

LOW-COST FORDISM? THE ANTINOMIES OF CLASS IN THE ROMANIAN AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY, 1989 – (2016)

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Submitted to
Central European University
Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Budapest, Hungary
2017

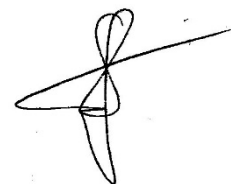
Abstract

This dissertation is a historical ethnography of class and industrial labor centered in and around the Dacia automobile plant in Romania, from the early postrevolutionary days of the 1990s to the mid-2010s, thus spanning both the tumultuous years of “transition” and the seemingly more settled era of dependent development arriving in the first years of the new millennium. The dissertation is based on 18 months of fieldwork and an extensive analysis of various historical documents of the post-89 era. While firmly grounded in the sociological, anthropological, and political economic literatures on class and industrial labor in post-89 Central and Eastern Europe, it recasts some of the major questions of this broad field of study and, with the benefit of both depth and hindsight, offers more nuanced answers and interpretations. Against various capital-logic or victimhood accounts of labor in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989, the dissertation uncovers a complex, multifaceted and convoluted hidden history of industrial work and workers—one out of many possible. Both individual laborers and organized labor hence appear as active makers of their own history, albeit never quite to the extent and in the manner they pleased. More specifically, they appear as initiators, supporters, or adversaries of a series of hegemonic projects meant to anticipate, foster, or respond to an ever-changing political economy, with the ostensible goal of affirming and establishing the material and symbolic value of industrial labor despite the hostility and ill omens of the times. Regardless of the setting of these hegemonic struggles—inside the factory, in the labor market, or in the neighborhood—ambiguities, contradictions, and dead ends abounded, resulting from endless frictions between misaligned political and moral economies of industrial labor. Based on a highly selective, primarily export-driven reindustrialization of the former state socialist countries of CEE, the maturing of dependent development in the 2000s fostered uneven development and labor fragmentation to an unprecedented extent. It thus offered a genuine possibility of success in asserting the value of labor, although only at the cost of hegemonic projects embracing and struggling for, not against, inequality and exclusion. If the cultivation of exclusionary solidarity eventually proved a recipe for success in mounting an organized offensive against capital, in rising to the apex of the labor market, and in achieving an ideal of urban modernity thought long lost, it also engendered increasingly obvious vulnerabilities and potential for failure. On the side of both the included and the excluded, exclusionary solidarity has resulted in deep personal anxieties, apparently insurmountable problems of social reproduction, and diminishing capacity of collective struggle.

I hereby declare that this dissertation contains no materials accepted for any other degrees in any other institutions and no materials previously written and/or published by any other person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

Budapest, January 2017

Ștefan Guga

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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Acknowledgments

In spite of my professional misanthropy, quite a few people have in one way or another contributed to making this dissertation possible. Without them, it would have probably never been written, or at least certainly not in this form and with this content.

Don Kalb has somehow managed to work miracles in handling a rather feisty and thoroughly stubborn student, whose instinctual reaction to any advice and suggestions has almost as a rule been “No!”. As work on the dissertation progressed, I eventually came to realize that Don had been right, again and again, on pretty much everything I can now remember—from readings in preparation for fieldwork, to writing up and making my work palatable to my professional peers, instead of to myself alone. Over the years, I have transitioned from thinking of my work as going against Don’s (in this regard, the imagined particularities of Dacia’s case proved a surprisingly good fit for early overconfidence) to turning both his understanding of class and his work on workers in Central and Eastern Europe into genuine cornerstones of my own attempt at taking on these two subjects. I hope this dissertation will contribute to solving the broader puzzle he has been wrestling with over the years. The dissertation being over and done with, we are left with the far more important assets of friendship and drinks sharing. I am very grateful for all.

Judit Bodnár’s influence on this dissertation has been more subtle, but nonetheless extensive and substantial. From early on in my long stay at CEU, Judit taught me to disregard the most often irrelevant boundaries between sociology and anthropology, to embrace political economy, to be systematically interested in history, and to enjoy geography. In practice, this meant I was able to read widely and experiment with writing without even thinking of transgression or at any time losing interest. These traits define this dissertation and, thus, my overall understanding of what it means to be a social scientist. Judit is also entirely responsible for my permanent dedication to the urban question. Even though I was aware from the beginning that this dissertation would not be a fully-fledged work of “urban studies”, I found myself pushed to envision the questions of class and industrial labor at Dacia as seen in the mirror of life in the town of Mioveni. My interest in public space and the public sphere—two major issues crisscrossing the entire dissertation—are also largely due to Judit’s teaching.

Several friends and colleagues were kind enough to read either partial or complete drafts and gave me invaluable suggestions on specific empirical and theoretical issues as well as on more general questions of form, structure, direction and overall argument. Dan Cîrjan read an almost complete manuscript in record time and helped me improve the overall structure of the dissertation and sharpen my theoretical interpretations. A native of Pitești and quite familiar with Mioveni, Dan provided me with some much-needed relief (that is, beers, companionship, and local contacts) in the very first weeks of fieldwork, when I was beginning to think quitting might not be that bad of an idea after all. Agi Gagyí pointed out some subtle lacks of emphasis and nuance in part II, while also confirming that the experiences of (at least some) Hungarian workers in the 1990s and 2000s were in many ways similar to those of workers at Dacia. Florin Poenaru gave me extensive comments on part III, first via e-mail and then as we nurtured our common passion for beer. Oana Mateescu offered me the unique

chance to discuss part III with her undergraduate students. More importantly, she has managed the unthinkable: to prove that intelligence and sanity can somehow subsist despite the thoroughly dismal landscape of Romanian social sciences. Alina Cucu gave me some excellent and very detailed last minute comments. Though I could address only a few of them in time, they will most certainly prove their worth in the future. Since Alina is currently at the beginning of a (in many ways, potentially similar) research project on Olcit/Rodae/Ford Craiova, Romania's second largest automobile producer, I hope this dissertation will make her life at least a bit easier and allow her to delve more deeply into things I could not. While he has not read any parts of the dissertation proper, Dragoș Adăscăliței forced me to think and write about the trade union movement at Dacia much earlier than I would have done on my own. The work we did together both before and during my drafting of part I proved immensely beneficial in clarifying my thinking and streamlining my writing.

My friends Adrian Grama and Andrei State deserve special mentioning. A scrupulous historian doing research on industrial workers in Romania during the interwar and immediate postwar periods, Adrian's ability to grasp the finest of details, his penchant for painstakingly nuanced interpretations, and awe-inspiring knowledge of our common subject of interest would make any ethnographer envious. Since our writing periods overlapped, we were able to discuss our dissertations as they progressed, though I proved unable to match the quality of Adrian's questions and suggestions. The voice of reason personified, Andrei State read the entire manuscript as I wrote it and assured me that I was neither incoherent nor absurd. Knowing it made sense to him allowed me to keep anxiety at bay despite an increasingly cumbersome writing schedule. Crucially, Andrei has offered me vital intellectual companionship outside the confines of academia, which I had long longed for. The work that resulted from our relationship allowed me to avoid burnout and maintain a high level of excitement with my dissertation despite the protracted writing process.

Saying that my friends in Mioveni played a fundamental part in the making of this dissertation is a huge understatement. Andrei, Adi, Bebe, Costel, Eugen, Ionuț, Michael, nea Nelu, Nelson, Puiu, Robi, Sebi, nea Sorin, nea Stelică and many others turned my fieldwork into a truly life-changing experience far beyond any professional preoccupation. I hope at one point I will be able to thank them properly. A special thanks to Mr. Ion Iordache, without whom my research experience and this dissertation would have been considerably poorer.

I started writing this dissertation in Budapest and ended up writing most of it in Bucharest. In Budapest, Dan Cîrjan and Sergiu Novac had to live with me for three months of binge writing, during which I exasperated them with all sorts of random stories and constant thinking aloud. Meanwhile, Alexandra Kowalski had to bear with a teaching assistant who exhibited the most troubling sort of factory manners. If that brief period had not been as decisive as it was in jumpstarting my writing immediately after fieldwork, apologies would be in order. I instead have to thank them.

In Bucharest, Costi Rogozanu and Dora Constantinovici were always there when I needed to get my mind off things and take a break from writing, even though by now they must be entirely fed up with stories from Mioveni and complaints about a never-ending writing process. Rodica Novac gave me the chance to delve into the details of the Romanian trade

union movement and to earn some much-needed money at a crucial time. I used the results of that research to recast my understanding of trade unionism at Dacia from the standpoint of the Romanian labor movement as a whole. With the finishing of this dissertation, the work I did for Rodica allowed me to exit academia in a much smoother and gratifying manner than I could have ever imagined.

At CEU, Ildikó Chikán was enormously patient and immensely helpful in quickly solving several bureaucratic blunders that I could not handle on my own. During the four months I spent at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle in the spring and summer of 2015, Chris Hann was nice enough not to press me to participate in the Institute's social life any more than I wanted to, which meant I could effectively lock myself indoors and concentrate solely on my work. Georgiana Angelescu and Istvan Egresi were kind enough to share their dissertations with me at a time when I had limited library access and needed to consult the few empirical works directly relevant to my case. Likewise, shortly before heading for the field, Adrian Deoancă helped me obtain some very important (and very rare) material on what was happening at Dacia during the 1980s.

The intellectual seeds of this dissertation were in fact planted long before the beginning of my doctoral studies, in a reading group organized by a handful of CEU MA students starting with the fall of 2008. Guided by Jakob Rigi, then an associate professor at the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Alexandra Oancă, Natalia Buier, Zoltán Glück and I set out to read Marx's *Capital* in as much detail and with as much commentary as we could produce. It took us no less than three years to go through all three volumes, a period during which the regular meetings of "the Marx reading group" were the undisputed high point of our graduate school routines. For objective reasons, the group dissipated in 2011, and this year Alexandra and I will be the last of its members to leave CEU. The intellectual output of our group and the collective effervescence resulting from its activity nonetheless persist to this day, not least in the pages of this dissertation.

During my doctoral studies, my family had to bear with a rather unusual spectacle, as I lived for several years between Bucharest and Budapest, acted all mysterious about what it was that I was actually planning to do, then moved to a small town in the provinces for a year and a half only to come back apparently even more puzzled and with all sorts of more or less funny stories to tell, only to spend the next three years constantly talking about "writing" my dissertation while doing all sorts of other highly obscure "work", though without having an office or going to work proper, operating according to an incomprehensible schedule, and only sporadically getting paid. While I sometimes still wonder what exactly I was thinking when I set out to do this, my family has granted me unconditional support. My mother and Relu, Emil and Veronica Burtea, as well as my sister Simina have always been there for me and criticism on their part has always been positive. During this whole time, my father, Lucian Guga, has offered me the most unconditional, effective, and discreet support possible. Knowing I could count on him has made me less afraid of failure and hence far better prepared in avoiding it.

Iolanda has on her own done all of the above combined and much more. She remains my only moral coauthor, my partner and accomplice in this and everything else.



THE DACIA-RENAULT PLANT IN MIOVENI.
Photograph by the author, May 2012.



"THE PROLETARIAT SPINS THE WHEEL OF HISTORY."

Anonymous author. Source: Călin Dan, *Imaginea muncitorului în grafica românească*, 1982, Bucharest: Meridiane.

INTRODUCTION

THE HIDDEN HISTORIES OF LABOR IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

The thing that should not be

On the morning of March 24, 2008, workers from all departments of Renault's Dacia plant in Mioveni, Romania, refused to start work. After a day off on Sunday, presses did not start in stamping, as workers refused to load the sheet metal, push the machines' two-handed buttons, and handle the bulky metal carts used for transporting finished parts; welding lines did not start in the body shop, as workers refused to put on their heavy leather aprons and pick up the massive welding guns scattered across the shop floor; the same happened in the paint shop, where no coats of paint were sprayed and no sealant was injected on the galvanized car bodies that remained still on the immobile paint lines; in assembly, no parts were handled and the digital counters displaying the day's production results remained stuck at zero; the same happened in the plant's engine and gearbox departments. The sit-down ended at three o'clock in the afternoon when workers from the second shift did not show up for work. The long-awaited general strike had begun.

What ensued was a three-week long strike that completely halted production at one of Renault's largest factories worldwide, unique for its high degree of integration of production and distribution chains. With over 10,000 employees producing over 1,000 cars each day for an annual turnover in excess of 2 billion euros, the losses were massive for all those involved, and so were the stakes. Until the restarting of work on April 11, the conflict went through several bouts of escalation and mitigation, as Dacia's management did not pull any punches in trying to push strikers into giving up: there were attempts at strike breaking, intimidation and threats galore. In response, strikers organized mass public rallies with which they hoped to attract outside support; the company likewise mobilized its heavy public relations arsenal to the maximum. While blows were unceasingly exchanged in public, a fierce legal battle was waged in court, where strikers eventually managed to secure a decisive victory. Admitting defeat, the company's management conceded to strikers' most important demands concerning wages and working conditions. Trade unionists declared a major victory that, they claimed, had no comparable precedent at Dacia and in the country's post-89 history.

The novelty of the situation was visible in the unusual excitement sparked by the strike among the media in the country and especially abroad, with flocks of journalists rushing on the scene to document what looked like a rather implausible event: a large scale strike in the Eastern European operations of a Western European multinational corporation that resulted in its undeniable defeat, despite the state of the art managerial machinery encountering a labor force that according to all expectations should have been organizationally downtrodden in the aftermath of the postsocialist onslaught. The interpretation that emerged as dominant across

the board was of the strike espousing a pronounced “European” dimension (see Delteil and Dieuaide 2008; Descolonges 2011:chapters 3 and 4; 2013). The fact that Romania had entered the EU just a few months earlier clearly played a part in this, as did the fact that Renault’s by now very profitable Romanian operations were just one instance of countless such investments by large Western European companies in the former socialist countries of the European periphery. As some authors insisted (Delteil and Dieuaide 2008), the major influx of foreign direct investment in the region recalled the aging notion of “peripheral Fordism”. This notion, which Lipietz (1987) and others had used to describe the peripheral integration of Southern European countries like Spain starting with the 1970s, seemed entirely fit for the situation. Somewhat vindicating the anachronism, at the time Romania approximated the typical peripheral Fordist country quite accurately: snowballing inflows of manufacturing FDI seeking cheap labor for reasonably skilled assembly work aimed at reducing the costs of imports and at tapping into a domestic market whose growth was driven mostly by an emerging urban middle class gorging on increasingly generous offerings of cheap credit from local branches of Western European banks.

The strike had a special place in this “peripheral Fordist” picture. Concerted forms of labor unrest were plaguing other similar sites in Romania—most notably, at the ArcelorMittal plant in Galați and the Daewoo Heavy Industries shipyard in Mangalia—so the strike could be said to be part of an emerging wave of labor unrest. Such a hypothesis enjoyed plenty of theoretical backing (e.g., Silver 2003; more on this below) and Dacia trade unionists themselves seemed to spontaneously support it as they called for help from workers from other industrial multinationals and proclaimed their right to “European citizenship”, which came with decent wages and proper working conditions. If this was not just an isolated event and was rather the sign of widespread coming labor unrest across Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), the Dacia strike could indeed prove momentous for two related reasons. First, if wages increased in the former socialist countries at a rapid enough pace and on a large enough scale—and it could be argued that the Dacia strike offered an intimation of this—the question of catching up, of the (upward) convergence of central and peripheral Fordisms, regained the legitimacy it had once enjoyed in discussions of the fate Southern Europe (e.g., Arestis and Paliginis 1995). Second, if this were to happen, the loss of jobs in the core due to the delocalization of industrial capacities to peripheral regions—epitomized by West–East flows of automotive FDI—would be stopped and workers from the two sides of the continent would no longer have to compete for jobs from “whipsawing” multinationals. This was the hope of not just progressive scholars reviewing the events, but also of French trade unionists who eagerly encouraged the strikers at Dacia.

Such positive scenarios were admittedly hampered by the seeming disconnect between the situation at Dacia and that of the national macroeconomic and policy contexts, on the one hand (Delteil and Dieuaide 2008), as well as by the apparent willingness of strikers to keep silent when it came to supporting the demands of their immediate peers in the local components industry (Descolonges 2011:chapter 4). Otherwise, it was unclear how the strike fit in a landscape of generalized “labor weakness” (Crowley 2004) that was known to characterize CEE. Indeed, the CEE labor weakness thesis had by then been widely embraced as proof of how even the strongest theoretical expectations of labor unrest could be frustrated by the

inability of organized labor to mount a meaningful opposition. While succeeding in laying out some of the stakes at hand, accounts of the strike failed in connecting the recent past to the present and thus produced rather innocuous explanations of the event. Entirely circumventing the question of workers' role in the potential economic catching up of CEE, Delteil and Dieuaide claimed that heightened wages fit in quite well with Dacia's business strategy and that the company's management had voluntarily pushed for increasing workers' incomes. Conversely, Descolonges stressed that Renault's management had no intention to export its French "social model" and emphasized the discursive and organizational resources available to strikers due to their newfound European allegiance: the claims to "European citizenship" and, above all, the support of French trade union confederations who sent representatives on the scene to encourage the strikers and discuss transnational solidarity. In these accounts, the overinflated weight given to the so-called European aspects of the strike meant that local realities faded almost entirely into the background, making room for generic, synchronic, and essentially incompatible analyses of the events of March–April 2008. This inability to link up past and present was compounded by the mismatch between present expectations and future outcomes. With the onset of the Great Recession in the late 2000s, hopes of widespread labor unrest in the East and convergence with the West were forgotten, and with them the whole issue of "peripheral Fordism" and labor unrest in the region. The workers and factories, on the other hand, stayed.

In methodological terms, what accounts of the strike missed was an ethnographic perspective that would have prevented the severing of present from past, management from trade union strategies, and discourses of "Europeanness" from realities on the ground, all the while distinguishing the genuinely significant and consequential elements from the circumstantial and transient ones. More precisely, an ethnographically-driven class analysis would have managed to connect the struggle of organized labor with the temporal and spatial unfolding of capital accumulation, to understand the dynamic relations of power on which both the valorization of capital and the material and symbolic resources of organized labor depend. This, however, is particularly difficult in Europe's ex-socialist periphery, where postsocialism is supposed to have left any semblance of an industrial working class thoroughly "unmade". In the absence of such a perspective, the dissonance between the striking display of labor strength in a historical context of generalized labor weakness remains an unapproachable puzzle.

It would nonetheless be difficult to fault present-day scholarship alone for such failures. After all, the lack of interest in the question of class and in its subordinate issues of labor and industrial work in CEE has been mentioned so often that it has long become a cliché hardly worth any scrutiny. As a recent overview (Ost 2015) demonstrates, during the past decades the degree of interest in class as a relational form of inequality has been appalling throughout the region (see also Kalb 2015a:3). Regardless of the major upheavals of the past three decades, local scholarship on class and its related topics has remained minuscule and entirely marginal in the overall scheme of knowledge production. In its turn, international scholarship has also been rather scant, albeit not entirely lacking in major contributions. With the fall from grace of "transition" and of its cognate metasignifier "postsocialism", ethnographic work on class and industrial labor in CEE witnessed a hiatus in the early 2000s, only to resurge toward the end of the decade as part of a broader, global interest in what Kalb (2011:7-8) refers to as a deepening

“dual crisis”, of popular sovereignty and of labor. There is no coincidence that this hiatus happened at the same time with “eastern Europe’s [ultimate] reversion to capitalism”, which “has moved the locus of ‘system competition’ out of Europe, a fact of crucial strategic significance for states as well as capital in Western Europe” (Böröcz 2010:146). The moving of “the main fault line of the global geopolitical conflict concerning property relations to Asia” (Böröcz 2010:147) has meant that much of the interest in class and labor has been reoriented toward this region. And this not just because funding may be channeled toward dealing with what is of “crucial strategic significance” for capital and states, but also because the rise of East Asia has promised to put labor unrest and explicit class struggle back on the global map of social conflict (see Silver and Zhang 2009), raising intellectual and political hopes that have long been witnessing a secular decline in other parts of the world. Conversely, the revival of scholarship during the late-2000s is not about the hopes, but the fears of what CEE labor might be a harbinger of on a global scale. Joining the reaction of those who insist on the continued global relevance of knowledge “from the South”, some scholars (Kalb 2015b; Ost 2005) have insisted on the global relevance of knowledge “from the East”—that is, from the Eastern European periphery.

Such calls for studying class and labor have nonetheless remained relatively exceptional and the meager literature on CEE labor that does exist would have little to say about the Dacia workers’ predicament. A cursory overview of the existing literature on industrial labor in post-89 CEE suggests that industrial workers striking with resilience and in very large numbers against a multinational corporation in demand of higher wages and improved working conditions and employing a discourse explicitly denouncing economic injustice should not even exist. More than anything, this is a challenge and a call for ethnography.

Making capitalism without proletarians

A concise depiction of the surreptitious exit of class and labor from the scene starting with the 1990s can be obtained by looking at the intellectual trajectory of Michael Burawoy, the global paragon of labor ethnography. Looking for explanations of labor quiescence and unrest, Burawoy started his career by analyzing the labor process under America’s monopoly capitalism in the 1970s and then focused his interest on Hungary’s state socialist regime, where he subsequently began to theorize postsocialism before finalizing his research on the transition to capitalism in postsoviet Russia (see Burawoy 2009). Based on these experiences, in recent years Burawoy has attempted an analysis of capitalism and resistance to “marketization” that has global reach and quasi-universal applicability, moving away from an initial interest in class and labor toward more generic understandings of power and struggle. In the meantime, he (e.g., Burawoy 2010) has also become a latter day denouncer of the “labor metaphysic”, fully embracing Mills’s (1960:22) criticism from half a century earlier: “in the face of the really impressive historical evidence that now stands against this expectation”, it is clear that the belief in the historical agency of industrial labor is “an historically specific idea that has been turned into an a-historical and unspecific hope”. The mutations in Burawoy’s work are crucial for understanding the fate of class and labor in CEE scholarship not just because of its preeminence, but also because it clearly shows how even the most stalwart dedication to these

issues could founder in the face of confusing post-89 realities. The way Burawoy put up a fight against “the really impressive evidence” is just as important.

Undertaking fieldwork in Hungary in the 1980s, Burawoy concluded that state socialist workers were sooner or later bound to revolt, as they confronted a widening chasm between the reality of everyday life on the shop floor and in the neighborhood and the socialist ideology proffered by state representatives. As he would later admit, being entirely absorbed by the question of labor, he completely missed that “state socialism appeared to be crumbling from above, not from below” (Burawoy and Lukács 1992:21). He thus unwillingly joined his worker informants and colleagues in remaining “passive onlookers during the regime’s transition” (Burawoy and Lukács 1992:147). Likewise disillusioned by the gap between ideology and reality, state socialist elites had acted first in bringing about the regime’s downfall. Revising his interpretation of labor politics under state socialism, Burawoy concluded that, notwithstanding its “critical consciousness”, the working class had been “effectively demobilized” (Burawoy and Lukács 1992:147).¹ With history frustrating all expectations of workers’ revolt, new hope was nonetheless to be had in the emerging postsocialist struggles. After witnessing the progressive alignment of both their interests and consciousness in the 1980s, Burawoy insisted, workers now saw themselves betrayed by intellectuals and new political elites who pushed for the establishment of capitalism and the economic and political marginalization of workers. In response, the working class witnessed a process of rapid “self-organization” (Burawoy and Lukács 1992:150) manifest in the effervescence of workers’ councils as a novel form of representation that promised to cancel out the organizational mishaps of state socialism. Apart from such councils, two other pillars of an “emerging alternative” of postsocialist workers’ politics existed: employee ownership and self-management of enterprises and the inevitable emergence of political parties defending workers’ interests on a national level (see Burawoy and Lukács 1992:chapter 6). He predicted that it was just a matter of time before industrial workers made their mark on the trajectories of post-state-socialist society.

Sociology did not yield any significant research on workers’ struggles during the 1990s and instead produced a substantial literature on elites, which Burawoy himself conceded were primarily responsible for bringing about regime change: intellectuals and technocrats were the major agents of change (Eyal, Szelenyi, and Townsley 1998), not industrial workers. Indeed, in the synoptic depictions of the social spaces of “reform communism” and “postcommunism” (see Eyal et al. 1998:33-4), industrial workers are firmly positioned at the (immobile) bottom, remaining a “large and poorly organized” class (Eyal et al. 1998:191), in stark contrast with the highly dynamic and politically consequential second *Bildungsbürgertum*. As such, industrial workers hardly deserved mentioning, let alone the wasting of scholarly resources.

The research program laid out by Eyal et al. easily established itself as dominant, as it promised to explain transformations for many years to come—that is, to provide an adequate description of the distinct type of capitalism emerging in the region—and also throw new light

¹ Interestingly enough, David Ost (2005) argues that it was precisely this “critical consciousness”—that is, the transparency of exploitation at the hands of the state, as opposed to the mystification of everyday life under capitalism—which stifled the development of genuine class politics, as the channeling of demands towards a fetishized state deflected class confrontation proper.

on capitalist transformation as such, a task for which CEE realities comprised a body of pristine strategic research material. In response, Burawoy (2001a) reasserted the thrust of his ethnographic research program on class relations. According to his critique, the “neoclassical sociology” outlined by Eyal et al. abandoned class altogether, as it overestimated “the importance of elites, patterns of privatization, and political democracy” and underestimated “the importance of capital accumulation, class relations, and global forces” (Burawoy 2001a:1101). Most importantly, “their analyses exclude subordinate classes, which in effect become the bewildered—silent and silenced—spectators of transformations that engulf them” (Burawoy 2001a:1107). This distorted reality and offered an at best partial description of postsocialist transformations, while yielding a skewed and ultimately inadequate understanding of the mechanisms driving social change. Burawoy thus insisted that class struggle proper—between the dominant and the dominated, and not just within the field of power—was still the major societal cleavage. Accordingly, there was a need to focus on the economy as structured by “the relations between classes”, on primitive accumulation and dispossession, and on the “potential disruptions of reform” from below. After all, he emphatically concluded, “capitalism may be made without capitalists, but certainly not without workers” (Burawoy 2001a:1116).

Apart from their non-relational understanding of class, which allowed them to deal with “the working class” separately from “the cultural bourgeoisie”, Eyal et al. (2001) added two criteria of relevance which, in their eyes, the postsocialist working class did not meet up to: engagement in collective action and tangible and purposive influence in deciding historical outcomes. Based on these criteria, they insisted, Burawoy offered justification for why workers were interesting in considering post-89 transformations. In fact, the very evidence he brought into play tended to undermine his argument. In a revisit of an old research site toward the end of the 1990s, Burawoy confessed to finding that “habitués had endured”, though “the overwhelming reality was status degradation, deplorable working conditions, plummeting wages, and imminent unemployment” (Burawoy 2001a:1115). He had nothing to say of the hopes of yesteryear: no workers’ councils, no employee ownership of enterprises, no labor parties, and not even any surviving critical consciousness. Indeed, these were exactly the sort of arguments used by scholars who insisted that workers were no longer historically relevant.

The apparent paradox of two ostensibly opposed sides reaching similar conclusions can be dispelled by considering that they started off from two different ideas of the purpose of social scientific research. For Burawoy, if Eyal et al. claimed primarily to describe and explain, he himself claimed not just improved description and explanation, but also a political import that was clandestinely inverted in the elite-centered account. Eyal et al. could nonetheless successfully claim both explanatory and political superiority, while granting some descriptive preeminence to Burawoy’s call for an ethnography of dispossession. In this arrangement, ethnographies of industrial workers would play a part in documenting transformation, albeit without providing explanations and boasting a severely diminished degree of political relevance.

Against such a division of labor, a more sophisticated call for ethnography claimed that macro-oriented accounts of postsocialist transformations did not factor in the possibility “that the collapse of party states and administered economies broke down macro structures, thereby

creating space for micro worlds to produce autonomous effects that may have unexpected influence over the structures that have been emerging” (Burawoy and Verdery 1999:2). Ethnography thus gains an explanatory and political advantage—and not just a purely descriptive one—in comparison to conventional sociological foci of institutions and groups engaged in collective action, since “it is precisely the sudden importance of the micro processes lodged in moments of transformation that privileges an ethnographic approach” (Burawoy and Verdery 1999:2). Accordingly, *Uncertain Transition* lays out an ethnographic research program based on the empirical “iron law of market resistance”, which is said to mirror “the iron law of market expansion” (Burawoy and Verdery 1999:7). Such resistance is not merely a defensive reaction, but, under the peculiar postsocialist condition of institutional and macrosocial unsettlement, is said to have an inherently creative potential and to play a crucial role in shaping emerging macrostructures.

Insofar as industrial workers are concerned, however, here as well the evidence seemed to point in a different direction. Included in *Uncertain Transition*, Sarah Ashwin’s (1999a; 1999b) work rather confirmed Eyal et al.’s suspicions that workers mounted meager, inherently defensive, and macro-inconsequential opposition. Burawoy’s own ethnographic research in Russia resulted in a similar interpretation: during the 1990s, Russia went through an historically unprecedented process of political economic involution (Burawoy 1996; 2001b) that left the working class “decimated” and with “its morale deflated” (Burawoy 2009:234). With an ongoing “primitive disaccumulation” and the bizarre return to a preindustrial dominance of merchant capital, it was difficult to talk of the working class existing even “in itself”. Worse yet, the reaction was “full flight from the market”, in self-defense at first, followed, yet again, by subservience to machinations in the field of power: “There was no evidence that, driven to extremes, it [the Russian working class] would spontaneously turn against the tide as Polanyi imputed to the English working class. Rather, reaction was more likely to come from above by way of a repressive state. Putin fit the role perfectly, personifying the authoritarian response to market fundamentalism” (Burawoy 2009:235).

Fieldwork in Russia convinced Burawoy that he could no longer ignore the evidence: the “labor metaphysic”, which he had so elegantly espoused earlier, required immediate abandonment. The optimism of *The Radiant Past* made no sense retrospectively (see Burawoy 2009:244), as for industrial workers things seemed to have come full circle: from “effective demobilization” and elite scheming under state socialism to effective “decimation” and elite malfeasance in postsocialism. He subsequently replaced Marx with Polanyi, the politics of production with those of marketization, and industrial workers with whatever social actors mounted an opposition to the ongoing “third wave” of marketization; industrial workers had little chance to figure among these (e.g., Burawoy 2010). Despite the persistent argumentative elegance, one would be hard pressed to find any of the Marxist conceptual and methodological thrusts of *The Radiant Past* and of his earlier work in his latest ideas on “sociological Marxism” (e.g., Burawoy 2013). The fact that ethnographic research on postsocialist workers could, in spite of Burawoy’s staunch opposition, contribute decisively to such a spectacular conversion of arguably the most avid supporter of Marxist-inspired research on industrial labor can be said to stand as perfect testimony of the ultimate lack of genuine relevance of an ethnography of class focused on industrial labor in the years following 1989. Burawoy’s intellectual trajectory

epitomizes the convoluted attempts at meaningfully including industrial workers into a research program on postsocialist transformations during the 1990s. Forced to face up to the evidence, many a researcher concluded—either openly and happily like Eyal et al. did from the very beginning, or muttering and grudgingly as Burawoy would belatedly acknowledge—that industrial workers did not fit into even such a broadly conceived ethnographic research program as that centered on micro-macro dynamics. No wonder that in this decade industrial labor figured rather scantily even in anthropology, a discipline that explicitly distinguished itself from the alleged institutionalist or macro-alloofness of sociology. Nonetheless, a handful of researchers took note of this rather glaring absence and pursued the arduous task of filling the gap. In another ironic twist, they found themselves embracing the role of documenting the disappearance of—they as well concluded—an overall societally irrelevant social category. This was essentially a humanitarian task.

Declinism

Despite decrying the lack of anthropological interest in workers' lives, David Kideckel's (2002; 2008) work on Romanian coal miners and chemical workers ends up offering an unusually elaborate justification for its persistence. Indeed, in one of the few full-sized ethnographic works on postsocialist industrial workers, Kideckel does not manage to surpass the problems that made those like Burawoy give up. Instead, he turns necessity into virtue and attempts a painstaking portrayal of workers' collective and individual decline after 1989: material and symbolic debasement, physical and psychological decrepitude, helplessness and disarray all receive plenty of attention as core elements of a broader process whereby the formerly proud socialist working class became "unmade" (Kideckel 2002). Narratives of marginalization and exclusion, community decline and stunted individual biographies abound as workers faced not just an onslaught at the hands of economic transformations—of the too rapid transition to "neo-capitalism", as Kideckel calls it—but also an unprecedented symbolic castigation systematically and viciously thrown at them by new intellectual and political elites (see also Buchowski 2006). Hence, the postsocialist working class has witnessed a wholesale process of "subalternization"; on a massive scale and with immense material and symbolic violence.

Kideckel offers ample evidence of the utter disarray of the working class after postsocialism, as the helplessness induced by incontrollable economic transformations was compounded by collective disorganization and a near-total alienation from politics and from public life more generally speaking. The purpose here is not to look for "resistance", but to uncover workers' "mournful dignity" (Kideckel 2008: 26), since, in a rather extreme gesture for an ethnographer, Kideckel points out that almost nothing that workers do or say can qualify as resistance. Their agency, insofar as it can be said to exist, is essentially "frustrated": while workers do exist, do think, and do act, there is a "generalized failure of worker agency" (Kideckel 2008:13). As powerful social forces relegate their individual and collective beings to the status of "anachronistic artifacts of failed socialism or obstacles in the march to capitalist prosperity" (Kideckel 2008:8), workers' only response consists in desperately attempting to "get by"—that is, to continue to exist, above all biologically. Kideckel's work thus provides the ultimate ethnographic backing for envisioning the postsocialist working class as what

Bourdieu (1977a) called “an object class”, a class so stricken that it is unable to mount even simply discursive forms of opposition to its being dispossessed.

Since Kideckel’s ethnography of workers’ failed agency renders itself out of bounds of the research program outlined by Burawoy and Verdery (1999), not to mention the debates among sociologists, he draws legitimacy from the alleged “critical position [workers occupy] in the postsocialist political and economic landscape”, in that their “lives and words testify to the essences of postsocialist structures” (Kideckel 2008:9). Aside from such vague and somewhat dubious claims, the most plausible justification is of a more political nature, though of a very different kind from Burawoy’s. What justifies ethnography is, above all, moral outrage at the sight of the sheer disaster plaguing huge swathes of humanity after the collapse of state socialism. Documenting workers’ social suffering goes hand in hand with the anthropologist becoming their spokesperson: if intellectuals and trade union leaders are not willing to do it, the task falls in the hands of the ethnographer. Accordingly, Kideckel’s ethnography is accompanied by condemnations of “blaming the victims” of postsocialist transformations and, beyond any academic clout, is ultimately envisioned as an appeal to postsocialist intellectuals, politicians, state representatives and other concerned agencies (see Kideckel 2008:chapter 8) to consider the plight of workers and their communities.

This is a sophisticated and unusually cogent version of what become the dominant genre of writing about industrial workers after 1989. Theirs was a story of indubitable material and symbolic decline, with economic and political transformations driving them into a genuine collective extinction accompanied by spiraling moral breakdown, biological debasement, and utter helplessness to boot. Once initial hopes of the kind espoused in *The Radiant Past* evaporated, the “unmaking of an East-Central European working class” (Kideckel 2002) quickly became the undisputed leitmotif of academic and non-academic commentary on the fate of industrial workers in the region. As it did not unsettle any waters, declinism easily secured an honorable, albeit marginal, spot in the pantheon of knowledge production on social change in former socialist countries.

Kideckel’s idea of “frustrated agency” would attract plenty of criticism from other authors who, under the banner of declinism, have insisted on “detecting” (Mrozowicki 2011:231) workers’ agency despite the postsocialist onslaught. Fatalistic depictions, Mrozowicki (2011:13) insists, tend to “overlook the active efforts individually to cope with changes, such as family entrepreneurship and mass migration abroad”. He concludes that there is plenty of genuine (that is, non-frustrated) agency to be had, although it has only individual manifestations and it is still typically of “the weak”. If Kideckel thought workers’ everyday struggle to get by was the ultimate expression of their helplessness, scholars like Mrozowicki believe that it is in the making of such manifold individual and family livelihood strategies that workers’ participation in postsocialist transformations needs to be sought out. Notwithstanding objective difficulties, workers are not passive or frustrated victims, but genuinely reflexive agents who espouse significant creativity in overcoming daily obstacles. Given its proximity to public policy scholarship and its relative political innocuousness, the emphasis on reflexivity and resources in devising livelihood strategies has become a well-known subgenre of the

declinist paradigm. The working class may be unmade, but (ex-)worker individuals manage to actively rethink their situation, (re)mobilize various types of resources, and survive, somehow.

From this starting point, reasons for optimism have emerged at the margins of declinism. Admitting the unquestionable and overwhelming decline of the ex-socialist working class *qua* class, Stenning (2003; 2005a; 2005b) believes that the eschatological overtones of declinism tend to efface the, as it were, positive side of things: “it is easy to reduce representations of these [i.e., workers’] communities to ones of failure, loss and struggle, and lose sight of both the wider processes of structural change and the more positive practices of kinship, friendship and pleasure and the mundane practices of getting by and making out” (Stenning 2005b:989). Structurally speaking, the working class has experienced decline in a highly uneven fashion, as evidenced by the diversity of livelihood strategies and by the emergence of strongly segmented labor markets. Getting by has begotten not just different forms of consciousness and concerted individual action, but also new forms of solidarity and resources for collective action. These are no longer based in the workplace, but in the community, as workers cope with the “end of work” by reshaping social ties outside the workplace and mobilizing “social capital”. Stenning hopes that such emerging forms of solidarity will eventually coalesce into a bottom-up renewal of trade unionism in the region, under the guise of a novel type of “community unionism” that could finally break the stranglehold of labor weakness plaguing ex-state socialist countries.

This would be a formidable task indeed. After all, the condition of endemic labor weakness has been by far the most documented aspect of the trajectory of the post-89 CEE working class. If decline is a more general characterization that can be obtained by means ranging from statistical accounts of job loss and mortality rates accompanying deindustrialization to detailed studies of forms of consciousness and agency, labor weakness is quite specific in referring strictly to the (in)ability of workers to mount collective forms of opposition to the wave of anti-labor reforms sweeping the region. It is thus both the starting point of declinism and the strong foundation ensuring its perpetuation. As another subgenre of declinism, the labor weakness narrative has received by far the most extensive attention and has generated a rich variety of internal explanatory cleavages. The common diagnostic—trade unions are weak, labor is generally quiescent and mounts a “minimal response” at best (Crowley 2004)—has been backed from multiple sides using a whole gamut of arguments ranging from economic and institutional to more cultural or ideas-centered explanations (see Crowley 2004; Ost and Crowley 2001a; 2001b). Echoing the ethnographic search for agency, the more elaborate versions insist that weakness is not merely an outcome of a combination of oppression and passivity, but rather a result of willing participation, of “labor’s [active] acceptance of the bad deal” (Ost 2000:93). This is not just about the internalization of subalternization, as Kideckel would have it, but, as Ost and Crowley insist, has to do with specific institutional and ideological legacies of state socialism, which lead workers and labor leaders to embrace a more or less idyllic vision of capitalism and voluntarily restrict their potential for collective response to disastrous socio-economic transformations. Here as well, we encounter the “enduring habituses” that Burawoy noticed, though in this version they stifle reaction and deepen workers’ predicament. Once granted validity, countering such arguments

without harking back to a version of the labor metaphysic is a tall order for even the most optimistic standard-bearers of Marxism.

Despite its affinities with ethnographic accounts and regardless of its being a transdisciplinary product par excellence, there are notable tensions between the labor weakness argument centered on national-level cleavages and the ethnographic perspective that builds upon local, everyday realities. Looking at the ethnographic research program outlined by Burawoy and Verdery (1999), the labor weakness argument, at least in its most popular variant (Crowley 2004), can be faulted for at least two important reasons. First, there is the insistence of comparing what could be called Eastern and Western European models of organized labor, or of using Western Europe as benchmark for assessing the weaknesses and strengths of organized labor in the East, a move which ethnographers explicitly warn against (see Burawoy and Verdery 1999:15). Second, there is the somewhat ingenuous understanding of legacies, be they institutional or ideological, which tends to ignore the standard ethnographic principle that “what may appear as ‘restorations’ of patterns familiar from socialism are something quite different: direct responses to the new market initiatives, produced by them, rather than remnants of an older mentality. In other words, (...) what looks familiar has causes that are fairly novel” (Burawoy and Verdery 1999:1-2). To these we could add a third reason: the tendency to efface the diversity of local realities and the disjuncture between local and national outcomes in favor of the latter. Indeed, the labor weakness argument is based almost solely on national-level assessments, backed by the standard battery of indicators: trade union density, collective bargaining coverage rates, incidence of strikes, role of trade unions in national politics, influence on public policy etc. (see Crowley 2004; Ost and Crowley 2001a; 2001b). Insofar as they make use of local case studies and ethnographic evidence, scholars of organized labor’s weakness do so only to further exemplify and confirm their national-level evaluations. At times (e.g., Ost and Crowley 2001a:220), they even argue that there is practically no significant difference between the two. The alignment between proponents of the labor weakness thesis and ethnographers has thus not always been perfect, as it clearly goes against the latter’s common sense. While theirs and Kideckel’s search for “essences” might be entirely compatible, Mrozowicki’s and especially Stenning’s insistence on the importance of diversity and fragmentation within the category of “workers” would certainly pose a few problems; so would accounts stressing the divergence between local and national outcomes when it comes to the strengths and weaknesses of organized labor (see Kalb forthcoming).²

As opposed to Burawoy’s metaphysic, the declinist literature is backed by solid empirical evidence, from which it rarely takes distance. It primarily springs from observations of real social change, of both quantitative and qualitative documentation of the massive decline of industrial labor in former socialist countries. The overbearing conclusion is that, regardless of the scenarios for the region as a whole—evolutionary, as in the advance to postindustrialism, or involutionary, as in the return to preindustrialism—and no matter the different explanatory emphases, there is little else to be done but bid farewell to the working class. This, at least, appears to be the dominant story of the 1990s. Another, less glaring, commonality of this

² For a political scientist’s similar criticism of the labor weakness narrative as overly static, totalizing, and deterministic, see Sil (2013).

literature are the expressed feelings, hopes, or beliefs that starting with the early 2000s things would markedly change as CEE countries appeared to acquire new geoeconomic trajectories. Instead of ubiquitous decline and deindustrialization, the novel phenomena were now the inflow of FDI, the arrival of multinational corporations, EU integration, and overall macroeconomic stabilization. Indeed, all authors mentioned above highlight the importance of this shift, though without elaborating on its exact implications.

The possibility that this shift could bring about a new era for labor is already intimated in the late declinist literature. Though scholarship on livelihood strategies and labor market segmentation has survived relatively unscathed (e.g., Stenning et al. 2008; Stenning et al. 2010) and the argument of labor weakness can still be claimed to hold plenty of validity (e.g., Ost 2011; Varga and Freyberg-Inan 2015), major figures in the field have not shied away from proclaiming “the end of postcommunism” (Ost 2009) and discuss emerging possibilities and signs of trade union revival in the region. As CEE capitalism hit “phase two” (Kalb 2002) in the 2000s, the social scientific debates of the 1990s seemed strangely out of place. Since capitalism “started to operate on the ground” (Kalb 2002:327), sociologists’ major point of controversy—namely, its functioning primarily “from above”—seems to have faded away on its own, leaving the barely formulated promises of “neoclassical sociology” and “postsocialist theory” in the dust. Worse yet, ethnography itself seemed increasingly less relevant, as the research program founded on the ontological assumption of an *ad interim* institutional disarray quickly saw this fundamental justification slip away. Indeed, after living a somewhat belated moment of glory at the beginning of the 2000s (Burawoy 2001a; Hann 2002), the metasignifier of “postsocialism” witnessed a peaceful and entirely uneventful death, despite the occasional attempts at rehashing the scholarly tropes of “transition” (e.g., Bandelj 2016).

What is most striking about this transformation is not that, in bitterly ironical fashion, the narrative of transition could be said to have been vindicated, with “neo-capitalism” sooner than expected giving way to capitalism pure and simple, but the speed with which the scholarly controversies concerning the 1990s were left behind. Contrary to Stenning’s (2005b:989) claim, there was no gap in this literature between “the depiction of the working class as (...) occasionally conscious (...) [and] engaged in industrial action and as a suffering class of the marginal (...), passively experiencing the dissolution of their livelihoods and collective identity”. Insofar as we understand the key word here to be “occasional” and not “action”, the ethnographic and non-ethnographic sides of this literature make for an unusually coherent whole, despite the superficial mismatches and the sheer scale and range of reality it claimed to command epistemically. As the 2000s progressed, however, a chasm opened between existing realities and the representations of labor inherited from the 1990s. Since they aimed not just to document postsocialist transformations but to elaborate encompassing explanations and theorizations of social change that explicitly claimed import in predicting future trajectories, their obvious failure in the latter respect should at least raise some suspicions as to the totalizing arguments resulting from the former.

A reassessment of the 1990s would thus be required to establish the exact lineages of the fully-fledged capitalism arriving in the 2000s. The trajectory of industrial labor would be a prime candidate for such a task, since the 2000s brought workers back toward the forefront of

CEE countries' social landscape. How they could go from apparently completely succumbing collectively and individually to once again assembling an increasingly stable class in itself is a question that is customarily glossed over. The even more urgent matter in this new era, however, proved to be increasing tendency of this old working class to assert itself as a class for itself of sorts. The “end of postcommunism” and the arrival of what is by most recognized to be a mature form of capitalism during the 2000s has thus fully rejuvenated the question of labor's trajectory and potential for action. As before, there have been many answers.

Dependent development and its forces of labor

What was unfathomable in the 1990s and barely intimated during the first half of the 2000s became a widely recognized and fully established truth toward the end of this decade: “transition” had ended, capitalism had finally arrived. It had done so in force and in a peculiar guise, as the former socialist countries firmly set themselves on a path of “dependent development”—or, indeed of “peripheral Fordism” or of any other variation on this topic—similar to the one taken by countries like Brazil and Mexico in the postwar era (Evans 1979; Gereffi and Evans 1981). While they witnessed macroeconomic stabilization and even spectacular returns to growth after a disastrous first postsocialist decade, they did so based on increasingly massive inflows of foreign direct investment coming from Western Europe in particular and on the snowballing weight of exports in their economies. In stark contrast with the relatively significant degree of national economic integration characteristic of state socialism, CEE countries now began to occupy a special position in a continental division of labor as manufacturing bases for Western capital that were “increasingly specialized in labor-intensive export industries such as medium-quality cars, machinery, electronics, and electrical products” (Nölke and Vliegenthart 2009:691).

Far from a simple economic reshuffling, this was a profound transformation that included not just considerable (re)industrialization but also the turning of CEE states into competitive institutional machineries bent on making as many concessions as possible in their race to attract FDI (e.g., Drahokoupil 2009). As scholars working within the “varieties of capitalism” research program emphasize, CEE countries have in fact developed a whole gamut of “institutional complementarities” layered on this hard core of their political economies. Nölke and Vliegenthart (2009:672) argue that these countries have become “dependent market economies”, whose main “comparative advantage [is] in the assembly and production of relatively complex and durable consumer goods. These comparative advantages are based on institutional complementarities between skilled, but cheap, labor; the transfer of technological innovation within transnational enterprises; and the provision of capital via foreign direct investment” (see also Vliegenthart 2010). The Visegrad countries are prime examples of this pattern of dependent development, with Romania following close behind (see Ban 2013). Transnational corporations have thus become major actors in CEE countries, wielding control over whole industries and considerable influence over politics and policy choices from their headquarters abroad. Coupled with EU integration, Bohle (2006) speaks of a genuine “passive revolution” through which CEE countries have become an integral part of a more encompassing “neoliberal hegemony” primarily serving the interests of transnational capital.

There are two important caveats to this. First, this transformation has proven highly uneven. Maintaining a consistent wage gap between the Eastern and Western parts of the EU is *the* constitutive prerequisite of dependent development in CEE, thus reproducing the historical pattern of semi-peripheral integration. Then there are the important differences between former socialist countries, springing from the type of manufacturing industries they rely upon—in other words, depending on the degree of complexity and capital-/labor-intensiveness of their “leading export sectors” (Greskovits 2008). Uneven development within individual countries has likewise proven essential for CEE dependent development. Industrial growth has been highly selective, to the extent that we can speak of a bifurcation between leading export sectors such as automotive and electronics and sectors that have either stayed on the path of post-89 decline, like mining, or experienced a rapid reduction of the prominence they had gained in the 1990s, like textiles. Countering any latter-day revival of the “developmentalist illusion” (Arrighi 1990a) customarily accompanying semi-peripheral integration, CEE countries have experienced the emergence of “dualistic economic structures”, in which “high unemployment and precarious growth perspectives” (Bohle 2006:74) are packaged together with selective reindustrialization and substantial FDI inflows. For labor, dependent development in CEE has quickly produced “a growing dualism (...), with rising disparities between those who participate and those who are excluded or who bear the costs incurred by the generous incentives offered by governments to attract FDI” (Nölke and Vliegenthart 2009:696-7).

