believing that we can grab power through the factory committees as in Austria, by replacing the owner, because this is what led to National Socialism.”

Yet neither the deployment of this rhetoric nor the enforcement of the trade-union law of late January 1945 could address what communist party bosses understood to be the unquenchable rebellious thirst of the factory committees. This problem became all the more acute by the end of the year, when the communist party had already recruited the extraordinary number of nearly 300000 members only to see itself “losing the masses”³⁷⁸ in the wake of the strike wave that unfolded throughout October.³⁷⁹ In spite of his Cominternism, Vasile Luca was not totally deprived of a modicum of commonsense. In late November 1945 he noted that “workers reason with the belly” and look up to the government to solve their most pressing needs.³⁸⁰ Workers, however, were reasoning with their senses and looked up to those in their proximity to provide them with better food at the canteen, clothes and footwear, firewood for the winter season, and even to kindle their hopes for higher wages.³⁸¹ These were the delegates of the factory committee, be they communists or social-democrats, men whom workers knew and had labored along during the war; men whom they might have befriended over drinks or accompanied on the road to the factory, and certainly men whom they could exert a certain pressure over at the risk of being punished for overstating their claims. Even the more experienced delegates, such as UDR’s long-term “man of trust” Iosif Mustețiu, spoke of “the discontent and unprecedented revolt of the workers”.³⁸²

³⁷⁸ This sentiment, already intensified by the struggles over the “winter aid” in October, was further reinforced when a great number of workers turned up for the public celebration of King Michael’s name day on November 8 1945; an event that took place in many urban centers across the country; for a conventional narrative see Petre Țurlea, *8 Noiembrie 1945* (Bucharest: Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2000).

³⁷⁹ This figure is given in ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 122/1945. It is important to note that out of these 300000 party members only 47% paid their membership fees regularly; ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 118/1945.

³⁸⁰ ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 107/1945, p. 10.

³⁸¹ For a similar argument see Jan de Graf, “More than Canteen Control: Polish and Italian Socialists Confronting their Workers, 1944-1947”, *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 59, 2014, pp. 71-98.

³⁸² ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 22/1945, p. 2.

The autonomy of the committees, then, was a consequence of the delegates succumbing to this exceptional pressure “from nearby” in two complementary ways. They could either - as was told of the Jiu Valley delegates - fail to wield “sufficient authority over the masses”³⁸³ or - as with one president of the factory committee in the town of Făgăraș - seek “to mischievously win the masses for his own personal goals”.³⁸⁴ For the leaders of the communist party it all amounted to one and the same thing, namely an open defiance of party and union directives:

[I]t goes without saying that any action - pursued consciously or unconsciously - which threatens work discipline goes against the best interest of the employees, even when one might be led to believe the action was carried out with the aim of gaining rights for the workers.³⁸⁵

Many of the actions alluded to here were indeed strikes: short-lived, localized, flimsy and arguably hopeless events that were either genuinely carried out with the support of the factory committee (hence “consciously”) or turned out rather impossible to be prevented by delegates (hence “unconsciously”). It was not necessarily the outcome of the strikes that worried most the leaders of the communist party, but rather their ability to pose and expose the antinomy of representation on the basis of which the party grew as a mass organization. This explains why both the CGM and communist party bosses denounced the factory committees for having become “political platforms” i.e. instruments in the hands of “demagogues” armed with “revolutionary phraseology” that used them as springboards for unrest:

³⁸³ ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 34/1945, p. 2. The report went on to note the local communist party organization in the Jiu Valley was left to the “locals”, who, while “devoted and zealous”, cannot control the masses because of a lack of “political judgment” (*discernământ politic*).

³⁸⁴ ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 179/1945, p. 2. This verdict is phrased identically with the one passed on engineer Constantin Aman.

³⁸⁵ “Cu prilejul alegerilor comitetelor de întreprindere. Între greșeli și înfătuiri”, *Scânteia*, III, No. 418, January 5 1946.

Where there are great difficulties and the employees are not cleared on the objective causes which produced the economic difficulties of the country, they go on strike in order to secure their demands disregarding the upper echelon of the trade-union [...] CGM has made it explicit that one cannot use the strike to pursue demands; the strike has a reactionary character now when the whole country needs to be reconstructed and all the citizens must sacrifice themselves. Given these conditions, those who want to go on strike are saboteurs of democracy and enemies of the reconstruction of the country.³⁸⁶

It was much easier when strikes or any other conflicts that involved the factory committee could be proven to have been instigated or backed up by social-democrat delegates; in such cases communist party bosses could mobilize an entire semantic arsenal centered on the notion of “reactionary”.³⁸⁷ It was not that these delegates were more militant or more prone to engage in striking activity than the communist ones, but they often found themselves pushed to the forefront of protests by workers disenchanted with the perpetual play on distance the latter were engaged in on the shopfloor. It was much more complicated when unrest was mounted or assisted by communist delegates, as it appeared to be the case with Tudor Anton at Malaxa Works in October 1945 or, in a slightly different context, with engineer Aman at the Anina mines the same month. Such party members were directly compromising both the mass organization they helped build and the meaning of communism they embodied before the workers. Confronted with an even more severe upsurge in striking activity in 1946, the communist party resorted to a more ambitious

³⁸⁶ Gheorghe Apostol, “Probleme actuale ale mișcării sindicale din România”, *Scântea*, III, No. 416, December 31 1945.

³⁸⁷ Much to his credit, Minister of Labor and social-democrat leader Lotar Rădăceanu protested against attempts to portray his rank-and-file as “reactionary” both privately - in letters addressed to communist party bosses - and publicly. For the first, see ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 154/1945. For the second, see Lotar Rădăceanu, “Probleme actuale”, *Revista Muncii*, II, No. 15, January 1947. Here Rădăceanu argues the issue of so-called “anarcho-syndicalism” was grossly exaggerated and required no special law to be contained.

containing strategy: the cultural education of the masses.³⁸⁸ What propelled this new strike wave, and further empowered the factory committees in 1946 was the adoption of another major policy coming out of CGM's headquarters shortly after the legislation of the "winter aid". By late 1945, CGM decided to make obligatory the signing of new collective labour contracts across all branches of industry, thus bringing back bargaining at the factory level. It is to the consequences of this policy that I shall now turn.

Contract and Backwardness

Writing in the 1960s, well after the completion of the Stalinist revolution in production in East Central Europe, communist party historians in Romania found CGM's decision to implement collective labour contracts in late 1945 barely comprehensible. It seemed the decision typified those mistakes "inevitable in any beginning" such as the unwelcomed promotion of "harmful egalitarianism". This catchword, often spelled "vulgar egalitarianism" or simply "egalitarianism" was the rallying cry behind Stalin's own struggle to force income inequality shortly after the NEP. In the Soviet Union during the early 1930s, the revolution in production imposed a strict hierarchy of industries, with the "leading" ones at the core (metallurgy, mining etc); a wage system based on linking growth to the quantum of the wage via premiums and bonuses and the revaluing of skill, by way of rewarding those among the workers able to sustain an ever intensified pace of work.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁸ "O furtună într-un pahar cu apă. Adevărul asupra 'grevei' de la Standard-Telefoane", *Viața sindicală*, II, No. 78, June 16, 1946.

³⁸⁹ The literature on the Stalinist revolution in production in URSS is too vast to quote. For a recent attempt to trace its impact on the Soviet periphery, see Andrew Sloyan, "The Politics of Crisis: Economy, Ethnicity, and Trotskyism in Belorussia", *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2014, 51-76. For how the "proper

This basic outline was replicated in Romania as well, but only in conjunction with the monetary reform of 1947. Contemplated from the standpoint of this great transformation, then, the collective labour contracts of 1945/1946 were indeed full of mistakes. According to this official party historiography, rather than making a hierarchy of industries, CGM's policy leveled them out so that miners, metal and oil workers ended up earning as much as workers in the light industry. Moreover, rather than revaluing skill, wage differentials were annulled within factories so that "all employees profited equally, irrespective of their skill and responsibility".³⁹⁰ Finally, alongside wage premiums, the collective labour contracts also saw the proliferation of hidden, non-monetarized forms of payment such as, for instance, the practice common to textile factories to give away a share of their products to workers (*tain*).

It certainly seemed anything but a mistake in November 1945 when CGM drafted the policy on collective contracts. On the contrary, the contracts were hailed as the first major departure from the wartime labour regime and its logic of the "wage regions" (*regiuni de salarizare*). As I showed in the previous chapter, once the General Commissariat for Prices acquired the right to centrally plan industrial wages in 1942, it proceeded to parcel out the sovereign territory into distinct "wage regions" in accordance with an equally centrally planned cost of living grafted on the rural/urban divide. The drawbacks of this legibility scheme were obvious from the outset but became even more so in early 1945 after the province of Transylvania

relationship between pay levels, qualifications, and difficulty of labour" inherited from the 1930s was challenged by Khrushchev's reforms of the late 1950s, see Kristy Ironside, "The Value of a Ruble: A Social History of Money in Postwar Soviet Russia, 1945-1964" (PhD diss. University of Chicago, 2014), 119-143.

³⁹⁰ Teofil Hăgan, "Lupta sindicatelor sub conducerea P.C.R. pentru îmbunătățirea condițiilor materiale ale oamenilor muncii (6 martie 1945 – 30 decembrie 1947)", *Acta Musei Napocensis*, Vol. II, 1965, 616. Hăgan had a poor understanding of the actual content of these collective labour contracts and their impact on industry, but the thrust of his criticism remained impeccably Stalinist.

was returned to the Romanian state. Companies set in this territory constantly lobbied the authorities in Bucharest to be upgraded to the first “wage region” because the countryside was left in tatters by plunder and forced requisitions.³⁹¹ In addition, after the war ended, it became harder to keep workers in place, particularly in the context of massive population displacements, re-settlement and de-mobilization.³⁹² Factories located in regions deemed rural were therefore severely disadvantaged. Commenting on the new contracts in early December 1945, communist party boss Chivu Stoica could not be more explicit when he noted:

Up until now, you could see that the same skilled workers employed in the same branch of industry but in different factories earned different wages even though they were equally qualified and worked equally hard. This new collective labour contract says: from Bucharest to Corabia and Iași, the turner will have the same salary, provided the length in service.³⁹³

Leveling the sovereign territory by abolishing “wage regions” was one solution, yet one which could hardly address the problems experienced by large-scale companies. Industrial mammoths such as Malaxa or UDR already paid the highest salaries but were still hemorrhaging workers by the day. An inquiry conducted by the Metal-Chemical Trade-Union in November 1945 revealed the steel mill in Reșița had lost over 20% of its workforce since the beginning of the year, of whom 1338 were highly skilled workers of German origin deported to the Soviet Union. In Bucharest the situation was less dramatic; Malaxa Works saw over 770 of its workers leave during the immediate months after Germany’s defeat but was able to find an equal number of

³⁹¹ ANR, MM, 1041/1945, p. 3.

³⁹² For the extent of these phenomena, see the exceptionally well researched study by Dumitru Șandru, *Mișcări de populație în România (1940-1948)*, (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2003). For the larger context, see Gerard Daniel Cohen, *In Wars Wake: Europe’s Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3-34.

³⁹³ ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, p. 32.

replacements, no doubt at the expense of the smaller metallurgical factories located in the capital city.³⁹⁴ These factories and many others in the cities of Arad, Braşov or Galaţi were crucial for the effort to pay reparations to the Soviet Union in line with the stipulations of article 11 of the Armistice Convention Romania agreed to in September 1944. Much of the heavy industry, therefore, was busy patching up trains, trucks and ships, or simply manufacturing a whole array of products for the Soviets, often under their direct supervision. This was an overall context in which skilled metalworkers could still opt to find better work with the national railroad company (CFR) - where their employment would be regulated by statutes rather than contracts - or moonlight with small private workshops where they could receive higher wages.³⁹⁵

To combat labour turnover, the new collective labour contract operated a subtle change in the understanding of the wage. Firstly, *pace* party historiography, it did retain and even expand a system of premiums and bonuses linked not only with performance but more importantly with seniority and job frequency. As one CGM leader explained, workers opposed this system and asked instead for the minimum wage to be increased.³⁹⁶ They knew very well that premiums and bonuses, no matter how they were to be determined, would soon be melted away by inflation. CGM feared inflation too, but feared more the possibility that higher wages would necessarily push companies to boost prices for industrial commodities. Secondly, the collective contract inaugurated in the eyes of its makers the distinction between the “economic” and the “social”

³⁹⁴ ANR, MM, 903/1945, pp. 2-30.

³⁹⁵ The Soviets complained constantly about the high wages earned by CFR employees in comparison to those given to workers of the core industries engaged in reparations; ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 81/1946, p. 2. Their solution was the leveling out of wages through premiums and bonuses. During a strike that took place in May 1946 in the port city of Galaţi on the Danube, dockworkers under Soviet supervision asked for their wages to reach the level of those paid to CFR workers; ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 37/1946, p. 12.

³⁹⁶ Emilian Angheliu, “Încheierea contractelor colective”, *Revista Muncii*, II, NO. 3-4, February 1946, 12-13.

wage. In the postwar epoch - it was argued - wages could no longer emerge out of the free competition between firms but should rather reflect the “real needs” of the workers.³⁹⁷ This type of reasoning was itself shaped by the rampant inflation of the period that plummeted real wages. What the “social” referred to was the fact that wages should include, alongside cash money, a number of subsidized benefits supported by the factories: transportation, electricity, firewood, meals at the canteen, and not least subsidized consumer items provided through factory stores (*economate*).

None of these so-called benefits were new. Previous collective contracts figured them prominently, even as recently as April 1945 when many companies in metallurgy, mining and the oil industry signed contracts with their employees.³⁹⁸ What was new was the incorporation of the benefits into the wage so that workers could ask for monetary compensation every time their employers failed to make available the prescribed range of goods. The historical outcomes of an uneven and contingent set of factors that included local varieties of paternalism, interwar labour law and the restructuring of the economy for war, in late 1945 subsidized benefits were finally redeployed as integral parts of the “social wage”.³⁹⁹ This was arguably the most practical solution, albeit a temporary one, to defend real wages and socialize the costs of the inflationary spiral.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁷ M.F. Economu, “Tentația câștigurilor ușoare”, *Finanțe și industrie*, XIII, No. 281, December 1945.

³⁹⁸ One CGM leader, for instance, thought the contracts merely legalized what many workers were already accustomed to receive, ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 10/1946, p. 17.

³⁹⁹ The argument was emphatically emphasized in party press, “Economate...și economate”, *Scântea*, XVI, No. 614, August 31 1946.

⁴⁰⁰ See also Charles S. Maier, “The Postwar Social Contract”, *International Labour and Working-Class History*, No. 50, 1996, 148-156. Maier distinguishes two periods of post-WWII Western Europe; the first (1944-1947) corresponded to a defense of real wages by comprehensive redistribution of social product (via social policy and labour militancy) against rampant inflation; the second (roughly after 1948) was characterized by attempts to reconcile labour and capital around higher productivity and the return to Taylorite pay schemes, wage differentials, etc. In Eastern Europe this second postwar period is coeval with the Stalinist revolution in production.

The wage system that emerged out of this transformation, however, was anything but transparent. In June 1946 UDR's management calculated that for every 1000 lei paid on wages, no less than 1650 lei were spent on benefits and subsequently asked for a "simpler wage system that would allow employees to clearly assess their earnings."⁴⁰¹ The same management went on to warn the Ministry of Labour about the perverse effects of another key feature of the new collective labour contracts, namely the creation of disciplinary commissions:

The sheer complexity of the wage system and the relentless surge of market prices for consumer goods created an atmosphere of unrest which did not allow for discipline to be implemented in accordance with the collective labour contracts. By appointing union delegates to disciplinary commissions in charge of punishing unruliness, the new collective labour contracts put the union leadership in a false position, at the same time representatives of the employees and people charged with punishing them.⁴⁰²

The enforcement of discipline was, of course, what CGM hoped most from the new collective labour contracts. The lack of discipline was understood in a twofold way: as labour fluctuation (high turnover coupled with skyrocketing absenteeism) and as the power of factory committees to obstruct the dictates of management, particularly in matters pertaining to the firing and hiring of personnel. To address the first, it was hoped the "social wage", bonuses tied to frequency and seniority together with the leveling of the national territory could reshape local labour markets and incentivize workers to stay put rather than quit, change or provisionally abandon their jobs. To address the second, the new collective labour contracts prescribed the formation of disciplinary commissions composed of factory committee delegates and representatives of the management. This measure was intended not necessarily to curb as much as

⁴⁰¹ ANR, UDR, 34/1946, p. 5.

⁴⁰² IBIDEM, p. 6.

to channel the power of the factory committee by having management veto any decision it deemed uncalled for. It was hoped this arrangement would make the factory committee more responsible and less prone to give in under the pressure emanating from below.⁴⁰³

If these were the hopes placed on the collective labour contracts, what then of their immediate consequences? By April 1946, the leaders of the communist party were flooded by reports about workers openly criticizing the government and agitating for strikes.⁴⁰⁴ Indeed, many workers regarded the contracts with utmost seriousness and begun, predictably, to negotiate the details of their application. In Reșița, union delegates reactivated their old practice of calculating a standard of living on their own and came up with the proposal to have their wages cover at least 3000 calories per day for every single worker irrespective of the quantum of individual wages, skills or the length in service of those concerned. To fix the standard of living in this way, they believed, gave all employees more security in the face of runaway prices to the extent the standard of living would act as an indexing mechanism.⁴⁰⁵ The proposal triggered shock and trepidation, notably for party boss Vasile Luca who took it as yet another instance of “anarcho-syndicalism”:

This anarcho-syndicalist tendency - which is a remnant of the way workers were educated during the struggle against capitalism - should be fought against in order to really increase production. [...] This is a tendency deeply entrenched in the masses, and currently reinforced by the fact they have a communist government; they would never have made similar claims against the governments run by Maniu, Brătianu or Antonescu.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰³ ANR, UDR, 239/1946, p. 411.

⁴⁰⁴ ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 77/1946, pp. 3-6.

⁴⁰⁵ ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 33/1946, pp. 15-18.

⁴⁰⁶ ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 34/1946, p. 11.

Luca was for once right. The gist of his rant correctly assessed the situation. The new collective labour contracts, much like the “winter aid” before them, were welcomed by many workers as concessions of a still largely favorable government against a background of general economic collapse. Moreover, these policies, irrespective of how they were popularized by CGM, FUM or the governing parties, were seen as open invitations for claim-making, negotiation, and struggle. Little did it matter that armies of union officials and top party representatives crisscrossed the country in an effort to persuade the rank-and-file striking was “reactionary” for strikes were bound to take place not merely when negotiations reached a dead-end but also when workers felt entitled to uphold the contract by less orthodox, even violent means. Therefore, the wave of strikes unleashed in the wake of the collective labour contracts (roughly after March 1946) had a very distinctive pattern, in spite of the panoply of local militant traditions, craft distinctions, the balance of power between social-democrats and communists, the unruliness of the factory committee or industry specific dynamics. They all referred to the details of the contracts and in many cases they all ended, as was noted of the petroleum industry north of Bucharest, with the demands formulated by workers recorded in official minutes (*procese-verbale*) signed by factory committees and management.⁴⁰⁷

Take, for instance, the wildcat strike that erupted in late May at Dermata, the country’s largest shoe manufacturing factory located in the Transylvanian city of Cluj. There, after the signing of the contract in March 1946, workers asked for the contract to be revised and their wages increased. In reply, management proposed the “winter aid” be paid well in advance in monthly

⁴⁰⁷ ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 64/1946, p. 4.

installments starting from May so that workers' wages go up over the summer period.⁴⁰⁸ The same month, over 2200 workers of the CMC armament factory in the small town of Cugir staged a lockout threatening to let no one in the factory unless the contract was observed by management. They asked for requitals in exchange for the inability of the company to supply the factory store with subsidized goods and denounced the committee for lack of support.⁴⁰⁹ Employees of the Letea paper factory in the Moldavian city of Bacău went on to negotiate their contract, but only after sequestering the manager of the company for two days in a row.⁴¹⁰ Less than 30 km away, in the small town of Buhuși, some 3900 textile workers proceeded to argue over the contract and put forward a list of claims of their own, asking to receive a share of the commodities produced, notably Soviet wool and cotton. They too sequestered the manager for a number of days, but this time around it was the communist delegates of the factory committee that led the strike.⁴¹¹ Management opposed their demands on the principle that workers would sell these commodities at higher prices and feed the black market.

Few of these strikes spilled over into the streets and even fewer turned into episodes during which whole cities were transformed into landscapes of struggle. In these rare cases, however, the role of the police proved crucial. Throughout 1945 the small Transylvanian town of Mediaș was a hotbed of radicalism. Local textile and glassworkers were singled out in top communist party

⁴⁰⁸ ANR, MM, 259/1945, p. 10. The strike is discussed in Alina-Sandra Cucu, *Planning the State: Labour and the Making of Industrial Socialism in Romania. 1944-1955* (PhD Dissertation, Central European University, 2014), pp. 81-85. Cucu, however, misreads the context of the strike by placing it against a general background of scarcity and by claiming workers "protest[ed] against a reduction of salaries". This causality, while plausible as any other natural phenomenon, ignores both what workers said and did during the strike and the conditions of possibility of the said and done, to wit the contract.

⁴⁰⁹ ANR, MM, 633/1946, pp. 1-52. Also MM, 615/1946, p. 1.

⁴¹⁰ ANR, MM, 582/1946, p. 2.

⁴¹¹ ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 112/1946, pp. 86-87 and IBIDEM, 42/1946.

meetings for repeatedly disobeying union's directives and putting pressure on factory committees.⁴¹² In February 1946 glassworkers started to negotiate the contract, complained about not receiving free tea, asked for compensatory pay, for subsidized firewood, working clothes and ended up purging a number of directors.⁴¹³ So too did the textile workers shortly thereafter only to find out the president of the factory committee had been supposedly arrested by the police. This rumor - false as it finally turned out to be - came after another incident in which the same local police arrested two workers and "following the custom in Mediaș, shamed them in the public square by beating them up."⁴¹⁴ Consequently, some 1000 workers stormed the headquarters of the police in an attempt to release the arrested, and then put a siege on the building of the trade-union commission, broke its windows and tore down a portrait of Stalin. Brawls ensued between the vastly outnumbered communists and the striking workers. The local police refused to intervene, arguably because having acquired "a bad reputé" it feared reprisals. The strike was ended when gendarmes from a nearby city were brought to Mediaș to devise lists with the leaders of the workers and arrest the so-called "hooligans". Workers were heard saying they will free them up with the help of peasants from the region.⁴¹⁵

The attack on police offices and the communists' mépris for workers of allegedly peasant origin went hand in hand in their own narratives of the strikes. For example, negotiations over the collective labour contract turned the port-city of Galați into a place where "lumpens, that is peasants from nearby areas" organized no less than four strikes in the course of two months. By

⁴¹² Glassworkers staged a strike as early as May 1945, ANR, MM, 1055/1945, p. 2. Textile workers were denounced for "doing whatever they want" in November 1945, ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 91/1945, p. 5.

⁴¹³ ANR, MM, 918/1945, p. 22.

⁴¹⁴ ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 112/1946, p. 115.

⁴¹⁵ ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 85/1946, p. 7. Two months after this strike, Mediaș's glassworkers sequestered the general manager for three days in a row during another round of negotiations over the collective labour contract.

July 1946, it was noted of the city and its surroundings that “we can generally say strikes won the right to take place and established themselves in the region” (*un fel de drept de cetățenie*). During one such event, dockworkers asked for subsidized tram tickets, turned against the CGM and openly cursed the communist party. When one of the workers was arrested and handed over to the secret police (*Siguranța*) - where it was rumored he was brutally beaten by the local communist party boss - the other workers marched on the police headquarters and attempted to blow up the building in order to force his release. Little did it matter in the heat of the battle these dockworkers were communist party members themselves:

Instigated by reactionary agents, workers disregarded the factory committee, the party organization and let themselves pulled into the strike; together with the social-democrats, some of them even became the leaders of the strike.⁴¹⁶

It was far from clear how the communist party ought to have reacted to events of such magnitude. Smaller strikes were dealt with in the classical way: expulsions from the party, layoffs and fines; this was the case of the miners in Anina in October 1945 or the shoemakers of Cluj in May 1946. Galați and Mediaș, however, were outbursts of protest of a different scale. Where the local police showed signs of reluctance, the party harked back on the strategy of mobilizing its most faithful rank-and-file to fight the strikers - a practice first experienced at Malaxa Works in February 1945 - even at the risk of being significantly outnumbered, bruised and bullied into retreat. When the rank-and-file found themselves at the forefront of the strike, as was the case in Galați, there was no one left to be mobilized. Consequently, party bosses in Bucharest sent a group of organizers to the city to go from house to house, talk to strikers' wives and “explain them,

⁴¹⁶ ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 112/1946, p. 68.

patiently, the grave mistake they were committing.”⁴¹⁷ Strike leaders, however, had to be arrested. Yet here too there were specific problems, above and beyond the propensity of workers to assault police offices and wreak havoc on the streets. It was certainly rather counterproductive to have the factory committee draw up lists of people for the police to arrest since in so doing the delegates would only further compromise themselves by ratting on their fellow workers in plain sight. Perhaps it was better, as party boss Miron Constantinescu intimated, to arrest workers during nighttime, away from the factories and without the involvement of the committees.

Sensible as this suggestion might have been, the chain of strikes the communist party was contemplating to contain revealed a much more unsettling social universe than even the ideological stricture of the Third International was ready to concede. Surveyed from the high terrain of the Central Committee in Bucharest these events exposed the sheer “backwardness” of the workers. This was no longer simply a question of “anarcho-syndicalism”, of party and union directives purposefully ignored at the factory level or of anxious communist delegates playing games of distance with their “fear of the masses”. Nor was it merely a question of “reactionaries” plotting to subvert industrial peace, harm the government and ruin the reputation of CGM. The multitude, it seemed, came in many shapes and forms. Some workers were “religious”, as Vasile Luca argued in the aftermath of a strike led by a local priest in the mining town of Petrita. Some were downright “simpleminded”, easy to manipulate and interested only in their wages, according to the same party boss following a strike in the mining settlement of Lupeni caused by the failure of the company to deliver cloth on time. Others were “lumpens” (*elemente de clasate*), workers lacking commitment to their jobs who hung around the shopfloor doing nothing but swelling the

⁴¹⁷ ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 37/1946, p. 13.

size of the “hidden unemployment” (*șomaj ascuns*). Yet others were “kulaks” (*elemente chiaburești*), workers who entered factories during the war in order to use their wages to buy up ever more land. From the standpoint of party rationality, however, the vast majority of them lacked reason and were in urgent need of ideological enlightenment (*lămurire ideologică*) for, as Gheorghiu-Dej explained during a FUM meeting in late October 1946, among workers “the confusion is so great that any instruction coming from us is overinterpreted in as many ways as possible.”⁴¹⁸

This language of backwardness was an explicit attempt to “organize difference” in Sewell’s sense: by reading cultural inferiority and political subalternity into the empirical detail the backward worker appeared to be joining strikes out of a *mêlée* of religious beliefs, questionable work ethics, shortsighted interests, naiveté, land ownership and an overall lack of political judgment. The language of backwardness was therefore a rationalized form of suspicion vis-à-vis really existing workers, an implicit social critique deployed from the entangled heights of state power and party rationality and an equally implicit indictment of the situatedness of ordinary working lives. Because the myriad conflicts structured by the collective labour contracts made visible a spectacle of social heterogeneity it also occasioned, arguably for the first time in the history of the Romanian Communist Party, the articulation of education as a cultural policy for the workers. It was not clear what this project could have entailed in 1946 or what “ideological enlightenment” referred to in that immediate context. Yet the talk about backward workers sounded strikingly familiar to labour inspectors as well as to factory managers who were already accustomed to the pedagogical ambition of the wartime dictatorship, it too premised on gardening

⁴¹⁸ ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 54/1946, p. 24.

“emotionally instable” workers into acquiescence. Let us now follow one such labour inspector in his analysis of a series of strikes that hit the gold, zinc and lead mines of Northern Transylvania.

The first strike broke out in early July, when miners of the Phoenix Company asked for compensatory payments in accordance with the prescriptions of the collective labour contract because management had failed to supply them with goods through the *economat*. It did not take long for what started out as a lockdown to erupt into an act of “open rebellion”: while some of the directors were sequestered, workers moved on to shut down the Electrical Power Plant that kept the mines running. Hurried to the scene to monitor the strike together with the local police, a sympathetic labour inspector noted these were indeed landless peasants working in the zinc and lead mines, hence totally dependent on the company for their basic survival. As the event unfolded, he went on to explain, miners proved themselves: “disorderly and threatening vis-à-vis the factory committee, the local trade-union and management. During the strike, they showed a complete lack of judgment, appointing strike committees (*comitete de grevă*) formed from chauvinistic individuals who had their own interests to organize the workers.”⁴¹⁹ In a fortnight, over 5000 workers of the nearby Minaur mines proceeded to demand compensatory pay for the total absence of subsidized goods at the company’s store. In exchange, management offered them a share of the profit, and blamed the state for the dearth of consumer items, a gesture which only pushed workers to physically assault the director. Communist delegates “did not formally agree with the strike, but neither did they do anything to stop it”, supposedly out of the belief the strike was legitimate.⁴²⁰ When brawls ensued, they chickened out and sought refuge with the local police. Here too the

⁴¹⁹ ANR, MM, 950/1946, p. 16.

⁴²⁰ ANR, CC/PCR, Organizatorică, 45/1946, p. 4.

labour inspector saw figments of “chauvinist and revisionist Hungarian agents” at work behind workers’ back.

Driven by the rules of his craft, the labour inspector felt obliged to propose an explanation of these strikes in terms of causes, of which he singled out three: economic, social and political. The first was a double-bind: in observing the collective labour contract to the letter companies would quickly run bankrupt; in disregarding it they would face a tremendous amount of unrest from their workers. The social cause amounted to nothing less than a lack of education on the part of the miners. Finally, the political cause had to do with “agitators”, which, given the patchwork ethnic landscape of the region, were painted as Hungarian revisionists. Driven by the rules of their own craft, social historians would no doubt find it easy to distill fact from fiction out of this explanation. They might well refine the “economic” cause with the help of hard data to reveal how the strikes were indeed short-lived and localized struggles over wages and benefits, emplotted in a larger scenario of sinking living standards, hyperinflation and the emergence of Soviet hegemony over East Central Europe.⁴²¹ They would then go on to dismiss the “social” cause as a form of contempt for the workers. Finally, they would follow up the list of “agitators” in law courts and party archives to decipher the meaning of “revisionism” (or “populism”) in order to rescue their figures from the enormous condescension of their contemporaries. They would have then restored a sense of historical justice to the utopian engineer of Anina, the motorcyclist coppersmith of Malaxa Works or the hungry dockworker of Galați.

⁴²¹ For this kind of argument see the exemplary analysis of strikes in postwar Czechoslovakia by Peter Heumos, “Zur industriellen Konflikt in der Tschechoslowakei, 1945-1968”, in Peter Hübner, Christoph Kleßmann, Klaus Tenfelde (eds.) *Arbeiter im Staatssozialismus. Ideologischer Anspruch und soziale Wirklichkeit* (Köln: Böhlau, 2005), 473-497.

Such an analysis, however, would be incomplete and perhaps even misguided because workers' unrest was a collective practice that produced a collective political subject: the crowd. It would be epistemologically misleading, as Dipesh Chakrabarty argued, to follow too closely the law and the police (one may add here the party archive as well) in breaking this collective subject into so many constituent individuals for it was the operation of power in the first place that "pull[ed] individuals out of the collective for the purpose of interrogation."⁴²² Framing faces, naming names, ferreting out biographical trivia, checking lists of alleged ringleaders would only obscure the evanescent assembling of the crowd and deprive it of its collective agency.⁴²³

Up until this point, I have myself engaged in an "operation of power", singling out the names of Constantin Aman and Tudor Anton respectively in order to illustrate how the Romanian Communist Party silenced certain practices and encouraged others in its pursuit of representation, numbers and industrial peace. Between 1945 and 1947, the communist party built itself from the ground up with the help of porte-paroles caught between the oscillating demands of party membership and the ever more intensified pressure coming from workmates. In telling the story of the porte-parole I have deliberately ignored the collective agency of the dominated, notably as they came together in spontaneous acts of revolt. The next section aims to shift the analysis away from the figure of the porte-parole in order to explore how the workers themselves undertook to organize difference in episodes of collective violence that openly questioned the antinomy of representation on which the communist party grew in size, all in an effort to hold accountable those

⁴²² Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Subaltern History as Political Thought", in Jacob T. Levy and Iris Marion Young (eds.) *Colonialism and Its Legacies* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2011), 214.

⁴²³ In addition, narratives that disperse the collectivity into individuals and individuals into essences are, according to Roland Barthes, a trait of "reactionary mentality", "L'usager de la grève", *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 2007 [1957]), 126.

supposed to represent them. What follows, then, is an effort to rescue the agency of the faceless, nameless and headless crowd that suddenly came together in early September 1946 inside Reșița's steel mill and in late April 1947 in the town of Arad.

Part III

Evanescent Crowds

No crowd has ever gone to jail as a crowd. That much writer Ion D. Sîrbu knew to be true. Born in 1919 in the mining settlement of Petrila to a family of miners, Sîrbu had been a communist party member in the interwar period and was teaching philosophy in 1957 when he was sent to prison following a show trial. One of the first texts Sîrbu wrote after his release in 1964 was *Frunze care ard* (Leaves that Burn); a conventional play about wartime resistance and the anti-fascism displayed by miners during a strike that took place in the Jiu Valley in 1941. Dedicated to his father, a militant miner himself, the play may indeed be interpreted as a concession to the cultural agenda of the socialist state, perhaps an understandable compromise given the author's trajectory.⁴²⁴ This reading, however, may be nuanced if we carefully attend to the preface of the play, a one-page extract from a book on the history of the Jiu Valley published in 1968 by local authorities. The extract conformed to the standards of party historiography, a mix of positivistic care for the written record and the duty to subsume all evidence to a teleological narrative of workers' struggle headed by the communists. The strike thus "expressed the determined will of the miners, led by the communists, to fight for better living conditions. The communists were the

⁴²⁴ Clara Mareș, *Zidul de sticlă. Ion D. Sîrbu în arhivele Securității* (Bucharest : Curtea Veche, 2011).

hardest hit, were arrested and sent to prison for years to come.”⁴²⁵ It was in the nature of this party historiography to abuse the textual practice of inserting quotes from source material. This was the case of the first half of the extract as well:

In minutes recorded by the authorities after they descended in the occupied pit it reads among others: “Asked to take turns when speaking in order to be understood” miners replied all at once: “We will not speak one by one, because when one of us speaks he is arrested.” Asked to go up to the surface, miners refused saying “Let us all stay here”; one said “You should stay here as well, so you could die together with us.”⁴²⁶

Pitted against the individualizing, hero driven plot of the play, Sîrbu’s strategic preface reveals one of the collective practices that constitute the crowd, namely the refusal of the parole. The collective subject thus produced is provisionally sheltered by the anonymity of the voiceful many. At the same time, the preface suggests how the everyday practice of identification works to extract out of the crowd the individual subject, to isolate a voice that could then receive a name, a date of birth, an address, a profile, a biography and the rest of the attributes that come with the privilege of being legally subjected to state sovereignty, including citizenship rights and civil duties. Once excised from the collective, the legal subject can be held responsible for his or her actions, dubbed “agitator”, carried to court, fired, fined or simply dismissed as innocent. This legal subject could then be celebrated by future historians as something of a prime-mover of historical events. This ritual of recognition is one instance of what Louis Althusser called

⁴²⁵ Ion D. Sîrbu, “Frunze care ard. Dramă în cinci tablouri”, in his *Teatru* (Craiova: Editura Scrisul Românesc, 1976), 85-155. The play was written in 1966 in Petrla. The plot revolves around a young miner and his involvement in the strike.

⁴²⁶ Quotation marks in the original.

interpellation, the process of subject formation that grounds authority in specific social settings: the street, the classroom, the home, the shopfloor or the pit.⁴²⁷

No crowd has ever gone to jail as a crowd, workers in Reșița might have thought on September 10 1946, shortly after noon, when they decided to “look after their rights in a single group” (*să-și caute drepturile în masă*). On that day, in accordance with the collective labour contract, UDR steelworkers were supposed to receive the “winter aid” in cash money. Unlike in 1945, this additional wage was now inscribed in the contract and was eagerly awaited by all. Some workers even perused the pages of *Scântea* in an attempt to find out in advance the exact amount they were to receive; and were somehow convinced they must get around 150-200000 lei. When they were handed in the pay envelopes lo and behold: the quantum of the “winter aid” was half of that amount and in many cases even less. Workers of the steel foundry section turned to their supervisor, an engineer, to claim they deserved higher pay. The engineer explained it was all a misunderstanding: what workers read in the newspaper was not the amount of the “winter aid” but the total sum companies were allowed to spend on individual workers, including wages, subsidized benefits and other payments. The engineer also took the angry workers out of the workshop, pushing them onto the street, with the hope they would soon dissipate. Rather than going home, a crowd of fifty composed of men and women marched towards management’s offices, crossing the town on foot, and gathering along over two hundred other vociferous workers.⁴²⁸ The general

⁴²⁷ Louis Althusser, *Sur la reproduction* (Paris : PUF, 1995), 226 *et passim*. Therefore, read from the standpoint of workers’ ways of circumventing interpellation (hence state authority) in moments of protest, Sîrbu’s preface gains its full meaning. This reading, however, presupposes an intimate knowledge of working-class culture. The writer, much like the workers themselves, knew very well that the “crowd” was an attempt to eschew the individualizing logic of the police and the law.

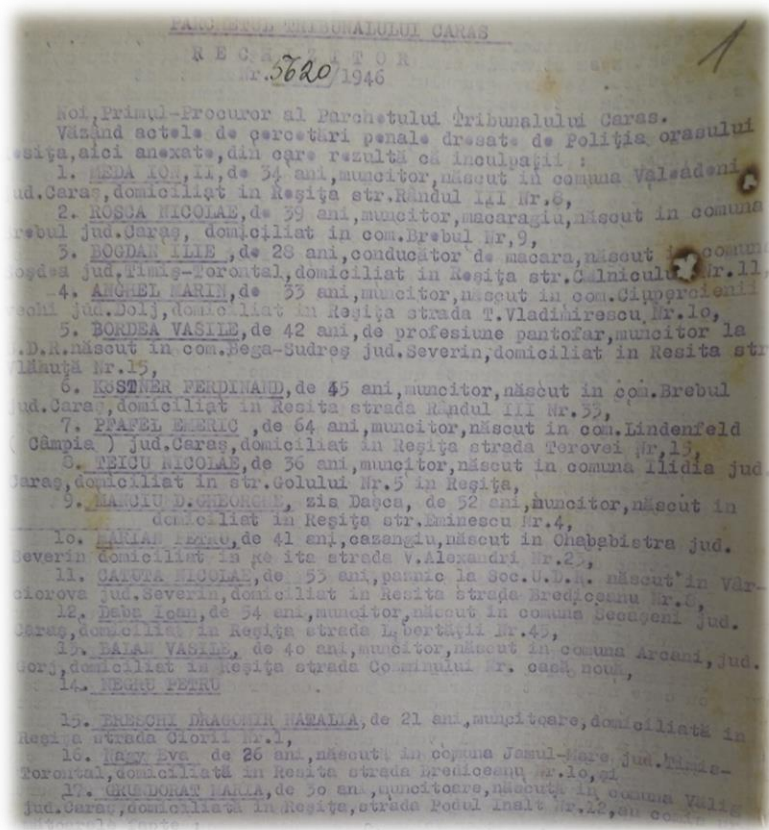
⁴²⁸ The size of the crowd was estimated to 300 by an eye witness, ANR, UDR, 93/1944, p. 44.

manager, an engineer by the name of Alexandru Vellan, was informed over the phone that a large crowd of overexcited (*surescitați*) workers was heading his way.

Crammed in an office, it took a while for the crowd to identify Vellan, the face of whom was unknown to the workers.⁴²⁹ He was seated behind a desk, a man in his late 40s, surrounded by two army officers. He was told one cannot even buy 50 kg of tomatoes (*paradise*) with “winter aid” money. Vellan waved his hand, no doubt in an attempt to make some space around him, and refused to engage the workers until the arrival of Mustețiu, the trade-union president, in order for them to talk orderly. The waving of the hand was recalled by one witness

as a “tactless” gesture, but so too was Vellan’s reliance on Mustețiu

as somebody who could buffer the tension between the two sides. In return, workers themselves waved their empty pay envelopes and asked for more money as “winter aid”. It was at this precise



List of the arrested; 15 men and 3 women; classified by age, profession, place of birth and residence; Source: ANCS, Parchetul Tribunalului Caraș, 240/1946.

⁴²⁹ The most complete report of the event is ANR, UDR, 240/1946, pp. 1-160 See also ANCS, Parchetul Tribunalului Caraș, 425/1946, pp. 1-16.

moment that a chair hit Vellan's skull, followed by innumerable blows to the body. When one of the officers tried to defend the victim, women in the crowd said they will beat him up as well, just like they did to Major Staricu. Vellan was thrown out of the office, dragged down the stairs, and nearly lost consciousness when he was finally rescued by a secretary who hid him in a locker. As punches were pouring in from everywhere, one worker was heard calling Vellan a "Bolshevik", a curse word among many others. When Mustețiu arrived at the scene he was accused of being "sold off" to management and knocked on the head with a bag. The whole event was over in a couple of hours; an ambulance rushed to the place to take Vellan to the hospital, where he lost his left eye.

During the late hours of the day, a number of workers from the steel foundry section were singled out as "agitators", arrested and locked up by the local police. It is very likely the arrested were identified by one of the section's "man of trust" who was subsequently threatened by the other workers to be burned alive in the oven for being a snitch. It was equally likely the taking into custody of the incriminated was aided by the local communist organization since two of the workers were "once" (*demult*) party members, presumably up until the day of the event when they were quickly expelled. Early next day, over sixty workers marched on the police station to free the jailed, which they succeeded in doing rather easily. Furthermore, the union put together patrols to keep under surveillance the steel foundry out of fear that there might be future attempts to organize a strike. The crowd, however, remained anonymous since it was not clear how to reconstitute it or how to break it apart into so many individuals. Vellan's office, it was reported, accommodated over forty workers. One union official suggested to lay-off all those who showed the slightest sign of support by joining in, or displayed any other consenting gesture such as booing and shouting.⁴³⁰

⁴³⁰ ANCS, Sindicatul Muncitorilor Metalurgiști din Reșița, 16/1945, p. 37.

During the following week only seventeen workers were arrested and put on trial for “rebellion against workers’ peace” (*răzvrătire împotriva liniştii muncitoreşti*).

The unexpected, violent and evanescent character of this form of protest went back, as the workers themselves pointed out, to the purge of Major Staricu and Colonel Boitan in early January 1945. Just like in Anina, the purge served as a living memory of empowerment, a constant reminder of workers’ entitlement widely used as a threat to management in moments of face-off. The body of the director was central to this repertoire of contention: it could be cornered, sequestered, punched, spit on from close range and mutilated. Vellan, however, was not the brutal and brutalizing army major of the wartime epoch; his everyday contact with ordinary workers was so limited few could indeed recognize him.⁴³¹ Moreover, Vellan skillfully maneuvered the pressures coming from the Soviets, who supervised production, the local trade union, who pushed for the contract to be applied, and the two political parties of the left - who were at war with each other over recruitment strategies.⁴³² Much like any other top manager across the industry, Vellan was repeatedly subjected to libelous campaigns in the communist press, under the accusation of not doing enough to boost production. Why would workers call him a “Bolshevik”?

The employment of the term suggests that by September 1946 workers understood they stood alone against a common front composed from the management, the local-trade union, the Soviet supervisors, the CGM, the communist party and the government. Naturally, there was strife

⁴³¹ Vellan was an oil drilling engineer involved in developing the national production of drilling equipment during the 1930s. He worked both for UDR and Malaxa Works as a subcontractor, and represented various American companies. He was appointed director of the steel mill in Reşiţa in February 1945; ANR, UDR, 282/1943, pp. 6-11 and *Stavila*, II, No. 13, February 25 1945.

⁴³² For Soviet complains see ANR, UDR, 32/1943, pp. 91-92; UDR, 189/1946, pp. 99-101. For the struggle between the communists and the social-democrats and Vellan’s attempts to calm down the two sides, see ANR, UDR, 200/1946, pp. 26-32.

and even open conflict between all of these institutions, but there was also agreement. For example, throughout the better half of 1946 they all pursued a crack-down on workers' right to holidays and medical vacations in the name of production. Workers were suspected of faking their illness or of illegally acquiring the necessary papers from the social insurance office.⁴³³ Small wonder, then, that in April 1946 the head of the local insurance office in Reșița (*Casa de Asigurări*) was found in a pool of blood following an assault by an anonymous group of workers. More importantly, they all agreed on repressing workers' attempts to openly criticize the trade-union. In April 1946, management was called upon to fire a group of "agitators" who were allegedly speaking against "the leaders of the public life and the trade-union" because union leaders argued "we were informed by our factory committees that in some sections of the plant workers are instigated to refuse to perform extra hours, to quit their jobs and to go on strike."⁴³⁴ Last but not least, there was agreement on the proper, nay "civilized" way to conduct negotiations between management and the trade-union, a legacy of UDR's variety of industrial paternalism. There were clear advantages to this local tradition of unionism, but it could also provoke occasional frustration, particularly when workers judged union leaders too inert. To call Vellan a "Bolshevik" on September 10, 1946 was to emphasize the shared assumption of this common front by linking the discontent over "winter aid" money and the rebuffing of a crowd of workers in its attempt to discuss grievances in the absence of an authorized and authoritative porte-parole to the failure of the government to deliver on its promise and the "anti-worker workerist" rhetoric of communist party bosses and CGM officials.

⁴³³ ANR, UDR, 165/1946, p. 10.

⁴³⁴ ANR, UDR, 189/1946, p. 24.

For the common front, the crowd was an expression of “anarchy” and “terrorism”. The local FUM meeting held on September 16 arrived at the conclusion that both political parties should view the event as nothing more than an act of “hooliganism” to be explained as such for the workers.⁴³⁵ One union official argued that the vast majority of workers were peasants from the region who could not be easily disciplined or influenced because they drink throughout the entire day. The Soviet supervisors called upon the trade-union and the political parties to “give another education to the workers”⁴³⁶ The engineers and the foremen of the steel foundry section spoke out on the same tone. What made the crowd assemble in anger was brushed aside completely as a form of “discontent” derived from cultural and political inferiority. These tirades, however useful for building up a discursive consensus, were not lesson to be learned. By December 1946 it became clear to party bosses in Bucharest that the problem was more complex and had to do with the inability of the trade-unions “to find the enemy” (*nu găsesc dușmanul*) since they could not criticize the government or the capitalists. This inability spelled instability, notably when trade-unions could not offer “moral satisfaction to the people”.⁴³⁷ Closer to the facts, the local communist party in Reșița saw even deeper into the problem: “you cannot lead the masses from a distance” (*masele nu se conduc de la distanță!*) was the injunction repeated in the aftermath of the event to the rank-and-file in charge of the factory committees.⁴³⁸ Distance had to be rolled back not only in meetings but also in face to face encounters with the workers if disgruntlement was to be diffused

⁴³⁵ ANCS, PMR Caraș, 17/1945, p. 21.

⁴³⁶ ANR, UDR, 240/1946, p. 94.

⁴³⁷ ANR, CC/PCR, Cancelarie, 62/1946, p. 2.

⁴³⁸ ANCS, PMR Caraș, 12/1945, p. 26.

and violence avoided in the future. Let us explore further the tension between “moral satisfaction”, *Eigensinn*, violence and the crowd.

On September 7 1946, metalworkers of Astra Arad - a large locomotive and rail car manufacturer located in the western town of Arad - called in a strike over the quantum of the “winter aid”. Unlike in Reșița, here local and regional union leaders managed to successfully contain the conflict, at the risk of being threatened with a general strike in the whole city if workers do not receive the promised money.⁴³⁹ In March 1947, following negotiation over the signing of a new collective labour contract, Astra’s metalworkers went on strike again to demand higher wages, better provisioning, and a significantly higher “expensiveness bonus”. For a moment, this strike seemed to spill over to other factories, but it too was put down rather quickly when 6 metalworkers at Astra were arrested and 18 workers of ITA - a nearby textile factory - were fired for “for boycotting the factory committee and the trade-union by spreading tendentious rumors about the labour movement and for saying they don’t need the factory store.”⁴⁴⁰ However, the hope of a town-wide, general strike in Arad was finally crushed on April 25, 1947.

On the previous day, workers at ITA had learned about their new wages set by the collective labour contract that had just been agreed upon.⁴⁴¹ Sheets of paper posted in each section of the factory informed them that they would have to work significantly more for their already

⁴³⁹ ANR, MM, 948/1946, p. 177.

⁴⁴⁰ ANR, DGP, 40/1947, p. 351.

⁴⁴¹ The best source on this event is ANR, CC/PCR, Administrativă, 36/1947, pp. 1-30. This is a detailed report authored by the chief of police in Arad one week after the end of the strike. Also useful is Gabriel Sala, “Revolta de la ITA din 1947 », *Analele Banatului*, Arheologie-Istorie, XIV, 2, 2006, 357-368. Sala’s essay is based on interviews with some of the participants, but omits important moments in the unfolding of the event (such as the beating of ITA’s general manager) and misreads the historical context in which the strike took place.

insufficient pay. After tearing down the papers, workers left home grumbling. When they returned the next day early in the morning, some of them decided to call in a work stoppage. One foreman proposed to improvise a meeting with the delegates of the factory committee, but workers bluntly refused. The arrival of one of the directors to inquire only aggravated the situation. By 8 o'clock, the factory's backyard was full of angry workers. One delegate of the factory committee tried to climb upon a box in order to speak to the crowd, but was quickly pulled down and denied the right to do so. Another delegate phoned the local trade-union commission and asked for higher ranked union representatives to rush to the factory. Yet another one sent for comrade Iosif Nedici, who was known to command some authority over the workers.

Nedici was indeed a figure of influence: a communist party member and the former president of the factory committee at ITA, he had managed to earn the trust of the workers because "everything he said could be done". Much like other delegates of the factory committee in those years, Nedici too felt the combined pressure coming from his workmates, the party and the management and sought to take distance by relocating to a less demanding position. In early 1947 he was only in charge of the factory's sports section, traveling around the region to organize events in a car he had borrowed from the factory committee. He seemed privileged, but many workers still regarded him as their leader and turned to him whenever they thought it necessary. Nedici was a rough, dirty-mouth, and "tactless" character, but was nevertheless respected. Even the general manager of the factory, a man by the name of Herzog, told the workers to take their demands to Nedici. When he arrived among the crowd, his proverbial obscenity came along as well. One young woman complained workers need bread and meat to survive, to which Nedici replied by pointing to his manly parts and inviting her to take a bite.

It was at this precise moment the crowd jumped Nedici, accusing him of getting too “fat” at the expense of the workers. And it was at this precise moment, while Nedici was sneaking away, ducking punches left and right, workers realized they had to organize a strike. Some went back in the factory to look for scabs, particularly foremen who refused to let their workers join the action. One foreman was indeed physically punished for locking the door to his workshop. Others went on a hunt for Fischer, the employee in charge of the factory store, whom they did not find. They beat up one of his subordinates instead. A group of workers marched into the office of the general manager where they wreaked havoc, kicking Herzog down the stairs and beating up just about everyone else who tried to prevent them. The vast majority of workers, however, tracked down Nedici; they visited his house, searched the cemetery and finally found him hidden in a nearby building that served as the headquarters of the local communist party organization. Nedici had taken refuge there along with other union delegates in a desperate attempt to escape the crowd and had instructed a guard to defend the building with a machine gun.