Second, this development is not entirely novel, meaning that it does not result from a complete break with the alleged involution of the 1990s. Indeed, behind the smokescreen of generalized degeneration, “rapid and thorough internationalization” (Greskovits 2008:20) was already well apace during the first postsocialist decade. The leading export sectors of the 2000s, among which the automotive industry featured prominently, did not share the disastrous trajectory of other sectors. Even though the later pattern of dependent development was not easily anticipated, selective inflows of manufacturing FDI and the consequent uneven development were already visible in the 1990s (e.g., Ellingstad 1997). If a tipping point was certainly reached only toward the middle of the 2000s, benefitting from the vital boost of EU accession, it is just as certain that the turn to dependent development was brooding from the 1990s. Regarding labor, this poses significant problems springing from the need to distinguish the historical continuities and discontinuities between these apparently very different periods. With a few notable exceptions, this has not been a significant concern for scholars of labor in the region, who have most commonly either stuck to the hackneyed narratives of the 1990s or decidedly ignored the requirement of addressing the labor question in a broader historical perspective.

Consequently, the depth and breadth of labor’s decline in CEE have been much exaggerated. Not because it did not take place as such (it most certainly did!), but rather because, since it did not account for the spatial and temporal dynamics of capital accumulation, the declinist narrative failed to grasp patterns of uneven development already emerging in the 1990s and was quickly caught off guard by the apparent point of rupture of the early-2000s. As with the standard bidding farewell to the working class, declinism was both ecumenical and eschatological. Even a theoretical possibility of reversal seemed out of the question, and, on

the rare occasions when such a possibility was discussed, one had to look to the labor metaphysic for support. If, however, “the theater of class can only be watched in the medium of time” (Kalb 1997:11), it is certain that staying in the 1990s is a mistake and that the first postsocialist decade needs to be integrated into a more encompassing historical narrative that looks at the fate of labor in relationship to the ebb and flow of capital accumulation in a longer time span. In this way, the trajectory of labor in the region can be recast by acknowledging that “historical capitalism (...) [is] characterized by recurrent dynamics, including the continual re-creation of contradictions and conflict between labor and capital” (Silver 2003:3).

In Silver’s (2003:16-20) terms, CEE labor has witnessed two full commodification/decommodification “pendulum swings” during the second half of the twentieth century. What could be called the making of a working class in the region was the outcome of the massive push for industrialization in the postwar era. The results are well known: large scale proletarianization, urbanization and sometimes spectacular achievements in terms of “modernization” (e.g., Chirot 1978), but also a widening chasm between socialist ideology and the reality of everyday life and the systematic fostering of labor unrest (see Arrighi 1990b).³ Silver calls this sort of offensive struggle by newly-formed, “forward-looking” (Ost 2009:26) working classes “Marx-type” labor unrest. In contrast, “Polanyi-type” unrest consists in defensive opposition “particularly by working classes that are being unmade by global economic transformations as well as by those workers who benefited from established social compacts that are being abandoned from above” (Silver 2003:20). The latter was characteristic for workers in former socialist countries during the 1990s and, where decline persisted, even into the 2000s (Ost 2009:26). Individual exit in some cases (Greskovits 1998), collective voice in others (Varga 2014) were typical reactions to the dismantling of the political economic scaffolding of the state socialist working class after 1989. As with other historical instances of localized disaccumulation discussed by Silver, this second swing of the pendulum in CEE was accompanied by a weakened labor movement, ultimately proving unable to resist. From this perspective, the trajectory of industrial labor in former state socialist countries in the second half of the twentieth century certainly approximates that of many other labor forces across the globe, albeit the scale and speed at which working classes were made and subsequently remade in the former cases might have been unprecedented. Nonetheless, at the abstract level at which she formulates her argument, Silver’s thesis fully stands up to the test of state socialism and postsocialism.

What, then, of the arrival of capitalism proper in the region starting with the 2000s? For one thing, the continued cycle of investment–disinvestment–reinvestment is far from new, and the resemblances between the region’s dependent development and other historical instances of semi-peripheral integration are anything but happenstance. Notwithstanding her caveat that the environments of accumulation and class formation in which each such cycle takes place are themselves substantially transformed as this dynamic unfolds, if Silver’s argument continues to apply, could we be witnessing a renewed “making” of an industrial working class, followed by a shift in labor’s stance from defense to offense, from the Polanyi-type unrest of the 1990s

³ Apart from voice, exit is another manifestation of labor unrest, as is neglect. Although Silver’s empirical investigation focuses practically only on labor unrest as collective action expressing voice, she acknowledges that this is just one of many possible forms labor unrest can take (see Silver 2003:34).

to a novel Marx-type unrest? This question of a third possible pendulum swing of labor de/commodification has been highlighted as one of the major questions of relevance for assessing not just the trajectory of CEE labor at the beginning of the new millennium, but also that of capitalism and democracy in the region (e.g., Bohle and Greskovits 2006; Ost 2009; Vliegenthart 2010).

There is a more global challenge to be had here, of the like claimed by scholars who advocate the relevance of “theory from the east” (Kalb 2015b; forthcoming; Ost 2005). The fact that Marx-type unrest would have undoubtedly been regarded as a total absurdity in the most recent past cannot be so easily skipped over. Indeed, the peculiarity of CEE is that, within the span of one or two generations, it has witnessed the making, unmaking and now incipient remaking of its forces of industrial labor. Today, it would still not be that difficult to encounter workers whose active working life spanned the 1980s, 1990s, 2000s and 2010s, four arguably radically different periods in what concerns capital accumulation and class dynamics. To put it differently, the three macrosociological pendulum swings can be looked at as overlapping historical layers shaping workers’ biographies, working class institutional and cultural formations, as well as forms of unrest and politics. The historical conjuncture making such a juxtaposition possible is relatively unique even from the standpoint of world-systems analysis, which typically stresses the combination of repetition and difference in history. First, with the fully-fledged incorporation of China and India into the capitalist world-economy, capital has increasingly less pre- or non-capitalist territories at hand for its spatial fixes. While this most certainly does not spell the end of such spatial fixes, future ones would more probably entail the reincorporation of already “made” or still very recently “unmade” ones. This is a development Silver (2003:6) does anticipate when observing that, in major sectors such as automobile manufacturing, capital has begun to increasingly relocate back to the old core countries from where it had departed in previous decades, in order to reap the super-profits now made available by the weakening of the very labor movements that had allegedly pushed it to the periphery. Before voicing any hopes of the cyclical renewal of working class formation and Marx-type unrest, we must acknowledge the genuine novelty of this situation and recognize the problems it poses for understanding the evolution of labor movements from a systemic standpoint. Under such conditions, the links between workers’ structurally advantageous positions and their engagement in collective action—links which Silver (2003:31-4) believes are unproblematic enough to be excluded from her analysis—would have to be granted much more attention. Indeed, a possible cycle of making-unmaking-remaking of working classes is something that stands almost completely outside Silver’s analysis, despite clearly being anticipated by it. Addressing this becomes even more urgent given the “‘speeding up’ of social history” (Silver 2003:79) that is likely to make such series of three pendulum swings at the same time more prevalent and more salient.

In this way, the labor question in Central and Eastern Europe at the beginning of the new millennium can constitute yet another piece of strategic research material offered by the region, after highlighting the limits of experimentation with non-capitalist alternatives (see Böröcz 2010:113) and recasting the classical sociological interest in the “the origins and character of modern capitalism” (Eyal et al. 1998:3). It is not a question of postsocialist industrial labor forces per se, as the compressed juxtaposition of historical layers described

above is rather unique to former state socialist countries in Europe. China, for example, has been experiencing the three-swing sequence in a rather peculiar fashion, with the geographical separation of a working class being unmade in its mainland “rustbelt” and a working class being made in its coastal “sunbelt” (see Lee 2007). The trajectory of CEE labor, on the other hand, has seen no such clear-cut separation between subcontinent-sized regions. Uneven development in CEE is not just massive, but takes shape between immediately adjacent areas—both between and within regions and localities—which makes it highly visible and salient in people’s everyday life. This difference can be expected to have a major impact both on individual biographies and on actual, lived relations between workers; via these proxies, it most likely also has a major impact in shaping labor unrest in the region. Studying the trajectory of CEE labor across the three-swing sequence while paying close attention to the intertwinement of repetition and difference can thus illuminate potentialities and pitfalls for labor forces in other regions, where the third swing has not picked up this much pace just yet. This empirical and theoretical import of studying present-day labor in this region compounds the likewise general conundrum of labor’s position and role under conditions of semi-peripheral dependent development. To these we must add the increasing political urgency of the labor question more generally speaking, which is another dimension the study of CEE labor is particularly well positioned to address (Kalb 2015b; forthcoming; Ost 2005).

Semi-peripheral integration and the entrenchment of dependent development initially entailed that, notwithstanding the return to growth, the marginalization of labor characteristic of the 1990s was not about to be reversed by FDI seeking cheap labor nor by states eager to make considerable institutional and political concessions in attracting such investments. Three types of reactions from labor have been identified in the literature. First, there is the option of “exit” mainly through mass migration that was greatly facilitated by EU accession, with research on East-West labor migration inheriting the major concern for individual or household strategizing of the livelihood strategies literature of the 1990s. This clearly resembles similar trends from the first postsocialist decade (Greskovits 1998), although ultimately the effects might prove to be quite different from patience and “crisis-proof” democracies. On the one hand, mass migration produces labor shortages and tightens labor market (Meardi 2007; 2012), thus strengthening workers’ “marketplace bargaining power” (Silver 2003:13) on top of the renewed “workplace bargaining power” endowed by industrial recovery, which authors like Meardi insist should favor the emergence of Marx-type unrest. On the other hand, the continued stifling of explicit class politics could under such circumstances foster reactions of a different kind, as observed by the growing concern with the increasing ascendancy of neonationalist populism in the region.

The capturing of class-generated anger via “anti-immigrant and anti-communist discourses” projecting it “onto supposed intruders into the national space and body politic” (Kalb 2011:30) seems to be the most widespread reaction beside mass migration, and not Silver’s Marx-type movements. Pioneered by David Ost (2005) and subsequently turned into a fully-fledged research program of continental relevance by Kalb and his collaborators (Kalb 2009; 2014; Kalb and Halmai 2011), the study of “the return of the passions” (Ost) or of “the repressed” (Kalb) has replaced declinism as the dominant narrative concerning labor in CEE and beyond. Such a return is equal, these authors claim, to a backlash against the systematic

turning of postsocialist working classes into subalternized object classes—of their dispossession, disenfranchisement, and denial of political and economic agency—who now attempt to reclaim their capacity to count as subjects. As the convoluted traumas of the 1990s and, above all, the break between intellectuals and workers have continued to weigh heavily on workers' capacity to understand and act in the world, this appears only in the guise of systematic misrecognition, as class politics is replaced by “culture talk”, and visions of democratic inclusion are replaced by “exclusionary solidarities” or “de-solidarizing logics” in which tests of worthiness are no longer applied primarily across class divides proper but within them. The successful capturing of workers' and ex-workers' anger by “the organized radical Right” (Kalb 2014:253) has meant that what are primarily “economic conflicts (...) have consistently been turned into battles over who is a true member of the community” (Ost 2005:186). These authors' concern for the deleterious impact this has had on democratic politics in the region has been fully vindicated by the political preeminence gained by neonationalist populism since the early 2000s to the present. *Pace* Greskovits (1998), the crisis of liberal democracy in the region now appears to have become endemic.

The consistent body of research on working class populism builds on the strong inheritance of labor declinism from the 1990s. It starts from the observation that all-out subalternization has continued into the 2000s and that it has cumulated to the point of political explosion. It also amends some of the major problems of the declinist paradigm. While Ost (2005) offers a crisp analysis of the social mechanisms and historical legacies contributing to the proliferation of working class populism in former socialist countries, Kalb and Halmai (2011) provide substantial ethnographic evidence of how things happen on the ground and of the significant empirical diversity of the phenomenon. Nonetheless, some of the problems of declinism are passed over into the research on working class populism. Just like declinism failed in coming up with an adequate description of labor's trajectory during the 1990s and instead imposed a totalizing narrative drawn up from national-level evaluations corroborated with dedicated ethnographic case studies, research on working class populism uses the same means to put together a remarkably unified portrayal of what is in fact a significantly more diverse working class experience. To be sure, Ost and especially Kalb clearly state that their objective is to describe and explain working class populism and not to provide a more or less full account of workers' objective and subjective existence, which takes on the role of *explanans*, not of *explanandum*, as was the case with declinism. Still, the problem does creep its way into the analysis. Even though Kalb (2011:2) admits to the “overwhelming heterogeneity of its [capitalism's] wage-dependent classes”, the chapters in *Headlines of Nation, Subtexts of Class* are meant to display this heterogeneity mainly between cases or locales, and not within them. Moreover, just like Kideckel's (2008) comparative ethnography of labor decline and Burawoy's (1996) comparison of “uneven involution” in Russia, these cases are meant to provide some degree of variation in accounting for the same general phenomenon, whose ubiquitousness is taken for granted. Decline and involution are never questioned by comparison, but only strengthened. With the ethnographic research program on working class populism this nonetheless happens in the absence of the strong totalizing claims of declinism, as it operates under the umbrella of a tempered concern for the macro-level implications of microprocesses.

While the importance of intra-class polarization and struggle is openly stressed by Kalb (2011), the ethnographies included in the book have surprisingly little to say about uneven development, economic dualization, and trajectory bifurcation within workers' ranks. Doing research in a region in which "new green-field plants (...) generated substantial employment and offered among the best wages (...) to young, educated workers" (Kalb 2011:25), Bartha (2011) focuses her attention on "the slowly dying Rába plant" (Kalb 2011:25) and on workers' "painful experiences" that have "effectively challenged the neoliberal chimera of development through privatization and fueled the construction of popular 'narratives of decline'" (Bartha 2011:96). In what looks like a carbon copy of declinist ethnographies from the 1990s, we hear nothing of those workers in the up-and-coming greenfield plants Kalb mentions, who might have boasted quite different narratives than those of workers in a "slowly dying" plant. Moreover, the proximity of prospering and dying industrial operations exacerbates the question of what role immediately tangible intra-class polarizations play in workers' everyday lives and in the forging of solidarities. Showing an interest in this would have corresponded to the increasing importance of dualization, as highlighted by political economists of dependent development in post-2000 CEE. In Bartha's account, however, we get a story of the political economy of the 1990s producing political effects in the 2000s.

Both Ost (2005:chapters 6 and 7) and Kalb (2009:219) admit that, as dependent development picked up pace, signs of an alternative reaction—namely, that of Marx-type unrest proper—were becoming apparent. While much of the research on working class populism in CEE studiously avoids tackling this possibility head on, the onset of the crisis at the end of the 2000s and the surging of populist politics in its aftermath provided even stronger evidence that, regardless of substantial reindustrialization, working class populism is still the main—or, indeed, the only—lesson to be had (see Kalb forthcoming). Meanwhile, labor weakness and Polanyi-type unrest have made it back on the agenda once the crisis entered full swing (e.g., Bohle 2011). In addressing Silver's hypothesis directly, Bohle and Greskovits (2006) argue that an improvement in workers' livelihood could be observed once FDI-led growth became established, though only in select leading export sectors. They insist that the main cause behind this bifurcation has been capital's propensity to concede higher wages and improved working conditions in anticipation of the high costs of potential labor unrest. This happens especially in capital- and skill-intensive industries, which is why workers in these sectors have witnessed a marked improvement in their livelihood (see Greskovits 2008). Recasting Silver's argument, the main determinant of this improvement is workers' increased workplace bargaining power, which itself results from characteristics internal to capital.⁴ The important caveat here is that, unlike Silver, Bohle and Greskovits do not link workers' structural power with collective action and choose to explicitly attribute agency to capital, who is said to anticipate potential unrest and opt for countering its emergence. Furthermore, Bohle and Greskovits point out that, notwithstanding the boost of its workplace bargaining power, there has not been any significant "labor empowerment" per se even in these leading export

⁴ This is by far the dominant interpretation in the political economy literature on CEE labor, which has soared in the aftermath of EU expansion. Variations of this capital-logic approach would include workers' growing marketplace bargaining power as a result of labor shortages induced by mass migration (e.g., Jürgens and Krzywdzinski 2009).

sectors. This corresponds perfectly well with Nölke and Vliegenthart's (2009:677-8) observation that transnational corporations investing in CEE tend to voluntarily "appease" their labor forces, while joining governments in attempting to prevent the adoption of national-level regulations favoring labor over capital. If this were to happen, they insist, the model of dependent development could easily hit a structural crisis.

The apparently overwhelming dissonance between theory (the expectation of Marx-type unrest) and history (the heavy legacy of labor weakness) is thus solved by appealing to capital-logic explanations that entirely bracket the question of workers' collective action, and, indeed, the question of workers' existing as agents in the first place. Labor's efforts to organize, to mobilize resources, to develop strategies and tactics—in short, workers' "associational power" (Silver 2003:13)—can be left entirely outside the analysis while still explaining empirical outcomes. This happens regardless of the awkwardness of having to admit that, at least in some cases, overt strike threats were needed for capital to concede (Bohle and Greskovits 2006:19). Authors like Meardi (2007), on the other hand, point out that improved workers' livelihoods cannot be simply attributed to the structure and will of capital and that under conditions of dependent development labor must organize and fight to achieve this. He insists that, around the middle of the 2000s, there were signs that the boost in workers' marketplace and workplace bargaining power was about to be accompanied by a renewal of their associational power. Individual exit strategies created room for the collective expression of voice. Even so, Meardi (2007:518) admits that the potential upscaling of the struggles for "social compromise" beyond select instances where combinations of structural and associational power can be obtained would require significant "social and cultural driving forces."

In the most systematic discussion to date of the potential for Marx-type labor unrest in CEE's dependent market economies, David Ost (2009) highlights five separate factors favoring trade union revival and the reversal of labor weakness: "[the] survival imperatives of union bureaucracies, integration into the European Union, emerging international solidarity, a new generation of workers, and the end of postcommunism in the firm, or the dismissal of unessential workers" (Ost 2009:20). He claims these five elements allow for the overcoming of labor weakness by fostering workers' associational power. While "the end of postcommunism" might in this way spell a new starting point for organized labor in CEE, a renewed labor movement would have to be built on the heavy legacies of, this time around, postcommunism: a growing chasm between trade union leaders and members, a widely shared suspicion toward the very idea of labor organization, as well as the absence of Gramscian intellectuals who could grant public representation and ideological coherence. On top of this, there are obstacles that have to do with the structural characteristics of CEE economies after the first postsocialist decade: the predominance of small firms and of labor-intensive investment, which are less favorable toward organized labor. Given such obstacles, Ost (2009:30-1) concludes, the economic dualization of CEE countries might just end up reproducing a divided trade unionism typical of dependent development as observed in the Global South—divided to the point that it is unable to form a broader movement capable of advancing workers' class interests. The heavy legacy of the 1990s, when trade unionists rejected the formation of such a broad-based labor movement above all else, might prove to be

too big of an obstacle, as unionists would find it difficult to leave behind the intra-class cleavages of the 1990s regardless of their newfound willingness to mount an opposition against employers. All this has remained at the level of a rather hypothetical, albeit well-informed, discussion. With the onset of the crisis at the end of the 2000s, the interest in Marx-type unrest and in the inklings of broader transformations in the labor landscapes of Central and Eastern Europe have once again subsided.

Labor's hidden histories

There have thus been three concurrent reactions to labor's persistently subordinate position in the new dependent market economies of Central and Eastern Europe: mass migration, a result of the reorientation of individual and household livelihood strategies; the populist backlash, a result of a revanchist rapprochement between disenfranchised workers and intellectuals and politicians turned into right-wing "political entrepreneurs"; and a potential and as of yet not as visible form of collective reaction akin to Silver's Marx-type labor unrest, based on rekindled work-based solidarity and trade union revival. This last reaction has received by far the least attention and has mostly been regarded with skepticism. It is thus clear that, when we speak of the trajectory of industrial labor in former state socialist countries, we are not dealing with a fundamentally uniform "hidden history" spanning a wide variety of empirical instantiations (see Kalb 2009; 2011), but with at least three distinct types of hidden histories that are linked to deepening intra-class fragmentation in the aftermath of the 1989 upheaval. These histories have not unfolded in isolation from each other. Instead, they have remained intertwined via the workings of state mechanisms of representation and redistribution, labor markets, public spheres, as well as the direct interaction between their protagonists.

Such labor fragmentation is driven by the systematic fostering of uneven geographical development as a result of changing patterns of accumulation, among which dualization has become the most prominent feature, and the rescaling of statehood, which increasingly makes national-level redistribution meant to mitigate spatial inequality a thing of the past (Brenner 2004). The more visible inter-country and inter-regional forms of uneven development hide substantial intra-regional and intra-local unevenness, these being the two scales at which labor markets actually function (Peck 1996) and at which solidarities are primarily forged or broken. Compounding geography, there is also a vital historical dimension to this, as these diverging hidden histories can be traced back to the 1990s. To be sure, while a tipping point was indeed reached toward the middle of the 2000s, the idea of this being a near-total historical break of sorts is undoubtedly exaggerated and has done more to hide the different histories of labor than to reveal them; industrial workers encountered dependent development from different starting points, with sometimes radically different resources and prospects. And yet it is precisely this sort of break that has been explicitly or implicitly favored by much of the research on workers starting with the 1990s. In spite of persistent warnings of the importance of uneven development and social fragmentation within workers' ranks (see Kalb forthcoming), ethnographies of labor have relied on a rather discretionary choice of case studies, formulating totalizing accounts of decline or backlash, with little systematic interest for intra-class fragmentation accompanying political economic change. Research on miners and steelworkers has abounded, while workers in manufacturing sectors that have not witnessed decline and

have even grown has been absent entirely.⁵ Despite the growing conspicuousness of this absence and although authors like Kideckel (2002:115) admit that exceptions to labor decline did exist while others like Burawoy (2001a:1115-6) go as far as pointing to major differences existing between steel and autoworkers at the end of the 1990s, the discussion of these differences and their implications has almost never surpassed the anecdotal.⁶

Hence, in the terms of Burawoy's (2000:27) Althusserian classification, most of the ethnographic work on industrial labor in post-89 CEE has operated with an "expressive" understanding of the relationship between part and whole, in which relatively homogeneous local outcomes are supposed to immediately reveal and reconfirm interpretations of macroprocesses at the national level and beyond. A "structured" understanding of the relationship between part and whole, which Burawoy advocates for, could not have taken for granted the importance of uneven development and social fragmentation producing novel intra-class cleavages and bifurcating trajectories. Such an ethnographic account would start from the basic assumption that, more than ever, the generic category of "industrial workers" is in need of major qualifications due to industrial, geographical and institutional fragmentation. Apart from a synchronic assessment of such differences, in accounting for why labor's contemporary responses vary, it would have to look back in time and identify the significant differences in the hidden histories that lay behind such responses. In short, what we need is historical ethnographic accounts that start from the assumption of the paramount importance of uneven development and social fragmentation as well as the coexistence of historical continuity and discontinuity in the present-day lives and past trajectories of industrial workers. Thus reconstructed, the hidden histories of labor can explain present outcomes, assess potentialities, and reveal pitfalls, for both scholarship and struggle.

This dissertation contributes to this broader goal by uncovering one instance of the third, and by far the least studied type of hidden history: that of workers who, starting with the 2000s, were set on the path of trade union revival and Marx-type labor unrest following their directly benefitting from manufacturing FDI flowing into the region. While asking what the significant differences are between the present-day experience of such workers and that of those who feature prominently in accounts of unequivocal disenfranchisement, the dissertation also looks at whether their recent past might likewise be dissimilar from the usual story of weakness and decline. A more adequate picture of the extant diversity of industrial labor in CEE should emerge from this, as should a more nuanced and empirically viable understanding of how workers experienced not one but several subsequent ruptures over the course of just one or maybe two generations: regime change in 1989, the turbulent reform period of the 1990s, privatization, FDI inflow, EU accession, and the crisis of the late 2000s and early 2010s. While such a historical ethnography of labor necessarily highlights the limits of various

⁵ Compounding its scarcity, research on Romanian workers deals overwhelmingly with the case of Valea Jiului coal miners, a region that has over the years been turned into a pristine place of pilgrimage for both foreign and local scholars. Regardless of the undoubtedly hard labor, this has happened in almost complete disregard for the very peculiar position, condition, and trajectory of this workforce.

⁶ Dunn's (2004) work is somewhat of an exception in this regard, although she shies away from distancing herself from the standard declinist narrative, to which her ethnography does not mount any challenge. The fact that Dunn's fieldwork was done in the mid-1990s, when fragmentation might not have yet yielded any significant consequences is also important.

institutionalist, elite-centered, or capital-logic interpretations, it does not eschew their relevance entirely and instead aims at positioning workers and their representatives within this thicket of actors, relations, and conflicts. In this way, it fully engages with the complexity-revealing comparative advantage of ethnography: not labor metaphysics, but concrete struggles and lived experience; not homogeneity and essences, but structured overdetermination; not theory or history, but their seamless entanglement.

The theoretical lens through which these questions are broached is that of class in its “expanded” version (Kalb 1997), linking the politics of production with those of reproduction, the experience of everyday life on the shop floor with that in the neighborhood in a consistently relational framework attentive to complexity and process above all else. Three major issues of interest come out of the combination of this approach and the above discussion. First, there is the question of organized labor, of the reality of Marx-type labor unrest proper in an overall context of labor weakness, of the various resources mobilized to make this happen, of the devising of strategies and tactics, of its multifaceted meanings and determinations, as well as of its existing and lacking potentialities. Second, there is the question of labor markets as the primary immediate drivers of inequality and fragmentation, as they are in their turn shaped by broader transformations fostering uneven development as well as by people’s relentless search for secure livelihoods. Third, there is the urban question, which is of paramount importance in understanding struggles over social reproduction and accounting for the availability of resources of solidarity and of motives for division. In sticking with the expanded interpretation of class analysis, I deal with all three of these dimensions in building up a composite and intrinsically dynamic picture of class relations that uncovers substantial complexity and continuity behind the appearance of uniformity and rupture.

The case: Dacia as strategic research material

The case chosen for this task is the one presented at the start of this introduction: the Dacia–Renault plant located in the town of Mioveni, approximately 120 km northwest of Bucharest. Dacia has several peculiarities that make it a particularly good choice in attempting to untangle the third type of hidden history. First and foremost, it appears to be an excellent example of emergent Marx-type labor unrest in the region following substantial FDI in manufacturing. Furthermore, as I argued above, capital-logic explanations and interpretations that avoid confronting present developments with the past carry very limited import in explaining labor unrest at Dacia. Third, Dacia is a prime example of the leading export operations that form the hard core of CEE dependent development, as does the entire automotive industry, which has become the region’s leading export sector par excellence. A brief look at the trajectory of this industry during the past decades is needed in order to understand more clearly what Dacia is a case of.

In broad strokes, the history of the CEE automotive industry starting with the second half of the twentieth century highlights the importance of specifically sectoral dynamics as opposed to national or regional accounts of industrialization and deindustrialization. Policies aimed at developing domestic automobile industries were implemented across the state socialist bloc starting with the 1960s, being part of a broader shift from collective to individual

consumption and the development of mass domestic markets for consumer goods (see Böröcz 2010:134-5; Siegelbaum 2011). To do so, state socialist governments acquired licenses from Western European producers who at the time faced an increasingly tough competitive environment and saw the state socialist option as an opportunity for a vital spatial fix. Abandoning the initial focus on domestic markets, CEE car assembly plants were eventually used by state socialist governments in their desperate attempts at acquiring hard currency via exports. Both policies failed, as the production of automobiles in CEE before 1989 systematically lacked quality on exports markets and quantity on domestic ones.

Contrasting with the decline of other industrial sectors after 1989, CEE again became the target of a spatial fix by Western European producers (Sadler, Swain, and Hudson 1993), while also attracting Asian manufacturers seeking easier access to European markets. Automobile assemblers' "rush to the East" (van Tulder 2004) happened very early on, with old automobile plants being taken over by Western European companies and many greenfield factories also being established during the 1990s (see Pavlínek 2002a). Observers of the CEE automotive industry were already talking of semi-peripheral integration, dependency, and uneven development no later than the early-2000s (e.g., Pavlínek 2002b). By the time dependent development entered full swing in the mid-2000s, the CEE automotive industry had emerged as the region's sectoral powerhouse, fully integrated into a continent-sized space of accumulation (Domański and Lung 2009). The market-seeking investments of the early 1990s had now largely given way to export-based, efficiency-seeking investments eager to reap the major benefits offered by CEE production sites: abundant, cheap and skilled labor, and proximity to Western European markets. The transfer of production capacities from West to East meant that, at the beginning of the 2010s, countries like the Czech Republic and Romania could compete in terms of production figures with countries like France and, respectively, Belgium—a staggering transformation in terms of both scale and speed. Accompanying this spectacular growth, interregional uneven development has become a particularly prominent feature of the industrial geography of CEE countries (see Pavlínek, Domański, and Guzik 2009). This has occurred on a local level as well, prompting researchers to look at the automobile industry above all others in developing various capital-logic explanations of labor appeasement (e.g., Bohle and Greskovits 2006; Jürgens and Krzywdzinski 2009). This would be the sector where we would most likely encounter instances of Marx-type labor unrest.

Behind this common story lies considerable variation in labor relations, not just when it comes to the much-discussed differences between assemblers and suppliers, but also between assemblers themselves (Drahokoupil, Myant, and Domonkos 2015). In this variegated landscape of CEE automobile production, Dacia has a very peculiar position. Together with Ford's Craiova plant, it is one of the two major assembly plants in Romania, a late comer to the automotive investment frenzy (Egresi 2007). It is a brownfield investment whose history dates back to the late 1960s. The plant's privatization to Renault in 1999 came as a result of the Romanian government's boosted interest in attracting foreign investors (more on this in chapter 3) and Renault's renewed interest in developing its business on an international level in the aftermath of the Asian Crisis (see Freyssenet 2007; 2009). Corresponding to its drive for innovation at the time, Renault's plans in acquiring Dacia aimed at developing an entirely new low-cost vehicle meant for the growing middle classes in newly developing countries such as

those of CEE. The resulting range of cars based on the new Logan platform proved to be a genuine “revelation” (Freyssenet 2009:280-1), with Renault managing to extract substantial innovation rents based on its reenvisioning of the age-old idea of a “people’s car”. Since its inception at Dacia, the Logan range has been transformed into a global success, being produced across the globe, yielding huge profits, and acquiring massive weight in Renault’s global operations (Jullien, Lung, and Midler 2012). Mirroring this global success, by the mid-2010s Dacia had established itself as Romania’s largest exporter and largest company in terms of annual turnover. Among the manifold organizational innovations, a peculiarity of the Dacia plant clearly stands out. With a workforce standing at well over ten thousand, the plant is not your typical capital- but not labor-intensive investment. In this sense, it does not fit easily in the categories developed by Bohle and Greskovits in devising their capital-logic approach to CEE labor relations. If anything, the huge importance of labor costs at Dacia—due not just to the large number of workers, but also to the massive cost pressures on which the innovation rents of its products depend—should make the plant particularly sensitive to conflicts over wages and other labor-related issues. The fact that it also boasts a unionization rate far superior to other major CEE assembly plants, outmatching even the famed “German model” of unionization (see Adăscăliței and Guga 2015), and that it is by all appearances backed up by strong militancy only makes the case more interesting for uncovering alternative hidden histories of labor in the region.

Ethnography and history

The dissertation is based on 18 months of fieldwork in Mioveni, lasting from July 2012 to December 2013. My initial intention was to move into town, find a factory job, and study whatever archives were available. Soon after I accomplished the first goal, I realized that doing the rest was going to be a tall order. Finding a job in the plant was particularly difficult, as I had not anticipated the peculiar labor market position the Dacia plant had occupied in the aftermath of the 2008 strike. More than just a result of my frustration, the constant controversies of who gets to work in the plant and what it takes to do it led me to expand my horizons beyond my original interest in organized labor and look at the shape and history of the local labor market. Archives, moreover, proved impossible to access and all my attempts at contacting the company in this regard added up to nothing.

As I was trying to get access to archival material and struggling to understand whether I would manage to find a factory job or not, I pursued a third direction, which for obvious reasons seemed much easier to approach and eventually yielded more ethnographic material than I could handle. I began to hang out with groups of workers in their off time, and especially before and after each work shift. Places for hanging out are scattered across Mioveni, with male workers regularly congregating around apartment buildings and grocery stores. In due time, I became a regular in several such groups, comprising mostly factory workers in their thirties and forties. “Outsiders”, as I will call them in part III, meaning those who have to make ends meet without secure and well-paid jobs, were a constant presence on the fringes of these groups and some could even claim—but not always meet up to the requirements of—regular membership. Apart from being a source of information on labor organization and the labor market, I turned public life itself into a research topic, as I witnessed firsthand some of the

major, fast-paced transformations of public space and interaction in Mioveni. More than half-way through my fieldwork I had the chance to become a regular in a rather peculiar group of workers, very different both from those having factory jobs and from the outsiders: young workers in their twenties who worked in the automobile factory only occasionally, on temporary contracts and on special 12-hour week-end shifts. They offered me a different perspective on the difficulties of social reproduction that many established older workers also struggled with.

During my stay in Mioveni, I regularly attended public celebrations, visited various social events organized by local authorities, and participated in public meetings held at the town hall. I also interviewed trade union leaders as well as workers and inhabitants who I contacted via different channels than my neighborhood connections. After several blunders, I understood that formally interviewing those with which I hanged out in the neighborhood was out of the question. This was partly because of my unescapably problematic status of being a Bucharest-born, foreign-educated “sociologist” who claimed to be doing something rather mysterious for a living (after several painstaking attempts, I gave up trying to explain how I could pay rent off “research”), who looked much younger than his actual age, conspicuously avoided confrontation and, above all, seemed unusually easygoing in daily interaction. In due time, I realized this was also because workers shunned as much vulnerability-inducing exposure as possible and refrained from significant trust investments among themselves, a barrier which I rarely managed to break through and which I also turned into a topic of research. Everyday interaction among male workers was not the sort of homey, carefree, smoothly egalitarian affair that we hear so much about in ethnographies of working class life. There was plenty of this, to be sure, but the potential for conflict always lurked in the background. Navigating such a danger-ridden field was not easy, especially as I set my sights on understanding why this was so.

In what was to become one of the two major breakthroughs of my work in the field, a few months into my stay in Mioveni I began investing part of my time in reading the local and regional press with the intention of using newspaper articles for a more systematic reconstruction of the history of the town and the plant. I was lucky enough to find that Dacia and Mioveni had an unusually rich tradition in this regard, with two major local publications spanning the past two decades. *InfoAutoturism* was the newspaper edited by the trade union from the late days of December 1989 to the present. Initially called *Autoturism*, it changed its name in 1994 after merging with *InfoDacia*, a similar—though to my knowledge now lost—publication edited by Dacia’s management. From 1994 to late 1999, *InfoAutoturism* officially functioned as a joint union–management publication, but was in fact largely run by trade unionists. Immediately after privatization, the new Renault management insisted on making a mark on the newspaper and up until 2003 the content was effectively split between the two sides. A general strike in 2003 also marked management’s giving up on the newspaper and its complete return in the hands of the trade union. It remained a regular publication—monthly and sometimes bi-monthly—until the 2008 general strike, after which it was published only sporadically and with increasingly lower quality content. Throughout the 1990s and the first half of the 2000s, *InfoAutoturism* dealt with a host of issues, ranging from trade union meetings, the economic situation of the company, the broader Romanian trade union movement, as well

as a plethora of accounts of everyday life on the shop floor and in Mioveni; it constantly presented plans, highlighted problems, and hosted debates. The quantity and quality of this content permitted a full reconstruction of the history of the trade union movement and of labor relations on the Dacia platform. Similarly, newspapers edited by Mioveni's local authorities—the most important of which was *Miovenii*, another monthly—proved invaluable. Though not as rich and systematic as *InfoAutoturism*, these still offered plenty of material for my dealing with public life and urban change from the 1990s to the present. I used these local sources as a filter for a systematic survey of the regional and central press across the same period. I also did a more selective reading of the pre-89 regional press.

The combination of historical sources and ethnographic fieldwork allowed me to reconstruct the history of organized labor, of the local labor market, and of everyday urban life. Conforming to the principles of the extended case method (Burawoy 2009; Evens and Handelman 2006), I used present events as both starting points and the end points for this reconstruction. My goal was to look at history to explain the present and to interpret past events in a way that makes sense from the standpoint of the present.

There are two additional implications of both the nature of my material and of the way in which I chose to interpret it. First, the entire dissertation has a strong and implicit focus on what could be called a local public sphere and constructs a story of its historical openings and closures. This contrasts with much of the literature on workers in former state socialist countries, which largely ignores the very possibility of such local public spheres existing. Instead, scholars customarily look only at national public spheres from which they can elaborate on the conflict between intellectuals and national-level trade union leaders corralled around central state institutions. A big chunk of local reality is in this way effaced and so are concrete forms of mediation between national and local levels. The major importance of local intellectuals and trade union leaders is thus missed, as are the cleavages between local and central intellectuals and trade unionists, between enterprises and workers on one side and the central government on the other. As I show in detail, the trajectory of postsocialist labor is inseparable from such local–national conflicts, from attempts at devising strong and specifically local forms of hegemony, and, as a part of this, of instituting local public spheres that were explicitly meant to work against those perceived as imposed from outside and above.

The second implication springs from the sort of situations and practices that I use as springboards for reconstructing processes and structures (see Burawoy 2009). I start not from exceptional events or breaks of routine, but from what constitute well-established routines: collective bargaining, the playing of games, and drinks sharing. Following Goffman and especially Randall Collins (2004), I describe these routines as “interaction rituals” that can open doorways to understanding inequality as a continuous process and class as a highly dynamic and overdetermined relation. The focus on interaction rituals further allows me to circumvent another major problem plaguing much of the literature on labor in post-89 CEE: the overwhelming reliance on workers' post-factum, extra-ordinary narratives. This has resulted in an impressive—and impressively repetitive—collection of what Bartha (2011) calls “narratives of decline”, which, though useful in giving expression to social suffering and in understanding some of the mechanisms whereby anger may or may not be channeled

politically, is not as effective in understanding the core dimension of everydayness that makes class tick (see Kalb 1997). Prioritizing practice and rituals instead of personal stories allows me to put concrete processes and struggles back into the analysis.

The most considerable and glaring shortcoming of my research is the marginal presence of women and gender relations. The scale of this problem lies beyond any doubt: women make up over a third of Dacia's labor force (an inheritance from state socialist times, which today's managers readily present as their own accomplishment in promoting gender equality) and, starting with the late 1990s, over half of Mioveni's population. The stark boundaries separating male-dominated public rituals of drinks sharing and hanging out and private lives in the family prevented any systematic access to conversing with wives and women workers beyond a strictly maintained threshold of scripted chit-chat. As I became integrated in neighborhood life, I had to live up to its rigors: any attempt to engage in more detailed conversation with a woman would have immediately triggered signals of inappropriateness and possibly violent rejection, not least because it would have required considerable and considerably visible efforts on my part in the first place. This was the case even with gatherings I attended in workers' homes, which were almost always strictly family affairs and were likewise heavily scripted, with women and men tending to congregate in different rooms. While talking, debating, and the sharing of jokes or concerns were certainly not the monopoly of the men I could freely interact with, spotty eavesdropping from the other room does not make for a proper ethnographic instrument. Of course, this ethnographic absence has very likely impacted my attempts at historical reconstruction. The inability to escape my unavoidably peculiar positioning in the field was a source of constant frustration and eventually convinced me that ethnography should from the very beginning be envisioned as a collaborative project.

A brief overview

Sticking to Kalb's (1997:8) approach to class analysis as a "narrative strategy", my method of presentation breaks with my method of inquiry. Each of the three parts that follows comprises a narrative dealing with the post-89 history of labor at Dacia from a particular standpoint: organized labor, the local labor market, and urban everyday life. The starting point for each narrative is similar: a detailed analysis of a present-day interaction ritual. Extending back in time and outward in social and geographical space ultimately allows for a repositioning of each ritual in a reconstructed field of force that goes well beyond the confines of its immediate situation. The present thus serves as point of departure and of arrival. The three narratives are parallel, in the sense that they look at the history of industrial labor at Dacia from three different perspectives, but they constantly intersect with and reflect back on each other: trade union action triggers structural shifts in the labor market, transformations of the labor market enable or hinder trade union action, urban everyday life is where the fiercest labor market and shop-floor struggles are displaced.

In part one I deal with organized labor and show that the general strike of March–April 2008 was exceptional only in scale and intensity. As trade unionists at Dacia have been consistently on the offense starting with the mid-2000s, we can truly speak of the emergence of a systematic form of Marx-type labor unrest, yielding substantial improvements in terms of

wages and benefits. I trace the roots of Dacia workers' militancy to the breaking of a compromise with management, which spanned both the years predating privatization and those that immediately followed. Their virtually unconditional support for privatization was not a priori, but was rather the result of hard-fought struggles over enterprise autonomy during the 1990s, which in their turn were triggered and fueled by a specific political economic conjuncture whereby state ownership over the enterprise could be regarded as profoundly exploitative. Apart from constant (though not entirely uncritical) support for the market, this conjuncture contributed to the very early adoption of a business model of unionism by Dacia's largest trade union. Contrary to most of the literature on trade unions in post-89 CEE, I show not only that the option of business unionism was more desirable for enterprise trade union leaders than others, but also that the pursuit of business unionism necessarily overflowed and pushed them toward other strategies of interest representation. The national–local cleavage that exploded during the first half of the 1990s and its accompanying dedication to business unionism eventually made the spectacular successes of the second half of the 2000s possible. They also set plenty of traps along the way, traps which, starting with the 2010s, became increasingly threatening, leading to the present situation of endemic uncertainty. If the militancy of Dacia workers can indeed be explained in terms of Silver's theoretical propositions, its import in explaining possible future outcomes on a broader scale is much reduced. The third pendulum swing has an entirely different geography than the first two, and the same goes for its political economic implications: uneven development is massively consequential not just internationally, but also intranationally, both between and within regions and localities. Under such conditions, upscaling solidarity from the local to the national scale, a key step in Silver's narrative, is a tall order for CEE trade unionists after 1989.

Part II is a structural history of the local labor market eventually leading to the emergence of durable forms of inequality within what previously could be considered a relatively homogeneous category—that of “industrial workers”. Contrary to the standard narrative that looks at postsocialist informal labor as separated from the world of formal work in industry, with the former rising as the latter declined, I show that the 1990s and the first half of the 2000s were marked by their continued intertwinement, dating back to the peculiar labor arrangements of state socialism. At Dacia, a burgeoning parts trafficking economy supplemented industrial work in structuring the local labor market for many years after 1989. Harking back to the literature on labor under state socialism, I link this peculiar labor market arrangement with the major issue of labor control in the factory. I show that struggles over labor control were unavoidably struggles over the shape of the local labor market and that such struggles were waged with various degrees of viciousness and efficacy up until the 2008 strike, which from this point of view functioned as a sort of *coup de théâtre*. For the first time in the plant's history, it instituted a practically total separation between work in industry and other segments of the labor market, while also raising its position from the bottom of the labor market to its very top. It also led to the congealment of durable inequality between those who work in the plant and those who do not, vindicating two decades of material and symbolic struggles in which ideas of work-based solidarity came to be based on exclusion, instead of inclusion. I show not only that this was not just another a priori point of departure, and rather a result of struggles waged in the post-89 era, but also that the shift from inclusion to exclusion did not

imply a “displacement” of class via non-class symbolic categories. On the contrary, exclusion was based on a constant remobilization of what could be regarded as a typical language of class: the proud affirmation of the value of labor and its associated claims to dignity. Finally, I illustrate how this convoluted history has shaped individual biographies in the past and especially in the present. Just like with the deepening uncertainty of organized labor on the Dacia platform, the post-2008 triumph on the labor market has in time yielded what for many workers appear to be insurmountable problems of social reproduction.

In Part III I look at how these labor market struggles and shifts in trade union strategy played out in the urban environment, where they were integrated in and transformed by attempts at dealing with what local authorities and intellectuals believed to be the most burning issue of all: the allegedly pitiful degree of urban modernity of the historically marginalized company town of Mioveni. Here, the localism springing from trade union struggles during the 1990s spilled over into a more articulate political discourse centered around the ideal of a proper physical and social urban environment. The end of Mioveni’s existence as a company town in the aftermath of privatization resulted in an emulation of the turn toward exclusionary solidarity based on a remobilized affirmation of the value of labor. Here as well, things did not come automatically, but only as a consequence of hard fought struggles concerning debt accumulation for utilities and unruly behavior in public space. In this way, the separation between the worthy and the worthless that was attempted in the labor market gained full justification. Dacia’s success and the 2008 strike had the double effect of cementing stark inequalities and finally put urban modernity within reach. Once again, I show that these achievements hide a daunting fragility. Not only is personal insecurity higher than ever on both sides of the divide between plant workers and non-plant workers, but the replacement of organic interaction rituals with engineered ones has severely diminished the resources of solidarity that in the past had enabled the devising of collective solutions to such problems.



WORKERS DURING THE 2003 GENERAL STRIKE PROTESTING IN FRONT OF THE PLANT'S ADMINISTRATIVE PAVILION. THE NOTICE SAYS: "INDEFINITE GENERAL STRIKE ON THE DACIA PLATFORM"

Source: Ionel Iancu, Mediafax, 21 February 2003.



PICTURE FROM THE JANUARY 2011 PROTEST AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSAL FOR A NEW LABOR CODE. CAPTION SAYS: "DACIA WORKERS RAISED THE FIST OF JUSTICE FOR ALL ROMANIANS."

Source: "Angajații de la Dacia au dat startul grevei generale în țară: 'Azi la Mioveni, mâine-n Cotroceni!'" [Dacia employees started the general strike in the country: 'Today in Mioveni, tomorrow in Cotroceni*!']" *Argeșul*, 26 January 2011.

* The Cotroceni Palace is the official residence of Romania's president.

Notwithstanding my initial expectations that frequent mobilization implies everyday effervescence, among themselves workers rarely speak about the trade union. Or at least they don't do so outside a few exceptional situations in which their direct intervention in union affairs is, in one way or another, called upon. In routine circumstances, however, I have heard more stories of various union officials' hunger for personal advancement and involvement in various acts that come as morally reprehensible to the regular union member than commendations of the manner in which the union represents the interests of its rank and file. Hearsay of one union official or another securing a factory job for his incompetent next of kin, owning a villa in the countryside, ignoring workers' grievances, or rigging negotiations with management to their disadvantage is not uncommon. On these occasions, union officials are referred to in the same terms as managers and politicians are—as "they," the ones upon whose decisions "we" depend, yet whose exploits "we" have very little knowledge of and upon whom "we" have even less influence. Even an ostensibly important event like last year's union elections proved largely anticlimactic, as I did not get to witness any sort of meaningful offhand debate. Though this could suggest apathy, it could also suggest that some things are different from what the occasional rumors imply and that members are more attached to the union than any casual rant indicates. The two are not mutually exclusive, however. By far the liveliest period is that of the annual negotiations for the collective labor contract, when there is considerable agitation both inside and outside the plant, with the union and its leaders taking the spotlight. As a rule, this resembles a tug of war with plenty of dirty tricks and constant appeals for support from the rank and file made by both union and management. Although workers generally refrain from talking to each other about their individual wage situations, the issue of collectively negotiated pay raises is hotly debated as the bargaining process drags along. When things get serious enough, displays of indifference are quickly replaced with avowals that "We will go out [O să ieșim]" if needed. Though there is plenty of criticism of the union to go around during the negotiations, there is much more outright and explicit support. The same happens when a move against the government is pondered. Then there is another kind of doubt—which feeds on fear rather than righteousness—casting an increasingly longer shadow over these critical moments. Even though, as a worker described it, "the annual dance" between the management and the union can be easily mistaken for a lighthearted experience for the larger part of the union membership, the question of how enduring its rhythmicity really is looms large within workers' ranks. While the memory of past struggles and the excitement of present victories still holds "us" together against "them," the future of this bond has become problematic. Problematic yet again, I should say, as I am under the impression that "the dance" has been happening for much longer than anyone cares to recall and that existential uncertainty is very much part of the game itself. This does not make the present predicament seem any less normal and urgent at the same time.

- Excerpts from my notes, February 2013. Fieldwork systematically failed to yield any unequivocal solutions to these dilemmas and rather tended to exacerbate them as I went along. Only much later did I learn to embrace ambiguity and appreciate commonplace contradiction.

PART I

THE ODDS ON THE DANCEFLOOR: A CHRONICLE OF ORGANIZED LABOR AT DACIA, 1989–...

The three-week general strike that paralyzed production at Dacia during the spring of 2008 was part of an entire series of militant actions stretching from the early 2000s into the 2010s. It was nonetheless notable for its duration and for the sheer viciousness of the conflict between strikers and the company's managerial apparatus. Closer inspection also reveals that the strike was a major turning in the history of labor relations on the Dacia industrial platform, as it marked a clear shift from Polanyi-type to Marx-type unrest—from primarily defensive opposition, to primarily offensive, affirmative militancy. By March 2008, Dacia's workers had strong positions relative to management both in the workplace and in the local labor market, as a result of the completion of Renault's postprivatization restructuring plans and of the increasingly acute labor shortage induced by mass migration abroad and an overall booming economy. In this sense, the strike also marked a turn from exit to voice in responding to what at the time seemed to be the unmet expectations of privatization.

But workers were not just structurally empowered up to the 2008 strike, nor could they have secured victory on advantageous workplace and marketplace positions alone. An entirely different course of events would have been highly probable, had they not been organized so well and in so high numbers. This associational strength had its source in the lessons of another general strike from five years earlier, which in contrast had proven an unequivocal failure for trade unionists. Similar to 2008, the February 2003 strike also comprised a shift from exit (and loyalty) to voice, though it was less a display of labor strength than a somewhat desperate attempt at coming to grips with an impending legitimization crisis threatening the union leadership and most likely the union as such. This was a direct outcome of the postprivatization compromise trade union leaders had struck with Dacia's management: conceding to harsh restructuring measures and "social peace" at all costs, in exchange for some degree of mitigation of the "social shocks" of restructuring and the promise of a secure future for the company. SAD proved itself a staunch defender of the ideal of privatization, both before and after Renault's acquisition of Dacia in 1999 and its leaders were manifestly unwilling to challenge policies wreaking havoc among the membership: mass layoffs, stagnant real wages,

work intensification, and the establishing of a despotic regime on the shop floor all went largely unchallenged in the first years after privatization. By the time of the 2003 strike, a rift had opened between the leadership and the rank and file, palpably threatening the future existence of trade unionism at Dacia.

Aside from the quite exceptional events from the beginning of 2008, therefore, it could be said that starting with the mid-2000s the trade union movement on the Dacia platform went through a process of “revival”, which, when combined with workplace and labor market advantages, led to a successful shift from defense to offense. By and large, such a narrative would correspond to the theoretical expectations of the break with “labor weakness” and the emergence of Marx-type unrest. Despite the apparently perfect match, the alternative hidden history of organized labor at Dacia stretches well beyond the post-2003 period. The story of the postprivatization legitimization crisis that was just cut short by the 2003 general strike might sound familiar to scholars of organized labor in post-89 CEE, but at Dacia it was an unusually late development. More specifically, it was not an inheritance of the 1990s, but a direct product of SAD leaders’ reasoned insistence on maintaining a previously highly productive compromise with management under radically different conditions than those of the 1990s.

All-out trade union support for privatization in the late 1990s did not simply materialize from a blind belief in the positive material and symbolic outcomes of the market, but was a relatively late development resulting from struggles typical of the property relations of that decade. Although discourses of market utopianism were routinely deployed by trade unionists very early in the 1990s, they remained relatively abstract and ineffective until push came to shove under Renault’s ownership. Their most significant influence during this time was in the quick adoption of a strategy typical of the so-called “business” model of unionism by SAD’s leaders—an overdetermined outcome in which international influence, state socialist legacies, and the above-mentioned struggles each played their part. Above all, it was the struggles over enterprise autonomy that gave direction to trade unionism on the Dacia platform in the 1990s. The combination between the persistence of state ownership over enterprises and a collapsing economic centralism proved explosive for managers and trade union leaders alike, as they joined hands in fighting for autonomy from the state. Constant oscillations and manifold failed experimentations with alternatives rendered the push for privatization to a foreign investor the only means available for securing such autonomy once and for all.

In what would seem as a bizarre situation for the labor weakness argument, this outcome was accompanied not by a weakening of the trade union’s position in the enterprise, but by its unprecedented strengthening: at the time of privatization, SAD enjoyed a significant degree of control over the shop floor and was indispensable in securing the daily functioning of production; it had removed virtually all competitors; it maintained its associational strength and by and large kept the rank and file in line with official trade union policy, including support for privatization. On a closer look, therefore, Romania’s overall landscape of labor weakness and haphazard Polanyi-type unrest during the late 1990s, reveals the potential for considerable labor strength at the level of individual enterprises—so much so that even Renault executives arriving at Dacia were baffled by the unusually powerful standing the union enjoyed in the management and functioning of the enterprise. Despite the apparent homogeneity,

fragmentation had already made its mark on the trajectory of Romanian organized labor: economic sectors, enterprises within the same sector, as well as trade unions within the same enterprise faced the new millennium from very different positions and with starkly different resources and prospects. Far from a merely economic outcome, labor fragmentation was actively fostered by trade unions from the early days of the 1990s, as it was explicitly entailed in the struggle over autonomy. If during the 1990s this acted as a source of strength, the objective and subjective fragmentation of organized labor would in time turn it into a major shortcoming even for the strongest trade unions.

As they unfolded, the struggles over enterprise autonomy typical of the 1990s were also a source of crisis. If support for privatization would quickly lead to legitimization problems of existential proportions during the first half of the 2000s, during the 1990s, they constantly pushed trade unionists into betraying their strict dedication to economic unionism and lapse into political involvement and social movement unionism, with ensuing dissent from within. The embracing of privatization and the periodic renouncing of economic unionism were contradictory outcomes of the unfolding of the struggles for enterprise autonomy. Trade union leaders turned these necessities into virtues, imbuing privatization with expectations upon which they would draw considerable strength in opposing management in the 2000s and sowing the seeds of the localist politics that were to radically transform urban everyday life in Mioveni during the same period. These expectations concerned the adequate material and symbolic value of labor: proper wages, adequate working conditions, the elimination of external exploitation, of various forms of cronyism and of “nonwork”—a protean category, ranging from the activity of shop floor supervisors and managers to all things informal, like the trafficking of car parts. Labor leaders proclaimed the ultimate economic and moral value of labor from the very first days after December 1989, as it was an integral part of the discourse of market utopianism they incessantly proffered at the time, all the while fitting their attempts at legitimizing the trade union as a monopoly seller of labor power. While it ostensibly constituted the ideological backdrop of the struggle over autonomy, it remained relatively inconsequential until privatization became a real possibility in the second half of the 1990s. At Dacia, the surprisingly peaceful atmosphere of the late 1990s was catalyzed by the cultivation of expectations regarding privatization, expectations that the value of labor would finally be recognized—once full enterprise autonomy was finally obtained, there would be no more excuses and need for sacrifice. If the combination of unmet expectations and persistent preaching of the benefits of privatization by union leaders led to an all-out crisis of legitimacy for the trade union and a debacle in the 2003 general strike, once union leaders shifted gears and began calling on management to fulfill the promises of privatization, the affirmation of the material and symbolic value of labor as an imperative that under Renault could no longer be deferred became a chief discursive instrument in the spectacular 2008 victory.

The so-called “legacies of postcommunism” thus had highly ambiguous implications for the Marx-type unrest of the late 2000s and early 2010s. In the short-term, they comprised a vital source of associational strength. In the long-term, however, fragmentation and autonomy, the pristine objectives of the 1990s, might just end up being a millstone about SAD’s neck. Rendered acute by the Great Recession, the bifurcation between Dacia workers’ successful offensive and the remaining on the defense of the vast majority of labor in the country and in

the region depleted much of the resources of solidarity required to upscale the offense to the national level. The accompanying segmentation of the local labor market dealt a severe blow to workers' marketplace bargaining power: if before the 2008 strike and the crisis Dacia workers could claim irreplaceability under conditions of labor shortage, relatively depressed wages and dismal working conditions, in the 2010s job security became a major concern and a chief weapon in the hands of the employer. By this time, workers' position in the workplace had witnessed dramatic transformations from the heyday of union control over the shop floor during the 1990s. The restructuring program in the aftermath of privatization had drastically curtailed workers' control over the organization of the labor process and had clearly marked the new management's intention to impose a despotic regime on the shop floor. While the trade union managed to regain a modicum of recognition from management on the shop floor, control was not negotiable and the role of shop floor union officials was strictly limited to observing the upholding of the collective labor contract. The union's overall strategy now no longer leaned on controlling the labor process, as it had done during the 1990s, but on negotiating wages and benefits in exchange for increased management control over work organization and intensity.

Dwindling marketplace and workplace bargaining power threatened to put Dacia's workers back on the defense sooner than expected, merely half a decade after the general strike of March 2008. Profiting from this, management's counteroffensive in the aftermath of the 2008 strike materialized around the mid-2010s under the guise of three distinct threats: delocalization, automation, and labor flexibilization. These pose potentially existential problems for organized labor on the Dacia platform, requiring the waging of struggle beyond the confines of a single enterprise, at least onto the scene of state politics. The forging of strong solidarity outside the enterprise is nonetheless doubtful. Doing away with the objective and subjective effects of fragmentation is a tall order, as is the overcoming of the near-secular rejection of political or social movement models of trade unionism by Dacia's trade unionists. Confirming expectations of the difficulties of the resurgence of a broader-based, national labor movement, Dacia rather represents the exceptionally positive peak of a highly divided labor movement that on the whole remains resigned and defensive. Though the uphill struggle of Dacia's unionists against the state in the 2010s might be interpreted as a bitter irony resulting from a historical penchant for autonomy and fragmentation—in other words, an apparently paradoxical situation in which the strongest are, above all others, existentially dependent on the rallying of the weak—one would likewise not be wrong in saying that strong enterprise unions are merely the only ones still capable of voicing such a need in the first place. Threatened by labor flexibilization, automation and, most importantly, by delocalization, the offensive moment of Dacia's workers could eventually prove much shorter than the macrosociological metaphor of the labor de/commodification "pendulum swing" suggests. The mounting uncertainty facing Dacia workers starting with the mid-2010s indicates that they have yet to come up with an answer on their own to the question of labor under dependent development.

CHAPTER 1

PRELUDE: THE GAUNTLET ROUTINE

Wildcat strike

On March 20, 2013, a few hundred employees from the Vehicle Plant stopped work and launched an illegal protest. This continued on second shift, with a similar number of people.

In the meantime, over 80% of the platform's employees continued working responsibly, in order to maintain the commitments made to customers.

The employees who left their work stations on March 20 will not be paid for the time they went absent without leave.

SAD (*Sindicatul Autoturisme Dacia*—the Automobile Dacia Trade Union) was notified that the protest is illegal. In its written answer to the Dacia management, SAD disassociated itself [*s-a desolidarizat*] from the spontaneous strike and confirms that the protest is illegal.⁷

This brief press communique was issued by the Dacia management in the evening hours of March 20. Unsurprisingly, not all sides involved agreed with this version of the events and, without entirely vindicating the alternatives, the facts did seem somewhat different. At around 9 o'clock in the morning workers in all departments of the Vehicle Plant stopped work, with many gathering in the courtyard (figure I.1). The exact number of active participants was uncertain: management was quick to declare that it was just several hundred, union representatives claimed the number went as high as five thousand, while reports in the media ranged from one to six thousand participants. What was certain was that the number was enough to halt production entirely. Toward noon, as they gathered behind the fences near gate 3, where the old administrative pavilion used to stand before being demolished four years earlier, and as they began talking to reporters who had rushed to the scene, it became apparent that very different demands were being voiced simultaneously: the need for management to stop sabotaging collective bargaining and accept workers' representatives as legitimate negotiation partners; the speeding up of negotiations; a 25% increase of the base wage; maintaining the existing system for overtime pay; improved working conditions and respect from shop floor supervisors; scrapping the alcohol test and the security checks when entering and exiting the plant premises. More generally, strikers complained of being treated as slaves, of pay not corresponding to the hard work they put in, of management's unwillingness to share the company's significant profits, of speedups and harsh supervision, of being policed worse than drunk drivers and thieves, of workers being targeted for layoffs. A company spokesperson present on the scene pleaded for organized dialogue and denied that negotiations were stuck; she rejected allegations that layoffs were being discussed and claimed that the alcohol test and security checks served the common interest of the company and of its employees. Workers booed in response and repeatedly cried out "Thieves!", "Down with the mafia!", "Unity!", and "Strike!". Union leaders allegedly tried to convince strikers that peaceful negotiations were the only option. Turning their eye to management, they nonetheless added fuel to the fire by stating

⁷ "Protestul spontan este ilegal." Online: <http://www.daciagroup.com/presa/comunicate-de-presa/2013/protestul-spontan-este-ilegal>.



FIGURE I.1. Workers in their work uniforms in front of the stamping shop during the March 20 stoppage.

Source: Laurențiu Ionescu, “Protest spontan la Dacia Mioveni. Producția a fost oprită. Lider de sindicat: ‘Prin protest se câștigă salariile mari de la Dacia.’” *Adevărul.ro*, Online: http://adevarul.ro/locale/pitesti/protest-spontan-dacia-mioveni-productia-fost-oprita-1_514979d000f5182b852_f0728/index.html.

that “This sort of thing happens every five years. Dacia’s management is probably in need of a strike!” All this before officially disavowing the protest—an unprecedented gesture that nonetheless sparked little controversy.

Taken by surprise, media outlets gave unusually ample space to the words and faces of workers themselves, while scrambling to catch wind of management’s tactics and haphazardly commenting on the presumably very high wages of Dacia employees. Lumping up what several workers had said as if they were the words of a single individual, a major news agency attempted a verbatim summary of strikers’ grievances:

They should give us the money we asked for and our rights. We lose on vacation money; we lose on bonuses. If they give us this, we start work. We want an extra 2, 3, 4 or 5 million old lei, but this is not what matters. The problem is that there is a lot of work and little money. They should pay us fairly for how much we work. You have to make a car in 40 seconds. Do you realize the speed at which we are working here? I repeat, they should give us the money according to how much we work. Not even bread at the bakery comes out as fast as a car does here. The ones from Morocco have higher wages and we have to put out a car every 40 seconds; it should be one minute or one minute and a half, but not 40 seconds. There is no car plant in the world where the car is put out every 40 seconds. We want decent wages. No one is slacking off here. We all work. Down there, in Mioveni, there is a prison without a schedule. Here we have a prison with a schedule. We are not slaves. We have not been accepted to negotiate the collective labor contract. We want to work, but not like this—like slavery!⁸

⁸ “Protest spontan la Dacia: peste 5000 de angajați au oprit activitatea.” *Mediafax*, March 20, 2013. Online: <http://www.mediafax.ro/social/protest-spontan-la-dacia-pest-5-000-de-angajati-au-oprit-activitatea-10678686>.

The strike continued on shifts two and three, and first shift workers again refused to start work the next day, when the protest went on far away from the fences, outside the public eye. On March 21, the highest estimates went down from 5000 to 1500 participants, still more than enough to paralyze production. Having recovered from the previous day's blow, management went on the counteroffensive. It first conceded to some of the strikers' demands: speeding up negotiations, they agreed to Easter and Christmas bonuses and overtime pay as per the union's demands and committed to immediately remove the alcohol testing at the plant gates. Along with a joint management–union promise that wages would be negotiated properly, this was enough for workers on the second shift to start work. Management also issued an official notice that those who had left their workstations would make the object of disciplinary investigations leading to appropriate sanctions; court action would be taken against strikers in order to recover the losses incurred by the stoppage (estimated in the media at around 20 million euros). Third, an elaborate media campaign was started with the issuing of a press communique that dispelled the previous day's confusion and attempted a reframing of the protest:

Dacia's management and SAD convened on Thursday, March 21, to continue negotiations for the collective labor contract, only on condition that work is restarted and a return to a normal productive activity is ensured. The sides have also agreed to continue the talks only within the negotiation commission, as stipulated in the law.

The illegal spontaneous protest started on Wednesday, March 20, (...) and continued on Thursday morning. A few hundred employees refused to work, though without indicating precisely what their demands were. Around 16 o'clock, employees stopped the protest and went back to work. (...)

The Mioveni plants constitute one of the engines of the Romanian economy, being the country's main exporter. This position, earned due to recent years' results, following a sustained investment and development program, forces us to be responsible and realistic. All employees (...) must prove their responsibility toward the company's customers, the suppliers and the community in which they themselves live. The economic stability of the company, of their own families, and even of the local car industry can be affected by this protest that was initiated in a difficult economic context.⁹

The communique continued by extensively listing the wage and non-wage benefits of Dacia employees:

Since the protesting employees referred to certain rights and benefits stipulated in the existing collective labor contract, we briefly present some of the provisions that are currently in force and were also valid in 2012: a guaranteed minimum wage for skilled workers of 1918 lei; in 2012, apart from their wage rights, workers enjoyed the following benefits: Easter and Christmas bonuses (873 lei gross and 957 lei gross respectively); gift tickets worth 60 lei for the 8th of March, granted to all women employees; Christmas gift tickets (60 lei); profit sharing bonus (1240 lei gross); vacation bonus (1276 lei gross); food vouchers; free warm meal (in total, for approximately 11500 employees); subsidized transportation; various aid (marriage, death, etc.); days off paid at the base wage rate, apart from the ones granted by law, in the following situations: family events (the birth of a child, marriage or death), changing of domicile, blood donation. (...) In 2011, 4100 employees benefitted from subsidized rest and treatment vouchers

This quotation was made up of what several workers from different departments had said to reporters. Though this might have been done for the sake of brevity and comprehensiveness, the implicit—and otherwise prevalent—assumption that workers' demands were homogeneous and fully compatible with each other falls apart on a minimally close reading. The prison reference is to the Colibași Penitentiary, located close to the plant.

⁹ "Angajații Dacia au reluat lucrul." Online: <http://www.daciagroup.com/presa/comunicate-de-presa/2013/angajatii-dacia-au-reluat-lucrul>.

(1,467,716 EUR paid by the company), while in 2012 there were 3400 beneficiaries and the total sum paid by the company was 1,330,542 EUR.

Next up, a synopsis of wage raises for the previous years, together with proof of Renault's enduring commitment to the country's economic welfare:

year	gross average wage	growth from previous year
2008	2256	-
2009	2668	18.26%
2010	3262	22.26%
2011	3632	11.34%
2012	3965	9.17%

Employees' wages have been raised every year, the benefits have been maintained, even though as of late, due to the crisis, the number of vehicles produced has continued to decline and the sales of Dacia cars produced in Mioveni has decreased as well.

At the same time, Renault has continued to invest in Romania, both in production and in diversifying its activities.

year	investments (mil. EUR)
2004	187
2005	180
2006	193
2007	260
2008	194
2009	154
2010	142
2011	148
2012	250

A blunt ending to a statement meant to highlight the economic irrationality of workers' demands and the questionable nature of their claims of deserving more than they had already been granted. This proved a no-brainer for most of the media, who quickly reproduced large sections of the second communique to the letter, effectively eliminating alternative viewpoints and curtailing any sort of debate on the subject. Thereafter, public interest in the strike subsided and the manifold nature of strikers' demands was effaced, making any explanation of the event—except for the ones appealing to workers' shortsighted rapaciousness—at the same time impossible and irrelevant. The same happened with identifying the precise role played by the strike in the ongoing negotiations, though it was widely agreed on all sides that this is what everything was really about.

The ritual of negotiations

In the preceding weeks, a series of events had heightened tensions in the plant, fueling the smoldering conflict that burst in the open on March 20. Negotiations for the 2013 collective labor contract started relatively late, only toward the end of February, which tested workers' patience and set the stage for a more strained atmosphere than the usual. At the beginning of March, the bulletin board battle began, with the management and the union posting notices across the plant premises informing workers about the ongoing negotiations. By the second week of March, union leaders were accusing management of delaying the negotiations and

promised that demands would “correspond to workers’ expectations.” They warned of the “militarization” of the plant and demanded the elimination of the alcohol test and the elaboration of a clear methodology for the frequent security checks. Counting on the fact that these were immediate objects of everyday discontent for workers, leaders threatened that, if a stop was not put to “militarization”, protests would follow between March 18 and 22.

Wage demands were summarily denounced as “exaggerated” and “unrealistic”: a 500-lei increase of the base wage for skilled workers, management replied, “does not take into consideration Romania’s economic context and the evolution of the car market,” it “endangers Dacia’s competitiveness and job security in the long term,” and it disregards that “Romanian private companies will have estimated pay rises between 0 and 5%” for the same year. Up to March 20, management had not made any significant concessions, sticking to its initial offer of merely a fifth of what the trade union demanded. Tensions reached a climax on the previous day as union leaders announced that the company was refusing to negotiate the wages chapter of the new agreement while management issued a proposal for the “flexibilization of working time,” marketed as “a balanced policy contributing to the competitiveness of the company.” For workers, this was an overt threat to the existing arrangement that allowed them to put in overtime paid at a rate of 200% while granting them a modicum of control over their work schedule. Add the persistent rumors of an impending speedup of the assembly line by several seconds per car and the announcement of job cuts in the paint shop due to the reorganization of the labor process and the stage was set for the events of early morning March 20, when workers in the paint shop, who were primarily concerned with impending job cuts stopped first; workers in the body shop, known for being the most militant, lambasted the “flexibilization” proposal in front of journalists and decried the hectic work pace; and workers in stamping lost their patience with the protracted wage negotiations; workers in assembly were, of course, most frustrated with having to put out cars “faster than bread at the bakery”.

Despite their criticism of being given “the run around” (Gouldner [1954] 1965:93) and even if the union publicly disavowed the protest, certain characteristics of the strike put its wildcat character in question. If a defining trait of a wildcat strike is that it “provides an indication of the willingness and ability of industrial workers to step beyond the bounds of bureaucratic unionism, to circumvent ‘acceptable’ channels of grievance resolution, and to engage in forms of activity expressing mutual solidarity” (Fantasia 1988:112), this was not entirely the case with the events at Dacia. A close look at the pre-strike negotiations shows that many of the strikers’ demands had been included in the union’s official position. Moreover, management remained the sole target from start to finish; no explicit criticism of the union leaders was formulated and no separation was made whatsoever between the existing leadership and the idea of unionism as such (see Fantasia 1988:116). Notwithstanding the juxtaposition of strikers’ demands and the union’s official position, it would be impossible to tell if this was, to use Gouldner’s ([1954] 1965:95) terms, a “genuine wildcat,” in which union leaders had indeed lost control over the behavior of the rank and file, or if it was a “pseudo-wildcat” in which they maintained a “concealed influence”.¹⁰ That strikers primarily pushed for brisker negotiations by strengthening the position of the union within the negotiations is

¹⁰ Somewhat hastily, Gouldner forgoes the possibility of a strike being a bit of both.

undisputable, although from acknowledging the catalyst role played by the strike in the negotiations to treating it as just another means of twisting management's hand is a long way. Yet the idea of the strike being a simple "demonstration stoppage" (Hyman [1972] 1989:23-5) of the union's strength largely went undisputed. And for good reason, as it was indeed a token of the rank and file's militancy and willingness to go as far as needed, of the union's capacity to mobilize this militancy, and of the union's active role in containing it. Of course, it also offered management a taste of possible things to come. While all this might suggest that the strike came as highly convenient to the union, the somewhat erratic nature of demands and the risk of everything lapsing into an attack on issues outside the bounds of negotiations indicated that the work of containment was genuine and the risks were at least partly impinging on the union leadership as well. This ambiguity persisted in the weeks to come.

In the following days, union leaders emphasized the genuine nature of the wildcat and insisted that "this protest was not organized and managed by us, the union, it was a spontaneous strike, an emotional one, which had an oscillating number of participants."¹¹ Inside the plant, they blamed the HR department's proposal for a "flexible working schedule" on provoking the strike, on top of the cutting of jobs, the general lack of respect toward employees, and overall bad management and dysfunctional communication.¹² Apparently intending to calm workers down, they presented evidence of the ongoing negotiations and reaffirmed plans to protest against the "militarization" of the plant.¹³ Prefacing the upcoming meetings with management, the SAD leader, Nicolae Pavelescu, warned of difficulties in obtaining a proper pay raise, decried the indolence of unnamed union officials, pointed to the danger of fragmentation, and made another proposition for organizing a protest, this time against price increases.¹⁴ Less than a week after the strike, open conflict was brooding again, with management dismissing the union's wage demands and proposing a two-year agreement instead of the standard twelve-months one—leaders rejected this outright, for it meant they could not legally strike during the next two years. To management's pleas for maintaining competitiveness, union representatives responded with calls to solidarity and maturity in formulating wage demands. Outside the plant, pressure was mounting, as the local media—habitually much less inclined to lambast the Dacia union than the central press—jumped on the bandwagon of moral scolding:

They strike on the first sign, even though they are among the best paid in the country. We are talking about the employees of the Dacia plant in Mioveni and about the most recent protest that took place last week (...). A protest through which workers from some departments asked for extra money, in a situation in which the worst paid employee, the cleaning lady or the security guard, cash in a minimum of 1900 lei each month. To which one adds benefits, various bonuses, subsidized transportation and free warm meals.¹⁵

This was just the tip of the iceberg. Others stressed that the allegedly real stakes of the protest were much higher and pressed for workers and the union to reconsider their position. The

¹¹ "Viceliderul Ion Iordache de la Sindicatul Dacia: 'Nu-i vorba de penalizare, ci de plata zilelor nelucrate'." *Jurnalul de Argeș*, March 28, 2013.

¹² "Direcția Resurse Umane Dacia a declanșat încetarea spontană a lucrului." *InfoAutoturism* 226, March 2013.

¹³ "Agenda SAD." *InfoAutoturism* 226, March 2013.

¹⁴ "Am început negocierile foarte devreme, cu 60 de zile înainte de expirarea contractului." *InfoAutoturism* 226, March 2013.

¹⁵ "4000 de lei—salariul mediu al unui angajat de la Dacia." *Obiectiv argeșean*, March 28, 2013.

following elaborate exposition of the arguments against them is worth quoting in full as it summarizes the post-strike atmosphere quite well:

The French writer Emile Zola placed his novel, *Germinal*, in a mine and in a mining community. Until then it was thought that the working-class element [*elementul muncitoresc*] was not apt to enter the purview of artistic creation. But both the book and its author made a page of universal literature. I am waiting for a writer to uncover the exciting novel of the car plant in Mioveni. If someone will write it, a page will be dedicated to these days' events.

Just when there was talk of the Dacia plant as our supreme element in competing for the future region, we hear it harbors a state of conflict, that protests are happening, and that a strike could even begin for wage-related reasons.¹⁶ The employees are asking for more, the company is offering less than they demand. A common thing, even banal. Such things happen everywhere in the world. It is normal for the one who sells his labor to want to earn as much as possible. And it is just as true that workers in our country earn less, for the same work, than their colleagues in France.

But an even bigger question emerges: what if this enterprise wasn't here, what would they make? What if Dacia had had the same fate as Aro—its sister making all-terrain vehicles in Câmpulung? What would have happened if Dacia had been shattered like Rolast—the rubber goods plant? Or if it had been in the same situation as Arpechim is today? Or the metallurgical industry in Hunedoara, Târgoviște and other cities? What if it had disappeared as it happened with production capacities where buses, agricultural machinery or tractors were made?

One thing is certain for everyone: Renault came here to make money [*să câștige*]! So far, it hasn't proved ravenous. On the contrary, it directed important sums toward investments that made the Dacia automobile a competitive car. Even a well-performing one, which can be seen on roads across the world. But this is how things are. The company has us in the palm of its hand [*ne are la mână*]. If it looked at the numbers and proved that it could do better somewhere else, it wouldn't be a surprise if it moved its nest, just like they did with the mobile phones.¹⁷ And we would be left only with crying on ruins.

Renault did not come here and is not staying simply for our sake [*de ochii noștri frumoși*]. Not even for the sake of Mister engineer Constantin Stroe, the man without whom Dacia would not exist in Mioveni, or in Romania.

If they have an understanding of the situation, employees from Dacia should not carry things too far [*ar trebui să întindă coarda numai atât cât să nu se rupă*]. And if someone is tampering with the nest so that it breaks, just so the bird laying gemstone eggs flies away, they are taking a great responsibility.

And this is how a slice of life becomes a page of literature. Great novels feed off conflicts, tensions, surprises, errors, turnarounds, positive and negative characters. I would prefer a novel with white pages instead of a fantasy one in which the Dacia automobile flies away to other parts, taking its nest and everything else with it...¹⁸

With SAD unabated by such criticism and managers bolstered by it, tensions escalated quickly in the first days of April. Seeking workers' support against the union, management reiterated their accusations of union leaders' "unrealistic" demands, which allegedly threatened Dacia's

¹⁶ At the time, the Romanian government was planning to radically transform the administrative organization of the country by lumping counties into regions. Theoretically, the change would have had major implications for investment and resource redistribution policies. Unofficially, the city of Pitești was set to lose the bid for becoming a new regional capital to the city of Ploiești, a decision fiercely opposed by Argeș county politicians, government officials, and representatives of the local business community. SAD also threatened to organize street protests in favor of Pitești becoming the new regional capital. In a few months' time, however, the regionalization plans were postponed indefinitely and, at least at the time of writing, have not been heard of since.

¹⁷ The reference is to the infamous case of the Nokia factory in Cluj, which shut down entirely in 2011, less than four years after it had opened.

¹⁸ "Autoturismul Dacia poate să zboare cu cuib cu tot..." *Curierul zilei*, March 23, 2013.

competitiveness and endangered jobs. In return, union leaders again accused management of irresponsibly forcing a conflict. Several such exchanges later, union leaders called for a general assembly scheduled for April 11, to discuss possible strategies; unofficially, this was a clear indication of the intention to organize a general strike. In response, they met with accusations of being out of touch with the real interests of employees and of dragging the negotiations to the point in which they endangered the stability of the company. On the eve of the general assembly, negotiations were officially at a standstill, with the union asking for a 450-lei pay raise and a 1600 lei profit sharing bonus and the company offering 175-lei and a 900-lei bonus. At this point, management renewed its offensive in the central media by making its offer public, tendentiously emphasizing the relatively high wages and benefits package already given to its employees, and aggressively pointing to the danger of delocalization; just like before, this received generous coverage in the press.¹⁹

In an unprecedented gesture, Dacia's general manager from the 1990s, Constantin Stroe, elaborated on the danger of delocalization in both national and international media. According to his widely reproduced statement, "if the protest does not end in a reasonable and satisfactory manner for both sides and if employees stick to their unrealistic demands, there is a great possibility that we will transfer an important part of production to Morocco (...). The advantage of the Moroccan plant is that an employee earns just 54% of the wages of a Dacia worker."²⁰ Stroe thus added his name to a long list of company officials who had publicly warned of the "Moroccan threat" to Dacia. His intervention was particularly important, as the former general manager was known to enjoy considerable popularity among workers and even among union officials. Far from just another largely anonymous authority figure, Stroe could claim to share a long and convoluted history with many of Dacia's workers and could attempt to re-enact the father-figure role on which he had based his authority in the first decade after 1989. Though his intervention could in other times be a *coup de grâce*, one day before the general assembly it appeared as nothing more than a desperate attempt at damage control. The next day, the company issued another warning to workers that the delay in the negotiations "had an extremely negative impact on Dacia's image and reputation within the Renault Group and in the eyes of its customers"; openly attacking union leaders, it emphasized that the union had nothing to lose in this situation, though Dacia and its employees had everything to lose.

On April 11, several hundred union delegates gathered at the Trade Unions' House of Culture in Mioveni for the extraordinary general assembly. SAD officials were joined by leaders from the Romanian Automobile Trade Union Federation (Federația Sindicală Autoturismul Românesc—FSAR) and the National Trade Union Bloc (Blocul Național Sindical—BNS) to which SAD was affiliated. Despite a tense atmosphere, the decisions of the assembly were adamant: the SAD council—the union's executive body, made up of all organization leaders together with the leader of the union and its two vice-leaders—received a mandate to declare an official labor dispute; in case things went as far as a general strike,

¹⁹ "Radu Mavrodin, director Resurse umane: 'Mizăm pe responsabilitatea salariaților noștri pentru a construi împreună un viitor sigur și stabil pentru compania noastră'." Online: <http://www.daciagroup.com/presa/comunicate-de-presa/2013/radu-mavrodin-director-resurse-umane-mizam-pe-responsabilitatea>.

²⁰ "Renault amenință că ar putea muta o parte a producției în Maroc dacă la Dacia salariile cresc prea mult." *Ziarul financiar*, April 10, 2013.

another assembly would be called to approve it; finally, the signing of the new collective labor contract would be conditioned on the absolving of those who were declared absent without leave during the March 20-21 protest of any impending disciplinary sanctions. In public, the union leadership stressed the cohesion and resoluteness of the rank and file, declared that the union was not scared of threats, and gave an ultimatum: peaceful negotiations would continue until April 20, after which strike procedures would be started; in case things got that far, they insisted, the bargaining margin for wages would shrink significantly, as striking workers would be much less inclined to accept anything less than what they initially wanted.

Just hours after the general assembly had finished, Stroe went on national television and pleaded for the media's intervention in defusing the conflict, all the while insisting that his stepping in had nothing to do with "negotiation techniques" and that a strategy to move a part of production to Morocco had already been drafted. Upping the ante of delocalization threats, he confessed that "I am the only Romanian who has seen what the strategy is in case this conflict will continue, if strikes will happen and so on and so forth. Apart from Morocco, the Dacia brand is also produced in India, in Colombia, in South Africa (...). The productive advantages [*avantajele de fabricație*] are at the moment clearly favorable to Morocco."²¹ Just when a further escalation seemed impossible, on the same day, the country's president, Traian Băsescu, publicly stated that he had warned the SAD leadership to limit their demands in order not to harm the company's profitability, since this would inevitably lead to delocalization.²² While dismissing Stroe's threats for simply being part of the negotiations, Băsescu in fact echoed his indication of the risk being materialized only in the long term. Though apparently balanced, the president's statement added to the threats piling up against Dacia's trade unionists. Furthermore, it fueled the discussion of possible delocalization scenarios—short-term versus long-term, total versus partial etc.—and of the consequences each would have for the workforce and for the country's economy.

On April 15, the union announced that the most recent round of negotiations had failed. SAD had symbolically scaled down its demands to a 420-lei raise and 1500-lei profit sharing bonus, while the company had stuck to its initial offer. With the April 20 deadline in sight, the union announced that this would be "the last week of amicable negotiations." The next day, the two sides issued a joint notification informing employees that negotiations were over and a new collective labor contract had been signed. Apart from deterring management's push for a two-year contract and the elimination of the alcohol test, the union successfully defended the participants in the March 20-21 strike, who would not be sanctioned nor investigated any

²¹ "Dacia se gândește să emigreze." *Ora de business*, TVR 1, April 11, 2013.

²² "Președintele Băsescu: Am atenționat sindicatul de la Dacia să nu preseze prea mult pentru salarii, dar avertismentul cu relocarea producției este o strategie de negociere." Online: <http://cursdeguvernare.ro/presedintele-basescu-am-atentionat-sindicatul-de-la-dacia-sa-nu-preseze-prea-mult-pentru-salarii-dar-avertismentul-cu-relocarea-productiei-este-o-strategie-de-negociere.html>. Previously, the Argeș county prefect had expressed his worries about the state of the negotiations and had asked for meetings with representatives of both sides. The only government representative who declared himself in favor of SAD's demands was the then Minister of Economy, Varujan Vosganian, who was immediately scolded by Stroe on national television. If Vosganian insisted that SAD's demands were not exaggerated since Romania could not remain a low-wage country indefinitely, his media critics again pointed out that the situation of Dacia workers was significantly better than that of the average Romanian employee, which supposedly invalidated any economic and moral reasoning in their favor.

further; this was nonetheless conditional on the maintaining of a peaceful “social climate.” As for the most contentious issue, workers would receive a 220 lei increase to their base wage, lower-level TESA personnel would receive 110 lei plus a 5% increase, with upper-level TESA personnel receiving a 6% increase to their salaries; on top of this, each employee would get a 1680 lei profit share bonus. With the Easter bonuses jointly announced a day later, what appeared to be an increasingly difficult to reconcile conflict was brought to a swift end. Union leaders publicly declared themselves content with the outcome of the negotiations, and so did workers. Though some believed they should (and could) have obtained more, the overall feeling was one of relief as both acceptable pay raises and job security were salvaged. In a couple of days, the subject of the negotiations evaporated from workers’ everyday conversations entirely. Possibly once more taken by surprise, the media registered several days of frantic reporting on the outcome of the negotiations and continued to speculate on the possibility of a future delocalization of productive capacities. The company’s profits, turnover, wage expenditures, as well as the history of the 2013 negotiations were widely discussed, though the vaguely eschatological undertones now seemed somewhat anachronistic from the standpoint of those directly involved in the story. Mirroring the plethora of similar articles in the central press, impressionistic comparisons between Renault’s Romanian and Moroccan operations made their belated appearance in the local media.²³

Extension/s, interpretation/s, explanation/s

Extending the analysis of the wildcat strike of March 20-21, 2013 in space and time quickly reveals its place in the tug of war of collective bargaining. Negotiations stretched from February to April and were waged both inside and outside the plant, linking the shop floor and the factory courtyard with newsrooms, meeting halls and seats of government. Though the strike rendered exchanges across these boundaries more effervescent, it certainly did not bridge them on its own, as proven by events taking place both before and after workers stopped work. As such, the strike represented just one of several peaks in a series of dramatic escalations and mitigations of a protracted conflict. Shifting from the immediate environs of the late March event to the encircling annual negotiations closely follows a core principle in the analysis of strikes as part of a structured continuum of work-related practices and relationships. As Hyman ([1972] 1989:184) puts it, “[m]aking ‘industrial conflict’ the object of inquiry—or, one might add, taking a narrow view of strikes as discrete incidents in the conduct of industrial relations—is (...) unhelpful if it suggests that what is at issue is a discontinuous set of individual events, each with a clear point of commencement and termination. For to explain convincingly (...) why disputes occur when and where they do, it is important to regard them not merely as incidents of industrial relations but as part of a continuum of practices and relationships inherent in any work situation.” From this perspective, the connection between the strike and the negotiations for the 2013 collective labor contract is obvious. So is the impossibility of understanding the former without accounting for the latter.

Nonetheless, according to scholars who have delved into the minutiae of interpreting and explaining the peculiar phenomenon of strikes (e.g., Franzosi 1995), extending into the

²³ “Argumente pro și contra plecării francezilor de la Mioveni.” *Jurnalul de Argeș*, April 18, 2013.

immediate temporal and spatial surroundings of an event is far from sufficient, as individual strikes and their proximate contexts are permeated by an accumulated history of struggle, which encompasses institutional trajectories of organized labor, cumulative medium- and long-term strategies of and compromises between managers, union leaders and regular members, as well as constantly mutating economic, social, and political milieus that provide strategic and tactical openings or closures. This broader history—and not just the short-term evaluation of a strike’s determinations and consequences—accounts for the current balance of forces (or the “structural” as well as the “associational” power of workers (Wright 2000; Silver 2003)); it also provides an active background for the mobilization of expectations, repertoires, and various other resources during the conflict. The strike also prompts a recalibration of these elements on the part of all sides involved, as they each go on the offense or defense. While being to a considerable extent made by such a history of struggles, an individual strike also makes that history, as it alters the balance of forces and forms the backdrop of future confrontations. The way in which a particular strike such as the one analyzed above strains or reproduces an existing compromise, or the way in which it functions as a harbinger of a future one, can only be delineated by a thorough analysis of a broader historical continuum.²⁴

This shift of perspective is necessary to fully understand the historical importance of the events of March 2013. It also points to the inherent fragility of the compromise extant at the time, as it uncovers its underpinning social mechanisms and can highlight its historical relativity. Recall the main elements of the 2013 negotiations and the March wildcat strike: annual negotiations in which wages are a highly contentious issue, seconded by close supervision, speedups, and the overall question of working time “flexibilization”; sustained rank and file militancy; a resilient union leadership making constant recourse to strike threats; a similarly resilient management making aggressive delocalization threats; repeated exchanges of threats and appeals to the solidarity, individual interests, and fears of the rank and file; the conflict escalating to the point of sparking a general strike; talk of crisis and of an overall “difficult” economic context; the conflict being waged outside the plant, with management’s repeated appeals to a mass media that is overwhelmingly hostile to the union; the backing of these appeals by local and central government officials of the highest rank; a sudden and somewhat anticlimactic ending in which the union obtained some defensive and offensive victories though apparently making more significant concessions in regard to wages, at least if

²⁴ My use of the term “compromise” reflects the definition by Durand and Hatzfeld (2002:4-5): “If the purpose of life together at work is the production of cars, it is the construction of dynamic productive compromises grounded in the diversity and opposition of positions and points of view that enables the construction of the complex product that is the car. The idea of productive compromise expresses the fact that divergences or oppositions of interest, of point of view or social rank are resolved in daily work to produce a social peace—inseparable from forms of domination—which enables cars to be produced. (...) Such a productive compromise (...) is being put into question by one or other of the parties, always being re-established, negotiated and renegotiated, marked both by more or less striking conflicts which mean that it will never be what it was before, and by long periods of calm which can lead one to think that differences and divergences have melted away.” Since the crucial question of labor control will be addressed later on in this dissertation, for now I have in mind a less encompassing meaning than that given by Durand and Hatzfeld, in that I prioritize the confrontation between the company management and labor in its explicitly organized form. Partially vindicating the grassroots perspective, I do not take the “organized” character of labor at Dacia for granted and will engage in extensive discussions of various processes of organization and mobilization. More in line with Boyer and Freyssenet’s (2000; 2002) idea of an “enterprise governance compromise”, I also emphasize the structuring lines of force of a compromise and the strategic, rather than merely tactical, confrontation between management and labor.

we consider its initial demands; workers happy both with what they obtained and that the threat of delocalization was temporarily averted; protracted public effervescence in regard to the outcome of the negotiations and the state of Renault's operations in Romania. By the time of the 2013 negotiations, these elements were familiar both to the parties involved and to outside spectators. Since most of them had featured during previous years' negotiations, the 2013 conflict simply appeared to be part of a well-established routine: a negotiations process starting peacefully, accumulating tensions to the point in which the union and management exchange threats and muster available forces, then reaching an agreement fulfilling a more or less significant part of the union's demands, followed by a long and mostly quiet period of peace to be interrupted only by the following year's negotiations. This has indeed been the case every year since a compromise was struck between the union and the company's management in the aftermath of a general strike that took place in 2008, whose effects were catalyzed by the onset of the economic crisis later that year. The compromise entailed a systematic integration of periodic conflict, as tough negotiations similar to the 2013 ones began forming a ritual rigorously enacted in the first months of each year. Though repetition gained its place in the spotlight, difference became increasingly more pervasive with each cycle. The 2013 negotiations are a good example in this regard, for this was the first year in which the so-called "Moroccan threat" made its full appearance and in which the union was forced to go this far in backing up its strike threats; a wildcat lasting one day and a half was also unprecedented during negotiations in the post-2008 era. While these were undoubtedly negotiation techniques, they also clearly pointed at cracks in the edifice that had been set up less than half a decade earlier.

Hence, a second extension: the embedding of the 2013 negotiations into a larger cycle of open conflict regulated by the functioning of a compromise established five years earlier. This cycle entails a specific dynamic of repetition and difference, making it at the same time homogeneous and cumulative. A potential future dismantling of the present compromise can come either as a result of an endogenous, gradual straining of the relationship between union and management, or can be suddenly provoked by unforeseen shocks from exogenous sources. As evidenced by the 2008 combination of a general strike followed by a prolonged economic crisis, it can also have a combined determination. In its turn, this medium-term historical cycle grounded in a relatively well-defined compromise needs to be embedded in a longer-term trajectory made up of a series of such structured compromises. Though this longer-term history is not cyclical, it is definitely cumulative, as is once again evidenced by some of the key organizational and discursive features of the events of early 2013.²⁵ Neither the massive importance of wages on both sides of the battlefield, nor the explosiveness of the working conditions issue during the wildcat, nor indeed the resilience of workers and their expectations

²⁵ A more adequate characterization of this trajectory is that it is not endogenously cyclical. As authors like Franzosi (1995), Silver (2003), or Tilly and his collaborators (Shorter and Tilly 1979; Haimson and Tilly 1989) have argued, labor unrest follows a roughly cyclical trajectory that mirrors cycles of investment and disinvestment as well as periodic mutations in the structure of labor markets. Based as it is on aggregate evaluations and aiming at highlighting the more contextual—facilitating but not determining—factors leading to labor unrest, this "piece of the puzzle", to pick up on Franzosi's metaphor, proves less useful in understanding the trajectory of labor relations in a single company like Dacia. And even less so since we are dealing with a period spanning just a quarter of a decade—roughly, from 1990 to 2015—in which several major overhauls of the company's standing and of its economic environment took place, which had too little to do directly with the periodic ebb and flow of capital accumulation or with what would be considered to be a normal evolution of the business cycle.

in regard to negotiations can be grasped without looking back to the history of labor organization at Dacia all the way to the post-privatization period of the early-2000s. Though delocalization might look like a recent threat, the accompanying comparisons with the industrial “ruins” scattered across the landscape of the Argeş county explicitly harked back to memories and fears typical of the 1990s and the assumed efficacy of this recollection played upon a peculiar history of labor at Dacia in the decade leading up to the company’s privatization. Most importantly, the overwhelming external hostility toward the union and the striking exceptionality of Dacia workers’ systematic engagement in industrial action are impossible to comprehend without looking at the history of organized labor at Dacia since the early days after December 1989. As we will see, this became increasingly more important in the aftermath of the 2013 negotiations as the post-2008 compromise appeared to give signs of collapsing into itself and as the historical faults and failures in upscaling labor’s objectives and forms of organization would strike back with a vengeance.

In the rest of this part of the dissertation I analyze organized labor at Dacia from the standpoint of these overlapping temporalities: short-term, escalating confrontations driven by the diverging strategic imperatives of the management and the union and animated by their mutually-adjusting tactics; medium-term cycles separated by the dismantling of existing union-management compromises and the establishing of new ones; and the long-term, cumulative trajectory made up of a succession of structured compromises from the early postsocialist years to the middle of the 2010s. As a point of anchorage, I will use the second of these extensions to frame the first and build up the third. From 1990 to 2015, there have been six such compromises, which are grouped in four separate chapters, depending on the main strategic challenges facing organized labor on the Dacia platform: political versus strictly economic involvement (chapter 2), privatization and ownership change (chapter 3), and, respectively, the balancing act of dealing with isolated failure and success (chapters 4 and 5). I start by looking at the first two years after December 1989, during which there was a rapid, structural reshuffling of both trade union organization and managerial activity. The next four years, roughly until 1996, witnessed consolidation and escalating conflict, though the state became the primary antagonist for both the union leadership and the management. This contrasts with the third, more explicit compromise that stretched from 1996 to late-1999, in which peace took the front stage as both management and union sought to secure the company’s privatization on their own terms. The first three years after Renault took over, from 2000 to early-2003, were marked by confusion and mounting tensions, as the union faced unprecedented legitimization problems from all sides. This anticipated the smoldering conflict of the next five years, as between 2003 and 2008 both the company and the union underwent significant restructuring and reorientation. The general strike of spring 2008 marked the establishing of a new compromise, in which conflict was institutionalized and an apparent win-win scenario was set into place only for it to show clear signs of weakness starting with 2013. Despite mounting tensions, a tipping point had not been reached by the time this dissertation was completed (late 2016), which means there is no denouement to the post-2008 story.

Each of these compromises evinces an endogenous accumulation of tension leading to an either violent or peaceful demise and renewal. Two more or less spectacular instances of the former kind mark the history of organized labor at Dacia: the 2003 and 2008 general strikes,

which I will analyze in detail. Other shifts were triggered by turning points in the organization of the union and the company—the change of leadership in 1992 and 1996, or the privatization of 1999. Major transformations of the political and economic milieus in which the plant is embedded have likewise played an important role in dismantling or putting together compromises—e.g., the political and economic turnarounds of 1992 and 1996, or the economic recovery of the second half of the 2000s and the economic crisis of the 2010s. The relationship between Dacia unionists and the national trade union movement, as well as the occasional attempts at engaging in international trade union cooperation have also carried weight in settling and unsettling compromises. The consolidation of these compromises and the reaching of tipping points spelling their demise were in each case overdetermined by several such factors, which at certain moments in time congealed in relational configurations leading to either stable or explosive outcomes. In what follows, both compromises and the shifts between them are analyzed through the lens of such “critical junctions” (Kalb and Tak 2005)—that is, of overlapping and intersecting relations of dependence and power spanning multiple geographical scales and temporal horizons. If the threefold temporal framework outlined above serves as the bedrock of the analysis, extending in space, across the geographical and organizational boundaries of the Dacia platform and its trade unions, functions as its substratum. On the surface, there are myriad struggles in which union leaders, managers, rank and file unionists, as well as various pundits and state authorities engaged across the years. Since the analysis pivots around the trajectory of organized labor, its spatial scope expands or contracts along with labor’s strategic horizons: local with a strong push toward the national scale in the first period (chapter 2), increasingly (and purposively) localized during the second period (chapter 3), and with a growing interest in international linkages and, by this proxy, in national politics from the late-2000s onwards (chapters 4 and 5).

Most crucially, such an expanded analysis of the trajectory of organized labor at Dacia highlights the various mechanisms through which strategies eliciting, maintaining, and combining structural and associational forms of power reproduced or altered the very social configurations that enabled them in the first place. The weight of the past has had a major—oftentimes decisive—impact on labor’s strategic and tactical space of possibles either from one month to another (as was the case immediately after the two general strikes) or across three decades, with almost no immediately observable traces (as was, and still is, the case with the staunch embracing of a narrow strategy corresponding to the business model of trade unionism). Relations of production—the asymmetric dependence between capital and labor—form the backdrop of these struggles and dilemmas, though without entering labor’s strategic purview; or, as we will see, at least not in unmediated fashion, as they continue to manifest themselves under the guise of jurisdictional problems. Despite having an unusually salient and tangible presence for most of the post-89 history of organized labor on the Dacia industrial platform, the fundamental separation between capital and labor was never genuinely put into question, though it constantly made the object of a host of strategic decisions, tactical choices, and normative judgments. This appears as a paradox—or as a yet another teleological assessment of the fate of organized labor in Central and Eastern Europe more generally—only if we fail to grasp that by the time of the 1989 upheaval, the dice had already been cast.