The sight of the armed guard deeply offended the workers and convinced them to put a siege to the building. One worker was heard saying they now wanted to shoot at them as it happened at Grivița back in 1933, a clear reference to a major strike of the interwar period organized by the communists in Bucharest which ended with the gendarmerie opening fire on the protesters. It did not take long for the workers to enter the building, disarm the guard and tie up Nedici. The two were then beaten with sticks and rocks, while some workers vandalized the place, broke windows, took some of the money found and brought down portraits of Stalin. When the factory’s medical doctor arrived at the scene to assist the injured, he was immediately driven away, and so too was an ambulance. When Nedici’s wife and small daughter came to the rescue, they were subjected to the same treatment, pushed aside and harassed. Shortly after noon, both Nedici

and the guard were dead, the latter stabbed repeatedly with a pocket knife. When workers realized the two stopped breathing, they proposed to make a cross out of the sticks used in the process, but gave up on the thought out of disgust.

While the headquarters of the communist party was under siege, more than 200 workers were roaming the town, going from factory to factory in search of solidarity with their strike. They thought this was the moment every worker in Arad was waiting for, particularly the metalworkers of Astra and those employed by the national railroad company (CFR), themselves engaged in a number of strikes over the previous year. They were wrong. The delegates of the factory committee at Astra blocked the entrance gates and told the strikers they would not back-up their action. This refusal did not hinder the ITA workers from going through the factory shouting they were on strike and calling for support. They even attempted to look for the general manager in order to beat him just like they did with their very own Herzog. Yet the metalworkers showed no willingness to join the strike; and so too did the railroad workers who locked themselves up in their workshops. In late afternoon on April 25, 1947, therefore, what could have been a general strike in the town of Arad, perhaps the first of its kind, ended in disappointment.

The aftermath of the strike was predictable. One police officer noted with bewilderment that on that day “at no point in time between 7 am and 4 pm, did the strikers feel the presence of state authority”. Indeed, neither the police nor the army intervened, convinced as they were that union leaders would be able to contain the unrest without gun shots. Out of the 2500 workers employed by ITA, 70 were arrested on charges of rebellion and manslaughter, the vast majority of which were communist party members.

The Violence of Industrial Peace-Making

In the realm of labour relations, between 1945 and early 1947 “communism” was an empty signifier in the banal sense that it stood for way too many things for way too many people. The term could be and was indeed filled in with contradictory content: it could inform wage demands, labour unrest, purges of managerial staff, and hopes of control by industrial workers of industrial activity; at the same time, the label “communism” was attached to attempts of silencing wage demands, suppressing strikes, reinforcing factory hierarchy and curtailing the control industrial workers hoped to exercise over their managers and union delegates. Moreover, “communism” was concomitantly an attribute of the government, a normative if elusive party identity and a popular set of expectations entertained by an army of rank-and-file which numbered little over half a million strong. Two years into the postwar period, however, the term had lost much of its semantic instability and slowly came to denote the authoritarian pursuit of industrial peace. This was a hard won peace brought about by the containment of localized, short-lived and often violent labour unrest; a phenomenon produced by the combined effort of the Romanian Communist Party to run the state, build a mass political party and manage an industry geared toward repayments to the Soviet Union, all against a general background of inflation.

In his seminal essay on the containment of the working-class in Nazi Germany, Timothy Mason tried to account for the lack of large scale, concerted collective action on the part of industrial workers during the 1930s. This absence was explained in terms of repression, neutralization and integration; mutually reinforcing yet poorly articulated policies that Mason

identified as part of the “structure of containment” erected after 1933.⁴⁴² Rather than carrying over this question to postwar Romania, this chapter sought to explain - in painstaking detail and narrative form - why myriad labour conflicts nonetheless did take place across the country’s factories and mines. In this view, the containment strategies devised by the Romanian Communist Party amounted to a piecemeal imposition of industrial peace, in most of the cases at the expense of its newly acquired, seemingly disobedient members. The containment of labour unrest, therefore, even when it was pursued through the more traditional police work, was essentially a form of party politics. Challenges to industrial peace thus derived not so much from pre-existing working-class identities or interwar traditions of unionization mobilized afresh in the postwar context, but rather from the contingencies of party-making at the factory level: purges, the emergence of factory committees, the overlapping of union and party membership and the legislation of collective labour contracts.

It was these factors that combined to produce labour unrest. The early purge of factory directors, engineers and military commanders was a springboard for careers within the party, but it was also a school of claim-making for the workers. Factory committees were the pillars of party enlargement, but they were also used by workers as launching pads for their more immediate struggles. Overlapping union and party membership brought the delegates of the factory committees under enormous pressure from above and from nearby. This pressure often erupted in strikes either with the consent of the delegates or with them as consensual victims of crowds of fellow workers. From a policy aimed at reshaping local labour markets and keeping real wages

⁴⁴² Timothy Mason, *Nazism, Fascism and the Working-Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 233-266.

afloat, the collective labour contract gave rise to unprecedented bargaining over the limits of the “social wage” and triggered waves of turmoil across industries. Communist party bosses reacted by way of trial and error: they harked back to the dusty theories of “social fascism” inherited from the Third International to describe the factory committees; endeavored to redescribe workers’ sense of entitlement as proofs of cultural inferiority and striking activity as a marker of political enmity; and they spoke about education and enlightenment because they cast the net of backwardness over an unruly multitude engaged in everyday industrial conflict.

Organizing cultural difference was reinforced by the occasional deployment of organized repression. Both the police and the gendarmerie had done an excellent job during the war in securing a peaceful homefront, arresting suspicious workers, patrolling neighborhoods and building up networks of informants in the factories. They were greatly aided by the secret police (*Siguranța*) - always on the lookout for communist agents - and by the militarization of the industry, which tightened up factory discipline. Once the war was over, however, this entire architecture of surveillance collapsed. Moreover, communist party bosses were utterly reluctant to openly use the police against the workers during much of the period to avoid being associated with state repression. Police agents themselves were very often equally reluctant to make use of violence during strikes and, following rounds of arrests, they would seldom oppose workers’ attempts to release their colleagues. Therefore, no strike was ever put down with gun fire, as had been the case during the interwar period. Many strikes ended up in mass lay-offs and expulsions from the party rather than in bloodshed. Small wonder that one historian found comparatively little

state violence in Romania between 1944 and 1947.⁴⁴³ Invisible to historical research, the everyday violence that accompanied postwar industrial peace-making was nevertheless pervasive.⁴⁴⁴

It manifested itself in various ways. The delegates of the factory committee could react violently to the many requests they received from their co-workers much like a foreman could occasionally spank an apprentice. Workers could harass the delegate in different ways, and there was a thin line between pressuring your delegate as a colleague and hitting him in the head with a bag or a stick as a foe in episodes of unrest. During strikes, it was far more common for workers to be beaten up by other workers, either in the factory or inside police headquarters. Scabs got enough of it, but so too did striking workers who were in many cases physically punished by their own representatives. Engineers' houses could be blown up with dynamite; managers could be locked in their offices for days in a row, molested and mutilated by evanescent crowds. In late November 1945, the director of Ferdinand Works - a medium-sized metal factory - was attacked by a group of women and men for failing to deliver firewood as specified by the collective labour contract: he was dragged out of his home, undressed and slapped in the open.⁴⁴⁵

It would be tempting to follow an entire tradition of research in working-class history and classify this violence as "traditional", a sort of violence allegedly tamed by modern trade-union politics whereby politically conscious workers engage in peaceful protests under the guidance of

⁴⁴³ Stefano Bottoni, "Reassessing the Communist Takeover in Romania: Violence, Institutional Continuity, and Ethnic Conflict Management", *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 24, no. 59, 2010, 61-64.

⁴⁴⁴ For a case in point see this otherwise informative article on everyday violence in late Romanian socialism, where it is noted the phenomenon was "once a relatively unimportant issue", Călin Morar-Vulcu, "Becoming Dangerous: Everyday Violence in the Industrial Milieu of Late-Socialist Romania", *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 45, No. 2, 2015, 316.

⁴⁴⁵ The event is recalled but not analyzed by Eusebiu-Marcel Narai, *Situația politică, economică și socială a județelor Caraș și Severin, August 1944-Iunie 1948* (PhD Dissertation, Babeș-Bolyai University, Vol. II, 2007), 284-386.

their legitimate leaders.⁴⁴⁶ This is an argument put forward by Andrew Port in his classical study of the upheaval that shook the GDR's Wismut uranium mines in August 1951. The unfolding of the riot, Port argues, relegates it to early modern forms of protest rather than to established patterns of union politics: "violent, localized, and more or less spontaneous, the uproar involved direct action, with women playing a loud and prominent role."⁴⁴⁷ The violence of the event, then, can be explained by the lack of "effective representation" in the GDR, where factory committees and trade-unions were indifferent to workers' claims and powerless against management. Exiled Romanian social-democrats understood in these very terms the question of the *porte-parole*. Writing from Paris, social-democrat Eftimie Gherman, a long time trade-union boss in the interwar period, reported an episode of violence that took place in Anina in late 1954. There, communist party member and manager of the steel mill in Reșița Mihai Dalea stopped by to chat with a crowd of miners gathered in the center of the town. Dalea - a native of the region - soon found himself under attack; he was spit on, cursed at and punched by miners. Hidden in the crowd, the assailants were never found. It is very likely Eftimie Gherman made up this story or collected it from misinformed hearsay, but the imagined plot is identical to the scenes of violence that populated the postwar period. Told in 1954, the story was meant to show what course of action workers could

⁴⁴⁶ For a summary of these debates, including the large literature in historical sociology on Western Europe, see Ronald Grigor Suny, "Violence and Class Consciousness in the Russian Working Class", *Slavic Review*, Vol. 41, No. 3, 1982, 436-442. For a critique of the same debates from the standpoint of Indian working-class history, see Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, "Workers, Violence and the Colonial State: Representation, Repression and Resistance", in his *Imperial Power and Popular Politics: Class, Resistance and the State in India, c. 1850-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 143-179.

⁴⁴⁷ Andrew Port, "When Workers Rumbled: The Wismut Upheaval of August 1951 in East Germany", *Social History*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 1997, 154.

hope for in a country where strikes were deemed “economic sabotage” and trade-unions, rather than voicing workers’ discontent suppressed it “in the service of state capitalism”⁴⁴⁸.

Postwar physical violence might indeed be attributed to a lack of “effective representation”, but it was in no sense of the term “traditional”. Rather, it emerged in a particular historical conjuncture in which it became possible for relations of mutual dependence, deference and hostility at the factory level to be turned into claims for rights. This was a process encouraged by the development of the communist party, the reemergence of trade-unionism and the temporary conversion of the industrial workplace into a nodal point of consumption via the collective labour contracts. Had factory committees been deprived of any bargaining power from the outset and reduced to mere sham institutions, it is doubtful their delegates could have experienced “the fear of the masses” or could have been accused of “anarcho-syndicalism”. It is equally doubtful whether men such as Mustețiu in Reșița or Nedici in Arad would have ended up at the hospital or the morgue. Had it not been for the purges of directors and engineers in 1945, it is unlikely Vellan would have lost an eye and Aman his job. Finally, had it not been for the “winter aid”, and the subsequent obligation companies acquired to provide their employees with subsidized goods at the point of production, strikes would have never taken off. This historical conjuncture, and the violence it had encapsulated, was radically transformed over the summer of 1947. The impact of this transformation is the topic of my next chapter.

⁴⁴⁸ The article was originally published in *România Muncitoare*, a newspaper Gherman edited for over two decades from Paris, and is now reprinted in Ion Apostol (ed.) *Eftimie Gherman - Treizeci de ani de exil* (Bucharest: Uranus, 2007), p. 46.

Chapter III

The Monetized Everyday (1947-1949)

Reading the Payslip

By the summer of 1949, countless moralizing images in the daily press had already portrayed assiduous workers enjoying the touch and sight of their wages being paid in fistful of cash. These cartoonish representations of the payday called attention to the rewarding gesture of holding well deserved stacks of banknotes in hard working hands, but obscured the experience of picking up the wage. In the intimacy of the cash desk, what factory



accountants distributed “How to Become a Leading Worker” Source: Scântea, XVIII, No. 1401, April 14 1949.

as wages was not simply cash money to be held in by the worker’s firm grip but rather tightly wrapped pay envelopes. In handwritten detail, the envelope displayed the number and type of wage deductions and served as a payslip on which the worker could read the quantum of the various payments subtracted as taxes. Tax withholdings, however, did not make the take-home pay. Wage deductions galore were minutely registered on the back of the envelope: “When the worker or functionary receives the envelope at the end of the month, he sees a long list of figures representing deductions. He counts, ponders and remains puzzled. Some of these deductions seem to him unjust.

He then goes to the accounting office where things are ‘clarified’ for him: a new subscription for magazine X, two tickets for the upcoming cultural event, a ticket for the next week’s ball etc.”⁴⁴⁹

The payslip was what the workers quarreled about with the accountant, discussed with their workmates and carried back home to their families together with what was left of their cash wages. The payslip, however, was more than a piece of paper crumpled in disgust only to be glimpsed at in moments of torment and bemusement. It was supposed to become the paper mirror of the worker’s effort on the shopfloor: not merely a record to be contemplated *en route* to self-achievement and better pay but also a predictable guide for organizing household spending. “Everything must be paid for in cash”⁴⁵⁰ union leader Josef Puvak informed UDR’s commuting metalworkers in March 1948. Selling on credit, however, was to be forbidden on the factory premises so that workers could no longer accumulate debts to the canteen or to the local cooperative. Once they received their wages in cash money with but two deductions for the income tax and the railway monthly ticket, Puvak remarked, workers would finally be able to see on their pay envelopes how the monetary value of overtime and production bonuses added up to their take-home pay.

Clearing the payslip of debts and burdensome deductions was one of the goals of the monetary stabilization and of the accompanying industrial policy package implemented during the long summer of 1947. These reforms aimed to reset the parameters of the “social wage” as it had been inscribed in the collective labour contracts enacted during the inflationary spiral of the first

⁴⁴⁹ “Nu rețineri abuzive, ci lămurirea și convingerea salariaților”, *Viața sindicală*, II, No. 393, December 18 1948.

⁴⁵⁰ Petru Miclăuș, “Reținerile din salariu și problema Casei de Credit. O importantă hotărâre a membrilor sindicatului Metal-Chimic din Reșița”, *Luptătorul bănățean* V, No. 1049, March 24 1948.

two postwar years. Consequently, industrial workers saw the dismantlement of the factory stores known as *economate* and their replacement with state shops and employees' cooperatives. The disentanglement of subsidized consumption from the realm of production purported to restore the financial balance of the factories which were borrowing heavily from the National Bank in order to cover the costs of the social wage. Moreover, industrial wages were to be calibrated to fixed prices for consumer goods through the priority given to the piece-rate payment system. State control over the supply of basic goods, a stable currency and wage premiums, the communist reformers believed, would stave off inflationary tendencies, abolish the "black market" and set the stage for reconstruction. The protracted reconfiguration of the social wage, however, revealed the extent to which workers' real wages were plagued by debts and deductions.

In late September 1948 a group of Bucharest workers were invited to participate in a meeting with the members of the Central Committee. The Party Secretary General asked the workers to share their practical knowledge about surviving as urban dwellers: "We want to know how you divide your budget, how you manage to get by from your wages, which are your more urgent needs. We think first and foremost about food because the moment we open our eyes we think about taking the edge off our need for food. Finally, there are other things we need, such as clothes and shoes."⁴⁵¹ The meeting soon turned into a collective payslip reading session as workers pulled out their pay envelopes and passed them around from one party leader to another. Explaining he was supposed to receive about 3000 *lei*, one weaver took out the payslip and handed it over to the Secretary General: "Now let me see, after deductions you brought home 480 *lei*,

⁴⁵¹ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămară, 37/1948, p. 11.

right? What will you do until your next pay?”⁴⁵² Wage deductions varied from case to case, some workers were still indebted to the *economate*, others pointed out the sheer amount of money retained for Greece, ARLUS, newspaper subscriptions, the canteen, firewood and the trade-union.⁴⁵³ Where suitable machines and sufficient raw materials were available, not even piece-work and overtime could compensate for these deductions. “We struggle to make day out of night and night out of day to eke out a living” one textile worker cried out. The General Secretary might have been listening in disbelief to what the workers had to say but he was curious enough to ask: “Who sits beside you when you pick up your wages to make all these deductions?”⁴⁵⁴ The question itself was perhaps rhetorical, and yet its formulation occasioned the suggestion that trade-union dues should not be subtracted from wages *ex officio*. The trade-union fee was different from the social insurance contribution, the Secretary General argued, because the latter was an obligation to the state whereas the first was simply a “matter of conscience.”

This chapter explores the remaking of the social wage in the context of the 1947 monetary stabilization and thereafter. I approach the transformation of the industrial wage relationship from three congruent angles: the reorganization of consumption, state-making and the monetarization of workers’ everyday life. In *part I* “Mastering Scarcity” I trace the ways in which the double crisis of the immediate postwar epoch - a crisis which unfolded as food scarcity against the collapse of the national currency and galloping inflation - structured urban arrangements for the provisioning of basic goods. This first part serves as a contextual pre-history of the monetary

⁴⁵² IBIDEM, p. 19.

⁴⁵³ By 1948 party activists were busily collecting money in support of the Greek Communist Party; ARLUS was a cultural organization that popularized Russian and Soviet literature; for more on the latter see Adrian Cioroianu, *Pe umerii lui Marx. O introducere în istoria comunismului românesc* (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2007), chapter 5.

⁴⁵⁴ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 37/1948, p. 14.

stabilization policies adopted in mid-1947. I pay particular attention to the question of consumption via the factory stores, and how this form of subsidizing the basic needs of industrial workers not only propelled the inflationary spiral but also pushed workers to accumulate debts, leaving the vast majority of them with little cash money on payday. In *part II* “Mastering Working-Class Traditions” I follow up this story with UDR Reșița’s metalworkers in order to reveal how the combined food and currency crisis played out at the factory level. UDR Reșița offered an ideal case to communist party bosses for appropriating the rudiments of a local working-class tradition construed around metalworkers’ long-standing habits of bargaining over the standard of living. Yet it also offered them an opportunity to formulate a sketch of the socialism to come, one in which workers privileged access to goods would be determined by productivity indexes rather than collective bargaining. In *part III* “Questions of the State” I turn to the policies of monetary stabilization enacted over the summer of 1947. Stabilization extended well beyond the mere currency conversion operations typical of postwar Europe in general into a bundle of policies designed to recommodify both industrial capital and labour.⁴⁵⁵ I understand these policies as the first major state-building episode that laid the foundation for large-scale bureaucratic structures for the regulation of labour supply and capital accumulation associated with the emerging socialist state.

Finally, in *part IV* “Wages of Peace” narrows down the analysis on the ways in which workers’ wages were monetarized. This process involved a brief experiment with employees’ cooperatives, the abolition of debts, mass savings campaigns and the extension of Taylorist

⁴⁵⁵ For the comparative analysis of currency conversions across the European continent, see the dated but still informative panorama of Fritz Grotius, “Die europäischen Geldreformen nach dem zweiten Weltkrieg”, *Weltwirtschaftliches Archiv*, Vol. 63, 1949, 106-152 and 276-325.

remuneration principles. The goals of monetarization were twofold: on the one hand, it was a way of reestablishing hierarchical wage scales after a period in which wage differentials were chipped away at by inflation, debts and subsidies; on the other hand, monetarization was a way of extracting out of the wage relationship any kind of bonuses such as the family allowance not immediately relevant to increased work performance on the shopfloor. By looking at the dynamics of the social wage between 1947 and late 1949, this chapter contributes to a history of postwar economic life that sheds a different light on the trajectory of the early socialist state in Romania.⁴⁵⁶

Part I

Mastering Scarcity

In the eyes of foreign analysts, postwar Romania was something of an anomaly among East Central European countries coming under the mantle of Soviet hegemony. One account published in May 1947 made the following case:

First of the satellites to break with the Axis, Romania was nevertheless last to hold elections; and when they were held, last November, the political succession was so heavily safeguarded that it was hardly necessary to reprint the Cabinet lists. Although the Groza Government, armed at all points with assurances of Soviet protection, has been in power for over two years, Romania today is, at one and the same time, a Communist State and a constitutional Monarchy, seeking capitalist aid for her Russian-controlled economy. These anomalies can only be explained by a review of the circumstances in which the present regime gained, and has since retained, power.⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁶ For the history of economic life see the programmatic text by William H. Sewell, Jr., “A Strange Career: The Historical Study of Economic Life”, *History and Theory*, Vol. 49, 2010, 146-166.

⁴⁵⁷ U.B., “The Rumanian Political Scene”, *The World Today*, Vol. 3, No. 5, 1947, 210.

Contemporary historians share with these early postwar diagnoses the penchant to describe and explain how the Groza Government - a cabinet run by an outspoken Stalinist party - seized, nurtured, and consolidated its rule (or “power”) against fierce opposition from “traditional” political parties. Soviet patronage, open repression, pervasive censorship and rigged elections are all factors considered to have facilitated the “takeover”, a scenario reproduced with small case-by-case variations across East Central Europe. Yet much of the historiography produced over the last decades never seriously interrogated this seeming anomaly that was so conspicuous in 1947. For why, indeed, would a state governed at one and the same time by a communist party and a king seek “capitalist aid” for an economy allegedly controlled by the Soviet Union? To begin to answer this question we need to grasp the postwar as a period of economic reconstruction rather than simply as one of elite power grabbing and attend to the manifold crisis that pervaded and reshaped social life on the ruins of the Second World War. This shift of perspective would cast light less on a communist government in pursuit of a monopoly on power, ditching rivals Left and Right, and more on a communist government attempting to master the social consequences of war.⁴⁵⁸

Food scarcity was one of the more devastating consequences of the war. During the better half of 1947, the vast majority of ordinary Romanians understood “capitalist aid” in a straightforward manner: the phrase referred to the urgency of purchasing tons of wheat on the international markets by a government faced with the greatest famine in modern Romanian history.⁴⁵⁹ The effort to acquire wheat in order to feed entire populations ravaged by postwar

⁴⁵⁸ For some of the reasons why a social history of postwar reconstruction in East Central Europe is long overdue, see Holly Case, “Reconstruction in East-Central Europe: Clearing the Rubble of Cold War Politics”, *Past and Present*, 2011, Supplement 6, 74-90.

⁴⁵⁹ This chapter has little to say about this highly important and sensitive topic. The famine reached its peak in late 1946 and early 1947 and was particularly harsh on the rural populations of Eastern and Southern Romania. No history of this defining postwar event exists, apart from impressionistic, poorly researched glosses. One exception is Florian

shortages was the cornerstone of the scramble for food that characterized much of Europe at the end of the Second World War. In Romania, the question of provisioning temporary brigaded opposing political forces: in early 1947 communist officials visited Argentina to seal one such purchase while Max Aușnit - the country's leading captain of industry and UDR's largest shareholder - was struggling to secure a loan with a New York bank for the same purpose. One year earlier, Nicolae Malaxa - the owner of Malaxa Works - used much of his international contacts to obtain wheat from the United States and so too did the Romanian ambassador to Washington for the better half of 1947. Moreover, large quantities of wheat were to be imported from neighboring countries: Yugoslavia, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria. The Soviet Union, confronted with its own internal postwar famine, softened its claims on agricultural deliveries from Romania. This was a context in which Romanian exports fell dramatically over the course of 1945

Banu, "Calamități ale secolului al XX-lea: foametea care a devastat Moldova în 1946-1947", *Arhivele Securității*, 2002, 1-8.

making the gold reserves of the National Bank (BNR) the only available currency to pay for imports of grain and raw materials.

Payments in gold, however, run considerable risk. As National Bank representatives never ceased explaining in a stream of memos to the government, gold deposits were essential for undertaking any postwar monetary reform. In April 1946, it was estimated BNR owned little over 239,450 kilograms of gold, an amount judged to be already insufficient in view of earlier historical experiences with monetary stabilization. Indeed, the 1929 reform was pursued on the basis of a similar amount of gold reserves at a moment when, a decade after the end of the First



Selling caviar in Bucharest, April 1946; Source: Life Magazine

World War, the issue of reconstruction was hardly any longer in question. These judgments were informed in equal measure by the old-age imaginary of the gold standard as well as by the more recent Bretton Woods Conference. As late as 1946, BNR still operated with the plausible scenario of Romania joining both the International Monetary Fund and the International Bank for Reconstruction, a process which would have entailed the use of further gold reserves as

membership requirements. Depleting the national gold reserve was a menacing threat, but so too was the prospect of mass starvation in the countryside and the cities. Food provisioning in times of endemic scarcity involved an unprecedented mobilization of public and private resources through relief and solidarity campaigns, policing “speculative” practices, regional intra-state cooperation and the remaking of rationing schemes for urban dwellers. Coupled with surging prices, runaway inflation and the accelerated plummeting of living standards, by mid-1947 the organization of food provisioning became one of the most urgent tasks of the government.

The import of grain from capitalist and other countries was nevertheless a hotly contested issue. For the first three postwar years, neither gold reserves nor exports could adequately support Romania’s reliance on the global market for acquiring foodstuffs, *pace* the government’s panglossian hope to export its way out of scarcity by way of cutting back elite consumption of luxury goods: “In exchange for caviar, foie gras, turkey meat and other delicatessen we could combat the drought; we could import industrial equipment and raw materials needed for the reconstruction of the country.”⁴⁶⁰ These were words of despair rather than meaningful policy proposals. Domestically, the problem of food scarcity was interpreted as a breakdown in market relations between the countryside and the cities which had to be restored through currency reform. During much of the summer of 1947, readers of the main communist daily *Scântea* were repeatedly informed about the state’s need to adjust the quantity of available money to that of available commodities: “[W]orkers and wage earners in general are the hardest hit by inflation and lose interest in wage work. Peasants too lose interest in money and give up on the opportunity to

⁴⁶⁰ “Frâu risipei de alimente”, *Scântea*, XVI, No. 724, January 15 1947.

come to town and sell their produce.”⁴⁶¹ This effort to re-monetarize the everyday and revamp the fluency of commercial exchanges between agricultural producers and workers was one in which peasants had to be persuaded to give up on hoarding resources and industrial workers to hold on to their cash wages. Let us now trace the history of how money first became useless on the roads linking the countryside to the cities.

The war had a major impact on agricultural production. Beginning with 1942, the state set up a rationing scheme centered mostly on bread and a delivery system (*colectări*) for wheat and maize at fixed prices.⁴⁶² The combined effect of rationing and deliveries had to ensure a fair distribution of food between the needs of the Romanian army and those of the civil population. On the home-front, however, the rationing system was from the outset geared towards provisioning wage earners, excluding the vast majority of the rural population and privileging public functionaries of the state rather than mobilized industrial workers. Employees of the state residing in urban areas could access rationed and non-rationed goods through newly opened state stores called *economate de stat* which were supposed to be organized for all public institutions as well as state owned companies. In conjunction with these state stores, a number of private shops run by urban entrepreneurs were to be assigned the duty of supplying rationed goods (*economate comerciale*).⁴⁶³ The provisioning of industrial workers, on the other hand, fell within the purview of factory management. The law for the regulation of work during wartime specified all factories with over 50 employees were obliged to set up their own provisioning facilities and cooperate

⁴⁶¹ “Lichidarea inflației”, *Scântea*, XVI, No. 848, June 19 1947.

⁴⁶² For a brief discussion of the war time food rationing, see Dinu C. Giurescu, *România în al doilea război mondial, 1939-1945* (Bucharest: All, 1999), 89.

⁴⁶³ I rely here on Valentin Vasile, “Disfuncționalități ale sectorului alimentar românesc în perioada 1944-1954”, *Caietele CNSAS*, II, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2009, 219-220.

closely with country-level supply offices.⁴⁶⁴ Larger, militarized factories deemed central for the war effort were to be regularly supplied by the army's own provisioning department, often with foodstuff requisitioned from the conquered territories of the Soviet Union.

The success of this rationing system is hard to evaluate. It is perhaps safe to assume with Mark Mazower that unlike other countries allied to Germany such as Finland, Romania did not experience any episodes of famine between 1941 and early 1945.⁴⁶⁵ Much like in other European countries, what governed the access to rationed goods and set their amount was a complex bundle of criteria mixing residence, salary and social worth. Predictably then, unlike in the Soviet Union, Romanian authorities did not find it necessary to extend rationing to the countryside where the vast majority of the population lived and where wages mattered little for the survival of peasant households.⁴⁶⁶ Moreover, although a richer analysis of food provisioning during the war could indeed reveal that industrial workers came to eat less, notably after the first months of 1944, it might be the case that they ate better. As I have already argued in the first chapter, the early stages of the 1940s saw an increase in the number of factory canteens throughout the country. Equally important, many factories found it necessary to invest in producing their own food, footwear and clothing items by erecting farms, buying land, hiring tailors and cobblers and growing their own crops. This was the case not merely for large plants such as Malaxa Works and UDR, but also for smaller factories. When, shortly after the war ended, a communist journalist visited Laromet

⁴⁶⁴ MO, CIX, No. 233, October 2 1941, pp. 5836-5840.

⁴⁶⁵ Mark Mazower, *Hitler's Empire. How the Nazis Ruled Europe* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), 288-289. For the "hunger economies" of the German occupied lands in Europe see Tatjana Tönsmeier, "Hungerökonomien. Vom Umgang mit der Mangelversorgung im besetzten Europa des Zweiten Weltkrieges", *Historische Zeitschrift*, Vol. 301, No. 3, 2015, 662-704.

⁴⁶⁶ The wartime rationing system of the Soviet Union has been explored in Wendy Z. Goldman, "Not by Bread Alone: Food, Workers, and the State", in Wendy Z. Goldman and Donald Filtzer (eds.) *Hunger and War. Food Provisioning in the Soviet Union during World War II* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).

Works - a metallurgical factory employing fewer than 800 workers on the northern outskirts of Bucharest - he believed to witness the seeds of Soviet modernity blossoming on Romanian soil. Arguing that in the Soviet Union all factories look like “small cities” the reporter went on to christen Laromet the “factory of the future” for no other reason than its impressive display of provisioning facilities:

Located on a vast swath of land surrounded by vegetable and flower gardens, the plant manages pig and cattle farms, a well-organized canteen, a house for apprentices, a daycare for workers’ children, sport fields, clobbering and tailoring workshops and its very own mill.⁴⁶⁷

In addition to rationed goods, both industrial workers and state employees had to rely on peasant markets for the acquisition of other goods at free prices, an option inscribed in the very logic of the “wage regions” as I have shown in the first chapter. Up until mid-1944, for instance, meat, milk, poultry, vegetables, cheese, and eggs fell outside the list of rationed goods. Because this rationing system was centered around so-called “bakery grains” (*cereale panificabile*), the state endeavored to extract as much wheat and maize as possible from agricultural producers, without endangering future crops. In practice, deliveries depended not so much on state coercion as on the cooperation of local authorities and village notabilities. Central authorities in Bucharest would circulate both the prices at which the state would purchase grains and the estimated quotas to be amassed in each county. Local government officials (*prefectură*) would subsequently break down the quota on individual villages (or localities) and send out collection teams made up of notaries and other officials. At the level of the village, the mayor would call in a meeting with the representatives of the village community and proceed to further divide the assigned grain quota on

⁴⁶⁷ H. Obedeau, “Uzina Laromet - Uzina vremurilor noi”, *Scântea*, II, No. 274, July 14 1945.

individual households, often taking into account the data on family status provided by the village's agricultural specialist (*agentul agricol*).

This way of organizing agricultural deliveries left a modicum of leeway for the peasants, who could hope to hide and then sell wheat and maize for higher prices on the mushrooming black market. More importantly, however, as the whole operation functioned on the basis of deals sealed at village level, local knowledge was essential for the quantification of the harvest. Statistical assessments that circulated between various ministries and the National Bank in late 1945 converged on the opinion that peasants tended to react to wartime rationing, fixed prices and deliveries by deliberately underestimating their harvests for wheat, even in those cases in which authorities would offer various bonuses for stimulating production. Indeed, there might have been some truth to this judgment for irrespective of the labour shortages caused by conscription and the consequent drop in labour productivity brought about by the severe reduction of draft animals, Romania's agricultural production was still overwhelmingly determined by climate swings.⁴⁶⁸ Statisticians were hard-pressed to explain why wheat harvests fell by more than half in 1942 in comparison to the previous year by any other means than the proverbial peasant cunningness. Allegedly, a more realistic estimation for the first half of the 1940s, one that would factor in peasants' underestimations, would reveal that, with the exception of 1942, the production of wheat and maize remained stable for much of the war only to collapse in 1945 (Table 1).

⁴⁶⁸ Henry L. Roberts, *Romania. Political Problems of an Agrarian State* (Archon Books: 1969), 239 *et passim*. Roberts notes that although the sheer number of draft animals, horses in particular was halved during the war, the number of tractors doubled in the same period, reaching over 8000 units in 1945.

Year	Wheat/Tons	Maize/Tons
1940	1650	4110
1941	2390	3670
1942	1030	2400
1943	2780	3170
1944	2870	3300
1945	1100	1010

Table 1: Compiled after BNR, Fond Studii, 2/1948, pp. 97-137.

Such figures might not tell us much about the average yearly consumption of wheat and maize per household, but they do nevertheless allow us to appreciate both the impact of the collapse of the harvest in 1945 and the larger institutional context in which it took place. While wheat dropped by 61% compared to 1944, and maize by 69%, over the summer of 1945 central authorities in Bucharest were contemplating the prospect of an impending hunger war in the countryside. It was no longer possible to simply count on the cooperation of mayors in securing deliveries since they too were now facing open resistance from the peasants and requested police help to conduct their affairs. Moreover, according to one report issued in August 1945 by the National Institute of Cooperation (INCOOP) - the state office in charge of coordinating grain deliveries - “not only do mayors, notaries, *pretors* and other officials not lend their support to

deliveries, they even oppose them, ordering local producers not to hand in their crops.”⁴⁶⁹ In this context, the political hue of the local authorities mattered little. Even communist party members running the administration found themselves siding with the peasants and disobeying the government’s decisions. In April 1945, the communist party secretary of the southern county of Gorj explained it was impossible to gather more than 10 tons of lard out of 75 tons targeted without ruining the livelihood of the peasants and turning them against the state: “we ask for our county to be spared from delivering cattle and fat in accordance with the Armistice Convention; we also ask for our bridges to be repaired and for investments in order to give the people the possibility to live.”⁴⁷⁰ This was far from a minority opinion. Many other petty bureaucrats and economic experts shared the same views on the tension between the need for reconstruction and the enormous burden placed on the country’s resources by the Armistice Convention.⁴⁷¹

Calls for postponing deliveries to the Soviets were both frequent and alarming. As early as March 1945, long-time communist party member engineer Herbert Zilber was deploring the impact of the Armistice Convention on the economy, complaining in private conversations to the American representatives in Bucharest that “as a Communist, he was not interested in achieving economic reform in a country which had become an economic desert.”⁴⁷² Several months later, Zilber delivered the keynote address at the annual congress of the Association of Romanian

⁴⁶⁹ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 47/1945, p. 13. The *pretor* was the head of an administrative unit called *plasă*, a number of which made up a county.

⁴⁷⁰ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 12/1945, p. 2.

⁴⁷¹ Signed in September 1944, the Armistice Convention required the payment of reparations to the Soviet Union worth of 300 million \$ in raw materials (notably oil), grain, cattle and foodstuff, in addition to financing the Soviet Army stationed on Romanian territory. For the details of the agreement and the reaction of the Romanian diplomats, the best guide is still Elizabeth Hazard, “Cold War Crucible: United States Foreign Policy and the Conflict in Romania, 1943-1952” (PhD Dissertation, Boston University, 1995), 59-62.

⁴⁷² Quoted in Elizabeth Hazard, “Cold War Crucible: United States Foreign Policy and the Conflict in Romania, 1943-1952” (PhD Dissertation, Boston University, 1995), 112.

Engineers (A.G.I.R.) in which he argued that “without substantial help from abroad, the Romanian economy will continue to display its current characteristic: the haphazard functioning of the factories, the enormous costs of transportation, large idle stocks and a severe lack of goods.”⁴⁷³ Zilber’s policy proposals were echoed one year later in a sober report issued by the Ministry of Finance. Here too it was explained that without the possibility of obtaining foreign loans for reconstruction, Romania could only afford to lobby the Soviets for a reduction of the burden of war reparations, in particular for commodities such as timber, oil and grain which could allow for a revival of exports. Yet even if such a plan would have been carried out successfully, it still involved major cut backs on domestic consumption in order to release as many resources as possible for exports and investments: “sacrificing the consumer in the name of capital accumulation took place in different historical epochs in the capitalist countries as well as in the Soviet Union, this being the cornerstone of building an industrial economy.”⁴⁷⁴

The Armistice Convention was not only blocking exports, it also served as a catalyst for inflation. By the end of 1945, with the harvest at a historical low, market prices for wheat, maize and potatoes skyrocketed.⁴⁷⁵ This surge in prices was only in part caused by the bad harvest.⁴⁷⁶ What also aggravated the situation was a near collapse of the national transportation networks. The

⁴⁷³ H. Zilber, “Changes in the Romanian Economy”, reproduced in ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 67/1945, p. 6. The report is not dated, but it is very likely it was written during the summer of 1945.

⁴⁷⁴ ANR, Ministerul Finanțelor. Oficiul de studii și coordonare financiară, 479/1946, p. 52.

⁴⁷⁵ Wheat went up from 197 lei/kg in early 1945 to 672 lei/kg in December 1945; maize from 225 lei/kg to 763 lei/kg; potatoes from 184 lei/kg to 503 lei/kg; BNR, Fond Studii, 2/1948, p. 137.

⁴⁷⁶ The bad harvests of the immediate two postwar years were caused by a mix of natural and man-made factors, of which severe draught and the changes in property relations induced by the agrarian land reform of 1945 were probably the most important. In their explanation, communist historians put the blame on the draught; by contrast, post-communist historians put the blame on the communists and their decision to redistribute land; for the first case, see Costin Murgescu, *Reforma agrară din 1945* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Române, 1956); for the latter, see Dumitru Șandru, *Reforma agrară din 1945 în România* (Bucharest: Institutul Național pentru Studii Totalitarismului, 2000).

total amount of goods moved on rail, water and road dropped by an estimated 27% in comparison to 1939, of which over 40% represented only deliveries to the Soviet Union in compliance with the Convention. More importantly, by the end of the year the amount of paper money in circulation reached staggering proportions, propelling an inflationary snowball that constantly chipped away at real wages.⁴⁷⁷ The National Bank was not only printing money to finance the plethora of commodities supplied to the Soviets, goods which often exited the national economy without standard custom controls; it also issued currency to cover a budget deficit of nearly 20% which could not be levied through taxes and other fiscal means. Suggestions of taxing the rich through progressive income taxes and expropriations of those who supposedly benefited from the depreciation of the national currency were perhaps sensible, but they could hardly have been implemented by an ever weakened state bureaucracy with little control over the banking sector.⁴⁷⁸ This was a context in which the national income dropped by over 60% relative to 1938 and one in which a dwindling monthly state budget for much of 1945 and 1946 was split equally between covering war reparations and reproducing an impoverished bureaucracy.⁴⁷⁹

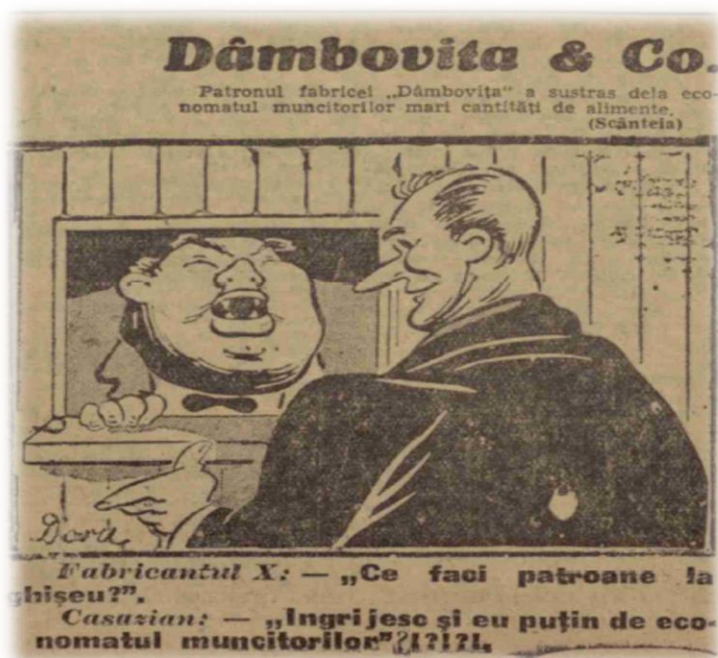
Inflation was also fed by the transformation of provisioning for industrial workers undertaken by the Groza Cabinet. Law 348 passed in May 1945 specified that all factories had to

⁴⁷⁷ In less than 12 months, the purchasing power (real wages) of state employees dropped by 47% according to ANR, Ministerul Finanțelor. Oficiul de studii și coordonare financiară, 396/1946.

⁴⁷⁸ For some early proposals of the communist party to tax the rich, the war criminals and the speculators, see ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 22/1945, pp. 2-3. For the suggestion that the postwar Romanian state had little control over the banking sector see John R. Lampe and Marvin R. Jackson, *Balkan Economic History, 1550-1950. From Imperial Borderlands to Developing Nations* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 556. The standard communist account written by the former governor of the National Bank is Aurel Vijoli, *Cercetări asupra capitalului financiar în țara noastră* (Bucharest: Tipografia Băncii de Stat, 1949) and, in a slightly more autobiographical mood, Aurel Vijoli, *Din prefacerile sistemului bănesc și de credit* (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1980).

⁴⁷⁹ The Hungarian state budget was allocated almost identically in the period preceding the monetary stabilization of August 1946, Hungary being the other East European state obliged to pay reparations to the Soviet Union worth of 300 million \$; see William A. Bomberger and Gail E. Makinen, "The Hungarian Hyperinflation and Stabilization of 1945-1946", *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 91, No. 5, 1983, 804.

set up and finance their own stores (*economate*) in order to be able to cater to the needs of their employees and save them from the ravages of runaway prices.⁴⁸⁰ This idea was not new. It merely represented an extension of the existing network of *economate* to all wage earners and their families, irrespective of whether they were employed directly by the state or by private business. Nor was it a very daring idea. The government could reasonably expect for factory owners to exhibit a manifest interest in keeping their employees under a



The upper text reads: "The owner of the 'Dâmbovița' factory took away large quantities of foodstuff from the workers' *economat*." The mock dialogue goes: "What brings you to the desk, master?", "I just want to take care of the workers' *economat*." Source: *Scântea*, XVI, No. 745, February 9 1947.

safety net, particularly in the context in which wage increases were officially frozen. Moreover, much of the infrastructure - including storage rooms, personnel but also state structures charged with coordinating provisioning - was already available as the core institutional legacy of both the previous war years as well as of local varieties of paternalism. For instance, in Reșița, UDR's management was able to adapt its own so-called Provisioning Institute (*Institut de Aprovizionare*) into an *economat* almost overnight and at little additional cost, relying on an experienced team of

⁴⁸⁰ MO, CXIII, No. 101, May 3 1945, 3625-3627.

functionaries to supervise the acquisition and distribution of goods.⁴⁸¹ Other factories were less fortunate and had to allocate important resources to organize the econodate. Matters of logistics aside, setting up these stores was less of an issue than financing them in the longer run.

In principle, the newly opened factory stores were supposed to complement the rationing system: they would have had to make their own budgets, locate suppliers among agricultural producers as well as other factories, buy much needed goods and sell them back to workers at official prices. Workers, in turn, would have had the opportunity to acquire food, textiles, firewood, footwear and other basic consumer items at prices well below those available at normal retail stores or on the black market. Accordingly, the whole project was couched in a language of enmity focused on the pervasive figure of the “intermediary” salesman - the so-called speculator (*speculant*) who would allegedly buy cheap and sell dear, circumventing official prices.⁴⁸² Central to this language was the notion of exploitation, which was framed as an inherent quality of market relations distorted by inflation. The communist daily *Scântea* published regularly a front-page column under the title “The Notebook of a Profiteer” in which various scenarios were imagined whereby corrupt businessmen pumped-up prices, tricked peasants into selling their last ounce of grain and made a mockery out of workers’ deprivation. Yet workers were also exploited by their employers, not on the shopfloor or before the cash desk as expected, but rather through the

⁴⁸¹ ANR, UDR, 917/1945, p. 114 and IBIDEM, 106/1945, p. 39.

⁴⁸² For a genealogy of “speculation” in the early Soviet Union, see Andrew Sloan, “Pale Fire: Jews in Revolutionary Belorussia, 1917-1929” (PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2009), 126-153. For the fear of the “speculator” in postwar Poland see Małgorzata Mazurek, “Morales de la consumation en Pologne (1918-1989)”, *Annales HSS*, No. 2, 2013, 506-518. Both authors insist that practices of speculation against a general background of hyperinflation were often denounced in ethnic and gender terms.

occasional plundering of the economate. Numerous obese, pig-faced, well-dressed and devious creatures were portrayed emptying the stores at the expense of their employees.

By January 1946 there was an estimate of 978 economate with a total number of registered members (employees and their families) surpassing 5 million individuals, nearly one third of the population.⁴⁸³ Many of these stores, however, found it increasingly hard to keep the pace of supply steady. While the initial capital, including reserves of cash, was provided by management alone, future operation costs had to be financed through loans. For much of 1945, a consortium of private banks reluctantly lent some of the requested money, asking instead for factories to place their own fixed capital as deposit, a contentious proposal that carried with it the risk of bankruptcy.⁴⁸⁴ For the banks, much like for the factories themselves, economate were nothing but financial black holes: goods were bought at free, market prices and sold farther at significantly lower, official prices. The difference between these two sets of prices, significantly widened by the added cost of transportation and state taxes, was simply a loss that could not be compensated for in any way. Moreover, workers seldom had sufficient cash to pay for the goods, and had to agree to take on debt, which would then be subtracted from their wages, leaving the vast majority empty-handed on payday. This type of debt reduced wage differentials to irrelevance not only because, as one CGM leader put it, “workers had no clue what goes into their paychecks”, but also because it promoted “petty-bourgeois egalitarianism” - a malaise of the highest order whereby workers allegedly ended up earning as much as engineers.⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸³ Ion Alexandrescu, *Economia României în primii ani postbelici (1945-1947)*, (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1986), 116.

⁴⁸⁴ ANR, UDR, 761/1946, p. 31.

⁴⁸⁵ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămară, 9/1947, p. 9 and IBIDEM, 2/1947, p. 4 for Vasile Luca's dread of „petty-bourgeois egalitarianism.”

It is worth insisting a bit on the logic of workers' debt. The accusation of "petty-bourgeois egalitarianism" propounded by communist party bosses was, of course, a staple of the Stalinist repertoire of denunciation against the leveling effect that debt had on wage hierarchies. On paper, engineers did earn significantly more than even the most skilled workers but since all employees, irrespective of their location along the chain of command, were likely to run debts, wage inequality was greatly reduced. Firstly, debt was inscribed in the way the economy was functioning. Haphazardly supplied, employees flocked to the factory stores to take out whatever goods were made available on the promise to have their purchase subtracted from their wages at the end of the month. Secondly, employees asked for cash advances on their wages. This practice was a response to the equally haphazard availability of goods in the private retail sector. No employee could afford to wait until the payday for securing basic consumption items, which had to be bought in larger quantities and stockpiled well in advance.⁴⁸⁶ Finally, employees would acquire debts to factory-based credit associations. While larger industrial plants such as UDR or Malaxa Works already opened their credit associations during the war, in the inflationary context that ensued in 1945 many other smaller factories saw it necessary to do the same.⁴⁸⁷ Therefore, to take but one revealing example: in August 1946 a metalworker of the capital city earning on average around

⁴⁸⁶ As a native of Reșița recalled: "Many (including my own parents) kept in the house the traditional flour box (*ladă cu făină*). Homemade bread of around 8 to 10 kilos, well fermented, was delivered early in the morning to the bakery and taken back in the afternoon. A note placed on the dough insured the identity of the owner. One such loaf of bread would last us for a whole week, even though it was our main source of food.", Dan D. Farcaș, *Hoinărind prin Reșița pierdută* (Reșița: TIM, 2008), 112.

⁴⁸⁷ Laromet opened its own credit association in November 1946 with the hope, a vain one as it turned out, to spare management from offering cash advances to workers; AMB, Fond Laromet, 9/1946, p. 36.

80,000 lei brutto would regularly take home on payday less than 10% of the cash wage.⁴⁸⁸ Save for taxes, the rest was retained by management as debt.

By 1946, the National Bank was forced to step in and singlehandedly bankroll the economate, printing liquidities to cover factories' spending on provisioning and soften owners' fears of economic collapse. Even the management of state companies such as The General Society for Gas and Electricity of Bucharest complained to governmental authorities of being paralyzed by the effort to finance the economat and asked for preferential loans: "The policy of renewing our equipment, of looking for new sources of electricity and expanding the gas network can no longer be supported from our own financial resources."⁴⁸⁹ In early 1947 it was estimated factories were able to refund a mere 2% of their borrowings, which totaled by now over 1.3 trillion lei. With no prospect of further repayments, one communist party boss called for a mass default of the economate arguing this sum of money should be viewed as a form of "help the state provided to the workers."⁴⁹⁰ Workers, on the other hand, *pace* constant disgruntlement over deficient supply, did welcome this way of organizing basic consumption, particularly after economate were inserted into the collective labour contracts in late 1945. Evidence to this fact is that companies that could not open economate, notably in construction, had the highest labour turnover. Only in 1946, over 30 construction sites were shut down because workers had no access to subsidized goods.⁴⁹¹ Likewise, agricultural producers were largely benefitting from the competition between economate

⁴⁸⁸ In extreme cases, workers went home almost empty handed. Metalworker Petre Geolfan, for instance, earned a gross wage of 80000 lei, of which he owned 20812 lei state taxes, 22400 lei for the factory store and the credit association and 36000 lei in cash advances. In August 1946 Petre received 808 lei on payday, ANR, MM, 1040, p. 274.

⁴⁸⁹ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 10/1946, p. 3.

⁴⁹⁰ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 3/1947, p. 5.

⁴⁹¹ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 1/1946, pp. 3-4.

over their produce and grain, which only pushed prices up.⁴⁹² Peasants could bargain with the representatives of the economate or, alternatively, they could make use of the chain of rural cooperatives administered by the state. When available, the second option implied selling at official hence lower prices, but opened the possibility to access industrially produced items such as tools, textiles or footwear via their membership in cooperatives.⁴⁹³

The consequences of this way of organizing basic consumption were both threatening to capital and socially explosive. On the one hand, the obligation to finance workers' provisioning depleted all funds for investments available at the factory level. Moreover, even in those rare cases when the National Bank offered loans for upgrading industrial equipment much of it ended up being spent on economate, often due to the pressure of the workers themselves. On the other hand, as wages were increasingly melted by inflation, workers were becoming ever more dependent on the economate for daily survival. This dependence in turn involved not only accumulating debts to management and receiving almost no cash on payday, but also the prospect of open protest when factories were unable to supply their stores as analyzed in the second chapter. Coupled with a severe lack of raw materials, this vicious circle rendered industrial production close to idle, notably in the large-scale manufacturing and the steel production sectors. Let us now examine how workers in Reșița reacted to the food crisis of early 1947 and how communist party bosses came to terms with the claim that UDR's metalworkers had enjoyed preferential provisioning and should continue to do so as a way of honoring the local working-class tradition.