*Lirică proletară: Negocierile CCM 2013**Proletarian poetry: The 2013 negotiations*²⁶

Trecu anul, veni altul Ne anunță Sindicatul: Pe sfârșit este Contractul, Un contract nu prea bogat În sfârșit a expirat	The year's passed, so came another The Trade Union gives us notice: The Contract's about to end, A contract not so abundant It's finally become redundant
Până la "Salarizare" Să fim calmi, s-avem răbdare. Suntem oameni necăjiți Nu vrem să mai fim mințiți Și nici să fim păcăliți!	Up until the "Wages Chapter" Let's be calm, let's keep composure. We are people in need We don't want to be deceived Nor do we want trickery!
Noi nu vrem ca să cerșim Vrem banii pe ce muncim; Avem sudoarea pe frunte Oasele din noi sunt frânte Și palmele tăbăcite.	We don't want to supplicate We want our work to pay; The sweat runs on our foreheads The bones inside us are shattered And our hands are calloused.
Fac apel ca Patronatul Să respecte Sindicatul; Steaua noastră n-a apus Noi vom ține steagul sus Să ne dea ce ne-am propus!	I appeal to the Employer To respect the Trade Union; Our fate is not yet sealed We will hold the flag up high So they grant us our desire!
Munca noastră e cinstită, Vrem să fie și plătită Nicidecum batjocorită; Mereu, la negocieri Avem toți, la cap, dureri!	Our work is honest, We also want it to pay, We refuse its being mocked; Always midst negotiations We're all stricken with headaches!
Iar începe Patronatul: Articolul 4x4! Vom vedea și rezultatul, Ni-l transmite Sindicatul. Mai avem de așteptat Și mult de negociat.	Here the Employer starts again: Article 4x4! ²⁷ We will hear of the result, The Union will let us know. There's plenty of waiting left And a lot that's up for grabs.
Lăsăm totul la o parte Ne trebuie unitate, Unitatea este forța Ca să nu se stingă torța!	Leaving everything aside Unity is what we need, For unity is the might So the torch does not go out!
Sindicatul e o forță, Veșnic arde ca o torță; Pentru noi, mereu veghează Atunci când negociază.	The Trade Union is a force, Always burning like a torch; For us, it's always awake When it's time to negotiate.

²⁶ Adrian Păunescu-Moldoveanu, *InfoAutoturism* 225, January 2013. A worker in the body shop, Păunescu-Moldoveanu is well known among workers for his "proletarian poetry" inspired from workers' and trade unionists' everyday problems. The body shop has more than just one worker-poet and such poetry usually enjoys a few moments of glory during moments of collective mobilization, being read out to workers during public gatherings.

²⁷ A reference to Article 4, paragraph 4 of the collective labor contract, stating that the provisions of a year's contract constitute a minimum threshold for negotiations in the following year. Conflict over the interpretation of this paragraph was sparked in the first days of the 2013 negotiations.

SAD putere mare are,	SAD has great strength,
Anul acesta fii mai tare!	This year, be more tenacious!
Dumnezeu va fi cu voi,	God will be with you,
Forța noastră suntem noi!	We are our own strength!
Mult succes și baftă mare,	Best of luck and break a leg,
Atunci, la “Salarizare”!	Again, as regard to “Wages”!

This poem, published in the union newspaper in anticipation of the 2013 negotiations, laid out the expectations of the rank and file (of obtaining proper monetary reward for hard work) and asserted their legitimacy, pointed to the foreseeable difficulties (in negotiating the wage chapter of the collective labor contract), and hinted at possible avenues of action for reaching a favorable outcome (upholding solidarity and making recourse to collective strength). Its major themes—the paramount importance of wages, the problems with obtaining adequate pay rises, the struggle against the material and symbolic debasement of manual labor, heroic resilience and the requisite of solidarity against opposing odds—had by then become common currency, as they had also been mobilized during the 2008 general strike that set up the existing compromise and made the course of the 2013 negotiations seem largely predictable and ritual-like. In its turn, the 2008 strike was fueled by the damaging experience of the 2003 general strike and by the unmet expectations of the 1999 privatization. The origins of these themes, however, go back to the immediate period after 1989, when the birth pangs of trade union organization on the Dacia industrial platform threw new light on the meaning of wages, on the symbolic politics of manual labor, and on the purpose of workers’ collective mobilization as workers, managers, and new and old union officials alike were for the first time trying to make sense of a type of trade unionism that appeared as novel as it seemed necessary. In order to fully comprehend the politics of organized labor at Dacia in the 2010s, it is to these early times we must turn first.

CHAPTER 2

A DIALECTIC OF VIRTUE AND NECESSITY: TRADE UNIONISM AND THE DILEMMAS OF POSTSOCIALISM

Birth pangs: embracing “capitalism”, shaking off “communism”

Jurisdictional clearings and delineations

In late December 1989, while the change of regime was more or less certain, though its precise meaning much less so, an ad-hoc “initiative committee” (*comitet de inițiativă*) from the Pitești Automobile Enterprise drafted a blueprint for a new trade union organization. No later than February 1990, the Free and Independent Trade Union of Automakers Dacia Pitești-Colibași (Sindicatul Liber Independent al Constructorilor de Autoturisme Dacia Pitești-Colibași) was established, with its own monthly newspaper, a declaredly novel organizational structure and statute that had already been approved in a general assembly, and a membership of no less than 23 out of a total of over 29 thousand employees. Responsible with making the announcement was Constantin Drăghici, the 39-year old leader of the new union.²⁸ A brief biography prefaced his intervention: having worked all his life on the platform, Drăghici started as a skilled worker—a honer—and was eventually promoted to technician tasked with the organization of production; attending the university extramurally, he obtained a degree in economics in 1982; four years later, he became union president, only to be ousted after just two years. “Repeated conflicts with party representatives”—due to public criticism of food shortages, improper working conditions and disregard for employees’ problems—had allegedly forced his resignation. Drăghici insisted on his happenstance recent election as union leader and emphasized the importance of the “will of the collective” and the widespread desire to create “a trade union that is genuinely free, independent, and in the service of our own aspirations for freedom and democracy.” He continued by stressing that there was no continuity between the Free Trade Union and its predecessor. The main task of the Free Union was presented as novel: defending members’ interests, with little concern for serving as a “catalyst” for the running of the enterprise. More concretely, the union would fight for securing jobs in the next two years and would implement “an exigent program leading to the affirmation of professional competences (...) [that is] very necessary for our product’s competitiveness”; this equated with the eradication of cronyism (*lichelism*) and the “guaranteeing of all democratic freedoms.” Drăghici declared the union’s openness to collaboration with other labor organizations in the Romanian automobile industry and, “depending on our needs,” to joining a trade union federation in the machine building industry, but flatly rejected the Free Union’s affiliation to any union structure organized according to territorial principles, as such organizations could not “influence or help industrial organizations [*organizațiile de tip industrial*].” He concluded by highlighting the union’s good relationship with the management of the enterprise, as the “administrative Board has not refused any sort of demand from the union, insofar as it fell

²⁸ “Redacția întreabă, liderii răspund.” *Autoturism* 1, March 1990.

within its area of responsibility”; he hoped to perpetuate this relationship, “in order to reach the common goal of working and living under normal conditions in our enterprise.”

During the first months of 1990 freedom and democracy were painted as pristine objects of desire rather than present achievements, and explicit efforts had to be made in order for them to become reality. Labor organizations were supposed to play an important part in reaching this goal, on condition that they behaved in a manner befitting the moment. The insistence on not building upon the organizational structure of the old trade union, on the primacy of interest representation and the circumventing of the union’s “catalyst” function, together with the election of a leader known to have opposed the Communist Party were part of an attempt to come to grips with the perceived necessity of completely breaking with the state socialist past. This persisted as a primary objective beyond this initial moment of constitution, inasmuch as it was acknowledged that communists were mischievous enough to outlive communism and to parasitize the new structures that were meant to promote freedom and democracy. The declaredly good relationship between the union leadership and the enterprise management was at least in part due to the fact that the new general manager, Constantin Stroe, could also claim to have been removed from his position as technical director of the Industrial Group for Automobiles after defying the party and now appeared as if returning from exile.²⁹ The absolute imperative of purging communists from management positions across the board (from upper management to low-level supervisors) was a defining feature of the atmosphere inside the plant during 1990. Lists with managers who had been demoted because of their previous allegiances were made public in response to accusations that the fight against communists was just for show.³⁰ Far from simply a symptom of intermanagerial bickering, the fight against suspected communists enjoyed massive support from workers themselves, who were more than willing to stop work and demand explanations as to why former party officials and high ranking managers were still employed in the plant.³¹ While this was the single most important issue driving conflict inside the plant during the first months of 1990, any success was as a rule followed by displays of frustration with not being able to go all the way, as communists were difficult to identify and, even when everyone knew who they were, made use of their cunning to remain in positions of power. Such complaints persisted until they were swept aside by issues covertly accumulating urgency in the meantime.

In light of the existing scholarship on the post-89 Romanian trade union movement, much of the early story of labor organization at Dacia sounds as typical as it can get.³² The grassroots rush to create so-called free, independent and democratic trade unions was widespread across the country, leading to the emergence of thousands of organizations similar

²⁹ See “Constantin Stroe: torturat 14 ore de Securitate, interogat 3 zile de Renault.” *Gandul.info*, January 4, 2010. “Interviu Constantin Stroe, vicepreședinte la Dacia: ‘Am făcut a doua facultate la Dacia’.” *Adevărul.ro*, August 9, 2012. Stroe returned to Dacia in February 1990. On the Industrial Group for Automobiles, see chapter 6.

³⁰ “Consens pentru rechini?” *Autoturism* 2, April 1990. “Răspuns.” *Autoturism* 3, May 1990 and *Autoturism* 4, June 1990. The lists included names as well as former and current positions and salaries.

³¹ “Activiști și securiști—barosani ceaușiști se adună la motor... Cine e tătuclu lor?” *Autoturism* 2, April 1990.

³² Despite scant interest on the side of local scholars (Pasti 1995:247-73; Vasiliu 1998), there is a relatively substantial body of scholarship on the Romanian union movement during the 1990s (Bush 1993; 1999; 2004; Keil and Keil 2002; 2007; Kideckel 2001; Ockenga 1997; Varga 2014). I rely heavily on these writings for analyzing the national situation in the first postsocialist decade. By far the best source on the first two years is Bush (1993). For an excellent account of the immediate post-89 context, see Siani-Davies (2005: chapters 5 and 6).

to the one at Dacia. As opposed to the party-dominated trade unions of old, who mainly functioned as “transmission belts” in the implementation of political and economic policies while paying lip service to interest representation, these free and independent trade unions claimed to prioritize the latter purpose while severing any links with party structures and preventing political control over labor.³³ When it came to their *raison d’être*, organizational features, means of action, and even personnel, the free and independent trade unions created in the immediate aftermath of the 1989 upheaval were purposively meant to be the exact and complete opposites of their predecessors. The sustained militancy aimed at exposing and removing “communist” managers was a common trait for the emerging movement as a whole; granting a successful purge, so was the declared willingness to engage in conditional cooperation with the management of enterprises.

Not all unions could so easily claim to have left behind the setup of the pre-89 UGSR (*Uniunea Generală a Sindicatelor din România*—The General Federation of Romanian Trade Unions). The free union at Dacia clearly declared itself on the latter side of the communist/anti-communist cleavage. The rejection of the idea of territorial union structures in the first months of 1990 separated the Dacia union from the three major confederations existent at the time, regardless of whether they were considered inheritors or usurpers of UGSR. The declared objective of breaking with the past, on the other hand, soon became common for Romanian trade unions notwithstanding their organizational lineage, while support for the principles of freedom, democracy and the market enjoyed universal appeal. Lip service aside, there was a genuine belief in the necessity and virtue of a substantive democratic polity (at the scale of both country and enterprise) and a functional market economy. At least at Dacia, there was considerable excitement at the thought of truly democratic trade union representation and the idea of a virtuous circle of the market—in which market success (profitability) went hand in hand with a proper recognition of the value of labor (adequate wages)—gained ground early on.³⁴ How potent should trade union representation be and what place it should have in the new economy became major points of controversy at Dacia and across the country more generally. The root of the problem lay less in the organizational or ideological legacies of state socialism than in the rapid foundering of this initial enthusiasm in the face of realities both inside and outside the plant.

Even when it came to its most straightforward aspects, breaking with the past was far easier said than done. Cunning aside, the hunt for so-called communists within the ranks of management and the ideal of a morally pure union leadership had their objective limitations. After all, it was not difficult to see that behind the flurry of anti-communist rhetoric lay an open

³³ On the party dominance of Romanian trade union structures during state socialism, see Nelson (1981: 160-162; 1988: chapter 3), Shafir (1985: 60, 101-104). For similar reasons, workers’ councils were short lived in postrevolutionary Romania and were quickly replaced by free trade unions (see Siani-Davies 2005: 119-225).

³⁴ For a more detailed discussion of this idea of the virtuous circle of the market and the controversies surrounding wage levels see part II. The belief in such political-economic virtuous circles was ideologically constitutive for the project of transition in post-89 Central and Eastern Europe. See Kalb (2000; 2005). Such a “utopian vision of capitalist transformation” (Eyal, Szélenyi, and Townsley 1998:85) did not constitute the monopoly of former dissident intellectuals and technocrats. Union leaders (who admittedly were most likely to originate from the lower and middle ranks of the latter) and possibly even union members themselves shared one version or another of it. It is impossible to simply attribute this to a post-89 indoctrination of union officials at the hands of Western propaganda agencies, though there was plenty of this to go around as well (see, e.g., Becker 2016).

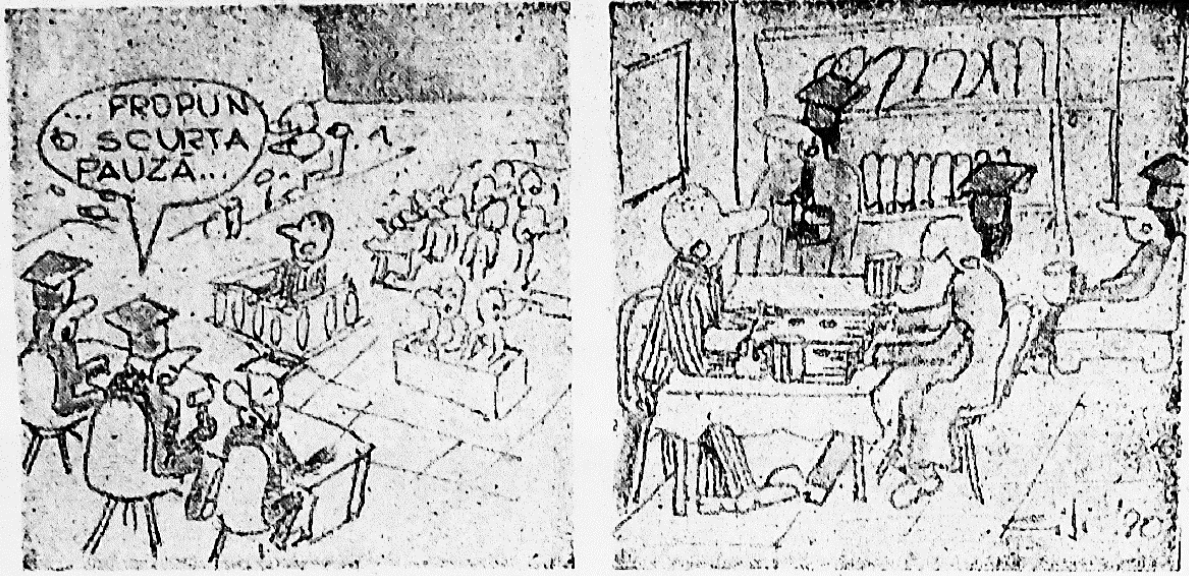


FIGURE I.2. The farcical character of early anti-communist purges: “I propose a short break,” says a judge to the accused.

Source: *Autoturism* 2, April 1990.

conflict between members of the plant’s established “technical intelligentsia” (Konrád and Szelényi 1979) and that, no matter how many lists and denunciations, the differences between the judged and the judging were not that significant (figure I.2). The bitter irony of anti-communist militancy was that a complete purge would have been the ultimate pyrrhic victory. The same was the case with the idea of entirely replacing preexisting trade union structures, as giving up on the functions of benefits distribution and service provision of the previous union would have spelled disaster for the newly christened free and independent organization. Indeed, these functions were entirely passed over to the new union.³⁵

Significantly more problematic was the claim that the union was to represent the interests of its members without an a priori emphasis on labor control, as state socialist trade unions were known to have done. Though a few voices contested the restriction of trade union responsibility to interest representation, both the union leadership and the new management were more or less in agreement. Paralleling Drăghici’s statement, Constantin Stroe confessed his preference for the union acting as a kind of “social department” (*direcție socială*)—this falling just short of referring to the union as simply an auxiliary branch of management—and taking full advantage of it being “the most authorized spokesperson of the masses”. According to Stroe, the union should have concerned itself with reaching a widely shared assessment of the plant’s situation, yielding a consensus on what needed doing.³⁶ While this was not exactly what the union leadership had in mind—reason enough for Stroe to emphasize the shortcomings in the union’s statute—the two positions were for the most part congruous. Signed on April 28, the first post-89 collective labor contract stood as telling evidence of this

³⁵ Its organizational chart comprised eight commissions out of which more than half were tasked with the administration of benefits and service provision: apart from the legal, technical-economic, and “mass media” commission, the new union had a sports commission, a housing commission, a cultural commission, a rest and health treatment commission, as well as a youth commission. “Organigrama S.L.I. din I.A.P.” *Autoturism* 5, July 1990.

³⁶ “Redacția întreabă, liderii răspund.” *Autoturism* 2, April 1990.

basic consensus. It recognized the union's function of representation side by side with management's right to decide on the running of the company and the organization of production as it saw fit in order to secure profitability. The contract clearly indicated what fell under the union's jurisdiction: wages, working conditions, benefits, vacations, promotions, training, and layoffs. It would not fulfill any direct and explicit managerial function, though it was granted representation on the company's administrative board. The union's role was restricted to negotiating the contract and then ensuring that management respected the agreement and did not break the law. In return, it guaranteed "social peace" (agreeing to an explicit ban on wildcat strikes) and committed itself to the enforcing of labor discipline and the promotion of professional competence across the board.

Jurisdictional frustrations and infringements

This definition of the interests of union members and of the legitimate means available to the trade union in defending them did not fare very well in the face of reality. Despite the initial consensus, questions of how far members' interests really stretched and in front of whom exactly they needed defending gained enough urgency to severely jeopardize the division of labor written in the contract. Even in regard to benefits distribution and service provision, which management fully recognized as trade union territory, the union was quickly confronted with unprecedented problems as local authorities began contesting the union's monopoly over vital issues like housing distribution.³⁷ While having to police the boundaries of its inherited jurisdiction outside the plant, the union also had to expand its terrain of action as it took on a new role of brokerage in the provision of public services like heating and hot water for Mioveni's inhabitants. Some of these issues were rendered irrelevant as the separation of jurisdictions between management, the union and local authorities became increasingly clear cut.³⁸ For the exact the same reasons, others were in time exacerbated to the extreme.³⁹

Jurisdictional boundaries were just as unclear in relation to management. As the plant's upstream and downstream economic networks appeared to collapse, putting its viability in question and threatening the regularity of wage payments, the union leadership admitted that a more proactive approach was needed when it came to its involvement in securing the welfare of the company and of its employees.⁴⁰ To guarantee legitimacy for its claim to interest representation, the union leadership increasingly insisted on drawing workers and management closer to the objective of the virtuous circle of the market. Labor discipline was designated as a necessary condition for market success and for the securing of wages, which, once again, were cast as the only legitimate appraisal of the value of labor (and the only one the union could claim monopoly on via collective bargaining).⁴¹ Since recognition of management's right to manage was conditional upon its capacity to deliver positive results that could then be

³⁷ "Sindicatul degradează primăria!?" *Autoturism* 3, May 1990.

³⁸ For example, by 1994 the trade union's housing commission was phased out since it was now acknowledged that it had become redundant. Until then, housing distribution and even housing construction had remained on the union's agenda, though they took on an increasingly symbolic presence. See "Raport privind activitatea SAD în 1994." *InfoAutoturism* 49, November 1994.

³⁹ On the importance of water and heating provision, see chapter 14.

⁴⁰ "Interviu cu Petre Pantilă, liderul Sindicatului Liber Independent al constructorilor de autoturisme 'Dacia'." *Autoturism* 4, June 1990.

⁴¹ I deal with this at length in part II.

redistributed via collective bargaining, the union needed to be ready to sanction any willing or unwilling infringement and intervene if the obstacles encountered proved insurmountable. As the disaster scenario gained plausibility, trade union voices accusing managers of pilfering company resources started chipping away at the cooperative veneer that had made the collective labor contract possible; these were shortly followed by more substantial denunciations of managerial inefficiencies and incompetence.⁴² This set up a tense relationship between union leaders and managers, as they both attempted to discipline the labor force while fighting with each other over managerial legitimacy. At least in Dacia's case, the latter struggle over control was far less prominent and convulsive than the authors dealing with the Romanian trade union movement in the first years after December 1989 claim it to have been overall in the country. Just as importantly, it was not primarily driven by an a priori desire of union leaders and workers to take over managerial functions, but rather by frustration at management's inability to deliver adequate wages and job security.

Just weeks after officially delegating the strategic management of the enterprise to the company's official managerial staff, union leaders were already speaking of the union's involvement in solving the company's problems with suppliers, obtaining investments, and securing its autonomy from the government. Drăghici's acknowledgment that the trade union's good relationship with management was based on all its demands being met insofar as they fell within management's capacity to fulfill them (see above) was a key qualification, since too few issues that directly impacted the interests of workers were actually in the hands of management. If upstream supply shortages halted production and prevented the company from putting cars on the market, there was little management could do, since suppliers held a de facto monopoly. If the already insufficient wages were plummeting even further as a result of accelerating inflation or if much needed investments in machinery were permanently postponed, there was little the management could do, since decisions on wages and investments had to be negotiated with the central government.⁴³ In apparently paradoxical fashion, in such a situation, defending the interests of union members could not be accomplished by struggling against management but rather alongside it and against the government. As big chunks of both internal company policy and its external economic environment fell within the responsibility of the government, only two avenues of action were available: either approach the government to directly solve issues that affected the interests of union members (e.g., to allocate necessary investment funds), or demand that the government give up on its responsibilities and pass them over to enterprise-level authorities (e.g., to grant autonomy to management in all matters concerning wages). Both could be pursued simultaneously.

Heavy dependence on government decisions quickly led to the displacement of conflict outside the enterprise. The possibility of favorably pressuring the government by all means necessary trumped any other source of dissent and favored cooperation between opposing sides within the enterprise. On the eve of the May 1990 elections, "our candidates for Parliament" were presented as enjoying the full support of the plant as a whole.⁴⁴ The two senior engineers running in the elections promised to defend the interests of the enterprise in Parliament and,

⁴² "Scaunele." *Autoturism* 5, July 1990. "Aveți curajul, d-le Director?" *Autoturism* 6, August 1990.

⁴³ On the company's autonomy in regard to wage policy, see part II.

⁴⁴ "Candidații noștri pentru Parlamentul țării." *Autoturism* 3 and supplement, May 1990.

more concretely, to solve supply flow problems, to contribute to the improving of working conditions, and to free the enterprise from the inherent incompetence of outside decision makers. Common support for candidate MPs and identifying the government as a common enemy were accompanied by the mitigation of interunion rivalry. In early April 1990 a second trade union was formed on the Dacia platform.⁴⁵ Drawing members from eight departments, the Hot Sectors Independent Trade Union (Sindicatul Independent al Sectoarelor Calde—SSC) claimed to represent employees who worked in particularly difficult conditions, who its leadership insisted required special attention and separate representation in front of the government. While the Free Trade Union was not yet part of a federative structure, the SSC leadership announced from the start that they would join the Metallurgy Union Federation, allying itself with more than forty other enterprise unions across the country. They insisted SSC was not a competitor for the existing union, that the two organizations should collaborate, and that management would meet with no problems from SSC in carrying the company across the profitability threshold. Just three weeks after it was founded, SSC became a co-signee of the collective labor contract, alongside its much larger peer. Its organizational chart was presented alongside that of the Free Trade Union and it was granted generous space and enjoyed constant positive coverage in the newspaper run by the latter. The major issue for the two unions at this time was not outcompeting each other, but ensuring cooperation while each pushed its demands with and took action against the government.

By June, the leadership of the Free Union had decided to join the Înfrățirea (Fraternity) federation, which assembled forty unions around a core of flagship enterprises like the truck and tractor plants in Brașov.⁴⁶ Înfrățirea forwarded a substantial set of demands to the government, the most important of which aimed at economic decentralization—the reorganization of interenterprise linkages and the full autonomy of large, highly integrated enterprises—and the placing of control over exports in the hands of enterprises themselves. The demands included the abolishing or modification of no less than 28 laws and decrees that were said to limit the autonomy of enterprises and hamper profitability. In reaching these goals, Înfrățirea representatives threatened to make use of all available means of “trade union struggle”: “meetings, petitions, protests, strikes and, finally, the general strike.” Taking cue from this, unions in automotive assembly enterprises—including the Dacia Free Trade Union and unions from Olcit Craiova, Aro Câmpulung and the Timișoara Automobile Enterprise—filed a joint petition demanding urgent measures to ensure the autonomy of enterprises and the reorganization of the entire machine-building sector.⁴⁷ In case things went far enough, the leadership of the Free Trade Union announced its intention to coordinate strike actions with SSC. Not in order to act together and make the disruption more effective, but to make sure that if members of one union stopped work the members of the other would have a sufficient supply of parts to continue work if they wanted to. It appeared that this would soon be the case, as

⁴⁵ “Sindicatul independent al sectoarelor calde.” *Autoturism* 3, May 1990.

⁴⁶ “Federația Sindicală ‘Înfrățirea’.” *Autoturism* 4, June 1990.

⁴⁷ “Interviu cu Petre Pantilă, liderul Sindicatului Liber Independent al constructorilor de autoturisme ‘Dacia’.” *Autoturism* 4, June 1990. The temporary and conditional nature of this consensus was clear, as a direct implication of autonomy was Dacia’s ability to voluntarily get rid of its predefined contracts with companies like Aro and Olcit, which were denounced for sapping its profitability. “Avem curajul să rentabilizăm Întreprinderea de Autoturisme Pitești-Colibași?!” *Autoturism* 4, June 1990.

Înfrățirea representatives announced that the government had not responded to repeated requests for dialogue, so preparations for a federation-wide general strike were underway.⁴⁸ A 4-hour warning strike was held on August 20, with the participation of the Dacia Free Trade Union. On August 23, workers from Tractorul Brașov went on a one-week strike, prompting reactions from the president and the government. On September 13, the day of the announced general strike, Înfrățirea temporarily called off the action after evaluating its potential consequences and granted the government time to find solutions to the unions' demands.

In the immediate aftermath, the leaders of the Dacia Free Trade Union pressed Argeș MPs to lobby the government for solutions to the shortages of raw material and for new legislation granting enterprise autonomy, though this yielded just another round of promises. Even if the Înfrățirea leadership had decided to go ahead with the general strike, it is uncertain how the leadership and the rank and file at Dacia would have reacted. Compared to the overall situation in the country, where the grassroots push for organization was accompanied by a wave of localized labor unrest, the quiescence dominating the Dacia platform was rather conspicuous. This was not because the union leadership had a firm grip over the behavior of the rank and file, nor because members refrained from acting haphazardly based on trust in their representatives. As with the presumably just and efficient market economy, adequate representation—that is, “democracy”—was proving to be another frustrated expectation, as the relationship between union leaders and regular members became increasingly strained.

Things got off on the wrong foot from very early on. Being recruited mostly from the ranks of the plant's technical intelligentsia, the union leadership seemed to make little effort at connecting to the everyday experience of workers who comprised the bulk of the membership. Sometimes even trumping the attire of the general manager, high-ranking union leaders commonly displayed their suit and tie paraphernalia when presenting themselves in front of members, while boasting discourses that appeared increasingly obscure and remote in relation to the piling livelihood problems union members had to cope with. Worse yet, conflict between leaders was becoming endemic, though without a direct relation to the actual problems of interest representation. Drăghici resigned from his leadership position less than a month after his programmatic announcement, without specifying his reasons and regardless of the disapproval of the union council, which meant that the signing of the first collective labor contract was left in the hands of an interim leadership.⁴⁹ Three engineers, one subengineer and one worker electrician ran for election, with the position ending up in the hands of Petre Pantilă, a representative of the first category.⁵⁰ By the end of the summer, Pantilă came under heavy attack from some of his colleagues: first for allegedly going behind the council's back in proposing a corrupt former communist manager for the position of county prefect, then for various acts of favoritism and embezzlement and, finally, for not caring about the improper services offered by the union-run medical dispensary in town.⁵¹ Though Pantilă dismissed the accusations, the situation in which the acting union leader had to defend himself from vicious

⁴⁸ Bush (1993:393-4) describes the context surrounding this strike, the preparations undertaken by Înfrățirea, and the response from the government. A detailed timeline is also available in *Autoturism* 7, September 1990.

⁴⁹ “Demisie.” *Autoturism* 2, April 1990.

⁵⁰ “Candidații la funcția de lider sindical al I. A. Pitești.” *Autoturism* 3, April 1990.

⁵¹ “Suntem în stare să ne judecăm părinții?” *Autoturism* 7, September 1990. “Să hotărască consiliul de conducere!” *Autoturism* 7, September 1990. “Dispensarul.” *Autoturism* 8, December 1990.

and, by all appearances, concerted attacks in the union newspaper was, to say the least, unusual. Since not even the newspaper editors were willing to back him and even engaged in veiled attacks of their own, Pantilă eventually had to make his exit.

In the meantime, the union's authority came to be challenged by managers and union members themselves. Upper management's refusal to respond to leaders' calls for dialogue and the putting of employees on half-pay leave without even notifying the union were certainly not indicative of a cooperative relationship and signaled management's willingness to take the union out of the loop in handling personnel affairs.⁵² A survey among employees showed that over 80% of respondents were not familiar with the activities of the union leadership and 90% were not happy with how union affairs were being handled.⁵³ While it is likely that the survey was just another weapon employed to destabilize the union leadership from within, it is unlikely that its results had been fabricated. Instead of massive and difficult to control strike-oriented militancy, soaring absenteeism, indiscipline and embezzlement became major problems for the management and the trade union leadership alike.⁵⁴ As this represented a direct challenge to trade union authority in front of both managers and members, the leadership found itself increasingly forced to adopt a tough stance against all forms of indiscipline. Adding to the lack of control over shop floor affairs, the union leadership seemed to lose grip even of its staple functions of service provision. The high-profile scandals in which trade union leaders were accused of using their advantageous positions to divert scarce benefits such as trips abroad or discounted automobiles were just the tip of the iceberg, as everyday conflict over highly desirable benefits and services crisscrossed the shop floor and the offices across the entire plant.

By December 1990, with union leaders in the ropes, Constantin Antonie, the SSC leader and one of the managers demoted in the purges earlier that year, made a harsh assessment of the situation: employees increasingly believed the existing unions were turning into carbon copies of the old one, especially as they got closer to management; corruption and dishonesty were rampant among the leadership; there was severe disconnect between leaders and regular members even at the shop floor level; the fact that the unions had taken on managerial tasks and failed to deliver had exacerbated members' mistrust; meanwhile, members had adopted an increasingly instrumental attitude and regarded trade unions simply as providers of services and solvers of specific problems, many of which should not have been the responsibility of unions in the first place. Antonie's solution was a return to the initial ideal of trade unionism: unions should defend members' interests in front of management, without allying with or encroaching upon it, while remaining wary of the risk of willingly or unwillingly turning into the old unions, the former communist party, or any of the existing political parties.⁵⁵

The consequences of this growing chasm between the leadership and the rank and file risked being exacerbated by the government's push for enterprise reorganization and trade union pacification. A government decision adopted in late 1990 split the platform into seven

⁵² "Proiectarea—Cenușăreasa întreprinderii?" *Autoturism* 6, August 1990. "Scrisoare deschisă către actualul consiliu de administrație și viitorii președinți de societăți." *Autoturism* 8, December 1990.

⁵³ "Sondaj de opinie." *Autoturism* 6, August 1990.

⁵⁴ On absenteeism and indiscipline as alternatives to overt conflict that can become far more complicated issues to deal with from a managerial standpoint than regular or even wildcat strikes, see Hyman ([1972] 1989:57-9). I deal with these issues at length in part II.

⁵⁵ "Există sau nu încredere în sindicat?" *Autoturism* 8, December 1990.

separate companies starting with spring 1991.⁵⁶ While this was standard procedure at the time, as the government prepared largest enterprises for privatization, trade unionists on the Dacia platform mostly feared the toll the split would have on union organization.⁵⁷ A more explicit challenge to trade union activity in general was the introduction of a comprehensive legislative framework in the early months of 1991 (see Bush 1993; 1999; Keil and Keil 2007). New regulations on collective labor contracts (law 1/1991), disputes and strikes (law 15/1991), and labor organizations (law 54/1991) aimed at curtailing unions' room of maneuver by severely restricting conditions under which they could strike legally, eliminating the possibility of unionists encroaching upon managerial functions, and rendering their political involvement illegal. While these regulations were largely ignored in the months to follow, as the government began proving its mettle in enforcing them the new laws slowly pushed the union movement into a different direction. At least in theory and if we strictly consider the Dacia platform, this actually brought unions closer to their leaders' initial hopes. Ironically or not, the much maligned government was ousted in October 1991, as a result of precisely the type of labor unrest it had tried to eliminate by legal fiat. While general elections took place only a year later, the autumn of 1991 marked a shift from a "liberal" to a more "populist" approach to economic policy (see Ban 2014:122-4), coupled with a less confrontational stance toward trade unions. 1992 was also the last year in which Dacia yielded negative economic results as well as the year in which its majority trade union left behind its endemic leadership problems. The election of a new leadership in April 1992 appeared to put a stop to the growing disconnect between members and leaders and set the stage for organizational consolidation in the years to come. Such a reversal was explicit in the electoral promises of the new union leader, Vasile Costescu, whose declared objectives were succinct yet far-reaching: guaranteeing job security, fighting against corruption, and the reunification of the platform under the banner of a single enterprise.

The business of political unionism and the politics of business unionism

By the time these transformations were in place the terrain of action as well as the organization and strategy of trade unions on the Dacia platform had registered a clear break with the situation of the first two years after December 1989. By and large, the trajectory of the Free Trade Union during these years epitomized the development of the Romanian trade union movement as a whole: from early concerns with internal power struggles to later engagement in national politics through landmark actions like the strike organized by Înfrățirea. Scholars of Romanian organized labor emphasize that a broader shift took place around 1992, even if the initial difficulties were never overcome and defined the trajectory of the union movement for the rest of the decade. While organized labor on the Dacia platform makes no exception, it does prompt a new interpretation of the condition of organized labor in Romania in the 1990s than the one shared practically unanimously among scholars concerned with this issue.⁵⁸

This dominant interpretation stresses, first, that during the entire decade union leaders constantly went out of bounds in their actions, becoming increasingly less concerned with

⁵⁶ See Government Decision nr. 1177 / 2 November 1990. "Reorganizarea IAP—în desfășurare." *Autoturism* 8, December 1990.

⁵⁷ "Sindicatelor IAP încotro?" *Autoturism* 8, December 1990. "Marea iubire." *Autoturism* 9, April 1991.

⁵⁸ See footnote 32 above.

bread and butter issues and more interested in taking over managerial tasks and becoming involved in state politics. When they did establish a modicum of rapport with enterprise managers, the story goes, leaders betrayed their constituencies by collaborating with them to the detriment of members' interests—going as far as engaging in cooperative asset stripping (see Cernat 2006:88-91). They interfered with elections, attempted to change governments in between elections, exerted a heavy influence on economic and social policies, and in plenty of cases even gave up on trade union activity altogether in favor of personal involvement in party politics. Second, leaders and their constituencies consequently became increasingly distanced from each other, despite the massive initial potential for effective mobilization, thus prefiguring some of the later debacles. Third, apart from certain objective factors like the decline of industry and the transformation of labor markets, the straying away of unions from the needs of their members was largely due to the naïve, irresponsible, ego-driven, opportunist, unknowledgeable, shortsighted or plainly irrational behavior of their leaders, who more often than not turned the legislative void of the early 1990s and the power they were endowed with by the sheer size of union organizations into instruments of personal advancement and profit. Fourth, all this led to contradictory and vacillating positions on major topics such as privatization, failures in obtaining any meaningful outcomes across the board, and an overall condition of weakness, despite the promising starting premises. From the early days of fragmented local strife over managerial control to its rapid entrance on the national political scene, the Romanian trade union movement thus allegedly had a congenital defect in that it mistook itself for something it was not and should never have been—in other words, trade unions suffered from an acute misunderstanding of their purpose and jurisdiction in the new capitalist context. And it continued doing so despite the government's policies aimed at staving off the misguided early enthusiasm, the disciplining effect of impending economic transformation, or the increasingly visible alienation of its membership.

In a different theoretical language than used in analyses of the Romanian labor movement in the 1990s, the strategy of “political” unionism (Lambert 2002)—a social movement unionism combining goals external to immediate affairs of production with explicit involvement in party politics—was dominant, clearly surpassing the alternative of “business” unionism—in which unions are strictly concerned with production-related bread and butter issues, foregoing the challenging of corporate goals and committing to the principles of profitability and labor control.⁵⁹ Such a position is easily identifiable in the works of local scholars (e.g., Pasti 1995; Vasiliu 1998), expressing not just the anti-union sentiments widespread among Romanian intellectuals, but also the easiness with which even the slightest deviation from the ideal of the narrowest business unionism could be perceived as betrayal of the rank and file and corruption of the ideals of a democratic polity and a market economy. Other authors manage to conceal this stark bias under the veil of post-factum assessments of labor weakness, which they attribute chiefly to unions; meanderings beyond the immediate goals of “preserving or expanding jobs, improving working conditions, and preserving and extending labor's purchasing power” (Kideckel 2001:97). In this case, the ultimate failure of political unionism is supposed to retrospectively indicate its a priori lack of pertinence.

⁵⁹ For a critical historical assessment of business unionism, see Moody (1988).

To be sure, there was plenty of personal profiteering, shortsightedness, gratuitous warmongering and all the rest of it on the side of trade unions, but such an admittance only goes so far in describing and explaining unions' actions and trajectories. This becomes clearer when considering that analyses of the Romanian trade union movement during the 1990s mostly focus on national union confederations and deal with unions lower on the organizational ladder only insofar as they are meant to illustrate interpretations arrived at via national-level analyses.⁶⁰ If the pursuit of political unionism is more prominent and easy to identify in the case of national confederations, as the Dacia case reveals, this seems much more ambiguous from the standpoint of local unions. The abysmal failure of the Social Solidarity Convention—*Convenția Solidarității Sociale*, a political party set up by the two most important trade union confederations at the time, CNSLR and Frăția—in the September 1992 general elections, at the height of the so-called politicization of the trade union movement highlights this difference.⁶¹ So does the refusal of the leadership of the Dacia Free Trade Union to join federative structures that served non-industrial purposes. But this decision was overturned soon enough, as Dacia unionists jumped on the bandwagon of mixing trade union with political representation. This, however, appears to have happened more due to necessity than because of leaders' venality or as a result of unionists' misperception of the goals of trade unionism as such. What primarily triggered the change was the realization that industrial interests had to be promoted politically, and not that party politics was valuable in itself. Moreover, and possibly even more controversially, the same goes for the struggle over managerial control within the enterprise.

Though a myriad of factors led to the pursuit of political unionism, the most crucial was the state ownership of enterprises, coupled with considerable governmental control over their management functions. Somewhat paradoxically, it was during the early 1990s that the condition of “transparency” of class relations typical of state socialism became genuinely explosive, as “enterprise struggles” did indeed morph into “struggles against the state,” now openly identified as “the transparent appropriator of surplus product as well as the redistributor of wages and services and the regulator of prices” (Burawoy 1985:196). This was due to the persistence (and persistent transparency) of state ownership of the means of production, now catalyzed by the mitigation of the state's repression of dissent and the economic chaos that ensued in the first years after December 1989. Class struggle nonetheless did not fit the ideal of workers organizing against exploitation as such in order to take ownership of the means of production and claim managerial control for themselves. While the transparency of unpaid labor pushed unions into struggling for its mitigation, it was framed in terms of the state extracting surplus not from workers per se but from enterprises, which, it was hypothesized, could indeed provide adequate wages and working conditions insofar as they could be freed

⁶⁰ The case of Valea Jiului miners is paradigmatic in this sense and, mostly for impressionistic reasons, represents an obligatory passage point for the entire literature on the subject.

⁶¹ The party obtained less than 0.5% of the votes. This has been described as a move by the rank and file against the political ambitions of union leaders. The sheer scale of the failure indicates that the union leadership itself was far from homogeneous when it came to an all-out pursuit of political unionism and that the confederate initiative lacked support not just from regular members but from a significant part of the leadership as well. As Kideckel (2001:107) notes, local trade union leaders could hardly eschew pressures from the rank and file, so it is highly unlikely that they gave unconditional support to highly controversial confederate initiatives. Retrospectively, one of the confederation leaders at the time also pointed out the rupture between the national and the local leaderships (see Mitrea 2015).

from the yoke of the state. From this standpoint, enterprise managers appeared as helpless and irrelevant middlemen or, as it happened at Dacia, as objectively victimized as workers themselves. This was the structural facilitator of collaboration between unions and enterprise managers, which has routinely been classified as yet another proof of union leaders' corruption and lack of understanding of the purpose of labor organization. The most obvious manifestation of such collaboration was the aggressive pursuit of enterprise autonomy, one of the hallmarks of unions' struggle against the government, meant to grant enterprise managers much more and certainly not less power. The relentless demands for economic reform and the largely unconditional support for privatization were likewise driven by the belief that the political and economic realms needed separation in order for the latter to function justly and efficiently. At Dacia, low wages, bad working conditions, lack of investment and dwindling job security were not regarded as consequences of market dysfunctionality, but rather as legacies of the planned economy and effects of present political meddling. With car buyer waiting lists of hundreds of thousands, the market imperative could not be invoked in order to explain the production slump of the first three years after 1989 and the decline in workers' welfare.⁶² Instead, what were perceived as alien and at the same time highly transparent political imperatives could.

The extant ownership structure thus pushed unions into fighting for separation from political interference. This was backed by a belief in the possibility of establishing a virtuous circle of the market, in which the market success of the enterprise and recognition of the value of labor buttressed each other. The supposed naïveté of this position has made for a pristine object of criticism in the literature on the Romanian labor movement during this time. That demands for marketization were more often than not accompanied by demands for state protection against the commodification of labor power only strengthened interpretations stressing the incoherent and blatantly contradictory nature of trade union action. What such criticism missed was the possibility that enterprise-level leaders were actually envisioning a model of unionism in which unions were integrated in a perfectly functional market economy as monopoly sellers of labor power whose existential function would be the upholding of collective bargaining on both sides: on the one hand, unions were to defend the immediate material interests of their members (wages and working conditions) while disregarding labor market inequality (which they could even actively foster if it advanced their objectives, as indeed was the case at Dacia); on the other hand, unions were to take an active role in labor control in order to guarantee that members stuck to their part of the bargain, largely irrespective of broader corporate goals, the setting of which remained exclusive to management. This, however, could not be achieved without managerial autonomy in bargaining over wages and working conditions and without functional markets in outputs and all inputs, including labor power. In their turn, these could only be obtained at the cost of unions' seeking influence with the government and engaging in ostensibly political affairs. More than a simple reaction to transparent exploitation, unions' political engagement thus gained somewhat of a crusading righteousness. Local unions' support for a model of political unionism was initially regarded as simple means to the end of obtaining a fully functional business unionism.

⁶² On Dacia's market situation during the 1990s, see part II.

There is a risk of scholasticism here, to the extent that the conceptual distinction between these two models of unionism is forcefully read into the development of trade unionism immediately after 1989. This was, however, a distinction made by all major actors involved: from government officials to enterprise managers and trade union leaders themselves. The 1991 legislative package explicitly aimed to promote a model of unionism strictly concerned with members' immediate economic interests excluding any concern for managerial responsibilities and any involvement in matters external to production. Such a view was reproduced by Constantin Stroe in his description of trade unions as "social departments" in the managerial organization of the enterprise. Accordingly, the collective labor contract signed in late April 1990—when the new legislation on trade unions and collective labor contracts was not even in sight—delineated union responsibilities that were largely congruent with this perspective. Most importantly, this was not done against the will of trade unionists and corresponded to the intentions of the union leadership. That leaders had such beliefs from so early on appears less far-fetched if we consider several important factors that contributed to the favoring of business over political unionism—that is, apart from the forceful promotion of business unionism by government and management, whose influence is difficult to deny. One such factor was precisely the legacy of state socialist trade unionism, which in fact had far more affinities with business unionism than with political unionism: not questioning broader issues, focusing on immediate material interests, and especially the maintenance of an active role in securing labor control were central characteristics of both the state socialist and the business models of unionism.⁶³ Another important role was played by representatives of trade unions from Western Europe and especially from the US who were sent to Romania in the early months of 1990 and who ended up having a huge influence on the normative commitments of trade union leaders across the board. While national-level leaders benefitted from training courses abroad, local training courses and seminars were made available to enterprise- and federation-level union leaders for several years after December 1989. The major player in this process was the AFL-CIO, which programmatically disseminated the business model of unionism (see Herod 2001:chapter 9; Lichtenstein 201:241).⁶⁴ In a time when the organization of trade unions was widely regarded as an experimental affair, such an exposure carried considerable weight.

The ideal of business unionism was readily available and certainly desirable to the actors involved in the reconstitution of trade unions after 1989. At least at Dacia, it appears to have been the only legitimate model of labor organization in the first months of 1990. The major structural antinomy of business unionism during this early postsocialist period was that

⁶³ Which is why critics of state socialist regimes could regard "the transmission belt unions of authoritarian communism" as "a bastardized version" of business unionism (see Falk 2003:289). While harking back to rudimentary conspiracy theories in attempting an explanation, Miron Mitrea, one of the most important leaders of the Romanian trade union movement in the early 1990s, pointed out that "We don't do politics! [*Noi nu facem politică!*]" was a major leitmotif of the movement during its early years—major enough for Mitrea to use it as a title for his book on Romanian trade unions—and that there was plenty of skepticism in regard to any sort of overt political involvement coming from the ranks of unionists themselves (see Mitrea 2015).

⁶⁴ According to a former confederation leader (Mitrea 2015:chapter 1), in this early period thousands of union officials from all organizational levels participated in training programs and seminars organized both abroad and in Romania, which were immensely influential for the entire union movement. Mitrea also confirms the paramount role played by AFL-CIO. The union movement on the Dacia platform made no exception, as news of participation in seminars in meetings appeared in the trade union newspaper up to the second half of the decade.

it seemed to require the employing of political unionism in order to reach an institutional setup adequate to its functioning. This contradiction sparked massive public controversy, made the government push for aggressive action against trade unions, and provoked conflict within the trade union movement itself. All these were exacerbated by the fact that some union leaders seemed to be turning the necessity of political unionism into a virtue worth pursuing for its own sake. If at first these processes were relatively difficult to discern in the landscape of fluctuating enthusiasm characteristic for the early organizational experimentation, generalized economic disarray, and frequent political turnarounds, they became much more obvious starting with 1992, as the terrain of trade union action began to stabilize. The dilemmas and conflicts of the first two years nonetheless set the stage for things to come up to the moment of privatization, defined the choices made at this crucial moment in the history of organized labor on the Dacia platform, and witnessed bouts of temporary resurgence in times of crisis even long after the change of ownership seemed to be leaving all these troubles behind.

The new men of power

A combination of structural (property relations) and ideational (belief in the virtuous circle of the market) factors pushed trade unions onto the national political scene. Here they were greeted with various responses, depending on the alliances sought by competing actors. Attempting to reorient and consolidate itself as a workers' party (see Siani-Davies 2005: 223-4) and at the same time keep chaos-inducing tendencies toward economic and administrative decentralization in check, the governing National Salvation Front had its hands full in obtaining labor's allegiance while deterring its most cherished objectives. If this was not enough, labor's demands closely resembled those of opposition parties and their intellectual allies: labor leaders praised civil society, democracy, decentralization, privatization, the market, and all the rest of postsocialism's "hegemonic signifiers" (Kalb forthcoming), which were gaining explicit anti-Front undertones. In an apparent paradox, organized labor was emerging as one of the key supporters of "reform", wanting things to move much quicker than the purportedly popular party in government was willing to concede.

All this sounds highly familiar. As David Ost (1990; 2005) has shown, anti-politics and market utopianism were the ideological pillars of Solidarity, having deep roots in post-68 developments and close affinities with the region's second *Bildungsbürgertum* in the making (Eyal et al. 1998). Indeed, in retrospect it has been highlighted that postsocialist organized labor systematically acted in favor of the class interest of the latter and against its own. But the ideational explanation usually invoked here can easily lapse into idealism and efface the complexity of the situation in which organized labor managed such a magnificent feat of misrecognition. The complex landscape of class relations extant at the time meant that such hegemonic signifiers were not appropriated in the same manner and to the same extent by everyone. Indeed, the depiction of a uniform belief spreading from the high ranks of central intellectuals to trade union leaders and workers themselves hides more than it reveals. As I show at length in this dissertation, trade union leaders had their work cut out for themselves in persuading workers to align their beliefs and actions to the dual ideology of market and civil society, a task at which they were not particularly successful. Aside from the occasional survey fabricating their supposed "opinion" in matters of political and economic philosophy, workers

faced more immediate and acute problems of securing their livelihood and possibly grabbing novel opportunities on the labor market. As I show in part II, this experience was quite different and much more ambivalent than the doctrines professed by those who continued to enjoy a relative distance from necessity. How can we explain the emergence and subsequent resilience of the apparent rupture between this everyday experience of labor and the ideological commitments of organized labor?

First and foremost, we must recognize that it witnessed constant fluctuations depending on the contradictory pressures bearing down on union leaders and on their capacity to navigate a disjunctive set of relationships centered around them. On one side, they faced central intellectuals and politicians rising mostly from the ranks of the state socialist bureaucracy and technical intelligentsia, who sought to ally themselves with enterprise managers in maintaining control over labor (see Siani-Davies 2005: chapters 5 and 6). Union leaders maintained a contradictory relationship with this bloc. First, most leaders evinced a spontaneous affinity of the habitus with the representatives of the new powers that be, as they were also recruited from the ranks of the technical intelligentsia—the typical trade union leader was an engineer with some experience in mid- or low-level management (see Pasti 1995: 250). This is certainly one of the major reasons why national-level trade union leaders were susceptible to being coopted into projects that were ultimately inimical to labor. This was the case especially with leaders coming from large enterprises from the biggest cities, which had strong managerial elites and offered opportunities of direct contact with the social world of the *Bildungsbürgertum*. Incorporation was not a straightforward affair, however, as labor leaders were likely to come from the lower tiers of management and oftentimes had a personal history of conflict with upper managers and bureaucrats. Coupled with the socio-spatial isolation of smaller settlements in the provinces, labor leaders who felt marginalized by their class peers could just as well harbor revanchist feelings toward them. The language of market and civil society could in this way function as an instrument for union leaders to wage war against enterprise managers, state bureaucrats, politicians and central intellectuals alike. If common class origin endowed this struggle with relative discursive homogeneity, the extant balance of forces gave considerable power to union leaders. As labor made a name for itself on the national political scene from the very early days of the revolution (see Siani-Davies 2005: 70-78), the labor leader became almost overnight a staple figure of the new political environment. To be sure, playing the hand of labor control could oftentimes trump formal hierarchy and class distinction. Leaders' ability to do so depended on the extent to which they successfully negotiated their similarly convoluted relationship with workers.

Consistent with their class habitus and claims to participation in the postsocialist *Bildungsbürgertum*, labor leaders constantly preached the market and civil society to workers themselves, and they quite readily confessed to attempting mass conversion. In doing so, they could count on a certain degree of charismatic authority by virtue of their membership in the technical intelligentsia—no matter the occasional squabbles, workers had an almost unconditional respect for engineers. This did not make labor leaders immune to problems of legitimacy caused by discrepancies between discourse and reality, and it certainly did not mean that workers automatically practiced what they were preached. As evidenced by the legitimization crises faced by so many postsocialist trade union leaders, this was a delicate

balancing act. Leaders, and especially those who resisted incorporation into the ranks of the political or administrative officialdom, faced an existential requirement to maintain a modicum of legitimacy in front of workers. Plenty of work had to go into this, alongside efforts to make room for themselves in central and local fields of power. No wonder that so many lacked the acumen and resources to navigate such a treacherous landscape.

The two-front war, 1992–1996

Organizational consolidation and the internal front

The leadership of the Free Trade Union elected in April 1992 benefited from a relative political and economic stabilization. In Dacia's particular case, this was determined by the booming of internal demand and the overcoming of the most severe supply flow problems of the previous years as well as by the granting of a certain degree of autonomy to the enterprise, translating into some leeway for collective bargaining. On the other hand, the new leadership found an inheritance of organizational disarray and disconnect between the officialdom and the rank and file. It is to this problem that the new leaders turned their eyes first as the union underwent a process of organizational consolidation lasting until 1996, when another junction of government and trade union elections would again change the terrain and strategy of struggle.

Vertical consolidation was first priority, and the union underwent a major overhaul of its internal structure. Together with the new name—Sindicatul Automobile Dacia (SAD)—a considerable part of these changes would persist to the time of my fieldwork. Efforts went into strengthening the position of the shop floor union officialdom—the group leaders representing small contingents of workers bound by division of labor, and organization leaders in charge at a departmental level—who were to function as autonomous two-way nodes between the union leadership and the rank and file. For this to work, the leadership took on the task of keeping shop floor union officials in line and sluggards and mavericks were regularly called to order. Direct election of shop floor officials by the rank and file was introduced to ensure bottom-up pressure and grassroots legitimacy. Attempts at decentralization of service provision and decision-making were undertaken, as shop floor officials were asked to contribute in designing of the union strategy and devising tactical responses involving mobilization. The leadership also vouched to intervene in

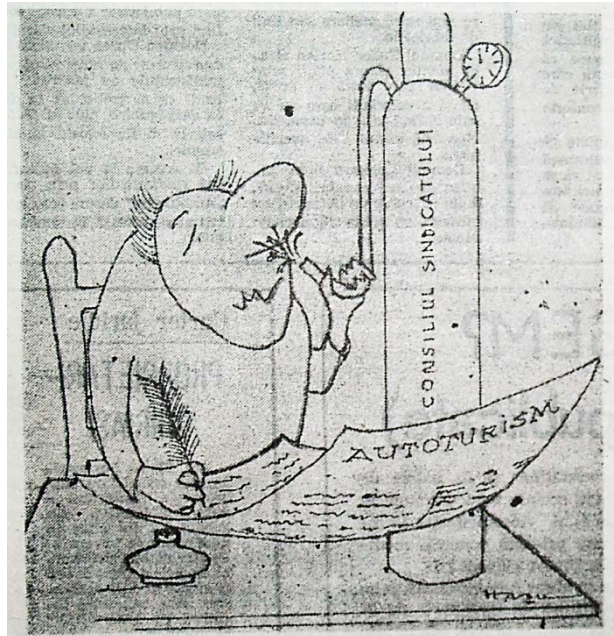


FIGURE I.3. The newspaper editors inspiring themselves from the union council.
Source: *Autoturism* 12, February 1993.

case of abuse from the management against shop floor officials or by the latter against the interests of the rank and file. After protracted discussions, a decision was made for organization leaders to be paid regular salaries and for group leaders to receive bonuses every three months,

providing them with a much-desired material incentive. The union also hired its own full-time staff: an accountant, an economist, and professional editors for its newspaper. While assuming partisanship (figure I.3), the new editors programmatically granted generous coverage to dissenting voices as part of a broader and conscious attempt at rendering union affairs transparent and democratic. Debates became a staple feature in the union newspaper during this period, on topics as important as objectives, organization and budgeting; transcripts from high-level meetings were published together with comprehensive lists with the names of union officials. A tradition of publishing a detailed annual report by the union leadership was instituted, which received comments from new assemblies held at the level of each organization and was approved in the union-wide general assembly. The practice of the general assembly became generalized across the structure of the union, with group assemblies being called upon to providing input from the rank and file and gather momentum for grassroots mobilization. From 1992 to 1996 there was a flurry of union-wide general assemblies that endowed union elections and negotiations for the collective labor contract with considerable public effervescence. At least numerically, these policies paid off, and the number of members increased from approximately 20,000 to 22,000.⁶⁵

This might just as well have happened due to the expansion of the union's functions of service provision. Concern for standard provision—vacation tickets, rest and treatment tickets, medical services etc.—increased starting with 1992 and advances were made in going beyond what was inherited from the pre-89 trade union. Though attempts at directly channeling resources toward housing construction failed, SAD gained ownership over the Colibași Trade Unions' House of Culture.⁶⁶ The union set up a company for car and car parts distribution, also selling various discounted goods to employees—from sugar, cooking oil and gas cylinders, to carpets, TV sets and washing machines.⁶⁷ This was welcomed as proof of embracing the market economy while acting as an additional measure of social protection. SAD also began organizing a series of public events—culture and sports competitions, celebrations, etc.—for union members and, more generally, for Mioveni's inhabitants, the most important of which—the SAD football cup and the celebration of the Automaker's Day [*Ziua Constructorului de Automobile*—endured into the 2010s.

The renewed emphasis on service provision was part of a broader reorientation toward bread and butter issues. Wages, job security, and working and social conditions were highlighted as chief objectives and “wages without layoffs” became a watchword of this entire period.⁶⁸ If job security was not as urgent a matter as it was feared, union officials had their hands full when it came to working and social conditions, which were nothing short of disastrous across the entire plant (figure I.4). Apart from minutiae like safety equipment, basic

⁶⁵ “Cine are interes să fim divizați?” *Autoturism* 9, December 1992. “Un sondaj de opinie care s-a făcut aproape chitic.” *Autoturism* 36, April 1994.

⁶⁶ SAD's victory came as a result of a protracted battle with CNSLR, the confederation that inherited most of the real estate and service infrastructure of the defunct UGSR, a transfer considered illegitimate and even illegal by unionists by rival confederations. This was one of the major issues dividing the Romanian trade union movement throughout the 1990s and well into the 2000s.

⁶⁷ For a detailed discussion on automobile and parts distribution see part II.

⁶⁸ “Proiect privind tactica și strategia Sindicatului Liber Independent al Constructorilor de Autoturisme Dacia Pitești, *Autoturism* 1, June 1992. “Adunarea generală extraordinară a SAD.” *Autoturism* 26, October 1993.



Microcantinele din secții duc o lipsă acută de tacături.
— Ionescule, ia polonicul dacă nu te-ai învrednicit să-ți aduci lingură de acasă.

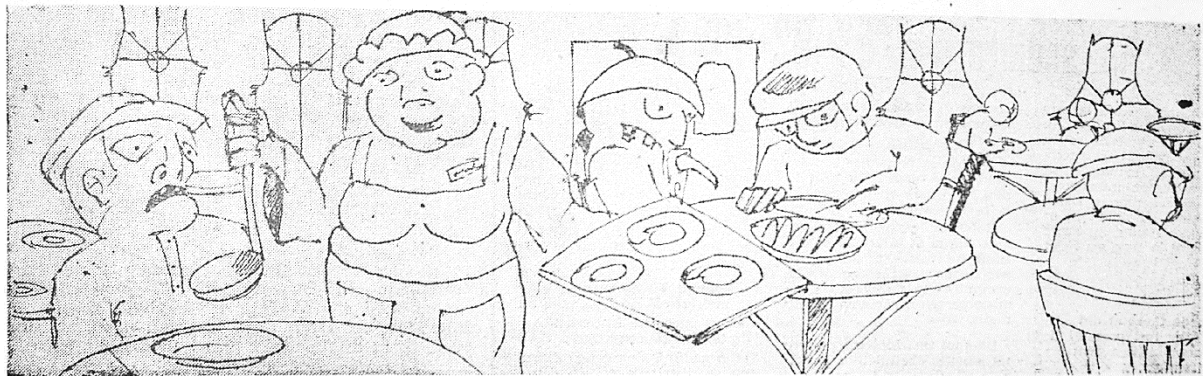


FIGURE I.4. Cold-weather working conditions: “If our ancestors lit fires on the peaks of the Carpathians to show that we were masters of these lands, today, on the Colibași industrial platform, both on the shop floor and in automakers' homes, fires are lit in order not to die from the cold.” And basic shortages: “The canteens face an acute shortage of utensils: – Ionescu, take this ladle, since you didn’t bother to bring a spoon from home.”

Source: *Autoturism* 11, February 1993.

tools, or soap and towels, unionists pushed management to insource transportation for commuting workers and insisted on the acquisition of new buses, offering to partially cover the costs with money collected from members. They also offered to give up on a court case demanding compensation for the lack of winter heating if management diverted money for the purchasing of new buses.⁶⁹ As negotiations over heating systematically failed, leaders pondered whether to strike or sue the company. Several strike threats and a loss in court later, they announced management’s willingness to cooperate.⁷⁰ Rejecting criticisms of their newfound resilience, leaders emphasized that even though strike threats and going to court were aggressive moves, the union had to hold its ground, albeit without lapsing into a mutually antagonizing relationship with management.⁷¹ The same applied to wages, which by and large remained the most contentious issue (figure I.5).

A major step in organizational consolidation was the enhanced role of the collective labor contract, depicted as the chief instrument for attaining bread and butter goals and whose

⁶⁹ “Dosarul frigului la Colibași.” *Autoturism* 17, May 1993.

⁷⁰ “Și la S.C. ECMA va fi cald.” *Autoturism* 46, October 1994. Strike threats failed to materialize due to disagreements in the union council (see below).

⁷¹ “Care pe care? Sau... respectul reciproc?” *Autoturism* 12, February 1993.

negotiation was touted as the union's primary task and reason for existing.⁷² Negotiations enjoyed massive coverage in the plant newspaper and information circulated both ways across the vertical structure of the trade union, with group and especially organization leaders being encouraged to play a more active role during negotiation periods. Attempts at professionalizing negotiations were made, with the setting up of a "technical-economic commission" tasked with analyzing the company's financial situation and advising the union's negotiations commission. Regarded as a mechanism of profit redistribution, the collective labor contract became increasingly detailed, with highly specific provisions regarding wages, wage classifications and bonuses. A consensus was reached that striking and protesting were measures of last resort, only when all attempts at peaceful negotiation failed. Negotiations themselves became increasingly tough and protracted, a standard feature thereafter, even if not yet resembling the much tenser postprivatization atmosphere. Another novelty was the union's insistence on enforcing the collective labor contract at all costs, which meant that shop floor officials had to be as knowledgeable as possible in matters concerning the contract and the existing labor laws. The attempt at establishing a type of union-run "contractualism" permeating all relations between employer and employees was buttressed by routine pleas for upholding the rule of law at all times and in all situations, with the collective labor contract acting as the main piece of legislation. In the oft repeated words of SAD's newly elected leader, "the only admissible dictatorship is the dictatorship of the law—in other words, the law is harsh but it is the law."⁷³

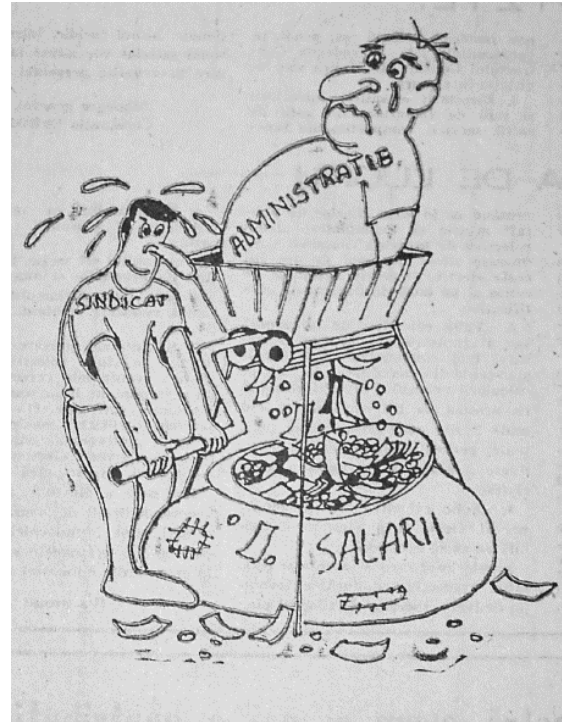


FIGURE I.5. "Management plus negotiations equals wages... but also honest work"
Source: *InfoAutoturism* 58, May 1995.

All efforts notwithstanding, establishing an industrial rule of law was not just about devising a coherent set of bureaucratically enforced, contractually specified and collectively bargained rights and obligations—traits of the classic type of workplace contractualism (see Brody 1996). Since it functioned as the core ideological component of consolidation, the discrepancy between the emphasis on the rights of good wages and proper working and living conditions in return for the obligation of honest work (figure I.5) and the reality of rapidly declining real wages, persistently disastrous working conditions, and visibly widening social inequality both inside and outside the plant risked jeopardizing the entire project of

⁷² "Negocierea contractului colectiv de muncă." *Autoturism* 1, June 1992. "Adunarea generală a SAD: Rostul sindicatului este acela de a negocia un bun contract colectiv de muncă." *InfoAutoturism* 52, February 1995.

⁷³ "Să gândim maturi despre noi." *Autoturism* 2, June 1992. On "contract unionism" (or "contractualism") and the idea of a shop-floor "rule of law", see Tolliday and Zeitlin (1992). Belief in the rule of law was a constitutive trait for the region's second *Bildungsbürgertum* (see Eyal et al. 1998:97) and remained highly salient in public life during the 1990s (see Verdery 1996:chapter 8).

consolidation. Hence, the contractualist discourse came to be accompanied by increasingly aggressive attacks on various types of internal enemies allegedly endangering the industrial rule of law based on the adequate valuation of labor.⁷⁴ Three groups were systematically antagonized in this manner: workers themselves, the so-called “technical, economic, and social-administrative” (TESA) personnel, and the upper management.

The leadership evinced a theoretically trenchant and practically highly ambiguous discourse in its relationship to the union’s majority constituency of manual workers. As consolidation entailed the union becoming a monopoly seller of labor power, it had to guarantee proper remuneration to workers and adequate labor discipline to management. Since both remained highly problematic throughout the 1990s, SAD adopted a tough stance on labor control and attempted to elicit both forced and voluntary dedication to the appropriate expenditure of labor power. A major component of the union’s role in securing labor control was the active fostering of labor market inequality and the drawing of clear cut boundaries of economic and moral worth within workers’ ranks. The period running from 1992 to 1996 was when the discourse putting “work” (disciplined, fully dedicated labor yielding expected results) against so-called “nonwork” (undisciplined, unproductive labor harboring ulterior motives) became an established feature of industrial relations on the Dacia platform.⁷⁵

TESA personnel made up the second group of internal enemies. They were accused of betraying workers and the common goal of securing the survival of production in favor of their personal interests.⁷⁶ The higher TESA salaries were said to inflict harm on the enterprise and were blamed for the insufficient wages of workers. Far from vaunting empty words, union leaders actively militated for a more equal distribution of the wage fund and castigated attempts at devising wage policies favoring non-workers. TESA were also accused of imposing a “dictatorial” regime on the shop floor, disregarding workers’ rights and the union’s right to represent them.⁷⁷ Upholding the collective labor contract implied the sharing of control over the shop floor between union officials and supervisors, so joint union-management commissions deciding on a vast number of issues became ubiquitous across the platform. Strengthening the role of shop floor officials included their active involvement in such institutionalized forms of shared control and, profiting from the weakness of supervision, union

⁷⁴ On the legitimation problems produced by the impossibility of ensuring labor reproduction via the expenditure of labor power in production see chapters 8 and 9. The identification of internal enemies that need to be banished in order to secure the physical and moral existence of the community of righteous individuals is typical of populist politics. I discuss this at length in part II, where I deal with the attempt at separating work in production from work in the informal economy of car parts trafficking. Since this concerns labor control, part II also contains a much more elaborate discussion of the union’s role in disciplining workers by attempting to impose classifications of worthiness within their ranks.

⁷⁵ The distinction between “work” and “nonwork” was taken over from state socialist times (see Verdery 1996:23). The post-89 refurbishing of state socialist discursive tropes concerning labor to fit new goals and novel challenges was a particularly salient issue not just when it came to organized labor, but also attempts at instituting labor market monopolies and regulating urban everyday life. Consequently, it has a constant recurring presence throughout this dissertation. I deal with the question of work and nonwork at length in part II.

⁷⁶ “Sindicatul ‘destabilizatoare?’” *Autoturism* 27, October 1993. “Raport privind activitatea Consiliului Sindicatului Autoturism Dacia-Pitești, în perioada ianuarie 1993 – ianuarie 1994.” *Autoturism* 32, February 1994. For an extensive discussion of TESA personnel and the role of the union’s criticism in securing labor control, see part II.

⁷⁷ “Două interviuri la nivel de vârf.” *Autoturism* 21, July 1993. “Siguranța locului de muncă gătită de frica șomajului.” *Autoturism* 31, January 1994.

officials could in many cases claim the lion's share of oversight over shop floor affairs. The anti-TESA stance of the leadership was not limited to this, as they stressed the parasitism and intrinsic uselessness of TESA personnel and militated for a drastic reduction in their number.

Shortly into the period of organizational consolidation, the union leadership proffered a similar discourse regarding the upper management. Angry pleas for the immediate removal of unnamed managing cadres harboring "other interests than the Romanian automobile" were relatively common until the second part of 1993 and became a standard feature of the leadership's discourse after the 1992 elections.⁷⁸

Having already remarked himself as a rare critic of Constantin Stroe long before being elected union leader, Costescu used his new position to launch a series of vicious attacks on the general manager of Automobile, the largest and most important company on the platform after the 1991 split.⁷⁹ This marked a clear break with the lack of opposition espoused by previous leaders and proved useful in winning the elections and mitigating the union's legitimacy problems. The first year of Costescu's mandate was marred by attacks on the upper management of all companies on the platform. If Stroe was too big a fish and enjoyed the support of a considerable part of the union officialdom, at least one director of one of the smaller companies on the platform fell victim to union militancy, this time not due to harboring a "communist" past but because of alleged incompetence and venality (figure I.6).⁸⁰ In mid-1993, signs of a ceasefire were apparent and "peace" could be spoken of by autumn.⁸¹ By the



FIGURE I.6. "They sequestered me". A cunning director stuck to his desk, despite militant workers demanding his resignation. Source: *Autoturism* 9, December 1992.

end of the year, Costescu was debating the alignment of interests between the union and upper management and the following year management representatives began attending the union's general assembly once again. At the beginning of 1995 Stroe himself insisted that SAD had finally reached "maturity" in its relationship to management.⁸² A year later, unionists rejoiced that SAD had come to share the seats of the platform's "general staff" with management.⁸³

The progression from open conflict to peace and, subsequently, a somewhat enthusiastic alliance with upper management was real enough. It had little to do with the leadership selling out to management and even less with the union and the upper management

⁷⁸ "Să gândim maturi despre noi." *Autoturism* 2, June 1992.

⁷⁹ "Domnilor vătafi." *Autoturism* 4, August 1992.

⁸⁰ "Demisii... duplicitate?" *Autoturism* 9, December 1992.

⁸¹ "Două interviuri la nivel de vârf." *Autoturism* 21, July 1993. "Mi-am reluat misia." *Autoturism* 24, September 1993.

⁸² "Adunarea generală a SAD: Rostul sindicatului este acela de a negocia un bun contract colectiv de muncă." *InfoAutoturism* 52, February 1995.

⁸³ "Adunarea generală a SAD." *InfoAutoturism* 72, February 1996.

equally sharing strategic managerial tasks. Indeed, not even at the height of the union's critique of management did its leadership claim managerial control as its own. While its officials openly stated that the union needed to perform certain managerial tasks, this was regarded as a merely temporary situation, as this was not the "traditional" purpose of trade unionism.⁸⁴ Moreover, the vast majority of these tasks that required union involvement were strictly related to the labor process: quality, productivity, the organization of production, personnel allocation, the rational use of resources etc. Insofar as the shop floor and the labor process were concerned, management proved more than willing to bolster SAD's leverage, sometimes even going against the actions of shop floor supervisors. One pillar of this alliance was the consented, contractualist containment of conflict, allowing for confrontations to take place only under the banner of collective bargaining, no matter how tough this proved.⁸⁵ The other was the division of managerial labor between strategic and shop floor tasks. While the union made no explicit claims on the former, it could claim a considerable share of the latter; and this with the explicit consent of the upper management who insisted that union involvement in securing labor control and managing the labor process was paramount. This alliance with the upper management contributed to consolidation by bolstering contractualism while at the same time giving the leadership enough leeway in its symbolic struggles with workers and TESA personnel.

Ironically, the peace that contributed decisively to SAD's organizational consolidation came at the jeopardy of permanent intestine conflict. SAD's leadership was pitted against a motley of ostensible allies: workers, union officials, and smaller unions that had appeared on the platform after the splitting of the defunct Automobile Enterprise. Insofar as it attempted to discipline the labor force without delivering on its promises for adequate wages and working conditions—in other words, insofar as it demanded that workers invest all their efforts in labor expenditure in production while at the same time demanding an indefinite deferral on expectations that such an investment guaranteed returns sufficient for reproduction—the union leadership faced an uphill battle in holding the rank and file in line and sometimes had to deal with workers' open revolt. If the occasional criticism of the leadership for not understanding workers' dire income situation might not have meant much, leaders' push for "cleaning up" the labor force could provoke violent reactions.⁸⁶ An unusual episode of this kind happened in the fall of 1994, when unknown assailants repeatedly broke the windows of Costescu's house during the night and left notes containing death threats and demands for resignation.⁸⁷ Far more common responses were indicated by the persistence of mass absenteeism, the proliferation of trafficking with car parts and raw material, or the lukewarm support given to trade union protest activities. Until privatization became a certainty at the end of the decade, the union's inability to control labor remained an insurmountable hurdle on the road to organizational consolidation.

Conflict within the ranks of the union officialdom was likewise endemic throughout this entire period. Partly an inheritance from the years of trade union constitution, this was now cultivated not just by Costescu's adversaries, but by the new leader himself, who, in contrast

⁸⁴ "În vederea pregătirii adunării generale SAD." *Autoturism* 31, January 1994.

⁸⁵ "Informarea consiliului SAD privind stadiul negocierilor noilor contracte de muncă." *Autoturism* 38, May 1994.

⁸⁶ "Domnule 'Anonim'." *Autoturism* 8, November 1992. On the union's proposals for "cleaning up" the workforce, see chapter 8.

⁸⁷ "Casa liderului Costescu sub asediu." *InfoAutoturism* 48, November 1994.

to those who preceded him, could count on support from numerous allies, and especially from a large part of the rank and file. Costescu's confrontational stance toward management and his early attacks on company directors sparked immediate protests in the union council, whom Costescu was separately gunning for by exposing alleged acts of corruption and sabotage. To be sure, the very

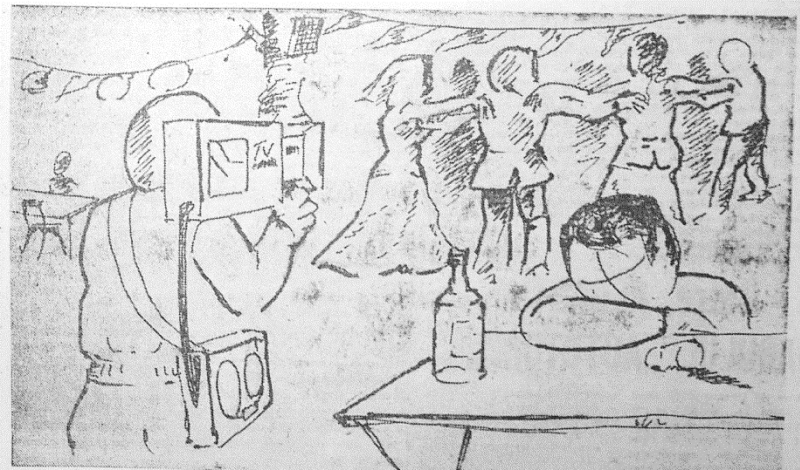


FIGURE I.7. The union's recently acquired video camera used for filming a private wedding.

Source: *Autoturism* 29, November 1993.

idea of organizational consolidation fostered such strife: if union independence from management came at the price of some shop floor officials “betraying” the union and joining the ranks of management, the bolstering of vertical cohesion sparked acute controversies over the redistribution of the union’s budget between organizations and central structures.⁸⁸ By early 1993, the conflict had become a standard feature of trade union affairs and the existence of two opposing camps in the union council was public knowledge. Costescu and his allies routinely accused their adversaries of harboring interests alien to the noble goals of trade unionism, selling out to management, embezzling assets (figure I.7), and systematically sabotaging important trade union actions. Costescu’s opponents, on the other hand, readily denounced his contrarian and authoritarian personality, accused him of manipulating the rank and file and of having won the 1992 elections through fraud; unsurprisingly, they demanded his prompt resignation.⁸⁹ A first peak was reached with the resignation of one of the vice-leaders who opposed Costescu, after a brutal exchange in a council meeting in which Costescu’s proposal for a warning strike against the lack of heating in the plant received a negative vote from council members.⁹⁰ A few weeks later, the conflict entered a new phase once Costescu’s newfound anti-TESA stance kicked in. With 19 of the union’s 44 organization leaders being TESA and some representing organizations in which TESA personnel made up the bulk of the membership, the increasingly systematic accusations of TESA betrayal and favoritism did not bode well with a large part of the SAD council.⁹¹

⁸⁸ “Sorcove... nu prea vesele.” *Autoturism* 9, December 1992. “Proiect pentru folosirea cotizației sindicatului.” *Autoturism* 10, January 1993. “.” *Autoturism* 10, January 1993.

⁸⁹ “Cine sponsorizează ‘zvonoteca?’” *Autoturism* 11, February 1993.

⁹⁰ “Disensiuni în sânul biroului executiv al SAD.” *Autoturism* 15, April 1993. “Pe scurt de la ultimele ședințe ale consiliului SAD.” *Autoturism* 15, April 1993.

⁹¹ In early 1994, there were 19 workers, 19 TESA and 6 foremen who acted as organization leaders. 104 out of the union’s 489 groups were led by TESA, with 17 led by foremen and 368 led by workers. Even though workers far outnumbered TESA (see part II), organization leaders had identical voting privileges on the council no matter how many members they represented. This was yet another point of contention, as attempts were made to limit the voting rights of leaders from smaller organizations. See “Raport privind activitatea Consiliului Sindicatului Autoturism Dacia-Pitești, în perioada ianuarie 1993 – ianuarie 1994.” *Autoturism* 32, February 1994. Obviously, it is possible that the anti-TESA discourse originated in pre-existing cleavages in the SAD council.

By late 1993, the conflict was rapidly approaching its climax, as Costescu called his opponents' bluff and asked for a vote of confidence from the rank and file. Still not anticipating the coming drama, Costescu suddenly announced his resignation in the first days of 1994, prompting the quick organization of elections, in which he initially declined to run.⁹² The *coup de théâtre* was yet to come: a few weeks later the council's report for 1993 was invalidated by the general assembly, which, according to the statute, meant that all officials would be removed from office and general elections would have to be



FIGURE I.8. The same camera, now used for exposing the conspicuous immorality of some of the members of the SAD council: “When we vote for the recording of SAD council meetings, what a surprise, the camera makes us lose sight of things: literally and figuratively....”
Source: *Autoturism* 34, March 1994.

held across the entire trade union hierarchy.⁹³ Costescu's ultimate decision to run in the elections and the precipitous transformation of the conflict into an apparently all-or-nothing affair gave birth to a flurry of back and forth accusations between Costescu's supporters and detractors, raising the level of hostility to an unprecedented level. Costescu lambasted his opponents' thievery from workers' pockets (figure I.8), while they denounced his sham resignation and blatant manipulation of the general assembly. Costescu eventually won the election after a second round of voting. The situation in the council remained just as unclear, since the worker/TESA composition was unchanged.⁹⁴ The vote temporarily settled the conflict, though verbal attacks continued sporadically. Despite his apparently massive victory, the animosity against Costescu persisted and eventually contributed to his presumably voluntary departure less than two years after his leadership position had been reconfirmed.

The March 1994 elections were the high point of TESA-worker tensions in the 1990s. This was the only time when the idea of breaking up SAD and turning it into a workers-only organization was publicly displayed in the general assembly.⁹⁵ Far from being a new idea, this followed the relatively common practice of having separate unions for workers and TESA in large industrial enterprises. The closest example was on the Dacia platform itself: the third largest trade union on the platform—the FAT trade union—was a breakaway organization from SSC and ostensibly represented the TESA personnel who had been allegedly disavowed by the

⁹² “O demisie.” *Autoturism* 34, January 1994. “Rămâne de văzut cine bate din palme.” *Autoturism* 32, February 1994.

⁹³ Including groups and organizations. See *Autoturism* 33, February 1994.

⁹⁴ See *Autoturism* 35, March 1994.

⁹⁵ “Doriţi un sindicat democrat, care să răspundă actualei etape, sau un sindicat tradiţional?” *Autoturism* 33, February 1994.

SSC leadership elected in 1992.⁹⁶ In SAD's case, this cleavage did not result in a split and, even though it did not fully subside, eventually gave way to an increasingly convoluted interunion rivalry. The atmosphere of interunion cooperation of the first two years did not last long into Costescu's leadership mandate. The fears that the split of the Automobile Enterprise into seven companies would lead to trade union fragmentation were at least partly vindicated: in 1992, there were no less than seven unions on the platform, five more than before the split.⁹⁷ With only around 14% non-unionized employees, SAD took the lion's share of the rest with its twenty thousand members making up over 65% of the platform's employees, spread across four companies; SSC came second, with approximately five thousand members (16%) in four companies; the other unions had from several hundred to just a few dozen members, with each union covering a separate company.⁹⁸ Fragmentation was accompanied by a struggle over members: while FAT split from SSC, this only happened after the latter had completed its monopoly over the hot production sectors by taking over a part of the SAD membership.⁹⁹ Relative peace between trade unions obtained in companies in which there was no significant overlap—SAD, for example, enjoyed a quasi-monopoly at Automobile, which employed over half the people on the platform. Beyond the principled exhortations of trade union unity, conflict burst in the open during negotiations in the companies in which the stronger unions overlapped. Here, competition over which union administered the best fringe benefits, which provided easier access to cheap automobiles or parts without lapsing into theft and corruption, or which betrayed workers' interests in TESA's favor continued to escalate until the platform was eventually reunified into a single enterprise in 1995.¹⁰⁰ Five unions entered the negotiations for the new, platform-wide collective labor contract, exacerbating interunion rivalry and throwing the negotiations into an unprecedented deadlock.¹⁰¹ SAD clashed with SSC, SSC with FAT, and the latter betrayed its existing alliance with SAD (predicated on their having a common enemy in SSC) by unilaterally declaring an official labor dispute.¹⁰² The solution to avoiding a union-induced debacle was unprecedented: Costescu and Iulian Nițulescu, the top leaders of SAD and SSC, were relieved of their responsibilities in the negotiations commissions, leading to an immediate streamlining of the negotiations and the brisk signing of the new collective labor contract.¹⁰³ Expectedly, Costescu's ousting from the negotiations—which, albeit symbolic, catalyzed the rapid changes to come—was made possible by the mobilization of his numerous adversaries in the union council. At this time, the split had been renewed not just by the negotiations crisis, but also by the resurgence of the confrontation between business and political unionism in defining trade union goals and means.

⁹⁶ "Intellectualitatea să se implice în apărarea drepturilor omului." *Autoturism* 30, December 1993.

⁹⁷ "Cine are interes să fim divizați?" *Autoturism* 9, December 1992. Six of the seven unions covered companies from the former Automobile Enterprise. The seventh organized workers from the CESAR design center, which had been a separate company from the very beginning even if it operated on the platform.

⁹⁸ "Pentru a ne edifica." *Autoturism* 15, April 1993.

⁹⁹ "Mișcarea sindicală de pe platforma industrială Colibași." *InfoAutoturism* 47, October 1994.

¹⁰⁰ "Cum vă place, la rece sau la cald?" *Autoturism* 38, May 1994. "Pe cine reprezintă sindicatul FAT?" *InfoAutoturism* 53, February 1995. On the distribution of automobiles and parts, see part II.

¹⁰¹ "Negocierea noului contract colectiv de muncă." *InfoAutoturism* 60, June 1995. "Supraviețuirea compromișilor." *InfoAutoturism* 61, July 1995.

¹⁰² "Negocierea este posibilă, dar trebuie bunăvoință." *InfoAutoturism* 62, August 1995.

¹⁰³ "În această săptămână, actul adițional la CCM se va semna." *InfoAutoturism* 63, September 1995. "Un unicat în România." *InfoAutoturism* 64, September 1995.

Up until 1995, the cleavage had been mitigated by SAD's pursuit of the platform's reunification; with this objective achieved, the union was now once again at a crossroads.

The external front and political entrepreneurship

The limited autonomy of trade unions in pursuing bread and butter goals due to the peculiar structure of ownership and economic organization of the early 1990s persisted into the middle of the decade. Even though the unions' room of maneuver was somewhat more generous than in the first two years (see above), crucial issues like wages and working conditions could be negotiated only to a very limited extent at the level of individual enterprises. This limited leeway that unions had obtained through their early militancy shrunk even further, due to the steep decline of real wages (see chapter 8, figure II.14) and the worsening of working conditions caused by the lack of investments. The deleterious effects of this so-called "ambiguity" of ownership and the syphoning of profits by the state were constantly decried by union representatives during this period as well. The splitting of the Pitești Automobile Enterprise into seven independent companies was regarded as another instance of unilateral action of "those high up" (*cei de sus*), at the expense of workers' interests and in utter disregard for the economic wellbeing of the platform.¹⁰⁴ Since the split was said to have resulted from governmental incompetence and cronyism, fighting for reunification became an integral part of the broader struggle for enterprise autonomy. With endemically dysfunctional inter-enterprise relations across the entire economy, the goal of reunification was from the beginning meant to guarantee the economic survival of the company by securing a stable supply flow and mitigating the debilitating consequences of economic decentralization.¹⁰⁵ Hence, reunification gained a central spot among SAD's strategic objectives, alongside better wages, job security, and improved working conditions. At least initially, reunification was subordinate to these bread and butter issues, for which it was allegedly a proxy.

Reunification provided an answer to the conflict SAD had begun waging against workers, managers and TESA, as well as against other union organizations. Since the split had fostered trade union fragmentation, going back to a single enterprise was expected to favor union mergers, out of which SAD, being by far the largest union on the platform, would be the sole beneficiary. Reunification would also contribute to labor control, as SAD leaders argued it would lead to a significant increase in wages. The split of the platform had allegedly produced many so-called "parallelisms", with a large number of costs (energy, raw material, warehousing, maintenance and a plethora of others) now being covered separately by each enterprise, while previously common indivisible assets now required multiple separate investments.¹⁰⁶ Reunification, leaders claimed, would eliminate such inefficiencies and allow management and trade unions to reallocate savings toward investments and wages. The question of managing cadres and TESA personnel was a special case in this regard, as SAD leaders relentlessly condemned the multiplication of non-worker employees. All in all, although the goal of reunification was largely legitimated by its subordination to bread and

¹⁰⁴ "Precizări." *Autoturism* 2, June 1992.

¹⁰⁵ "Proiect privind tactica și strategia Sindicatului Liber Independent al Constructorilor de Autoturisme Dacia Pitești, *Autoturism* 1, June 1992.

¹⁰⁶ "Modificarea Hotărârii Guvernului nr. 1177/1990." *Autoturism* 4, August 1992. "Scrisoare fără răspuns." *Autoturism* 26, October 1993.

butter objectives, it also weighed heavily in SAD's pursuit of organizational consolidation. In spite of opposition from management (and especially from the management of smaller companies on the platform), of skepticism from the rank and file (figure I.9), and of the fostering of antagonisms, SAD aggressively militated for reunification in front of the government, the management, other trade unions, as well as its own members.

Considering the state ownership of enterprises, reunification could not be fought for within the confines of the platform alone, as company managers officially had no direct say in the matter. Reunification thus contrasted to the bread and butter issues to which it was ostensibly subordinated, since it required influence with the government. In the words of the day, it required that SAD "do politics," blatantly contradicting the much flaunted principle of staying away from political involvement at all cost. Corresponding to reunification's status as a proxy goal, political involvement became legitimate only insofar as it remained strictly, and transparently, instrumental. With such a mandate in hand, starting with early 1992 the SAD leadership sent countless open letters to the president, the prime minister and members of government, as well as to various MPs; they organized protests, requested audiences with state representatives, participated in meetings in Bucharest, and invited major government figures to visit the platform and convince themselves of the economic (and political) viability of reunification. Until the prime minister's visit in January 1995, these actions merely seemed to be keeping other government-devised plans concerning the organization of platform at bay.¹⁰⁷ This kind of solo push was not the only avenue of action available; nor was it the most legitimate one, since defending union members' interests in front of the central government was supposed to be the task of trade union federations and confederations, not of local unions. In line with its policy of organizational consolidation, the SAD leadership invested considerable efforts into these forms of representation, even though it tried to do so only on its own terms.

In the first months of 1992, SAD's objectives seemed entirely compatible with its Înfrățirea membership, and it indeed supported the federation's actions, including threats with a general strike, attempts at negotiating a branch-level collective labor contract, various petitions, training seminars, and other things of the sort.¹⁰⁸ Membership in the federation was regarded as a means of pressuring the government, and for some time the SAD leadership

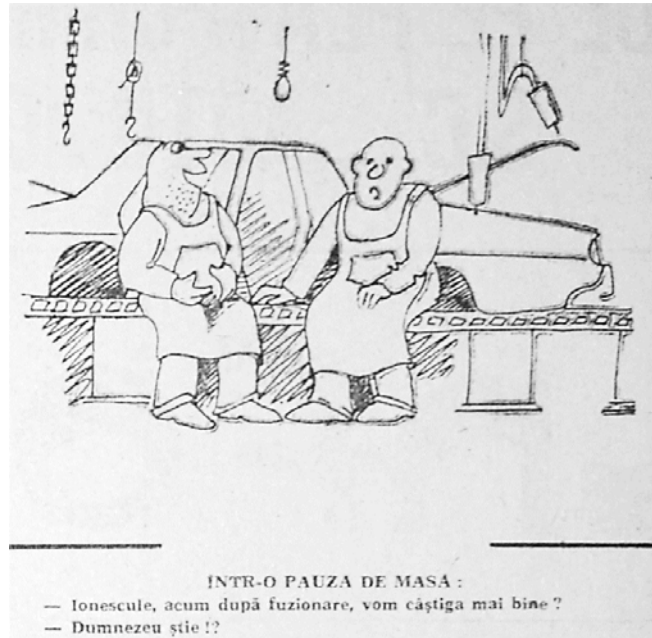


FIGURE I.9. "During a lunch break: – Ionescu, after the merger, will we earn more? – God knows!?".

Source: *InfoAutoturism* 58, May 1995.

¹⁰⁷ "Un obiectiv de stringentă actualitate." *InfoAutoturism* 51, January 1995. "Nedumeriri." *Autoturism* 28, November 1993.

¹⁰⁸ "Comunicat." *Autoturism* 7, November 1992.

managed to impose reunification as one of Înfrațirea's demands.¹⁰⁹ A federation could also negotiate a platform-wide collective labor contract, believed to alleviate some of the effects of the split and indicate that reunification was entirely feasible in what concerned labor. The attempted signing of such a contract foundered by the middle of 1993, sparking criticism of the allegedly inadequate representation of SAD members by Înfrațirea and pushing the SAD leadership into reviving an older idea of creating a federation based on the platform representing Romanian autoworkers generically speaking.¹¹⁰ While this was to be the broader purpose, the federation still had to pursue SAD's immediate goals: a platform-based labor contract and reunification. The founding of the Romanian Automobile Trade Union Federation (FSAR) was nonetheless hampered by SAD's rivalry with other trade unions on the platform and with the worsening of relations with unions in other enterprises, such as the Olcit automobile plant in Craiova.¹¹¹ Though initial plans spoke of the future federation in conspicuously ecumenical terms, the founding members included only SAD, FAT (who was allied with SAD by virtue of having a common enemy in SSC), and the Dacotrans union (one of the smaller trade union from the Dacia platform).¹¹² A platform-wide contract was eventually signed at the end of 1994, just a few weeks before the federation was engulfed in a series of scandals from which it would never fully recover.¹¹³ By the beginning of 1995, the tense relationship between the SAD and the FAT leaderships had spilled over into FSAR territory, as SAD representatives denounced the alleged corruption and incompetence of the FSAR leadership (who originated from FAT), triggering a second round of elections in the first year of FSAR's existence. In return, FAT managed to rally FSAR's smaller members against SAD, decrying the latter's overbearing influence over federation affairs. Profiting from the conflict in the SAD council, SAD's adversaries unexpectedly managed to win the FSAR elections and reinstate the previous leadership. Two months later, the FSAR leadership publicly accused SAD of sabotage, declared that FSAR had yet to become fully functional, and promptly resigned.¹¹⁴ By then FSAR was already facing an existential crisis, as reunification rendered its only success—the negotiation of a platform-wide collective labor contract—unrepeatable. All attempts at consolidating FSAR by coopting members from outside the platform and detaching it from SAD's immediate field of action failed and, by 1996, SAD leaders themselves seemed to have other plans for cross-company organization, while FSAR experienced yet another round of resignations and early elections.¹¹⁵ Under such circumstances—by and large persisting into the 2010s—FSAR failed to gain any genuine relevance even for labor affairs at Dacia. Despite initial hopes, it also played a marginal role in achieving reunification and improving the wage and working conditions of union members.

¹⁰⁹ "Petiția federației Înfrațirea Brașov ce urmează să fie înaintată Guvernului României în care este inclus și punctul nostru de vedere." *Autoturism* 11, February 1993.

¹¹⁰ "Ședința generală extraordinară a Sindicatului Autoturisme Dacia." *Autoturism* 6, October 1992. "O federație sindicală la Colibași." *Autoturism* 22, August 1993. "Ședință de consiliu." *Autoturism* 23, August 1993.

¹¹¹ For a discussion of the conflict between SAD and the trade union at Olcit, see chapter 7.

¹¹² "Adunarea generală extraordinară a SAD." *Autoturism* 26, October 1993.

¹¹³ "Mișcarea sindicală la nivel de federații reflectă puterea membrilor săi." *InfoAutoturism* 50, December 1994.

¹¹⁴ "O demisie ca o dezertare." *InfoAutoturism* 61, July 1995.

¹¹⁵ "Alegeri pentru funcțiile de conducere." *InfoAutoturism* 89-90, December 1996. "O societate sindicală asemănătoare ACAROM." *InfoAutoturism* 81, July 1996.

Another reason for breaking away from Înfrățirea and setting up FSAR was that the latter provided direct representation in the National Union Bloc (BNS), the confederate structure that SAD had earlier joined as a member of Înfrățirea.¹¹⁶ Theoretically, BNS offered local unions and industry federations influence over national-level policy making and direct access to the ears of both central and local governments; with the advent of tripartitism during this period, it was increasingly clear that participation in confederate structures was less and less optional. The relatively late constitution of BNS—officially sanctioned only in January 1992—attracted federations and unions that for one reason or another had refused to join the larger confederations—this was the case with Înfrățirea and SAD, whose leadership constantly criticized older confederations and resisted plans for confederate mergers.¹¹⁷ Just like with Înfrățirea, SAD initially supported BNS by acting as a local information relay and supporting national-level actions. SAD's position within BNS seemed particularly privileged, given that Dumitru Costin, BNS's general secretary, had been a SAD member. A former engineer in the body shop at the Automobile Enterprise who had acted as SAD's Înfrățirea delegate in the first months after December 1989, Costin was elected BNS president in November 1993, after a two-day meeting of the confederation's national council in Colibași. After this, the absolute high point of SAD's participation in BNS actions were the March 1995 country-wide protests against a planned freeze on wages.¹¹⁸ By then, SAD had progressively distanced itself from BNS and adopted a largely instrumental approach to confederate affairs. This was the case with the struggle over the government's control of wages (figure I.10), for which the SAD leadership readily mobilized in support of BNS. Otherwise, BNS officials were unhappy with SAD's unwillingness to participate in confederation-wide production stoppages—and, indeed, with SAD's unwillingness to stop production under any circumstances—and in their turn met with mounting criticism from the SAD leadership.¹¹⁹ While Costin's election and the necessity of massive street action against the government temporarily mitigated SAD's dissatisfaction with BNS, by late 1995 FSAR and SAD leaders were pondering a withdrawal from BNS.¹²⁰

There were several sources for dissatisfaction on SAD's part. First, there was the reluctance toward the mediation of representation by the confederate bureaucracy, with the SAD leadership wanting direct access to meetings between BNS and government officials.¹²¹ Second, there was the alleged disorganization and lack of interest for internal consultation and democratic procedures, with BNS leaders ignoring proposals and objections from federations like FSAR.¹²² Then there was the constant bickering between confederations, which made little sense from SAD's standpoint and was claimed to reduce the effectiveness of national-level actions.¹²³ Even when confederate leaders had their way, the results were disappointing and

¹¹⁶ "Raport privind activitatea Consiliului Sindicatului Autoturisme Dacia-Pitești, în perioada ianuarie 1993 – ianuarie 1994." *Autoturism* 32, February 1994.

¹¹⁷ "Ședința consiliului federației Înfrățirea." *Autoturism* 21, July 1993.

¹¹⁸ "Pe cea mai mare platformă industrială a Argeșului, răbdarea a ajuns la capăt." *InfoAutoturism* 55, March 1995.