⁴⁹² Overbidding (*supralicitare*) was seen as a cause of inflation by the government; ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 41/1946, p. 3.

⁴⁹³ No history of the rural production cooperatives exists. For a brief overview of this institution see "Întreprinderile cooperative" in *Enciclopedia României*, Vol. 4 (Bucharest: Imprimeria Națională, 1943), 668-669. I thank Dan Cîrjan for pointing out this reference to me.

Part II

Mastering Working-Class Traditions

The commercial interplay between economate, agricultural producers and rural cooperatives, already skewed by inflation throughout 1945 and 1946, came to a standstill in early 1947, after yet another draught stricken period pulled harvests further down, pushed prices further up and nearly paralyzed all monetary transactions. Take, for instance, the case of Ludovic Brandmayer, a functionary employed by Laromet's economat. In early December 1946, packing over 30 million lei in cash money, he was dispatched by management to Northern Transylvania to buy beef, beans, apples, marmalade and nuts for the factory's store. It did not take long for Brandmayer to realize that securing all of these goods on local peasant markets was far more difficult than anticipated.⁴⁹⁴ Not only was there fierce competition for the produce among fellow representatives of the factories, but the money he was initially given was losing purchasing power by the day. In the space of no more than three weeks, Brandmayer was compelled to ask management for an additional 69 million lei with which he was able to acquire less than one third of the planned quantities of goods. This was arguably what many other functionaries of the economate roaming the countryside during the winter of 1946/7 experienced as they saw the value of the national currency depreciating at breathtaking speed.

Two congruent indicators would probably suffice to reveal the sheer scale of the depreciation of the *leu* during the early 1947. First, the volume of banknotes in circulation grew

⁴⁹⁴ AMB, Fond Laromet, 5/1947, pp. 49-52.

from 649 billion lei in 1945 to a shocking 48 trillion lei in the first half of 1947. Secondly, for the same span of time prices for basic goods multiplied by 140 times.⁴⁹⁵ What this amounted to during the spring of 1947 was a drop in the purchasing power of real wages by roughly 75% relative to 1938. Consequently, for the first half of 1947 the cost of living index, which included among others prices for rent and utilities, public transportation, footwear, clothes, medication and basic foodstuff skyrocketed (Table 2). While these figures should be taken with a grain of salt since the evolution of market prices was hard to assess even over short intervals, the image they conjure was one of near total economic collapse. Had Brandmayer been sent to purchase goods for Laromet's economat in April 1947 rather than in December 1946 not only would he have needed hundreds rather than tens of millions lei in cash but it is also very likely agricultural producers would have preferred to hoard or barter rather than sell in exchange for devalued currency.

1947/Month	Cost of Living Index
July	641.272
June	615.688
May	512.557
April	406.391

⁴⁹⁵ I follow here the analysis of Costin C. Kirițescu, *Sistemul bănesc al leului și precursorii lui. Vol. III* (Bucharest: Editura RSR, 1971), 54-107. Kirițescu's chapters on postwar inflation and the causes of the depreciation of the currency are far from apologetic and remain the only reliable if somewhat technical guide to the phenomenon. In line with the communist party's view on the matter, Kirițescu did criticize the National Bank's "dogma" on gold reserves, blame the liberal handling of the Ministry of Finance up to late 1947 and trash the financial consequences of the "social wage". Paradoxically, however, in his discussion of the main anti-inflationary policy of the first two postwar years - the so-called "Loan for National Reconstruction" (*Împrumutul Refacerii Naționale*) through which the government hoped to drain the market of liquidities and make up part of the state budget by selling gold coins to citizens, a policy also implemented in places like India, China or Switzerland - Kirițescu ends up agreeing with the IMF which declared it unsound in the late 1940s.

March	142.352
February	120.584
January	85.626

Table 2: The Evolution of the Cost of Living Index in Bucharest; compiled by the author after BNR, *Fond Studii*, 2/1945, pp. 354-365. On the national level the figures are slightly lower but the trend is identical, see Henry L. Roberts, *Romania. Political Problems of an Agrarian State* (Archon Books: 1969), 317.

The collapse of the currency and the ensuing flight from the *leu*, a classical symptom of hyperinflation, pushed the government to tighten up the rationing system in order to cater to the needs of the industrial workers. A decree passed in December 1946 limited bread rations for urban residents to 250 grams per day or, in those cases where bread was lacking, to 350 grams of potatoes. Rural residents were still excluded from receiving rationed bread, but were now allowed to retain for consumption only 500 grams a day of wheat or corn per household member out of their individual crops. Workers, however, depending on the type of work performed, were entitled to supplementary rations: 625 grams/day of bread for miners; 375 grams/day for metalworkers and 250 grams/day for the rest.⁴⁹⁶ Restrictions on the transportation by citizens of a variety of rationed and non-rationed goods were also enforced with the aim of containing black market practices and price gouging. The news of new rationing quotas for industrial workers spread throughout industrial communities faster than the rations themselves, firing up feelings of entitlement against a general background of utter desperation. In Bucharest, metalworkers at Malaxa Works ransacked and destroyed the improvised shops that surrounded the plant, assaulting shopkeepers in an attempt

⁴⁹⁶ MO, CXIV, No. 291, December 16 1946, pp. 12936-12937.

to punish allegedly “blood-sucking” profiteers. Such acts of spontaneous justice were not encouraged by the communist party, though they were tolerated in silence as long as workers refrained from scapegoating the government.

The situation was even grimmer across UDR’s mining and metalworking divisions. In Reșița, already in October 1946 the factory store was unable to meet the rationed quotas for flour. Several trips to Bucharest undertaken by local trade-union bosses with the hope to lobby the Ministry of the National Economy for preferential provisioning hardly improved the availability of foodstuff.⁴⁹⁷ Meanwhile, in Anina miners were starving. In early January 1947, during a meeting between union delegates and UDR’s management, miners refused the offer to be compensated in cash money for the lack of goods at the economat. They knew perfectly well that whatever money they could receive it would be insufficient to procure food on the local market and asked instead for management to supply the economat as prescribed by the collective labour contract.⁴⁹⁸ Yet, no matter how depreciated the currency was by that point in time, the sight of cash money did matter for these workers, particularly during the ritual of the payday. While it was saddening enough that wages could buy very little, the prospect of getting close to no cash on payday was even more demoralizing. In late February 1947, many metalworkers in Reșița protested after receiving empty pay envelopes once again. Indeed, it was this material practice of contemplating empty envelopes that angered workers most rather than the inability of their cash to serve as a medium for appropriating basic commodities.

⁴⁹⁷ ANR, DGP, 43/1943 Vol. I, p. 3 and 33.

⁴⁹⁸ ANCS, UDR Caraș, 32/1947, p. 151.

Management's reaction was prompt but ineffectual: in March 1947 it was decided workers should receive at least two thirds of their wages in cash, irrespective of the schedule of installments by way of which they were supposed to repay their debts.⁴⁹⁹ Moreover, Reșița's metalworkers running higher debts were given cash advances worth of up to 30% of the average wage. None of these policies, however, prevented the fact that by the end of March an estimated 60% of the workers went home empty-handed while the rest of them got between 100,000 and 150,000 lei, hardly enough to buy a few kilograms of potatoes.⁵⁰⁰ As spring set in, so too did a wave of unrest across the plant. A series of work stoppages and one-day strikes took place in late April and early May, the high point of the double crisis of food provisioning and the depreciation of the currency. In Reșița over 250 workers blocked the inner railroad network of the plant in an effort to persuade union-leaders to petition local entrepreneurs to sell their goods at official prices, even with the help of the police. In the village of Bocșa-Română, where UDR operated a smaller metal factory, over 380 workers stopped working and turned their anger against a local miller whom they attacked under the suspicion of making a profit out of their misery. In Anina, as well as across UDR's smaller mines, workers refused to enter the underground on account of a lack of food.

The atmosphere of revolt that seized UDR throughout the spring of 1947 can certainly be found in many other industrial settlements. It was not only in Reșița that workers shouted during the Labour Day Parade: "The First of May without Bread and Corn Flour!" (*Unu mai fără pâine și mălai!*). Across the gold and silver mines of Southern Transylvania miners attempted to organize a strike only to find out that "instead of bread and rights they got the army."⁵⁰¹ In early April 1947

⁴⁹⁹ IBIDEM, p. 667.

⁵⁰⁰ ANR, DGP, 43/1943 Vol. I, p. 81. In March 1947 a pair of shoes was sold with an average price of 2 million lei.

⁵⁰¹ ANR, DGP, 66/1947, p. 33.

the same workers had proposed to receive a meager quantity of wheat in exchange for the 8-hour workday. In the port cities along the Danube, where Soviet ships preferred to use their own personnel for loading and unloading rather than hiring the natives, dockworkers were simply contemplating starvation amidst revolt. This was a context in which, as Mark Pittaway noted of the hyperinflationary postwar Hungary “an industrial job became valued because it guaranteed a degree of preferential access to basic means of subsistence.”⁵⁰² Yet, while this was very much the case for the vast majority of industrial jobs in Romania as well, even for those offered in small-scale workshops and factories, for UDR’s metalworkers the question of preferential access to a basic standard of living was enmeshed with a locally embedded and historically informed notion of working-class expectation. Or to put it differently, what made the outburst of protest in Reșița different from any comparable event in other parts of the country was that for UDR’s metalworkers privileged provisioning was a question of tradition. This was an invented tradition construed around the pivotal role the steel mill played for the national industry not merely for the interwar epoch, but more importantly for the war economy when UDR became a powerhouse for the production of armament.

UDR’s centrality for the postwar heavy industry was underlined early on by onetime general manager of Malaxa Works - Nicolae Korcinski - in evocative terms. In a front-page manifesto published by the communist party’s daily *Scântea* in January 1945, Korcinski noted that due to the war Romania would most likely find it very difficult to import the raw materials and the manufactured goods needed by industry: “In our country, UDR Reșița is the largest and

⁵⁰² Mark Pittaway, *The Workers’ State. Industrial Labour and the Making of Socialist Hungary, 1944-1958* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 36.

almost the only metallurgical plant able to produce those raw materials and manufactured goods, and in so doing it is the lever that may either stagnate or accelerate the work of reconstruction.”⁵⁰³ Korcinski’s argument went deeper still, for during his brief stint as head of Malaxa Works, he came to realize that nothing can be assembled without the support of UDR: “No other industrial plant in this country can fully produce a locomotive, a rail car, a boat or a cauldron because we all lack the necessary machines for the manufacturing of one or another component. Thus our dependency on UDR Reșița is absolute, and following the war UDR achieved unchallenged monopoly.”⁵⁰⁴ There was little exaggeration in these words. UDR’s structurally dominant position within Romanian industry translated into a regime of exemption granted by the state, both during the war when it received comparatively better provisioning and after when its vast forestry domains were partially saved from land redistribution under the agrarian reform of 1945. Throughout 1946 communist and social-democrat leaders of the local trade-union in Reșița converged in propping up management’s land-grabbing struggle against the local peasantry under the justification that UDR’s property was an essential source of food.⁵⁰⁵

Moreover, as I have repeatedly pointed out in the first two chapters, UDR’s workers’ representatives, be they “men of trust” active during the wartime dictatorship or union delegates elected after 1945 were in the habit of elaborating their own standard of living. This intricate practice, often directly encouraged by management, was the cornerstone of collective bargaining, and perhaps the only token of workers’ delegated power in a historical context in which ever since

⁵⁰³ Nicolae Korcinski, “Reșița trebuie naționalizată”, *Scântea*, II, No. 106, January 12 1945.

⁵⁰⁴ IBIDEM. Or, take another description of the nodal point occupied by UDR’s integrated steel mill: “If the steel from Reșița is awaited by the tractor manufacturer IAR, and the agricultural tools factory in Bocșa Română waits for (UDR’s) bridge and locomotive section, then Malaxa Works waits as well, and so too does the entire metal industry of the country.” *Luptătorul Bănățean*, III, No. 553, July 18 1946, p. 1.

⁵⁰⁵ ANR, UDR, 174/1945, pp. 9-78.

1942 the negotiation over wages was banned. The survival of this practice was evidence of an entrenched local tradition, the lineage of which may be traced back to the post-Great Depression historical conjuncture. It was indeed after the mass unemployment and massive strikes that seized the town of Reșița in the early 1930s that UDR's management and the local trade-union found in the joint calculation of a standard of living a common ground for agreeing over the cost of food, utilities, rent, firewood, working equipment and many more. For the postwar communist government, however, the combined legacy of UDR's dominance of Romanian heavy industry and workers' local tradition of collective bargaining was ambiguous at best. On the one hand, it had to be praised for exhibiting all the genuine features of a supposed proletarian enclave: diligence, hard work, sacrifice and solidarity. On the other hand, it had to be denounced for its propensity to make workers struggle and for instilling them with a sense of distinction.⁵⁰⁶

This dialectic of praise and criticism was deployed by the main communist newspapers of the day every time the question of communitarian welfare was raised in Reșița. Praise was well earned, for instance, when, following the deportation to the Soviet Union of a large number of ethnically German metalworkers in early January 1945, UDR's management decided to hire over 600 of their wives. Even though these women "could not easily replace the men" they did deserve "the same rights as male workers after one year of employment. Consequently, they will receive for free one overall and one pair of boots."⁵⁰⁷ Criticism poured when, in December 1946, UDR's management failed to take proper care of a new contingent of workers hired from Eastern

⁵⁰⁶ This sense of distinction was upheld even by local communist party bosses who explicitly went against the party's disdain for wage "egalitarianism", arguing against UDR's management decision to award bonuses to workshop supervisors. Such a position was unthinkable in Bucharest's industry. See *Luptătorul Bănățean*, III, No. 519, June 7 1946, p. 4.

⁵⁰⁷ *Luptătorul Bănățean*, II, No. 317, September 29 1945, p. 3.

Romania: “lacking basic means of survival in their drought-stricken regions they sought shelter with UDR.”⁵⁰⁸ Naked, barefooted, full of lice and sleeping in the train station, their physical appearance was thought to violate the standard of living long enjoyed by UDR’s employees. The article went on to note it was the duty of management to integrate them in the community. Again, words of praise were devoted to those workers “darkened by smog and soot” who, although “drained of their strength” kept production running and overcame hardships galore.⁵⁰⁹ Criticism was lavished on the same workers who, during a meeting of the factory committees, dared ask why “strikes and trade-union freedom were allowed in the past and today they are no longer.”⁵¹⁰ For these curious yet supposedly naive minds, scorn was not sufficient. They needed to understand that “in a democratic regime, fascists cannot benefit from the liberty to fight against democracy”⁵¹¹, though how precisely this judgment could answer the question was less clear.

Be that as it may, following the wave of unrest that unfolded throughout late April and early May 1947 in Reșița as well as across UDR’s scattered mines and smaller workshops, this double-sided play on tradition was reaffirmed with a vengeance, both at the local level and in the high offices of the Central Committee in Bucharest. For local union and party leaders it became clear that to continue to encourage workers’ belief in preferential provisioning risked feeding the fire of striking activity. It was high time to “clean up our backyard” as one local party boss put it and protractedly acknowledge the fact that what made unrest possible was neither simply food

⁵⁰⁸ Eric Wayand, “Importanța UDR-ului ca factor primordial a refacerii economice și care este situația actuală a producției de oțel”, *Luptătorul Bănățean*, III, No. 687, December 25 1946, p. 3.

⁵⁰⁹ “Cetatea fierului. Acolo unde se muncește cu râvnă, abnegație și sacrificiu și se sabotează pe toată linia”, *Luptătorul Bănățean*, IV, No. 770, April 13 1947, p. 1 and 5.

⁵¹⁰ B. Abraham, “Cum este sabotată producția la UDR”, *Viața sindicală*, No. 126, May 18 1947, p. 3.

⁵¹¹ IBIDEM.

scarcity nor directly the sight of empty pay envelopes, but something called “tradition”.⁵¹² The first could and were indeed dealt with either by having management import maize from nearby Bulgaria, as it happened in late May 1947, or by rescheduling debts so that every worker may receive some cash on payday. The trade-union was successful in suppressing repayments for July and August 1947.⁵¹³ Workers’ expectations of preferential provisioning, however, nurtured as these were by a local tradition of collective bargaining over the standard of living was addressed in narrative form as the story of an undeserving “labour aristocracy” pursuing its privileges. Let us briefly follow this line of argument as it was articulated during a meeting of the Central Committee summoned in a hurry on May 12 1947 to tackle the events in Reșița.

What is remarkable about the discussion occasioned by this meeting is the obstinacy with which party bosses portrayed the food crisis in Reșița as culturally mediated. Sure, talk of political enemies, notably social-democrats, was abundant, and so too were suggestions to hunt down and arrest “agitators”. Yet, as Ana Pauker elaborated on the significance of the wave of strikes, arresting workers was not feasible:

For us it is clear: we won’t go very far with repression. We have to win over the masses, because Reșița has a layer of worker-aristocrats (*muncitori aristocrați*), but the vast majority of the workers work hard. It is one thing in England, where it can be counted on the colonies to support the labour aristocracy (*aristocrația muncitorească*), and it is a different kettle of fish here, where these worker-aristocrats cannot be supported

⁵¹² Carol Lonțear, “Fiecare tonă de oțel, fiecare bob de cărbuni, fiecare kilovat de energie electrică constituie o cărămidă la clădirea viitorului”, *Luptătorul Bănățean*, IV, No. 782, May 1 1947, p. 5. Lonțear will be appointed general manager of the steel mill in 1948; see chapter 4 below.

⁵¹³ ANCS, Sindicatul Muncitorilor Metalurgiști din Reșița, 16/1944, pp. 95-100.

by the owner. If they nevertheless are, then we should mobilize the mass against them. We attack the owner and at the same time we attack the labour aristocracy.⁵¹⁴

To explain the emergence of this so-called “labour aristocracy”, party bosses appealed to the combined and uneven history of the development of UDR’s paternalism and to the consequent failure of the communist party to implant itself in the region during the interwar years. It fell on Vasile Luca - the party’s most versatile interpreter of working-class history - to tell this story:

Because this was an isolated place and because of the terror, it was impossible for us to penetrate it before, so we never had a revolutionary movement in this region. There were also well paid workers, the labour aristocracy, created by the company, which was very influential with the rest of the workers. This was a very backward region, with workers leading a patriarchal life. Aușnit built them a church and clubs; the unskilled workers are illiterate. Everything was done to keep the mass in darkness.⁵¹⁵

The point of this argument was twofold. Firstly, it was meant to suggest that the practice of collective bargaining over the standard of living, even when it took the form of protest as in late April and early May, was the privilege of the few. It was a minority tradition of the company entertained by a vanguard of traditionalist workers. Secondly, it pointed out that the struggle for basic food was nevertheless legitimate to the extent it was led by a few committed communists appointed from Bucharest rather than by native union leaders claiming cultural intimacy with the place. As Luca further explained: “if we state the problems with courage, no matter how foreign the ones who speak are, they are not so foreign as not to be able to secure for themselves some influence and authority.”⁵¹⁶ This second vanguard, once firmly established in the local trade-union,

⁵¹⁴ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămară, 18/1947, p. 10.

⁵¹⁵ IBIDEM, p. 8.

⁵¹⁶ IBIDEM.

would then undertake to show to the workers that management was incapable to secure adequate provisioning even though UDR's main shareholder - Max Aușnit - was entrusted to facilitate the import of grain from the United States and was also allowed to retain the company's land following the agrarian reform. For Luca then, much like for Ana Pauker and the other party bosses, UDR's food crisis and the revolt it triggered was an opportunity to appropriate a practice by discarding its practitioners. This appropriation presupposed a discursive reevaluation of the long history of trade-unionism in Reșița that would decouple workers' expectation for preferential provisioning from the cultural specificities of the place. A series of articles published in the regional communist press carried this task to completion by emphasizing what should be understood by the notion of tradition in Reșița (*tradiție reșițeană*). The struggle of the past, it was explained - be it against Austro-Hungarian imperialism before 1918 or financial capital in the interwar epoch - had to be venerated and metalworkers were in the right to take pride in this working-class heritage.⁵¹⁷ There was no pride, however, in the fact that some form of unionism was allowed to exist under the wartime dictatorship:

That workers in Reșița had strong trade-unions in the past is very true, we can be proud of it, but that our trade-union was not abolished by Antonescu brings no glory to its past leaders, who were all collaborators.⁵¹⁸

The trouble with these union leaders was that they promised, in the midst of the food crisis of 1947, to bargain for “white bread at one's will” (*pâine albă la discreție*) and presented themselves as the only ones capable to deliver it to the workers. It was not that workers did not deserve “white bread”, for they certainly could very well aspire to such rare goods, but not as an

⁵¹⁷ Eric Wayand, “Tradiții și tradiții. Noțiuni de care s-a abuzat mult în fața muncitorimii reșițene”, *Luptătorul Bănățean*, IV, No. 904, September 27 1947, p. 5.

⁵¹⁸ Mihai Dalea, “Noi Reșițenii”, *Luptătorul Bănățean*, IV, No. 938, November 6 1947, p. 2.

offshoot of a manipulated notion of tradition. Preferential provisioning ought to depend on UDR's management ability to effectively increase output, as it did in the recent past when "management sent its time and motion experts (*calculatorii*) in each and every workshop to register the pace of work. Everybody worked to the full: from management to the workshop supervisor; from the army of time and motion experts to the foremen, they all shouted 'faster, more work'".⁵¹⁹ Because this was no longer the case in 1947, so the argument went, the question of struggling for "white bread" was ethically misplaced and politically dangerous. In 1947 "time and motion experts with their stop watch in their hands have disappeared. Time no longer matters for them".⁵²⁰ In this context, tradition was nothing more than a bulwark against the effort to increase production.

Such reasoning, however convoluted it may seem, should be taken seriously as an expression of communist political thought in action. The attempt to redescribe a culturally mediated tradition of struggle over preferential provisioning by linking it affirmatively with a past of intensified work bespoke of the socialism to come, one in which workers will be granted better access to goods in their capacity as "objects of capital" working "faster" rather than as "living creative subjects" negotiating the social value of their labour-power via trade-unions.⁵²¹ By making it clear that food was conditioned on work performance, the case of mastering Reșița's working-class tradition showed the extent to which communist bosses regarded the question of tradition as a discursive field that could structure workers' subjectivities, notably in the case of practices of collective bargaining in times of scarcity. As we will see further down, this question would pop

⁵¹⁹ Eric Wayand, "Umbre peste Uzinele și Domeniile Reșița", *Luptătorul Bănățean*, IV, No. 725, February 17 1947, p. 2.

⁵²⁰ IBIDEM.

⁵²¹ For the double determination of workers as both "objects of capital" and "living creative subjects" see David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (London: Verso, 2006), 114. Chapter 5 below expands on these core Marxian categories.

up time and again in the following years around a variety of issues. More importantly, however, this example anticipated the contours of the political project that will emerge against the background of the currency reform and the accompanying industrial policies implemented throughout 1947. It is to these reforms that I now turn in order to explore the state-form that undergirded the effort to monetarize the everyday.

Part III

Questions of the State

On August 15, 1947, Romanians were called upon to line up in front of bank offices and improvised exchange desks in their factories, schools, neighborhoods and villages in order to convert their cash money to the new currency issued by the National Bank. For state authorities and communist party bosses this day signaled a radical new beginning: postwar inflation would be rolled back, the economy would take off and recover its pre-war standards while ordinary workers and peasants would gain enough confidence in the stability of the *leu* to overcome the food crisis by engaging in commercial exchanges. This optimistic atmosphere was conveyed in myriad newspaper articles, all emphasizing the regained value of the national currency:

Indeed. There is less money on the market. But this is good money. It is good because it is less. Gone is the time when people had no place in their pockets for the millions which they received as monthly wages, and when these wages could not even satisfy the basic needs for one week [...] The peasant now knows that the money he receives in exchange for the fruits of his labor is good money, which does not lose its value. Today,

tomorrow, in a month time the peasant may buy all the goods that he needs without fearing his money will “melt away” (*topește*), as it did during inflation.⁵²²

The conversion of the old currency for a new one was the centerpiece operation of the monetary stabilization programs governments undertook across Europe in response to the inflationary spiral that characterized the immediate postwar conjuncture. National variations aside, the underlying scope of all these programs East and West alike was to drastically reduce the volume of liquid assets by eliminating cash stacks citizens accumulated during the war and after. In so doing, it was hoped the rate of inflation would be tamed, which in turn would discourage hoarding and rebalance the ratio between consumers’ purchasing power and the availability of goods on the market.⁵²³ The drastic reduction of note circulation, however, was bound to come at a price for it could not but discriminate against various social groups holding large quantities of cash money such as the peasantry, shopkeepers or the entrepreneurs. The Romanian case was in no way different. With the conversion rate set at 1:20, the lowest threshold was imposed on the self-employed, the unemployed and the retired (pensioners, war invalids, war widows etc.), all of whom were allowed to exchange only a maximum of 1.5 million lei, a sum equivalent to little over 3 US dollars. By contrast, all wage earners irrespective of their place of employment were given the opportunity to exchange 3 million lei, which by that point in time made up for roughly the average wage of a foreman in the heavy industry. Lastly, peasants could exchange the largest

⁵²² “Perspective după stabilizare”, *Scântea*, No. 914, September 5 1947.

⁵²³ John G. Gurley, “Excess Liquidity and European Monetary Reforms, 1944-1952”, *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 43, No. 1, 1953, 76-100. For the Romanian case see Miron Constantinescu, *Lupta pentru stabilizare* (Bucharest: Ministerul Artelor și informațiilor, 1948). Although intended as a propaganda brochure, Constantinescu’s booklet is remarkable for its honesty in listing the goals of the stabilization and its manifest hostility towards the social arrangement that regulated industrial relations for the first two postwar years, such as the collective labour contracts and collective bargaining, both of which allegedly lead to high wages and inflation.

amount of cash money, between 5 and 7 million lei in old banknotes, the latter sum being conditioned on them having sold their harvests to the state.⁵²⁴

This scale of entitlements to new cash money expressed the effort to reach a compromise between the two social groups communist party bosses believed to represent - the workers and the peasants. The timing of the monetary stabilization is telling in this respect. Scheduled for the month of August, the conversion struck halfway through the harvesting season, to wit after peasants would have sold much of their grain (wheat and maize) and before the autumn harvesting of potatoes and other vegetables in demand on urban markets. It was therefore hoped peasants would quickly come to appreciate the new currency and, with their cash reserves gone, would start bringing to town their produce in large quantities. Moreover, because August 15 was a payday for the vast majority of industrial workers, the government expected for this social group to possess little to no cash and thus be less affected by the conversion. This was a reasonable expectation, particularly in view of the vicious debt circle workers were caught up in.⁵²⁵ Workers would consequently receive their wages directly in the new currency and would thus ideally spend their money wisely on peasants' goods. Finally, the low threshold set for the non-producing population reflected the government's economic rationality to the extent these people were either seen as a burden on state expenditure or were simply castigated as "speculators" of sorts, none of whom were to play any role within the commodity chains that ought to link the city to the countryside.

⁵²⁴ G. J. Conrad, *Die Wirtschaft Rumäniens von 1945 bis 1952* (Berlin: Duncker & Humbolt, 1952), 13-15.

⁵²⁵ See also the recollections of Sorin Toma, former editor of *Scântea*, who drafted the front-page articles announcing the stabilization in the summer of 1947; Sorin Toma, *Privind înapoi. Amintirile unui fost ziarist comunist* (Bucharest: Compania, 2004), 103 *et passim*.

The hierarchy of economic worth inscribed in the conversion thresholds puzzled some experts with the Ministry of Finance. They agreed with the government on the necessity to undertake the monetary stabilization as well as on the need to reconnect rural producers to urban consumers. The grain harvest for 1947 - estimated at 87% higher than the one yielded in 1946 - offered an ideal opportunity to overcome the food crisis of the preceding two years and incentivize monetarized transactions between peasants and workers.⁵²⁶ Where they disagreed with the government's program was on the very logic of setting the lowest conversion threshold for non-wage earners. On the one hand, it was pointed out that workers' purchasing power was not the main factor influencing the formation of free prices for agricultural goods. It was therefore misleading to hope that a stronger currency would automatically push peasants' produce to flood urban markets. On the other hand, it was explained that the harsh conversion threshold set for shopkeepers and entrepreneurs would deplete their financial resources and paralyze the flow of commodities they mediated between cities and the countryside. Privately owned retail shops were still the overwhelming mechanism through which urban consumption was organized. Two months after stabilization all these fears proved well founded. By October 1947, taxing authorities noted with great alarm that due to the sudden drop in note circulation it became increasingly hard to levy any taxes. As neither the payment of wages for state employees nor the payment of reparations to the Soviet Union could suffer delays, the government saw itself again forced to appeal to the National Bank for printing money.⁵²⁷ Moreover, both the owners of retail shops and peasants seemed unable or unwilling to engage in commercial exchanges. Here too the government saw it

⁵²⁶ ANR, Ministerul Finanțelor. Oficiul de studii și coordonare financiară, 494/1947 and 516/1947.

⁵²⁷ IBIDEM, 527/1947, p. 35.

necessary to revive the market for basic consumption items by cutting down on transportation taxes and offering various tax exemptions for textiles and agricultural tools with the hope to stimulate peasants' need for cash money.

Peasants' blunt refusal to reenter the market in the weeks following the monetary stabilization as well as the impending fiscal crisis of the tax state sent shock waves through the corridors of the Central Committee in Bucharest. Here debates heated up around the so-called compromise between the peasants and the workers for party bosses felt they were faced with a conundrum: they could either push up prices for agricultural goods or they could allow industrial wages to grow. Each choice carried heavy political consequences. Prices for agricultural goods on local markets were set by municipalities through daily or sometimes weekly public price lists called "mercuriale". These lists were displayed throughout towns and were often jotted down under the pressure of trade-unions who would lobby authorities to keep prices low in order for workers to afford larger purchases. Yet low prices created massive shortages as peasants preferred to engage in wasteful household consumption rather than obey the dictate of the municipality. As party boss Vasile Luca explained: "[...] visit the villages, go to the market, and talk to ordinary people. You will then see that the peasant opts to lubricate the wheels of his cart with butter rather than fuel oil because it is cheaper; you will also see that pigs are fed with milk because the cost of bringing it to town is higher than what he might expect to get for it."⁵²⁸ Pushing prices up would have therefore very likely triggered discontent with the workers. Raising industrial wages,

⁵²⁸ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămară, 30/1947, p. 8.

however, was an equally troublesome choice given that higher salaries went against the aim of the monetary stabilization by potentially feeding another inflationary snowball.⁵²⁹

The short-term outcomes of the monetary stabilization might have briefly polarized the Central Committee over the alleged dilemma of sacrificing workers to incentivize peasants but it also revealed the extent to which the effort of the communist government to remonetarize the economy was curtailed by structural factors, in particular by the dependence of the waged population on the privately produced goods in the countryside and the private retail sector. In this context, the monetary stabilization raised - arguably for the first time since the end of the war - the question of the material sinews of the emerging *socialist* state, namely the bureaucratic mechanisms, networks and logistics that were to underpin the allocation and distribution of basic foodstuff. More importantly, however, the cluster of interlocking financial and social policies that prepared, accompanied and followed up the stabilization should be and *were* seen as constituting the first concerted attempt on the part of the communist party at radical state-building. The state-form that emerged out of stabilization was not only geared toward managing the food crisis through an expanded rationing system and the development of the public retail sector, but equally toward regulating the interplay between labor and capital by way of administrative recommodification. This latter function of the state implied making both factories and their workers profitable (*rentabili*) through rationalization, with the hope of first recovering and then surpassing the industrial output and productivity level of the prewar epoch. In turn, rationalization covered a wide spectrum of policies, from the imposition of financial discipline on management, selective

⁵²⁹ The politics of low wages and higher prices for agricultural goods was strongly defended by party boss Ioan Gh. Maurer who claimed it expressed the opinion of Soviet advisors as well, ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 28/1947, p. 35.

unemployment and the dismantlement of economate to the extension of piece-rate, the abolition of workers' debts and the remaking of the wage relation. Let us now delve a bit on the question of the early socialist state.

“The state and its nature”, writes Mark Pittaway, “is perhaps the most central question for writing the social history of socialism in the region. The state not only industrialized and collectivized and distributed (semi-successfully) food and consumer goods; it also sought at various times to remake the institution of the family, to invest a new nation, to transform the mentalities of its workers.”⁵³⁰ Few historians of postwar East Central Europe would disagree with this claim. Indeed, the state is so massively central to any account of the postwar transition to Stalinism that one can hardly imagine any aspect of social life falling beyond its reach. There are good reasons for this methodological choice. For an older historiography, it was vital to understand the emergence of the totalitarian state, a state whose authority was held to deeply permeate society. The concept of “totalitarianism” itself was nothing more than a theory of the state’s unlimited agency and hence of the unhindered ability of the new communist elite to reshape the very texture of the societies over which it governed.⁵³¹ For a more recent historiography, one explicitly critical of totalitarianism’s explanatory value, the emphasis falls on the negotiated agency of the state. The state, it is argued, even at its most unshackled was still very much a product of the manifold, quotidian and pervasive back-and-forth between various social groups and the bureaucracy. For

⁵³⁰ Maria Bucur, Rayna Gavriloa, Wendy Goldman, Maureen Healy, Kate Lebow and Mark Pittaway, “Six Historians in Search of Alltagsgeschichte”, *Aspasia*, Vol. 3, 2009, 198.

⁵³¹ I reviewed some of this literature in my “Labour’s Logic. Some Remarks on the Social Limits of Stalinization in Romania, 1941-1945”, paper presented at the workshop *Labor History in Eastern Europe*, organized on the 2nd and 3rd of November 2012 by CEU History Department in Budapest, Hungary.

Pittaway, this back-and-forth delineates a social space best captured through the notion of legitimacy.

How, then, should the question of legitimacy cast new light on the emergence of the postwar socialist state in East Central Europe? According to Pittaway, a focus on legitimacy might allow historians to eschew the temptation to reify the state as an autonomous form of rule severed from the social contexts in which power is customarily exercised. Legitimacy then is to be understood “as a state of affairs in which a given regime’s claim to rule met with sufficient degree of acceptance to ensure that it was able to acquire the necessary degree of ‘infrastructural’ power to rule on a day-to-day basis and thus appear as a coherent, unified actor ruling above the rest of society.”⁵³² The focus on the processual and relational nature of the “infrastructural power to rule” would then reveal a multitude of social spaces riven with tensions leading to both conflict and compromise between various policies and, for instance, “the aspirations, cultures, and political identities of ‘actually existing’ industrial workers” or “the moral economies of village communities”.⁵³³ In this view, to ask whether a regime is legitimate or not is secondary and counterfactual, though perhaps no less morally and politically salient. What matters instead is the historian’s ability to explore the “dynamic reality which existed in the critical space between rulers and ruled” in order to grasp the “evolving set of socio-cultural values which were influenced partly by the legitimating actions of rulers but also by the attitudes of the ruled.”⁵³⁴

⁵³² Mark Pittaway, *The Workers’ State. Industrial Labor and the Making of Socialist Hungary, 1944-1958* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 4.

⁵³³ *IBIDEM*, 6-7.

⁵³⁴ This proposition informs the research agenda on political legitimacy in mid-twentieth century Europe sketched by Martin Conway and Peter Romijn, “Introduction”, *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 13, No. 4, 2004, 377-388.

To view the state through the lens of “legitimacy”, then, is a welcome attempt to grasp infrastructural power, namely “the capacity of the state actually to penetrate civil society, and to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm.”⁵³⁵ This view complements older understandings of power that have informed studies of the postwar in East Central Europe. One such example is what Jan T. Gross - drawing on his study of wartime occupied Eastern Poland - famously called the “spoiler state”.⁵³⁶ According to Gross, the type of power that grounded this form of state, allegedly to be found in postwar East Central Europe as well, is called absolute power: “[w]hat else is absolute power but that others do not have any? Thus absolute power is produced by the incapacitation i.e. by a process of reduction, not amplification, of the existing or potential *loci* of power in society”.⁵³⁷ There is much to recommend this essentially despotic understanding of power. The postwar destruction of “traditional” political parties, of churches and other kinds of civil associations may all be seen as instances of “incapacitation”. Yet Gross’s understanding remains deeply one-sided, particularly in its insistence on the reduction rather than amplification of society’s organizational strength. In this view, the state still appears as a levitating agency hovering over an increasingly powerless society, constantly depriving it of its supposed autonomy. To focus on the infrastructural power of the state, instead, promises to reveal not so much what was repressed as what was produced.⁵³⁸ This shift of perspective entails paying close

⁵³⁵ Michael Mann, “The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results”, *European Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 1984, 190.

⁵³⁶ For the notion of the “spoiler state” see the epilogue to Jan T. Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland’s Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002). Gross suggested this notion might as well describe the postwar context across the region; Jan T. Gross, “War as Revolution” in Norman Naimark and Leonid Gibianskii (eds.) *The Establishment of Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe, 1944-1949* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997).

⁵³⁷ *IBIDEM*, 32.

⁵³⁸ In practice, of course, the workings of infrastructural power depend heavily on the state’s ability to contain or incapacitate alternative nuclei of organized civil life. For analytical purposes, however, an examination of

attention to the techniques of production that propel the state effect.⁵³⁹ Let me now put some flesh on these abstract bones.

In the first part of this chapter I attempted to describe the mechanism through which grain was extracted from the peasantry during much of the war up until the draught years of 1945 and 1946. This mechanism, I argued, was premised on the cooperation of state authorities and local notabilities at the village level, and allowed a space of maneuver for the peasants to the extent individual quotas of wheat or maize depended on the knowledge about the harvest made available by the village agricultural expert. Predictably, the whole process took place after the harvesting of the crops was well over and the peasants had managed to carry home their grain. For this reason, as I showed above, grain deliveries were accompanied by a considerable degree of *mépris* on the part of ministerial authorities in Bucharest, so much so that statistics had to be adjusted to peasants' underestimations of their harvest. Over the summer of 1947, however, authorities attempted to tighten their control over deliveries by collecting grain in the field (*la treer* or *la arie*) rather than in the village.⁵⁴⁰ This was a radical though understandable change: because the harvest was judged to be large enough in order to significantly alleviate the devastating food crisis and because peasants were traditionally suspected of bad faith, it seemed justified to introduce a more severe delivery regime. This operation implied the presence of the mayor, the notaries and soldiers (or

infrastructural power should focus not so much on repression as on the creation of new forms of organization. I owe this point to Ștefan Guga.

⁵³⁹ I am following here Timothy Mitchell, "Society, Economy, and the State Effect", in Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta (eds.) *The Anthropology of the State. A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 178-182. Note that the distinction between despotic and infrastructural power proposed by Mann is analogous to the one between sovereignty and *gouvernementalité* introduced by Foucault and furthered developed by Mitchell. For the social historian, what these approaches share is a call for overcoming analyses of the state seen in the words of Mitchell as a "machinery of intentions" or as a "subjective realm of plans, programs, or ideas."

⁵⁴⁰ "Un nou regim al cerealelor", *Scântea*, No. 855, June 27 1947 and "Noul regim al cerealelor", *Scântea*, No. 857, June 29 1947.

gendarmes) in the field, where they would surveil the reaping and threshing processes, weigh the grain, coordinate the workforce employed, retain the quotas, pay the peasants in cash money on the spot and work together with the representatives of INCOOP to distribute, store, and transport the goods to various cooperatives.⁵⁴¹

The redeployment of the grain delivery system from the village to the fields was premised on avoiding any kind of input from the peasants. This, in principle, entailed an unprecedented extension of the state's infrastructural power, all amidst protest from agricultural producers who were now finding themselves deprived of the room of maneuver customarily enjoyed at the village level.⁵⁴² Infrastructural power, however, encompassed more than the mobilization of personnel and bureaucratic resources on the fields. It also involved the forced monetarization of the countryside through the expansion of wage labour. Once the state assumed some form of control over agricultural producers at the point of reaping, the problem of how to pay the day laborers emerged with utter urgency. Traditionally recruited from the ranks of the impoverished and landless peasantry, these day laborers were contracted by agricultural producers and paid in kind with a part of the harvest. To continue to keep to this payment method, particularly after the monetary stabilization allegedly made available a strong currency, was considered an extra burden

⁵⁴¹ The nitty-gritty of this transformation is curiously ignored by anthropologists Verdery and Kligman although it significantly strengthens their argument that “the subject of [foodstuff] collections was the most frequent topic of [state] regulation throughout the first decade of the new regime”; Gail Kligman and Katherine Verdery, *Peasants under Siege. The Collectivization of Romanian Agriculture, 1949-1962* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 110.

⁵⁴² Throughout 1948 some local authorities purposefully ignored these prescriptions just to avoid further antagonizing their rural citizenry, ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 74/1948 and IBIDEM, Secția Cancelarie, 12/1948. Grain deliveries for 1948 produced mixed results. On the one hand, party bosses were constantly expressing their fear that, as one of them put it “we are at the hands of the peasants”, repeatedly calling for the organization of vegetable gardens and farms around cities. On the other hand, local authorities were content with the amount they collected given the situation in the countryside; ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 20/1948 and 35/1948.

placed on urban consumption since it diminished the available stock of grain. It was therefore argued agricultural producers should be compelled to use the money they get from selling their grain to the state to pay cash wages to their temporary employees. This option, as one party boss warned in July 1949, risked alienating the poor peasantry. For an entire rural population purposefully excluded from the rationing system, receiving cash wages equaled a sentence to mass starvation.⁵⁴³

The combined outcome of these techniques of grain extraction in the countryside was the first major postwar peasant rebellion that swept across Western Romania for much of July and August 1949.⁵⁴⁴ What is remarkable about these violent events - which left dozens of dead on both sides and led to arrests, imprisonment and executions - was the precision with which the peasants identified the state with the new techniques for grain extraction. As one report of the secret police noted in July 1949 peasants were “angry over the decision of the government to pay reaping in cash wages and collect the quotas in the fields.”⁵⁴⁵ As a result, during the rebellion peasants attacked threshing machines, devastated the cooperatives, threatened to blow up storage facilities, destroyed the carts carrying grain, and vandalized the local village halls and the headquarters of the police and the communist party.⁵⁴⁶ What explains the occurrence of the rebellion in 1949 rather than earlier (grain deliveries were instituted before Romania joined the war in 1941) was not only the transformation in the regime of collection but also the effort to monetarize agricultural work

⁵⁴³ See the discussion in ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 234/1949.

⁵⁴⁴ The best recent overview of the events is Carmen Elena Potra, “Revoltele țărănești din județul Bihor în vara anului 1949”, Clara Mareș and Constantin Vasilescu (eds.), *Nesupunere și contestare în România comunistă* (Iași: Polirom, 2015), 19-42. No general study that places the rebellion in the agricultural history of mid-twentieth century Romania exists.

⁵⁴⁵ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 43/1949, p. 8.

⁵⁴⁶ See ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 41/1949 for the unfolding of the rebellion.

as a way of boosting grain reserves. The discontent over the interdiction to pay day laborers in kind fed into a moment of solidarity between peasants of different social standing at the village level and turned whole rural communities otherwise divided by land ownership, wealth and ethnicity against the state. Removed from the space of negotiation, the new delivery system produced a state doubly external to the moral economy of harvesting grain: it affected at the same time the landowners (so-called *chiaburi* or *kulaks*) and the day laborers.

This example shows the manner in which the extension of infrastructural power through various techniques of production creates the state as an external entity standing above though not always in opposition to community life. At the same time, however, the very same techniques give birth to the social conditions for revolt or acquiescence, weaving together textures of solidarity or digging trenches of resilience. It is at this level of quotidian social practice, then, that legitimacy is openly disputed. Struggles such as the ones described above, no matter what other forms they may take at one point or another, are an immanent feature of this process rather than a by-product of traditional peasant values or other rationalizations of *longue durée* cultural dispositions. The merits of this perspective on the state for a social history of early socialism is threefold. Firstly, it tempers the propensity to impute intentions to abstract entities such as the state, the party or society. Rather than seeing each of these entities as fully formed historical actors, the perspective advocated here conceives them as interlocking, mutually constituting sets of practices. Secondly, it widens the repertoire of objects liable to be investigated as relevant for state-making, expanding the focus beyond questions of overt coercion and implicit consent. Thirdly, it grounds state-making practices in wider economic and social dynamics that connected, for instance, the rebellious peasant fighting over grain quotas in the fields of Western Romania to the embittered metalworkers of Bucharest's Malaxa Works accusing the communist government of "not giving a hoot about our

starving children but still asking us to work with empty bellies.”⁵⁴⁷ Let me now turn to the question of “administrative recommodification”, the central process through which infrastructural power was channeled following the monetary stabilization of August 1947.

Two policies designed to regulate the relationship between capital and labor accompanied stabilization. The first, known as the “rational allocation of the workforce” (*repartizarea rațională a brațelor de muncă*) aimed to cut back the number of employed industrial workers to prewar levels in order to free factories from “hidden unemployment” and reduce aggregate demand for goods and services. The second materialized in the creation of so-called Industrial Offices - large scale bureaucratic structures charged to coordinate the production of entire industrial branches, deciding over the supply of raw materials, prices for finished goods and credit control with the goal of lowering production costs by all means available.⁵⁴⁸ Both policies were seen as the pillars of a rationalization drive that would instill some efficiency into an economy plagued by high production costs, shortages, and the combined idleness of labor and capital. Both policies were key moments of state-building to the extent they raised questions of legitimacy around the overt extension of infrastructural power into the realm of industrial production. Finally, and in the language of the epoch, together with the monetary stabilization both policies may be conceived of as cornerstones of the transition from the war to the peace economy. This transition, I argue, might be best understood through Claus Offe’s notion of “administrative recommodification”.

⁵⁴⁷ The full text of the petition is reproduced in Mioara Anton and Laurențiu Constantiniu (eds.) *Guvernați și guvernanți. Scrisori către putere, 1945-1965* (Iași: Polirom, 2013), 136-137.

⁵⁴⁸ The reduction of production costs by all means available was considered the “greatest problem of the Romanian economy” during a meeting of the chief managers of the Industrial Offices in February 1948, ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 48/1948, p. 3; see also CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 19/1947; 62/1947.

Originally articulated to account for the crisis of the Western welfare state of the 1970s, the notion of administrative recommodification designates those policies undertaken by states in order to secure that neither labor nor capital fall outside of the commodity form and fail to exchange themselves as values. These policies can range widely, but they all converge on attempting to create the conditions for the commodity form to prosper: investments in public infrastructure, retraining opportunities for obsolete workers thrown out of the labor market, tax exemptions for capital, joint public/private financing etc. Administrative recommodification is therefore markedly different from policies that rely on the self-regulating ability of markets or from welfare policies premised on subsidizing non-value producing sectors of the economy. The goal of these policies of recommodification, as Offe put it rather cryptically, is to achieve “a maximum of exchange opportunities.”⁵⁴⁹ The postwar transition from the war to the peace economy in East Central Europe was mediated by a similar bundle of policies.⁵⁵⁰ Take, for instance, an economic recovery plan drafted in early 1948. This plan addressed the issue of the “profitability gap” (*gol de rentabilitate*) i.e. the total amount of monetary losses run by factories after stabilization, and sought to propose a set of measures to redress it. Firstly, it was recommended profitless factories (*întreprinderi neeconomice*) be shut down and their industrial capital concentrated in large scale production units. Secondly, the plan prescribed a radical change

⁵⁴⁹ Claus Offe and Volker Ronge, “Theses on the Theory of the State”, *New German Critique*, No. 6, 1975, 142. Note that “administrative recommodification” refers both to labour and capital. With respect to the first, Offe distinguishes between passive and active proletarianization in order to argue for the centrality of social policy in the “transformation of *dispossessed* labor power into active wage-labour” (emphasis in the original). Or, to put it slightly differently, social policy is constitutive of the labor-market. See Claus Offe, “Social Policy and the Theory of the State” in his *Contradictions of the Welfare State* (London: Hutchinson, 1984), 93-94. In this sense, the policy of the “rational allocation of the workforce” should be seen as an attempt of the postwar Romanian state to actively organize labour supply.

⁵⁵⁰ Beyond the perceived idleness, inefficiency and shortages of capital and labor, as I noted in the first part of this chapter the postwar Romanian state was running its own fiscal crisis while massively subsidizing the private consumption of workers through *economate*.

of investment strategies. It noted that investments in fixed capital can only be financed through the National Bank, and should be divided into two types: investments for reconstruction and for development. The first were to be privileged over the second to the extent investment operations ought to be directed toward those sectors of the economy that guaranteed rapid amortization and higher short-term profits. Thirdly, it was underlined the number of employees in industry is still too large and ought to be downsized, particularly among the administrative and supervisory personnel. Of the three policies, the firing and subsequent reshuffling of workers among factories proved the most difficult to implement.

The origins of the “rational allocation of the workforce” policy may be traced back to the first debates over stabilization that engaged the members of the Central Committee in March 1947.⁵⁵¹ Then and there it was noted that by early 1947 Romanian industry had come to employ over 554,000 workers, including blue-collar employees and administrative staff whereas in 1938 - the benchmark date for the take-off of the war economy - statistics indicated a mere 324,000 employees. If these figures were even remotely accurate it resulted that in the space of little under ten years, the total number of employees in industry almost doubled while industrial output fell by an estimated 60%.⁵⁵² In order to restore the ratio between capital and labour to prewar levels, it was decided that at least 30% of the employees had to be fired and, if possible, redirected either to agricultural work or to those factories that might experience temporary shortages of manpower. To assist with this operation, in July 1947 the Ministry of Labour was charged to set up “workforce allocation” offices throughout the country and provide trained personnel for them. Once

⁵⁵¹ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămară, 9/1947, pp. 1-9.

⁵⁵² ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămară, 30/1947, p. 6.

established, these offices would ask all industrial units in their designated area to deliver information about their total number of employees and propose lists with those to be discharged.⁵⁵³ Although the decision on whom to fire rested in principle with management alone, at the factory level it often fell on the members of the factory committee to draw up lists given their influence among workers.⁵⁵⁴ The singled out workers could, in turn, plead their case in front of the “workforce allocation” office representatives, with varying degrees of success.

The entire operation was predictably likely to trigger discontent. The results of an improvised opinion poll conducted in the capital city of Bucharest in late June 1947 showed that many of those interviewed believed that “the firing of workers fed anti-governmental sentiment” because “[t]he government will be accused that it purges workers on political grounds and the unemployed will serve the purpose of the reaction.”⁵⁵⁵ In south-western Transylvania social-democrat workers protested for being laid-off by none other than the local chief of the gendarmerie who was now presiding over the “workforce allocation” office: “this fact will produce general discontent given that the county of Hunedoara is an industrial one and we ended up being judged by gendarmes, the very ones who have persecuted us in the past.”⁵⁵⁶ These fears steaming from below dispersed far and wide. Communist party bosses feared that the involvement of the trade-

⁵⁵³ ANR, MM, 162/1947, pp. 1-21. The discharged workers were entitled to receive one compensatory salary as well as firewood and foodstuff.

⁵⁵⁴ In one case concerning the paper factory “Letea”, management was not only not aware of who was put on the list, it was also shocked to discover the factory committee jotted down the name of the director among those to be dismissed, in ANR, MM, 464/1947, p. 1-5.