¹¹⁹ "Doriți un sindicat democrat, care să răspundă actualei etape, sau un sindicat tradițional?" *Autoturism* 33, February 1994.

¹²⁰ "Comunicat." *InfoAutoturism* 62, August 1995. "Blocul Național Sindical, încotro?" *InfoAutoturism* 63, September 1995.

¹²¹ "Congresul Blocului Național Sindical." *Autoturism* 23, August 1993.

¹²² "Vrem adevărul, așa cum este el!" *Autoturism* 29, November 1993.

¹²³ "Nevoia unității în mișcarea sindicală." *Autoturism* 29, November 1993.



FIGURE I.10. The struggle with the government over wages: “In reply to the government: ‘I don’t gossip about him, nor do I go behind his back / I’m going to whack him in the head [with a loaf of bread]! / And he’ll regularly raise / My indexation by one percent.’” “The response of government representatives [Writing a decision on ‘higher wages’ with ‘eyewash’ ink]: ‘You want high wages? It’ll be readily solved: We will change prices so they... inflate again.’”
 Sources: *InfoAutoturism* 66, October 1995 77, May 1996.

seemed to be of little or no import for the issues faced by local unions. All these were highly critical reactions to the “illusory” (Ost 2000; 2011) character of Romania’s emerging corporatism. The increasing integration of national-level union structures in state affairs failed to yield its promised results for union members and lower-level unions; it instead tended to function as an instrument of pacification (figure I.11). Even so, the systematic “mockery” of “tens of thousands of fee-paying members” at the hands of “a handful of individuals” would not have prompted the animosity it did had it remained within the confines of an illusory corporatism per se.¹²⁴ The decisive factor was the penchant of confederation leaders to grant explicit support to political parties, either by defecting or, much more severely, attempting to herd the rank and file into voting for or protesting on behalf of one party or another. While the BNS leadership initially evaded such endeavors, its declared support for The Democratic Convention (Convenția Democrată Română—CDR), a coalition of opposition parties, in the coming elections was lambasted by the SAD leadership, who refused political regimentation.¹²⁵

Failure in the pursuit of reunification via federative and confederative representation left SAD leaders with the only option of seeking unmediated political influence. Though reunification was eventually achieved in May 1995, an important byproduct of this protracted struggle was the utter disenchantment of SAD leaders with the possibility of upholding horizontal and vertical solidarity within existing trade union structures. Plans to consolidate FSAR were rather examples of wishful thinking than of genuine strategic opportunity, while the withdrawal from BNS, which also never materialized, was not to be followed by affiliation

¹²⁴ “Conferința Națională a BNS, sau cum își pot bate joc câțiva veleitari de zeci de mii de plăitori ai cotizației.” *InfoAutoturism* 48, November 1994.

¹²⁵ “Nu vom acorda capital politic nici unui partid.” *InfoAutoturism* 44, September 1994. Interestingly enough, one of the arguments invoked at this time against political involvement was “the risk of copying the experience of Polish Solidarity”. On the debacle of Solidarity’s post-89 embrace of state politics, see Ost (2005).

to another confederation. Springing from necessity, independent action was surreptitiously turned into virtue: from an objective condition overdetermined by trade union fragmentation, economic decentralization, and dysfunctional political representation, isolation came to be endowed with an aura of heroism and gained a discursive articulation centered around the reaffirmation of the value of labor in the face of exploitation at the hands of—socially as well as geographically—external foes. Such a discourse found a bedrock in the previous struggle over enterprise autonomy, which underpinned the question of reunification. It also reinforced this struggle by imbuing it with an overbearing sense of righteousness.

As discussed above, the framing of enterprise autonomy as equivalent to liberation from exploitation had its roots in the state ownership of the means of production, which persisted alongside the accelerated dismantling of the centrally planned economy (which, allegedly due to its incompleteness and haphazard implementation, incurred heavy damages upon enterprises and employees) and the principled encouragement of popular dissent and criticism (as a step toward a democratic polity, which entailed both electoral and trade union representation of employees). The transparency of class was the cognitive backdrop supporting trade union struggle against the government. Apart from steeply declining wages and dilapidated working and living conditions, the concreteness of this image of the state as exploiter was supplemented by the everyday confrontation with the arbitrariness of government action, its apparent ignorance toward and lack of knowledge of enterprise affairs, and the glaring inequalities between corrupt government officials and their cronies, on one side, and workers on the back of which they made themselves rich and whom they always put the blame on, on the other.¹²⁶ Compounding this transparency of unpaid labor, the prevalent relations of production also yielded a partly unmediated overlap between trade union representation and representation in the official arena of politics. As this was widely considered as bearing a volatile mix of necessity and risk, unions



FIGURE I.11. Against the instrumentalization of the union movement on the behalf of political parties: “The union as a nana—as some would want, a jade’s servant—caring for the country’s spoiled children. Government: ‘If you don’t buy me ice-cream, I’ll leave you in the hands of Miron Mitrea’ / Opposition: ‘I want peanuts! Otherwise, uncle Ciorbea will cut your pension!’” Source: *InfoAutoturism* 43, August 1994.

Note: Miron Mitrea and Victor Ciorbea were two confederation leaders whose enmity famously passed over into party politics, once they both left the trade union movement and joined opposing parties. The cases of Mitrea and Ciorbea were at the time considered paradigmatic in exemplifying the confederations’ betrayal of local trade unions and their members.

¹²⁶ “Vorbe de vacanță.” *Autoturism* 21, July 1993. “Scurtcircuit parlamentar.” *Autoturism* 42, August 1994. “Ciocoi timpurilor noi.” *InfoAutoturism* 48, November 1994.

had two apparently opposite paths they could follow. The first consisted in the separation of economy and polity and manifested itself in the struggle over enterprise autonomy and the utter rejection of unions' and managers' political involvement; as mentioned already, this was coterminous with a business model of unionism, for which local trade unions had a structural penchant. The second consisted in the embracing of political involvement via participation in emerging tripartite structures, direct negotiation with political actors, or involvement in party politics. For national-level trade union structures, the pursuit of this political model of unionism was difficult, if not outright impossible to avoid, even when their ultimate goal was the separation of economy from politics. As confederate leaders attempted to steer the trade union movement in the latter direction, they faced accusations of betrayal and defection by local trade union leaders, for whom the illusory tripartitism and dubious political deals appeared to serve no other purpose than to secure a place for confederate union leaders among the exploiters.¹²⁷ This voluntarist rejection of political unionism did little to alleviate local unions' need for political representation. SAD's seeking of direct access to government representatives was one way to broach the problem, though it seemed more of a gamble—a makeshift, rather than a coherent strategy—that only temporarily alleviated the need to accommodate the mix of political and trade union representation without falling into the trap of betrayal and defection.

By relegating political representation to mere instrumentality, the goal of reunification had temporarily mitigated the pressure for making such a strategic choice. The actual struggle over reunification had made this necessity even more apparent, as it proved that little could be achieved without political representation and that this could not be delegated to trade union superstructures. Having failed to set up an effective division of labor between local and national-level organizations, a local response could no longer be avoided. This is illustrated by the apparently paradoxical juxtaposition of two different approaches to political engagement that emerged in the backstage of the struggle over reunification only to fully enter the scene once this objective was achieved. On the one hand, the SAD leadership maintained its staunch criticism of political parties and of everything directly or indirectly associated with them, including union confederations. On the other hand, there was a growing tendency to highlight the need for a different kind of political representation, which, though grounded in organized labor, would not depend on any political party nor be subordinated to supralocal union structures.¹²⁸ As supporters of this idea—among which Vasile Costescu was the chief representative—emphasized, this form of political representation would not be built on the grassroots organization of labor alone, but on a wider mobilization of the “mute masses” who were ignored, exploited, and oppressed by everything associated with official politics—the government, the parliament, trade union confederations, the nouveaux riches, and even the burgeoning mass media industry.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ “Sindicatelor în vârtejul economiei de tranziție.” *Autoturism* 21, July 1993.

¹²⁸ “Lăsați guvernul să lucreze!” *Autoturism* 24, September 1993.

¹²⁹ “Sindicatelor în anul electoral.” *InfoAutoturism* 71, January 1996. In the language of unionism models, this was an attempt at envisioning a broader “social movement” unionism, targeting constituencies outside the confines of production (thus differing from business unionism), though without engaging with party politics (thus differing from political unionism) (see Lambert 2002:188). Years after winning the elections for the mayor's office, Costescu continued to deny his political “regimentation” (that is, his engagement in politics proper) and insisted he was merely “confronting” politics (in other words, that he was still refusing or even fighting against politics,

These ostensibly opposed standpoints had two core commonalities. First, both were predicated upon the affirmation of the material and symbolic value of labor, which could only become reality by activating the virtuous circle of the market and providing genuine democratic representation. Second, they were based on a stark assertion of the heroism of isolation, of the virtuous necessity of fighting against outside maleficence without outside help. Within this framing, each standpoint yielded distinct objectives. On the one hand, enterprise autonomy was

synonymous with the removal of ties of economic subordination and their replacement with, first, the supposedly neutral mechanism of market exchange in negotiating the relationship between (the collectivity that made up the) plant and its environment and, second, the freedom to adequately control labor and to live off labor alone. On the other hand, localist politics entailed a rejection of the involvement of national and regional actors (be they government representatives, politicians, the mass-media, intellectuals, etc.—figure I.12) and the adoption of a self-styled organization of democratic politics in which citizenship could be obtained only by living up to certain expectations of both private and public propriety. Both these objectives implied drawing boundaries around a collectivity of labor, whose survival depended on maintaining neutral relationships with the outside and upholding discipline on the inside.

With the bolstered criticism of politics, the question remained as to how legitimate and, indeed, how feasible it was for the trade union movement at Dacia to pursue these two objectives. Though in theory they might have been mutually accommodating, the dissonance between the rejection of politics and the embracing of a declaredly different kind of politics was difficult to efface. If to this we add the smoldering conflict in the union council, we end up with an explanation of why the SAD leadership witnessed an internal split in the mid-1990s—an event which, though long in the making, was decisively catalyzed by this strategic bifurcation. In the aftermath of reunification, Costescu and his allies aimed at perpetuating their self-styled activism beyond the boundaries of the plant by militating for the cutting of the number of members of parliament in half—a proposal that did not gain any support from BNS and further fueled the localist discourse from where it originated.¹³⁰ Facing dwindling support



FIGURE I.12. “—You’ve worked for almost a life time surrounded by automobiles. You are one of the oldest of Automobile’s people. What’s your opinion about the general manager? — Mister, my opinion is that you’re leaving and I’m staying here...”

Source: *InfoAutoturism* 45, September 1994.

only by other means). “Ca să obțină o hotărâre pe placul său de la Consiliul Local primarul Vasile Costescu trebuie să pună problema invers.” *Puls*, April 28, 1998.

¹³⁰ “Platforma Colibași—o piramidă cu baza plină de trotil.” *InfoAutoturism* 50, December 1994. “Moțiune.” *InfoAutoturism* 67, November 1995.

in the council following the debacle of the post-reunification negotiations with management, Costescu resigned in November 1995 and subsequently announced that he would be running as an independent for the Mioveni mayor's office in the following year.¹³¹ The origins of the localist paternalism (as I call it in part III) that Costescu promoted during the decade he subsequently spent in the mayor's seat thus had a clear origin in the evolution of the trade union movement on the Dacia platform in the first half of the 1990s. With Costescu's departure, and corresponding to the strategic bifurcation it entailed, the newly elected SAD leadership adopted an even clearer policy along the lines of the business model of unionism. This came with a stepping up of the struggle for enterprise autonomy and the sealing of an explicit alliance between workers and management against the state. In practice, this meant that SAD would increasingly support the management in securing labor control and that management would increasingly count on the union to do so. It also meant that the two sides would jointly fight for separation from the state in the only manner possible: privatization.

This decisive strategic clarification—for which the change of leadership was a clear marker, just as it had been in 1992—was a landmark in the history of the trade union movement at Dacia. With privatization passing from a purely theoretical possibility to a genuine and genuinely necessary potentiality, SAD's relationships with the management, the government, and its constituency had to change. If reunification and union elections were the endogenous factors leading to a trajectory shift, several other developments contributed to its timing. The victory of CDR in the 1996 national elections marked the end of the post-89 developmentalist attempts as government policy was reoriented along clear-cut neoliberal lines (see Ban 2014:157ff), including a much more aggressive push for the privatization of large state-owned enterprises. Further contributing to the shift was an amendment of the law on collective labor contracts (law 10/1996) introducing the notion of trade union “representativeness” (see Bush 1999:49ff) and effectively banning smaller unions from participating in negotiations with management. In a post-reunification context, this dealt a severe blow to all of SAD's competitors and greatly mitigated the interunion rivalry that had become explosive during the post-reunification negotiations. Finally, certain developments had by 1996 become obvious enough to prompt genuine worries regarding Dacia's future economic viability. The mid- and long-term prospects of maintaining the booming internal market, which had allowed Dacia to prosper despite losing the exports markets that had absorbed most of its production before 1990, were increasingly bleak. The demand for the Dacia's aging yet relatively cheap cars was expected to drop, regardless of the economic effects of the reforms expected from CDR: if they paid off big time, demand would shift in favor of newer and more expensive cars; if they spelled disaster, the fragile existing demand would crumble. Having failed to secure the required investments for technological upgrading, privatization now appeared to be not just what was required for the market, but also what the market itself demanded.

¹³¹ “Scrisoare deschisă.” *InfoAutoturism* 68, November 1995.

CHAPTER 3

FROM “OUR PLANT” TO “OUR JOBS”: EXPECTATIONS OF PRIVATIZATION (I)

Pacification and privatization

Becoming a “realm of consensus”

The uneventful election of Nicolae Pavelescu as SAD leader in early 1996 should have appeared surprising to anyone not familiar with the union’s brooding intestine conflicts. A few months earlier, Pavelescu would have been considered the dark horse candidate par excellence, as he had not made any mark whatsoever on SAD’s increasingly vivid public presence. Originally a mechanical engineer in the gearbox department, Pavelescu had burst on the scene relatively late, during the crucial post-reunification negotiations, when he became president of the union negotiations commission and swiftly quelled interunion rivalry. Winning against nine other candidates, Pavelescu emphasized the need for union officials to increase their involvement in cutting waste, eliminating theft, and improving quality; he also stressed the paramount importance of supporting the company’s image and of working closely with management in maintaining Dacia’s market position.¹³² Contrasting his views with Costescu’s, Pavelescu insisted that unionists renounce populism and embrace a so-called pragmatic approach, with concern not just for securing higher wages, improved working conditions and job security, but also for higher productivity and improved quality, which were painted as prerequisites in augmenting the material standing of employees.¹³³ The purpose of the collective labor contract was to establish a balance between wages, productivity and profit or, in other words, between the “social needs” of employees and the “financial needs” of the company.¹³⁴ While this was undoubtedly a reaffirmation of the union’s commitment to labor control, the change of leadership gave a new impetus to this self-assumed task. As opposed to Costescu’s alleged populism, in which labor control was pursued mainly for abstract reasons pertaining to the virtuous circle of the market, Pavelescu’s pragmatism emphasized concrete aspects of the relationship between labor control and market success: things like productivity, quality, or market share now became objectives to be pursued systematically by the union, alongside and as a proxy for the standard battery of bread and butter issues.

This renewed preoccupation with labor control stood at the heart of a renewed alliance between the SAD leadership and the upper management. The sealing of an indeterminate peace with management was implicit in the now ostensibly friendly atmosphere of the annual negotiations; it was also earmarked as such by representatives from both sides. For the SAD leadership, striking was repeatedly said to be a measure of last resort, and union officials rushed to publicly dismiss any rumors stating otherwise; a compromise-favoring attitude was now said

¹³² “O echipă de conducere cu elan tineresc va realiza ceea ce ne-am propus.” *InfoAutoturism* 72, February 1996.

¹³³ “De automobilul Dacia depind 500000 salariați.” *InfoAutoturism* 79, June 1996.

¹³⁴ “Contractul colectiv de muncă, act de importanță vitală.” *InfoAutoturism* 79, June 1996.

to replace any sort of aggression. Collective bargaining was presented to workers as a win-win scenario, buttressed by a declaredly objective alignment of interests between employer and employees. This materialized in an agreement to strengthen the division of managerial labor between the union officialdom and the upper management. While SAD embraced productivity and quality objectives set by upper management, the latter called upon the union leadership to take control over the organization of the labor process and participate in its rationalization. Although this division of labor was not new, its quasi-official sanctioning definitely was. Not only were the speedups necessary for reaching an output of 100,000 cars per year not contested by the union—indeed, any such claim was deemed illegitimate—but the leadership pleaded for organization and group leaders to get involved in so-called “quality-cost” actions and in the managing of the labor process more broadly speaking, to such an extent that unionists were openly urged to take over supervisory functions inappropriately handled by shop-floor managers.¹³⁵ Apart from the formalization of the union’s commitment to rationalization via provisions in the collective labor contract, joint “work meetings” meant to produce coordinated “production and quality analyses” became a standard feature in union–management relations. In likewise unprecedented gestures, both the general manager and the union leadership routinely reaffirmed their support for each other in public, with unionists going as far as threatening with industrial action in case state authorities attempted to replace Stroe.¹³⁶

SAD’s role as an “equilibrium factor”, as the main guarantor of social peace on the platform, stretched beyond the negotiations and the keeping of impromptu militancy at bay, as pacification was attempted on all fronts. After a brief bout of organizational streamlining and the replacement of the two viceleaders with clear supporters of strictly bread and butter unionism, bickering in the SAD council came to a halt; to such an extent that Costescu could count on the support of his former enemies in running for the Mioveni mayor’s office.¹³⁷ Consolidation was accompanied by a bolstering of the membership to over 23 thousand. The absorption of FAT in anticipation of the legal requirement of union representativeness (see above) gave SAD several hundred extra members and eliminated one of its competitors.¹³⁸ Though five unions remained on the platform, according to the new law only SAD had the right to negotiate the collective labor contract. The SAD leadership used this opportunity to plead for all unions to follow FAT’s example and took an avowedly ecumenical stance by turning the general assembly into an assembly of all employees, regardless of their union affiliation, and announcing that all other unions were welcome to participate in the negotiations. While the display of rivalry with SSC reached a high point during this period, it remained largely innocuous and the SAD leadership could easily contrast its so-called pragmatic approach to the

¹³⁵ The output target of 100,000 cars was reached in 1997. In contrast to most state-owned enterprises (Cernat 2006:61), Dacia managed to significantly boost its productivity levels in the second half of the 1990s. “Semnificația acțiunii calitate-costuri.” *InfoAutoturism* 84, September 1996. “Prioritățile imperative pentru S.C. Automobile Dacia S.A. pe anul 1997.” *InfoAutoturism* 91, January 1997. “Adunările generale ale organizațiilor sindicale la nivelul secțiilor de producție.” *InfoAutoturism* 106, December 1997. On productivity and the rationalization of the production process, see part II.

¹³⁶ “Se moare de grija altuia.” *InfoAutoturism* 99, August 1997. Replacing recalcitrant managers was one way for the government to secure control over enterprises. Fighting against this was part of the struggle over autonomy.

¹³⁷ “Febra electorală a început să urce, încet-încet.” *InfoAutoturism* 76, April 1996. “De automobilul Dacia depind 500 000 salariați.” *InfoAutoturism* 79, June 1996. “Ca om al cetății exprim o părere.” *InfoAutoturism* 79, June 1996.

¹³⁸ “Crește numărul organizațiilor SAD.” *InfoAutoturism* 74, March 1996.

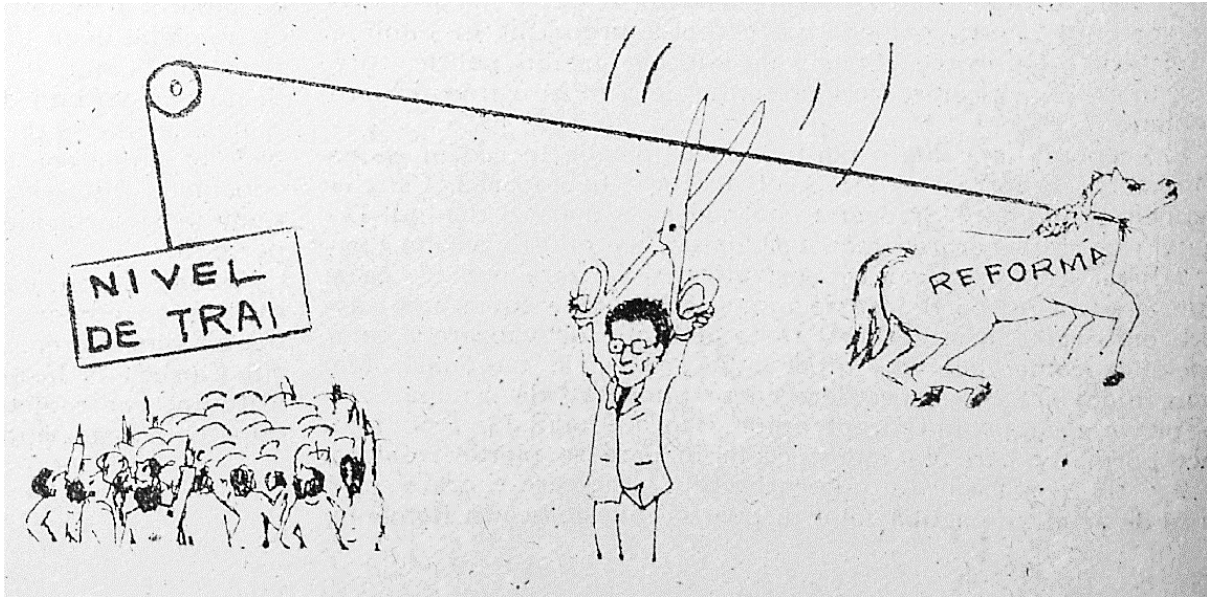


FIGURE I.13. The CDR Prime Minister, Victor Ciorbea, corrupting the spirit of economic reform by cutting the line between it and the standard of living.

Source: *InfoAutoturism* 105, December 1997.

failure of the alleged populism propagated by the SSC leadership. In spite of the rolling back of reunification in preparation of privatization (see below), SAD managed to mitigate interunion rivalry long before the impending privatization eliminated it entirely.

Relative peace was also achieved on the external front, despite the national union movement entering a period of “unending militancy” (Kideckel 2001) once its brief “honeymoon” (Bush 2004:41) with the CDR government came to an abrupt end (figure I.13). The change of leadership did not fundamentally alter SAD’s position toward the national union movement, though it might have been responsible for abandoning the idea of withdrawing from BNS and seeking independent political entrepreneurship. Barring this, criticism of union confederations—who were said to exist only on paper and whose leaders were lambasted for making up a thoroughly illegitimate “union aristocracy” feigning interest for the wellbeing of the rank and file and barely concealing personal political ambitions—stayed relentless for the rest of the decade.¹³⁹ BNS remained a typical target, with accusation of “populism” being once again the preferred weapon.¹⁴⁰ Nonetheless, “pragmatism” involved maintaining a foothold in vertical union structures while acknowledging the risk of political contamination and keeping close to immediate bread and butter objectives.¹⁴¹ Giving up on seeking influence with the government was even more out of the question than in the first half of the decade, as Dacia was by now producing almost entirely for the internal market.¹⁴² SAD’s efforts were thus channeled toward securing this massive market share by pushing the government to impose stricter regulations on car imports and by fighting against potentially price-damaging policies.¹⁴³ Even

¹³⁹ “Lección del metro.” *InfoAutoturism* 74, March 1996.

¹⁴⁰ “Răspunsuri tranșante.” *InfoAutoturism* 97, June 1997.

¹⁴¹ “Contractul Colectiv de Muncă este o sumă de principii și reguli.” *InfoAutoturism* 111, July 1998.

¹⁴² On this shift and on the questions of imports and tariffs, see chapter 7.

¹⁴³ “Restructurarea industriei de autovehicule.” *InfoAutoturism* 73, March 1996. “Automobile Dacia la concurență cu importurile.” *InfoAutoturism* 87, November 1996. “O lege nedreaptă.” *InfoAutoturism* 91, January 1997. “Încotro mergem?” *InfoAutoturism* 109, March 1998.

if it occasionally mobilized aid from FSAR and BNS in pursuing market protection, during this entire period SAD mostly kept its distance from the surging union militancy across the country. While making occasional declarations of solidarity, SAD representatives also readily acknowledged that large enterprise unions had their own problems, which they mostly managed to solve without help from confederations and through peace, not protest.¹⁴⁴

Embracing privatization

Pacification had two main objectives. First, the instituting of what was considered the normal state of affairs—namely, something equivalent to the ideal win-win scenario of business unionism. Peace was, in this case, a normative goal. It was, on the other hand, also an openly instrumental one, since it was deemed necessary in obtaining a good deal in the upcoming privatization. The absence of internal conflict, the rationalization of production, the non-conflictual relationship with the government, and the securing of a dominant position on the internal car market were all meant to make the company more attractive for market-seeking foreign direct investment. Pacification was subsumed to the imperative of privatization and it was the turning of privatization from a rather abstract potentiality into an increasingly tangible one that bolstered SAD's peace efforts in the second half of the 1990s, while also underpinning its alliance with the upper management. To be sure, this alliance was vaunted as being sealed under the auspices of privatization, with SAD guaranteeing peace and cooperation and management guaranteeing job security and regular wage payments until the change of ownership happened. The management–union consensus over the unavoidability of privatization was nonetheless established long before this bargain was struck. Throughout the 1990s, the main question had never been whether the plant should be privatized or not, but in what manner this was to occur, and even in this case there was little genuine debate to be had.

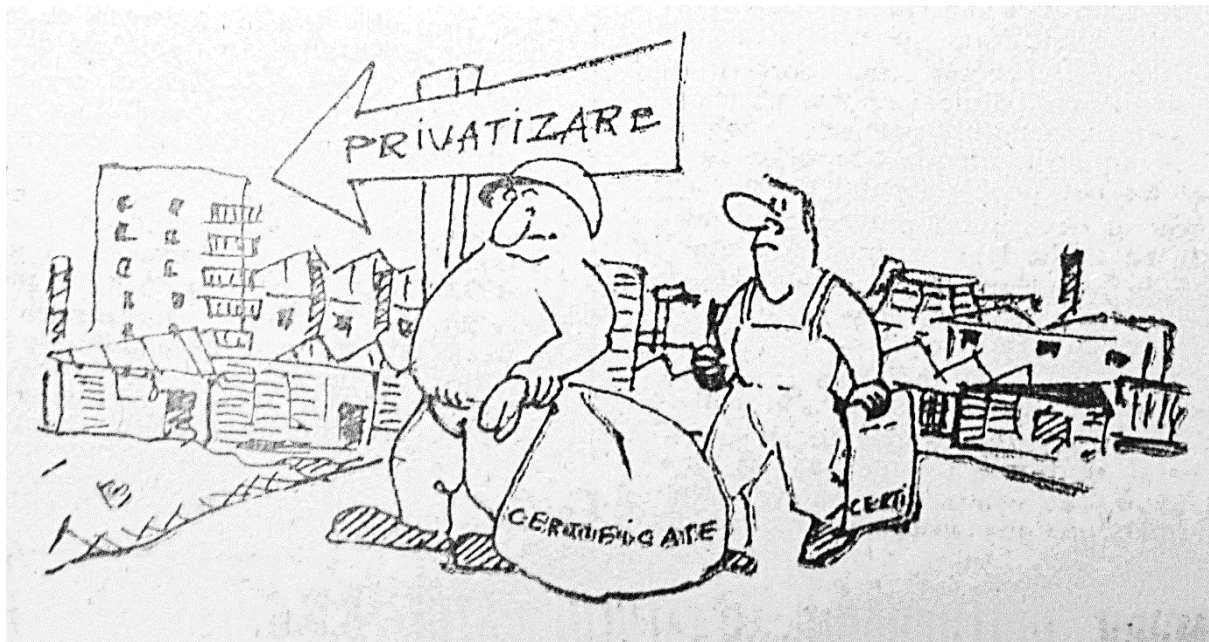


FIGURE I.14. Mass privatization and the fostering of inequality.

Source: *InfoAutoturism* 44, September 1994.

¹⁴⁴ "S-a aprins vâlvătaia mișcărilor sindicale." *InfoAutoturism* 97, June 1997. "Compromisuri." *InfoAutoturism* 119, November 1998.

Throughout the 1990s, the government's approach to privatization consisted in the haphazard implementation of rather incoherent and consistently wobbly policies (Cernat 2006:47-76; Tardy 1997). The stance of the union movement mirrored this state of affairs: mostly (and militantly) in favor of privatization and economic reform, yet constantly opposed to the government's handling of the issue. SAD made no exception. Despite the more or less radical changes concerning other major aspects of its strategy, during the 1990s SAD remained consistently in favor of privatization. To be sure, this was fully congruent with the struggle for enterprise autonomy, with the adoption of a strategy akin to the business model of unionism, and with the early belief in a virtuous circle of the market. Nevertheless, this support was conditional upon certain requirements: that the union not be left out in the implementation of the privatization plans, that privatization would not facilitate asset stripping or purposeful plant closure, that privatization would

not simply function as an instrument for the enrichment of politicians or managers on the backs of workers, and that privatization would be targeted at market success and survival in the long term. These reasons were invoked against mass privatization, in both its voucher and MEBO versions, which allegedly encouraged profiteering and fostered inequality (figure I.14), to the benefit of inherently corrupt politicians and dubious enterprise managers (figure I.15). Mass privatization was not something worth embracing. Ironically, this reluctance added to the drive for autonomy and the praising of isolation, as it was claimed to be part of outsiders' plans for personal enrichment at the expense of the plant and union members. Rather grudgingly put forward, the only acceptable scenario for mass privatization was if members themselves became shareholders.¹⁴⁵ With the announcement of an "accelerated" program of mass privatization starting with late 1995 and early 1996, which included the sale of 49% of Dacia's stock, SAD leaders scrambled to come up with a strategy of participation in the privatization process.¹⁴⁶ Taking cue from plans devised by union confederations, SAD set up its own Program for Shareholder Employees (Programul Acționarilor Salariați—PAS)—effectively, an association that could acquire shares on employees' behalf. Notwithstanding the fanfare



FIGURE I.15. Managers profiting from privatization on workers' backs: "Carried on the backs of others, one keeps wanting... privatization."

Source: *InfoAutoturism* 49, November 1994.

¹⁴⁵ Admittedly, Costescu had timidly attempted to give theoretical justifications of why this solution was the proper one in principle and not just as a compromise in response to haphazard government policies. Just like the thought of union members handling the strategic management of the enterprise never really caught grip, the idea of employee ownership was never a real alternative to privatization to an outside party. "Șomerii și acționarii." *Autoturism* 9, April 1991. "Dacă strategie nu e, nimic nu e." *InfoAutoturism* 69-70, December 1995.

¹⁴⁶ "Proiect de hotărâri propus spre dezbateră Adunării Generale a Sindicatului Autoturism Dacia, din 25 ianuarie 1996." *InfoAutoturism* 71, January 1996. "350 000 titluri de proprietate depuse la S.C. Automobile Dacia S.A." *InfoAutoturism* 80, July 1996.

accompanying its launch, initial discontent with employees' lack of enthusiasm eventually turned into quiet resignation, as PAS managed to buy just 0.5% of total Dacia shares.¹⁴⁷

The PAS failure should not have come as too much of a surprise, given that by this time MEBO privatization had become a target of constant attack from the side of both SAD and the management. Since takeover by self-interested third parties could be ruled out, the most significant problem with MEBO was that it could not yield sufficient funds for investment in technological upgrading on the scale required for Dacia's long-term survival. In the words of an organization leader, what the plant needed was money, not "papers" (i.e., property titles) and, given the government's lack of interest, the only option remaining was finding a capable foreign buyer.¹⁴⁸ Even if this sort of calculation became common once the government heightened its mass privatization efforts, the idea of foreign investment had been on the table from the first weeks of 1990, when massive technological and product upgrading were considered the only solution for averting an imminent loss of external markets. Attracting a foreign investor was widely considered to be Stroe's personal mandate, in time enjoying growing support from the SAD leadership. By 1996, this privatization path was increasingly deemed paramount for survival in the medium term. The majority of external markets had by then been lost and, even though Dacia retained a massive share of a booming domestic market, resistance to imports and patchy alternatives to the plant's outdated technology and lack of know-how were admitted as makeshift solutions. Adding to this, the CDR government made foreign investment a top priority, at the expense of the privatization methods preferred by the previous governments (see Cernat 2006:47-76). Corresponding to its alliance with management, starting with 1996 the SAD leadership consistently declared its support for Stroe's quest for a foreign investor. The union had no business with the starting of the privatization process, leaders insisted, as this was the responsibility of the management.¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless, it was vital for SAD to participate in the privatization negotiations, in order to ensure that employees were protected from the potentially deleterious effects of ownership change. This briefly summed up SAD's formal stance toward privatization.

The debate around Dacia's luring of FDI focused on what were considered the only two available possibilities: a joint-venture with a foreign car producer, or a complete takeover. The first was favored especially during the first part of the decade, as it fit the governmental strategy at the time and supposedly secured a modicum of security against potential asset stripping and hostile market grabbing moves.¹⁵⁰ Until early 1996, this was still the preferred method, despite occasional acknowledgments that the sheer scale of the required investments rather favored a complete takeover. By 1997, SAD and the management were opposing any other manners of

¹⁴⁷ "Despre privatizare." *InfoAutoturism* 84, September 1996. "Despre programul de acțiune al salariaților (PAS)." *InfoAutoturism* 85, October 1996. "Sindicatul spun 'pas': N-avem bani să ne implicăm în privatizare." *Curierul zilei*, November 5, 1998.

¹⁴⁸ "Salariul este mizerabil în comparație cu necesitățile." *InfoAutoturism* 75, April 1996. "Din economia României." *Autoturism* 34, March 1994. "La cumpăna zilei de mâine." *InfoAutoturism* 71, January 1996. "Cu un efort suplimentar, S.C. Automobile Dacia poate deveni proprietatea salariaților." *InfoAutoturism* 82, August 1996.

¹⁴⁹ "Mesaj către salariați." *InfoAutoturism* 118, October 1998.

¹⁵⁰ On the possibility of a foreign takeover simply aimed at shutting the plant down to free the domestic market from Dacia's dominance, see "Lista lui Dima, publicată în presă, este o bulibășeală sau o mișcare subversivă." *InfoAutoturism* 92, February 1997.

“estranging” the enterprise except the two.¹⁵¹ Discussions with Hyundai seemed to finally materialize in late 1997, with the signing of a cooperation agreement through which Dacia was to receive equipment and know-how for setting up a new production line for Hyundai models. For Dacia, this was a much awaited opportunity to upgrade its technology and its products, albeit only partially. For Hyundai, it was part of a strategy of global expansion and provided an opportunity to enter European markets, following in the footsteps of Daewoo’s joint venture with the other Romanian small car producer, Olcit. By mid-1998, however, the deal had fallen through, as the Asian financial crisis finally caught up with South Korean car makers, forcing Daewoo into a spiral of decline and Hyundai into a major restructuring that no longer included operations in Romania (see Chung 2009; Dicken 2011:44-56).

By the time the Hyundai deal had been sealed, the joint venture idea had fallen out of grace with the government. Since a takeover was considered unavoidable, the collaboration with Hyundai was marketed as just another advantage in conjuring a fully committed investor. Indeed, this was pursued simultaneously with the Hyundai deal and implied a rolling back of the 1995 reunification. With both government and management favoring a second split, insisting that the reunification was nothing more than a botched result of political meddling into economic affairs, SAD’s opposition was practically nonexistent.¹⁵² The union leadership did not just passively agree, but merely insisted on the split not having negative consequences for “union unity” and, when the split finally occurred in the second half of 1997, it ensured SAD’s dominant position by maintaining a single collective labor contract.¹⁵³ Far from incoherent, the SAD leadership’s unflinching acceptance of something the union had recently fought so hard to obtain could only be understood within the context of its shifting alliance with the management, in full agreement that the objective of privatization trumped everything else and that it was up to the management to deal with the organizational preparations.

Talks with Renault began in the spring of 1998, with full union support. Leaders now prepared to accept the cost of a most likely brutal restructuring process following privatization, including a potentially massive number of layoffs—a criterion that was said to have previously tilted the scale against a foreign takeover. Now the question was not whether layoffs should or would happen, but of how to alleviate the subsequent “social shock”.¹⁵⁴ For this the SAD leadership demanded both government intervention and direct participation in the talks with Renault. As they readily obtained both, its leaders began to contemplate the major tasks the union would have to undertake in the coming years. Corresponding to the pre-privatization compromise, SAD was to act as a peacekeeper in the upcoming restructuring process, which included the shedding of more than a third of Dacia’s 29 thousand employees. This was a mandate the SAD leadership fully consented to in exchange for a comprehensive “social plan” accompanying the restructuring.¹⁵⁵ It certainly seemed an organic continuation of its role during the second half of the 1990s.

¹⁵¹ “Stimați salariați!” *InfoAutoturism* 92, February 1997.

¹⁵² “Cronică SAD.” *InfoAutoturism* 99, August 1997. “Interviu cu dl. dr. ing. Constantin Stroe.” *InfoAutoturism* 100, August 1997.

¹⁵³ “Convenție.” *InfoAutoturism* 102, October 1997. The split proved short-lived and largely redundant, once Renault showed its willingness to acquire the entire platform.

¹⁵⁴ “Agenda SAD.” *InfoAutoturism* 119, November 1998.

¹⁵⁵ For a detailed discussion of labor control during the restructuring process, see chapter 10.

Tactical openings and strategic closures

Renault officials observing union activity at Dacia on the eve of privatization expressed a mixture of curiosity, admiration, and concern. At the end of the 1990s, union density on the platform stood at a staggering 94% (Angelescu 2007:29). This seemed straight out of the immediate post-89 period, considering that the overall union density in the country had fallen from over 80% in 1991 to less than 45% at the end of the decade.¹⁵⁶ Even stranger was SAD's embeddedness in the everyday functioning of the enterprise, which, Renault officials pointed out (Debrosse 2007:29), was reminiscent of the position unions had enjoyed in French state-owned enterprises during the 1970s. "Co-management" (Debrosse 2007:118-9) was a standard feature at Dacia, and so was the paramount importance of collective bargaining. On the shop floor, the weakness of the managerial hierarchy was compensated by a strong grip of union structures over the organization of the labor process (Debrosse 2007:127, 288). Union control over the shop floor maintained an overbearing atmosphere of consensus, for which French managers expressed considerable appreciation. According to Renault reports, the pre-privatization situation was characterized by "a stable social climate overall favorable to the process of change", "it must be noted that, for many years now, there has been no important social movement at Dacia: it is the realm of consensus [*le royaume du consensus*]" (Debrosse 2007:288). Given the extraordinary turmoil caused by the peaking of labor unrest across the country during 1999, the situation at Dacia seemed even more extraordinary. Renault officials were nonetheless far from willing to give unconditional credit to unionists, especially when considering the upcoming layoffs. Another report stressed that especially during the second half of the decade Romanian unions frequently broke privatization deals and provoked unrest (Debrosse 2007:29). Still, the most Renault officials expected in case unionists disavowed privatization agreements was an occupation of buildings and a sequestering of managers. Genuinely violent action was not factored into even the worst case scenario.

Such caution was not entirely unfounded if one looked at SAD's own activity during 1999. While the Dacia platform might have remained a "realm of consensus," SAD did not seem entirely unaffected by the surrounding wave of labor unrest. The declarations of solidarity with the much maligned unrest of the Valea Jiului coal miners during that year as well as the willingness to participate in country-wide actions organized by trade union confederations marked a clear difference in SAD's approach when compared to the previous years.¹⁵⁷ SAD's participation in the national "poverty protest" included an agreement to go on a warning strike, though again without stopping production and limiting the action to a so-called "Japanese-style strike" [*grevă japoneză*] in which participants just wore a white armband as a sign of protest.¹⁵⁸ The SAD leadership had also declared their willingness to participate in a subsequent country-wide general strike, although this was later cancelled by confederation leaders. These events came only after Dacia unionists had unilaterally declared their intention to protest in the first

¹⁵⁶ According to the ICTWSS database, version 5.0. There were five unions on the platform at the time of privatization: SAD, with around 22,500 members, SSC, with approximately 4,000, and three others with a few hundred members each (Debrosse 2007:288). According to Debrosse, SAD dominated not just numerically, but also through an intense activity on the shop floor.

¹⁵⁷ "Agenda SAD." *InfoAutoturism* 124, February 1999. "Conferința extraordinară a FSAR." *InfoAutoturism* 125, March 1999. "Agenda SAD." *InfoAutoturism* 126, March 1999.

¹⁵⁸ "Guvernul trebuie să se implice serios și imediat în privatizarea Daciei." *InfoAutoturism* 127, April 1999.

months of 1999. Not against poverty, but against what were perceived as deliberate attempts by state authorities to unjustifiably delay or even sabotage the takeover by Renault.¹⁵⁹ Early 1999 saw unionists' attempt to muster all available resources of militancy in favor of privatization. A total consensus was thus reached between outstanding enemies like SAD and SSC, local newspapers announced "a general mobilization" across the county in support of Dacia's privatization, while relationships between SAD and BNS appeared to be getting on the right track after years of discord.¹⁶⁰ Even if all this was in favor of the Renault deal, it could just as well be said that these organizational resources could subsequently be used against the new owners. In the eyes of potential buyers, therefore, SAD was a hefty gamble.

Adding to this were the existential dilemmas of the SAD leadership regarding the future of the union in the post-privatization era. To be sure, they were adamant that trade unions still had a job to do in privatized companies and were wary of potential attempts at undermining SAD's continued existence.¹⁶¹ To ward off potential attacks, the SAD leadership insisted on establishing relations with international union structures and on strengthening their ties to the national union movement.¹⁶² They also pondered an imminent change of strategy from the standpoint of members' "mentality". In the words of Nicolae Pavelescu, privatization marked a far-reaching shift from a situation in which "the plant is ours" [*uzina e a noastră*] to one in which "we work for an employer" [*noi lucrăm la patron*]. Accordingly, an unprecedented separation between management and union affairs had to be made, while union members needed to readjust their expectations and their appetite for mobilization.¹⁶³ The exact meaning and consequences of working *la patron* were nonetheless difficult to assess in advance and by the turn of the millennium had remained somewhat of a mystery. Around this time, speculations spanned the entire spectrum of potential union strategies: from pursuing higher wages above all else to reassessing the principled rejection of political engagement.

Somewhat paradoxically, the second option was favored precisely at the end of the era of state ownership and so-called political meddling in economic affairs, which allegedly favored "populist" and "antipolitical" positions, coupled with permanent denunciations of the newly rich, of corruption, and of organized theft.¹⁶⁴ While politics remained a dirty word for Dacia unionists well into the 2000s, privatization seemed to make the extant "antipolitics" somewhat redundant. This ambiguity opened a new space for action, in which unionism and political engagement (which was admittedly still denied as such) were no longer seen as incompatible. Though political entrepreneurship had become attractive once before, in contrast to the middle of the 1990s there now seemed to be more room for experimentation. Rather than a factor of erosion and divisiveness within the union movement, political engagement could now appear as a catalyst for unity and consolidation in the uncertain period to follow. An

¹⁵⁹ "Agenda SAD." *InfoAutoturism* 125, March 1999.

¹⁶⁰ "Sindicatelor cer explicații." *InfoAutoturism*, supplement, November 1998. "Mobilizare generală pentru Dacia." *Jurnalul de Argeș*, May 8-14, 1999. 1998/194. "Comunicat." *InfoAutoturism*, supplement, November 1998.

¹⁶¹ "Dezbateri pe tema: Calitatea de acționar." *InfoAutoturism* 73, March 1996. "Agenda SAD." *InfoAutoturism* 124, February 1999.

¹⁶² "Agenda SAD." *InfoAutoturism* 119, November 1998. "O nouă strategie." *InfoAutoturism* 130, August 1999. "În formula actuală SAD este reprezentat în exterior astfel." *InfoAutoturism* 132, October 1999.

¹⁶³ "Schimbarea de mentalitate de la 'Uzina e a noastră' la 'noi lucrăm la patron'." *InfoAutoturism* 132, October 1999.

¹⁶⁴ "Să terminăm cu 'Noi ne facem că lucrăm, voi vă faceți că ne plătiți'." *InfoAutoturism* 132, October 1999.

opportunity was even at hand, with the coming local elections in June 2000. As early as December 1998, the BNS leadership had announced it would seek partnership with an “authentic social-democratic” political party allowing direct union involvement “at all levels.” By the time of Dacia’s privatization, BNS was close to reaching an agreement with The Alliance for Romania (Alianța pentru România—APR), allowing unionists to run in the elections under APR’s banner.¹⁶⁵ Consistent with its programmatic rejection of political involvement, the SAD leadership declined to join in and denounced the political ambitions of the BNS leadership. In one of the most bizarre episodes in the union’s history, which was at least partially explained by the confusion of privatization and by its improved relations with BNS, the SAD leadership announced its intention to join BNS’s alliance with APR en masse. SAD forwarded a list of candidates for all offices that were put up for election—the Mioveni mayor’s office, the local and county councils. A brief but energetic electoral campaign was organized, including public celebrations at the Mioveni Trade Unions’ House of Culture in support of APR’s candidate for the mayor’s office. Costescu’s by



FIGURE I.16. Maleficence descending upon the industrial community via the regional and national public spheres, with unknown parties pulling the strings.

Source: *InfoAutoturism* 140, April 2000.

now patented localist discourse was mobilized as part of “SAD’s offer” in the campaign, with union members trading places with Mioveni’s “worker-inhabitants”; the union was presented as the only connection left between the plant and the town in the aftermath of privatization.¹⁶⁶ Denunciations of unseen, external evil-doers were likewise a staple of SAD’s electoral presentation (figure I.16) and with them came the standard rejection of national party politics. Both were obvious in declarations made by union leaders-cum-candidates: “We don’t do politics, we just want to manage a town that is in a state of physical and moral decay (...). Mioveni’s inhabitants, SAD’s members have the moral duty to think of their future and the future of their children. It is not politicians from elsewhere who will solve their problems, but the people next to them, to whom they can appeal whenever they need.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ BNS had previously declared its support for APR, regardless of criticism coming from SAD and FSAR. “Cronică SAD-FSAR.” *InfoAutoturism* 117, September 1998.

¹⁶⁶ “Jumătate din locurile de muncă externalizate de pe platforma Dacia vor rămâne în Mioveni.” *InfoAutoturism* 141, May 2000. As I show in part III, these tropes were mobilized by Costescu as well, albeit with far more success. On “SAD’s offer,” see “Oferta Sindicatului Autoturisme Dacia.” *InfoAutoturism* 142, May 2000.

¹⁶⁷ “Nu trebuie ratată șansa pe care o avem!” *InfoAutoturism* 142, May 2000.

“My party is the Colibași plant and the headquarters of the party is Mioveni” was one of the slogans used by Paul Păun, the SAD/APR candidate for the mayor’s office in the June 2000 elections. It was to prove blatantly inefficient, as he came only fifth, with a measly 4.8% of the votes. Costescu, by comparison, easily secured a second term in office by ratcheting up more than 60% of the votes. Though SAD’s candidates for the local and county councils—among whom were its top ranking leaders—fared somewhat better, 7.88% of the votes for the former and 7.4% for the latter was not quite what union leaders had expected. In the aftermath, the few SAD officials who obtained mandates quickly withdrew, as the leadership admitted to the failure and attributed it to officials’ inability to convince members that candidates were not simply pursuing their personal interests.¹⁶⁸ From a different standpoint, the attempt at self-conversion to political unionism by trade union leaders who had previously boasted their keen support for business unionism utterly failed precisely at the hands of that part of the former SAD leadership who had embraced political unionism early on. The 2000 local elections thus fully (and strangely) exhibited the ambiguous cleavage that had plagued organized labor at Dacia since the early days of 1990. It marked the end of an era not just for the town, which would indeed witness unprecedented turmoil due to its subsequent separation from the automobile plant (see part III), but also for SAD, since it more or less completely eliminated political unionism from the union’s strategic repertoire and bluntly restricted the room for experimentation that privatization had briefly made available. The elections debacle meant that the union would have to face its post-privatization existential dilemmas head on.

Working *la patron* and the new existential questions of interests and representation

Peace from above

At the beginning of the new millennium, the uncertainty of privatization was compounded by economic and social havoc to a scale not unlike that of the immediate months after December 1989. Among other things, the CDR government’s onslaught had led to plummeting real wages, threatening to cripple the until then booming market for personal automobiles. For workers and trade unions, the massive push for privatization had yielded mostly disastrous results, especially when coupled with energetic efforts to shut down enterprises diagnosed as economically unviable. The abysmal situation of the Valea Jiului coal miners (see Kideckel 2008) was well known to Dacia workers and the region had by then firmly secured a place in their geographic imaginaries as the netherworld of the post-89 social order.¹⁶⁹ Though for very different reasons—the first falling victim to botched, asset-stripping driven privatization deals, while the second collapsed along with its mother company in the aftermath of the Asian crisis—Romania’s two other automobile producers, Aro Câmpulung and Rodae/Oltcit Craiova, seemed set on the well-trodden path to industrial ruination, leaving Dacia workers without any local references capable of dispelling an overbearing pessimism. Despite obtaining a supposedly much better deal than Aro or Oltcit ever had, anxieties ran high when it came to

¹⁶⁸ “Comunicat.” *InfoAutoturism* 144, June 2000.

¹⁶⁹ Though certainly in a less vivid manner, such geographical imaginaries of industrial and social decay survived to the time of my fieldwork in the early 2010s. Though politicians and media pundits had by then long lost any interest in its fate, for Dacia workers Valea Jiului persisted as a point of reference in assessing their own situation.

assessing the prospects for the company. Moreover, working *la patron* was a big unknown for workers and union leaders alike, so both negative and positive expectations abounded.

SAD's role in the period immediately following privatization was established well in advance, during the negotiations with Renault.¹⁷⁰ As mentioned earlier, the deal leaders presented to their members was, in theory, simple enough: in exchange for the spreading of restructuring over four years, coupled with the alleviation of "social shocks" and the programmatic respect of individual competence and workmanship in handling all personnel-related affairs, the union would fully commit to Renault's plans of overhauling production and would do its best to make sure that employees did the same. Put differently, in exchange for the mitigation of "social trauma," the union would ensure social peace during the restructuring process. At face value, the SAD leadership was well prepared for this task, as it had by then acquired solid experience in the pacification years of the second half of the 1990s. This time around, however, peace meant something quite different: if in pre-privatization times pacification was equivalent with the union leadership refraining from fostering conflict—with management, with other unions on the platform, with the government, with confederations, etc.—, peacekeeping after privatization implied it being actively involved in the alleviation and containment of conflict springing from workers' ranks. This was the self-assumed mandate of the SAD leadership in the post-privatization era, at least until the company was expected to exit the limbo of restructuring toward the middle of the decade.

Even more than during the late 1990s, peace was now said to carry a double—economic and moral—imperative. Economic, since it was paramount in ensuring the company's survival, which could only happen via Renault's restructuring program; and moral, because union members should have been primarily interested in working hard rather than seeking other means of obtaining a decent livelihood—through various parasitical activities like parts trafficking or moonlighting (see part II) or, indeed, through unwarranted conflict.¹⁷¹ For the union leadership, this double imperative was said to carry an intrinsic conditionality and peace was not to be pursued merely for its own sake. More precisely, just like under the pre-privatization compromise, it depended on management's ability and willingness to deliver on the union's bread and butter objectives.¹⁷² If everything else had before been trumped by job security, wages and working conditions now took the front stage, with leaders announcing that, after a decade of deleterious concessions on wages, the time had come for SAD to demand proper remuneration for its members.¹⁷³ Correspondingly, an even stronger emphasis was placed on the negotiations of the collective labor contract for delivering on the union's bread and butter objectives. Strangely, given that the union leadership had not changed since the second half of the 1990s, the opposition between populism and pragmatism was again mobilized, with the latter now equated to the channeling of discontent through the negotiations

¹⁷⁰ For a detailed analysis of personnel restructuring and SAD's role in it, see chapter 10.

¹⁷¹ E.g., "Adunarea Generală Extraordinară a SAD." *InfoAutoturism* 131, September 1999. "Adunările Generale ale organizațiilor sindicale componente ale SAD." *InfoAutoturism* 135, December 1999. "Raport de activitate al Consiliului SAD pe anul 2000." *InfoAutoturism* 152, January 2001.

¹⁷² "Proiect de hotărâri." *InfoAutoturism* 137, February 2000. "Agenda SAD." *InfoAutoturism* 137, February 2000.

¹⁷³ "Schimbarea de mentalitate de la 'Uzina e a noastră' la 'noi lucrăm la patron'." *InfoAutoturism* 132, October 1999.

and the renouncing of unconditional guarantees of job security.¹⁷⁴ From such a “pragmatic” standpoint, the leadership could permanently stress the paramount importance of its direct interaction with the upper management in the negotiations while also reporting on various successes during negotiations as accomplishments of the union as a whole and as fulfillments of goals that the contingent of (legitimate) members had fully agreed upon in advance.

Emphasizing contract negotiations was just one element in the orchestration of social peace. Interunion rivalry was rapidly brought to a complete standstill, with SAD absorbing most of the smaller unions on the platform—with the notable exception of SSC, toward which it initially showed a degree of benevolence similar only to the first months after December 1989. After the elections disaster, SAD kept a prudent distance from BNS, rejecting any sort of political involvement while granting unprecedented support to the confederation’s pursuit of bread and butter goals. On the multiple occasions when BNS organized protests—in Câmpulung, Pitești, and Bucharest—SAD managed to successfully make its mark on the national-level union struggle that decisively contributed to the adoption of an ostensibly employee-friendly Labor Code in 2003.¹⁷⁵ Most important for peace at Dacia, however, was the renewed alliance between SAD’s top leadership and the company’s new upper management. Contract negotiations stood at the heart of this alliance and both sides routinely gave public praise to the positive atmosphere and outcomes of the negotiations. For the SAD leadership, “real negotiations” with a “real partner” were allegedly an entirely different ball



FIGURE I.17. “...Negotiations”: SAD’s top leadership (on the left) in a tug of war with Dacia’s top management. It could be suggested that the former had somewhat of an advantage.

Source: *InfoAutoturism* 151, December 2000.

¹⁷⁴ “Adunarea generală a SAD.” *InfoAutoturism* 138, February 2000. “Sondaj printre lideri.” *InfoAutoturism* 139, March 2000. “Raport de activitate al Consiliului SAD pe anul 2000.” *InfoAutoturism* 152, January 2001.

¹⁷⁵ Reports from these protests highlight SAD’s constant (and relatively numerous) presence, in comparison to the dwindling interest showed by other unions from the Argeș county. For a discussion of the early 2000s as a turning point for the national union movement and of the meaning of the 2003 Labor Code, see Varga and Freyberg-Inan (2015).

game; for Dacia's management, union cooperation and "realism" during the negotiations were declaredly crucial in putting the plant on the right track.¹⁷⁶

Buttressing the role of the annual negotiations was the institutionalization of the union's involvement in the everyday implementation of the restructuring program: everything from the company's future product policy and the details of the investment plans to the most specific issues related to personnel restructuring and improvements in working conditions were discussed between SAD's top leadership and the new three-man Direction Committee (*Comitetul de Direcție*). Joined by SAD's two vice-leaders, Ion Iordache and Marin Anghel, Nicolae Pavelescu thus faced Constantin Stroe, Christian Estève and Manuel Roldan in the joint handling of restructuring (figure I.17). This was presented and, to be sure, was also regarded as evidence of management's recognition of the union and as a guarantee that employees' interests were directly represented in front of decision makers.¹⁷⁷ In practice, it led to the proliferation of joint meetings between the Direction Committee and the SAD leadership, which, at least theoretically, ensured co-coordination of and co-supervision of the nitty-gritty aspects of the restructuring process. In this sense, another unprecedented gesture—which, technically speaking, was not a post-privatization innovation—was the permanent participation of the Direction Committee in the SAD general assembly and even in the assemblies held by department-level union organizations.¹⁷⁸ For the rest of the union officials and for the membership this made for a clear display of unity between the union's top leaders and the company's upper management in which everything was subsumed to an overbearing dedication to the restructuring program. Constant pleas for workers' patience on the part of managers were joined by similarly constant pleas for trust in Renault on the part of SAD's top brass.

Though ostensibly opposing each other, in the immediate aftermath of privatization, SAD's leaders and the company's management began speaking in a single voice in front of employees and lower-level union officials. Behind this consensus lay their mutual recognition and the leadership's programmatic unquestioning of management's choice of goals and strategy, including the oft-repeated motto of achieving "Renault/European quality with Romanian prices"—which should have sounded at least a bit strange, given that low prices explicitly meant low labor costs while the union leadership stressed wages above all else.¹⁷⁹ Beyond pleas for patience and trust, the union was actively involved in the upholding of work discipline and supported managerial initiatives aimed at strengthening labor control.¹⁸⁰ Contributing to this were the leadership's constant appeals to union discipline and mobilization—that is, for vertical mobilization in contributing to the goals agreed upon with management. From the top of the union organization even the most sensitive goals—like the much discussed separation of union and management hierarchies and daily affairs—seemed

¹⁷⁶ "Agenda SAD." *InfoAutoturism* 142, May 2000. "Din intervențiile participanților." *InfoAutoturism* 153, February 2001.

¹⁷⁷ The Direction Committee was said to have extraordinarily broad prerogatives in handling everyday affairs and was to "operate on a daily basis, if needed." "Colaborarea cu Renault asigură Daciei un viitor sigur." *InfoAutoturism* 130, August 1999.

¹⁷⁸ "Cronica socială." *InfoAutoturism* 134, November 1999. "Adunarea Generală a SAD." *InfoAutoturism* 136, February 2000. "Adunarea generală a SAD." *InfoAutoturism* 153, February 2001. "Adunarea generală a SAD." *InfoAutoturism* 163, February 2002.

¹⁷⁹ "Editorial." *InfoAutoturism* 152, January 2001.

¹⁸⁰ The new wage system was one such initiative. For a detailed discussion of labor control, see part II.

substantially unproblematic, given the apparent willingness of the top management to recognize the union's standing and core prerogatives of representation. Lower down SAD's organizational ladder, on the other hand, cooperation quickly proved to be much more problematic, since, apart from the concrete, lived impact of the layoffs, restructuring implied the dismantling of workers' control over the shop floor, of which a considerable share pertained to low- and mid-level trade union officials. Since management aimed at the removal of trade union influence over the production process altogether, speaking of union-management mutual recognition was a far more convoluted matter on the shop floor. When combined with this systemic brooding of conflict from below, the active promotion of peace from above, including the insistence on overcoming any "resistance to change," risked producing an all-out crisis of legitimacy not only for the leadership, but for the trade union as such.¹⁸¹

Legitimation crisis

Sporadic signs of discontent appeared soon after privatization, though springing from a perceived necessity to immediately make up for the years of declining real wages and decaying working conditions and not from the impact of the restructuring process itself.¹⁸² Pleas for patience and trust were in such cases quite effective in keeping workers in line, so things remained quiet until the effects of restructuring began piling up around the middle of 2000. If in the first months after privatization SAD's organization leaders reported good relationships with managers, this began to change once it became obvious that the new management's intention was to grab full control over the shop floor. News of abusive firings, systematic disregard for layoff procedures, unexplained personnel transfers, the imposition of an entirely new regime of close supervision coupled with the overbearing presence of arrogant, obstinately monolingual French managers, arbitrary speedups and general work intensification due to layoff-induced personnel shortages, as well as displays of aggression toward shop floor union officials became more and more common. Added to these were the persistence of low wages and lack of substantial investment in social and working conditions. In stark contrast with the atmosphere of peace paraded among the upper echelons, the picture at the bottom looked increasingly bleak, with organization leaders repeatedly warning SAD's leadership of the generalized discontent, bad atmosphere, and worrying lack of solidarity among the rank and file; the possibility of spontaneous unrest was explicitly highlighted.

Not all of these complaints came out of loyalty to the leadership. On the contrary, centrifugal tendencies were fueled by the spiking of dissent within the ranks of the union officialdom to levels unseen since the early 1990s. While pressure from below clearly prevented organization leaders from joining the peace retinue at the top, the extreme unevenness of the restructuring process—with some departments targeted for massive investments, other for disinvestment and subsequent externalization, and still others for outright termination—resulted in very different and sometimes even opposed stances of shop floor officials toward SAD's policy. Furthermore, since SAD's new alliance with the upper

¹⁸¹ On the need to overcome "resistance to change", see "Să terminăm cu 'Noi ne facem că lucrăm, voi vă faceți că ne plătiți'." *InfoAutoturism* 132, October 1999.

¹⁸² "Prin reorganizarea, atât a producției cât și a desfacerii, cred că și salariile vor crește." *InfoAutoturism* 133, November 1999.

management entailed comprehensive responsibilities for the top brass, organization leaders oftentimes found themselves left out of discussions with management and were even excluded from the contract negotiations commission—an impossible situation during the entire 1990s, sparking outrage in the general assembly.¹⁸³ Lower down the organizational ladder, the loyalty of group leaders was even more difficult to maintain, not just because dissenting organization leaders were officially responsible for this or that group leaders were even more susceptible to pressure coming from workers, but also because management's attempts at strengthening shop floor supervision oftentimes came with the luring of shop floor union officials into supervisory positions and away from the union hierarchy.¹⁸⁴ While the top leadership repeatedly complained that group leaders were failing to do their jobs, rumors of the latter's intention to unilaterally engage in industrial action abounded.

No later than October 2000, tensions ran high enough for peace to be broken by workers and shop floor union officials against the advice of the union leadership. On October 9, workers in the body shop launched a wildcat strike together with small contingents of workers from the stamping, assembly and mechanical departments.¹⁸⁵ Though in the weeks leading up to the strike problems with working conditions in the body shop had produced some controversy, wages were the main reason for the stoppage. Several developments had rendered the wage question explosive in the second half of 2000. First, massive inflation meant that real wages had been on the decline throughout the 1990s (see chapter 8) and the crisis year of 1999 had been particularly devastating in this regard. Second, the first negotiations after privatization had failed to secure a better deal (figure I.18), thwarting any hopes of rapid recovery once the enterprise secured full autonomy from the state.¹⁸⁶ Third, since the vast majority of workers were paid in a piecework system, the increasingly common and increasingly longer work stoppages caused by the collapse of the internal market and by plans to overhaul production meant that workers received considerably less money than stipulated in the collective labor contract. In combination with the delayed tax deduction for a bonus received in the previous months, this led to extreme reductions of workers' remuneration, to the point in which some received negative net pay on their October wage slips. As a result, approximately one thousand angry workers stopped work on October 9 and 10 and organized a six-hour protest in front of the plant's administrative pavilion. In response, management and union representatives scrambled to contain and then put an end to the protest and settled for an immediate increase of the wage fund, which convinced strikers to restart work.

A genuine wildcat, the October 2000 strike caught both managers and union leaders completely off guard. According to a report by one of the members of the Direction Committee, managerial reaction was threefold (see Debrosse 2007:appendix 27): the future exercise of caution in regard to the wage question, deemed extremely sensitive; the bolstering of efforts to take control over the shop floor, since SAD's reliability in maintaining peace proved

¹⁸³ "Adunarea generală a SAD." *InfoAutoturism* 163, February 2002.

¹⁸⁴ "Organizația SAD-Vopsitorii." *InfoAutoturism* 137, February 2000. "Adunarea generală a SAD." *InfoAutoturism* 138, February 2000.

¹⁸⁵ A relatively detailed description of the events on October 9/10 as well as of the measures taken in the aftermath is available in Debrosse (2007:309, appendix 27).

¹⁸⁶ According to management representatives, average wages at Dacia were at the time lower than the average for the sector (see Debrosse 2007:appendix 27).

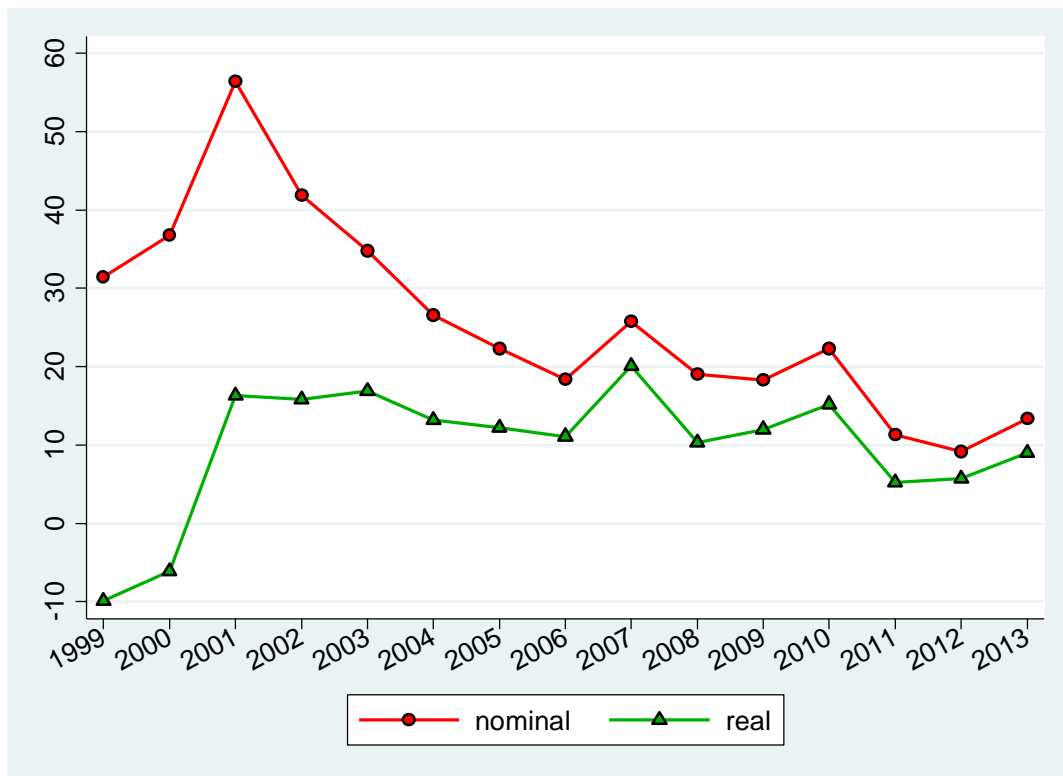


FIGURE I.18. Gross average wage increase (% from previous year) for Dacia, 1999–2013.

Data sources: *InfoAutoturism*, *Ziarul financiar* (various articles), company data, National Institute of Statistics. Author's calculations.

Note: Annual increases do not necessarily reflect higher (or lower) degrees of success in wage negotiations. While negotiations mostly concern the base wage, the graph illustrates the evolution of the actual average wage, which includes overtime and other bonuses. A spike in overtime due to labor shortage or a temporary boost in production targets can have a significant impact on final wages in a year that can be uneventful in what concerns the variation of the base wage. An overhaul of the wage system might likewise produce significant differences from one year to another. What matters most here is that the overall growth is sustained over the years, which—if we are concerned with the trade union's position and degree of success in negotiations—makes wage increases in the later period significantly more important than earlier, even though percentage-wise they might be lower. This is why, for example, 2008 appears rather uneventful if we take the graph at face value, even though this is when SAD obtained a landmark victory in its push for higher wages. Finally, averages also conceal wage differences between workers and TESA—one of the highly contentious issues of the 2000s.

questionable; and the devising of special action plans in case a larger and longer strike happened (see below). There was no managerial suspicion whatsoever of the bad faith of the SAD leadership and the need for the last two measures actually sprang from managers' realizing that union leaders could not even predict unrest, let alone guarantee adequate control of the rank and file. The leadership's claims of not knowing anything about the strike were more than vindicated by the strikers' verbal aggression toward union leaders, which surprised managers and rightfully shocked trade union officials.¹⁸⁷ Just as shocking was the bursting in on the negotiations of unnamed individuals who "only minded their own interests, without having elementary knowledge of what negotiations are about"; worse yet, they were aided by several organization leaders explicitly acting against the leadership. The reaction of the latter was more diverse and less concerted than the management's. Initial outrage was replaced with declarations of appreciation for the positive consequences of the strike accompanied by pleas for union discipline and patience. Several measures meant to strengthen the union's vertical

¹⁸⁷ "Liderul SAD atrage atenția asupra impostorilor." *InfoAutoturism* 149, November 2000.

organization were undertaken: bulletin boards, which management also started using during this period, were turned into an instrument of direct communication with the rank and file, several organizations were merged to keep up with restructuring and attempts were made at strengthening the relation between organization leaders and the rank and file. In time, blame displacement was also used more intensively as union representatives accused either old managers, unknown “impostors” looking to manipulate honest workers—including the SSC leadership and those preferring “nonwork” to work (absentees, thieves, etc.)—or the state’s taxation policy for harming the interests of both employees and the company. Finally, a new strategy of “constructive opposition” in relating to the management was announced.¹⁸⁸ Taking cue from the rank and file’s penchant for a more adversarial stance, and adapting it to the leadership’s peacekeeping role, “constructive opposition” entailed the integration of conflict into the union’s pursuit of industrial peace. This, however, carried plenty of risk.

The actions of the SAD leadership in the negotiations following October 2000 exemplified the new strategy. After management’s refusal to grant a 300-euro wage increase—meaning a 92% nominal wage increase, according to company officials (Debrosse 2007:10-2)—union leaders declared an official labor dispute and followed the legal procedures for launching a strike by collecting signatures from members. Backed by over twelve thousand signatures in favor of striking and after toning down its demands, the union obtained a favorable pay raise, though only at the cost of agreeing to the acceleration of restructuring.¹⁸⁹ At the height of the negotiations deadlock, SAD organized a protest in front of the administrative pavilion, gathering around eight thousand participants. The protest epitomized the ambiguity of “constructive opposition”: the overt purpose was to pressure management into making wage concessions while expressing workers’ support for “the Dacia–Renault project” (Debrosse 2007:12). From this point of view, management’s reaction at the sight of workers moving toward the pavilion—an order of evacuation given to foreign managers on the platform and, in expectation of a drawn out conflict, the transfer of important documents and computer equipment to Bucharest—seemed exaggerated and was an overly literal interpretation of the strike action plans drawn up in response to the October 2000 events.



FIGURE I.19. Workers from the body shop during the wildcat strike on June 17, 2002.

Source: *InfoAutoturism* 167, June 2002.

¹⁸⁸ “Opoziția constructivă—o nouă strategie.” *InfoAutoturism* 153, February 2001.

¹⁸⁹ “Agenda SAD.” *InfoAutoturism* 155, June 2001. “Adevărul despre negocieri.” *InfoAutoturism* 155, June 2001.

A year later, all this was largely forgotten and negotiations proved conspicuously uneventful. Despite continued criticism coming from organization leaders and constant warnings of workers' growing discontent, "constructive opposition" seemed to go no further than seeking moderate wage concessions coupled with a return to the top-down cultivation of peace. Leaders were again caught by surprise when approximately five hundred disgruntled workers from the body shop stopped work to protest against a signed wage agreement they claimed did not do justice to the difficult working conditions they had to endure (Debrosse 2007:1-4). Once again, SAD leaders found imposing union discipline difficult as they insisted that the union was the only legitimate means of action against management and that wildcats were in fact damaging to workers' interests.¹⁹⁰ Though this time around lacking support from other SAD organizations, the May 2002 wildcat strike together with its repetition a month later (figure I.19) exposed the limitations of "constructive opposition" and highlighted the dangers of a continued pursuit of peace from above. Simply absorbing the smoldering conflict on the shop floor into ostensibly peaceful and peace-inducing negotiations taking place behind the doors of the administrative pavilion was not an option if SAD was to survive in long run. With restructuring continuing apace, by October 2002 there were signs that a tipping point would soon be reached as the union leadership shifted toward overt accusations of management's unwillingness to engage in dialogue with employees' representatives.¹⁹¹ Two months later, Pavelescu announced a deadlock in the negotiations for the 2003 collective labor contract, again because of disagreements on the wages chapter.¹⁹² After three years of sacrifice, Pavelescu insisted, employees and their families deserved proper wages, which management was nonetheless not intent on offering. With the dignity and wellbeing of union members on the line, as well as those of the union itself, the SAD leadership vowed to remain adamant in their struggle for decent wages. For the first time since the change of ownership in late 1999, the managerial call for patience was no longer accompanied by the trade union's echo.

The 2003 general strike and the necessary jeopardy of defensive opposition

We must, once and for all, break the ice. Today we must decide if SAD will continue to exist over the years, without us, with other employees, or if today SAD is dissolved. When you will cast your vote, you will be doing so in full awareness of what is at stake. (...) The current management proposed to us, to the negotiations commission, to accept something we had never conceived: to lower this year's wage! Anything below 23% (what we asked for), means that real wages at Dacia will decrease. If last year, in 2002, an employee bought one bread, this year management tells you to rip a piece from the bread you had in 2002 and take the rest to your children. [A gesture illustrated by actually tearing a piece of a loaf of bread the speaker had brought with him.]

Today you will decide—be aware, it is a major decision—whether to kneel the union and Dacia's employees. I am not saying workers or engineers, I am saying Dacia employees, because no one at Dacia is content with his earnings. Don't think an engineer who has class 5 [the 5th wage category] is content and a worker who has class 5 is content. The 2002 wages were barely enough for you to get by. Do you admit it? Do you know what the union asked for? Do you know what your representatives asked for? They asked for a minimum livelihood. They

¹⁹⁰ "Incorectitudinea naște incorectitudine." *InfoAutoturism* 167, June 2002. "Realizări și optimism." *InfoAutoturism* 168, July 2002.

¹⁹¹ "Dialogul direct va fi calea de rezolvare a problemelor." *InfoAutoturism* 170, October 2002.

¹⁹² "Negocieri." *InfoAutoturism* 172, December 2002.

asked for the purchasing power of 2002 to be maintained in 2003. Not one extra euro! We did not ask for Dacia to make a [supplementary] financial effort. I am telling you this because some people will come and say that we want to destroy Dacia, that we don't want a secure future for Dacia. We just want for Dacia to exist and we asked for last year's wage, to buy this bread, which we had in 2002. They tell us to go home with a truncated loaf! They also tell us this: from the 16,280 jobs agreed to be left at the end of restructuring we should give up on a further 4,000! So the ones who stay, not because they want to work like robots, be forced to leave this enterprise. They are planning to bring seasonal workers in the plant, to exploit each for two years and send them home, to bring others, with as low a wage as possible!

I asked my colleague, Marin Anghel, who handles social affairs, for an assessment to show you how many people have died in the Colibași plant. I gave up, since it seemed macabre. People in their prime, our colleagues, die because of the stress, because of improper nourishment. We can't even imagine how badly some of our coworkers [*semeni*] live.

The Colibași plant has become an enclave, a prison, considering Romania's context. I refrain from telling you, since it would be an act of instigation, what wages people from other enterprises have. I withstood everything and turned my cheek so you could spit at me, both you and them, just so that things were good at Dacia. We said we should let them settle in, so that we make cars, so that things go well at Dacia. The future of Dacia's employees is today, not tomorrow, as they tell us! I have lived like this for three years. They humiliated me as they pleased. They are humiliating us. At night, they call us at home: "Be reasonable, man, be reasonable; there are people in the room who will support you if you propose to sit like this for another year", I was told on the phone. (...)

I went on the assembly line and I was surrounded by workers of around 35 years of age who told me: let us take the buyout and go home. Why, I asked, where would you go, since there is nothing out there? We are sick of the plant, they replied. They can't keep up with the physical and moral stress to which they are exposed!

Decide today what we should do! Eliminate any alternatives for us, union leaders, so we no longer negotiate piecemeal [*să nu mai negociem particular*].

The union has two core values and if we give them up we no longer exist: first, decisions are made collectively, through voting, by the will of the majority and, second, solidarity. If Stamping dies, we all die; if Assembly dies, we all die; if Wiring dies, we all die! This is the principle of solidarity. Not if things are good for me somewhere and I obtained—also through the union—some deserved and legal rights I am no longer interested in how others are doing.

I am against illegal movements. I am for legality. Any (...) movement led by the trade union is in conformity with Romania's Constitution. We ourselves do not respect the Romanian Constitution. You protest alone, on the inside, inside your homes. The Constitution allows us to protest collectively, if we want to do so. I have probably called for a secret vote out of desire to overcome your fear. While conversing with yourselves, you will maybe make a decision worthy of us all. (...)

I don't know what will happen if we agree to strike. I am against striking, but striking is a right, a constitutional protest of the worker, of the employee. I am against taking you out in the street, but if we are organized as a trade union, we must act as a union. I don't know what will happen if we go on strike. I don't know what will happen in a week's time, since we are not God! I don't know if Dacia will still exist one year from now. I am telling you the forecast: great countries became great because they protested. France is great because France protests when things are not right. The French from Dacia are not France!

(...) Don't forget: today you will not just decide our fate. We are all old, we have over twenty years working in this plant, and this is probably why we are reticent when it comes to industrial action. Here is my problem: I, Iordache Ion, came to the plant when I was twenty; it is as if I rebelled against my parents. I have this stupid feeling because I was raised in this plant, and so were you. We got married, we had kids. Well, the plant is no longer ours. I want to rip this idea out of your heads with pliers. The plant is now theirs and the jobs are ours.

If we do not fight with courage today, tomorrow you will have a much lower wage, there will be fewer of you at work in each department. This is it! Whoever tells you different is lying. They are tasked with lying to us, so that they keep it going for another year, so that they retire, if possible. They do not care what they leave behind.

I am telling you our struggle is righteous. (...) So things go well, let's not organize revolts (...). To our shame, we are not asking for one extra euro, we want to have this year the real value of last year's wage. And they don't want to grant us this. Shamelessly, they impose all sorts of conditions, they threaten us. I am making a public statement: we feel physically threatened, because we don't want to do what they tell us. They invented tick firms [*firme căpușă*]. We have engineers earning 100 euros doing the same thing as engineers earning 1,000 euros. We have workers who work for 1,000 euros next to workers who do the same for 100 euros. Do you know why the Frenchman has 1,000 euros? Because he fought to have 1,000 euros.¹⁹³

This passionate speech was held by Ion Iordache, one of SAD's two viceleaders, at the general assembly on February 11, 2003. One of many speakers on that day, Iordache took it upon himself to provide the almost five hundred delegates present at the assembly with a diagnosis of the previous three years, an interpretation of the significance of the moment, and a taste of what was to come if things went in the wrong direction—which, he repeatedly warned, could happen regardless of what delegates decided. Iordache emphatically pointed to the tensions that had brought the union on the brink of disaster. For three years, the SAD leadership had agreed to keep silent, systematically making concessions in relation to management and swallowing the criticism of the rank and file. In the process, it had allowed management to impose a despotic regime on the shop floor, to accelerate the layoff program—which was said to already be one year ahead of schedule, with more than 11,000 employees being laid off by the end of 2002—and to now obstinately demand that an extra two thousand employees be laid off on top of what was left from the original plan Renault had committed to in front of the government and employees' representatives. In combination with an expected raising of production targets, this meant more speedups and the further enforcement of close supervision. Under such circumstances, Iordache insisted, passivity spelled disaster for both individual livelihoods and collective organization.

These measures had wreaked havoc among regular union members—many of whom had rushed to exchange their jobs for the buyout provided by the government despite the lack of alternatives on the labor market—as well as within the ranks of the union officialdom—who by early 2003 needed far more than just spirited pep talks if they were to fall in line with SAD's official policy. Furthermore, the leadership seemed to be systematically failing at offering what it had promised to deliver above all else—and, to a certain extent, in exchange for everything else: proper wages. During the 1990s, SAD's commitment to adequate wage increases was an absolute existential requirement, since it could not otherwise legitimately claim to simultaneously represent and control the labor force. In this sense, the achievement of a modicum of labor control during the second half of the 1990s depended on the accumulation of expectations in regard to post-privatization wage levels. The immediate disappointment after the Renault takeover led to the shock of October 2000, forcing management into making moderate wage concessions and the union into adopting the strategy of “constructive opposition.” During the 2003 negotiations, things seemed to be heading back to where they

¹⁹³ “Adunarea generală extraordinară.” *InfoAutoturism* 173, February 2003.

had started. Notwithstanding the still endemic stoppages that put actual wages below their contractual levels, management's offer of a 14% increase to the nominal base wage allegedly did not cover the forecasted inflation of 19%, thus leading to a decrease of real wages from the get-go. SAD's adamant demand for a 23% raise was thus not just about the immediate conservation of purchasing power, but also about avoiding a repeat of the 2000 situation, which could have endangered the union's existence in the long run. Management's resoluteness in sticking with its 14% offer was likewise motivated by a perceived requirement to not give in to any kind of genuine pressure coming from either SAD or independently-acting workers—an imperative made crystal clear by the October 2000 wildcat.¹⁹⁴ Having merely spectated on the previous negotiations, union members were for the first time invited to speak out on their troubles and act according to the full extent of their discontent. Heeding Iordache's plea, eleven out of fifteen thousand SAD members voted in favor of a general strike, leaving no alternative to the leadership but to do so for the first time in the union's existence.

The SAD leadership had arguably no real choice between striking and not striking. The latter would have exacerbated the crisis of legitimacy in relation to both workers and managers. A general strike, or at least the credible threat of it, was by then the only option to at least slow down, if not reverse, the weakening of the trade union. As it is obvious from Iordache's speech, the leadership was well aware of this, just as they were aware of the risks of attempting to organize a strike at that particular moment. To be sure, the organizational challenge was significant, especially since it was widely admitted that SAD had never coordinated a genuine strike, either before or after privatization.¹⁹⁵ During the 2001 negotiations, the gathering of signatures in favor of striking looked more like a scaremongering tactic than proof of a genuine intention to strike.¹⁹⁶ And just a year before the assembly in which Iordache held his speech voices from inside the union were pointing out that SAD was unable to organize a general strike and that it was facing endemic fragmentation and lack of solidarity among its members.¹⁹⁷ Adding to these problems was the expected opposition from management, toughened in reaction to the October 2000 wildcat strike. Managers' analysis of the situation at the time also indicated that SAD was "entirely incapable" of controlling a larger, longer-term strike (Debrosse 2007:appendix 27), although it was expected that SAD would join in if something of the sort happened spontaneously. The emergency action plan devised after October 2000 included the active mobilization of shop floor supervisors and the manipulation of "the environment"—the media, local authorities etc.—against protesting employees. Having prepared in advance, at the beginning of 2003 Dacia's management was ready to swiftly quell any significant form of unrest. Finally, there was the lengthy process that, according to the law, had to be gone through for a strike to actually happen: negotiations had started on November 15, 2002; a labor dispute had been officially declared only at the end of January and after repeated failures in the negotiations; several mandatory rounds of conciliation had to pass after the starting of the dispute; in case these failed, a two-hour warning strike had to be organized;

¹⁹⁴ The management also came with their own inflation estimate of around 13-14%, claiming to fulfill SAD's declared objective of maintaining the real wage at its 2002 level.

¹⁹⁵ "Adunarea generală a SAD." *InfoAutoturism* 138, February 2000.

¹⁹⁶ "Agenda SAD." *InfoAutoturism* 155, June 2001.

¹⁹⁷ "Adunarea generală a SAD." *InfoAutoturism* 163, February 2002.

finally, only five days after the warning strike could the actual strike start.¹⁹⁸ For a trade union witnessing increasing organizational disarray, this lengthy process, filled with legal quagmires, was as much an opportunity as it was a danger. An opportunity, as it allowed union officials some last-minute attempts at accumulating much-needed organizational resources. A danger, since it left the union vulnerable to concerted managerial attack for a longer period of time, allowing management to achieve victory before the actual strike even began.

In preparation for the strike, organizational resources had to be mustered. The union officialdom had to be permanently mobilized and the support of the rank and file had to be secured, leading to a flurry of general assemblies and an overall push to rekindle the relationship between the top and the bottom of the union hierarchy. Management set up a top-level crisis committee focusing on strengthening the authority of shop floor supervisors while making sure they followed orders from above (Debrosse 2007:17). Meanwhile, an “information war” was waged inside as well as outside the plant, as both sides attempted to draw support from workers, from central and local authorities, and from the general population.¹⁹⁹ The SAD leadership sought to enlist a number of other allies: it strengthened its relationship with BNS, whose top officials joined SAD’s actions leading up to the strike; letters were sent to the government and the presidency and, via BNS, appeals for support were made to the International Labour Organization, to a number of international trade union confederations, and to the French president and prime minister. SAD’s leaders also profited from a conflict between Renault and Dacia’s minority shareholders and attempted to enroll the latter. Discursively, the SAD leadership relentlessly emphasized the righteousness of its wage demands and management’s lack of respect for employees and denial of their dignity. After a long absence, the old cleavage between workers and TESA was brought back to the forefront of the union’s officially sanctioned discourse. Growing wage disparities after privatization and the new, “terrorizing” regime of close supervision had by then produced plenty of tensions between workers and TESA, though SAD’s peacekeeping mission had prevented the discursive articulation of this conflict. An important addition was the pitting of Romanian workers against French managers and supervisors, who were accused of arrogance and despotism of cashing in much higher wages than Romanian employees for the same work. Taking cue from accusations made by the minority shareholders, the SAD leadership accused French managers of various attempts at asset stripping—bringing in outdated equipment from Renault’s foreign sites and using Dacia (that is, Romanian) money to do it, setting up a so-called “tick firm” [*firmă căpușă*] whose alleged purpose was to pay preposterous salaries to select employees, all on the backs of poorly paid workers.²⁰⁰ Managers were repeatedly denounced for employing a policy of “colonialism” and for behaving as “disciplinary battalions” bent on remorselessly cracking down on already ill-fated workers.²⁰¹ By constantly highlighting that Romanian employees earned more than ten times less than their French counterparts, the orchestration of a

¹⁹⁸ See Law 168/1999 on the solving of labor disputes.

¹⁹⁹ On the “information war”, see Debrosse (2007:318) and “Adunarea generală extraordinară.” *InfoAutoturism* 173, February 2003.

²⁰⁰ “Liderul de sindicat Nicolae Pavelescu declară că francezii și-au creat o firmă al cărui scop este căutarea specialiștilor români.” *Curierul zilei*, January 31, 2003. “Sindicaliștii trag Dacia pe dreapta.” *Curierul național*, February 21, 2003.

²⁰¹ “Viitorul salariaților de la Dacia este astăzi!” *InfoAutoturism* 173, February 2003.



FIGURE I.20. “Together with unionists from BNS, the members of the SAD council picketed the French Embassy.” The banner says: “1990-2002, 11,000 employees laid off from Dacia. Stop the massacre!” Source: *InfoAutoturism* 178, January 2004.

nationality-based cleavage—an albeit entirely exceptional one, since, as Iordache insisted, “the French from Dacia were not France”—came full circle in framing the stakes of the conflict: wages, working conditions, and, as unionists insisted, moral probity.

These organizational and discursive resources were first put to the test on February 6, when SAD and BNS leaders picketed the French embassy in Bucharest and called for a stop to the ongoing “massacre” happening at Dacia since privatization, pointed to employees’ dramatic situation, and called on the French to keep the promises made at the moment of privatization and stick to their defining national principles of “liberty, equality, and fraternity” (figures I.20 and I.21). Having presented their case to embassy officials, unionists sent a letter to Louis Schweitzer, Renault’s CEO, restating their demands and reasons for protesting.²⁰² If mobilizing support from the French government or from Renault’s top brass were far-fetched objectives, in the battle over media exposure and public image the embassy protest proved a reasonably efficient weapon. Even more so when it came to flexing the union’s organizational muscles in anticipating a more complex action in the weeks to come. Until then, a warning strike was scheduled for February 14, when SAD managed to rally just over half of the company’s employees (Debrosse 2007:15)—an apparent victory, since it proved SAD could outmatch management in the struggle over worker mobilization. If the level of mobilization could be maintained, it was—although just barely—enough to fulfill the legal requirement for organizing a general strike in a week’s time.²⁰³ In response, management demanded that all employees sign nominal lists specifying if they agreed or not with striking, a measure of

²⁰² “Scrisoare înaintată de SAD și BNS directorului general al Concernului Renault Louis Schweitzer.” *InfoAutoturism* 173, February 2003. “Pichetarea Ambasadei Franței.” *InfoAutoturism* 173, February 2003.

²⁰³ Romanian labor law stipulates that at least 50% of union members must explicitly agree with a strike in order for it to be legally organized.

intimidation met with fierce criticism by SAD leaders who warned workers that those who signed would subsequently be fired. Three days after the warning strike, a wildcat took place in stamping, interrupting a last-ditch attempt at peaceful negotiations.²⁰⁴ With tensions peaking, the next day the SAD council decided for the general strike to begin on the first shift on February 21. All other battlefronts notwithstanding, both sides knew the scale would tilt in favor of who held better control over the shop floor.

The events on Friday, February 21 unfolded very quickly. As it was by now customary, SAD organized a mass gathering in front of the administrative pavilion (figure I.22), despite management officially denying that any of the senior managers were on the site. Outside the plant gates, BNS brought trade unionists from across the country and organized a smaller protest in support of the strikers (figure I.23). Company representatives insisted that only 36.7% of employees were in fact participating, effectively rendering the strike illegal; since the union claimed otherwise, a solution could only be found in court.²⁰⁵ Before this could happen, things on the ground were decisively altering the fate of the strike. Reports on the strike (e.g., Debrosse 2007:155) insist on the crucial role of direct, face to face interaction, as the two adversaries attempted to draw workers to their side. Violence erupted spontaneously and in an apparently haphazard manner. Union leaders complained of managers' aggressive intimidation tactics, including supervisors locking in workers to prevent them from joining the others. Management, on the other hand, pointed to the violent behavior exhibited by strikers toward machinery and equipment, as well as toward employees who refused to participate in the strike;



FIGURE I.21. The picketing of the French embassy in Bucharest. Banners say: “Liberty, equality, fraternity” and “Dacia = tears, blood, pain”.

Source: *InfoAutoturism* 173, February 2003.

²⁰⁴ The genuineness of the wildcat was immediately questioned by management (Debrosse 2007:317). The stamping organization was known for its loyalty to SAD's leadership. See “Adunarea generală a SAD.” *InfoAutoturism* 163, February 2002.

²⁰⁵ “Francezii spun că protestul este ilegal.” *Curierul național*, February 22, 2003.



FIGURE I.22. Strikers gathered in the plant courtyard during the 2003 general strike.

Source: *InfoAutoturism* 173, February 2003.

they also accused SAD's leaders of allowing unauthorized individuals on the plant premises.²⁰⁶ Threats with court trials were exchanged, though only management would pursue this to the end. On February 25, the Pitești Court of Appeal responded to the company's complaint regarding strikers' violent behavior by postponing the strike until March 15. In reaction, SAD



FIGURE I.23. "During the general strike, hundreds of trade unionists from across the country showed their solidarity with SAD members by picketing the gate of the plant."

Source: *InfoAutoturism* 178, January 2004.

²⁰⁶ For an account of supervisors' harassment of workers during the strike, see *The Marius Tucă Show*, 25 February 2003, available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vBPwKIFDnYw> (Retrieved, March 13, 2015).

leaders could do little else than promise to promptly restart the strike three weeks later, while accusing judges of corruption and collusion with Dacia's lawyers. This, however, would never happen, as an agreement was reached on March 6 for a 19% pay raise—a 17.4% increase of the base wage plus a one million lei bonus.

In the immediate aftermath of the strike, both sides rushed to claim victory. In a speech held in front of Dacia's managers on March 19, Louis Schweitzer remarked that an important test had been successfully passed, illustrating the profound changes Dacia had gone through since privatization (Debrosse 2007:appendix 41). Behind closed doors, senior managers congratulated themselves for the successful implementation of the "responsibilization" policy targeted at Romanian shop floor supervisors after the October 2000 wildcat (Debrosse 2007:155).²⁰⁷ The alliance of French and Romanian managers and supervisors made nationality largely irrelevant during the strike, so this framing of the antagonism largely disappeared from the discursive arsenal of the union as rapidly as it had gained prominence. The SAD leadership, on the other hand, emphasized that wages would not have been raised above 14% without the strike. They also insisted the strike was a landmark not just for SAD but for the national union movement as a whole, as it was the first "genuine" strike organized after December 1989 in the entire country.²⁰⁸ Outside the public eye, the union leadership knew full well the strike provided at least a partial solution to the organizational decomposition SAD had witnessed during the previous three years. It was by then the only way to show the union still defended its members' interests above all else.

If this indeed was the case, the strike also exacerbated a series of organizational problems by bringing them out into the open. Many employees saw the 17.4% raise as a failure, with some voices claiming SAD had in fact obtained nothing on top of what management was willing to voluntarily give from the very beginning. Then there was the criticism of striking as such, with leaders having to face accusations that, by hampering Renault, they were in fact fighting against the common interest of the industrial community formed around Dacia.²⁰⁹ Moreover, there was a realization that the union had surrendered a considerable part of its control over the shop floor to management and that the situation at the bottom of the union hierarchy was to a significant extent outside the control of the leadership. These last two factors had made the difference in the strike proceedings and there was little reason to believe they

²⁰⁷ Management's assessment of the October 2000 wildcat strike (Debrosse 2007:appendix 27) emphasized that Romanian managers and supervisors took almost no action to stop the strike and were otherwise unaware of what they had to do in such situations. The wildcat exposed not just the worrying unpredictability of workers, but also the lack of discipline of the Romanian management. An immediate recommendation concerned the strengthening of the presence and direct intervention of French managers on the shop floor. Over the medium and long term, measures had to be taken to strengthen the discipline of Romanian managers. While the former policy fueled the pitting of Romanian workers against French managers before and during the 2003 strike, SAD's defeat came because of the successful implementation of the latter. Due to higher wages, stricter hierarchical supervision, and an incipient *esprit de corps*, in February 2003 there was a far smaller difference between the actions of French and Romanian managers. SAD subsequently reoriented its attacks toward management as such and, as the contingent of French managers shrunk significantly with each year that passed, occasionally even turned the Romanian management into its preferred target.

²⁰⁸ This, of course, meant it was the first major strike against a private owner and organized in full agreement with legal requirements. "Greva de la Dacia din februarie 2003— cea mai importantă acțiune sindicală din România în ultimii 70 de ani." *InfoAutoturism* 175, May 2003. "Negocierea contractului colectiv de muncă 2004." *InfoAutoturism* 177, November 2003.

²⁰⁹ E.g., "Un nou Ilie (Pintilie) cu o altă... pălărie?" *Miovenii* 39, April 2003.

would not continue to take negative toll on the union. Strategically, the outcome of the strike had also ultimately convinced union leaders that profit was an insurmountable prerequisite for trade union struggle. First, because they had no answer to management's insistence that the company could not grant higher wages since it was still running massive losses due to restructuring and, second, because striking had little impact in a period in which the plant operated severely below capacity, with management itself regularly scheduling production stoppages. Coupled with an increasingly fragile labor market position for Dacia workers (see chapter 11), this meant that, even if its officials had managed to organize the rank and file properly, SAD would have still been at a significant disadvantage during the strike.

Even if the critical situation in which SAD found itself at the beginning of 2003 did not come and go with the general strike, the events of the first months of that year constituted a major turning point for the trade union movement on the Dacia platform. The SAD leadership was now fully aware of the priority of rolling back the debilitating transformation it had witnessed since privatization. Internally, the strike marked a shift from empty "declarations" of solidarity to the active seeking of "practical" solidarity; organizational consolidation once again became a chief objective.²¹⁰ From one point of view, the strike made things easier in this regard, since it practically sealed the fate of SAD's only competitor, the only trade union on the platform it had not yet absorbed. Crippled by restructuring and having behaved haphazardly in the prelude to the strike over which SAD alone could claim merit, SSC would succinctly and quietly exit the scene. From another standpoint, however, the strike had made things much more challenging for SAD as it moved from the rather innocuous strategy of "constructive opposition" to one of actual opposition; peace could no longer be the main objective.

Although SAD representatives continued declaring their support for "the Renault project," the confusion between managerial and trade union goals and means, which had been so pervasive in the post-privatization era, was now objectively and subjectively dispelled. Even if the strike had been defensive—being primarily aimed at preserving existing rights threatened by concerted managerial action and the endemic decline of the Romanian economy—there was nothing to suggest an offensive switch could not happen in the future. Indeed, other important events happening around the time of the 2003 strike compounded its acting as a strategic turnaround: even though it was not the 6000-dollar car everyone was expecting, the launch of the new Solenza model shortly after the strike intimated an end to the slump Dacia had been experiencing since 1999; scheduled for 2004, the end of the restructuring program would free up many of SAD's organizational resources and would eliminate the pleas for deferral that management employed so relentlessly; finally, the new labor code included a much tougher stance on wildcat strikes, leading to an immediate strengthening of SAD's position toward its membership. Adding to the closure of the post-privatization compromise were the first signs of overall economic recovery, as Romania was entering a new era of economic dependence (Ban 2013; 2014:213-54). For Dacia, this would eventually translate into a recovery of the domestic market for cars. For its workers, it would fuel a convoluted process (see chapter 11) at the end of which they would find themselves in a particularly good position—although accompanied by and springing from a particularly bad condition—on the local labor market,

²¹⁰ "Raport de activitate al Consiliului SAD pe anul 2003." *InfoAutoturism* 178, January 2004.

thus offering the “structural power” (Wright 2000) that they had so dearly lacked during the 2003 general strike. While this certainly favored the turning away from defensive opposition in favor of an offensive strategy aimed at the supplementation of workers’ rights, this could not happen overnight or on its own and largely depended on SAD’s capacity to coalesce its membership in opposing management. This was something the union had proved to be lacking during the 2003 strike. If and when another moment for a general strike presented itself, it was up to trade unionists to demonstrate they had really heeded to the tough teachings of that conflict. For this to happen, SAD would have to take back some of the organizational terrain its leadership had tacitly given up on after privatization. The double narrowing of the union’s jurisdiction both outside the plant (in the realm of politics) and in its deepest confines (on the shop floor) that had accompanied privatization had rendered SAD’s strategy increasingly unviable. Rather than pulling the union away from the cliff’s edge, the strike of February 2003 merely ensured it would not fall off prematurely.