⁵⁵⁵ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 6/1947, p. 9. The opinion poll was conducted on a sample of roughly 500 residents of Bucharest with the help of police officers at the request of the government. For similar cases of sampling an early form of “public opinion” in postwar East Germany see Mark Allinson, “Popular Opinion”, in Patrick Major and Jonathan Osmond (eds.) *The Workers’ and Peasants’ State. Communism and Society in East Germany under Ulbricht 1945-1971* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 96-111.

⁵⁵⁶ ANR, MM, 156/1947, p. 242.

unions in the firing of workers would compromise them even further and recommended for the rank-and-file to at least avoid the use of the term “unemployment” (*şomaj*) and speak rather of “decongestioning” (*decongestionare*) or “compression” (*comprimare*) of workers.⁵⁵⁷ Euphemisms aside, it was far from clear who these workers waiting to be dismissed should be. There was a significant amount of reasonable prejudice among communist party bosses for the so-called “pogonari”: double-dwellers with one foot in the countryside owning a modicum of land and making a seasonal living in industry. On the one hand, firing these workers made things easier for management and the union delegates since they represented a fluctuating, low-skilled and poorly paid workforce often accused of absenteeism, lack of political commitment and bad manners. On the other hand, glued to their land, it was nearly impossible to relocate the double-dwellers to other regions where labour was supposedly scarce. Small wonder then that by September 1947 party bosses were contemplating a mass of unemployed persons moved from one end of the country to the other:

[T]hey take people and send them from one town to another, and when they arrive there the factory committee or the owner does not want them. They say it is not their business to find accommodation for them. Those who have to be allocated to other factories cannot work because the owners do not even give them a cottage to shelter them from wind and rain.⁵⁵⁸

The lay-off campaign proved less than satisfactory. By late 1947 it was estimated that of the initial target of 166,200 workers scheduled to be dismissed, the “workforce allocation” offices managed to process between 26,000 and 380,00 people.⁵⁵⁹ Two reasons explain this state of affairs.

⁵⁵⁷ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămarilor, 23/1947, 75/1947 for the improbable suggestion that CGM should take care of the workforce allocation rather than the firing in order to appear on the side of the workers.

⁵⁵⁸ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămarilor, 32/1947, p. 60.

⁵⁵⁹ IBIDEM, p. 7.

First, the assumption that informed this policy was misleading in the sense that 1938 could hardly have been taken as threshold year for assessing the performance of industry in peace time. In many cases, factories suffered significant technological upgrading and enlargement during the war and hired personnel as a consequence of their newly acquired production capacity. Reducing their number of employees in 1947 to prewar levels would have only idled them more, as factory managers never ceased to argue. Moreover, even with the same machines there were also cases of factories for which the transition from war to peace production required more rather than less employees. Second, and more importantly, the lay-off campaign provided the opportunity for factory committees to get rid of politically troublesome workers or conversely to save from firing comrades, all in an atmosphere of generalized suspicion and moral indignation that brought management and union delegates at loggerheads. Take, for instance, the example of Laromet Works in Bucharest. This metal factory employed a total of 406 workers in 1938 and 830 in 1947, a boost accounted for by a doubling of the administrative staff and almost a tripling in the unskilled labour force during the war period. Consequently, the list of workers to be fired ultimately embodied the struggle between union delegates and the factory's director, with the first picking out among the functionaries and the latter mainly among the unskilled workers or among those in charge of the welfare of the employees such as a medical doctor serving as a midwife.

Despite such conflicts, which were indeed common throughout Romanian industry in 1947, the experiment with selective unemployment was not a complete failure for communist party bosses. Even though it encountered myriad forms of resistance both against the lay-off and the subsequent redistribution of workers, the "workforce allocation" offices remained in place as a key mechanism for managing labour supply and one of the more significant institutional legacies bequeathed by stabilization reforms to the early socialist state. Granted, for the next few years

recruitment in industry remained a localized affair resolved at the factory's gates through informal networks. Yet, particularly in large cities prone to immigration from the countryside such as Bucharest, the role of the "workforce allocation" offices became more and more important in the organization of labour markets. From the standpoint of cutting costs and recovering the lost efficiency of Romanian industrial production, however, the lay-offs campaign did prove a failure. Not only was the number of the fired workers rather insignificant, but as long as the structure of the wage was still determined by the collective labour contracts implemented in the immediate aftermath of the war, there was little hope that factories would be able to reduce their production costs. The remaking of the wage system, therefore, was another aspect of the administrative recommodification undertaken alongside monetary stabilization during the summer of 1947 and after. It is to the social and cultural implications of this process that I now turn.

Part IV

Wages of Peace

"In the production process, just as well as in consumption, any unnecessary spending is a source of waste (*risipă*). This is the hidden disease of industrial plants, which is not always easy to track down. Waste often goes unnoticed, as just another factor that contributes to production. Yet waste is a loss to the national economy and we should strive to find its origins in

order to avoid it.”⁵⁶⁰ Thus reads one of the main conclusions of a sociological study undertaken in late 1947 by a team of researchers of the Bolyai University in the city of Cluj. Headed by Hillel Kohn, the team conducted fieldwork in the city’s largest metal repair workshop in order to assess the impact of the monetary stabilization and the industrial policy package passed over the summer of 1947 on working conditions, labour productivity and the prospects for a thorough rationalization of production. Much like myself in this chapter, they too started their investigation with the food crisis of early 1947 - “months of the darkest misery” - when undernourished workers “fell down at their workbenches” and abandoned their factories only to supposedly come back the next day to complete their tasks.⁵⁶¹ Unlike myself, however, Kohn’s team took their cue from Eugen Varga’s recently published book on postwar capitalism where they found the argument that industrial growth depended on round-the-clock production on the assembly line and higher labour productivity was to be achieved with an overwhelmingly unskilled workforce. The Romanian case seemed to conform to this scenario: the intensification of work and the role of the “human factor” (*factorul uman*) were deemed essential for economic reconstruction against the background of the monetary stabilization whereby “any investment which does not immediately put on the market an adequate quantity of commodities can give way to inflationary tendencies.”⁵⁶²

⁵⁶⁰ Hillel Kohn, *Productivitatea muncii în atelierele CFR din Cluj. Contribuție la problema productivității muncii în Republica Populară Română* (Cluj : 1948), 66. Kohn (1891-1972) - a long time communist party member and Holocaust survivor - went on to produce a series of studies in Hungarian and Romanian of the early collective farms as well as a detailed social history of Cluj’s largest factory - the shoe and leather manufacture Dermata, Hillel Kohn and Alexandru Keszi (eds.) *Exploatarea capitalistă la Dermata* (Bucharest: Editura de Stat pentru Literatură Științifică, 1954).

⁵⁶¹ IBIDEM, 44.

⁵⁶² IBIDEM, 58 The argument went on as follows: “Before we can acquire new machines for our industry we have to increase labour productivity with the actual stock.”

For Kohn and his students, the “human factor” rather than capital was the genuine object of rationalization in a double sense. On the one hand, given the post-stabilization financial landscape and the general postwar condition of the country, investments in fixed capital (machines, assembly lines etc.) were likely to be minimal at best: “the goal of rationalizing an industrial plant is to increase its productivity and lower production costs, using the same machines and labour input (*manoperă*).”⁵⁶³ On the other hand, the workers themselves were the major source of waste that pushed up costs and hindered the lean functioning of the labour process. Kohn was adamant in documenting a wide range of unproductive behavior on and outside of the shopfloor: absenteeism, strolling, daydreaming, chatting, disobeying orders, disrespecting bosses. All of these attitudes had informed and were in turn encouraged by the tensioned relationship between workers and the supervisory personnel, particularly engineers for it often happened for the latter to be accused of being reactionary. It was the factory committee, Kohn went on to note, that “knew how to represent the advanced rather than backward workers”, refusing to “win over cheap popularity” and managing to contain the unjust demands put forward by “anarchist elements”.⁵⁶⁴ The factory committee was also to be praised for overseeing the lay-offs campaign, kicking out of the factory over 270 “undeserving” workers without much fuss. What, then, of the remaining “human factor”?

In its empirical detail, Kohn’s study was an ode to the male, mature and skilled metalworker, the “know-it-all” (*știe-tot*) type of worker, the master of shopfloor creativity, endurance and authority. Predictably, it was this type of worker rather than the cohorts of the unskilled predicated by Varga that responded the best to the intensification of work and the push

⁵⁶³ IBIDEM, 62.

⁵⁶⁴ IBIDEM, 83.

for higher productivity. Through a number of biographical sketches, Kohn revealed how those over the age of forty were the “backbone of the workshop” because they had mastered all working techniques, possessed remarkable dexterity and had “a different political and professional education.”⁵⁶⁵ Yet it was not only their skills, craft consciousness and political commitments that made these workers so central to the labour process; it was also their family standing that made them stable and reliable. Kohn’s researchers discovered all of these workers had at least three family members in their care, a fact which “throws a new light on their work, on the intensity with which they are tied to their workplace”⁵⁶⁶ and explains why they are more productive than the rest. For Kohn, the pivotal role of the senior skilled workers was poorly reflected in the wage system under which they worked. Based on output bonuses, this system was known as “team piece-rate” and rewarded the collective rather than the individual performance of workers. The lack of individual performance, therefore, was spread out to the whole team, producing yet another form of waste.

The concern with a more just wage system that would re-value skill, the rediscovery of the stable and productive male breadwinner and the obsession with wasted resources were all topics hotly debated in the wake of the mass lay-off campaign, not merely during the meetings of the Central Committee but also by factory managers. In Reșița, UDR’s general director Popp was arguing to the same effect. Popp, however, was more attuned to the details of industrial life than the Cluj sociologists as he blamed the collective labour contracts enacted at the end of 1945 for the downfall of the skilled metalworker. Popp underlined three consequences the contracts had on

⁵⁶⁵ IBIDEM, 71. The younger workers, Kohn argued, had fallen for “the lies of fascism”.

⁵⁶⁶ IBIDEM, 72.

UDR's workforce. First, these contracts produced a kind of harmful uniformity since they failed to distinguished between the stable and skilled workers and "the seasonal and semi-industrial, those who have a plot of land and look at industry as an additional source of income for their families."⁵⁶⁷ Secondly, the contracts achieved a double flattening out (*turtire*) of the wages. On the one hand, the unskilled worker earned with over 40% more in 1947 than in 1940; on the other hand, the difference between skilled workers was itself reduced so much so that whereas in 1940 a forger received on average 80% of the wage of his foreman, in 1947 the same forger took home roughly 93%. This wage scale led to "such an exaggerated equalization that it did away with the incentive to lead a good life by occupying a position of greater responsibility."⁵⁶⁸ Thirdly, the contracts were responsible for the total collapse of the piece-rate system. According to Popp, sensible piece-rate norms should allow workers to add at most 20% to their basic wages and not, as it was the case in 1947, over 500%.⁵⁶⁹

The remaking of the wage scale, however, entailed more than the introduction of tighter piece-rate norms and higher pay for the skilled worker. It also entailed the dismantling of the "social wage" as it was embedded in the prescriptions of the postwar collective labour contracts enacted by CGM. As I have argued in the second chapter, the "social wage" was essentially understood as access to subsidized goods via the factory stores (*economate*), including firewood and clothing items. Running these stores, however, created a double burden: it forced management to take out credit and spend it on provisioning workers rather than investments and made workers

⁵⁶⁷ ANR, Ministerul Economiei Naționale, 9/1947, p. 24.

⁵⁶⁸ IBIDEM, p. 25.

⁵⁶⁹ For the same argument about the levelling of the wage scale see also ANR, UDR, 22/1947, p. 15 "We ended up in a situation in which the salary is given in kind (*avantagii în natură*), independently of production and of the role and responsibility of the employee."

accumulate long-term debts, leaving them with little to no cash on payday. As the communist daily *Scântea* explained in late August 1947, the nature of the economate had always been temporary, a form of “help our democratic state offered to employees in harsh times.”⁵⁷⁰ Furthermore, it was argued the National Bank will only lend money for investments in production and explained that the abolition of subsidized consumption will significantly reduce production costs. The news must have come as a surprise to workers and factory owners as well. During the months leading to the monetary stabilization the communist press never mentioned the dismantlement of the economate. On the contrary, myriad articles pleaded for their retention as still the best way to organize provisioning, and accused “the capitalists” of “diabolical” plans to close down the stores.⁵⁷¹

It was certainly shocking to witness armies of financial inspectors descending upon the country’s largest economate during late 1947 and early 1948 to close them down. In Reșița, it was revealed UDR’s economat engaged in massive “unjustified” spending during the food crisis of early 1947, buying up large quantities of beef and pork meat thus “blocking funds necessary for production” and contributing to the “economic chaos before the monetary stabilization.”⁵⁷² This type of rhetoric emphasized time and again the degree to which the factory stores were wasting financial resources, and replicated many of the arguments against subsidized consumption put forward for the last couple of years by the General Union of Romanian Industrialists (UGIR).⁵⁷³ Therefore, dismantling the economate was a precondition for administratively recommodifying

⁵⁷⁰ “Mai sunt sau nu necesare și folositoare economatele”, *Scântea*, XVI, No. 906, August 27 1947.

⁵⁷¹ Emilian Angheliu, “Invenția diavolicească. Unii patroni cer desființarea economateelor și cantinelor”, *Viața Sindicală*, March 30 1947. There were many more articles in this tone published up until June/July 1947.

⁵⁷² ANR, Ministerul Economiei Naționale, 17/1947, p. 29.

⁵⁷³ UGIR was so puzzled by the unexpected decision of the communist government to abolish the factory stores in August 1947 that it even sent a memo to the Ministry of Industry in order to inquire about whether this policy was real or not and asked for workers to be obliged to pay the full price of a meal at the canteen; ANR, Ministerul Industriei, 8/1947, p. 170.

industrial capital by way of injecting back into production the modicum of credit made available by the National Bank. Moreover, at the factory level the disentanglement of subsidized consumption from managerial duties could indeed free for more “productive work” a number of employees formerly in charge of provisioning. Be that as it may, with a vastly underdeveloped state retail-shop network even in the largest cities, it was far less clear how industrial workers would continue to procure for themselves basic consumption items in the absence of economate.

This question was all the more important in the context of the new rationing law that doubled the monetary stabilization.⁵⁷⁴ In significant ways, the law departed from earlier forms of rationing: not only did it expand the scheme to a wide array of foodstuff beyond bread but it now also covered clothing, textile and footwear items. Moreover, the new ration cards came with a scale of worth of their own which distinguished not merely between employees and their family members but equally between different types of work. Thus, for instance, miners and metalworkers were entitled to the largest quantities of rationed goods, followed by workers of the light industries, the state functionaries, war veterans and the like. Yet much like the previous laws passed during the war and after, this law too discriminated against rural residents and even against employees owning land in the countryside. Peasants remained excluded from accessing ration goods well into the 1950s.⁵⁷⁵ This comprehensive and hierarchical rationing system expressed a fear of a rising purchasing power of the salaried masses under the new wage system and was in principle supposed to hold at bay inflationary tendencies, thereby anticipating an upsurge in real wages. The sudden

⁵⁷⁴ Law 308, M.O. CXV, No. 200, September 1 1947.

⁵⁷⁵ See the detailed discussion of the implications of this rationing system for the Romanian rural social universe in Mircea Scrob, “From Mămăligă to Bread as the ‘Core’ Food of Romanian Villagers. A Consumer-Centered Interpretation of a Dietary Change (1900-1980)” (PhD Dissertation, Department of History, CEU, 2015), 130-133.

closing down of the factory stores, however, directly questioned the ability of the rationed goods to reach their consumers. The solution proposed in late August 1947 - one remarkable for its immediate failure - was the autonomous employees' cooperative.

The idea was not without precedent. As we have seen in the first chapter, UDR's metalworkers set up their own cooperative in the aftermath of the Great Depression of the early 1930s, an *Aktiengesellschaft* through which they hoped to control price fluctuations on local peasant markets by bringing into the town of Reșița cheaper goods. It is not clear how widespread such initiatives were in the interwar period. In Bucharest, an allegedly "old social-democrat" cooperative called "Victoria" was revived with the help of CGM in early 1945 and catered to its members at official prices. This cooperative, however, was hardly a success story: its three small shops scattered across the city were almost always empty due to the competition it was subjected to by factory stores, which were willing and able to pay more on whatever goods were available during the postwar food crisis.⁵⁷⁶ What the new employees' cooperatives would retain from this historical experience was the mutualist principle on which such an institution was based: employees from different factories would brigade on a residential rather than factory base, pay their deposits (*parte socială*) and membership fees (*cotizație*) and expect for the cooperatives to deliver them various goods. Moreover, cooperatives would inherit much of the logistic underpinning the economate, including their unsold stocks, vehicles and personnel. Unlike the economate, cooperatives would never see any money from the National Bank or from the factories,

⁵⁷⁶ For instance, in 1945 "Victoria" bought eggs from Bulgaria; ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 95/1945, p. 11-13. One of its shops was located close to Malaxa Works, according to its one-time employee and future dissident Vasile Paraschiv, *Lupta mea pentru sindicate libere în România* (Iași: Polirom, 2005), 24.

their capital being exclusively made up of their members' deposits and fees.⁵⁷⁷ Conceived as “voluntary associations”, employees' cooperatives were to become a “weapon against intermediaries”, replacing the factory stores and supplementing an emergent public retail-shops network.⁵⁷⁸

Employees' cooperatives were an explicit attempt to excise the state from the wage relation by placing the costs of organizing provisioning on the workers themselves. Neither the government through bank loans nor the factories out of their own funds would subsidize workers' basic needs. The epoch of collective bargaining over provisioning, with its strikes, sequestrations and outbursts of violence, was over. Replacing the *economate* with “voluntary associations”, however, was easier said than done. For the two months following stabilization no less than 45% of the credit granted by the National Bank was spent on wages rather than investments.⁵⁷⁹ Yet it was the sheer lack of cash money on the part of the workers that doomed this project from the outset. By early 1948 there were 38 cooperatives in Bucharest alone with a membership exceeding 313,000 employees, and 202 cooperatives across the country totaling over 711,000 members.⁵⁸⁰ Significantly, very few of these cooperatives actually functioned, and those that did were themselves facing bankruptcy. Not only were they heavily underfinanced, as few of their members afforded to pay their fees, they also lacked the logistical means to transport and store basic goods

⁵⁷⁷ “Problema cooperativelor”, *Scântea*, XVI, No. 919, September 11 1947.

⁵⁷⁸ “Cooperativele, mijloc de îmbunătățirea a situației salariaților”, *Viața Sindicală*, September 14 1947.

⁵⁷⁹ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămară, 32/1947, p. 20. Controlling what factories did with their bank loans remained an issue even after the creation of a specialized bank for investments (Banca de credit pentru investiții) in 1948; ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 45/1949.

⁵⁸⁰ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 16/1948, pp. 24-27.

such as vegetables or meat. It was no surprise that by the end of the year the cooperative experiment was considered unfeasible and had to be overtaken by an emergent state retail sector.⁵⁸¹

Nor was the total externalization of provisioning costs outside of the factory a resounding success. By early

1950 a governmental

decree urged factories

to organize vegetable

gardens and pig

farms, for which the

National Bank would

indeed provide credit.

Managers were

instructed to feed

their livestock without

“recourse to the

market” and make extensive use of voluntary, unpaid work of its employees for servicing the

gardens and farms.⁵⁸² This project, which resembled similar plans attempted during the war, was

complemented in late 1952 by an additional decree that forced local municipalities in industrial

areas such as Reșița or the Jiu Valley to organize their own vegetable gardens and cater for the



Mobile C.E.C. Office in a Working-Class District of Bucharest, 1949; Source: *Viața Capitalei*, No. 38, June 17 1949.

⁵⁸¹ Unlike the cooperatives, the state stores called “Alimentara” would be opened to all, selling both rationed and non-rationed goods. In Bucharest, some of them were inaugurated on November 7 1948 to celebrate the Revolution, see ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 30/1948, p. 22.

⁵⁸² On how this decree was interpreted at the factory level, see AMB, Fond Laromet, 8/1947, pp. 13-19.

local population.⁵⁸³ And then there were the factory canteens, the supply of which remained an obligation of management even though here too beginning with late 1947 workers were made to pay the full price of their meals.⁵⁸⁴ Paying in cash for the canteen, or for firewood, was a consequence of this transformation in provisioning and a precondition for the implementation of the new wage system. What it amounted to was a complete monetarization of the workers' everyday life - a process which had to overcome the regime of debts workers had become accustomed to during the immediate postwar years and allow for the recovery of the value of cash money for working-class households. It was only against a monetarized everyday that a more hierarchical, performance-based wage system could make sense.

Monetarization proceed at a slow pace. A national "price slash" enacted in October 1948 revealed workers' wages were still plagued by debts which left many with little money to seize the chance of buying cheaper.⁵⁸⁵ This was hardly surprising for in spite of the complaints it provoked on payday, the regime of debts had its clear advantages. Consider the issue of firewood - the main fuel available for household heating. In line with the policy of shifting the costs of provisioning from the factories and the National Bank onto the workers, in early 1949 the Ministry of Finance decided to do away with the "debt system and the monthly installments subtracted through pay lists"⁵⁸⁶ from the employees by management. Instead, it was a newly created state company -

⁵⁸³ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 40/1952. More on this in chapter 5 below.

⁵⁸⁴ "Să luptăm pentru îmbunătățirea cantinelor", *Viața Sindicală*, December 14 1947. For Reșița see Petru Miclăuș, "Reținerile din salariu și problema Casei de Credit. O importantă hotărâre a membrilor sindicatului Metalochimic din Reșița", *Luptătorul bănățean*, No. 1049, March 24 1948.

⁵⁸⁵ "Price slashing" was a practice imported from the Soviet Union. On a given day and amidst great fanfare, prices for basic commodities would be cut. For the postwar Soviet context see Kirsty Ironside, "The Value of a Ruble: A Social History of Money in Postwar Soviet Russia, 1945-1964" (PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2014), Chapter I. For the popular reactions to the price slashing in various regions of Romania see ANR, DGP, 24/1948.

⁵⁸⁶ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 74/1949, p. 147.

Comlemn - that would run the firewood provisioning in the major cities, organizing storage facilities and expecting workers to pay in cash (*din mână*). Factories would then be freed from the duty of supplying their employees with firewood and saved from having to retain parts of their salaries as debt.

This decision triggered a wave of discontent among workers.⁵⁸⁷ During a meeting convened by CGM in Bucharest in May 1949 the vast majority of workers invited to comment on the decision expressed their desire to stick to the old system of debts. As one foreman employed by Malaxa Works - comrade Abramovici - put it: “In the old days we took firewood on pay lists and [the factory] retained our debts. Nobody really complained and I believe that now we should do the same; this would be good.”⁵⁸⁸ Or take the argument put forward by comrade Moroza, a locksmith of the same factory:

I took out from the former economat 3 meters of cloth, one shirt and a pair of shoes in millions, and when stabilization came they were recalculated in the new currency. For example, they said the pair of shoes is now worth 900 lei. For 99% of my workmates the factory retained their debts in the new currency at official prices. This is why last month when we were given the pay lists with our debts, there were comrades owing even sums of over 56,000 lei.⁵⁸⁹

In this context, some workers did welcome the opportunity to get rid of debts, but feared this would only favor the well paid, those earning enough to be able to pay their old debts and the firewood. The problem of debts was finally settled a few months later when the government

⁵⁸⁷ Already in 1948, for instance, Malaxa Works fired its employees in charge of firewood provisioning, including a group of cart owners employed for the transportation of wood to the employees' homes, all amidst protests; for the cart owners' petition see ANR, MM, 2493/1947, p. 2.

⁵⁸⁸ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 74/1949, p. 154.

⁵⁸⁹ IBIDEM, p. 163.

stepped in, abolished all debts and put an interdiction on the customary practice of taking up advances on the wage.⁵⁹⁰ Workers' debts, it was argued, obstructed the new wage system because "they messed up the workers' and the functionaries' plans, who could not organize their households, never knowing how much money they could count on."⁵⁹¹ Consequently, debt was recast as yet another "legacy of the capitalist system" rather than of the postwar collective labour contracts. Once cleared through governmental decree, the regime of debts would be replaced with a monetarized social universe in which "each wage earner would make up her budget in accordance with her salary."⁵⁹²

To help workers budget their earnings, two mass savings campaigns were launched in early 1949. The first aimed at the creation of workplace based mutual savings associations or "houses" (*case de ajutor reciproc*) which would help the "government better apply the wage system" by "doing away with advances for good" and keeping salaries free of debts.⁵⁹³ Here, again, UDR Reșița's mutualist fund offered a model for these new voluntary savings and loan associations: in principle, workers could make monthly deposits of up to 3% of their wage and, once a given threshold was reached, could expect to receive a loan for emergency cases not exceeding two monthly wages taken together.⁵⁹⁴ What was remarkable about this initiative was the fact that a form of mutualism was envisioned as a way of socializing the needs of the employees in the absence of state and factory resources. The second campaign involved deposits with the state's

⁵⁹⁰ The first proposal to abolish debts dated from November 1948, ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 53/1948.

⁵⁹¹ "Un nou sprijin acordat muncitorilor și funcționarilor", *Viața Capitalei*, No. 61, July 14 1949; "Noi lămuriri cu privire la anularea datoriilor muncitorilor și funcționarilor", *Viața Capitalei*, No. 107, September 7 1949.

⁵⁹² "Aprovizionarea populației muncitoare cu lemne", *Viața Capitalei*, No. 38, June 17 1949.

⁵⁹³ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 67/1949, pp. 2-4. See also ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 81/1949, pp. 7-19 for the draft law and its justification.

⁵⁹⁴ "Casele de ajutor reciproc", *Viața Capitalei*, No. 68, August 16 1949. The case of UDR is discussed as a model in *Viața Capitalei*, No. 87, August 13 1949 and in ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 81/1949, pp. 22-23.

Savings and Consignments Bank known as C.E.C.: “the conscientious wage earner makes her own budget with great care and knows how much to spend on the moment and how much to save in order to later buy firewood, clothing, shoes, furniture and similar items”.⁵⁹⁵ Such exhortations were not merely presented as a way of rationalizing household budgeting but also as a means to finance postwar reconstruction, a superior goal for which each socialist citizen should have felt responsible. It is hard to say what results these two campaigns yielded. An initial estimate of C.E.C. deposits in Bucharest for 1949 showed only the better paid railroad workers manifested a clear interest in this opportunity.⁵⁹⁶ Yet it is beyond doubt that such campaigns monetarized workers’ everyday to a certain, perhaps limited extent and softened the transition to the new wage system.

This wage system was a moving bundle of paradoxes: an experiment in inequality designed to revalue skill and reward stability that openly discriminated against the skilled and stable workers. Its early formulation dates from before the monetary stabilization when top union bosses turned in the name of hierarchy against the collective labour contracts they themselves helped implement. Already in March 1947 it was explained the contracts had the perverse effect of demonetarizing wages to such an extent that only between 20% and 40% of workers’ earnings came in cash money (*numerar*), the rest being made up of various subsidies.⁵⁹⁷ It went without saying that under-monetarized wages could not be subjected to any type of performance-based remuneration schemes such as the Soviet payment-by-result system (*muncă în acord*).⁵⁹⁸

⁵⁹⁵ “Depunerile la CEC, o contribuție la îmbunătățirea traiului salariaților”, *Viața Capitalei*, No. 262, March 12 1950. For Reșița see “S-au deschis ghișeele C.E.C.”, *Flamura Roșie*, No. 29, June 10 1949.

⁵⁹⁶ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 74/1949, p. 25. By contrast, of the 8601 employees of Malaxa Works only 202 made any deposits.

⁵⁹⁷ “Poziția CGM față de problema salariilor”, *Viața Sindicală*, March 2 1947.

⁵⁹⁸ By calling it “Soviet” I merely want to name a particular version of Taylorism pioneered in the Soviet Union which came to inspire the wage systems of postwar East Central Europe. This brand of Taylorism was different from the various forms of piece-rate experimented with in interwar and war-time East Central Europe such as the Bedaux

Subsidized components of the wage apart, there were other details of the collective labour contracts that allegedly hindered the adequate correlation between performance and payment. Here is Vasile Luca explaining the gist of the matter in simple terms:

The new wage system does away with all the accessories of the old. In the old system workers worked the whole year for nothing and come Christmas, the capitalist tricked them with a small bonus, which they gave away according to their liking anyway. After August 23 1944, rather than doing away with this system we stood by it, we accepted children bonuses (*ajutor de copii*), things which simply replaced the wage; things which had nothing to do with performance. Labour productivity plummeted while wages went up. The wage itself was replaced with different commodities (*mărfuri*), which turned workers into profiteers [...] All of these bonuses, advances, loans, all of them kept workers glued to their factories because they had debts.⁵⁹⁹

Luca concluded his speech by making it clear factories were neither institutions of social insurance (*asigurare socială*) nor of social assistance (*asistență socială*) and by threatening all managers with jail time if they kept on giving loans to their workers. The new wage system tolerated none of this. It abolished the children bonus - a sort of family allowance paid to those workers with children - and the seniority bonus (*prima de vechime*) as well. The latter - a significant incentive for skilled workers to stay put with one employer for longer periods of time - was simply declared “dead wood weighing heavily on production costs and being in no way connected with higher productivity.”⁶⁰⁰ Moreover, by late 1948 Labour Chambers were rendered useless by way of being deprived of their basic function of organizing skill tests and handing out qualification certificates, all of which would now be undertaken solely within the factory by

system; on Hungarian *darrabér* see Mark Pittaway, “The Social Limits of State Control: Time, the Industrial Wage Relation, and Social Identity in Stalinist Hungary, 1948-1953”, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 1999, 271-301.

⁵⁹⁹ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 70/1948, p. 79.

⁶⁰⁰ “Roadele noii salarizări”, *Viața Capitalei*, No. 31, June 9 1949.

specialized personnel “objectively, not responding to pressure as before, not even to the intervention of the factory’s party secretary.”⁶⁰¹ As party boss Gheorghiu-Dej explained in December 1948, this was a wage system crafted with the help of “Soviet advisors” and designed to assist the transition from a “politics of social assistance” to one of “economics”⁶⁰². It was also “the biggest enemy of laziness” that will contribute to the “disappearance of egalitarianism”.⁶⁰³ Clearing the wage relation of bonuses and debts, of subsidized goods, of Easter or Christmas gratifications, Gheorghiu-Dej intimated, might raise questions of legitimacy: “we will have against us the backward worker, the enemies within the factories”.⁶⁰⁴ But these were misplaced fears as the new wage system was implemented without much dissent on the part of either the skilled or the unskilled workers.

The absence of any wave of protest over the dismantling of the “social wage” is perhaps not that surprising for the new wage system had its obvious trumps. Even when it discriminated against the more skilled workers by eliminating the seniority bonus, it also compensated them by lifting the skilled to the top of the wage scale.⁶⁰⁵ Characteristically, an investigation conducted at Malaxa Works in November 1948 revealed that on paper the number of foremen seemed small but this was only because management decided to classify them as supervisory personnel in order to allow them to earn better than the skilled workers who already gained the highest wages.⁶⁰⁶ The

⁶⁰¹ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămarilor, 124/1949, p. 2.

⁶⁰² ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămarilor, 69/1948, p. 6.

⁶⁰³ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 14/1948, p. 5.

⁶⁰⁴ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămarilor, 69/1948, p. 6.

⁶⁰⁵ For lack of space I cannot delve more deeply into the question of the wage scale here. Suffices it to say that between late 1947 and early 1950 Romania experimented with various Soviet inspired “mobile” wage scales for industrial workers. The wage scale that became hegemonic across heavy industry for the first half of the 1950s comprised 12 skill categories.

⁶⁰⁶ ANR, Ministerul Economiei Naționale, 8/1948, p. 2.

situation was similar at UDR Reșița, though here management also noted the practice of pushing up the wage scale the skilled entailed higher wages for the unskilled as well. For the workers themselves, jumping from one wage category to another was very similar to the wartime “reevaluations” (*reîncadrări*) discussed in the first chapter. Unlike these earlier “reevaluations”, however, the ones undertaken throughout 1948 and 1949 were remarkably indulgent. In Reșița no less than 3000 workers submitted official complaints in early 1949 asking to be pushed up on the wage scale, of which over 1000 received a positive answer.⁶⁰⁷ The following months another 2000 complaints were again filed for the same reason, prompting one local party official to explain that engineers are under so much pressure from their workers that they preferred to push whole workteams up the wage ladder irrespective of their members’ skill levels.⁶⁰⁸ Neither UDR Reșița nor Malaxa Works were exceptions. On the contrary, across Romanian industry the introduction of the new wage system provoked an upsurge of nominal wages and benefited both the unskilled and the skilled workers. No wonder that by early 1949 communist party bosses were discussing again the issue of “levelling” and the “hidden increases” of wages.⁶⁰⁹

From the point of view of the monetarization of workers’ everyday life, the new wage system proved remarkably effective: debts were indeed abolished, subsidized consumption was excised from the wage relation, payments in kind were forbidden and the mutualist savings associations attracted a good deal of workers’ savings in the following decade. The postwar social wage was remade in relative tranquility. Equally successful was the imposition of skill hierarchies

⁶⁰⁷ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 28/1949, p. 20.

⁶⁰⁸ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 70/1949, p. 60. The local trade-union in Reșița gave significantly higher figures. According to one report in May 1949 out of 4573 written complaints over 3300 were positively reviewed; ANCS, Sindicatul Muncitorilor Metalurgiști din Reșița, 25/1949, p. 277 and 371.

⁶⁰⁹ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămară, 31/1949, p. 10.

in factories. In a speech delivered in October 1949, newly appointed Minister of Finance Vasile Luca congratulated his party colleagues for overcoming “the situation in which an unskilled worker with many children had a higher salary than a skilled one with fewer.”⁶¹⁰ All of these successes came at a price of rising nominal wages across industry and effected a reshuffling of everyday forms of conflict away from questions of provisioning to issues of workers’ control, norm determination, the payment of extra hours (*ore suplimentare*), shopfloor indiscipline and the climbing of the wage ladder.

I will explore in greater detail these bones of contention at the factory level in the last chapter. For the moment, I want to conclude by pointing out that all of these conflicts were immanent to the wage system implemented in 1949. It was the wage system itself that largely determined the shift from the type of open protest around subsidized provisioning analyzed in the second chapter to the maddening and shadowy shopfloor struggles over work norms, productivity bonuses or piece-rate schemes that I will survey in the final part of this dissertation. As we will see, piece-rate wage systems were ideally suited to underpin the First Five Years Plan (1951-1955) - half a decade of massive capital accumulation - for the very simple reason that by keeping tariff wages (i.e. the base salary) at a minimum, the take-home pay was conditioned on the completion of production targets. By 1956, the tariff wage amounted to roughly 62% of the average wage in industry, with the rest directly depending on norm fulfilment. Consequently, the wage system implemented in 1949 would be transformed again in 1957 when industrial experts attempted to remedy “the exaggerations of the piece-rate system” by lifting the quantum of the tariff wages up

⁶¹⁰ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămară, 135/1949, p. 13.

to over 80% of the monthly wage in an effort to make available a “safety net” (*bază sigură*) for most employees.⁶¹¹

⁶¹¹ I. Blaga, F. Burtan, *Principiul leninist al cointeresării materiale* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1961), 33.

Chapter IV

People's Capital (1948-1956)

The Plot of Property

“‘If a writer would carefully observe the life of our factories’ comrade Ion Marin tells us at the very end ‘I am sure a whole book could be published that would benefit the entire working-class of our country’”⁶¹². Voiced through the anonymous voice of an employee of Malaxa Works, this call for committed research and writing was printed by the communist party’s daily *Scântea* in the summer of 1948, shortly after the state’s seizure of industrial property, an event the article dubbed “the revolutionary act of nationalization”. Indeed, comrade Marin was reporting from within the new epoch inaugurated by nationalization, and looked back at the recent past with contempt for a vanquished world that deserved nothing but contempt. This was a world of privilege, war and dictatorship, but also one of bitter struggle against the plant’s owner, against right-wing social-democrats (“wolves dressed in sheep’s clothing”) and likeminded saboteurs who still:



“Our Factories” (1948), painting by Vasile Dobrian with the occasion of the nationalization of industry, *Source*: Fototeca online a comunismului românesc, 175/1948.

⁶¹² “Din lupta muncitorilor de la Uzina ‘23 August’ (fost Malaxa)”, *Scântea*, XVII, No. 1180, p. 4.

seek to compromise the leadership ability (*capacitatea de conducere*) of the best among the workers and the newly appointed managers, trying to show that only an exploiter, only somebody coming out of the bourgeoisie knows how to rule such an industrial establishment as our own.⁶¹³

There was no shortage of writers willing to take up this plot, explore industrial life and come up with plays, short stories and novels, all striving to experiment with the genre of socialist realism. Yet few writers were able to accomplish the task with a reasonable degree of political consciousness and a keen eye for the details of the workers' everyday social universe. Take, for instance, the case of Lucia Demetrius (1910-1992), the author of *Cumpăna* - arguably the most successful play about nationalization.⁶¹⁴ A marginal, impoverished actress and occasional writer during the 1930s, Demetrius took up a job with Malaxa Works in 1937. There she was tasked with reading, summarizing and investigating the petitions various workers sent to the owner of the plant - engineer Nicolae Malaxa - asking for money and help. Demetrius would often visit the working-class neighborhood of Pantelimon, where some of the poorer workers lived, and briefed her boss on the living conditions of the many, underlining the need for a local medical cabinet and perhaps even of a canteen. This experience might have helped sharpen the political sensibilities of the young actress, but it did not prepare her, ten years later, for the daunting undertaking of narrating "the revolutionary act of nationalization". On the contrary, the first version of *Cumpăna* contained "a most serious political mistake", as one censor reproached her, because a scene was found to

⁶¹³ IBIDEM.

⁶¹⁴ *Cumpăna* actually inaugurated the new state theater in Reșița in 1949; for a general view of the socialist realist literature of the 1950s, including drama see Cristian Vasile, *Literatura și artele în România comunistă* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2010), 71-125.

depict a “Japanese strike”, an unthinkable event after nationalization.⁶¹⁵ Demetrius grudgingly rewrote the scene in accordance with party doctrine, but went on to note:

We, writers, we went into the field (*pe teren*) with all our faith; we wanted to see the true changes, the true conflicts. It often happened for our plays to be read and criticized by office people, people who knew the doctrine, knew the intentions of the rulers, but were alien to reality.⁶¹⁶

Going “into the field”, jotting down notes, talking to and even living among people of various social backgrounds were all characteristic features of the new socialist realist literature that emerged in postwar Romania to capture the unfolding of the socialist revolution. Some plays and novels aimed to depict how the coming of socialism transmogrified industrial life; others followed the trajectory of senior communist party activists, portraying their struggle against the forces of old and their contribution to the liberation of the country; yet others took on the revolution as it affected the countryside, detailing the advent of socialist agriculture, the collapse of traditional village structures and the building of collective farms. These were all topics easily amenable to narrative representation, whereby in line with the requirements of the genre of socialist realism heroes could be made to epitomize the fighting splendor of the new socialist universe in the making and pitted against the resilient backwardness of the old régime. Nationalization, however, was a narrative puzzle for it was far from intuitive how the alleged revolutionary nature of this event could be revealed into a plot. Demetrius’s mistake of inserting a “Japanese strike” into her play spoke volumes about the sheer difficulty of grasping what nationalization was supposed to mean and what exactly it was supposed to change at the level of the factory. How was nationalization

⁶¹⁵ Lucia Demetrius, *Memorii* (Bucharest: Albatros, 2005), 348. Demetrius, unaware of the notion of a Japanese strike, recalls it as a “Portuguese strike”.

⁶¹⁶ IBIDEM.

“revolutionary” and what made it an “act” were questions that troubled the souls of these writers just as much as they lingered on the minds of workers, engineers, and perhaps managers who witnessed the state’s appropriation of private property firsthand on June 11 1948.

These must have been the questions that haunted writer Ion Călugăru (1902-1956) as he set out to research his great novel *Oțel și pâine* (Steel and Bread): “I went to document heavy industry, ~~that is to say collective work~~ in the summer of 1948, few days after the revolutionary act of nationalization.”⁶¹⁷ Călugăru first turned towards Malaxa Works - predictably within arm’s reach as Bucharest’s largest industrial plant - where he spent countless days observing workers, strolling at the rolling mill, and taking part in various meetings, including a visit by the Czechoslovak prime-minister. But this was an all too disappointing experience for Malaxa Works had little to offer in the way of food for the literary imagination:

I must admit I felt like a simple tourist. I could not see whole people, only their silhouette. It became clear to me that I needed to learn the basics about how the machines function in order to understand how man and machine mutually set their tone.⁶¹⁸

Călugăru never quite got to know the metal lathes or the grinders and sanders of the foundry section, but the brief stint with the metalworkers of the capital city changed his mind about the setting of his novel. He wanted to write about the steel mill, the place where “the cast iron was boiled, where the steel was rolled”, the epicenter of industry and the heart of the future socialist economy. Here there were only two options. The writer could either choose to cast his plot around the steel mill in Reșița or he could opt for the smaller, underemployed and state- owned steel mill

⁶¹⁷ ANR, Fond Ion Călugăru, C/14C/1950, p. 63. Strikethrough in the original.

⁶¹⁸ IBIDEM, p. 65.

of Hunedoara, an industrial enclave located in southwestern Transylvania. Călugăru found Reșița too modern, like a small city “on the Ruhr”; its working-class too traditional, orderly, and ordinary:

I did not opt for a formerly private factory. This was not by chance. Visiting Reșița, or Călan [I saw] these were places where Aușnit had built an orthodox church, a source of opium for the people and he had also built villas for the labor aristocracy. I did not ignore all of this, but I did not pay them much attention. Finally, I settled for a state-owned factory for my study, an industry which could reveal the true state of development, or better still, the true state of backwardness of our metal industry, controlled by foreign trusts from afar and by their agents within the country [...] In our view, Reșița is a metal town similar to those on the Ruhr, endowed with high bourgeois technology. It lacks the concentration of all the elements of a steel mill in such a tight space as Hunedoara, it lacks all the contradictions between various social classes.⁶¹⁹

Călugăru’s choice of location was admittedly curious for we might legitimately ask how would one narrate the revolutionary transition to state ownership by weaving the plot of the novel around an industrial plant which already belonged to the Romanian state ever since 1920? Equally curious was the mentioning of the traces of the local variety of paternalism in Reșița as something of marginal importance, perhaps even a burden for the literary imagination. Finally, it was certainly curious, if not dubious to the eyes of the contemporary historian, to follow Călugăru’s implicit argument that private property was not essential for understanding the dynamics or “contradictions” of class conflict in postwar Romania. Or to put it differently, it was remarkable that Călugăru picked up the steel mill in Hunedoara rather than Malaxa Works in Bucharest or UDR in Reșița as the ideal place to write the great socialist realist novel about nationalization. This might have been because Călugăru understood nationalization not merely as the event that took place on June 11 1948 signaling the shift to state property across industry, the banking,

⁶¹⁹ IBIDEM, p. 90.

transportation and insurance sectors, but rather as a national emancipation of a backward economy from the rule of global capital and national market forces.⁶²⁰ According to contemporary journalist Barbara Ward it was a widely shared opinion in postwar East Central Europe that “[n]o state with any pretensions to greatness could afford to risk the competition offered by the businessmen and industrialists of Western Europe.”⁶²¹ In this sense, Hunedoara’s steel mill was indeed a crass example of how a state-owned, state-run company could be forced to under-produce through cartel politics and as a consequence of the Romanian state’s lack of resources for upgrading the plant throughout the interwar decades.⁶²²

What, then, of the plot? How would Călugăru - given his broad understanding of nationalization and choice of place - narrate the revolutionary act? The answer might have been obvious to any informed reader of newspapers in the weeks following June 11 1948: the crisis of managerial authority. *Steel and Bread*, therefore, has two main narrative threads: the first concerns the rise of a socialist work ethic among the workers and engineers of the plant who had been in the habit of working “as if for the state” (*ca la stat, ca pentru stat*); the second was the story of Pavel - the new general manager appointed by Bucharest to take over the steel mill. Both threads converge in the efforts of the new manager to gain and secure authority before workers, the

⁶²⁰ This anti-colonial understanding of nationalization became hegemonic during the second half of the 1950s when it was grafted on the “Leninist” developmentalist discourse; Ken Jowitt, *Revolutionary Breakthroughs and National Development: the Case of Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

⁶²¹ Barbara Ward, “Europe Debates Nationalization”, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 25, No. 1, 1946. 45. This was, of course, a set of arguments for developing national capital that went back at least to the late nineteenth century Listian economists and made a vigorous comeback after the Great Depression.

⁶²² The steel mill in Hunedoara reached its maximum utilization capacity during the war in 1943 at less than 50% of the total capacity of the steel and rolling mills; Alexe Rusu, *Uzinele de fier ale statului din Hunedoara (U.F.H). Descriere, activitate, probleme* (Bucharest: 1947), 38 *et passim*. See also Ludovic Bathory, “Dezvoltarea uzinelor de fier ale statului de la Hunedoara între anii 1919-1940”, in Ludovic Bathory, Ștefan Csucsujă, Gheorghe Iancu, Marcel Știrban (eds.) *Dezvoltarea întreprinderilor metalurgice din Transilvania (1919-1940)*, (Cluj: Editura Presa Universitară Clujană, 2003).

technical staff of the plant and the body of engineers. Pavel, we soon learn, had replaced a certain Mr. Gogu, the general manager appointed by the workers themselves during the purging campaign pursued in last months of the war, when workers “were encouraged to be bold and forget about the time when they were scared even of the shadow of the manager.”⁶²³ Mr. Gogu was a man of few qualities, a “no-good fly-away” (*o pramatie uşuratică*) and a bourgeois on top of all, yet a man whom workers felt they could control because, as one of them is made to say in an early chapter of the novel, “we appointed the manager, we will take him down”.⁶²⁴ Replacing Mr. Gogu carried the potential of antagonizing the workers, as comrade Pavel would soon come to understand.

The central chapters of the novel describe the unfolding of a major protest within the steel mill similar to the ones I myself have discussed in the second and particularly third chapter of this dissertation. The lack of basic goods at the economat, hyperinflation and debts brought workers at loggerheads with the new manager, whom they intended to purge, and perhaps assault physically in the process. Comrade Pavel, however, emerged victorious out of this conflict, gaining workers’ trust with his way of speaking, enlightening the rebellious crowd and securing his authority as the undisputed master of the plant. The rest of the novel shows Pavel learning his role, acting friendly with those that deserved kindness, being firm with the engineers, and impressing just about everybody else with his commitment “to be the first to come to work and the last one to go home.”⁶²⁵ Scene after scene, the plot moves closer to the denouement which reveals how managerial authority - embodied in the person of Pavel - was fully restored well after 1948.

⁶²³ Ion Călugăru, *Oţel şi pâine* (Bucharest: Editura de stat pentru literatură şi artă, 1951), p. 26. I discuss the purging campaign and its consequences for workers’ sense of entitlement with reference to Malaxa Works, UDR Reşiţa and the Anina mines in the first two chapters.

⁶²⁴ IBIDEM, p. 84.

⁶²⁵ IBIDEM, p. 298.

Granted, Călugăru was less interested in what happened after 1948, possibly because he envisioned a sequel to *Steel and Bread*, but his novel as well as the entire socialist realist literature build around nationalization is chockfull of clues for a social history of state property in postwar Romania.⁶²⁶

This chapter follows in the footsteps of Ion Călugăru and asks what, after all, happened at Malaxa Works and UDR Reșița that was so inimical to the literary imagination? How were these two pillars of Romanian metal industry nationalized, and what was the impact of state property on labor relations? Unlike Călugăru, however, this chapter proceeds by placing nationalization in a longer history of shifting capital ownership while also grasping it as an event explicitly produced on June 11 1948 i.e. the day when party and state representatives descended upon factories, seized official papers, lectured to workers, announced the appointment of new general managers and claimed state property now extended to all industrial establishments above a certain size. In **Part I** “The Making of an Event” I explore how June 11 1948 became the day of the revolutionary act of nationalization and how this “revolutionary act” transformed ownership structures across Romanian industry and initiated a crisis of managerial authority, both in industries administered by Soviet-Romanian joint companies, the so-called Sovroms and in the ones left to the Romanian state. **Part II** “The Crisis of Managerial Authority” looks at the struggle of the new general managers to win, secure and reinforce their authority before the workers. Managerial authority had

⁶²⁶ One of the methodological stakes of this chapter is precisely to show how some of the socialist realist literature of the late 1940s and early 1950s may be legitimately read as source material. For a bold attempt to employ a socialist realist novel for gaining access into the *Arbeitswelt* of North Korean metalworkers after 1953 see Cheehyung Kim, “The Furnance is Breathing: Work and the Everyday Life in North Korea, 1953-1961” (PhD Dissertation: Columbia University, 2010), 225-237. Unlike Kim, my use of the social realist literature is not so much motivated by the lack of archival material but rather by the belief that these authors, even at their most rudimentary, were still sensitive recorders of social life.

been constantly tested and significantly weakened not merely as a consequence of purges, strikes and revolts, but also due to the expansion of party and trade-union organizations at the factory level, where party and union bosses would often find themselves competing with hence challenging the decisions of the top manager, engineers and workshop supervisors. While a certain ambiguity around the issue of leadership within factories was encouraged by the communist party up until June 11 1948, after that date murky lines of command and fractured, overlapping hierarchies were denounced for hindering the smooth run of production. The effort to reestablishing managerial authority, however, produced a complex ritual of suspicion between party, trade-union and management, replete with mutual accusations of embezzlement and libelous campaigns.

The historiographical narrative about nationalization - be it apologetic or critical - was governed by an inescapable concern with ownership rights. In communist historiography, nationalization was presented as the key policy that marked the transition to socialism, whereby the latter was defined exclusively as workers' collective ownership of the "means of production".⁶²⁷ Conversely, recent scholarship recasts nationalization as the abolition of the market through the dismantlement of private property.⁶²⁸ Both historiographies agree that ownership was connected to control over capital, but seldom break the surface of historical analysis and often ignore the nitty-gritty of the new dynamic between rights and control. In *Part III* "The Gender of

⁶²⁷ Gavril Sonea, *Naționalizarea principalelor mijloace de producție în România: 11 iunie 1948 [The Nationalization of the Main Means of Production in Romania: 11th of June 1948]* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1968).

⁶²⁸ There is a burgeoning literature often based in regional archives; see Hortensia Gavrilescu, "Economie planificată - economie de piață în România postbelică", *Arhivele Olteniei*, No. 17, 2003, 323-329; and Ioan Stelean Boia, "Banatul în primii ani ai regimului communist. Naționalizarea industriei, 1948", *Studia Universitatis 'Vasile Goldiș'*, No. 10, 2000, 20-24. See also Bartos Zoltán, *Naționalizarea în fostul județ Mureș* (11 iunie 1948), (Cluj: Editura Risoprint, 2009).

Investment” I explore the tensioned relationship between investment policies and the social function of the industrial plant following nationalization. Should the “factories of the people” use their scarce resources to finance daycare facilities or should they rather invest in expanding their productive capacities? Was there a specific variety of socialist (or Soviet) paternalism available to guide the development of newly nationalized factories? These questions, I argue, are best answered by grasping the nationalized factory as a gendered social space doubly circumscribed: first by the evolution of the collective labour contracts following June 11 1948, and second by everyday struggles over issues of social reproduction at the factory level and beyond.

Part I

The Making of an Event

The juridical transfer of ownership rights from shareholders and owners of capital to the state took place on Monday, June 11 1948. This operation involved not only the passing of a law by the Great National Assembly - the parliamentary body of the newly founded Popular Republic of Romania - but it also required direct state action and the mobilization of legions of party activists across the country. On that day it fell on the factory committees to gather the workers, stage a meeting after the lunch-break and break the news. The metalworkers of Laromet Works in Bucharest, for instance, were summoned at 2 p.m. and informed by one comrade Tegzeş - the secretary of the factory committee - about the “occupation of core industries”, a news which just came through a radio announcement.⁶²⁹ Tegzeş immediately added, allegedly accompanied by

⁶²⁹ AMB, Fond Laromet, 10/1945-1949, p. 69.

waves of applause from the audience, that in these nationalized industries the distinction between exploited and exploiters ceased to exist and that managers of working-class stock have replaced the old directors. Furthermore, he went on to draw attention to the fact that all employees must now be on the watch in order to safeguard the property of the people; that there must be tighter collaboration between manual workers and the technical staff and finally that the communist party is to be thanked for this unparalleled achievement. The new general manager of the factory - a former worker by the name of Meșala - took the floor and asked the audience for support in his new mission as head of Laromet. Shortly thereafter another party activist told those present that the Soviet Union decided to reduce by half the quantum of the war reparations owed by Romania thereby opening the door for socialism. The gathering ended at five minutes past 3 o'clock in the afternoon with the collective singing of the Internationale. The last words of this report, however, cannot but strike the eye: "The meeting was all the time accompanied by applause and catchwords; the audience was enthusiastic over the unexpected event."⁶³⁰

Jotted down in pencil on the notebook used to record the minutiae of the factory committee's weekly meetings, this account reads like any other run-of-the-mill article on the unfolding and significance of June 11 published by the newspapers of the day. The emphasis on the emotional effervescence of the audience, the timing of the speeches and the details of the meeting, the reference to the end of exploitation, the thanks due to the Soviet Union and the party - these were all tropes associated with nationalization. Take, for instance, the front-page article featured by the monthly magazine *Femeia* (The Woman) entitled "How I Received the Great News". It contains mock interviews with women workers of Bucharest's cotton spinning and

⁶³⁰ IBIDEM, p. 70.

textile industries and recounts the schedule of the day: the afternoon meeting, the speeches, and the appointment of new managers: “Even today I tremble at the thought of it. I will never forget the moment when I entered the manager’s office, I put the seal on the money box and on all the documents and I checked his briefcase.”⁶³¹ The near identical



Colectia Cristian-Liviu Mosoroceanu

Nationalization Meeting at the Anina Mines, June 11 1948; Source: Colectia Cristian-Liviu Mosoroceanu

wording of these stories as well as their encomiastic tone displayed at the same time in the printed press and in handwritten factory archives is no coincidence. Rather, this narrative pattern suggests their authors were probably writing in accordance with certain formulaic guidelines, part of which must have been to exaggerate workers’ enthusiasm, record the speeches made and underline the unforeseen nature of the event. Why, then, was nationalization an “unexpected event”?

It certainly could not have come out of the blue for Laromet’s workers themselves, at least not for those among them who participated in the general meeting of June 9 1948. It was during that particular gathering that the 50% reduction offered by the Soviet Union was first advertised and comrade Tegzeş asked in return for more labour discipline on the shopfloor because “it won’t be long until, through our own work, we will advance toward socialism, ending the exploitation

⁶³¹ “Cum am primit vestea cea mare”, *Femeia*, No. 5, July 1948.

of man by man.”⁶³² On the other side of the city, metalworkers at Malaxa Works might have been slightly surprised by the meeting of June 11, but they were certainly not shocked to discover the plant did no longer *de facto* belong to Nicolae Malaxa. Following an investigation conducted in early 1948, representatives of the Ministry of Industry allegedly found out that the board of administration of the company spent much of the credit borrowed from the National Bank on investments not connected to production such as the maintenance of a farm nearby Bucharest that provisioned the canteen and the acquisition of shares in other companies. Because such actions violated the law, the Ministry of Industry was entitled to directly appoint its own general manager to overrule the board and supervise the owner. Consequently, in April 1948 Malaxa Works greeted its new general manager in the person of engineer Bobârnac, a man who would stick to this position until the end of 1948, thus making irrelevant the appointment of another general manager on June 11.⁶³³ In Reșița the rain must have made the meeting rather unpleasant, but it surely did not make much of an impression on the metalworkers worth mentioning in the main newspaper of the region *Luptătorul Bănățean*.⁶³⁴ The new general manager - a young man by the name of Carol Lonțear - was indeed a former worker of the steel mill, but he already served as deputy manager since April 1948.⁶³⁵

⁶³² AMB, Fond Laromet, 10/1945-1949, p. 69.

⁶³³ Law no. 249 passed in July 1947 authorized the Ministry of Industry to perform checks on companies that took out loans from the National Bank and appoint general manager (*administratori delegați*) where the law was not observed; for the details of the Malaxa case see ANR, Ministerul Economiei Naționale, 1/1947, pp. 6-9. Characteristically, the story was widely popularized as a corruption case throughout the summer of 1948, see, for instance, “N. Malaxa și complicități săi au pompat fondurile necesare producției uzinelor trimițând sume mari peste granițe”, *Viața Sindicală*, June 26 1948.

⁶³⁴ June 11 1948 was a rainy day in Reșița according to the memory of Augustin Virag, a local communist party boss quoted by Karl Ludwig Lupșiasca, *Höhepunkt ihrer Geschichte: eine Geschichte des Banater Berglands in der Zeitspanne 1920-1948* (Reschitz: Banatul Montan, 2006), 345.

⁶³⁵ “Spor la muncă tovarășe Lonțear!”, *Luptătorul Bănățean*, No. 1065, April 11 1948.

The “eventfulness” of nationalization must be evaluated against this background. Party and factory archives that closely document nationalization reveal an unquenchable tension between the epochal meaning attributed to it and the mundane, bland aspect the whole operation had to preserve; between the “revolutionary” nature of a day supposedly filled with popular enthusiasm and the widespread feeling that, with the exception of a hastily organized meeting, nothing spectacular had happened on that given Monday. This tension may be described as the interplay between two very different temporalities: the temporality of law-making and the corresponding temporality of social labour.⁶³⁶ The first temporality, more amenable to historical narrative, showed state institutions and party organizations working together to create an element of surprise, planning the action weeks in advance under rules of secrecy so as to catch the factory owners off-guard and preempt any hostile reaction on their part. June 11 1948 was thus conceived as a genuine bushwhack operation that would allow for peaceful dispossession, negligible disorder and the swift transfer of ownership rights from private persons (corporate and individual) to the state. The second temporality, one fitted more for statistical representation, saw the same actors fretting over the need to reproduce the rhythms and routines of industrial production: hurrying workers back to their workbenches, enforcing the eight-hour workday, making sure wages were paid on time, facilitating transactions between companies, helping new managers get the hang of ruling over workers, accounting books and paychecks etc.

⁶³⁶ Social labour should be understood here in the Marxian sense as a form of abstract, objectivized domination that presents itself as “fate” to those whom it subjects; as Marx himself put it in *Grundrisse*: “Individuals are subsumed under social production, which exists, like a fate, outside of them; but social production is not subsumed under the individuals and is not managed by them as their common power and wealth.”, quoted and explained in Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination. A Reinterpretation of Marx’s Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 125. The implications of this understanding of social labour as the deep structure of modern social life will become clear below.

It was the interaction of these two temporalities that combined to produce June 11 1948 as an event. The day started early in the morning, possibly around 4 o'clock, with a meeting of the members of the nationalization commissions. This institution - created during the previous weeks and sharing its headquarters with the communist party - grouped party bosses, trade-union activists and state officials at the county level; all of them charged with supervising nationalization in their home cities and villages. Roughly after 9 a.m. nationalization brigades left for their assigned locations, careful not to enter factories before half past noon. Once inside, they grabbed and sealed cash registries, factory papers and the available correspondence. The meeting with the employees was convened between 2 and 3 o'clock in the afternoon, shortly after the Great National Assembly unanimously voted the nationalization law. The full text of the law was broadcasted in the evening, probably after 6 o'clock. In many factories, reliable party members, police officers and gendarmes were asked to put in overtime by setting up night patrols to guard the factories and their surroundings during the night; the best among party activists were instructed to visit working-class neighborhoods in order to explain to housewives what had just happened during the day. Few details were left to chance. A national census conducted in late 1947 by the country's leading statisticians provided the activists with a reliable roadmap for the location and profile of the factories, mills, and larger workshops that had to be nationalized.⁶³⁷

⁶³⁷ The results of the census were published as Mircea Biji, *Inventarierea întreprinderilor de stat, industriale, comerciale și de transport: rezultate provizorii* (Bucharest: Institutul Central de Statistică, 1948).

Unlike in large scale factories where, as we have seen, the event might have carried an air of surprise though not of utter shock, in smaller factories June 11 was indeed perceived as a revolutionary action, not least because the owner/s of such businesses was almost everywhere replaced by new managers amidst great fanfare. Reports sent from the provinces to the attention of the Central Committee in Bucharest describe a number of tragic scenes: in the western city of Timișoara no less than 70 women workers employed by a small workshop started to cry when they

saw their owner thrown out the factory gates - they were denounced for “compromising attitude” (*atitudine împăciuitoare*); in the seaside city of Constanța one woman



Indoor Nationalization Meeting, UDR Reșița, June 11 1948; *Source: Fototeca online a comunismului românesc, 174/1948.*

refused to take over the

head manager position out of lack of self-confidence and respect for the former owner - she was allegedly suffering from “mental issues”; in the town of Sibiu, the Romanian owner of a formerly German factory refused to be replaced claiming he was appointed directly by the Soviet Army in late 1944; on the oilfields North of Bucharest, party activists detected anti-Semitic sentiment on the part of some workers who found out their new manager was of Jewish origin. Meanwhile, in the city of Iași a newly appointed factory manager found the job daunting, got depressed and run away. Such cases were characteristic for the small scale, artisanal Romanian industry made up of

family businesses hiring slightly above 100 employees in both urban and rural environments. Because in many cases home and factory (or mill) were physically tied one to the other, nationalization often spelled homelessness and dislocation, with owners being deprived of their residence as well as their capital.⁶³⁸ In these circumstances, it is perfectly plausible for women workers to have cried over their *patron* and for men to have gone berserk; for these workers and their employers June 11 1948 was emotional, violent and life changing, to wit revolutionary.

June 11 1948 was surely, then, a revolutionary event for communist party bosses and perhaps even for the legions of activists that descended upon the factories that Monday. Yet while the latter were disappointed that workers do not quite understand basic slogans such as “factories belong to the people”, the first worried some workers took the slogans to heart and misrepresented their message. Indeed, a cursory reading of the debates engaged within the Central Committee in the wake of nationalization reveals an ambiguous discourse about the event. Some workers, it was claimed, had come to entertain the “totally wrong opinion” that “nationalized factories became their personal goods”.⁶³⁹ Other workers got the equally wrong idea that “nationalization means the complete defeat of the enemies of the working class and the end of the exploitation of man by man. In fact, capitalist exploitation goes on both in nationalized factories and in the countryside where leftover boyars and kulaks exploit the labour power of the rural proletariat.”⁶⁴⁰ Moreover, some workers were seized by “reformist ideas” and begun to write petitions in order to save their former managers and owners by keeping them employed in the same factories. Finally, perhaps the most

⁶³⁸ For the relationship between home and factory in the small scale, artisanal economy, see David Brody, “Time and Work during Early American Industrialism”, *Labor History*, Vol. 30, No. 1, 1989, 16-17.

⁶³⁹ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămarilor, 92/1948, p. 17.

⁶⁴⁰ IBIDEM.

misleading opinion of all was shared by workers arguing that “factory hierarchy should disappear. Some workers distort their friendship with the new managers picked from the working-class, mock the engineers and the supervisory personnel while speaking about an unjust form of egalitarianism.”⁶⁴¹ For party bosses, nationalization ought to have been about something else:

Nationalized factories become more and more profitable (*rentabile*) due to the enthusiastic work of the workers, due to their love for the factory which manifests itself in the care with which tools are being handled in order to increase production and productivity. Funds resulted from increased profitability are accumulated within the factory and taken over by the state, which uses them to build new factories, develop social assistance, culture houses, and for boosting the material and cultural wellbeing of the working people.⁶⁴²

This language of profit, accumulation and redistribution spoke not merely of the fear that some unnamed workers might have gone too far in interpreting nationalization; it equally spoke of the need to reproduce, and even enhance the reproduction of the practices that constitute social labour. Whereas the temporality of law-making promised the revolutionary break with forms of ownership associated with capitalism, the temporality of social labour made manifest the continuity (hence implicit neutrality) of a set of practices proper to both capitalism and socialism: the structure of the workday, the rhythms of the shopfloor, the wage relation, factory hierarchy and the flows of industrial production.⁶⁴³ The interplay of the two temporalities, therefore, was

⁶⁴¹ IBIDEM, p. 12.

⁶⁴² IBIDEM, p. 15.

⁶⁴³ The notion of “structure” should be understood here in opposition to that of “event” along the following lines: “While events are caused or suffered by specific subjects, structures as such are supra-individual and intersubjective. They cannot be reduced to individual persons and seldom to exactly determinable groups. Methodologically, therefore, they demand functional determinants. Structures do not in this way become entities outside of time, but rather gain a processual character, which can then enter into everyday experience.”, Reinhart Koselleck, *Future Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time*, translated by Keith Tribe (New York: Colombia University Press, 2004), 108. It is in this sense that social labour can be said to be a “structure”: at the same time the object and the ground of domination in modern societies.

bound to create some confusion with the workers and even with party bosses monitoring the event from Bucharest. Thus, for instance, in an early draft of instructions for activists on how June 11 should unfold, it was envisaged that workers must necessarily make up for the lost time between 2 and 3 o'clock in the afternoon - the full hour during which they were summoned to the meeting that announced nationalization.⁶⁴⁴ Neither the workday, nor the payments of wages could be altered by June 11. On the contrary: as nationalization took place four days before the first wage installment (*chenzină*), the new managers were instructed to do everything in their power to pay wages on time. For those factories lacking money to cover salaries, managers had to immediately notify the National Bank which would duly provide the required amount of cash. Moreover, on June 15 the Ministry of Industry sent out an alarmed telegram to all nationalized factories noting how the rate of commercial transactions plummeted and the nexus between firms, markets and clients was risking to break apart causing the money flow to fall. It urged managers to restart production, take care of their orders and observe the rules of offer and demand.

In the aftermath of June 11, the two temporalities intertwined to create a vantage point for assessing the transformative consequences of the new state ownership on workers' consciousness. Indeed, according to the communist party's daily *Scânteia*, the event of nationalization could not have but energized workers' everyday: absenteeism, foot dragging, disobeying factory hierarchy were all deemed bad habits inherited from the capitalist past to be overcome. One article devoted to Laromet Works went on to note that although the situation of wasted productive hours got significantly better after June 11 there were still many workers who "did not learn to cherish every

⁶⁴⁴ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 57/1948, p. 11. The paragraph was crossed out in red pencil marks.

minute and love each moment in production.”⁶⁴⁵ In the following weeks, the proper use of the workday (*întrebuințarea riguroasă a zilei de muncă*) became something of an obsession for the new manager, comrade Mașala.⁶⁴⁶ A crackdown operation was launched against the customary ten minutes of tolerated morning delay, with employees made aware that any punching card not validated at 7 a.m. sharp would duly bring a fine to its owner.⁶⁴⁷ Moreover, nobody was any longer allowed to linger on after the official end of the workday signaled by siren, less out of fear of sabotage and more as a way of enforcing a certain degree of control over the use of extra-hours. Small wonder then that already on June 24, during a general meeting of the employees, one party activist gleefully explained nationalization was in his view the last step in the long struggle undertaken by the communist party to “normalize the 8-hour workday”.⁶⁴⁸

Mașala’s enforcement of a stricter workday was preceded by the enforcement of Mașala as a stricter general manager of Laromet. On June 17 1948, during the first meeting of the technical personnel of the factory after nationalization, the body of engineers gathered to salute the “new leader”, a former employee of the national railway company (CFR) for over 20 years, and somebody “who knows what we need, knows our worries”⁶⁴⁹. Both Mașala and the engineers admitted his task was not easy as the factory was running high debt and had no money for investments. Yet they also agreed that June 11 ought to make workers more diligent, ready to care for their tools, more concerned with higher output, less prone to wasting time and materials, now

⁶⁴⁵ “Să combatem cu hotărâre indisciplină în muncă”, *Scântea*, No. 1155, June 27 1948.

⁶⁴⁶ Labour inspectors shared the same obsession with the proper use of the workday. One such labour inspector, for instance, visiting Laromet Works in November 1948 recommended among others for comrade Meșala to set up privies in each and every workshop. In this way workers would be prevented to leave their posts and run around desperately in search of toilets thus wasting time. ANR, MM, 2545/1947, p. 1-6.

⁶⁴⁷ AMB, Fond Laromet, 15/1945, p. 138 and 150.

⁶⁴⁸ AMB, Fond Laromet, 10/1945-1949, p. 74.

⁶⁴⁹ AMB, Fond Laromet, 14/1947, p. 38.

that factories belonged to them. These words were not in vain. By the end of 1948, comrade Mașala could show an outstanding increase in the production of core nonferrous semifabricates: brass, zinc, aluminum, and copper. With the same industrial machines, a small bank loan and the same number of employees, Laromet managed to almost double its output between June 11 and December 31 due to the “class consciousness of the employees and the political education instilled by the party.”⁶⁵⁰ Financially, the factory cut back on its debt, registered a modicum of profit (*beneficiu*) and even allowed itself to pay for the maintenance of a daycare and build a hall for indoor sports and meetings. This success story, certainly exaggerated and perhaps even doctored, reveals how the event of nationalization was “normalized” in the course of the second half of 1948.

The fear that workers and the new managers could read too much into the “revolutionary act” of nationalization was real. That it was a misplaced fear, more a figment of the party bosses’ imagination that a fact of industrial life, changes nothing: the newspapers were full of warnings of the following kind: “Some believe that now after we have removed the owner, profit will be split among the workers. This is a mistaken way of ‘understanding’ nationalization. Now profits will be used first and foremost for investments.”⁶⁵¹ Or, further down the page in the same issue of *Scântea*: “In some places, workers of the nationalized factories tend to waste the capital and income of their factories on various things which are important indeed but which are not necessary at the moment: some want to begin the ‘reconstruction’ of an open air swimming pool, others want a chalet in the mountains, yet others crave for a modern sport hall etc. Even some of the new managers go in this direction - either because they want to win over cheap popularity or because

⁶⁵⁰ AMB, Fond Laromet, 5/1948, p. 3.

⁶⁵¹ “Fabricile sunt ale poporului muncitor. Să le gospodărim chibzuit”, *Scântea*, No. 1149, June 19 1948.

they don't treat the problem with the seriousness it deserves."⁶⁵² It is hard to say whether such hopes and desires were actually held by workers and their new managers or whether they were simply publicized by the printed press in anticipation of what might happen if the event of nationalization was misunderstood. It is therefore more reasonable to argue that such discourses of anxiety over the meanings of June 11 were not overt reactions to popular demand but rather the product of an effort to dissolve the rupture occasioned by nationalization, including the revolutionary horizon of expectation allegedly opened up on that day, into the normal flow of industrial production. This is precisely why the day was never intended as a popular fête nor would it ever be celebrated on par with November 7, May 1 or August 23 - all dates of central importance for the socialist calendar and popular culture. June 11 would rarely name streets, never stadiums, parades or holidays.

For communist party bosses, the temporality of social labour with its time sheets, punching cards, paychecks, output figures, list of prices, guidelines for capital investment, bank loans, factory debt, and profit margins was the only testing ground for judging the nature of June 11 as a major revolutionary event. For William Sewell Jr. the practicing historian should to be able to distinguish between genuine events and mere ruptures in the texture of social formations: the first "significantly transform structures", the latter, while momentarily explosive for social order "are neutralized and reabsorbed into the pre-existing structures in one way or another."⁶⁵³ Chains of ruptures, according to Sewell, might indeed give birth to events to the extent they resist

⁶⁵² IBIDEM.

⁶⁵³ William H. Sewell Jr. *Logics of History: Social Theory and Transformation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 227.

neutralization, and as a consequence end up revolutionizing social relations and practices.⁶⁵⁴ Was nationalization, then, an event in Sewell's sense or was it rather a rupture stitched back onto the fabric of social practices that constituted social labour in mid-twentieth century East Central Europe? Or to put it more bluntly: is the success of Laromet Works during the second half of 1948, no matter how suspicious, evidence of a revolution in social structure initiated by June 11 or is it rather the expression of an accelerated reproduction of social practice brought about by nationalization?

Stated in this way the question is simply meaningless since it can be answered both ways.⁶⁵⁵ Writing from his Parisian exile, social-democrat Șerban Voinea was led to believe June 11 did indeed launch a revolution in social structure, albeit one pursued through dictatorial means that deeply compromised the meaning of nationalization before the Romanian working-class.⁶⁵⁶ Experiencing the aftermath of June 11 on the shopfloor, metalworkers at Malaxa Works might be forgiven for navel gazing before the sermons about nationalization delivered by party activists; workers looked forward to signing new collective labour contracts at the end of the year, argued over piece-rate norms, demanded proper working clothes and complained about the lack of

⁶⁵⁴ IBIDEM, 226. Note that for Sewell social relations and practices are “profoundly governed by underlining social and cultural structures.” It is this insistence on the constraining effects of “structure(s)” that makes Sewell's complex understanding of the role of contingency in social transformation (i.e. events) stand out from the crowd of more traditional approaches to the topic that privilege a voluntarist and conspiratorial, nay intuitive grasp of social life; see Pierre Nora, “Le retour de l'événement”, in Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora (eds.) *Faire de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 2011 [1974]), 283-307.

⁶⁵⁵ The question ceases to be meaningless on a more charitable understanding of events, such as the one proposed by Koselleck: “A trial involving labour law, for instance, can be both a dramatic history in the sense of ‘event’ and simultaneously an index of a long-term social, economic, and legal elements.”, Reinhart Koselleck, *Future Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time*, translated by Keith Tribe (New York: Colombia University Press, 2004), 108. My interpretation of nationalization is heavily influenced by Koselleck's great essay “Representation, Event, and Structure”.

⁶⁵⁶ Șerban Voinea, *La socialization* (Paris: P.U.F., 1950), 176-180. For a summary of Voinea's postwar French writings, see Marcel van der Linden, *Western Marxism and the Soviet Union. A Survey of Critical Theories and Debates since 1917* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 177-178.

consumer items at the local cooperative.⁶⁵⁷ For them, as for many other workers and their families, a more shocking news must have been the governmental decision issued in November 1948 according to which the customary Christmas bonus was abolished on the grounds it represented “a technique of the bourgeoisie to deceive wage earners”.⁶⁵⁸ In Reșița, metalworkers might have contemplated their navel as well, but they were also made to contemplate the production diagram - drawings on small blackboards, sometimes in colored chalk that allegedly helped workers of the bridge construction section of the plant to achieve the highest productivity ever.⁶⁵⁹ For them and their peers across UDR’s sections, the introduction of the production diagram signaled a period of labour intensification, and so too did the constant pressure of the new managerial team brought about by June 11 to cut down piece-rate norms and make workers push harder for achieving their base salary.

June 11 1948 was both an event, albeit one less revolutionary than *Scânteia* claimed and more traumatic than the briefings describing the experience of the dispossessed owners suggested, and an index of the heightened reproduction of practices embedded in the structure of social labour. Grasped from within the temporality of law-making, the transfer of ownership rights to the state is the stuff of dramatic history and can be rendered in narrative form, much like the socialist realist writers discussed above did in their plays and novels dedicated to the event. This temporality, however, could not provide the meaning of nationalization, above vignettes about the downfall of the propertied bourgeoisie and beyond plots about lurking class enemies committing sabotage,

⁶⁵⁷ AMB, Comitetul Municipal PCR București, Comitetul Sectorului 23 August (Malaxa) al PCR, 17/1948, pp. 62-69.

⁶⁵⁸ AMB, Comitetul Municipal PCR București, Comitetul Sectorului 23 August (Malaxa) al PCR, 18/1948, p. 59.

⁶⁵⁹ “Muncitorii și tehnicienii de la Fabrica de poduri au atins cea mai mare productivitate a muncii avută până în prezent”, *Luptătorul Bănățean*, No. 1245, November 14 1948 and “Să fie îmbunătățite diagramele de producție la oțelărie și furnale înalte”, *Luptătorul Bănățean*, No. 1235, November 3 1948.

both of which constituted the political *faits divers* that filled newspaper pages. The full meaning of nationalization had to be inferred from within the temporality of social labour, a maneuver that required statistical description rather than plain narrative. The epochal significance of June 11 1948 as a foundational moment in the history of state socialism in Romania was to be confirmed by the type of output report assembled by Laromet's manager or by the chalked charts figured on the shopfloors of UDR Reșița. It was these kind of documents, alongside paychecks, punching cards and production plans that verified both the reproduction of social labour and the transformative consequences nationalization had on the social structure of Romanian society. There was no contradiction between the two as long as socialism was synonymous with the emergence and development of the large scale company because "it is not hard to understand that a large and profitable state factory has more opportunities to better the 'social wage' and to contribute to the bettering of its employees' standard of living."⁶⁶⁰

That socialism was about large, state owned factories making a profit for the sake of redistribution was not intuitive; that this process would entail an intensified pace of work, tighter piece-rate norms, a stricter factory hierarchy, and a deferral of investments in social welfare all for the purpose of capital accumulation was rather hard to understand. Foremen, for instance, might have found it hard to understand why all of a sudden some of them were accused of being secretive about their job, not sharing crucial details about the functioning of machines and the use of tools. In Reșița, one party activist noted with some concern that "there is a kind of tradition that foremen don't give away their secrets. This is why when one of them falls ill somebody has to visit him

⁶⁶⁰ "Regruparea întreprinderilor industriale", *Scântea*, No. 1189, August 15 1948.

home and ask him how to work in order for production not to come to a still on that day.”⁶⁶¹ The intensification of work could not be hindered by such anachronistic habits of the craft. Party activists and union delegates must have been surprised that after June 11 1948 they were forbidden to hold meetings during working hours or storm into the office of the general manager with all kind of petty requests. Both the production plan and the authority of the manager could have been sapped by such recently acquired routines. Finally, workers must have been puzzled to find out the new collective labor contracts signed in early 1949 kept obliging factories to invest in livestock, farms and vegetable gardens only to condition these investments on overall profit. Socialism implied sacrifice. Let us now explore the manner in which managerial authority was manufactured in the aftermath of nationalization, and how factory hierarchy and state ownership were made to go hand in hand.

Part II

The Crisis of Managerial Authority

Engineer Bobârnac’s career as head manager of Malaxa Works was cut short several months after nationalization. Praised in the party press for his outstanding abilities as leader of Bucharest’s largest metal plant, Bobârnac swiftly and rather unexpectedly came under the combined attack of trade-union and party bosses at the factory level. By late June 1948 a bucket full of reproaches was thrown at the head manager by these two organizations: he was accused of seldom being present in his office, of attracting the sympathies of no one and of displaying a kind

⁶⁶¹ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 28/1948, p. 9. The most entertaining literary rendering of this attack on metalworkers’ craft tradition by the young and unskilled is Mihail Davidoglu’s *Cetatea de foc*, a socialist realist play set in Reșița in 1949.

of “forced respect” (*respect forțat*). This was harsh, though understandable criticism as Bobârnac must have been a very stressed out man, with limited time at his disposal for weaving ties of respect with his peers and getting to know the plant’s party and trade-union consecrated leaders. Yet he was guilty of something much more serious: “he showed mistrust toward his subordinates, hindering them from taking any kind of decision without his consent”.⁶⁶² Moreover, he appointed a number of “old men”, known to have been close associates of the of the former owner, Nicolae Malaxa; engineers and office clerks who, paradoxically, seemed intent to work “as if for the state”, without any commitment whatsoever. Bobârnac pleaded his cause by arguing he was a busy man, admitting he did not trust his subordinates and by pointing out union and party bosses at the factory level were plotting to discredit him. Ministerial authorities took the side of the manager and dismissed the allegations, showing that Bobârnac was “able and hardworking, committed from seven in the morning to half past ten in the night to solving problems small and large.”⁶⁶³ Solving problems “small and large” singlehandedly was the very stake of this scandal, as will become clear couple of week later when Bobârnac was again accused of having “monopolized all the work for himself”.⁶⁶⁴ It was this last round of criticism that forced Bobârnac to resign.

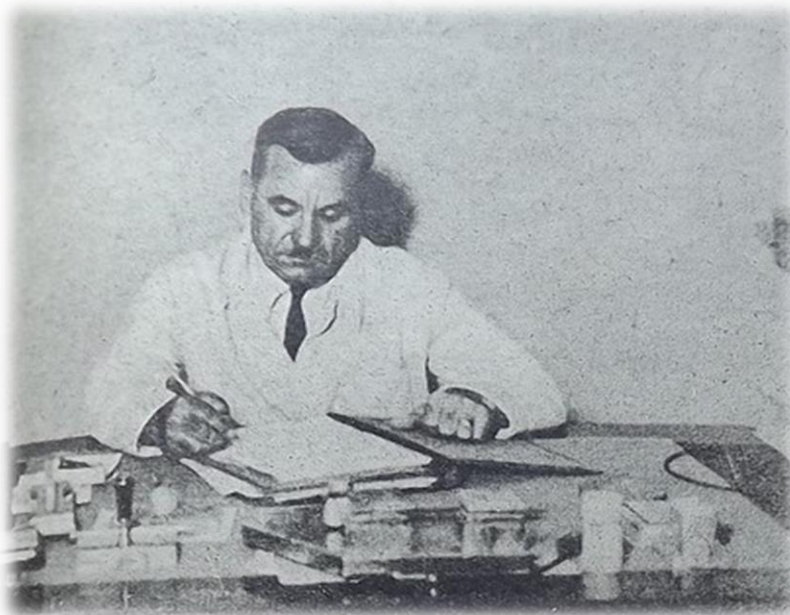
In advancing their different interpretations of what factory hierarchy should look like following June 11 1948, neither union and party leaders at the factory level nor the head manager of Malaxa Works were acting against the general principle of managerial authority laid out by the communist party in the wake of nationalization. This principle, colloquially referred to as *troica*, prescribed that authority in the newly nationalized factories is shared among the trade-union, the

⁶⁶² AMB, Comitetul Municipal PCR București, Comitetul Sectorului 23 August (Malaxa) al PCR, 19/1948, p. 113.

⁶⁶³ IBIDEM, p. 115.

⁶⁶⁴ IBIDEM.

party organization and the head manager, with the first two obliged to help the latter in administering the factory. In this view, the general director could not rule alone, but rather had to consult union and party delegates on a whole array of matters pertaining to everyday politics such as provisioning, promotions, hiring and lay-offs. The *troica* principle notably made sense in small and medium-sized factories where the newly appointed managers were selected from among the more faithful and trustworthy workers, and could thus be legitimately suspected of lacking experience in running an industrial establishment. Here is how a widely circulated pedagogical brochure articulated the relationship between the manager, the party organization and the union delegates:



Comrade Tudor Nicoale, a former worker and the newly appointed manager of a medium-sized metal factory in Bucharest; *Source*: Revista Muncii, No. 29-30, July 25 1948.

They [i.e. the new managers] were welcomed by the workers with love and enthusiasm. It is the duty of each and every party member and worker to help the managers so that they can accomplish their tasks. Let us note that most of them lack the experience to lead (*experiența de a conduce*), to administer the factory: let us then help them to acquire the necessary experience and ability as quick as possible, and use them in the service of the working people. They should enjoy the complete respect of the workers, engineers and functionaries. We

should be aware that friendship relations between former working mates and the new manager-worker (*directorul-muncitor*) might harm work discipline and the smooth running of industrial production.⁶⁶⁵

This type of discourse addressed to party and union bosses was complemented by myriad speeches meant to instruct the new managers on how to get a grip of their status as leaders of industry. Such was the case, for instance, with a lecture delivered by Minister of Industry and party notable Chivu Stoica before an audience composed of Bucharest's newly appointed managers. Stoica attempted to explain the duties of management now that "capital belongs to the people"⁶⁶⁶, particularly in view of the concerns expressed by some of the new managers themselves in the weeks following June 11 1948. Firstly, Stoica pointed out the expertise of former owners in matters of financial, administrative and technical organization is highly valuable and managers should be able to "steel their secrets". Moreover, even though nationalization abolished the institution of the Board of Administrators, it often happened that highly skilled engineers were part of these boards. They too should be milked of their knowledge, and retained within factories under the close supervision of the party for "the capital of their expertise does not belong to them."⁶⁶⁷ Secondly, any change in the wage scale was strictly forbidden, even in those cases in which technical personnel was judged to earn too much. Characteristically, in early July 1948 the Central Committee approved a ministerial recommendation according to which after nationalization the new managers, as long as they were appointed from among the working-class, would necessarily

⁶⁶⁵ *Despre naționalizarea întreprinderilor industrial, bancare, de asigurări, miniere și de transporturi* (Bucharest: Editura PMR, 1948), 39.

⁶⁶⁶ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 57/1948, p. 4.

⁶⁶⁷ IBIDEM, p. 3. The argument Stoica was making here run as follows: since these engineers were trained in public schools financed by the taxpayers' money either in Romania or abroad, their acquired knowledge was eminently public in nature.

receive a lower salary than the chief engineer of the factory.⁶⁶⁸ The wage scale rewarded skill over function. Finally, Stoica ended the lecture by urging the new managers to become “more severe than a capitalist manager. You will see that such issues pop up on a daily basis. You will be helped by the party and trade-union in order to proceed as the government demands.” The daily issues Stoica had in mind concerned the question of profit. He gave the example of Vulcan Works, a medium-sized metal factory of the capital city where workers had recently built a canteen with the owner’s money and were now requesting all sorts of investments in similar amenities: “[T]his is neither possible nor right. The surplus must be directed to the state’s treasury. [...] There might indeed be pressure to build swimming pools or sports fields. We should not give in.”⁶⁶⁹ Giving in, Stoica concluded, would bring the “death of our regime.”⁶⁷⁰

Bobârnac was hardly conforming to the new category of “manager-worker”: he could neither be suspected of lacking managerial experience nor could he be denounced for retaining friendship relations with his former workmates. As we have seen, the opposite was the case as Bobârnac allegedly turned out to be a distant character bent on taking his job seriously and in so doing willing to risk antagonizing Malaxa Works’ party and union bosses. His downfall came as a consequence of a struggle over the nature of managerial authority within the factory in the wake of nationalization. This struggle, which pitted managers against party and union bosses, was common to both small and medium-sized factories headed by “manager-workers” such as Laromet and for large-scale plants put under the leadership of engineers as was the case with Malaxa Works. By late September 1948 an upsurge in conflicts around managerial authority determined the

⁶⁶⁸ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 17/1948, p. 5.

⁶⁶⁹ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 57/1948, p. 8.

⁶⁷⁰ IBIDEM.

Central Committee to declare the *troica* principle a failure. Noting that in many nationalized factories it was either the manager controlling party and union bosses, or union delegates and party representatives controlling the manger, Secretary General Gheorghiu-Dej concluded the *troica* diffused rather than shared authority causing strife where industrial order and responsibility should have reigned. Consequently, nobody could be made accountable for failing production plans as long as the manager's prerogative to give orders was challenged and undermined.⁶⁷¹ What replaced the *troica* would come to be known as the “sole leadership” (*conducere unică*) principle.

The “sole leadership” principle - i.e. the idea that the manager was the only source of command within the factory, endowed with power to overrule both the ruling body of the factory committee and the ubiquitous party organizations planted in each and every section of the plant - had a venerable Stalinist pedigree. Indeed, it was in the Soviet Union of the late 1920s that the principle was first formulated as an answer to a question which might have seemed familiar to Bobârnac himself: “Is it possible to exercise command against the party if its politics hinders industrial efficiency?”⁶⁷² The general manager of Malaxa Works - engineer Bobârnac - seemed to have answered this question in the positive, yet so too did the new “manager-worker” of UDR, thirty-one-year-old former welder Carol Loncear. Following June 11 1948, Loncear proceeded to tone down the acquired routines of the party and union bosses in the plant by setting office hours and by declaring he cannot be disturbed, not even by CGM representatives traveling from Bucharest unless an appointment was made in advance. Predictably, this administrative move was

⁶⁷¹ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 35/1948, pp. 5-6.

⁶⁷² This is how historian Yves Cohen sums up in question form the manifold debates around managerial authority that took place in the Soviet Union in the late 1920s; Yves Cohen, *Le siècle des chefs. Une histoire transnationale du commandement et d'autorité (1890-1940)*, (Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2013), 640.

met with slander by local party and union leaders. While the setting up of office hours in and of itself was not found to violate the *troica* principle, Loncear's attempt to seal himself off from the everyday politics of the plant was found utterly offensive, a token of the entrenched industrial tradition of the place ("*spiritul Reșiței*").⁶⁷³ Reproaches poured: "He works a lot, and he looks to rise up to the occasion, but more often than not he is anarchic in his work methods and rather superficial. Even when he aims to explain a problem he does not manage to nail down the subject; in the past he did many wrongs, was a drunkard, and a bit of a fly-away (*ușuratic*), recently has somewhat matured. He tackles many problems too quickly, he often agrees with us but then he lets himself influenced by the technical personnel and does the opposite. He displays some unjust attitudes of defiance."⁶⁷⁴ Born in 1917 he was further accused of being too young to wield any authority over workers, and too inexperienced to head the country's leading industrial plant.⁶⁷⁵

None of these accusations stuck. Unlike engineer Bobârnac, the young welder from Reșița retained and consolidated his position for a number of years, only to then make a career as deputy minister and minister of heavy industry throughout the 1950s. Part of the reason why Loncear could not be easily moved might be attributed to the timing of the struggle, which unfolded at the moment when the Central Committee agreed on introducing the "sole leadership" principle. Matters of chance aside, the fact that Loncear was a native poster child of the steel mill must have also contributed a great deal to sweetening local expectations. That he was also something of a communist hero, having spent time in jail during the war following the arrest and death of his own brother - a communist militant - must have counted for something in the eyes of party bosses in

⁶⁷³ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 28/1948, p. 13.

⁶⁷⁴ IBIDEM, p. 8.

⁶⁷⁵ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 33/1948, pp. 5-6.

Bucharest.⁶⁷⁶ That Loncear surrounded himself with an aura of modesty, refusing to take residence in the villa of the former general manager in order to transform it into a daycare, must have suggested the new director continued to be a man of the people.⁶⁷⁷ Even those who got to know Loncear personally during the early 1950s recall his down-to-earth approach to factory life. Take, for instance, the following description provided by Dorin Pavel, the engineer in charge with building a dam and a hydro-electrical power plant to supply the steel mill in Reșița:

From the outset, and as long as Loncear was general manager, we were left to work independently. We did not need to request official approvals for our solutions or projects. When we encountered difficulties, it was enough to give a call to comrade Loncear and everything was put in order. The following event is telling for this able former welder. We arrive in Reșița in the morning to visit the locomotive workshop where they would weld the 700mm Semenik pipes, designed to resist the extraordinary pressure of 75 atmospheres. They had already tested the first pipes and noted that under the water pressure many had leaked. They welded them only on the outside. I immediately asked comrade Loncear to come and see. ‘Well, well, my brothers, my welders, have you no shame ... you say you cannot go inside the 700mm pipes to weld, bring me a ventilator’. As tall as he was, though lean, he welded the whole ten meters on the inside. Put to the test the pipe was waterproofed. ‘See now, does it work or not? Weld me the entire stack of pipes and I’ll give you 40000 lei as bonus.’ There were seven welders and they all got the promised money that day.⁶⁷⁸

No doubt, Loncear’s ability to secure a degree of independence for the engineers supervising the construction site, as well as his capacity to put things in order upon a phone call

⁶⁷⁶ These biographical details are provided by long time social-democrat trade-union boss Eftimie Gherman in an article written in exile, see *România Muncitoare*, No. 10, October 1952, p. 35. Gherman mocks Loncear, whom he might have known personally, because he became a communist not by conviction but by chance, due to the family tragedy he endured during the war. The tone of the portrait, however, remains respectful: “Of all the communists in Reșița, Loncear is the only one who knows what he wants.”

⁶⁷⁷ “La Uzinele Reșița s-a înfăptuit of frumoasă creșă pentru copii”, *Luptătorul Bănățean*, No. 1176, August 25 1948.

⁶⁷⁸ *Caietele de amintiri ale profesorului Dorin Pavel. A patra conferință a hidroenergeticienilor din România*, 26-27 mai 2006, București (unpaged manuscript).

presupposed a certain political savviness in coordinating the distribution of resources and containing the occasional snooping around of zealous party activists. It is no surprise, then, that it is precisely this skillset of the general manager that made it into the pages of a socialist realist novel devoted to the erection of the dam, Nicolae Jianu's award winning *Cumpăna luminilor* (1952). For Jianu - who had spent several weeks incognito among construction workers around Reșița - comrade Chirtoș, the character modeled after Lonțear, was capable of subtle maneuvering among rival engineers, competing foremen, and dispassionate office clerks, always aiming to conduct the conduct of his subordinates. And it was this pastoral behavior that allegedly impressed workers and engineers alike because, as another character of the novel is made to say about the general manager "snappish at times, his words sting, but he's always helpful when needed and good at it too."⁶⁷⁹ Yet no matter how many more such examples we might retrieve in support of Lonțear's power position vis-à-vis local party and trade-union bosses, none of them will fully explain why the young welder was able to shake off criticism. This explanation is to be looked for not merely in the symbolic practices that construed Lonțear's managerial authority but also in the ownership structure that was imposed on the steel mill following June 11 1948. In this respect, the difference between Malaxa Works and UDR Reșița could not be greater.

While both companies were integrated into the German war economy via the Nazi conglomerate Reichswerke Hermann Göring (H.G.W.) in early 1941, the manner in which this inclusion took place was different. For the case of Malaxa Works in Bucharest, the Romanian state acquired 50% of the shares in January 1941 and the other half during the following month thus effectively nationalizing the plant before renting it out to a German joint-stock company

⁶⁷⁹ Nicolae Jianu, *Cumpăna luminilor* (Bucharest: Editura Tineretului a C.C. al U.T.M., 1952), 466.

(ROGIFER) later that same year. According to historian Florian Banu, this type of wartime nationalization was undertaken out of Ion Antonescu's fear that the loss of control over economic life at the hands of the Germans would bring about the loss of control over domestic politics.⁶⁸⁰ This allegedly "protectionist" reaction against the expansion of German capital could not be replicated in the case of UDR where H.G.W. inherited a large number of shares from a Czechoslovak shareholder swallowed by Germany in 1938. With the collapse of the war economy, Malaxa Works underwent privatization and was returned *in toto* to its original majority shareholder, Nicolae Malaxa. Declared "enemy assets" by the Armistice Convention of September 1944, UDR's H.G.W. shares were taken over by the Soviets as war reparations. It was these "enemy" shares, amounting to over 30% by November 1947, that constituted the Soviet contribution to the joint-stock company - Sovrommetal Reșița - that emerged after nationalization to manage the steel mill, the metal factories and the mines that had belonged to UDR.⁶⁸¹ By contrast, Malaxa Works was simply nationalized again in 1948 and placed under the control of the Romanian state.

Sovrommetal Reșița was a latecomer to the string of Soviet-Romanian joint-stock companies (Sovroms) that came into existence after the end of the war in naval and maritime transport, the petroleum, wood processing, banking, manufacturing, mining, movie and other industries as well.⁶⁸² Yet in spite of their importance for the postwar economy, both domestic and international, little is known about how these joint-stock companies operated. From the standpoint

⁶⁸⁰ Florian Banu, *Asalt asupra economiei României, de la Solagra la Sovrom (1936-1956)*, (Bucharest: Nemira, 2004), 54.

⁶⁸¹ ANR, UDR, 1039/1947, p. 5 *et passim* for the full list of UDR's shareholders.

⁶⁸² Still the most reliable guide to the spread of Soviet joint-stock companies across Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania and Yugoslavia is Nicolas Spulber, *The Economics of Communist Eastern Europe* (Cambridge, M.A., MIT Press, 1957), 166-223.

of ownership, these were bi-national corporations governed by the laws of profit. One agreement between the two countries signed in 1949 specified dividends were exempt from taxes, with the two shareholders splitting 80% of the annual profit, the remaining 20% being retained by management for investments and similar spending within the company.⁶⁸³ It is reasonable to suppose that apart from facilitating an outflow of cheap goods, notably raw materials such as oil and timber, these companies also contributed to a transfer of industrial technology from the Soviet Union to Romania. The evidence, however, is scarce. For instance, soviet experts did build an assembly line for the caterpillar KD-35 tractor in the city of Braşov and did provide expertize for the enlargement of the steel mill in Reşiţa. More importantly for the argument developed in this chapter was the way in which managerial authority was upheld within the Sovroms. Unlike the companies integrally owned by the Romanian state such as Malaxa Works or Laromet in Bucharest, the joint-stock Soviet-Romanian companies were infinitely more keen on enforcing factory hierarchy.

Take, for example, the case of the Soviet specialist supervising the production of tractors in the city of Braşov. By July 1949 comrade Supikaşvilli was driven crazy by the manner in which the general manager - one comrade Trandafirescu - understood his role as “sole leader” of the plant: “He does not have the ability to comprehend the major problems of the factory, and even though he works very much, he always gets lost in details.”⁶⁸⁴ According to Supikaşvilli, comrade Trandafirescu was unable to lower production costs because he lacked authority: he refused to fire at least 40 office clerks of the allegedly overstaffed accounting unit of the plant; he was always

⁶⁸³ ANR, PCM, Comisia de Colaborare Tehnico-Ştiinţifică, 7/1949, pp. 1-6.

⁶⁸⁴ ANR, CC/PCR, Secţia Cămară, 169/1949, p. 66.

granting audiences during the workday arguing that were he to stop doing so workers would call him dictator; and finally Trandafirescu could not grasp the proper relationship between the general manager and the party and union bosses. Not only was he always asking for their input in matters of administration but he was also turning a blind eye when these petty activists were forcing many good technicians to quit their jobs. Supikaşvilli, therefore, demanded a new general manager. The young Loncar, we now begin to understand, no matter how much authority he was personally commanding, was diligently observing the requirements needed to run a joint-stock Soviet-Romanian company. The Soviet advisor in Reşiţa, comrade engineer Simonenco, acting as a deputy general manager of the steel mill was an adamant supporter of the “sole leadership” principle. During a national conference that assembled the country’s leading experts of the metal industries in October 1949, Simonenco expressed his disappointment that more than one year after nationalization many directors were still sharing their authority with party and union bosses at the factory level: “The sole leadership is of utmost importance. From the general manager down to the team leaders and workshop supervisors, all of them should feel responsible for the duties entrusted to them by the state. This cannot be done unless every leader (*conducător*) will come to know perfectly his obligations. Decisions over production depend on it.”⁶⁸⁵

Naturally, it was much easier for lower management - workshop supervisors, team leaders, engineers, foremen and others - to secure their authority before workers and party organizations within a joint-stock company. Working under the Soviets allowed them to justify their commands by simply invoking the will of the Soviet advisors rather than of native managers. Thus, for instance, engineers of the Jiu Valley mining company Sovromcărbune were able to dismiss or

⁶⁸⁵ ANR, CC/PCR, Secţia Cămară, 91/1949, p. 101.

ignore workers' demands (*revendicări*) by way of arguing they were instructed by the Soviets to do so. Moreover, using the same justification made it possible for them to apply fines and distribute punishments down the chain of command without fearing reprisals from the party or union organizations. Small wonder anti-Soviet sentiment was soon detected among the miners, who complained of having their requests silenced. Occasional acts of revenge were nevertheless undertaken: in November 1949 a young miner was pressured by his workmates to take Sovromcărbune to court for having failed to provide him with working equipment in accordance with the collective labour contract.⁶⁸⁶ The appeal of anti-Soviet sentiment, however, should not be exaggerated. For instance, Simonenco was held in high regard for his willingness to undertake reevaluations without the consent of the trade-union in order to reward newly qualified workers.⁶⁸⁷ Be that as it may, by the end of 1948 it became increasingly clear that even within the Sovrom companies, trade-union activists were pushing for workers' demands by way of fighting against the new general managers: "Many bosses of the factory committees show the tendency to substitute themselves for the general manager. Even when they don't do it completely they still force the new managers to adopt a passive attitude which is very bad for the production process and for the collaboration between workers and engineers."⁶⁸⁸ These so-called "anarchists", one report alarmingly noted, "still did not understand that their role in defending the real interests of

⁶⁸⁶ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 53/1949, p. 19 *et passim*.

⁶⁸⁷ ANCS, PMR, Comisia Județeană Reșița, 9/1950, p. 37. Simonenco was a firm believer that workers should acquire their skills at the point of production, see ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămară, 91/1949, p. 102. Even the exiled social-democrat Gherman, for whom the Sovroms were "Russian" imperialist devices for plundering his native Romania of all her resources, had this to say about Reșița's Soviet managers: "Nevertheless, we have to admit the two directors Serghienko and Simonenco, appointed by the Soviets, proved themselves capable, bringing real gains to Reșița. The first was a wonderful technician, the second a skilled organizer. The other Soviet directors that came after did nothing but ruin what these two created.", *România Muncitoare*, No. 10, October 1952, p. 22. Not much is known about Serghienko apart from the fact that in August 1947 he introduced a special bonus system for metalworkers working in dangerous conditions (heat, toxicity), thus lifting their wages above the average, ANR, UDR, 306/1947, pp. 3-5.

⁶⁸⁸ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 72/1948, p. 39.

the salaried cannot take the form of making all sorts of demands on management, often inspired by reactionaries. The leadership of the Sovrom companies is not a capitalist leadership.”⁶⁸⁹

The new leadership that followed comrade Bobârnac at Malaxa Works might have not been capitalist. Yet between late 1948 and early 1953 the plant changed four general managers, all of whom were deeply concerned with containing challenges to factory hierarchy coming from party and union bosses. Unlike in the case of Reșița where party, union and management found a common ground immediately after the end of the war in 1945, Malaxa Works remained a factory divided between strong party and union organizations and a managerial team controlled up until late 1947 by the plant’s owner, Nicolae Malaxa. The absence of Soviet advisors in Bucharest only deepened this rift, encouraging party and union bosses at the factory level to openly dispute managerial prerogatives, first and foremost the firing and hiring of personnel. The removal of Bobârnac was a direct consequence of the influence party bosses enjoyed at the factory level, an influence which beginning with 1949 was thought to seriously hinder production. The failure to meet plan targets for that year triggered an investigation into the tensioned relationship between the managerial staff and the so-called “mass organizations.” Let us try to decipher the report’s conclusions.

Investigators attributed underperformance to a runaway conflict all but amplified after June 11 1948 between party and union bosses and the technical personnel, particularly engineers who were found in state of “passivity”. This state was induced by the plethora of accusations thrown at them by party and union leaders who “waste no chance to insult them.”⁶⁹⁰ Some of these

⁶⁸⁹ IBIDEM, p. 30.

⁶⁹⁰ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 71/1949, p. 12.

insults were personal, others derived from a so-called “leftist” or “anarchist” attitude as party bosses failed to understand why engineers earn more than they do and why they should not be mocked for “living at the expense of the workers.”⁶⁹¹ The general manager himself - engineer Emil Oniga - was caught in the line of fire. On the one hand, he could not exercise even basic managerial control over the labour process without the consent of the party and the factory committee. Moving people from one section of the factory to another according to the needs of production was impossible; and so too were minor attempts at rationalizing the labour process. For instance, the introduction of the production diagram was rejected on the grounds it was a “fascist method”. On the other hand, the plant’s financial resources as stipulated by the collective labour contract were vociferously claimed by union delegates. Oniga, although he set regular office hours, could not stop being visited during worktime: “they went so far that workers’ delegates came to me to push for social demands (*revendicări sociale*) in the name of the trade-union.”⁶⁹²

Malaxa Works remained a conflict zone even after engineer Oniga left the plant in late 1950.⁶⁹³ The next two general managers - Teodorescu and Dumitraşcu - were equally unsuccessful in forging managerial authority and organizing a fluent, uninterrupted chain of command that could tone down the pressure of party and union bosses. In this context, the plant’s newspaper *Viaţa Uzinei* - launched in May 1949 - was the main vehicle of the struggles. Workers’ relocation from one section to another, for example, appeared in its pages as an attempt of a malevolent

⁶⁹¹ IBIDEM.

⁶⁹² IBIDEM, p. 55. Some of these demands included the use of the plant’s cars for trade-union affairs and the curious suggestion for Oniga to guarantee as general manager of the plant that workers buy home appliances on credit from Bucharest’s Ferometal shop.

⁶⁹³ In one of his last meetings summoned as general manager, Oniga noted rather euphemistically that, in spite of his personal efforts, party and union bosses still do not collaborate with the technical personnel, ANR, CC/PCR, Secţia Economică, 37/1950, p. 22.

engineer to break up well-trodden work collectives.⁶⁹⁴ In face-to-face encounters, during meetings or episodes of contention, engineers and functionaries could be accused of sabotage, arguably the most powerful discursive resource available at the hands of trade-union and party bosses. The break-down of a machine, a work accident or a fire were as many occasions for “class enemies” to be ferreted out and bullied from among the managerial staff. The head of the forging workshop - engineer Drogeanu - a severe character known to have boosted armament production during the war became completely “inactive” and suggested to shut down the plant because “workers do politics (*muncitorii fac politică*)”.⁶⁹⁵ The engineer had been a victim of workers’ libels. In another section of the plant a party leader was reportedly bossing around foremen, taking upon himself the task of distributing workloads.⁶⁹⁶

The protracted process of instituting managerial authority at Malaxa Works following June 11 1948 was arguably detrimental to fulfilling production targets. Ministerial authorities, top communist party bosses and Soviet advisors were certainly of the conviction that higher output comes with a strict factory hierarchy, the “sole leadership” principle emanating downwards from the director’s office to the shopfloors. Hierarchy was not inimical to party politics, if the latter touched on issues not immediately relevant to the labour process. Hierarchy, however, was not merely about allocating workloads, assigning norms and obeying the commands of foremen, workshop supervisors or engineers. It was equally about controlling the factory’s financial resources, particularly as money reached out into the realm of social reproduction. It is hard to

⁶⁹⁴ Radu Ioan, “Lipsuri în colaborarea dintre muncitori și tehnicienii la Edile și Construcții”, *Viața Uzinei*, No. 1. May 1, 1949.

⁶⁹⁵ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 60/1950, p. 19.

⁶⁹⁶ IBIDEM, p. 33.

imagine any party or union boss at the factory level worthy of that name diligently engaged only in the “cultural education” of the workers, thereby relinquishing any claims to managerial authority. Deciding on the priority of investments in the plant’s paternalistic institutions was an issue in which most everyone had an interest: male and female workers, engineers, party leaders, the general manager, the employees of the medical cabinet or of the daycare. It is to the struggles around social investments and their gendered outcomes that I now turn to.

Part III

The Gender of Investment

Socialist realist playwright Lucia Demetrius might have indeed needed the watchful eye of censorship to properly emplot nationalization in her widely successful play *Cumpăna* (1949) simply because it was far from clear what nationalization was really about and how its transformative impact on ordinary workers should be depicted in narrative form. Demetrius’s experience as an office clerk with Malaxa Works’s social assistance department during the late 1930s might have not helped the author to tell the story of nationalization as an event, but it certainly came in handy for another play she wrote about the social function industrial plants acquired after June 11 1948. Published in the mid-1950s, *Cei de mâine* is the author’s lesser known and arguably least successful play. Unlike nationalization, the topics broached in this play were not narrative puzzles but rather hotly debated, public issues of the time: managerial authority, factory welfare, women’s double burden and the all-pervasive question of investments in industry. Equally public and publicized was the link that brought all of these together: the future of children

as socialist citizens. Demetrius might have known something about these topics given her personal trajectory and it is not hard to imagine what she might have seen upon visiting Bucharest's mid-century working-class neighborhoods. She might have seen, as contemporary sociologist Natalia Popovici revealed in a short study published during the war, that it was only the young and unmarried women, the widows and those abandoned that took up day jobs, seldom regular employment. She might have also seen that the vast majority of these women could not but leave their children unattended "on the streets in the company of the other kinds of their age."⁶⁹⁷ It is plausible to suppose Demetrius wrote the character of Catrina, a recently abandoned mother of three living on the outskirts of the capital city, with this social landscape in mind.

Catrina was a typical figure of the early 1950s: a former washerwoman and a single mother who took up a job in industry partly because this was now openly encouraged by the communist authorities, partly because her husband left her for another woman.⁶⁹⁸ Catrina would constantly ask the general manager to invest in the extension of the factory's overcrowded daycare so that it could take in her kids as well. The manager, an old-time communist named Petru, was equally characteristic: he took offence in criticism coming "from below", overworked dreaming of building a model metal factory, complained of not having sufficient funds for investments and gave priority to buying new machines over the enlargement of the daycare. The play's plot is rather

⁶⁹⁷ Natalia Popovici, "Influence du travail de la femme sur la vie de famille", *Archives pour la science et la reforme sociales*, XVI, No.1-4, 1943, 132.

⁶⁹⁸ In one way or another, the "typical figure" embodied by Catrina was at the center of socialist industrial development. See, for example, the opening story of Krystyna W. - a young mother of two who entered Poland's Silesian coal mines in 1952 - in Małgorzata Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1-3. In the same vein Natalia Jarska, "Rural Women, Gender Ideologies, and Industrialization in State Socialism. The Case of a Polish Factory in the 1950s", *Aspasia*, Vol. 9, 2015, 65-86. See also some of the articles collected in Shana Penn and Jill Massino (eds.) *Gender Politics and Everyday Life in State Socialist Eastern and Central Europe* (London: Palgrave, 2009), notably the ones by Massino, Tóth and Brunnbauer.

predictable: the manager would learn through criticism and self-criticism to value the social function of factories in liberating women and breeding the next generation of socialist workers. The type of conflict portrayed by *Cei de mâine* is a good starting point to think about what I shall call here the *gender of investment*, namely a conceptual approach to the structural limits and inherent dynamic of struggles over the allocation of resources at the point of production.⁶⁹⁹ These struggles were indeed very often about issues of social reproduction yet they rarely if ever took the form of women workers asking for their rights to welfare facilities. Before examining in some detail why this was the case, we need to know more about the type of industrial paternalism inaugurated by June 11 1948.⁷⁰⁰

Post-nationalization paternalism not only retained but also built on many of the features that historically defined UDR's and Malaxa Works' varieties of paternalism. Because the goal of producing stable, skilled and loyal workers remained unchanged and even amplified, there were conspicuous lines of continuity between paternalist practices enacted before and after the June 11 divide. The clearest example is the combined development of housing and vocational training

⁶⁹⁹ This suggestion is in line with Scott's larger argument according to which gender is "a crucial part of the organization of equality and inequality.", Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 91, No. 5, 1986, 1073. Thus, as Sewell justly pointed out, Scott's argument makes gender "an important constituent of virtually all institutional realms.", William H. Sewell, Jr., "Gender, History and Deconstruction: Joan Wallach Scott's Gender and the Politics of History", *CSST Working Papers* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, 1989), 9. The institution of industrial paternalism attracted a spate of excellent gender analysis starting with the classic work of Sonya O. Rose, *Limited Livelihoods. Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1992), chapter 1. Closer to my topic is Dennis John Sweeney, "Heavy Industry, Company Paternalism, and Political Culture in the Saar, 1889-1914" (PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1994), notably 18-19 for the rather intuitive argument that paternalism "was embedded in a discourse about family life and morality".

⁷⁰⁰ What follows, then, is not a gender analysis of social policy. Rather, what I aim to do in this section of the dissertation is to show the extent to which the establishment of managerial authority (and implicitly factory hierarchy) was informed by gendered struggles over factories' financial resources. Moreover, the use of the notion of industrial paternalism is justified given the context of the 1950s, one in which the distribution of welfare was pursued through the factory rather than exclusively through the state. In this context, the person (and personality) of the director was crucial for the allocation of resources to daycares, canteens or housing.

policies about which I shall have more to say shortly. However, in important respects post-nationalization paternalism marked a break with company tradition to the extent it grounded (and implicitly justified) the provisioning of factory welfare into a general notion of “social wage” (*salariu social*). In principle the social wage included all the benefits wage earners as wage earners and socialist citizens enjoyed at the point of production: access to free medical care, cheap meals at the canteen, low rents on the factory’s housing estate, subsidized transportation for commuters, the possibility of using the daycare, paid holidays etc. More importantly, the social wage also encompassed social insurance which was now relocated at the factory level and placed under the combined administration of trade-union delegates and lower management. Yet neither of these components of the social wage could be adequately quantified and although jotted down in the collective labour contracts few had the status of social rights. On the contrary, this type of welfare depended on the one hand on the ability of the factory to fulfil the plan and on the other on the struggles over the distribution of resources that unfolded along the chain of command. Both aspects derived from the radical transformation in the nature of collective labour contracts after 1948.

Two aspects of this transformation were paramount for the redefinition of industrial paternalism. The first concerned what communist party bosses called the contracts’ “confused and clumsy” character, namely the fact that historically collective labor contracts in Romania lumped together issues of wage policy, social insurance and social assistance, work safety, transportation subsidies and various other obligations companies agreed to observe for the benefit of their employees such as daycares, housing, marriage bonuses etc. In addition, the postwar contracts imposed by CGM added the duty of management to provision their employees with subsidized basic consumer items via the *economate*. The collective contracts enacted beginning with 1949 did away with this alleged confusion by splitting up, emptying out and relocating most of these

obligations: wage policy would be set by the state via its ministries, workers' rights would be protected by a new labour code, social insurance would be regulated by law and administered by trade-unions, while rules of discipline would be spelled out in codes of conduct authored by management alone.⁷⁰¹ The second transformation targeted the very object of the contract which was no longer just "living labour" collectively represented by union delegates but also the production plan.⁷⁰² This was indeed an absolute legal novelty of distinctively Soviet provenance.⁷⁰³ The production plan was inserted into the contracts as blank spaces to be filled up with numbers: "here you will write down the plan requirements for 1952 in absolute values or percentages as compared to the ones for 1951; the global production expressed in lei, the labour productivity, production costs [...]"⁷⁰⁴ Blank spaces, however, were not only reserved for the production targets to be reached but also for investments in welfare at the factory level: "the factory is obliged to use the investment funds, the director's funds and the social insurance budget administered by the trade-union to build houses for workers amounting to ... lei; locker rooms, showers, barracks worth ... lei."⁷⁰⁵

⁷⁰¹ Liuba Chişinevschi, *Noul contract colectiv* (Bucharest: Editura Confederaţiei Generale a Muncii, 1949), 10.

⁷⁰² Non-Soviet inspired collective labour contracts, including the two enacted by CGM in 1946 and 1947, were built as all labour law is around the impossibility of separating labour as a commodity from the body of its seller (or "living labour" in its Marxian original). The rights of the worker inscribed in the collective labour contracts derived exclusively from its subjection to the employer rather than, as in the Soviet case, from fulfilling production targets and subjection. On the *aporia* of traditional "European" labour law see Alain Supiot, *Critique du droit du travail* (Paris: P.U.F., 2011), 60-63.

⁷⁰³ For a brief genealogy (and contemporary relevance) of the relation between numbers and Soviet labour law see Alain Supiot, *La gouvernance par les nombres. Cours au Collège de France (2012-2014)*, (Paris: Fayard, 2015), Chapter 6.

⁷⁰⁴ ANR, PCM, 29/1952, p. 3.

⁷⁰⁵ IBIDEM.

The blank spaces, then, were apparently invitations to negotiation between the two legal corporate fictions engaged in the contract: management and the factory committee. Yet these were always-already constrained negotiations since the amount allocated for issues of welfare was conditioned on the fulfilment of the plan: on paper, the money available for investments, for the social insurance budget or for the director's fund were distributed in accordance with the performance of the respective industrial unit. This conditionality did not make the blank spaces

any less

negotiable, as

both CGM and the

workers

themselves took

them seriously out

of necessity. An

investigation

pursued by CGM

in late 1951 revealed



New Housing in Reșița, Lunca Pomostului, 1951; *Source*: ANR, PCM, 23/1951.

that many factories ignored their obligations on the ground that, unable to fulfil the production plan, they lacked investments funds. Two years of experimenting with the new collective labour contracts and the mood was grim indeed: “Unless we take urgent measures, we will find ourselves at the end of 1951 just like one year ago with factory management not observing the obligations deriving from the collective labour contracts, which would only make workers lose faith in

them.”⁷⁰⁶ For the workers, particularly for those toiling in hazardous conditions without proper working equipment, appealing to the collective labour contract was a desperate matter of last resort. Thus, for instance, disgruntled employees of a wood



The “Universal Store” in Reșița, mid-1950s,
Source: Postcard

processing facility lacking working clothes wrote a protest memo and sent it together with a copy of the collective contract to management and ministerial authorities.⁷⁰⁷ CGM representatives were therefore not in the wrong to fear workers might begin to regard the new contracts as mere legal shams with no binding power on management. If out of the 3758 collective labour contracts signed across industry in 1951, the vast majority were found to have been violated by management, notably in the realm of “social investment” (*investiții sociale*) this was simply because many small and medium-sized factories were unable to fulfil the production plan.

Industrial giants such as UDR or Malaxa Works were too big to fail. Their importance for the national economy and the transnational Soviet joint-stock commercial empire secured them some investments funds even when production plans were not reached. This allowed UDR’s

⁷⁰⁶ ANR, PCM, 200/1951, p. 2.

⁷⁰⁷ They never received an answer, ANR, PCR, 146/1951, p. 46.

management to continue its local paternalist tradition of subsidizing workers' and functionaries' accommodation in town and investing in the development of new housing for its employees. Faced with a mounting housing crisis by the late 1940s Reșița retained its status as a company town with housing and rent subsidies as the two main managerial devices for controlling local labour supply.⁷⁰⁸ During the immediate postwar period construction efforts were far and in-between, with a first major investment project scheduled for 1947. UDR promised to build 110 houses for married workers: one big room, a small kitchen, a surrounding garden, running water and electricity would allow over 220 families to settle in the town.⁷⁰⁹ Nevertheless, company housing was scarce and mostly geared towards servicing white rather than blue collar workers. Out of the 1216 technical personnel residing in the town in 1948, only 297 owned private houses, over 400 were accommodated on UDR's housing estate while the rest were given rent subsidies. By contrast, out of the 8015 resident blue collar workers only 1665 owned their own houses, leaving over 6000 in needed of monthly rent money.⁷¹⁰ In postwar Reșița - the town most famous journalist once wrote - one "did not rent a room, only a bed."⁷¹¹ It was in this context that housing projects dating from the war period were revived after nationalization, most notably in the so-called Lunca

⁷⁰⁸ On the link between work, residence and labour control as the defining trait of company towns see Marcelo J. Borges and Susana B. Torres, "Company Towns: Concepts, Historiography, and Approaches", in Marcelo J. Borges and Susana B. Torres (eds.) *Company Towns. Labor, Space, and Power Relations across Time and Continents* (London: Palgrave, 2012), 9-10.

⁷⁰⁹ "La Reșița se construiesc 110 case familiale muncitorești", *Luptătorul Bănățean*, No. 763, April 4 1947. It is not clear how many of these houses were finished if any.

⁷¹⁰ ANR, UDR, 208/1948.

⁷¹¹ Toma George Maiorescu, *Geneze la borna stelară* (Reșița: Editura TIM, 2013), 220. Maiorescu (b. 1928) was one of the first local journalists employed by the postwar regional communist daily *Luptătorul Bănățean* to write about his native town.

Pomostului - an area UDR expropriated from villagers as early as 1942 in order to build individual houses for workers.⁷¹²

Lines of continuity could be noticed in the underlining stress on domesticity that accompanied the expansion of the apartment stock. Characteristically, inaugurated in 1952 Reșița's remarkable symbolic building of the first postwar construction boom was a large general store selling a wide variety of goods. The ideology of domesticity linked shopfloor and public space in an overarching celebration of the duties of family life. In august 1949, the town's cooperative



One of Reșița's First Postwar Daycares, Source: ANR, PCM, 23/1951.

decided to reward the most productive workers by offering to freely transport goods to their place of residence so that “their wives won’t waste time strolling around shops, picking up rationed goods, and would use their time for the good of the family, therefore contributing to bettering the lives of those who build socialism in our country.”⁷¹³ The good of the family was the duty of the husband as well, whose spare time could not be wasted on young women, parties or booze. Both

⁷¹² Dan Gh. Perianu, *Istoria uzinelor din Reșița, 1771-1996* (Reșița: Editura Timpul, 1996), 103. See also ANR, UDR, 189/1946, p. 24 according to which the plan of building houses in Lunca Pomostului dated from 1945. In any case, the Lunca Pomostului housing project was the second largest investment project financed by the Ministry of Industry in 1948 after Hunedoara, ANR, Ministerul Economiei Naționale, 3/1948. For the latter see Mara Mărginean, *Ferestre spre furnalul roșu. Urbanism și cotidian în Hunedoara și Călan* (Iași: Polirom, 2015).

⁷¹³ ANCS, Sindicatul muncitorilor metalurgiști din Reșița, 25/1949, p. 284.

the local newspaper and trade-union bosses carried occasional moralizing campaigns to discipline workers out of their loss of “interest in the education of the children and household chores.”⁷¹⁴ Discipline was also required for the children of the families who moved in the new apartments of Lunca Pomostului, many of whom “slam the doors disturbing the peace of the other residents.”⁷¹⁵ Under the post-nationalization paternalism, Reșița was to become a town of rooted families rather than one of loose male tenants. Children could look up to a career in the plant via the network of vocational schools jointly sponsored by local authorities and UDR’s management, with the end result of the company securing a stable flow of reliable workers. The beginning was modest yet hopeful:

Thus, for example, this year [1949] we had planned to build 300 working-class flats, out of which only 120 will be finished with great delay. The same applies for the apprentices’ school and canteen, as well as their dorm. We also planned to build another dorm with a capacity of 600 places but up until this moment construction work did not take off. The same goes for the daycare of the Romanilor Street which should cater to those families where both mother and father work.⁷¹⁶

Turning Reșița into a company town of nuclear families was a long process. For most of the 1950s it was merely a paternalist dream amidst a quicksand urban landscape crisscrossed by commuting male metalworkers (*navetiști*).⁷¹⁷ UDR’s investment plan for 1949 is telling in this respect: out of the total budget only 15% went for so-called “social investments” (housing,

⁷¹⁴ “O femeie își caută soțul”, *Flamura roșie*, No. 30, July 17 1949.

⁷¹⁵ ANCS, Sindicatul muncitorilor metalurgiști din Reșița, 27/1950, p. 293.

⁷¹⁶ “Să asigurăm uzinelor brațele de muncă și să intensificăm grija față de ele”, *Flamura roșie*, No. 49, November 27 1949. For the full list of “social investments” scheduled for 1949 see ANR, UDR, 347/1948, pp. 8-9.

⁷¹⁷ For a typology of the commuter see Z. Bejenaru, “Deplasări pentru lucru la Uzinele Reșița”, in N.A. Rădulescu (ed.) *Lucrările seminarului de geografie economică, 1941-1946* (Bucharest: Academia de Înalte Studii Comerciale și Industriale, 1946), 105-107. In 1948, over 25% of the total workforce employed by UDR in Reșița was commuting from nearby villages on foot, by bus and by train.

vocational training buildings, crèches etc.), 22% for maintenance operations of industrial equipment and over 62% for the expansion of production capacity.⁷¹⁸ Though I was unable to find any data for the following years I suspect this basic distribution was kept at least up until Sovrom was disbanded in 1954 and perhaps well into the late 1950s. The town's urban growth took off only in the 1960s with the construction of Lunca Bârzavei, a district that would come to accommodate over 60% of the local population.⁷¹⁹ Structural investments (*investiții capitale*) of this sort, however, were not the only source of money for financing the institutions of managerial paternalism. Two additional mechanisms complemented it: the first was bank loans; the second was known as "the director's fund".⁷²⁰ The latter was another legal innovation introduced by the collective labour contracts enacted in 1949 of explicit Soviet lineage: a special amount of money management was entitled to retain from the company's annual profit for investments in the factory's social function as well as for giving out bonuses to norm breakers, Stakhanovists, and other productive workers.⁷²¹ How the director's fund was spent was a contentious matter that came to shape everyday politics at the factory level throughout the 1950s. It was also a public matter as workers were formally required to debate investment priorities and make suggestions. In late 1955 a governmental decree made the director's fund easier to access i.e. less dependent on fulfilling

⁷¹⁸ ANR, UDR, 77/1948, p. 117.

⁷¹⁹ Dan Gh. Perianu, *Istoria uzinelor din Reșița, 1771-1996* (Reșița: Editura Timpul, 1996), 133 *et passim*.

⁷²⁰ Loans, even when they were granted by banks, required massive paperwork and a bureaucracy to support it, ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 75/1951, p. 25 for the effort to build a park with a loan in Reșița.

⁷²¹ For the *Direktorfonds* in GDR see Sandrine Kott, *Le communisme au quotidien. Les entreprises d'État dans la société est-allemande* (Paris: Belin, 2001), 77, 86-87. Kott argues the social policy financed through the director's fund constituted a form of paternalism the goal of which was to instill company loyalty.

the plan, thus implicitly acknowledging it had become the main source for supporting factory welfare.⁷²²

Given Loncar's authority and Simonenco's expertise in Soviet management, how to spend the director's fund in Reșița was a decision taken between the two. Union delegates, while aware such a fund existed, were nevertheless rather uninformed about its use, arguably because they knew they could exert little control over investments.⁷²³ It was indeed Simonenco who designed the first spending plan for 1950, allocating a monthly budget of one million lei for the director's fund: 200000 lei for building or repairing daycares, hostels, and canteens; 300000 lei for money prizes awarded to norm breakers; 200000 lei for the acquisition of musical instruments for the plant's choir and sporting equipment, mountain trips, books and magazines; and finally 300000 lei for so-called individual aid given to needy employees following a work accident, a death of a family member, sudden illness and other unpredictable events. For the second half of 1950 the monthly budget was raised by 50% and reordered so much so that investments in housing, canteens, kindergartens and daycares almost doubled.⁷²⁴ Such clarity in the way the fund was spent was craved for at Malaxa Works in Bucharest. Here, as the person in charge of the plant's medical cabinet - doctor Weintraub - noted, the general manager always claimed funds were lacking which then often "popped up as if by miracle following an investigation."⁷²⁵ Published in the plant's newspaper, Weintraub's article was a form of lobby on behalf of the 14 medical doctors employed

⁷²² ANR, PCM, 53/1956. The same decree reduced the percentage of the director's fund to be spent on bonuses for productive workers from 25% to 10% with the hope of forcing managers to invest more in welfare facilities at the factory level.

⁷²³ ANCS, Sindicatul muncitorilor metalurgiști din Reșița, 27/1950, p. 89 asked about whether the director's fund would be used for housing, one union boss replied in the negative.

⁷²⁴ IBIDEM, pp. 7-9. To get a sense of these figures, it is worth mentioning here the average wage of a skilled metalworker in late 1949 was well under 9000 lei.

⁷²⁵ Șura Weintraub, "Dispensarul nostru", *Viața Uzinei*, No. 13, November 7 1949.

by the plant to take care of its workforce, including the employees' children.⁷²⁶ In making it clear the medical cabinet needed at least a car for transporting patients, the doctor was staking out a claim on the director's fund and throwing in a jab at the director's moral composure.

Naturally, Weintraub was not alone in launching a struggle over investments in the pages of *Viața Uzinei*. The plant's newspaper was the ideal medium through which similar claims were voiced. For example, workers of the metal repair section allegedly told the reporter: "We ask comrade director Oniga whether he knows the location of our workshop? We never saw him take any interest in the harsh conditions under which we work."⁷²⁷ They were asking for some money in order to consolidate the walls of the workshop while complaining the new bosses of the factory "forgot they come from among us and by turning a deaf ear to the mass they cut themselves off from it."⁷²⁸ Money was also required for the plant's daycare as comrade Maria Ionescu made it clear in a virulent article in which she argued that "our daycare is part and parcel of the social wage".⁷²⁹ This argument was a double edged sword. On the one hand, it was used by authorities to justify low wages. The official women magazine *Femeia* regularly explained how women workers receive not merely cash money on payday but also the "social wage" such as, for instance, keeping the kids in the factory's daycare.⁷³⁰ On the other hand, women in charge of the daycare or the crèche at the factory level found in the notion of "social wage" a ready-made rhetorical device that could be employed to articulate demands within the limits of the official discourse. This strategy allowed comrade Maria Ionescu to complain about the lack of adequate milk for the

⁷²⁶ For more on what authorities considered a "model" medical cabinet see *Viața Capitalei*, No. 326, May 20 1950.

⁷²⁷ *Viața Uzinei*, No. 18, January 15 1950.

⁷²⁸ IBIDEM, p. 3.

⁷²⁹ Maria Ionescu, "Lucruri ce trebuiesc remediate la creșă de copii", *Viața Uzinei*, No. 44, January 23 1951.

⁷³⁰ Ada Bârseanu, "Pentru bunăstarea oamenilor muncii", *Femeia*, No. 2, March 1950.

children, to ask for medicine and a larger building. One month later she complained again about the difficulties of buying a laundry dryer.⁷³¹

The actual outcomes of these struggles over the distribution of the director's fund are hard to assess. The collective labour contract that marked the onset of the First Five Year Plan in 1951 mentioned none of these bones of contention. It spoke of housing for unmarried young male workers "who live outside of the city"; of an open pool, a theatre and cinema hall, reading rooms, a neighborhood park and of the need to build a so-called "palace of culture".⁷³² An investigation conducted at the plant revealed that the contract had been severely violated with the exception of the daycare which received a new wood storeroom and 70 of its children were sent on summer camp for free.⁷³³ Moreover, unlike in Reșița, the plant's resources seldom spilled outside of its walls. It was the local municipality who singlehandedly financed housing in the neighborhood, although for symbolic reasons Malaxa Works did offer to help with construction material when needed. Nor were things much clearer for 1952. With the exception of a barbershop opened on the premises of the plant to cater to the needs of the workers at lower prices, the contract was apparently ignored again. An angry article by one of the union bosses explained what management had failed to invest in: showers, tables for the canteen, dentistry equipment, the cinema hall and finally a soccer stadium in the nearby neighborhood of Balta Albă. It is no coincidence that the

⁷³¹ "Unde duce birocrațismul", *Viața Uzinei*, No. 48, February 28 1951.

⁷³² "Cum vor crește Uzinele '23 August' în cursul primului an al Cincinalului", *Viața Capitalei*, No. 326, July 11 1950.

⁷³³ ANR, PCM, 18/1951, p. 43.

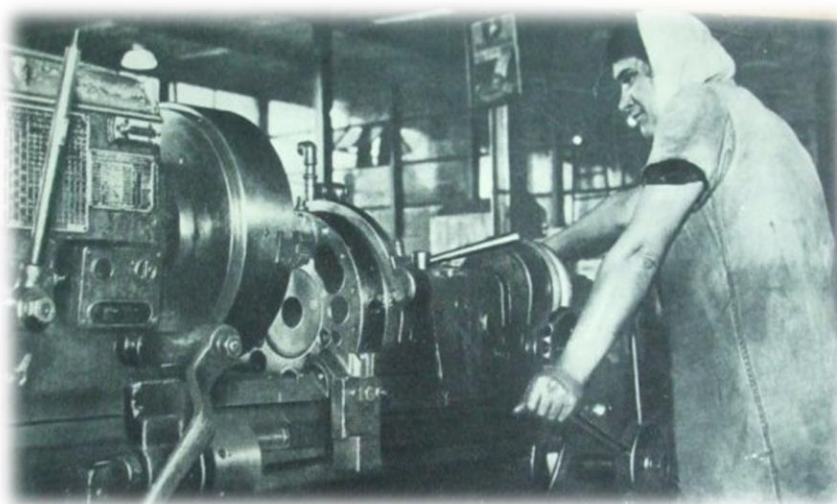
soccer stadium - more of a sport field in fact - was finally built under the management of comrade Constantin Putinică, the plant first general “manager-worker” appointed in 1953.⁷³⁴

The rise and fall of Putinică between 1953 and 1957 might help us to better understand how paternalism, managerial authority and the gendered struggles over factory welfare deeply structured investment priorities. In many ways the appointment of Putinică as head of Malaxa Works marked a turning point in the trajectory of the plant as the new director successfully consolidated managerial authority while also muting much of the criticism published by *Viața Uzinei*. Indeed, a close reading of the factory newspaper under Putinică’s leadership shows not only a dwindling number of articles claiming some of the financial resources of the director’s fund but also a complete disappearance of references to the person and personality of the general manager. How, then, did Putinică achieve such a remarkable feat, at the same time securing authority for himself and silencing demands from below? Or to put it differently, how did he succeed in sheltering the director’s fund from the claim-making propensity of medical doctors, ordinary metalworkers (women and men alike), employees of the daycare, of the canteen or of any other institution that went into the “social wage”? Part of the answer lies the first article published under Putinică’s name shortly after his appointment, which was an ode to the authority of the foreman on the shopfloor. Putinică’s success rested on his ability to reinforce factory hierarchy, an effort which involved episodes of camaraderie, mixing masculinity with attention to manly concerns. The complex chain of command linking lower management to engineers, planners,

⁷³⁴ Not to be confused with the “23 August” - Bucharest’s largest sport arena - built in the mid-1950s and located two kilometers away from the plant.

accountants and top directors - a hierarchical decision-making process historian Yves Cohen called *l'entrechef* - was exclusively male.⁷³⁵

Constantin Putinică was the dream manager of the 1950s. Born in 1911 in a land-owning peasant family, his professional trajectory on the interwar labour market took him to Brăila, Cluj, Bucharest, Braşov and Râşnov. He was a mechanic with the national railway company until 1934; a salesman for a couple of months; a cleaning man and an office clerk in the capital city; again a mechanic with the aerospace manufacturer IAR between 1939 and 1941; and finally a norm checker and a functionary of a small factory in Southern



Skilled Woman Metalworker, Malaxa Works, cca. 1949; Source: Postcard

Transylvania for much of the war up until 1949. Putinică was also a communist militant involved in the underground operations of the party. Sentenced to twenty years of political imprisonment during the war he was lucky to spend no more than eight days in jail. The end of the war found Putinică caught up in the struggles over workers' representation as leader of a factory committee. A family man and faithful party member, Putinică worked for the Ministry of Industry after 1949.

⁷³⁵ Yves Cohen, *Le siècle des chefs. Une histoire transnationale du commandement et d'autorité (1890-1940)*, (Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2013), 644. In the Soviet Union of the interwar epoch, Cohen argues, *l'entrechef* was based on the exclusion of women which makes the archival documents left behind by Soviet managers at all levels traces of male sociability.

In 1952 he was appointed general manager of a factory in the town of Târgoviște, from where he left for a managerial position with Sovromtractor - the Soviet-Romanian joint-stock tractor manufacturing company located in the town of Brașov. Here, Putinică might have acquired the basics of the “sole leadership” principle first-hand from Soviet advisers like Supikașvili. In early 1953 Constantin Putinică was called upon to take up the more challenging task of managing Malaxa Works, a factory known for its recalcitrant party and union bosses.⁷³⁶

It took over three years for the party and union bosses of the plant to orchestrate the downfall of Putinică. In an unsigned note that reached the Central Committee in late 1956, the general manager was denounced for having hired his own sons and for bringing over 500 of his close associates from Brașov to work in the factory. These people, the note explained, were used as spies; a fact that gained Putinică the derogatory nickname “the general”: “doesn’t he understand workers see all this and badmouth him?”⁷³⁷ In addition to his allegedly rough manners, what really brought the director a bad reputation among Malaxa Works’s employees was Putinică’s habit of giving parties, particularly with his protégées and patrons. Among the latter, persons of influence were singled out at the municipal level who supposedly gave Putinică a free hand. The note was followed a couple of months later by an investigation of party and ministerial officials. Let us now try to make sense of what they discovered at Malaxa Works by attending to their report.

The team of investigators found Putinică was an excellent pupil of the “sole leadership” principle: “every time the party committee or the trade-union attempted to follow up workers’

⁷³⁶ This fragment builds on Putinică’s party biography, ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, Dosare Anexe, 51/1956. Many of the details are not explained or followed through. For instance, it is not clear why Putinică was released from jail so quickly.

⁷³⁷ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămară, 99/1957, p. 4.

complaints, he accused them of wanting to attack him personally.”⁷³⁸ Moreover, “any attempt to single out the guilty was considered by him a personal affront, an attack to his prestige as leader (*conducător*).”⁷³⁹ Neither party nor union bosses at the factory level could exert control over Putinică. It was not easier for state authorities such as the “economic police” (*miliția economică*), a brigade of which was kicked out of the factory while attempting to investigate a case of theft. As for opportunities for the employees to voice their opinions, in print or otherwise, Putinică was accused of “strangling criticism from below”. There is hardly anything new in these remarks; the tone was reminiscent of the immediate post-nationalization struggles over the nature of managerial authority. What was new in the report was the following astute observation about factory hierarchy: “between the sole leadership (the general manager of the plant) and his subordinates (*executanți*) there is a compact layer of dubious people who have no interest in fulfilling workers’ demands.”⁷⁴⁰ The most blatantly ignored demand of the workers was to have a say in matters pertaining to the spending of the director’s fund. Putinică, however, retained absolute control of the fund and spend it together with the “dubious people”. Who, then, made up this so-called layer?

Firstly, there were the 189 foremen, 53 of whom were overqualified young engineers promoted by Putinică. Secondly, there were the workshop supervisors (*șefii de secții*) whom the general manager used to call to his office on a daily basis to discuss issues related to production. Thirdly, there were men with experience, long time employees of the plant who survived all political regimes from the late 1930s onwards. Sure, the report painted grim portraits of these men in the vernacular of everyday struggle, accusing them of having beaten up workers in the past, of

⁷³⁸ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 20/1958, p. 29.

⁷³⁹ IBIDEM.

⁷⁴⁰ IBIDEM, p. 22.

making shady business with state money and of being morally corrupt if not politically dangerous. Hardly surprising, Putinică's effort to restore managerial authority and establish factory hierarchy along the chain of command meant that he "not only tolerated but even supported them".⁷⁴¹ These were men whom Putinică trusted to run the factory, including the distribution of the director's fund. Money could therefore be spent on building a sport field for soccer games, for giving bonuses to football players and, more importantly, for "buying" football players from other factories of the capital city.⁷⁴² Equally, the director's fund was used for financing "parties". Shortly after nationalization, Malaxa Works became the key industrial complex to be visited by foreign delegations. Engineers, poets, political figures, journalists and even ordinary workers were often taken on a tour of the plant. Putinică saw in these visits opportunities to organize collective meals, sometimes even in the company of paid women dancers.⁷⁴³ For many on the factory's hierarchy these were also opportunities to bond, team building moments that oiled the flow of command as it trickled down from the main office to the shopfloors. Small wonder the amount of money spent on these parties was staggering: "no matter how much food there was and no matter what hotel they were put into, a single human being cannot consume that much."⁷⁴⁴

Naturally, the passion for soccer, good food and women dancers could not deplete the director's fund in its entirety. The general manager also used it for more personal goals, such as the acquisition of a photo camera and the siphoning of construction material necessary for his own private house. It would be exaggerated, however, to consider Putinică's manner of spending the

⁷⁴¹ IBIDEM, p. 19.

⁷⁴² Buying football players was a literal phrase in the report. What it could mean is that Putinică used the director's funds to transfer workers who played the game from other factories offering them better working conditions and bonuses.

⁷⁴³ For a Hungarian delegation, Putinică even hired the famed group of dancers "Paris on Ice" (*Parisul pe gheață*).

⁷⁴⁴ IBIDEM, p. 15.

director's fund a form of corruption. Anachronisms apart, for the investigators it was something much worse, namely a case-study of a director of working-class pedigree and communist faith "loosing class feeling (*simț de clasă*) and the sense of direction a proper leader should have."⁷⁴⁵ On the one hand, it was an infringement on the plant's variety of paternalism. Under Putinică's leadership investments in housing plummeted, meals at the canteen got worse and the needs of women workers were arguably pushed back even in terms of entertainment let alone social reproduction. Moreover, the reinforcement of the male dominated factory's hierarchy could not but reinforce men's customary disdain for women working in metal industries.⁷⁴⁶ On the other hand, Putinică's success in securing a degree of autonomy for the chain of command above and beyond the reach of party bosses at the factory level was a risky affair that finally backfired. Granted, it gave the general manager absolute control over financial resources and a free hand in spending the director's fund, but it also exposed him (and those close to him) to a more devastating form of criticism than what he might have received in the pages of *Viața Uzinei* (had he allowed it).

The downfall of Putinică, although couched in a rhetoric of conspicuous consumption and reckless spending, came as a consequences of the plant's chronic underperformance.⁷⁴⁷ Indeed, the investigation that brought down the general manager was motivated less by what Putinică did and

⁷⁴⁵ IBIDEM, p. 31.

⁷⁴⁶ Before Putinică's stint, it was still possible for the party organization at the factory level to scold and shame those foremen unwilling to accept women workers. It was also possible for the party to punish workshop supervisors such as Carol Schwager for "doing abject gestures" before recently employed women wanting to learn the craft. The same went for men such as comrade Orbeșteanu who lied about being married in order to take advantage of fellow women workers on and off the shopfloor. AMB, Comitetul Municipal PCR București, Comitetul Sectorului 23 August (Malaxa) al PCR, 37/1950, pp. 43-45.

⁷⁴⁷ The investigation was triggered by Malaxa Works failing again to meet production targets in 1956 and asking the Ministry of Industry to bail it out by providing it with money for the director's fund.

more by what he could not do, namely fulfil production targets. That the plan could not be executed in an industrial plant where, as the report put it, the party was “weak” in relation to the technical and managerial staff suggests that not even unencumbered factory hierarchy and a fluent chain of command unhindered by the nuisances of everyday politics could secure higher output. While managerial authority and paternalism were preconditions of increased productivity, at least in socialist theory if not in industrial practice, they were meant to be complemented by rationalization, performance wages and a flexible workforce. It is the uneven trajectory of this rationalizing drive that the last chapter of this dissertation attempts to explore.

Chapter V

The Politics of Productivity (1950-1958)

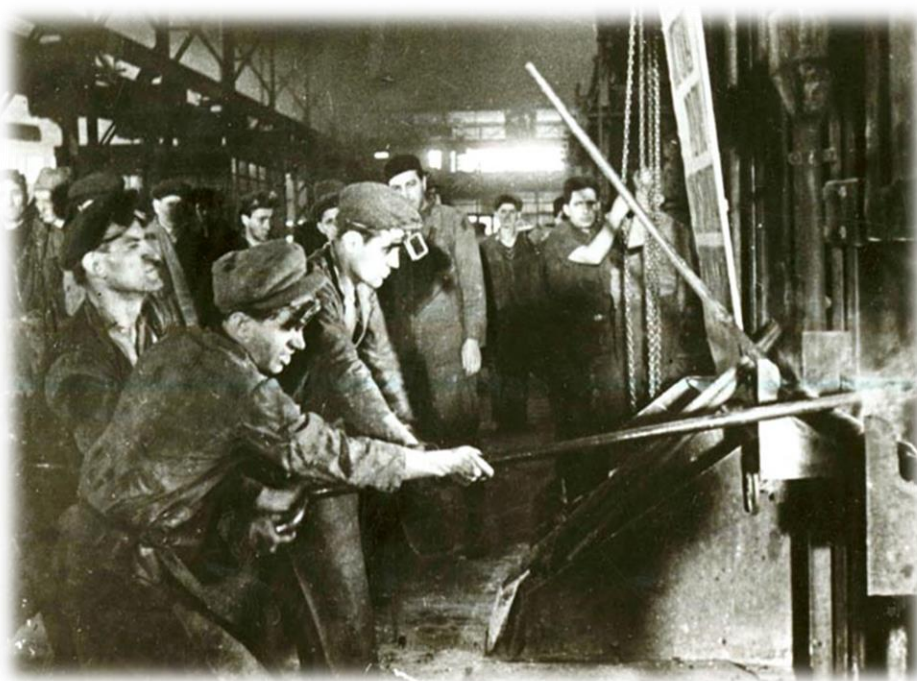
Trajectories of Rationalization

Little did engineer Silviu Sepi know one day he would reach the heights of the profession as head of UDR's steelworks section (*oțelărie*) and deputy vice manager of the entire steel mill in Reșița. Throughout

late 1944 and early 1945, however, he feared for his job, and possibly for his life as well. For much of the war, Sepi had been put in charge of the apprentices'

dormitory where he

was allegedly enforcing a draconian disciplinary



"Tall, strong and always cheerful" - foreman Matei Stubnya overseeing a team of workers loading the blast furnace; *Source: Fototeca online a comunismului românesc*, 181/1950.

regime on the young workers. Come November 1944, he was singled out in the communist press for his brutality and for having been something of a fascist.⁷⁴⁸ One newspaper article purported to adduce evidence in support of these claims and proposed for the engineer to be immediately purged.⁷⁴⁹ Yet Sepi survived unscathed from the wave of purging activity that seized UDR at the

⁷⁴⁸ "Se cere purificare la Reșița. Abuzurile fasciștilor și parveniților prohitleriști la UDR", *Luptătorul Bănățean*, No. 57, November 19 1944.

⁷⁴⁹ In addition, Sepi was suspected of collaborating to *Stavila*, the only non-communist newspaper published in Reșița between November 1944 and April 1945; see *Luptătorul Bănățean*, No. 77 December 11 1944.

time. Luck, circumstance and political sympathies saved him.⁷⁵⁰ How exactly Sepi ended up catapulted at the helm of the steelworks section is less clear. Membership in the communist party was a precondition, but so too might have been his professional standing as well as his ability to navigate the pressure stemming from party peers and management. Local party archives show Sepi taking his communism seriously: he engaged in regular exercises of criticism and self-criticism during meetings and suggested ways of educating the “backward” commuting workers. At the same time Sepi took his engineering equally seriously: he kicked out of his office nosy party activists, openly privileged the foremen of his section and refused to report overblown production figures to nagging journalists keen on popularizing plan achievements.⁷⁵¹ While it was certainly challenging to take seriously both communism (i.e. the requirements of party membership) and engineering (i.e. the duties of the craft) at the level of everyday factory routine, in one important respect they were nevertheless made compatible by the rationalization drive of the epoch of which authorship of the productivity discourse was a key component.

Communist engineers like Silviu Sepi were ideally suited (if not outrightly demanded) to become authors of the productivity discourse that spread throughout the 1950s in socialist Romania.⁷⁵² Myriad ways of increasing productivity in industry were presented in tens of books,

⁷⁵⁰ Sepi was supposed to be purged together with Boitan and Staricu in January 1945; see ANR, MM, 988/1945, p. 6. Ironically, as early as 1942 the secret police (*Siguranța*) put Sepi under surveillance for communist sympathies and “anti-Romanian feelings” together with two other UDR engineers, Ivancenco and Licev; ANR, Colecția Nr. 50, 2828, pp. 1-2.

⁷⁵¹ ANCS, PCR, Comitetul Municipal Reșița, 1/1951, p. 273; IBIDEM, 8/1951, p. 18 Sepi admits before his communist comrades that he “put the interests of production before party life (viața de partid).”

⁷⁵² Following Foucault, by “author” and “authorship” I understand “a functional principle” that organizes the emergence, proliferation and circulation of texts and circumscribes their meaning. In this view, whether communist engineers like Sepi or workers like Căpuțan and Stubnya actually authored the texts they signed is beside the point, thought admittedly a topic worthy of future research; Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?”, in James D. Faubion (ed.) *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology, Volume II* (New York: The New York Press, 1998), 205-222.

dozens of brochures, hundreds scholarly articles, thousands newspaper columns and an endless stream of translations from Soviet sources, not to mention innumerable lectures, conferences, speeches, meetings, officials visits and informal talks. To contribute to this discourse one had to be professionally and politically synched for even though not all communist party members were excellent professionals, all excellent professionals in industry were required to be communist party members. Accordingly, as early as January 1950 Sepi's name was attached to an article that explained how labour productivity may increase in the steelworks section: the elimination of downtime (*timpi morți*), a flexible coordination between sections, more authority granted to foremen and an overall better organization of work were singled out as prime resources that could secure more steel output.⁷⁵³ Published in the regional newspaper, such articles reached a limited audience so much so that in January 1951 Sepi limited himself to reaching his steelworkers by voice rather than through the written word. Wider audiences were more plausibly targeted via the brochure and the scholarly article. Widely circulated, Sepi's co-authored brochure was arguably the first to introduce the notion of "inner reserves" (*resurse interne*) - the conceptual staple of the rationalization drive of the 1950s:

The lengthening of the use time of industrial equipment is one of our most important reserves, being at the same time the easiest to put to use because it requires no special investments, only an organizational effort.⁷⁵⁴

The quest for "inner reserves" was hailed as the backbone of rationalization, a process which could encompass nearly every item located on the industrial landscape from bodily motions

⁷⁵³ Silviu Sepi, "Cum va putea Oțelăria Siemens Martin să-și ridice productivitatea", *Flamura Roșie*, No. 55, January 8 1950.

⁷⁵⁴ Silviu Sepi, Adolf Druker, Ion Lăzărescu, *Rezervele mijloacelor de bază ale industriei în slujba cincinalului* (Bucharest: Editura CGM, 1952), 24. Naturally, the notion of "inner reserves" was of Soviet parentage, earlier popularized through various translations; see A. Arakelian, *Rezervele întreprinderilor în slujba planului cincinal* (Bucharest: Editura CGM, 1951).

and space to the built environment and time. In Reșița, Sepi argued, more productive space was obtained by a thorough organization of the locker rooms; a trivial detail at first sight, yet one that saved cement, bricks and labour power from being wasted on a new construction: “the discovery and capitalization (*valorificare*) of each and every square meter of unused space is an important gain for the factory and for the economy.”⁷⁵⁵ This discourse of productivity, no matter how carbon copied it seemed after the Soviet original, was nevertheless able to respond to local conditions in postwar Romania. As Sepi himself was the first to admit, even a 10% increase in the use of fixed assets (*mijloace de bază*) would “yield a similar productive outcome as billions of lei invested in capital”.⁷⁵⁶ This observation pointed to the simple fact that, at least for the first Five Year Plan (1951-1955) the sources of boosted productivity were to be looked for predominantly in the combined organization of work and the rationalization of existing equipment rather than in massive investments in technological upgrading. To be sure, capital input would not be missing altogether, but the amount of money scheduled to be poured into the acquisition of new industrial equipment would nonetheless be modest.⁷⁵⁷ The state’s chronic lack of financial resources throughout the 1950s only made the domestication of the discourse of productivity plausible in the eyes of engineers like Sepi. Yet how could the same discourse of productivity be rendered plausible in the eyes of the workers, many of whom were now targeted for an intensified pace of work?

⁷⁵⁵ Silviu Sepi, Adolf Druker, Ion Lăzărescu, *Rezervele mijloacelor de bază ale industriei în slujba cincinalului* (Bucharest: Editura CGM, 1952), 16.

⁷⁵⁶ Silviu Sepi, Ioan Licev, Vladimir Popovici, “Colectivul tehnicienilor și muncitorilor de la ‘Sovrommetal’ Reșița a început lupta pentru îndeplinirea planului în 11 luni”, *Probleme Economice*, No. 4-5, April-May, 1951, 167.

⁷⁵⁷ I am referring here strictly to investments in heavy industry (particularly metallurgy and machine building) which only picked up significantly in the late 1950s. As John Montias noted, the bulk of investments for much of the 1950s went to those industries “capable of yielding large amounts of foreign exchange” rather than to “industries traditionally associated with a development strategy of the Soviet type”, John Montias, *Economic Development in Communist Romania* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967), 35-36. It was the oil, lumber, and cement industries that attracted investments for the better half of the First Five Year Plan; all producing commodities that allowed for a rising level of exports.

Communist workers, much like communist engineers, were also invited to join the authorship of the discourse of productivity. Take the case of Ion Căpuțan, a smelter manning the Siemens-Martin blast furnace No. 7 of the steel mill in Reșița. This name appears on one of the many brochures published in 1950 in order to popularize how workers in various industries understood to increase productivity and how this very effort of understanding transformed in turn their lives. Providing portraits of leading (*fruntaș*) workers in the steel, oil and gas, coal, construction, wood processing and transport industries, the project was inspired by the editorial practices of the Soviet trade-unions and managed to print over 79000 copies, including translations in Hungarian and German.⁷⁵⁸ The narrative was confessional: on a busy day in late April 1950, just about the time Căpuțan's team was preparing to load the furnace for a last time in order to allegedly honor May First, he was called upon to the office of the general manager. Fearing his brief absence would cause for the precious load to be wasted, Căpuțan looked around the section for instruction from his boss - engineer Sepi - who was nowhere to be found. Upon reaching the office of the general manager, Căpuțan was greeted by Sepi himself, who was waiting to offer him the Work Medal in view of his outstanding record in production. The prize occasioned a moment of introspection for Căpuțan, who could not apparently take his mind off the furnace:

A wasted load equals my wage as smelter for no less than 4 years; and losing the material means wasting the chance of constructing either 12 tractors or 1 kilometer and 200 meters of railways. I think these numbers speak for themselves.⁷⁵⁹

⁷⁵⁸ See the review published in *Lupta de clasă*, No. 7-8, July-August 1950, 131-136.

⁷⁵⁹ Ion Căpuțan, *Reșița luptă pentru mai mult oțel* (Bucharest: Editura CGM, 1950), 16. Căpuțan was not the only worker-author of the brochure; his story was accompanied by three more biographies of leading workers of the steel mill in Reșița.

Perhaps these numbers spoke for themselves, but so too did the ones more intimately connected to Căpuțan's life trajectory: his father, a landless peasant, was employed by UDR for 37 years; had 7 children and brought the young Căpuțan to the steelworks in 1935, shortly after UDR pushed up the production of steel following the slump triggered by the Great Depression; it took him 5 years to enter the ranks of the skilled workers, just about the time the plant came under German control; himself a father of 3, Căpuțan was the typical commuter, residing in a village 38 kilometers away from Reșița, a distance he would travel daily by way of a truck provided by the company. It is these numbers rather than simply the obsession with quantifying wasted steel that explain why a worker like Căpuțan was chosen to author a brochure on the discourse of productivity: his biography appealed to the many, and the many more future commuters looking to enter industrial life, climb the skill ladder, provide for numerous families while retaining a foot in the village. Căpuțan might or might not have been an excellent steel worker - one endowed with enough practical knowledge worthy of being shared in textual form - but he was nevertheless an exemplary case that could potentially be made an example of: given his background in the countryside and commuting lifestyle, Căpuțan had all the characteristics of becoming a so-called "slacker": physically exhausted, always on the move and unavailable for party meetings hence politically "backward" and supposedly less dependent on the wage to due him owning a meagre plot of land. By telling the story of a commuting worker that was eminently not a slacker, the brochure bearing Căpuțan's name served more as an ideological corrective to the discourse of

productivity by instructing trade-union bosses, engineers and party activists that with enough discipline even the commuting worker might carry forward the banner of productivity.⁷⁶⁰

Along the chain of command, in-between Sepi and Căpuțan - the chief engineer and the leading smelter - stood Matei Stubnya - the master foreman - a genuine fountain of practical knowledge on the shopfloor and a distinguished author of the discourse of productivity. Much like the first two, Stubnya was also a communist party member, one highly active in party meetings. Unlike the first two, however, Stubnya's name never benefited from the wide reach of the brochure; his authorship remained local, deeply entrenched in the craft tradition of the steel mill, and popularized exclusively through the regional newspaper *Flamura Roșie*. Stubnya's biography could hardly appeal to anyone beyond the outskirts of Reșița: coming out of a skilled urban working-class family of Czech descent, the young Matei spent years learning the craft under famed foreman Mayer, including the bossy manners and paternal tone of the shopfloor master, always calling subordinate workers "children". Outside of the shopfloor, Stubnya was the master of the house: "large rooms, a kitchen, porch and a bath. Modern furniture. Books on the shelves: Heine, Sadoveanu, Goethe ... Gherda, his playful daughter, just finished high school."⁷⁶¹ For party activists, as well as for the general manager of the steel mill, Stubnya was already "a new type of worker", one that did not limit himself to making steel, but went on to make new workers "often sharing through the press the advanced work methods (*metode înaintate*) he acquired during the

⁷⁶⁰ "Să dezvoltăm atitudinea nouă față de muncă", *Flamura Roșie*, No. 180 July 7 1951. Căpuțan was "a living example of work discipline for all the steelworkers" because he never missed workday.

⁷⁶¹ Toma George Maiorescu, *Geneze la borna stelară* (Reșița: Editura TIM, 2013), 228.

three months that he spent amidst Soviet steelworkers.”⁷⁶² How could Reșița’s quintessential type of craft master also be the new communist worker, and a Stakhanovite no less?

Stubnya’s mastery of the labour process could be doubly trumpeted: on the one hand, the master foreman could be shown to promote Soviet work methods, including Stakhanovism, which in and of themselves allegedly increased productivity; on the other hand, Stubnya’s skillset was indispensable for patching up the fissures and overcoming the innumerable obstacles that occurred on the shopfloor, from work stoppages due to lack of raw material and electricity to the need of onsite repairing of the blast furnace. Thus, Stubnya could lecture side by side with engineer Sepi on the prospect of better organizing workteams⁷⁶³; or he could author an article in order to explain how the life cycle of a blast furnace could be enhanced without much investments apart from quality bricks;⁷⁶⁴ or, finally, Stubnya could suggest ingenious ways of obtaining scrap iron when supply was low, notably by having all the unused horseshoes around Reșița collected and sent to the steelworks.⁷⁶⁵ This was treasured advice, even when backed by less tolerable attitudes. Stubnya was occasionally chided for locking himself in his own office, disregarding the work of supervision; for tolerating abuses on the shopfloor, purposefully bending pay schemes or for invoking “objective difficulties” when production quotas were not met. This *eigensinnig* behavior could trigger the wrath of the general manager who saw nothing but “carelessness” when engineers

⁷⁶² “Oameni și fapte din Reșița de azi”, *Flamura Roșie*, No. 623, October 30 1955. It is not clear when Stubnya travelled to the Soviet Union. According to general manager Munteanu, already in 1952 Stubnya was “educated by the party to learn from the Soviet experience”; Mihai Munteanu, “Sovromurile – un ajutor prețios în opera de construire a socialismului”, *Flamura Roșie*, No. 287, July 30 1952.

⁷⁶³ “La Oțelărie”, *Flamura Roșie*, No. 130, January 9 1951.

⁷⁶⁴ Matei Stubnya, “Cum putem prelungi durabilitatea vetrei și bolții cuptorului Siemens-Martin”, *Flamura Roșie*, No. 440, January 23 1954. Căpuțan repeated some of Stubnya’s opinions in an interview published several years after; “Să prelungim viața cuptoarelor”, *Flamura Roșie*, No. 779, April 24 1957. Căpuțan was a “relentless researcher, passionate about solving the secrets that help him in the work of maintenance of industrial equipment.”

⁷⁶⁵ “Ce spun oțelarii despre aprovizionarea cu fier vechi”, *Flamura Roșie*, No. 897, June 14 1957.

placed responsibility on the foremen, and the foremen placed it firmly farther down on the shoulders of smelters. The chain of command linking Sepi, Stubnya and Căpuțan was doubled by a network of reciprocities that could at one and the same time boost or hinder productivity.⁷⁶⁶

That these three men became authors of the discourse of productivity was not by chance since each in his own way represented the ideal agent of rationalization of the labour process as envisaged by the emerging socialist regime. That each became an author of the discourse of productivity was a confirmation of their double determination as subjects of a specific industrial project and objects of the dynamic of capital accumulation that undergirded the First Five Year Plan. The productivity discourse, then, functioned in two complementary ways: as a general framework for guiding industrial production and as a language of (self)identification for the vast mass of industrial employees. The interplay between the two - particularly as it concerned issues touching on the wage system and workers' control over the labour process - defined the overall experience of building socialism for the likes of Sepi, Stubnya and Căpuțan. This last chapter aims to explore the basic coordinates of this experience in order to make a larger argument about the rationalization and austerity that underpinned what John Montias called Romania's "unbalanced growth" during the 1950s.⁷⁶⁷

Montias identified two growth policies pursued by the communist government during the 1950s. The first, extending to late 1953, was defined by massive exports of raw materials

⁷⁶⁶ This network of reciprocities rooted in shopfloor routines, manliness, skill, seniority, intra-class solidarity and inter-class deference and hostility is what defines the notion of "workers' control"; see David Montgomery, *Workers' Control in America. Studies in the History of Work, Technology, and Labor Struggles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 11-12. More on this below.

⁷⁶⁷ John Michael Montias, "Unbalanced Growth in Rumania", *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 53, No. 2, 1963, 562-571.

(notably oil, cement, lumber and foodstuff) that together with credit contracted from the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia paid for the acquisition of industrial equipment. The second, covering the middle of the decade up until 1958/9, saw exports of raw material and the purchase of machinery dwindle, followed by a shift towards exporting semifabricates and importing raw materials needed for the domestic manufacturing industry (ore, coal, coke and steel) to run at full capacity. Both policies were predicated on the sacrifice of the consumer or what Montias called “austerity”: comprehensive rationing was disbanded only in December 1954; investments in infrastructure, housing and services were minimal while the wage system inaugurated in 1949 produced a vast mass of precarious workers barely surviving on low wages. By freeing foodstuff and raw materials for export, austerity allowed the government to import capital goods and push for the reconstruction, modernization and diversification of domestic industrial production.⁷⁶⁸ In this context, boosting productivity could only be a matter of rationalization. On the one hand, the impossibility of keeping a steady inflow of technological upgrade left men like Sepi, Stubnya and Căpuțan to mine for productivity gains in the fuller utilization of existing industrial equipment and machinery, factory redesign, work methods and supply chains. On the other hand, austerity blocked attempts to buy productivity gains with higher average wages, whereby an expanded national market in consumer goods could compensate for increased managerial control of the labour process.

Following Montias, this chapter argues that the 1950s in Romania was hardly a decade of “forced industrialization” as contemporary historians still argue, but should rather be viewed as one during which rationalization and austerity structured both the options available to policy

⁷⁶⁸ John Montias, *Economic Development in Communist Romania* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967), 15-71.

makers and the experience of industrial work.⁷⁶⁹ In other words, the spurts of growth recorded during the 1950s were rooted in the social and economic consequences of the war. Idled machinery, broken chains of supply, artisanal routines and workers' enhanced control over the labour process were developments already visible during the war and much accelerated thereafter. Likewise, wartime consumer sacrifice, the general scarcity of the immediate postwar and inflation arguably made the austerity of the 1950s more tolerable than it might have otherwise been the case. In **Part I** "Inner Reserves" I offer a contextual reading of the productivity discourse as it was articulated in both scholarly journals and the popular press. Understanding how its basic concepts operated is crucial for at least two reasons: firstly, because these texts sketched the horizon of interpretation - apologetic and critical - of socialist industrial life; secondly, because the same texts framed the way in which reports of industrial activity were construed. If questions of "bottlenecks" (*strangulări*), for instance, were singled out as "problems" to be solved through rationalization, it was only from the standpoint of an ideal production process that knew no delay or shortage. In **Part II** "Wages of Growth" I examine the transformations of the wage system as it underwent successive rationalization attempts. By 1956 the goal of rewarding the intensification of work through extensive payment-by-result and performance bonuses ended up polarizing the workers into those benefitting from bargains with lower management over norm breaking and higher wages and those excluded from informal shopfloor solidarities and left eking out a living on the so-called tariff wage (base salary). **Part III** "The Ends of Austerity" surveils the impact of the major wage

⁷⁶⁹ The notion of "forced industrialization" still makes an appearance in Bogdan Murgescu's recent synthesis of economic history; see *România și Europa. Acumularea decalajelor economice (1500-2010)*, (Iași: Polirom, 2010), p. 336. However, the author does seem to suggest "forced industrialization" applies more to the 1970s rather than the 1950s.

reform undertaken by the communist government in 1957. By slightly increasing workers' purchasing power, particularly among the lower income tier, this reform questioned the austerity of the 1950s and the political economy of exporting raw materials. It is no surprise, I shall argue, that the debates that ensued focused less on the advent of consumerism and more on the prospect of rolling back state spending on healthcare or the daycare system.

Part I

Inner Reserves

It might be instructive to begin the analysis of the productivity discourse of the 1950s with a text that contributed significantly to its scholarly codification and represented its most coherent textual product: Biji's and Trebici's sociological factory monograph *Uzinele 'I.C. Frimu' - Sinaia*. When the book first came out in 1957, it was widely praised for its accessible language, one which could appeal to economists, managers, engineers "and in general to all those who find themselves in a position to lead a factory, a section or a workshop."⁷⁷⁰ The book's accessible style did not imply any sacrifice in the handling and presentation of its main data: based on extensive research in the company's records, the book is full of graphs, statistics, diagrams and charts, with a more narrative part outlining the social history of the factory as it was transformed from an "anarchic" bundle of timber, metal and armament producing workshops before 1948 to a specialized manufacturer of injection pumps after 1953. The first and for a period only such manufacturer in Romania, *ICF* was embodying a success story of the First Five Year Plan (1951-1955): through

⁷⁷⁰ *Flamura Roșie*, No. 922, September 10 1957.

rationalization, standardization and investments in technological upgrading, the construction of tractors and buses could now rely on a domestic supplier. Import substitution, however, was only part of the story Biji and Trebici were telling; equally important was the question of labour productivity.

Here, already, the book slightly departed from the conventional wisdom of the age by arguing the decisive role in boosting productivity should be assigned to the introduction of new machinery as well as “its adaptation to the conditions of specialized production” rather than to labour alone. After a brief period of factory redesign (1949-1952), when the bulk of investments went into the reconstruction of buildings, power supplies and access roads, *ICF* received massive capital input between 1953 and 1956 when new assembly lines (*linii de fabricație*) were brought in. This latter phase coincided with the specialization of production whereby the panoply of goods previously produced, one ranging from various spare parts for the emerging tractor and truck manufacturers to gearboxes and carburetors was dropped in favor of the now “mass produced” injection pumps. To be sure, the authors added that the organization of work was as important in boosting productivity as technology, and went on to describe how work methods evolved over the course of the early 1950s. The argument about technology, however, could hardly be extended to other industries where, due to the lack of such production profile changing investments, workers’ higher output was to be achieved almost exclusively on the basis of existing equipment.

If from the standpoint of capital, *ICF*’s trajectory was rather exceptional in the context of Romanian industry during the early 1950s, from the standpoint of its workers it was anything but unique. Accordingly, Biji and Trebici spent a good deal of energy to suggest ways of rationalizing the labour process. Let us take them by turn. Firstly, the two authors noted *ICF* still hired a

proportionally higher number of functionaries and auxiliary workers than required, which unjustifiably increased production costs. While, given the technological development of the factory, more engineers were indeed needed, this was not the case for office employees and for those workers charged with undertaking maintenance work. This argument was grounded in the distinction between productive and unproductive employees, whereby rationalization implied the reduction of the latter at the expense of the former. Secondly, Biji and Trebici went on to diagnose the case of labour turnover, which allegedly went up from a mere 5% in 1950 to over 20% in 1956 causing some labour scarcity along the assembly line. The origins of this phenomenon were located in the combined effects of a lack of investment in housing and a haphazard employment policy targeting the young and the restless. Therefore, although the total number of employees increased by roughly 40% during the First Five Year Plan, management was still forced to rely on a so-called “nucleus” of traditional workers and engineers, many of whom were with the company for over 10 years. Required to commute over long distances, the others came and go “out of their own will” (*din proprie inițiativă*).

The distinction between productive and unproductive employees and the question of labour turnover were not the only conceptual categories through which the labour process could be approached. Unlike the popular press or the party meeting, however, Biji and Trebici had little to say about discipline or its lack thereof on the shopfloor, nor were they ethnographically much interested in questions of absenteeism, workers faking medical papers, brawls and the like. It was more important for the authors to underline that tired workers are inefficient and to suggest that rather than paying for their monthly train tickets management would do well to build them houses near the factory. The total cost of transportation for the entire year for 25% of the workforce, Biji and Trebici argued, would finance around 20 new apartments. And then there were



“They’re joking!” - caricature denouncing shopfloor brawls at Malaxa Works; Source: *Viața Uzinei*, No. 455, December 29 1958.

work methods and skill acquisition, both of which represented “practically unlimited resources” for pushing up output: “bettering the use of current technology is of utmost importance because it saves the state from additional investments while at the same time raising output with the same

machinery.”⁷⁷¹ Granted, the two authors did note that a three shift workday was impossible to implement due to poor lightning during nighttime, but apart from this impediment, labour and its organization was a resource that knew no end. What it did know, however, was occasional idleness caused by broken supply chains. Some of these suppliers, such as the steel mill in Reșița, were delivering their material late, forcing *ICF* to use all sorts of improvised, low quality scrap material in order not to paralyze the assembly line.

The book ended on a cautious note, reminding managers, planners and workers the goal of a socialist factory was efficiency above all (*rentabilitate*), which had to be understood as “the relationship between profit (*beneficiu*) and production costs (*preț de cost*)”, with profit defined as the “difference between wholesale prices (*preț cu ridicata*) and the entire costs of producing the commodity (*marfa*)”. Such reminders were customary in the epoch, as even an oblique reading of the main newspapers reveals.⁷⁷² Calls directed at the managerial staff in order to raise awareness to the necessity of observing the rules of profit were themselves part of rationalization. Here is engineer Dordea chiding Malaxa Works’ workshop overseers for ignoring “the analysis of economic efficiency of the manufactured goods, being content to pass on this important task to the workshop economic group (the economist, the accountant, and the planner).”⁷⁷³ The overseers’ lack of responsibility, according to Dordea, translated into a lack of efficiency of the whole plant as the allocated wage fund (*fondul de salarii*) was not only distributed in total neglect of economic

⁷⁷¹ M. Biji and V. Trebici, *Uzinele ‘I.C. Frimu’-Sinaia* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1958), 170.

⁷⁷² Ion Ispas, the chief accountant of Malaxa Works, regularly explained in the factory newspaper how the rules of profit operated in socialism and why it was vital for the economy to cut down production costs; see for instance “Ce sunt acumulările bănești?”, *Viața Uzinei*, No. 284, November 5 1955.

⁷⁷³ Nicolae Dordea, “Mai multă preocupare pentru îndeplinirea sarcinilor economice”, *Viața Uzinei*, No. 436, October 11 1958.

performance, but it was also overstretched thus causing production costs to go up.⁷⁷⁴ The emphasis on cutting production costs through various operations of rationalization - in this case enhanced supervision of the accounting books - was a staple of the productivity discourse of the 1950s that rested on the unanimously shared belief among economic experts and the leaders of the communist party that Romanian labour was too expensive.

How, then, are we to evaluate this first effort of the postwar Romanian social sciences to propose a “Marxist factory monograph” and systematize a basic set of concepts through which industrial activity could be grasped, acted upon and transformed? First, it should be noted that apart from its less than common object of study - i.e. a medium-sized successful Fordist enterprise employing little over 1200 workers in a mountainous region 120 kilometers north of Bucharest - the main lines of analysis do not differ much from the regular factory reports assembled by communist party officials and ministerial authorities for the better half of the 1950s. The distinction between productive and unproductive employees, for instance, was seminal for efforts to cheapen (*ieftinire*) production costs.⁷⁷⁵ When a ministerial delegation visited the steel mill in Hunedoara in February 1953, its members were flabbergasted by the decision of the plant’s management to double the so-called “coordination” personnel (technicians, engineers, accountants, secretaries, overseers etc.) in the course of one year, thus going against governmental decree 1478/1951 which prescribed the exact opposite.⁷⁷⁶

⁷⁷⁴ This understanding of industrial efficiency invites comparison with product-cost measurements implemented in Carnegie’s fin-de-siècle steel mill empire as discussed by Jonathan Levy, “Accounting for Profit and the History of Capital”, *Critical Historical Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2014, 184-188.

⁷⁷⁵ Petre Andrei, “Cu privire la simplificarea și ieftinirea aparatului administrativ în întreprinderi”, *Lupta de clasă*, No. 12, December, 1956, 108-110.

⁷⁷⁶ ANR, PCM, 241/1953, pp. 2-4. The report noted in 1953 the number of workers went up by 15% compared to 1952, while that of “coordination” personnel increased by a whopping 94%, from 1744 in 1952 to 3391 in 1953.



Caricature depicting comrade Ivancenco - the deputy manager of the steel mill in Reșița - passing down the responsibility for securing a steady supply of raw materials to one of his subordinate engineers;
Source: Flamura Rosie, No. 447, June 2 1954.

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contradictory nature of the productivity discourse as well as the contradictions likely to be experienced by management during the First Five Year Plan.

Second, the relationship between the productivity discourse of the 1950s and industrial activity, *y compris* managerial practice and the labour process, was prefigurative rather than reflective.⁷⁷⁸ This gives Biji's and Trebici's study its allure of criticism. Indeed, read outside of its immediate context, *Uzinele 'I.C. Frimu'-Sinaia* might be taken as an empiricist denunciation of the socialist economy in the making, couched in statistics rather than in the idiom of orthodox Marxism. Here, too, the book merely codified what by the time of its publication was already common practice. Take, for instance, the so-called phenomenon of "storming" (*munca în asalt*): due to the lack of raw materials, it often happened for managers to "make up" for idleness during a short period of time, typically at the end of the month, when workers were required to do overtime and get things done. From the standpoint of the productivity discourse, the problem with "storming" was that it pushed up production costs and damaged machinery on the longer run: putting in extra hours at the end of the month significantly increased workers' wages, made them waste more material and put a high price on their bodies, justifying their beginning of the month spurts of absenteeism. Moreover, "storming" overused machinery causing it to break down easier or put out commodities of much lower quality. Because a governmental decree passed in March 1952 had little to no impact on this industrial practice, the productivity discourse kept on criticizing the ways in which suppliers (*furnizori*) understood to observe contracts between industrial units or factory managers for evading responsibility in securing raw materials. Caricatures as the one

⁷⁷⁸ Bluntly put, the prefigurative function of discourse is to "change the self-identification and behavior of those addressed", Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class. Studies in English Working Class History, 1832-1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 24.

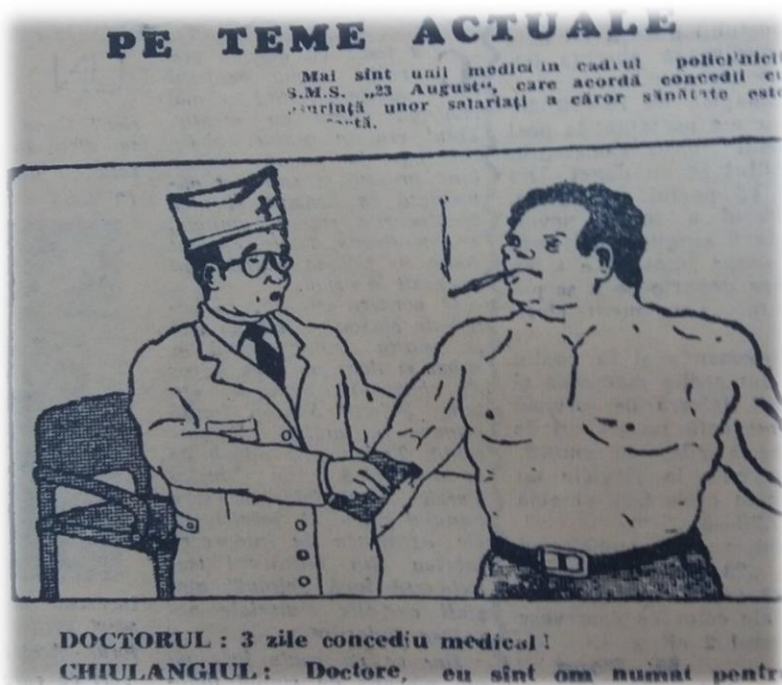
presented above addressed this issue by moralizing the figure of the manager; articles calling for the need to use any kind of scarp material laying around as the one authored by Stubnya spread responsibility down the chain of command to the shopfloor. Both were meant to accustom employees with the duty of “rhythmically fulfilling” (*îndeplinirea ritmică*) production plans, a way of underlining “storming” was a temporary and circumscribed pathology in the otherwise normal run of industrial activity.⁷⁷⁹

Third, *Uzinele ‘I.C. Frimu’-Sinaia* provided some scientific credentials to the pivotal notion of “inner reserves”. As we have seen in the case of engineer Sepi, the notion was already in use as early as 1952, and perhaps even earlier. Yet it was only after the communist party’s plenum convened in late August 1953 that “inner reserves” took off as a key component of the productivity discourse and the primary guide for rationalization at the factory level. In principle, the plenum was supposed to mark a turning point in the industrial strategy of the party, now willing to pay more attention to the development of agriculture, the light industry and the consumer goods manufacturers. In fact, the plenum merely stated the obvious, namely that the Romanian state was unable to finance the growth of the steel and manufacturing industries at a reasonably stable pace.⁷⁸⁰ The lack of investments for expanding heavy industrial infrastructure had to be acknowledged by managers as well: as one economic expert put it, the plenum “energetically

⁷⁷⁹ Carol Loncear, “Pentru îndeplinirea ritmică a programului de producție în industria metalurgică”, *Probleme Economice*, No. 5-6, May-June, 1953, 72-78. Loncear’s analysis of « storming » is similar to the one proposed for postwar Hungary, arguably from within the same discourse of productivity, by János Kornai, *Overcentralization in Economic Administration. A Critical Analysis based on Experience in Hungarian Light Industry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 132-138.

⁷⁸⁰ One economic expert summed up the plenum as follows: “from now on, the development of our heavy industry will not be achieved through investments but rather through the discovery and intensive use of factories’ inner reserves.”, L. Radu, “Mobilizarea rezervelor interne în uzinele siderurgice”, *Probleme Economice*, No. 1, January, 1954, 27.

struggled against the unhealthy tendency exhibited by party cadres and state functionaries who do not make extensive use of the factories' inner reserves and ask instead for the state to make investments for the construction of new factories in order to boost output.”⁷⁸¹ Workers and engineers were called upon to understand that their duty is first and foremost “to raise output by way of using inner reserves” and only after by way of “the construction of new sections or factories.”⁷⁸² The emphasis on “inner reserves” after August 1953, then, would allow “for an increase of labour productivity without an increase of fixed and circulating assets (*mijloace fixe și circulante*) or of the number of employees, which would finally reduce the cost of production.”⁷⁸³



Caricature depicting a muscular, smoking, allegedly healthy worker at Malaxa Works receiving a 3-day medical leave from the factory's doctor and asking for more; *Source: Viața Uzinei*, No. 344, January 5 1957

It is worth delving a bit more into the question of “inner reserves”. On the one hand, as we have seen, the notion articulated a strategy of growth without investments, whereby increased

⁷⁸¹ L. Marcovici, “Mobilizarea resurselor interne ale întreprinderilor”, *Probleme Economice*, No. 6, June, 1954, 148.

⁷⁸² IBIDEM. Marcovici was critically reviewing a booklet published by Carol Loncear, *Mobilizarea resurselor interne ale întreprinderilor* (Bucharest: Editura pentru literatură politică, 1954).

⁷⁸³ IBIDEM.

output and higher labour productivity were to be achieved from existing machinery through rationalization rather than by way of technological upgrading or the expansion of “fixed and circulating assets”. In this context, rationalization was understood as a complex set of managerial practices, work methods, incentive schemes and organizational devices geared towards boosting efficiency and, implicitly, reducing production costs. As Simion Zeigher - boss of the State Committee for Work and Wages - defined the process: “in order to discover reserves we need to thoroughly analyze each component that goes into production costs: raw materials, fuel, energy, wages and amortization. Equally, we have to study ways of cutting back on useless spending, as well as on spending on administrative work.”⁷⁸⁴ For instance, workers submitting proposals to management for reusing scrap material were part of the process⁷⁸⁵; and so too was the campaign orchestrated by communist party activists against doctors giving away medical leave to supposedly ill workers. On the other hand, the actual content of the “inner reserves” varied from industry to industry. Rationalizing the wage scale in mining, for example, was far more important than in metallurgy. As we will see below, it was no surprise mining attracted the largest contingent of conscripted soldiers performing cheap, often unpaid work for much of the 1950s and was the target of the first attempt to modify the wage structure inherited from the 1949 reform.

⁷⁸⁴ Simion Zeigher, “Să mobilizăm rezervele pentru reducerea prețului de cost în industrie”, *Probleme Economice*, No. 10, October, 1954, 26.

⁷⁸⁵ For more on this practice in the GDR see Thilo Schimmel, “Shopfloor Politics under Socialism: Worker Identity, Rationalization, and Company Culture in (East) Germany, 1920-1996), (PhD Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2008), 5-7. Schimmel describes the practice as follows: “a tool to convince workers that they were participants in a socialist workplace democracy but also [...] a cheap tool to increase productivity without investments.”

Components of Production Cost

%	Mining	Metallurgy	Light Industry	Food Industry
Raw Materials	32.6	62.5	73	81.6
Fuel and Energy	10.9	6	3.1	2.9
Wages	41.6	17.4	14.2	7.3
Amortization	15.9	7.3	4.2	3.2
Additional Spending	8	6.8	5.5	5
Total	100	100	100	100

Table 3: The components of production cost in need of rationalization by industry; taken from Simion Zeigher, “Să mobilizăm rezervele pentru reducerea prețului de cost în industrie”, *Probleme Economice*, No. 10, October, 1954, 27.

It was in the nature of the “inner reserves” to be endless, easily observable and omnipresent. In many ways, every employee could enroll on the journey to discover them: the unskilled ambitious youth, the skilled peasant worker, the master foreman, engineers, technicians, planners, accountants, norm-setters (*normatori*), and management. In Reșița, it was told of a locksmith aged 72 who significantly increased the use of his lathe: “long past the pension age, the old man (*moșul*) does not want to stay home, he wants to be among workers.”⁷⁸⁶ Two years later, it fell on a group of Stakhanovite workers to forward an open letter to management noting there were still “inner reserves laying around” and asking for approval to perform at two machines at once in order to put

⁷⁸⁶ “A îmbunătățit gradul de utilizare al mașinii sale”, *Flamura Roșie*, No. 123, January 16 1951.

them to better use.⁷⁸⁷ Meanwhile at Malaxa Works in Bucharest, many workers were wasting precious reserves by strolling, chatting, and procrastinating.⁷⁸⁸ Nor were efforts to ferret out reserves during the second and third shift, when workers simply refused to commit, came in late and went home early, more successful.⁷⁸⁹ To be sure, here too, much like in Reșița, positive examples abounded. In 1957, apparently, some workers took the duty to uncover “inner reserves” so seriously, applying to the letter a technical procedure handed down by the engineers, that they ended up producing more waste than finished goods. In this context, waste (*rebuturi*) was itself transformed into an “inner reserve” to be rationalized, catalogued and subjected to operations meant to save it for reuse. This process was not necessarily as efficient as it was imperative: faulty goods had to be injected back into consumption otherwise the losses incurred by the factory would skyrocket. Granted, one of the engineers at Malaxa Works did note with some concern that “during those thousands of hours spent for repairing what others broke, we could have built many more motors.”⁷⁹⁰ Such calls for quality fell on deaf ears because sloppy work was more an outcome of haphazard supply and the wage system rather than of workers’ collective negligence.

This was one of the premises that informed a major time and motion study conducted in the Transylvanian city of Cluj. In 1955 two researchers associated with the Faculty of Law and Economics of the Bolyai University descended upon a local metal factory in order to scientifically uncover “inner reserves” (what they called less metaphorically “the latent reserves of production”) hidden deep in the workday and, implicitly, in the manner in which work was organized. In so

⁷⁸⁷ *Flamura Roșie*, No. 430, December 16 1953.

⁷⁸⁸ “Plimbăreții din uzinele noastră”, *Viața Uzinei*, No. 216, July 17 1954.

⁷⁸⁹ “Și disciplina are un cuvânt de spus”, *Viața Uzinei*, No. 374, August 3 1957.

⁷⁹⁰ Marcu Ioniță, “Rebuturi recuperabile?!”, *Viața Uzinei*, No. 399, January 25 1958.

doing, the researchers appealed to participant observation, “photographing” as they put it an entire work shift and closely observing individual workers. Moreover, since this method could only yield partial results, they also asked for a sample of workers to “photograph” themselves, jotting down on a special form the rhythm, speed and pace of their work, as well as the time units required to accomplish certain tasks. This double “photographing” (*fotografiere*) was intended to closely monitor, analyze and propose solutions for boosting the efficiency of the factory. The outcome of the study was rather predictable, with the researchers noting that workers waste too much time due to contradictory and often conflicting requests: “It often happens for the workers not to know what they are supposed to do at the beginning of the shift or it happens that the tasks assigned to one worker are changed during the workday multiple times. Therefore, the worker is forced to switch between the tasks handed to him by the workplace supervisor, which often goes against the recommendation of the foreman.”⁷⁹¹ Locksmith Aladar Katz, for instance, lost around 150 minutes of his 8-hour workday adjusting his lathe to perform various operations while many of his peers roamed around the factory looking for raw materials and tools, losing on average no less than 90 minutes per day. Because the piece-rate system rewarded quantity over quality, foremen had no incentive to check the state of the products manufactured, delegating the procedure to subordinate workers and adding precious minutes to their lost time. Finally, workers lost time during lunchtime, queuing for a hot meal at the canteen, and at the end of the workday, leaving earlier to avoid queuing for hot water at the showers.

⁷⁹¹ I., Kecskès, E. Kerekes, “O metodă de descoperire a rezervelor interne ale timpului de lucru în întreprinderile industriale”, *Probleme Economice*, No. 3, March, 1955, 63.

What was remarkable about Kecskès and Kerekes's study was neither the use of the stopwatch or the effort to time bodily rhythms at work - both of which being practices widely used to rationalize the postwar shopfloor in Western as well as in Eastern Europe - but rather the tone of the investigation. Much like Biji and Trebici, the Bolyai researchers abstained from discussing the labour process in terms of workers' lack of discipline and put instead the blame on management, accusing it of neglecting the logistics of supply. This type of analysis, however important for the productivity discourse of the 1950s, was exceptional, most likely because it required resources and highly trained personnel. Kecskès and Kerekes were probably stepping in the footsteps of Hillel Kuhn, whose early studies in industrial sociology offered not so much a template as a precedent. Likewise, Biji and Trebici were leading

statisticians and demographers, both having already enjoyed respectable careers in interwar Romania, and both commanding institutional levies due to the positions they now occupied with the country's central planning offices. The great bulk of the productivity discourse, therefore, was produced through more artisanal means by activists of the communist party, local journalists,



Caricature showing two slackers wondering why they were singled out for shabby work when they don't even work to begin with;

Source: Viața Uzinei, No. 384, October 12 1957.

voluntary correspondents and trade-union bosses. Their medium of expression was neither the brochure nor the scholarly journal, but the factory newspaper; their weapon of choice the caricature and the moralizing column. To be sure, few correspondents had an easy life as most of them were constantly harassed by the very subjects about whom they wrote: denied access to the shopfloor, their mail opened and destroyed, their name the subject of dirty jokes.⁷⁹² By shaming the lazy, mocking the absentees, ridiculing the unruly youth, praising the diligent and promoting the exceptional, the factory newspaper was the main material support of the productivity discourse.

The duality inscribed in the productivity discourse of the 1950s - part elaborate analysis of the labour process, part disciplinarian portrayals of factory life - reflected the dual nature of the worker as it was increasingly subsumed under the drive of rationalization. On the one hand, workers appeared as use-values for capital, pure labour-power to be bought, quantified, shifted around, paid and expended in production. On the other hand, the same workers appeared as embodied labour-power, carnal subjects weaving solidarities, spawning animosities and making the most out of their state of subjection at the point of production. These two sides of the productivity discourse were not merely complementary; they were mutually constitutive. The caricature showing the two slackers presented above makes little sense outside of the socialist obsession with a rhythmic, uninterrupted, round-the-clock labour process. To take the first as evidence of culturally or politically mediated workers' resistance would be misleading. Rather, the type of obstinacy to industrial drill that we glimpse in the caricature, read about in newspapers or

⁷⁹² "Să fie sancționați sugrumatorii criticii corespondenților muncitori", *Munca*, No. 1687, March 14 1953. This was one of the many articles published during the 1950s by the main trade-union weekly *Munca* calling for those that harassed its correspondents to be sanctioned. It named factory managers, foremen, engineers and even ordinary workers. See also A. Lucaci, M. Alexe "Mai multă atenție criticii de jos", *Lupta de clasă*, No. 9, September, 1956, 86-91.

stumble upon in the archived minutes of a trade-union meeting was immanent to rationalization, a mere fact of factory life.⁷⁹³ The slacker was neither “backward” as communist party activists were tempted to infer, nor engaged in “passive resistance” as exiled social-democrats were claiming.⁷⁹⁴ The slacker was the natural by-product of speed-ups, piece-work and all the other methods geared towards labour intensification against the background of broken chains of supply, “storming” and “bottlenecks”. That the effort to mine for “inner reserves” through rationalization was met with something of a “guerilla warfare” on the shopfloor was hardly surprising.⁷⁹⁵ Surprising was the slow relocation of industrial conflict on the shopfloor, now pertaining exclusively to issues of workers’ control rather than, as up to late 1948, to questions of provisioning.

How did this mutation happen? As I have argued in the third chapter, rudiments of the productivity discourse were already visible in the way in which communist party bosses approached the food crisis in Reșița in 1947. When access to “white bread” was demanded by metalworks as a token of a local tradition of preferential provisioning in the context of hyperinflation, communist newspapers reacted by arguing food should be conditioned on economic performance and by reminding workers that unlike before the war, in 1947 “time and motion experts with their stopwatch in their hands have disappeared. Time no longer matters for them.”⁷⁹⁶ Because time did not matter to workers and management alike, the very notion of

⁷⁹³ I follow here Chakrabarty’s ruminations on the Marxian notion of “the despotism of capital” in Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 58-59.

⁷⁹⁴ On the notion of “passive resistance” as formulated by exiled social-democrats, see *România Muncitoare*, No. 17, May 1953; No. 34, October 1954; No. 48, December 1955; and finally No. 64, April, 1957. The latter issue takes on the wage reform of 1957.

⁷⁹⁵ For the metaphor of “guerilla warfare” on the shopfloor, see David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (London: Verso, 2006), chapter 3.

⁷⁹⁶ Eric Wayand, “Umbre peste Uzinele și Domeniile Reșița”, *Luptătorul Bănățean*, IV, No. 725, February 17 1947, p. 2.

slacking could hardly be employed as a critical term for discussing the labour process or for framing the contours of shopfloor conflict. In order for *time* to become an “inner reserve” in need of rationalization, a whole array of social and political transformations rooted in and around the industrial workplace had to take place. Firstly, the practice of collective bargaining embedded in the collective labour contracts was diffused after 1948 when the contracts were rewritten following the Soviet model. As I have shown in the fourth chapter, the new contracts were premised on a productivity bargain whereby depending on the performance of their factories, workers would in principle freely benefit from all sorts of privileges: paid vacations, daycare facilities, medical care, canteen meals, subsidized accommodation etc. This shift in the nature of the contracts recalibrated the nature of bargaining itself, marking a transition from representation via “men of trust” and trade-union delegates to the internecine struggles between various representatives of the communist party over social investments at the factory level. The new objects of gendered contention were now the director’s fund or the social insurance budget rather than the jointly calculated standard of living. Secondly, the change in the structure of bargaining was accompanied by pacification i.e. the containment of industrial violence with its panoply of wildcat strikes, sequestrations and the mutilation of managers’ and workers’ representatives’ bodies. Beginning with 1948, managerial authority was no longer to be decided by workers’ purging or molesting the manager or the engineer in evanescent moments of collective unrest, but rather through mundane rituals of suspicion and denunciation bent on testing the moral character and political rectitude of the supervisory body of the factory against party doctrine. Thirdly, for “time to matter” industrial wages (and cash money) had to be restored to their double status as incentives to perform on the shopfloor and as the privileged medium for the acquisition of goods. For lack of a better term, I have dubbed this third process “monetarization”: the protracted control of inflationary tendencies

within the economy followed by the abolition of workers' debts, mass saving campaigns and the clearing of the wage relation of its subsidized components such as firewood or basic consumption items sold through the factory shops (*economate*).

It was this great postwar transformation that allowed for rationalization to take off and socially grounded the productivity discourse, rendering it meaningful in the eyes of its authors and audience. By the time of the wage reform of 1949, *time* started to matter again, together with skill, hierarchy, authority and cash money. Characteristically, the semantics of “backwardness” for communist party bosses altered as well: whereas for most of the immediate postwar, the “backward” worker was the one who went on strike, rebelled against party discipline and militated for the collective labour contracts to be observed by management to the letter, during the 1950s the same “backward” worker was the one who rebelled against industrial discipline by coming in late, faking illnesses in order to obtain medical leave, strolling around the shopfloor, chatting with and even bullying workmates, and leaving early. Gone was the talk of “anarcho-syndicalism”, of “fascism” and the “fear of the masses” for during the 1950s one of the gravest offences was the one told of comrade Veiconi - a steelworker in Reșița - who worked whenever he so fancied (*când are poftă*), breaking the norm one day, not fulfilling it at all the next.⁷⁹⁷ In this context, mastering one's bodily rhythms and pace of work on the shopfloor, either together in work teams or individually at one's workbench, was one form of control workers' could aspire to preserve over the labour process and potentially turn into their own “inner reserve” for boosting their wages, lengthening their free time, and buffering the pressure of rationalization. Let us now examine how

⁷⁹⁷ “Disciplina în muncă - veriga principală în sporirea productivității muncii”, *Flamura Roșie*, No. 736, November 24 1956.

workers' control of the labour process translated into higher wages and why, by the end of the 1950s, the piece-rate system inaugurated in 1949 was abandoned.

Part II

Wages of Growth

Suppose we start again, as we have done on a number of occasions in this dissertation, with an exceptional archival document that might be taken to reveal, as Grendi famously put it, the normal state of things, a state so “normal that it usually remains silent.”⁷⁹⁸ And suppose



Bucharest Workers Manning Their Motorbikes, cca. 1961; Source: Grama Family Album

we start at the end of the decade, in 1961, rather than at the beginning of the 1950s, in an effort to work our way backwards in search of *explanans* for the following *explanandum* formulated by Malaxa Works employee, Lupu Ancelovici:

⁷⁹⁸ “[...] tanto normale da risultare più spesso sottaciuta.”, Edoardo Grendi, “Ripensare la microstoria?”, *Quaderni Storici*, Vol. 29, No. 86, 1944, 544. Or, in an earlier formulation, “il documento eccezionale può risultare eccezionalmente ‘normale’, appunto perché rivelante.”, Edoardo Grendi, “Micro-analisi e storia sociale”, *Quaderni Storici*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 1977, 512.

We receive one car in service for repairing, not one but three people work on it. I open up the motor, I carry it to the workbench, I wash it, I reassemble it, and the other guy gets the bonus because his name is Vasile and he is a cousin of the foreman. Comrade Lucian, comrade Marin Vasile, they are the foreman's men. Comrade Lucian always rides a motorbike into town during worktime. Naturally, these hours are counted [i.e. as worktime]. He steals gas from the state and wastes working hours. The foreman is named Calcianu. If I tell this to the foreman, he says I don't work on the plan: 'You are free to go wherever you want' he says. It is true that I cannot work as before, say 15 or 16 years ago, but without me they cannot move a finger, I am there at every kind of repair work. I have been working for 34 years, my eyesight is not that good, and my strength cannot compare to the one I had say 15 or 16 years ago, yet I work with all my power. At 17:30 I am in the factory, and it often happens that I find the light turned on, or a motor running for nothing, and I care, I cannot just stay passive (*nu pot să stau pasiv*) because I earn my bread from this workplace. If I'd be indifferent as so many others are, what will then happen to us all.⁷⁹⁹

And here is the follow-up to Lupu's remarks as articulated by his brother, Moise Ancelovici, himself an employee of the same factory:

I raise the question of gas. Those who have motorbikes take gas out of the factory. One worker manufactured spare parts for his bike in the factory. I cannot take him by his throat because I lose my bread. [...] There are still people who steal gas, tools etc. The problem of stealing has been dealt with some years ago. They made up fake papers and took out of the factory all sorts of things. Finally, they were caught and sent to jail for 6 years, but only after they caused great losses. I was once in the tram and I saw 2 workers carrying some wire taken from the factory. The other problem is the exams. If we ask to promote us to a different wage category, they force us to take exams and they ask us theoretical questions to which we cannot answer. Those who just came in the factory, they are immediately put into a higher wage category. We do not know theory, we know practice, we know how to work with the chisel, the hammer, the screwdriver.⁸⁰⁰

⁷⁹⁹ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 25/1961, p. 13

⁸⁰⁰ IBIDEM, p. 16.

Let us now try to decipher the larger social context that made the Ancelovicis' discontent possible and pushed the two brothers to forward their written complaint to the office of the General Secretary of the Romanian Workers' Party - Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, who not only read their petition but also jotted down marginalia - as he so often did - in multiple color pencil marks. We should first note, as Lupu himself admits, that the workers were past their prime, perhaps approaching retirement. Elderly workers were a common presence on Romanian shopfloors well into the 1960s, arguably until the first major pension reform of 1966. Low pensions and murky bureaucratic procedures such as *ad hoc* factory commissions made up of management and trade-union representatives deciding over workers' rights to retirement, made exiting employment difficult. Moreover, pension dossiers were also reviewed by the Ministry of Labour, whose office clerks were always subjected to accusations of corruption, being castigated for giving away pensions with too much leniency.⁸⁰¹ Difficult as it was to obtain, pensions were nevertheless sought after by workers who could no longer keep up with the demands of industrial work or came to earn too little to justify their toil. One report issued in 1960 argued over 100000 workers took their claims to court during the 1950s in an effort to have directly state rather than their employers grant them pension rights.⁸⁰² In this context, it is reasonable to suppose Lupu's reference to his aging body, one that could not perform as "say 15 or 16 years ago" was made with this prospect in mind: the life that awaited him at the end of his life of employment was grim. If the two

⁸⁰¹ ANR, PCM, 177/1955, p. 47 *et passim*.

⁸⁰² ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 24/1960, pp. 4-6. Workers went to court because it was nearly impossible to reconstitute their length in service - the backbone of the pension system - on the basis of factory archives, most of which had either been destroyed during the war or simply missing.

Ancelovici opted to voice their discontent, this might have been because retiring was hardly an option.

Yet 34 years of employment does not quite make retirement age. What it does make for is skill and seniority, and perhaps a general sense of pride in one's standing on the shopfloor, among his workmates. Ancelovici's apparent brag about him doing all the work while the others promenade displayed such sensibilities, and so too did his apparent snide remark that it was the others rather than him getting wage bonuses. Here, however, the situation was already more complex than Lupu's words make it sound. One ministerial investigation at Malaxa Works revealed wage bonuses were indeed given out on thin achievements and out of occasional "favoritism", but the general scheme of rewarding was unmistakably "egalitarian": because bonuses were relatively meagre and because foremen had the last say in allocating them, all the workers got them in rotation in order to make all of them happy. One worker, for instance, was found carrying a notebook where he jotted down who among his colleagues got the bonus, so that he may know when his turn would come up.⁸⁰³ Moreover, Ancelovici's complaint about not being promoted to a higher wage category and being required to take "theory" exams looks equally puzzling in view of the findings of the investigation. Ministerial officials detected the same "egalitarian" principle in this case as well since out of 1229 workers who took their reevaluation exams (*reîncadrări*) in 1960 only 51 failed, and even these, when asked, said it was only a matter of time until they climb higher up the wage scale. How, then, should we assess Ancelovici's denunciation of the inequality and inequity encapsulated by the distribution of the wage bonuses

⁸⁰³ Not by accident, the report following this investigation at Malaxa Works is contained in the same archival dossier enclosing Ancelovici's complaint; ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 25/1961, p. 9.

and reevaluations? One possible explanation is that both Lupu and Moise Ancelovici were left out of the networks of shopfloor solidarity that made the system “egalitarian” in the first place, as the investigation pointed out. Theirs was a condition of marginality vis-à-vis the regime of complicities that regulated how wage bonuses were handed out and made plain failing exams was just an unlucky accident, not a tragedy. To be excluded from these networks of camaraderie and kin translated into quotidian conflicts with the foremen and framed the characteristically outsider’s view that everybody was a relative or a friend to everybody else, save for the outsider, and all of them were thieves of sorts.⁸⁰⁴ Lupu Ancelovici even sensed an air of anti-Semitism informing his troubled relation with foreman Wolf Cassian: “He brings me on the brink of shouting: ‘I am Jewish, you are German, why do you pick on me?’ [...] Comrade, let us both cut our fingers and let’s see, isn’t your blood as red as mine?”⁸⁰⁵

Lupu’s and Wolf’s blood might have been equally red, but this was arguably the only metaphor they still had in common. It was rare for senior and skilled workers such as the Ancelovici brothers to be excluded from the set of relations of mutual dependence, inevitable conflict and necessary cooperation that informed workers’ solidarities on the shopfloor.⁸⁰⁶ For much of the 1950s, it was the young, seldom skilled, rarely disciplined, most never on time worker who was pushed on the margins of the shopfloor, mocked, abused or simply ignored.⁸⁰⁷ The

⁸⁰⁴ The classical outsider’s view of the state socialist shopfloor is Miklós Haraszti, *A Worker in a Worker’s State* (New York: Universe Books, 1978), notably 143-146 for the relationship between work competition, friendship and the making of the so-called “homers”.

⁸⁰⁵ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 25/1961, p. 15.

⁸⁰⁶ This set of relations has been called “the social system of the factory” by Donald Roy in his study of machine operators in postwar Chicago, *Restriction of Output by Machine Operators in a Piecework Machine Shop: A Preliminary Analysis* (PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1952), Chapter 3.

⁸⁰⁷ The best literary description of this phenomenon is Nicolae Breban’s novel *Francisca* (1965). Drawing on his short stint as a worker at Malaxa Works during the early 1950s, Breban presents the trials and tribulations of a relatively young, unskilled worker of peasant stock who, under the paternal eye of a communist party boss, tries to move up to

Stakhanovist movement, for instance, supposed to mobilize the young by giving them a chance to burn the stages of apprenticeship, was characteristically hijacked by workteam bosses, the senior and skilled and the foremen. An entire issue of *Viața Sindicală* - the trade-union newspaper - took to uncover forms of “familialism” (*familialism*) in the way the title of Stakhanovite was granted, an old catchword used by communist activists to describe ties of solidarity between workers and lower management.⁸⁰⁸ Myriad newspaper articles called upon the goodwill of the foremen to take under their wings young workers and integrate them into workteams. Typically, these articles pointed out that young workers were indeed rowdy, negligent and occasionally inebriated, but this was only a question of industrial psychology, merely a consequence of their marginality on the shopfloor to be remedied by the foremen’s persevering benevolence.⁸⁰⁹ To be sure, denunciations of “old-fashioned” foremen were equally common. Such was the case of Malaxa Works’ employee, comrade Marinescu who “distributes good work only to the few old craftsmen (*meseriași vechi*) knowing they will get things done without further clarifications from the foreman”.⁸¹⁰ For the young workers, however, comrade Marinescu distributed “scrap” work (*ciurucuri*), had no “love” (*dragoste*), no good will (*bună voință*), assigned them to the worst machines, and generally paid them “under the counter” without official paychecks. Skilled workers, in turn, were criticized for keeping to themselves, unwilling to share the so-called “secret” of their craft with the young out of “egoism” and cultural prejudice against the newly employed.⁸¹¹

the rank of skilled metalworker, an effort which required him to overcome family pressure, social stigma, and obtrusive horseplay and humiliation at the hands of his future workmates.

⁸⁰⁸ *Viața Sindicală*, No. 1630, January 8 1953.

⁸⁰⁹ Marin Dobre, “Cum am reușit să introducem o severă disciplină în muncă”, *Munca*, No. 1677, March 4 1954. Dobre - a foreman in Reșița - allegedly acquired the knowledge of how to appeal to the benevolence of the foreman after a training session in the Soviet Union.

⁸¹⁰ “Maistru rămas în urma vremii”, *Viața Uzinei*, No. 192, January 22 1954.

⁸¹¹ “Secretul”, *Viața Uzinei*, No. 302, March 20 1956.

What, then, might account for the transformation of shopfloor marginality from an industrial pathology affecting predominantly the young and unskilled for the better half of the 1950s to one that also came to plague the elderly and skilled by the end of the decade? Or to put it differently, what explains the breakdown in the kind of shopfloor solidarity forged between skilled workers and foremen for much of the 1950s and later apparently disproved by the bad blood between Lupu and Wolf? Part of the answer lies with the radical wage reform of 1957. Decided upon in late December 1956 during a party plenum, this wage reform was explicitly designed to overturn the consequences of the wage system inaugurated in 1949, notably what Simion Zeigher - boss of the State Committee for Work and Wages - called the system's "petty bourgeois egalitarian" aspects.⁸¹² Hidden behind this Stalinist



"Technological 'Discipline' at the Special Steelworks";
Source: *Flamura Roșie*, No. 465, April 21 1954.

metaphor stood a deceptively simple reasoning: predicated on the extension of piece-rate and the fulfilment of norms, the old wage system produced shopfloor alliances and forms of cooperation geared towards the manipulation of norms, wage categories and payment schemes. Moreover, in spite of Zeigher's metaphor, the system was anything but "egalitarian": inside factories, some

⁸¹² Simion Zeigher, "Unele probleme ale îmbunătățirii sistemului de salarizare a muncitorilor în industrie", *Probleme Economice*, No. 6, 1957, 18-32.

workers thrived on “overblown norms” (*norme umflate*) making use of their networks of solidarity to amass sufficient raw material and get the better tools, while others barely eked out a living on the base salary alone. This polarization was reinforced by the control of the labour process the first could exercise and was spelled out, as we have seen above, as a conflict of generations segmented by skill, morality, seniority, gender and social origin. For Zeigher, it was precisely this polarization and the solidarity that undergirded it that blocked the introduction of “technical-scientific norms”, excessively fragmented wage categories, perverted the allocation of wage bonuses and frustrated efforts to ferret out “inner reserves”.

That a “guerilla warfare” on the shopfloor accompanied the drive for rationalization across state socialist East Central Europe during the 1950s is nothing new. Both Mark Pittaway for Hungary and Peter Hübner for GDR - the first inspired by the research tradition on workers’ control, the latter drawing on Alf Lüdtke’s historical anthropology - showed in minute detail how workers not only resisted, but also appropriated various components that made up the “Stalinist revolution in production”: specific methods of labour intensification, work brigades, Stakhanovism, payment schemes, “storming” etc.⁸¹³ That this back-and-forth between party activists, industrial experts, trade union bosses and management on the one side and workers on the other was a form of everyday politics already in the Soviet Union was noted early on by Lewis Siegelbaum in his analysis of Stakhanovism:

⁸¹³ The clearest exposition of this line of argument is to be found in the work of Mark Pittaway, notably his early “The Social Limits of State Control: Time, the Industrial Wage Relation, and Social Identity in Stalinist Hungary, 1948-1953”, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 1999. For Peter Hübner see his classic *Konsens, Konflikt und Kompromiss: Soziale Arbeiterinteressen und Sozialpolitik in der SBZ/DDR, 1945-1970* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995), Chapters 1 and 2.

The raising of labor productivity to a first-order priority - itself a response to ongoing socioeconomic processes - evoked not only enthusiasm and resistance, as Soviet and Western historians respectively assert. Maneuvering and accommodation were at least as much present. These responses inflected Stakhanovism and may be said to have constituted the politics of productivity. If productivity is defined as output per fixed unit of working time, then the struggles over the means of raising output and the ways of deflecting or minimizing the burdens associated with this effort were its politics.⁸¹⁴

That this type of “struggle over the means of raising output” played a stabilizing role in the running of the emerging socialist economies was argued by a number of historians⁸¹⁵: workers’ obstinately made the most of their worn tools and scarce raw materials while at the same time making the most of their condition for themselves. This, in turn, implied antagonism and solidarity, both between management and workers and among workers themselves, with party and union bosses often buffering the two sides. Workers who, through the sheer power of their practical knowledge on the shopfloor, could patch-up a rusty machine, invent a device for spinning it faster or propose ways of saving materials were particularly valued. Self-reliant workteams needing little additional supervision or instruction from foremen or engineers, though occasionally frowned

⁸¹⁴ Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 7.

⁸¹⁵ Most clearly for the case of GDR by Andrew I. Port, “East German Workers and the ‘Dark Side’ of Eigensinn. Divisive Shop-Floor Practices and the Failed Revolution of June 17, 1953”, in Hartmut Berghoff and Uta Andrea Balbier (eds.) *The East German Economy, 1945-2010. Falling Behind or Catching Up?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 111-130. See also Jeffrey Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline in East Germany, 1945-1989* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), notably Chapters 4 and 5 on the so-called “campaign economy” and workers’ entrenched control of production.

upon by party activists for their autonomy and alleged disregard for “technological discipline”, were equally valued by management.

Characteristically, a caricature featured by the local newspaper in Reșița drew a parallel between the methods used at the factory’s canteen, where a chef would advise his cook to add salt to the soup as he himself saw fit, and steelworkers pushed by the foreman to load the furnace according to his very own “rough estimate” (*după ochi*). Here, experience and craft mastery passed as tasteless whim, a form of resistance against technological progress. Management, however, knew better. Here is how the director of “Steagul Roșu”, a leading truck manufacturer located in the Transylvanian town of Brașov saw one of his best workers:

I personally granted comrade Hofman twice to take out construction materials from the factory almost for free in order not to cause too

much of a stir (*vălvă*). He did a lot of innovations for our factory. One day he came to me saying his mother fell ill and his wife and child live in the town of Deva, to which he always commutes. This citizen was helped because he wanted to quit us. I gave him one month of leave to settle his family affairs and come back to us. Then he said he is willing to come back but only if he has a house. When the house was ready, his family decided not to follow him and he sold his new house to the chief accountant. He



“Foreman Adam Mihai of the Martin Steelworks (Reșița) made a habit out of running away during the shift. Direction: The Restaurant. Foreman Adam: ... so lads, as I was telling you, it feels terrific to pour. Not only steel! This brandy is great and deserves being taken good care of...”;

Source: Flamura Roșie, No. 805, July 24 1957.

went back to his town to take care of his ill mother. Then he got divorced, he took his child and came back to us, and he married again. This time I granted him again another house.⁸¹⁶

If Hofman could bargain for two new houses and some free construction material, many other skilled workers could easily get away with less: less supervision at the factory's gates to take home various goods useful around the house such as wire, more material at the workbench to break norms and boost their wages, and enough overall grip over the production schedule to squeeze in an hour over drinks with one's peers during the workday. The sum total of these small gestures, underpinned by the indifference towards the young and unskilled, made up the senior workers' control over the labour process, one grounded not merely in skill, camaraderie and cultural distinction, but also in the prevailing wage system that structured Romanian industry between 1949 and 1956. For the industrial experts that drafted the wage reform of 1957 it was obvious that rather than producing individualism, breeding competition and sapping shopfloor solidarities all in the name of higher productivity, piece-rate payment schemes afforded workers more autonomy, better control over their worktime and strengthened alliances between lower management (i.e. foremen) and skilled workers. This did not mean that keeping to one's self, occasional strife and rivalry were attitudes missing on the shopfloors or that these attitudes were inimical to more output; it simply meant that the wage system itself was liable to be appropriated by certain groups of workers to their own benefit and to the detriment of others. Or to put it differently, it was the structure of the wage system itself that produced at one and the same time solidarity and conflict.

⁸¹⁶ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Organizatorică, 5/1957, pp. 7-8. For much of the 1950s factories could sell at market prices construction materials to their workers in order for them to build their own private houses. This policy was part of a larger effort of the Romanian state to support the so-called "stabilization" of workers, mostly through offering them cheap bank loans to finance the building of private houses.

Some of the reports drafted before and during the wage reform of 1957 not only acknowledged the perverse effect of the wage system but also proposed to overcome it with the goal of significantly reducing piece-work (*munca în acord*) across industries. The decision to cut back on piece-work was remarkable. Trumpeted by the communist party as early as March 1945 as the best way to approach postwar reconstruction, piece-work payment schemes were extended to virtually all industrial jobs save for office work in early 1949. Naturally, this process took some persuasion as well as a lot of convoluted arguments since piece-work was not only not new for Romanian industry, it was what interwar trade-unions had traditionally fought against as a “brutal form of exploitation.”⁸¹⁷ The enchantment with piece-work, a global phenomenon between roughly the end of the First World War and the 1960s, was shared equally between command and market economies, socialism and capitalism, liberalism, social-democracy, communism and fascism. Whereas under predominantly market regulated national contexts, the various forms of piece-rate were considered “the most thoroughgoing means of applying straight market principles to wage determination”⁸¹⁸, under state socialism piece-work acquired the allure of the fairest wage system available, one that would reward individual and group effort and incentivize workers to perform at higher standards. In addition, this particular wage system was seen as a universal solution to an entire array of postwar malaises: during the inflationary period of the immediate postwar it promised to keep workers’ earnings in check, not allowing them to accumulate stacks of cash money, push up demand and boost prices; during the First Five Year Plan (1951-1955)

⁸¹⁷ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 39/1945, p. 3. See also “Munca în acord”, *Viața Sindicală*, No. 16, April 8 1945.

⁸¹⁸ Ronal Dore, *British Factory, Japanese Factory: The Origins of National Diversity in Industrial Relations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 347.

piece-work could place the burden of economic growth on the workers rather than on capital input by turning norm breaking into the primary motivation for enlarging one's income.

As I have pointed out in the last part of the third chapter, although efforts to impose piece-rate marked the monetary stabilization of 1947, it was only at the beginning of 1949 that a comprehensive wage reform was passed. This reform introduced the distinction between tariff wage (*salariul tarifar*) and the total wage (*salariu total*), with the first set in accordance with the skill level of the worker, type of industry, and complexity of tasks and the latter dependent on the worker fulfilling norms and earning bonuses. Typically, the tariff wage was kept extremely low even in those industries considered of paramount importance for the national economy in order to constrain workers to add up their total wage from norm breaking and bonuses, which in turn would have acted as an incentive to better perform. Furthermore, piece-rate was of two kinds: simple and progressive. The simple one was intuitive: breaking the norm was rewarded with the same amount of money as reaching it; the progressive piece-rate instituted a differentiation between the two so that breaking the norm was paid better than reaching the norm.⁸¹⁹ All these forms of piece-rate were distinguished from hourly rates of pay or time-rate (*munca în regie*), a system of payment reserved for management and office clerks, as well as for any kind of job that could not be subjected to piece-rate. For this too wage bonuses played an important role, but the overall distinction between the tariff wage and the total wage did not apply. It was this entire wage system

⁸¹⁹ For how this system worked in the steel industry see Constantinescu Ștefan, "Un nou sistem de salarizare în siderurgice", *Flamura Roșie*, No. 357, April 4 1953.

that came to be reformed in 1957 because, as one report put it, the tariff wage “lost its importance in workers’ earnings” and failed to secure “a stable and secure source of income”.⁸²⁰

That the tariff wage lost its importance for workers’ earnings was, of course, an exaggeration since low tariff wages were the backbone of the piece-rate system from the very outset in 1949. What industrial experts found scandalous was that workers were able to manipulate it: because tariff wages were low, management would often turn a blind eye to norm breaking, letting workers over-fulfil their norms so that at least some of them could earn a decent pay. Those who did so were the skilled and the senior, workers who could secure for themselves a constant flow of raw materials, better tools and kinder words from the foreman. “Overblown norms” became the rallying cry for the reformers as they looked back at the trajectory of the first half of the 1950s. Examples of fake norms filled entire reports: in one factory north of Bucharest screwing in six light bulbs took six hours; in another factory in Transylvania workers were registered with a workday of 24 hours⁸²¹; in yet another one workers regularly broke their norms by an average of 400%.⁸²² When peasants raised prices for their produce, foremen and factory managers “tolerated countless cases and even supported the practice of overblown norms” in order to allow workers to “artificially boost their wages” and compensate for the increased prices.⁸²³ In this context, norm setters (*normatori*) were boxed in from all sides: workers mocked them and their stopwatches while barring their access on the shopfloor, notably during end of the month “storming” sessions;

⁸²⁰ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 139/1956, Vol. 1, p. 234.

⁸²¹ This was the so-called “pencil method” (*din creion*); for the registration of non-existing work in the Soviet Union see Lewis H. Siegelbaum, “Masters of the Shop Floor: Foremen and Soviet Industrialization”, in Nick Lampert and Gábor T. Rittersporn (eds.) *Stalinism: Its Nature and Aftermath. Essays in Honor of Moshe Lewin* (London: Palgrave, 1992), 141.

⁸²² ANR, PCM, 441/1954, pp. 5-7.

⁸²³ *IBIDEM*, 4.

managers appointed some of the least authoritative persons as norm setters - the recently employed or even women - so as to avoid nagging conflicts with the workers; and finally party and trade-union bosses at the factory level conspired to guard this stalemate by doing little to disturb the tacit agreement between workers and managers, an agreement which functioned as an informal, discretionary wage raise for seemingly privileged groups of workers.

By 1956 the tariff wage counted on average under 50% of the take-home pay, a fact that made it nearly impossible to impose new work norms in search of higher labour productivity: even a slight tightening up of the norms directly affected workers' earning by pulling wages down was immediately met with resistance on the part of the workers and even managers. In this context, the issue of workers' control over the implementation of norms was deemed a major obstacle for squeezing out "inner reserves", nothing but the burdensome legacy of an earlier wage system in need of rationalization.⁸²⁴ This was hardly an original verdict. Just like the enchantment with piece-rate was a global phenomenon for very different justifications, so too was the disenchantment with it, though for very similar reasons. Brown's famous study of piece-work conducted at the British Glacier Metal Company in the early 1960s spoke the same language as industrial experts in socialist Romania: it too underscored that piece-work chipped away at managerial authority and made supervision of the labour process difficult. Moreover, because workers enjoyed too much autonomy on the shopfloor, the foremen had little control over the pace of work, the rhythm of production and work methods, not to mention the always complex and conflictual affair of "rate-fixing" i.e. determining the content of working norms scientifically rather than practically, the

⁸²⁴ This was a suggestion already made in 1955, see M. Vasiliu, "De ce productivitatea muncii trebuie să crească mai repede decât salariul mediu?", *Lupta de clasă*, No. 10, October, 1955, 105-109.

latter heavily relying on workers' practical knowledge and input. Brown's plea for abandoning piece-rate in favor of hourly rates could have been voiced in Bucharest too, just like his suggestion to free management from dealing bonuses and allocating prizes mirrored reform proposals that reached the desk of Secretary General Gheorghiu-Dej in 1957.⁸²⁵

The reform, therefore, focused on four interrelated aspects. First, it increased the importance of the tariff wage in the total wage which went up to an average of 83.2% by December 1957.⁸²⁶ This involved an overhauling of the whole wage system which was now effectively operating overwhelmingly on hourly rather than piece rates. Second, it reevaluated working norms across industries, making it harder for workers to break them with more than 120%.⁸²⁷ Third, it cut down skill categories (*rețele tarifare*) from an estimated 240 to around 20. What this amounted to was a drastic reduction in the number of available types of crafts (*meserii*), the fragmentation of which over the previous decade was the outcome of the classical Taylorist obsession with breaking down job requirements into as many tasks as possible. Finally, the reform redefined the role of the foreman on the shopfloor, enhancing its authority and supervisory powers.⁸²⁸ The impact of the reform was felt immediately. On the one hand, the reduction in the importance of norm-breaking for the take-home pay could not compensate for the new tighter norms, which

⁸²⁵ Wilfred Brown, *Piecowork Abandoned: The Effect of Wage Incentive on Managerial Authority* (London: Heinemann, 1962). While Secretary General Gheorghiu-Dej agreed with the reform proposal presented to him, he also noted it was full of good intentions but missed the role of the "subjective element" (*elementul subiectiv*), by which he presumably meant the panoply of informal practices and shopfloor solidarities available to workers and managers; ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 21/1958, p. 8. For Brown's failure to consider the "subjective element" in his analysis of the piece-work system at Glacier Metal Company see the review by John H. Goldthorpe in *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 73, No. 292, 1963, 747-750.

⁸²⁶ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 21/1958, p. 6.

⁸²⁷ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 39/1957, p. 10. Before the reform, norms were allegedly surpassed with an average of 200%.

⁸²⁸ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 62/1959.

meant that workers accustomed to fill in their wages through going above the norm came to earn less than before. On the other hand, fewer skill categories momentarily stiffened factories' internal labour markets which had allowed workers to easily move up the wage scale. More importantly, however, the wage reform occasioned the realignment of shopfloor solidarities by making the input of the senior and the skilled less vital at the point of production. Experience, dexterity and practical knowledge were more important under the piece-rate schemes, particularly in the case of team work such as in metal industries, when norms had to be surpassed rather than under the hourly rate system when, as one industrial expert put it, "workers' income is more stable but the drawback is that when they don't make the plan they get more. Under the old system when they did not make the plan they got 500 lei, now they receive 800 lei."⁸²⁹ Moreover, with the tariff wage at over 80% of the total wage, under the new wage system factories idled by the lack of raw material would have to spend more money on their equally idled workers.

We now begin to understand Ancelovicis' discontent. After the wage reform of 1957, the brothers' craft mastery in the repair shops of Malaxa Works was no longer paying off to the same degree as under the piece-rate system. They might have still done their job conscientiously, taking motors apart and reassembling them all by themselves but foremen like Calcianu and Cassian were no longer dependent on Lupu's and Moise's ability to do so singlehandedly and could afford to marginalize the skilled and the senior while at the same time promoting their own acquaintances. Perhaps their marginalization came couched in anti-Semitism or failing bodily strength, but neither of these factors were its causes. Nor was marginalization triggered by "thieving" kin networks and the increased supervisory role of the foreman. If the brothers ended up excluded from shopfloor

⁸²⁹ ANR, PCM, Stenogramme, 10/1957, p. 53.

solidarities, this was due to the fact that over 80% of the wage was now paid irrespective of the number of norms one could achieve. This made neither a decent pay nor was it a disincentive to manipulating norms, bonuses or skill categories, but it did secure a stable income above and beyond one's personal effort at the point of production. In this context, even old craft masters of Lupu's stature could come to suffer at the hands of foreman Wolf. Let me now turn to the other form of suffering that marked the biographies of industrial workers during the 1950s: austerity.

Part III

The Ends of Austerity

While the trajectory of workers' control, the vagaries of the piece-work wage system and the question of shopfloor solidarities and conflicts during the 1950s in Romania presents a scenario of sameness across East Central Europe, austerity reveals a stark contrast. One way of approaching this historical difference is to attempt to grasp comparatively the absence of any significant popular revolt among workers in Romania. Unlike in Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic or Poland, Romanian workers during the first half of the 1950s, although subjected to similar austerity policies and nearly identical rationalization drives, did not openly rebel, nor did they show any propensity to express their discontent collectively and engage in open claim-making. In his excellent historiographical essay on the "labour question" under state socialism in East Central Europe, Peter Heumos attributed this lack of protest to the lack of working class traditions and the political weakness of the Romanian Social-Democratic Party during the interwar epoch. This being the case, Heumos perceptively argued, historians of postwar Romania are deprived of "an

interpretative model that is widely used for obvious reasons by Czech, Polish, and Hungarian scholars”, namely “the examination of the strategies used in conflicts between working class traditions and the demands of the new reality under communist dictatorship.”⁸³⁰ Being a product of socialist industrialization, therefore, the Romanian working class could not appeal to deeply engrained memories of militancy that, in specific circumstances, might have shifted its involvements from the private to the public sphere. Instead, the argument continued, historians might want to explore the figure of the “worker-peasant”, supposedly the classical subject of socialist industrialization in an overwhelmingly agrarian setting.

There is much to recommend in Heumos’s argument. Nonetheless, the evidence I have presented in chapter two and three largely tends to question this line of reasoning. To be sure, a certain notion of “tradition” did inform much of workers’ struggle during the food crisis of early 1947 in Reșița; just like remnants of social-democratic militancy (disparaged as “labor aristocracy” by communist party bosses) in the same town were indeed crucial for articulating workers’ demands during the same period. This case, however, was an exception. The rest of the labour unrest I have examined in detail between 1945 and 1947 emerged out of the dialectical process of party-making, the semantic scramble over the social meaning of “communism” and the prescriptions of the collective labour contracts. These conflicts had little to do with any previous historical experience and many were directed against social-democrat trade-union leaders. The fact that these conflicts did not occur after 1948 cannot simply be explained by the absence of what did

⁸³⁰ Peter Heumos, “Workers under Communist Rule: Research in the Former Socialist Countries of Eastern-Central and South-Eastern Europe and in the Federal Republic of Germany”, *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 55, 2010, 102.

not produce them in the first place, namely working class traditions and social-democracy. Could, then, the all-pervasive figure of the “worker-peasant” be held accountable for making the 1950s quiescent? Indeed, the vast majority of workers that entered industrial jobs during this period were residents of the rural hinterland, owners of small plots of land whose households were in principle more autonomous than those of urban workers because less dependent on wages. According to anthropologist John Cole, this household autonomy was maintained through the “second shift”, that is to say through work performed by the worker-peasant “after hours”, a fact that was largely welcomed by the authorities because it allowed them to pursue a politics of “low remuneration and high investments” even at the risk of yielding poor quality work during the workday.⁸³¹ While Cole was making this argument for the 1970s, we can clearly see the process already unfolding during the postwar period, not merely in Romania but also in Hungary. According to Mark Pittaway, the double dwellers (*kétlaki*) were loathed and admired at the same time for their ability to retain a certain distance from the combined burden of price and wage fluctuation. Having a more or less autonomous household was an ideal to which many urban workers aspired, notably during periods of shortage when consumer items were missing or pricy.⁸³²

That a more self-sufficient household better mitigated austerity is a sensible suggestion. It was also what Romanian communist party bosses banked on when they decided to keep wages low during the First Five Year Plan, excluded from the distribution of ration cards those employees that owned property in the countryside and campaigned for local administrations to organize

⁸³¹ John W. Cole, “Family, Farm, and Factory: Rural Workers in Contemporary Romania”, in Daniel N. Nelson (ed.) *Romania in the 1980s* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1981), 95.

⁸³² Mark Pittaway, “Retreat from Collective Protest: Household, Gender, Work and Popular Opposition in Stalinist Hungary” in Jan Kok (ed.) *Rebellious Families. Household Strategies and Collective Action in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), 199-230.

vegetable gardens around factories. Conversely, this policy was believed to encourage urban workers to seek employment: the promise of access to rationed goods and an industrial wage for town residents without any other source of income was supposed to function as an incentive, one confirmed by a survey conducted on 1500 urban working-class families which revealed that between 1948 and 1950 household income provided in addition to the earnings of the head of the family went up from 5% to 14%, showing a modest but steady trend of working class women entering employment.⁸³³ Moreover, the trend applied for the urban residents that could only benefit from ration cards type E, the lowest form of entitlement reserved for the unemployed and for those with no legal income. The number of type E ration cards decreased drastically between 1947 and 1949 from around 1798000 to under 100000 as more and more urban residents took up jobs in industry, retail or administration. This evolution indicates that before the onset of the First Five Year Plan the great bulk of new employees came from the urban environment rather than the countryside. By contrast, worker-peasants flocked to industry between 1949 and 1951, when the number of total employees went up from 1700000 to 2400000 while the number of ration cards remained constant, suggesting the newcomers were predominantly plot owners.⁸³⁴ Household autonomy, therefore, was a governmental program that could work both ways: on the one hand, it could push urban residents to the ranks of the fully employed, discouraging them to eke out a living on ration cards type E or to rely exclusively on the salary of the male bread winner; on the other hand, it opened up industrial employment to the rural population chasing to supplement their

⁸³³ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 33/1950, p. 8.

⁸³⁴ ANR, PCM, Stenograme, 9/1951, pp. 50-90.

meagre existence with a factory job. More importantly, however, the hope of household autonomy justified the authorities' politics of low wages.

We can get a sense of just how low the low wages were from a survey ordered by the government in 1954. By that point in time, the total number of employees rose to over 2784100, out of which 1849800 industrial workers, 229000 engineers in industry alone. For a family of three, a monthly household budget that could secure the minimum of survival was calculated at 784 lei. With the average minimal industrial wage set at 346 lei, the survey pointed out that 42% of workers earned below 300 lei/month, another 42% between 300 lei and 500 lei, 8% between 500 lei and 700 lei, and only 4.8% above 700 lei.⁸³⁵ The survey did not explain how over 80% of workers, even in the likelihood of having two family members employed, could cover their bare existence from their wages, but did point out their condition was critical. The situation was even grimmer in view of the proposal to abolish the rationing system, effective December 1954, which in principle made workers even more dependent on highly unstable peasant markets (*piețe țărănești*) given that doing away with rationing was followed up by a general increase in prices across the state retail sector.⁸³⁶ A second survey conducted in the fall of 1956 - nearly two years after the end of rationing - showed a similar picture: well over half of the active workforce employed in industry, 436000 out of which blue collar workers, earned below the minimum wage, which was now set at around 425/500 lei.⁸³⁷ This increase was due to the so-called "ration card compensation" (*compensație de cartelă*) - a special allowance given to all former card holders in

⁸³⁵ ANR, PCM, 441/1954, pp. 32-62.

⁸³⁶ On the context (and logic) in which the rationing system was abolished see Marius Cazan, "Poziția Bucureștiului în anii aprovizionării raționalizate. Gestiunea resurselor alimentare în R.P.R. (1948-1954), *Studii și articole de istorie*, Vol. LXXXII, 2015, 58-59.

⁸³⁷ In rounds of popular consultation held within factories during the spring of 1957, workers asked for the minimum wage to be set at 800 lei and the average one at 1500 lei; ANR, PCM, 94/1957, p. 3.

order to compensate them for the surge in retail prices following the abolition of rationing, which amounted up to 100 lei per employee. Unlike in 1954, this survey set the subsistence family budget at 1450 lei/month, the doubling of the budget indicating a doubling of prices for basic consumer items.

The nominal increase of the average minimal wage over the course of two years tells us little about how working class households survived on low wages. If anything, it is very likely that between 1954 and 1956 real wages stagnated, with the “ration card compensation” unable to fully cover the surge in prices. For instance, an inquiry ordered by the Institute of Public Hygiene in 1956 pointed out that over 3.5 million persons representing low wage workers and their family members had a 50% deficit of caloric intake of animal origin, consuming mostly vegetables.⁸³⁸ Unsurprisingly, these impoverished households spent all their income on food, opting to pass on clothing items and footwear from one generation to the next, with the (mostly male) bread winner limited to wearing the working clothes given away by the factory on a daily basis. It was very common for these families, while made up of urban dwellers, to send their children away to live with their relatives in the countryside for extended periods of time. Urban workers too were in the habit of moving back to the countryside or back and forward between jobs, town and village and even between various regions of the country in search of a cheaper life. Passed in November 1951, decree 207 - one of the several pieces of legislation attempting to limit workers’ mobility by making quitting one’s job more difficult - was met with anger precisely because it stipulated workers were forbidden to change their place of employment for a period of five years.⁸³⁹

⁸³⁸ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 139/1956, Vol. II, p. 165.

⁸³⁹ For a sample of negative opinions on decree 207 see ANR, PCM, 54/1952.

If by 1956 over half of the workforce earned below the average minimum wage, another group of workers came even cheaper. These were the so-called “worker-soldiers” (*ostași muncitori*), conscripted young men compelled to perform work for the entire duration of their stint in the army in those industries deemed to suffer from a shortage of workers, notably mining and construction, and paid with a symbolic monthly allowance. The working soldier was imagined as an in-between figure - cheap labour recruited from the ranks of the peasantry, the soldier would ideally acquire his skills through temporary forced work rather than by way of vocational training only to finally settle in rapidly industrializing regions. An early 1951 report on the Jiu Valley and Banat mining regions is indicative of this type of project. The soldiers, it was noted, were the best solution against the enormous degree of labour fluctuation. The mining companies, therefore, were advised to subsidize their lodgment, build housing facilities and encourage them to sign five-year long work contracts after their release. This would have allowed soldiers to bring in their families and organize their lives around the mines.⁸⁴⁰

My archival evidence, however, suggests that soldiers working in the Anina mines had little to hope for. It was perhaps their temporary status that made the mining company close its eyes to their living conditions.⁸⁴¹ Widely circulated rumors about sending back the soldiers certainly justified this attitude. For instance, the Vâlcea County Military Commandment complained that although it rounded up 200 soldiers for the Anina mines, the company did not care to pay for their trip.⁸⁴² It is also not clear how much the soldiers could learn from the more experienced miners since the “ratty and barefooted” young men were constantly ridiculed by

⁸⁴⁰ ANR, CC al PCR, Secția Economică, 20/1951, 5-6.

⁸⁴¹ ANR, PCM, 206/1951, p. 12.

⁸⁴² ANCS, Trustul Minier Banatul-Anina, 85/1952, p. 292.

foremen.⁸⁴³ Within the piecework system, it did not pay off to have poorly equipped and unskilled soldiers in your work unit⁸⁴⁴; while offering bonuses to those military officers that could make the soldiers more committed proved a failure.⁸⁴⁵ The management would therefore end up arranging for the soldiers to travel back home in exchange for various goods.⁸⁴⁶

By 1955 the disappointment over this policy became clear. In no more than five years the percentage of forced military labour in the mining regions rose from 20% to 75%. This led not only to a great amount of discontent among the soldiers; it also contributed to a significant decrease in labour productivity. As a report issued by *Serviciul Muncii* - the state agency that controlled the military labour system - put it “due to the existence of this cheap labour, the mining equipment is not used to its full capacity”.⁸⁴⁷ In addition, mining companies, far from trying to stabilize the soldiers, actually ended up completely relying on them and disregarded any efforts to further recruit new workers.⁸⁴⁸ The report concluded that forced military labour, no matter how well intended, was in fact obstructing the normal development of the national economy.⁸⁴⁹

Much like forced military work in mining, by late 1956 the politics of low wages came to be perceived as an obstacle to boosting productivity and implementing the rationalization drive. Ferreting out “inner reserves” with conscripted soldiers and undernourished workers earning less than 400 lei per month proved impossible for a couple of reasons. First and foremost, low wages

⁸⁴³ IBIDEM, 52/1952, p. 9.

⁸⁴⁴ IBIDEM, 2/1953, p. 3.

⁸⁴⁵ IBIDEM, 32/1950, p. 1.

⁸⁴⁶ IBIDEM, 90/1952, p. 12.

⁸⁴⁷ ANR, CC al PCR, Secția Economică, 10/1955 p. 5.

⁸⁴⁸ Only in the first half of 1953 nearly 7000 workers abandoned the Jiu Valley mines; ANR, PCM, 268/1953, p. 242.

⁸⁴⁹ Between January and September 1957, the number of worker-soldiers in the Jiu Valley dropped from 17500 to 5700, ANR, PCM, Stenograme, 13/1957, p. 79.

exploded local labour markets, with workers switching jobs in search not merely of a cheaper life but also of better working conditions, housing, and overall better prospects for moving up the skill ladder. From the management's point of view, this effervescence of job switching was detrimental to production causing "labour shortages" and kept workers unskilled, always on the move and with no proper incentive to stay put for a longer period of time during which they could acquire skills. Secondly, low wages were blamed for perverting the piece-rate wage system. On the one hand, it polarized the workforce into a privileged skilled and senior minority who could yield enough mastery over the labour process to earn more and bargain with management over "overblown norms" and a steady flow of raw materials. On the other hand, the vast majority of the workers that could access neither deals with management nor their own skillset on the shopfloor found it impossible to fulfil their norms and had to limit themselves to taking home the meagre tariff wage. In both cases, the introduction of new norms with the help of norm setters' stopwatch was unfeasible: the tightening up of "overblown norms" was met with resistance by the minority of workers backed by management; the modification of standard norms was met with indifference by the majority of workers. Small wonder that when a group of engineers of the country's leading industrial plants was invited to Bucharest to discuss the wage reform of 1957 with governmental authorities their opinions converged on a single proposal: higher wages for all.⁸⁵⁰

While austerity frustrated the process of rationalization, it also blocked the possibility of workers' protest. Unlike Czechoslovak or East German workers, the vast majority of Romanian workers during the 1950s simply did not have enough money to bear the brunt of the combined fluctuation of prices in the state retail sector and peasant markets. Those who were indeed affected

⁸⁵⁰ ANR, PCM, 465/1957, p. 4.

represented the tiny minority of higher income workers, the likes of Stubnya, Căpuțan, arguably the Ancelovici brothers and Hofman, many of whom used the rationing system to acquire durable goods and clothing items and the peasant market to secure additional food. Or to put it differently, the over 80% of the workforce eking out a living on the tariff wage alone or slightly over the tariff wage was not yet composed of dependent consumers. Furthermore, for a country that relied on the export of raw materials, grain and foodstuff throughout the 1950s such as Romania, it was the peasant rather than the worker who accumulated reserves of cash money. The low income workers fell back on subsistence, piecing together the autonomy of their households by appealing to kinship networks to raise children, bequeathing trousers and boots across generations and treasuring the taste of meat, eggs and milk on festive occasions. For the formerly unemployed urban population, this meant a return to a standard of living comparable if not higher than what they had endured on the type E ration cards; for the “worker-peasant” it meant higher self-sufficiency and possibly an incentive to look for another job. Neither of these two types of workers that filled the ranks of the working-class during the 1950s experienced the abolition of rationing and the price upswings that followed it as a significant collapse of their livelihood routines. Nor were they particularly troubled by the admittedly failed attempts to tighten work norms.

By contrast, the double pressure of rationalization and austerity in Czechoslovakia and the GDR prepared the ground for major upheavals. The workers’ unrest that took place in early June 1953 in the industrial city of Plzeň was precipitated by the currency reform and the abolition of the dual system of rationing and market prices, with the consequence of doubling retail prices

almost overnight.⁸⁵¹ Coupled with Czechoslovakia status as a food importer in which the urban rather than rural population held reserves of cash, this sudden surge in prices hit predominantly working-class constituencies.⁸⁵² A similar treadmill of factors contributed to the unleashing of the more famous June uprising in the GDR. There, an increased pressure to inject performance into the piece-rate system merged with the state's expenditure on the military, tax and price raises and the rolling back of welfare to channel popular discontent, all against the background of plummeting living standards "for much of the population."⁸⁵³ Taking to the streets, East German workers called for the old piece-rate system to be restored and for the price of non-rationed goods sold through so-called HO stores to be lowered.⁸⁵⁴ Granted, in both cases other factors were at play: it certainly did matter that Plzeň had been a bastion of social-democracy before the war or that the regional organization of the communist party showed signs of weakness, notably within the Škoda plant⁸⁵⁵; and it certainly did matter that workers in Berlin, Leipzig, Halle or Görlitz could draw on a repertoire of shopfloor organization that included the election of strike committees and the march towards the center of the town.⁸⁵⁶ Yet none of these components of a successful uprising which might be lumped together under the banner of "tradition" triggered the protests, even if they did help them unfold and amplify. The relative social tranquility of Romanian workers during the better half of the 1950s, no matter how deprived they were of such "traditions", had structural rather than cultural origins. The politics of low wages and the dynamics of Romania's exports up

⁸⁵¹ I draw here on Kevin McDermott, "Popular Resistance in Communist Czechoslovakia: The Plzeň Uprising, June 1953", *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 2010, 287-307.

⁸⁵² Edward Ames, "Soviet Bloc Currency Conversions", *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 44, No. 3, 1954, 342.

⁸⁵³ Gareth Dale, *Popular Protest in East Germany, 1945-1989* (London: Routledge, 2005), 17.

⁸⁵⁴ The best analysis remains Jörg Roesler, "'Akkord ist Mord, Normenerhöhung ist das Gleiche': Eine Tradition des Ökonomischen Kampfes der Deutschen Arbeiterklasse unter der 17. Juni 1953", *Jahrbuch für Forschungen zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung*, No. 2, 2004, 4-17.

⁸⁵⁵ Johann Smula, "The Party and the Proletariat: Škoda, 1948-53", *Cold War History*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2006, 153-175.

⁸⁵⁶ Jonathan Sperber, "17 June 1953: Revisiting a German Revolution", *German History*, Vol. 22, No. 4, 630.

until 1957 made both rationalization and austerity more amenable to be suffered in silence. Paradoxically, then, low wages secured the regime's legitimacy.⁸⁵⁷

What motivated the general wage reform of 1957 was not the authorities' fear of a possible confrontation with the workers but rather the belated acknowledgement that low wages equaled low productivity. The reform introduced an indirect wage raise that came in two steps: first through the added monetary value of the "ration card compensation", effective since 1955, and second through the lifting of the tariff wage to over 80% of the total wage, a figure that stabilized by late 1957.⁸⁵⁸ By increasing the availability of money for working-class households, this general wage raise brought back the danger of an impending inflationary spiral. In the absence of rationing and as long as the government continued to pursue its policy of exporting raw materials and foodstuff, workers' new money would begin to chase fewer and fewer goods, pushing prices up. This danger was made concrete by the bad harvest of 1956 and by the state's decision to abolish the system of compulsory deliveries in late 1956, thus giving more room of maneuver to the peasants to engage in "free exchange" (*liber schimb*), including more leeway for negotiating prices for their produce.⁸⁵⁹ The first solution considered to avert the inflation was a change in the balance between exports and imports. A significant reduction in the import of semi-fabricates coupled with a halt on construction work would have eased the burden of exporting foodstuff (notably meat and grain) and free raw materials such as timber for private domestic consumption. Moreover, if duly

⁸⁵⁷ "Roughly speaking, legitimacy is sovereignty recollected in tranquility.", Ernest Gellner, *Legitimation of Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 24.

⁸⁵⁸ According to the estimate compiled by the personnel of Radio Free Europe, the average industrial wage increased by 24.7% between early 1957 and early 1959; "Romanian Decision on Wages, Pensions, Taxes and Prices: An Analysis", 25 July 1959. HU OSA 300-8-3-5374; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Publications Department: Background Reports; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

⁸⁵⁹ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămarilor, 139/1956, Vol. I, p. 174.

implemented this policy would have cut down the number of workers employed on construction sites who, once returned in the countryside, would have helped shrink the size of the general wage fund by exiting regular employment.⁸⁶⁰

The second solution was the reversal of the “ration card compensation” policy. By 1957 this special allowance was effectively integrated into the tariff wage making it available for the entirety of workers, including fresh recruits into industry who did not hold ration cards before 1954. This proposal was quickly rejected even though some policy experts still denounced the allowance for violating the principle of socialism and for promoting a form of wage “egalitarianism”.⁸⁶¹ The third and final solution proposed following the wage reform was arguably more shocking than the first two since it involved a drastic rollback of welfare for the employed population. However, the reasoning behind it was not new. As I have showed in the third chapter, attempts to excise the state from the wage relation were already tried out in the context of disbanding subsidized consumption via the factory stores (*economate*) following the monetary reform of August 1947. In 1957 the argument was similar: because workers came to earn more through the wage raise they should pay out of their own pocket for at least three public services subsidized from the state budget: day-cares and kindergartens, meals at the factory canteen and medical assistance.⁸⁶²

⁸⁶⁰ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cancelarie, 123/1956, pp. 16-20. It is important to note in this context that communist party bosses looked forward to another mass lay-offs campaign similar to the one pursued in mid-1947 in order to reduce the general wage fund, but were not convinced the Labor Code would allow it since it had no article on firing workers; see the discussion in ANR, PCM, Stenogramme, 3/1957, pp. 27-40.

⁸⁶¹ For the entire debate see ANR, PCM, Stenogramme, 5/1957, pp. 3-33.

⁸⁶² In addition, beginning with 1955 workers were made to pay half of the price of the working clothes distributed to them by their employers; ANR, PCM, 59/1967, p. 28.

Unsurprisingly, by 1959 state spending on day-cares was modest. Out of the 330000 children living in urban localities, the day-care system took in a mere 4%, with the parents' personal monetary input calculated at between 6.7% and 8% of the total amount of money spent yearly on a single child. This low figure was explained by the fact that the majority of day-cares were linked with factories, their services made available only to their employees and their provisioning dependent on factory resources and managerial will. This system created "inequality of treatment between children", privileging some workers at the expense of other less fortunate to work for a factory large enough to support its own day-care.⁸⁶³ The proposal suggested not only an increase in the parents' participation to financing the facilities, but also the decoupling of day-cares from factories and their consequent opening up to all the residents on a given territory rather than to specific groups of employees.⁸⁶⁴ This transformation would have unburdened the factories from wasting their resources while at the same time externalizing the cost of running the facilities on a vaster pool of citizens.

The same logic informed the decision taken in 1959 to abolish state subsidies for the meals at the canteen. By that point in time, 2400 factory canteens across the country serviced a population of 550000 employees, roughly 18% of the entire workforce, all of whom were paying no more than 56% of the cost of a single meal. Forcing half a million employees to cover the full cost of the meals would have put an end to the "indirect and unjustified enhancement of their income", an

⁸⁶³ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămarilor, 27/1959, Vol. II, p. 230.

⁸⁶⁴ The transition from predominantly factory based child care facilities to territorial/residential ones is characteristic of the 1950s across Eastern Europe. For the Hungarian case, see Éva Bicskei, "'Our Greatest Treasure, the Child': The Politics of Child Care in Hungary, 1945-1956", *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 2006, 165-170.

infringement on the “law of distribution according to the quantity and quality of their work.”⁸⁶⁵ Finally, a policy paper estimated that in 1958 the Romanian state offered free medical assistance to 40% of its population, over 7 million employees, pensioners and their family members. The paper argued on logistical rather than political grounds against a previous proposal to integrate the spending on medical care in the workers’ wage, giving them an extra monthly allowance in view of having them pay in cash for whatever services they might need in the hospital. The operation was judged too complex and counterintuitive: “even if the employee would not spend that sum of money on something else thus saving it for the future, the amount of money would still be too little and could not cover the full medical treatment”.⁸⁶⁶

Few of these solutions were actually implemented. Yet all of them were taken seriously as ways of managing the allegedly negative consequences of abandoning the politics of low wages. Taken together, they reveal the conundrum the regime faced in its relentless pursuit of higher productivity: giving up on austerity and potentially on the social tranquility it had nourished for much of the 1950s only to face inflation, contemplate another round of mass lay-offs, cut down on welfare, and bring to a halt both export driven industrialization and the emergent construction boom, all for the sake of a firmer grip on the labour process and the possibility of rationalizing production. Equally important, this snowball of possible policies and unlikely decisions confirmed for communist party bosses the soundness of the autonomy of the household strategy for keeping the costs of labour in check. As communist economists argued, the take-off of industrialization during the long 1960s would have to take the form of “developed industrial zones” (*zone*

⁸⁶⁵ IBIDEM, p. 243.

⁸⁶⁶ ANR, CC al PCR, Secția Economică, 21/1958, p. 73.

industriale dezvoltate), assemblages of smaller industrial towns clustered around larger urban centers.⁸⁶⁷ In these so-called zones, the working class would retain its rural foothold without being occupied in agriculture hence able to combine wages and self-subsistence. By the 1970s, the landscape had changed radically, as one foreign visitor perceptively noted not without an air of dismay:

It is difficult to get away from smoke, noise, and roads crowded with dusty trucks and buses. All towns, even small ones, are in the midst of this industrial boom, and some of the most beautiful low mountain valleys of Romania are now filthy with smog. The society emerging from this transformation is primarily one of small industrial towns. Even in the larger cities, with a few exceptions, the rows of factories and colorless new apartments create a distinctive, provincial atmosphere that resembles neither the cultured and affluent best of European urban life nor the worst of the crowded and desperate slums which are common in the poorer countries of the world.⁸⁶⁸

Two decades after the end of the Second World War, socialism was getting built, haltingly, as the same tourist remarked, leaving no one behind:

There are no depopulated villages, hopelessly poverty-stricken districts, or large numbers of floating, unemployed migrants. Village collectives that should be disbanded on strict economic grounds continue to produce food for their population, at a net loss for the national economy. Factories that should have been located near other industrial centers provide work for villagers who do not have to migrate. Individuals who cannot adapt to modern life continue to live and work in activities that would have disappeared a long time

⁸⁶⁷ Mircea Biji, Vladimir Trebici et alii., “Resursele de muncă și utilizarea lor în economia națională”, in *Dezvoltarea economică a României, 1944-1964* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei R.S.R., 1964), 194. This is very similar to what anthropologist Gerald Creed called “the domestication of industry” with reference to neighboring socialist Bulgaria, Gerald W. Creed, “Agriculture and the Domestication of Industry in Rural Bulgaria”, *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 22, No. 3, 1995, 528-548.

⁸⁶⁸ Daniel Chirot, “Social Change in Communist Romania”, *Social Forces*, Vol. 57, No. 2, 1978, 475.

ago in free market economies. All this obviously cuts down on social overhead costs, and it also humanizes the transformation, particularly for those least adapted to it.⁸⁶⁹

Epilogue

The Specter of Austerity

In his classic study of the “Soviet bloc”, Zbigniew Brzezinski noted that one of the most conspicuous achievements of the communist parties that came to rule Eastern Europe after the Second World War was the launching of “several spectacular schemes which were to symbolize the new socialist era and stand as lasting monuments to the socialist order. Each People’s Democracy boasted of some such project: Nowa Huta Steel Works in Poland, the Gottwald Steel Plants in Czechoslovakia, the Stalin Works at Dunapentele in Hungary, and the Dimitrovo Steel plant in Bulgaria.”⁸⁷⁰ Justly missing from this list of iconic steel mills erected during the 1950s was Romania, a country that only managed to build its own steel mill from scratch in the early 1960s. Unlike their peers in Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria or GDR, Romanian communist leaders lacked sufficient resources to invest in such large scale projects at the onset of the 1950s, and went on to modernize and expand the country’s two existing steel mills they had inherited at the end of the war.

By the end of the decade, however, after rounds of welfare cuts, rationalization drives and various experiments with wage systems, resources had finally started to accumulate. Experts of

⁸⁶⁹ IBIDEM, 482.

⁸⁷⁰ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc: Unity and Conflict* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 101. He might as well have added to the list GDR’s Eisenhüttenstadt.

Radio Free Europe closely monitoring the country's development concluded in one of their "background reports" for 1959 that "in contacts with Western economists and journalists, regime officials let it be understood that the industrialization of the country now pays dividends after a ten-year austerity program."⁸⁷¹ In an interview for the Washington Post of the same year, party boss Chivu Stoica spoke in the name of the government when he announced that at last "we are able to pay in dollars".⁸⁷² The full weight of these words became clear in 1960 when Romania decided to embark on the building of its own large, modern steel mill on the banks of the Danube near the port town of Galați. Unlike the existing steel plants in Reșița and Hunedoara, this new industrial colossus, as one Romanian expert put it, would be technologically up-to-date because that way "production is cheaper".⁸⁷³

Hard won dollars during the 1950s allowed the government to look beyond the Soviet Union and COMECON countries as providers of technology. Indeed, the steel mill in Galați would be an essentially transnational project in industrial development, with Austrian, Italian, British and French companies competing to supply licenses needed to operate oxygen steel making processes and ship in the complex industrial equipment required. Characteristically, the only high ranked Soviet official to see the steel plant was Anastas Mikoyan, who arrived in the town of Galați in August 1964, shortly after Austrian vice chancellor Bruno Pittermann. Moreover, just like in the case of all the steel plants erected across Eastern Europe during the 1950s, on the outskirts of the

⁸⁷¹ "Romanian Decision on Wages, Pensions, Taxes and Prices: An Analysis", 25 July 1959. HU OSA 300-8-3-5374; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Publications Department: Background Reports; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

⁸⁷² IBIDEM.

⁸⁷³ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 1/1960, p. 35.

old port town on the Danube a model socialist city would emerge to cater to the needs of thousands of new steelworkers.⁸⁷⁴

The decision to invest in the Galați steel plant in 1960 might be taken as the symbolic end of the postwar period in Romania. By that point in time the closed nature of the economy that defined the decade and a half after 1945 was slowly changing. No other investment project in industrial development undertaken at the end of the 1950s expressed this fact better than the new steel plant, which would receive some of the best technology available at the time. For the leadership of the communist party, the politics of productivity pursued throughout the previous decade proved a success. Between 1948 and 1958 the national output of iron ore increased sixfold, steel and cast iron quadrupled and the production of laminated finished goods tripled.⁸⁷⁵ In this context, for the management of such European companies as Först, Inocenti, Schneider or Davy & United Engineering, Romania became a worthy business partner willing to pay for their products in order to develop what seemed the pinnacle of a decade of hardship, namely a state-of-the-art steel plant.⁸⁷⁶

The new steel plant was part of a larger project of opening the economy towards global markets. As such, Galați would become the pillar of the heavy industry, supplying at the same time the national market in steel and semifabricates and fueling an increasingly large share of exports. Both UDR Reșița and Malaxa Works in Bucharest showed the way forward by reorienting themselves towards the global markets already by the end of the 1950s. Characteristically, the

⁸⁷⁴ ANR/CC/PCR, Secția Cămară, 101/1960 and IBIDEM, Secția Economică, 34/1960 for the plan of the new city.

⁸⁷⁵ ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 185/1959, pp. 1-8.

⁸⁷⁶ For some of the negotiations, see ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Economică, 4/1963.

regional newspaper *Flamura Roșie* begun to print regularly images of locomotives and motors as they were being shipped to various corners of the planet. Moreover, in their occasional visits, communist party bosses would reproach management and workers alike for their lack of quality work, in an effort to make them aware that goods sold on the global markets ought to respect a certain standard: “You will produce ever more machines and tools for export and if you don’t take it seriously, what will come of us?”⁸⁷⁷

Throughout the 1960s, in party meetings, speeches and reports on the state of the economy, producing for export will become one of the main bones of contention. Attempts to alter the wage system, rationalize the labour process, boost consumption and expand welfare will no longer be justified with reference to overcoming the social consequences of the war or even to “building socialism”, but rather in view of becoming competitive on the global market. Productivity remained a constant concern for industrial experts, party bosses and ministerial authorities, but its rationale was now different. A typical lecture on the need to increase labour productivity during the late 1960s would start with the following observation:

We have to understand that there is a general law of the market that controls production. Those who lag behind lose the competition which takes place on the global market (*piața mondială*) and are inevitably pushed aside. We have to fight to observe this law of the global market in order to be able to compete with anybody.⁸⁷⁸

Romania’s ambition to overcome its secular status as importer of industrial equipment and exporter of raw materials and foodstuff ran considerable risks. On the short run, as John Montias

⁸⁷⁷ These words were uttered by party boss Gheorghe Apostol in one of his visits to Reșița in 1963, ANR, CC/PCR, Secția Cămară, 3/1963, p. 51.

⁸⁷⁸ ANR, PCM, 16/1968, p. 5.

presciently noted, “the systematic policy of building plants on the basis of the latest world technology, no matter how capital-intensive it happens to be”⁸⁷⁹ was pursued without much concern for providing industrial jobs to the vast mass of underemployed rural residents. Yet this was a price communist party bosses were willing to pay. More importantly, however, on the longer run, Romanian exports of semifabricates and industrial goods to the global markets, both inside and outside of the Soviet bloc, could potentially falter. “If worse comes to worse”, Montias predicted, “consumers may be denied a part of, or all, the increases in living standards they have been promised. Additional agricultural produce might then be extracted from the economy and sold on the world market.”⁸⁸⁰ The failure to secure reliable outlets for Romanian exports, Montias went on, might potentially push communist party bosses to reintroduce “austerity measures” and justify them through nationalism.

Future work on Romanian state socialism between 1960s and 1980s should take seriously Montias’s prophetic wisdom and explore the consequences the country’s growing integration within the world economy had on labour relations. How did Romania’s turn towards exporting semifabricates and finished industrial goods rather than raw materials and foodstuff determine the trajectory of the working class? What role did the experience of social tranquility during the 1950s play in informing the decision of communist party bosses to return to austerity measures in the 1980s? How were the upswings and downturns of global markets mediated domestically through the modification of wage scales, the introduction of new payment schemes, workers’ access to welfare and rationalization drives? Did the experience of competition on foreign markets make

⁸⁷⁹ John Montias, *Economic Development in Communist Romania* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967), 232.

⁸⁸⁰ *IBIDEM*, 186.

workers and engineers more susceptible to the appeals of Nicolae Ceaușescu’s version of “national Stalinism”?”⁸⁸¹ These are some of the questions that might feed into a research agenda on global labour history that is at the same time sensitive to the political economy of world capitalism and careful to explain the often ambiguous experiences and convoluted social dynamics nurtured by state socialism.

⁸⁸¹ For instance, arriving in Costa Rica in the 1970s to sell Malaxa Works produced locomotives, a groups of Romanian engineers and workers were met by the natives with a strike allegedly sponsored by a rival American company and quickly realized they were in a “jungle” in which “one uses any means to remove unwelcomed competition”, Costin Diaconescu (ed.) *Uzinele Malaxa – 23 August – Faur. Un arc peste timp: 1921-1999* (Bucharest: CD Press, 2007), 461. For the notion of “national stalinism” see Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism for all Seasons. A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

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