CHAPTER 4

“POLANYI–MARX-TYPE LABOR UNREST”, 2003–2008

From weak defense to strong offense

In the half decade following the February 2003 strike, Dacia went through a deep and surprisingly fast transformation. After the launch of the Logan series (the much vaunted 6000-dollar or 5000-euro car) in 2004, production and sales figures skyrocketed, leaving far behind not just the post-privatization slump but also the second half of the 1990s, which, until the crisis of 1999, had been the company's glory years in the post-89 era. From over 100,000 cars in 1997 and 1998, production fell to just 50,000 in the first three years after privatization. Hence, understandably, and against union leaders' expectations, the planned increase to around 70,000 assembled vehicles in 2003 did not significantly aid the strikers' cause in February that year. The next two years, however, yielded spectacular results, with production increasing by over 30% in 2004 and by no less than 81.5% in 2005 alone in comparison to the previous year. By 2008, Dacia was producing over 240,000 vehicles per year (figure I.24), on top of which came substantial quantities of spare parts and complete knock-downs (CKDs) exported for assembly in other Renault factories. Riding the wave of the country's credit- and consumption-driven growth, the domestic market still absorbed over half of Dacia's production (over 100,000 cars) until 2007, when it became a primarily export-oriented manufacturer. Financially as well, the company's situation registered a marked improvement, with spiking turnover figures once Logan production and sales kicked in in 2005, the first year in which Dacia registered a net profit after privatization (figure I.25). This was not just the result of a new range of products, but also of a massive reorganization of production that was completed in 2004 and 2005. While personnel restructuring continued beyond the threshold agreed at the time of privatization, the production of the Logan was accompanied by the arrival of several first-tier suppliers taking over Dacia's operations targeted for outsourcing. Internally, management consolidated its position and strengthened its iron-fisted hold over shop floor affairs. Workers were now confronted with increasingly aggressive close supervision and constant work intensification due to speedups and personnel restructuring.

Having silently conceded defeat in its first general strike, SAD mounted little opposition to the completion of the restructuring process. Verbal criticism and a symbolic “Japanese-style” protest against management's handling of personnel restructuring were quickly followed by an agreement on supplementary layoffs.²¹¹ In the face of managers' obvious capitalization on their victory, trade unionists could do little else than organize as efficient a defense as possible given the circumstances. In the year following the strike, this meant insisting on respecting the collective labor contract above all else (figure I.26), without posing any serious challenge to the broader goals or vision behind management's

²¹¹ “16,280?...” *InfoAutoturism* 175, May 2003. “Protest împotriva abuzurilor administrației de la Dacia.” *InfoAutoturism* 176, August 2003. “Administrația de la Dacia refuză continuarea procesului de restructurare pe cale legală.” *InfoAutoturism* 176, May 2003.

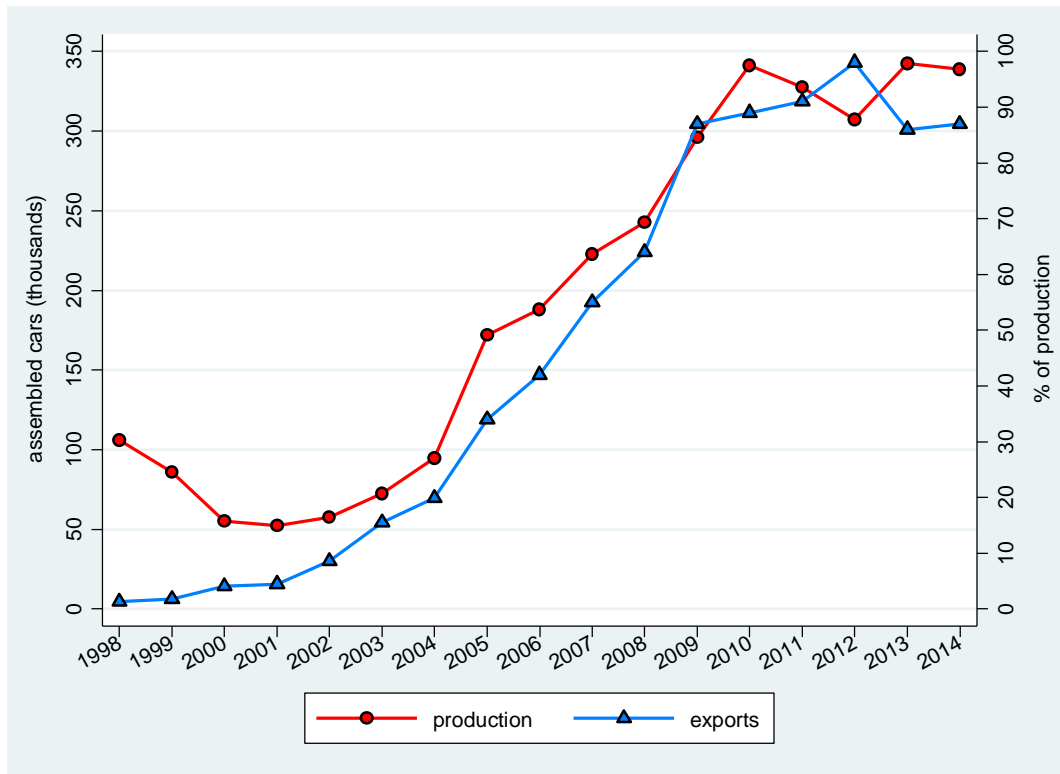


FIGURE I.24. Production of assembled cars and exports (as % of production of assembled cars), 1998–2014.

Data sources: *InfoAutoturism*, *Ziarul financiar* (various articles), Vardie (2009).

reorganization plans. During this time, SAD representatives experienced increased difficulties in having their role recognized on the shop floor, while in relation to the upper management the space for negotiation and recognition had likewise shrunk once the trade union lost its peacekeeping appeal. An emphasis on a reworked contractualism—this time used against management, and not against union members and various other “internal enemies”, as it had primarily been employed during the 1990s (see chapter 2)—was very likely the only genuine tactical choice available. Mobilization was out of the question, since the strike had proved that members’ declared support would not automatically turn into actual support in case the union took a more oppositional stance toward management. For this to happen, SAD had to go through a laborious process of organizational consolidation.

Starting with 2003, SAD would have had to face a series of major organizational challenges with or without the general strike. At the time of privatization, the leadership had obtained a formal guarantee that the outsourcing process would happen with the safe transfer of employees to the new employers, while maintaining the rights they had previously obtained individually and collectively. Even if this went according to plan—as it indeed did—there was no guarantee of relevant trade union presence in the new companies, which SAD had to actively work for once the outsourcing process picked up pace in the second half of 2003. If SAD was to maintain a solid foothold in supplier companies, an equilibrium had to be established between former Dacia employees whose rights had been guaranteed in advance and new employees who had no such guarantees whatsoever. On top of this came suppliers’ intent on making extensive use of fixed term contracts and temporary agency work, a policy yet unheard of at Dacia. Opposition to such practices was partially successful: though fixed term contracts

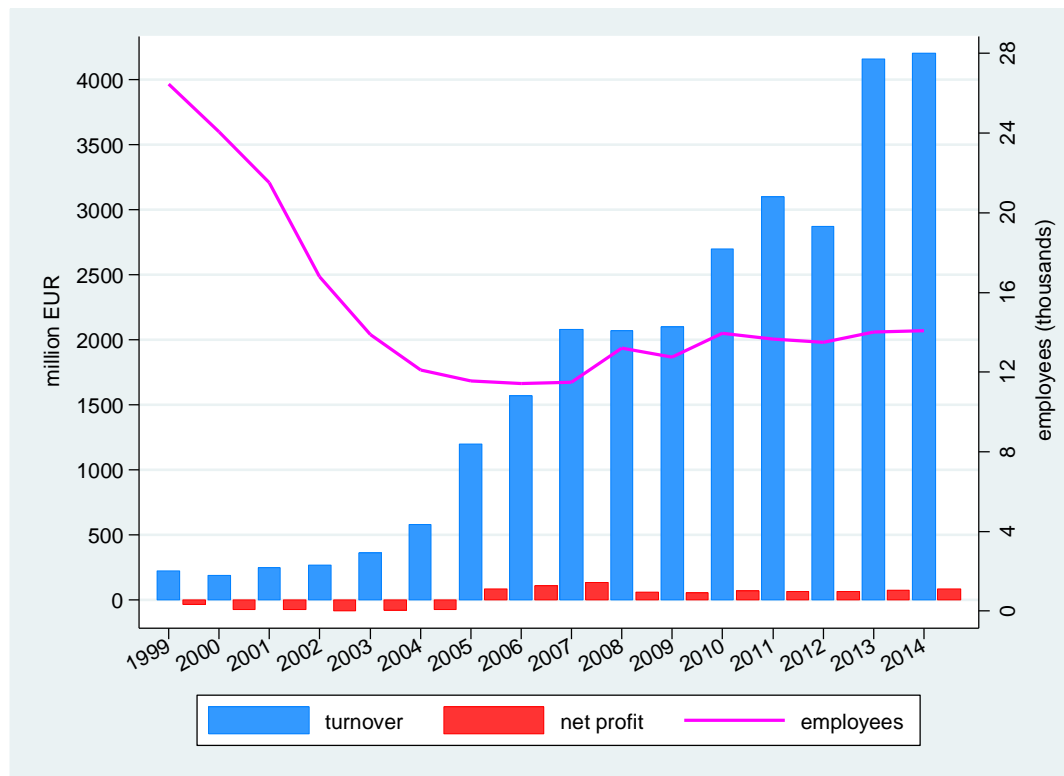


FIGURE I.25. Dacia turnover, net profit (mil. EUR) and number of employees (thousands), 1999–2014.

Data sources: *Ziarul financiar* (various articles, Debrosse (2007), Vardie (2009)).

became more and more common over the years, agency work, which in theory presented the biggest threat, remained entirely taboo at Dacia and rather exceptional with its unionized local suppliers.²¹² By early 2008, SAD had moved from negotiating a single collective labor contract per year to no less than thirteen contracts—one with Dacia and twelve with its suppliers.²¹³ While this required significant additional efforts, it also bolstered SAD’s overall position and brought an increase in its membership. If at the end of restructuring SAD had approximately 12,000 members, it soon reached 14,000, part of which were new members coming from supplier companies.²¹⁴ The others were new Dacia employees, many of whom were hired for starting a third shift on the production of the Logan.

Membership numbers were only one part of the puzzle of consolidation, and a somewhat unimportant one at that. The problem had never been one of how many members the union had, but of how many members it could count on for active support. Electorally, things appeared to be nothing short of excellent: in the 2004 elections, the top leadership faced almost no opposition at all, with Pavelescu receiving over 84% of the votes.²¹⁵ This, however, spoke more to SAD’s organizational disarray than to the genuinely strong relationship between its leaders and the rank and file, for the landslide victory was accompanied by constant

²¹² In stark contrast to standard policies in other similar plants across Central and Eastern Europe (see Drahokoupil, Myant, and Domonkos 2015).

²¹³ “Negocieri ale CCM 2008 la societățile comerciale în care SAD este reprezentativ.” *InfoAutoturism* 207, April 2008.

²¹⁴ “Adunarea generală a SAD.” *InfoAutoturism* 185, March 2005. “Adunarea generală a SAD.” *InfoAutoturism* 191, February 2006.

²¹⁵ “Adunarea generală a SAD.” *InfoAutoturism* 179, March 2004.

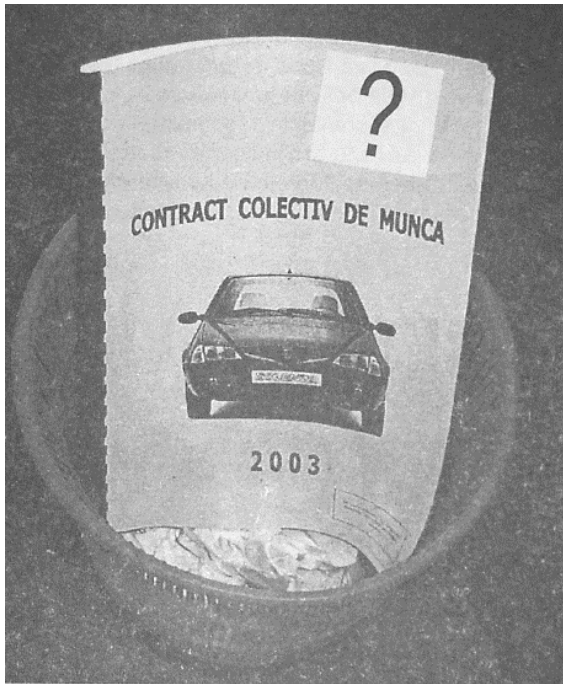


FIGURE I.26. The collective labor contract is good for the trash bin?
Source: *InfoAutoturism* 175, May 2003.

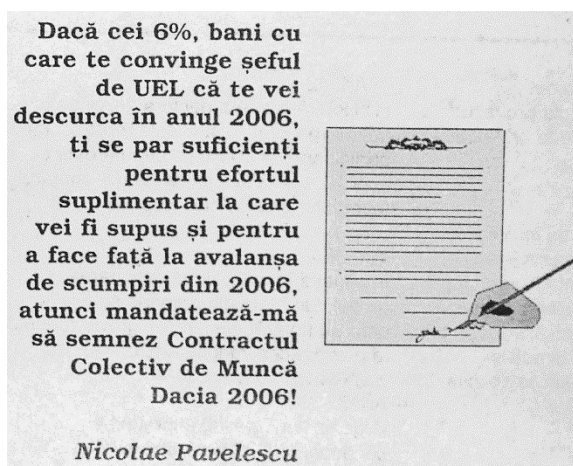


FIGURE I.27. “If the 6%—money with which the UEL boss is telling you you will get by with in 2006—seems to you to be enough for the extra effort you will be forced to make and for coping with the avalanche of price increases in 2006, then give me the mandate to sign the Dacia 2006 Collective Labor Contract.”
Source: *InfoAutoturism* 190, January 2006.

complaints of the lack of solidarity prevalent among the union membership, of the lack of basic preparedness of shop floor union officials, and of the impossibility of transferring votes into real support for as elementary an action as the collective bargaining of wages. From this perspective, the landslide victory was more a matter of inertia and lack of interest than of organizational strength. One of the more arduous tasks the SAD leadership needed to undertake was to convince the rank and file of the trade union’s genuine dedication to collective bargaining and, in the end, of the legitimacy of collective bargaining as such (figure I.27). This was difficult not just because of the lackluster results of the previous years, but also because of the overbearing influence that shop floor supervisors had gained by the end of the restructuring program; the “UEL bosses,” above all others, were particularly troublesome because of their willingness and ability to pressure SAD members into not supporting the union.²¹⁶

For SAD not to end up counting just on paper, unionists had to fight back to regain a strong presence on the shop floor, and there was little SAD’s top leadership could do in this regard than strengthen the position of the lower ranks of the union officialdom. Regular training courses were held for group and organization leaders and, as part of an explicit policy aimed at making organization more efficient, the capacity to mobilize the rank and file was introduced as an evaluation criterion for shop floor officials; the development of a “culture of protest” among the membership was set as an

²¹⁶ Unitatea Elementară de Lucru (UEL)—the Elementary Work Unit, after the French *Unité Élémentaire de Travail*—is the name of the work team at Dacia. The “UEL boss” [*șeful de UEL*] is the lowest-level shop floor supervisor, directly in charge of the organization and coordination of the production process. Inspired by the ideas of teamwork associated with flexible production (for an extensive comparative approach, see Stewart, Castillo, and Durand 1999), the UEL system at Dacia—and, with it, the figure of the UEL boss—became increasingly despotic as management strengthened its control over the shop floor. I discuss several other aspects of this development in parts II and III.

objective.²¹⁷ Officials who proved they could not satisfactorily do so or those who were systematically criticized by regular members were promptly removed. The overall purpose of these measures was to regain legitimacy in front of both workers and supervisors on the shop floor and to simultaneously streamline vertical organization—the two elements that had contributed most to the 2003 defeat.

Probably the most important change to occur in the aftermath of the strike was the reorientation of SAD's official discourse toward workers, and away from the generic category of employees, which included TESA personnel. Workers were now said to carry the most—albeit the least recognized—merit for the company's growing success.²¹⁸ As discussed previously, the discursive category of the worker had only figured prominently in SAD's policy during the early-to-mid 1990s, when, under Costescu's leadership, the union had gone through another major process of consolidation. Though it did mark a definite break with one of the pillars of the peaceful compromises that had come and gone since the mid-1990s, this time around the worker-TESA conflict was fostered more implicitly than explicitly, as Costescu and his allies had done. More precisely, the SAD leadership did not just revamp the old idea of the TESA internal enemy, but chose to refocus their efforts toward workers and kept the ecumenical category of employees for secondary usage. As it had become obvious in the days running up to the 2003 strike, this entailed a tacit acceptance of workers and TESA antagonizing each other on an everyday basis. Pragmatically, it made plenty of sense. While not banishing its TESA members and continuing to negotiate with management on their behalf, the union leadership would cease to pretend it could count on the backing of TESA when push came to shove in its dealings with management. Conversely, workers, who were the only ones who had systematically shown an interest for industrial action, would be specifically targeted for this purpose, while taking into consideration one of the major reasons for their discontent—their increasingly antagonistic relationship with non-worker personnel on the shop floor. In this way, the obviously problematic nature of the situation in which some union members—workers—were in a permanent state of conflict with other union members—shop floor supervisors and, more generally, TESA personnel—was partly embraced, partly circumvented.

This reorientation implied far more than a simple tweaking of leaders' discourse and had important strategic implications. First, the SAD leadership no longer joined management in handling damage control in case of wildcat strikes—which continued to occur despite the tougher legislation—and scrambled to secure a modicum of protection for participants in spontaneous work stoppages.²¹⁹ Second, workers'—not employees'—interests were brought to the forefront in the union's negotiations with management. This was most visible in SAD's renewed focus on pay inequality and its attempts to pressure management into granting fixed-sum pay raises in the annual negotiations; the traditional practice of percentage raises across the board was criticized for favoring income inequality among employees, without corresponding discrepancies between their respective contributions (figure I.28).²²⁰ This

²¹⁷ "Adunarea generală a SAD." *InfoAutoturism* 191, February 2006. "Priorități." *InfoAutoturism* 192, March 2006. "Școala liderilor de organizație." *InfoAutoturism* 195, May 2006. "Școala liderilor de grupe sindicale." *InfoAutoturism* 197, October 2006. "Repere." *InfoAutoturism* 198, December 2006.

²¹⁸ "Tensiune la Dacia." *InfoAutoturism* 190, January 2006. "Solidaritate." *InfoAutoturism* 191, February 2006.

²¹⁹ "Adunarea generală a SAD." *InfoAutoturism* 191, February 2006.

²²⁰ "Scrisoare deschisă." *InfoAutoturism* 190, January 2006.

appeared to be even more valid now that union leaders claimed workers were the primary profit makers and deserved a much bigger share of the Logan's success. All this made more than enough sense for the regular union member: while Dacia's soaring financial figures were matters of public knowledge, so was their connection to the constant speedups, the increasingly close supervision, and the paychecks that increasingly seemed to not be worth the effort.²²¹

SAD's approach to this issue was steadfast: there was no problem with profit-making per se, which was deemed the normal state of affairs in a capitalist society; the problem was the insufficient redistribution of profits to workers. In Dacia's context after the launch of the Logan, this meant that the SAD leadership gave a principled agreement to the speedups and various cost-cutting measures, insofar as they were factored into workers' wages and insofar as management guaranteed the pace of production would be strictly regulated through the collective labor contract and

the activity of shop floor union officials. Although SAD remained very much concerned with problems of working and social conditions in the plant, conceding to periodic accelerations of the production process while demanding only that it happen in an orderly and non-arbitrary manner restricted the union's room of maneuver in fighting over working conditions from the outset. Correspondingly, wage raises were now labeled as the main—indeed, almost the sole—*raison d'être* for the union and especially for collective bargaining.²²² And with wages came a whole set of secondary objectives: establishing preset daily work quotas, adopting strict regulations for overtime work, and obtaining proper overtime pay.²²³ A strategic shift took place, with the leadership beginning to systematically employ a productivity–wage calculation whereby speedup or push for labor process rationalization were accepted in principle, if and only if they had positive consequences for workers' paychecks.

While such a strategy might have appealed to union leaders given the lineage of dedication to the business model of unionism, that it was given a coherent and explicit formulation only now had more to do with the immediate troubles in which SAD found itself after the 2003 strike than with internal cleavages dating back to the 1990s. To be sure, the union did not by any measure whatsoever control the organizational and discursive resources that could allow it to mount an effective opposition to management's insistence on producing more and more cars with fewer and fewer employees.²²⁴ Stressing the importance of wages above



FIGURE I.28. “Worker, Management doesn’t agree to fixed-sum pay raises for all Dacia employees. This is the major divergence in the wage negotiations of the 2006 collective labor contract!”

Source: *InfoAutoturism* 190, January 2006.

²²¹ In part II, I discuss opportunities to make a living in and especially outside the local labor market, which became increasingly available starting with the mid-2000s.

²²² See, e.g., “Grija zilei de mâine.” *InfoAutoturism* 183, October 2004.

²²³ “Priorități.” *InfoAutoturism* 192, March 2006. “Îngrijorări.” *InfoAutoturism* 201, May 2007.

²²⁴ Admittedly, this was an issue that at least in part antedated the 2003 strike. All evidence indicates that the SAD leadership never questioned the so-called “Renault project,” but only the manner of implementation. However,

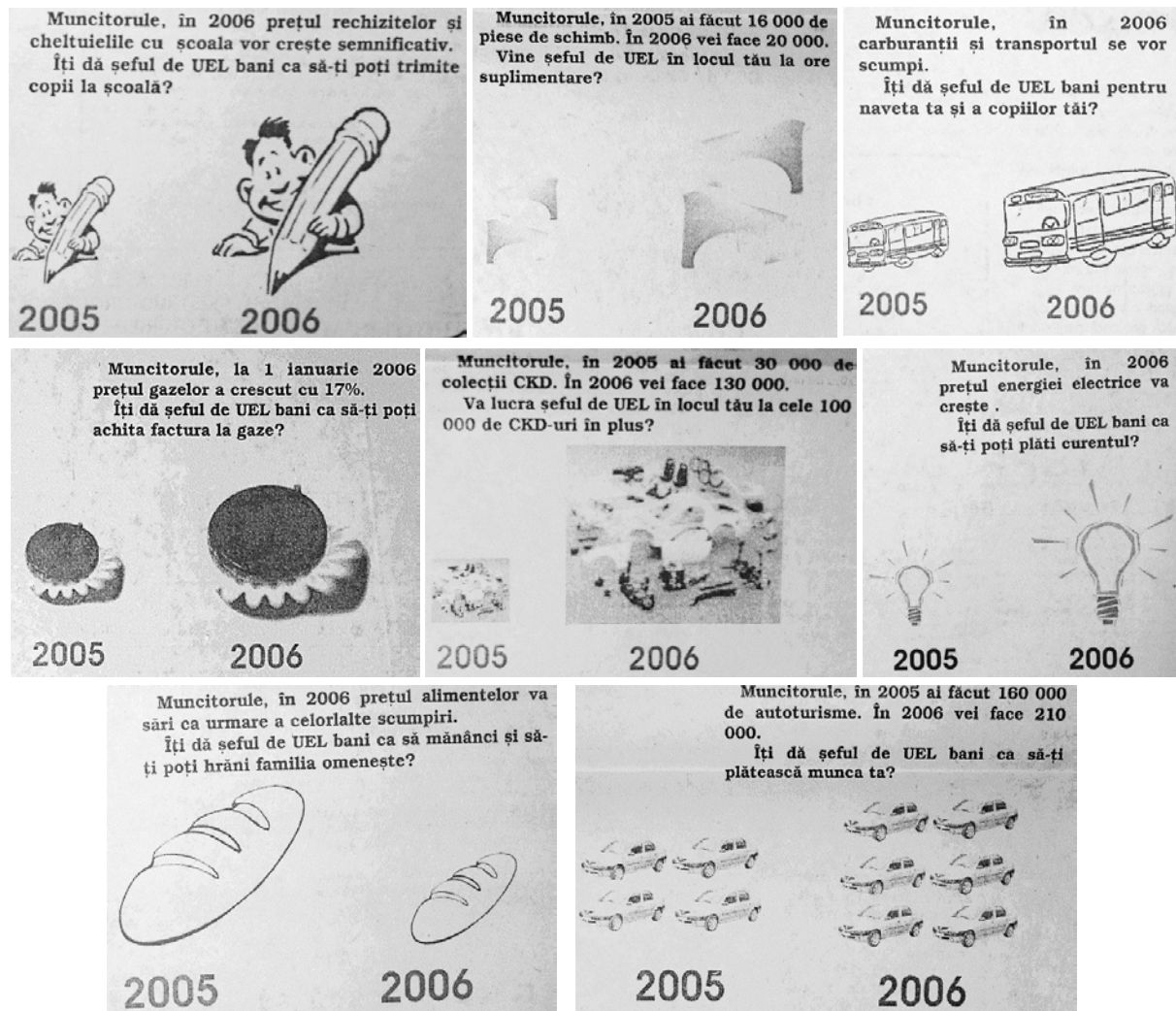


FIGURE I.29. Appeals to workers during the 2006 negotiations: “Worker, in 2006 the price of school supplies and expenses will increase significantly. Will the UEL boss give you money to send your kids to school?”; “Worker, in 2005 you made 16,000 spare parts. In 2006 you will make 20,000. Will the UEL boss put in the overtime in your stead?”; “Worker, in 2006 fuel and transportation will be more expensive. Will the UEL boss give you money for your and your kids’ commute?”; “Worker, on January 1, 2006 the price of cooking gas increased by 17%. Will the UEL boss give you money to pay your gas bill?”; “Worker, in 2005 you made 30,000 CKD kits. In 2006 you will make 130,000. Will the UEL boss work in your stead for the 100,000 extra kits?”; “Worker, in 2006 the price of electricity will rise. Will the UEL boss give you money for your bill?”; “Worker, in 2006 the price of food will rise as a result of other price increases. Will the UEL boss give you money to eat and feed your family decently?”; “Worker, in 2005 you made 160,000 automobiles. In 2006 you will make 210,000. Will the UEL boss give you money to pay for your work?”

Sources: *InfoAutoturism* 190, January 2006.

all else, and openly acknowledging their willingness to make significant concessions in exchange for higher wages, was in one way a manner of channeling SAD’s available resources toward an objective that was somewhat in reach. From another standpoint, however, it was an offensive move, since, if it worked, it would bolster SAD’s legitimacy in front of both workers and management, while regaining a reasonably strong (albeit clearly circumscribed) presence

after the end of restructuring—in which SAD’s role was formally recognized from the very beginning—and having lost a great deal of recognition with the failed general strike, SAD’s capacity to challenge management’s manner of implementing the “Renault project” declined dramatically.

on the shop floor. All the leadership had to do was convince workers and managers of the mutual advantages of the deal. As mentioned already, there were plenty of signs that workers had lost a good deal of their trust not only in the union but in collective bargaining as such, so it took extra work to reel them into the common sense of the productivity–wage calculation (figure I.29). With management, this proved much more difficult.

Starting with 2005, the first year with a positive net profit after privatization, wages became the single most important issue during the negotiations of the collective labor contract. Even if wages had been paramount before, in contrast to previous periods, the wage issue was now no longer outcompeted by questions of job security, enterprise autonomy, privatization, restructuring, working conditions, or profitability. In their turn, the negotiations gained increasingly more weight in the overall activity of the union, becoming more and more contentious in the process. This differed from the 2003 conflict, which at the time was largely regarded as a one-off exception meant to set back on track the essentially peaceful relations with the management. Along with the turn to the productivity–wage calculation in the aftermath of the strike, therefore, SAD adopted a programmatically dissenting stance in the negotiations. The declaring of official labor disputes during the negotiations became routine, and so was the collection of signatures from the rank and file in support of striking. Union members' formal backing of strike threats seem to oscillate from year to year and, although it was always above the legal requirement of 50%, as late as 2006 SAD's leaders were very much aware that in case of actual industrial action it would dwindle far below this threshold.²²⁵ In the meantime, union leaders appeared to support small scale protests and showed their willingness to organize strikes in supplier companies where conditions were proving particularly dire. SAD's participation in the protests organized by BNS against the government's intended modification of the Labor Code was likewise notable, with no less than three thousand members participating in a street protest in Pitești in early 2005.

A turnaround became apparent only once the policy of consolidation kicked in during 2006, as some shop floor union officials began openly demanding more radical action from the union. By the time of the 2007 negotiations, this position had gained sufficient ground to make strike threats credible to management and had allowed the SAD negotiations commission to remain adamant in demanding a 25% wage increase. The amount asked for was the largest yet in both nominal and real terms, as the high inflation of the early 2000s was a thing of the past. It was also a clear gesture of defiance to management, who appeared stuck with an offer of around 6%. In a repeat of the 2003 moment, preparations for striking were made well in advance by both sides and the information war was waged once again inside as well as outside the plant (figure I.30). Meanwhile, SAD made full use of its confederate affiliation in lending more credibility to its strike threats and put additional pressure on management by successfully coordinating a mass refusal of overtime for three weeks in a row. In contrast to 2003, the scheduled warning strike on February 26 and general strike on March 6 remained on paper, since on the morning of February 26 management conceded to a 20.19% wage increase for workers plus a monthly profit share bonus.²²⁶ Breaking with previous years' trend, this was

²²⁵ "Adunarea generală a SAD." *InfoAutoturism* 191, February 2006.

²²⁶ By 2007, the collective labor contract stipulated a fixed-sum wage increase for workers and a percentage increase for TESA. Though this was only marginally in workers' favor, it did provide some sort of solution to the



FIGURE I.30. From the media, “titles and subtitles... written or about to be written.” Real and fictitious titles highlighting the situation at Dacia: extraordinary productivity, soaring profits, low wages, managerial dictatorship, and the right to strike.

Source: *InfoAutoturism* 199, February 2007.

mostly considered a victory for SAD, the first one in the post-privatization era, and Pavelescu praised the resoluteness and disciplined behavior of union officials and members alike.²²⁷

Notwithstanding the apparent success, there was little reason to believe this was a decisive victory and a backlash was most certainly going to follow. More importantly, 2007 came with more speedups, continued rationalization, higher profits, and essentially little change in the despotic stance of management in handling shop floor affairs. When we add that the obtained wage increase did little to improve the Dacia’s position on the labor market, as its workers continued to face more and more advantageous opportunities abroad and on the local labor market (see chapter 11), SAD’s victory was merely a sweetening of what for many looked like an increasingly bad deal. For union leaders, this clearly indicated that the 2007 negotiations did not mark a definite turning away from the existential crisis in which SAD had found itself in the post-privatization era. It came as no surprise, therefore, that small protests and threat making continued unabated for the rest of the year.²²⁸ A few months later, the offensive that had secured victory in the 2007 negotiations would prove a useful rehearsal for an event that would make all prior actions in SAD’s history pale in comparison.

embrace and circumvent approach to the conflict between workers and TESA (see above). See “Negocierile privind Contractul Colectiv de Munca.” Online: <http://www.daciagroup.com/presa/comunicate-de-presa/2007/negocierile-privind-contractul-colectiv-de-munca>.

²²⁷ “Reînvierea.” *InfoAutoturism* 200, April 2007.

²²⁸ “Protest împotriva accidentelor de muncă.” *InfoAutoturism* 203, September 2007. “Protestul—soluția pentru rezolvarea problemelor.” *InfoAutoturism* 203, September 2007. “Proteste.” *InfoAutoturism* 205, December 2007.

General strike

Given a few different tactical decisions on both sides of the negotiating table, a strike could have undoubtedly happened in 2007. Talk that “a long strike” was in order circulated from late 2005 and consolidation explicitly concerned SAD’s capacity to organize a strike without repeating the 2003 debacle.²²⁹ SAD officials repeatedly boosted the union’s strike fund and directed a considerable part of their efforts toward strengthening union discipline—lack of which had proved decisive in 2003. Most importantly, by the time of the 2007 negotiations they could count on members’ generalized discontent with the constant speedups and despotic regime imposed by management as well as the consistently unsatisfactory wages, which, especially for workers, remained far below expectations even with the concessions obtained toward the end of the restructuring program and after. Despite SAD’s insistence that wage discrepancies should be limited and a larger share of the wage fund be allocated to workers, management could not be dissuaded from its plans to bolster the commitment of TESA personnel to its goals as well as their authority on the shop floor.²³⁰ Under the guise of SAD’s demand for fixed-sum wage raises, this issue of widening differences in labor incomes inside the plant would play a major role in the general strike of March–April 2008.

By early 2008, workers’ disappointment with existing wages was compounded by developments outside the plant, as raises at Dacia did not seem that positive in light of the country’s economic boom. On the labor market, jobs at Dacia seemed to be yielding less than the increasingly more available alternatives and it was becoming obvious to many that the economic boom was leading to a deepening shortage of labor. Though the national union movement was not doing particularly well in this period (see Varga and Freyberg-Inan 2015), labor disputes motivated by wage demands were mushrooming across the country, as employees claimed a bigger share of Romania’s unprecedented economic growth (see Guga and Constantin 2015:51). Successes like the ones of Mangalia shipyard workers, of school teachers, or of workers at the Topoloveni car parts factory were well known to the SAD membership.²³¹ After years of uncertainty, Dacia itself seemed to be entering an era of prosperity, the exact magnitude of which was difficult to predict: from around 57 million euros in 2005, the company’s net profits had increased to just over 100 million in 2006 and 145 million in 2007, and there were plenty of reasons to believe soaring financial success was going to continue. Having obtained a breakthrough victory in 2007, all these gave enough confidence to the SAD leadership to take an even more aggressive stance in the negotiations of the 2008 collective labor contract. On February 28, shortly after officially declaring a labor dispute, the SAD leadership made public the set of demands that had led to the negotiations deadlock:

1. Employees’ rights stipulated in the 2007 collective labor contract represent a minimum threshold for the 2008 negotiations.
2. Wage rights from the 2008 collective labor contract will be enforced from January 1, 2008, for all employees.
3. A fixed-sum general wage raise for all employees:
 - 50 lei starting with January 1, 2008.
 - 200 lei starting with June 1, 2008.

²²⁹ “Organizația SAD Presaj: Adunare generală.” *InfoAutoturism* 189, December 2005.

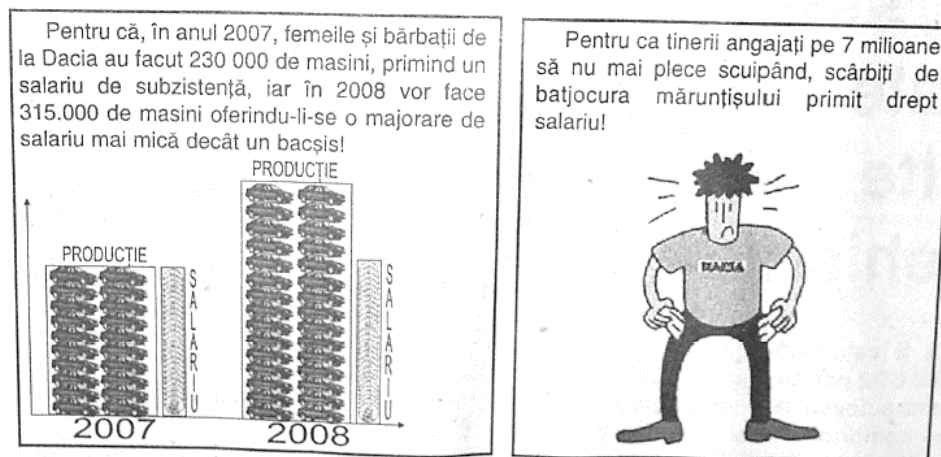
²³⁰ On TESA wages as a mechanism of indirect control of workers, see part II.

²³¹ “Din Topoloveni în California solidaritatea învinge.” *InfoAutoturism* 206, March 2008.

Arguments in support of this demand:

- An increase in production figures from 221,499 cars assembled in 2007 to 319,000 in 2008.
 - A 42.3% of the production volume.
 - An increase in CKD production figures from 280,000 in 2007 to 500,000 in 2008.
4. Work quotas, staffing levels, and the organization of work—as an appendix to the 2008 collective labor contract.
 5. The internal regulations policy to be negotiated with SAD and to be included in the collective labor contract as an appendix.
 6. Profit sharing—between 5% and 10% of the net profit.

CONFLICT DE INTERESE DE CE?



CUI FOLOSEȘTE?



FIGURE I.31. “Labor dispute. Why? Because in 2007 the women and men from Dacia made 230,000 cars, on a subsistence wage, and in 2008 they will make 315,000 cars while being offered a raise smaller than a tip! So young employees hired on 7 million [lei] don’t leave spitting, disgusted by the mockery of getting pocket change as a wage!”; “Who is it useful for? For the women and men from Dacia who, with blood, tears and sweat, have in 2007 made a profit of 160 million euros for their employers! For the shareholders of the Renault Group, whose interest is for employees to be content with their payment so that they continue producing profits! For the Dacia management, who must understand that slavery was abolished and that Dacia’s employees are free and dignified people!”

Source: *InfoAutoturism* 206, March 2008.

7. An Easter bonus equal to 50% of the gross company average wage. A Christmas bonus equal to 50% of the monthly gross company average wage.
8. A vacation bonus—one monthly gross company average wage.
9. A bonus to be granted in September, on the occasion of the Automakers' Anniversary Day—amounting to 200 lei and a day off.
10. The billing price for employees wanting to buy cars from the Dacia Logan, Renault and Nissan ranges will be discounted by 15% in comparison to the sale price.
11. A working conditions bonus for workers in the body shop (electromagnetic radiation) and stamping (noise).
12. Respecting art. 40, paragraph d., from the national collective labor contract.²³²
13. The granting of similar rights to employees working in the same conditions.
14. The number of fixed-term contracts should not exceed 15% of the total number of individual work contracts.²³³

Numbers 6, 10, and, above all, 3 proved particularly contentious. As it was customary by this time, wages were the most problematic issue, with SAD's demand of 550 lei being considerably greater than the 310 lei the union had initially demanded in the previous year's negotiations. Management representatives adopted an unflinching attitude toward these



FIGURE I.32. One of management's many notifications distributed among employees: “SAD knows that the strike is illegal! Decide on your own for yourselves and for your families!

Photograph by Jerome Sessini, “Romania, Bucharest. Dacia car factory. 2008”. Available online: http://www.magnumphotos.com/C.aspx?VP3=SearchResult_VPage&STID=2TYRYDCGFZVA (Retrieved March 12, 2015).

²³² Article 40, paragraph d. of the national collective labor contract valid at the time stipulated that all personnel with jobs requiring higher education qualifications be remunerated with twice the company minimum wage. This demand was most likely at the same time targeted at worker–TESA wage discrepancies and at TESA–TESA wage discrepancies.

²³³ “Scrisoarea SAD către Directorul General—Prima etapă a conflictului de interese.” *InfoAutoturism* 206, March 2008.



FIGURE I.33. Page-size ads in local newspapers indicating what the company had done for its employees since privatization (improving working conditions, investments, increased wages etc.) and what it offered in the latest round of negotiations during the strike (in this case: a 250-lei gross wage raise—a 156 lei actual wage raise plus a 94 lei monthly bonus—and the turning of 700 fixed-term contracts into open-ended contracts).

Source: *Argeșul*, March 29-30, 2008; *Curierul zilei*, April 5, 2008.

demands, combining threats with an offer of around five times less than what SAD demanded. By allowing the negotiations deadlock to lapse into an official labor dispute, followed by several other rounds of negotiations until the March 14 warning strike, management most likely intended to call out what they regarded as SAD's bluff. This was to a considerable extent regarded as necessary, since a second union victory could mark an unwarranted shift in the balance of forces established at the time of privatization and consolidated in 2003. And if push did indeed come to shove and SAD went on a general strike, management counted on the precedent of its brisk victory from half a decade earlier. SAD's position looked similarly adamant and, unlike during the 2007 negotiations, it did not seem one bit willing to tone down its initial demands. The union's general assembly scheduled the beginning of the general strike for March 24, as concerns were voiced for the need to prevent any violent or haphazard gestures that could lead to a repeat of the 2003 defeat. If a strike were to happen, union discipline would once again be decisive.

With both sides well prepared and unwilling to budge, the general strike started on the first shift on March 24. Management immediately filed a court complaint, accusing SAD of not having collected enough signatures in favor of striking and reporting a participation rate of just 49%, marginally below the 50%+1 legal threshold and far below the 80 to 85% the SAD leadership had advanced. With its adversary attempting to stop the strike as quickly as possible, SAD could counter either by winning the trial or by obtaining a postponement. In stark contrast with its display of inexperience during the 2003 strike, the union managed to secure not one, but two postponements, for April 2 and then for April 9, putting significant pressure on



FIGURE I.34. Workers and the SAD viceleader, Ion Iordache (on the right), facing journalists during the 2008 general strike.

Source: “Tribunalul a decis: greva de la Dacia este legală,” *România liberă*, Aprilie 9, 2008.

managerial shoulders to either end the strike by any other means possible or, if this proved impossible, win the court case at any cost. Correspondingly, management mobilized an impressive array of instruments for drawing SAD members to its side and deterring any sort of support for strikers inside and outside the plant. An absolute novelty were the threats with delocalization, which management proffered both via public and private channels—in its official press communiques and in letters sent by special courier to each employee’s home. The so-called information war reached new heights, with management going on an all-out offensive.²³⁴ Denunciations of SAD’s alleged weakness—a purported sign of which was precisely the mischievous postponement of the court trial—abounded in the notifications displayed for employees on the plant premises (figure I.32). On top of relentless criticism of SAD and constant pleas for strikers to turn against the union, management persistently made its case for resisting SAD’s demands by publishing full page-size ads in local newspapers meant to display its benevolence in handling investments, wages, and working conditions, as well as its willingness to make significant wage concessions (figure I.33).

Most controversial in the information war waged outside the plant were the actual wages of Dacia workers and the proper gauging of SAD’s wage demands: while management insisted workers’ wages were considerably above the national average and that fulfilling the current demands meant raising wages by as much as 70% for some employees and by more than 60% on average, SAD’s leaders denounced the absurdity of thousands of workers (between 2,500

²³⁴ On the impressive communications efforts made by the management, see the account of Liviu Ion, Dacia’s communications manager at the time: “Cum poate fi scoasă o criză din priză.” Online: <http://www.cariereonline.ro/articol/cum-poate-fi-scoasa-o-crizadin-priza>.



FIGURE I.35. Picture from the rally held in Mioveni during the 2008 general strike. Photograph by Daniel Mihăilescu, Mediafax Foto.

and 3,000 employees) earning a measly 700 lei a month (around 55-60% of the net average wage) despite considerable profits and massive increases in productivity. Rather than outright falsehood, behind such starkly diverging declarations lay different methods of calculation upon which company and trade union representatives based their attempts at conquering the local and national public spheres: gross, as opposed to net wages, base, as opposed to actual wages (which included overtime, seniority etc.), workers' wages, as opposed to the company average (which included TESA and upper management salaries), monetary compensation, as opposed to total compensation (which included fringe benefits). The 2008 general strike inaugurated the public use of such red herring tactics regarding wage levels, quickly becoming routine in the years to come. The same proved to be the case when it came to deciding who was on strike and how many people actively participated: while managers insisted on a maximum of 49% of employees from the first shift on a given workday, SAD representatives counted over 80% of union members distributed across all three shifts. From this all-important point of view, SAD seemed to have the letter of the law on its side.

Inside the plant, management rallied its allies: shop floor supervisors, TESA personnel, and many of the recently hired workers on fixed-term contracts. A timid attempt at restarting first-shift production was made, with all available non-strikers manning the assembly line. After making less than a hundred cars in an entire day—less than the output of two hours of regular work time—and, according to SAD representatives, facing severe quality problems, the possibility of forcefully breaking the strike in this way became moot. While rumors of shop floor supervisors receiving hefty bonuses for each worker they convinced to stop striking circulated among the rank and file, SAD could count on its preparations for maintaining



FIGURE I.36. Strikers from the CESAR (R&D) department during the March 27 rally holding a banner saying “Begging... for our existence, we defy Renault’s oppression”. To the right, there are two banners announcing the presence of postal workers’ trade unions from the Dolj county and Oltenia region. Source: *Argeșul*, March 28, 2008.

discipline. Shop floor strike committees were set in place from the very beginning and group leaders and a handful of unionists were to remain on the shop floor at all times to ensure security and counter any backdoor tactics employed by the management; to ensure vertical communication, general assemblies were held at the level of each union organization throughout the duration of the strike. Outside the plant, the SAD leadership participated with alacrity in the information war and appeared constantly ready to counter the flood of press communiques and management’s other media interventions (figure I.34). Threats with delocalization, for example, were cunningly turned against upper managers, as union leaders pointed at their predilection for plunder and insolent exploitation. SAD officials made constant public pleas to non-strikers to join the strike and threatened that whatever rights strikers eventually secured would apply to strikers alone. While any sort of violent behavior toward machinery or non-strikers was banned from the beginning, rallies were held in each department, with large groups of strikers noisily patrolling the shop floor in attempting to intimidate managers and non-strikers and display their resolute solidarity.

The high points of the strike nonetheless happened outside the plant, as SAD organized two massive rallies in front of the trade unions’ houses of culture in Mioveni (on March 27) and Pitești (on April 10). Participation at the Mioveni rally (figure I.35) was estimated to have ranged from 9 thousand to 12 thousand people, as organizers brought together as many strikers as possible in an impressive demonstration of solidarity. Importantly, these rallies were also meant to show that SAD could count on many trade union allies: BNS leaders, who had constantly declared their support for SAD since the labor dispute was officially announced; a



FIGURE I.37. A worker in the parking lot for commuters' buses outside the plant showing a flyer declaring the support of CGT and CFDT for the strike and announcing that money will be raised by unionists from other Renault plants to aid Romanian strikers.

Photograph by Jerome Sessini, "Romania, Bucharest. Dacia car factory. 2008". Available online: http://www.magnumphotos.com/C.aspx?VP3=SearchResult_VPage&STID=2TYRYDCGFZVA (Retrieved March 12, 2015).

host of unions from across the country, from public and private companies, who sent delegates to both rallies (figure I.36) and offered aid in money and in kind. A contribution to the strike fund was also promised by delegates from French trade union confederations—the Confédération générale du travail and the Confédération française démocratique du travail—who addressed the crowds from the balconies of the houses of culture. The French unionists insisted the strike was paramount for workers on both sides of the continent, because it set an example that opposing an apparently vastly more powerful transnational corporation was indeed possible and also because it could catalyze trade union solidarity across borders and thus spell a new beginning for labor movements East and West (figure I.37). Such a European framing of the event bode particularly well with the SAD leadership, quickly transforming it into one of their strongest playing cards. While rehashing the familiar antagonism between the oppressed, lowly paid, and honest Romanian workers and the oppressing, obscenely highly paid, and unscrupulous French managers, SAD officials could count on Romania's recent EU accession to label the strike as a European event and equated their demands with strikers' desire for "genuine European citizenship." Foreign journalists who had flocked on the scene readily jumped on the occasion to frame the strike as a landmark of the ongoing process of building a united Europe. Moreover, SAD managed to get a large part of the local media on its side, with Argeș newspapers proving mostly sympathetic to the strikers' cause. This offered a much-needed counterweight to the hostility SAD faced in the central media, where management proved more successful in propagating its anti-strike claims. Major political parties also joined



FIGURE I.38. Trade unionists gathered around SAD's attorney on the steps of the Pitești courthouse. The legal battle was a prominent feature of the 2008 general strike and played a major role in establishing its outcome.

Source: Rompres / Agerpres.

the debate, with local politicians voicing their support for the strike by and large regardless of their affiliation. On a national level, on the other hand, strikers were lambasted by the prime minister and by representatives of the National Liberal Party, prompting immediate reactions of support from the Social Democratic Party. Banking on politicians' concern with the upcoming elections later in the year, SAD leaders attempted to bolster political support for the strike by publicly criticizing the liberal party and the prime minister during the Pitești rally. Having by that time entered its third week, the strike was apparently heading to an end, with both SAD's adversaries and its fringe allies showing clear signs of weariness.

On the afternoon of April 8, hours before the court's expected decision on the legality of the strike, the company made a final attempt at stopping the strike by conceding to a 300-lei raise plus a 94-lei monthly bonus. While SAD officials were quick to reject the offer, they claimed to do so not of their own will but only because the rank and file had voted in disagreement. Otherwise, they declared it to be the first "serious" offer made by management since the beginning of negotiations. Strikers' imminent victory became apparent the next day, as the court ruled in SAD's favor and declared the strike legal (figure I.38). By the time of the Pitești rally, on April 10, a part of the local media outlets and politicians who had previously been in favor of the strike seemed to be growing tired with the strikers' unwillingness to budge. On the morning of April 11, an agreement was reached and work was scheduled for restarting at 13 o'clock on the same day. Strikers obtained a 360-lei fixed-sum raise for workers, with TESA employees benefitting from a 15% salary raise.²³⁵ In addition, a one-off profit sharing bonus of 900 lei was granted to all employees. Special bonuses for body shop and stamping

²³⁵ Depending on the (implicit) method of calculation, the 360-lei raise was said to represent an increase of 28 to 34% of workers' wages.

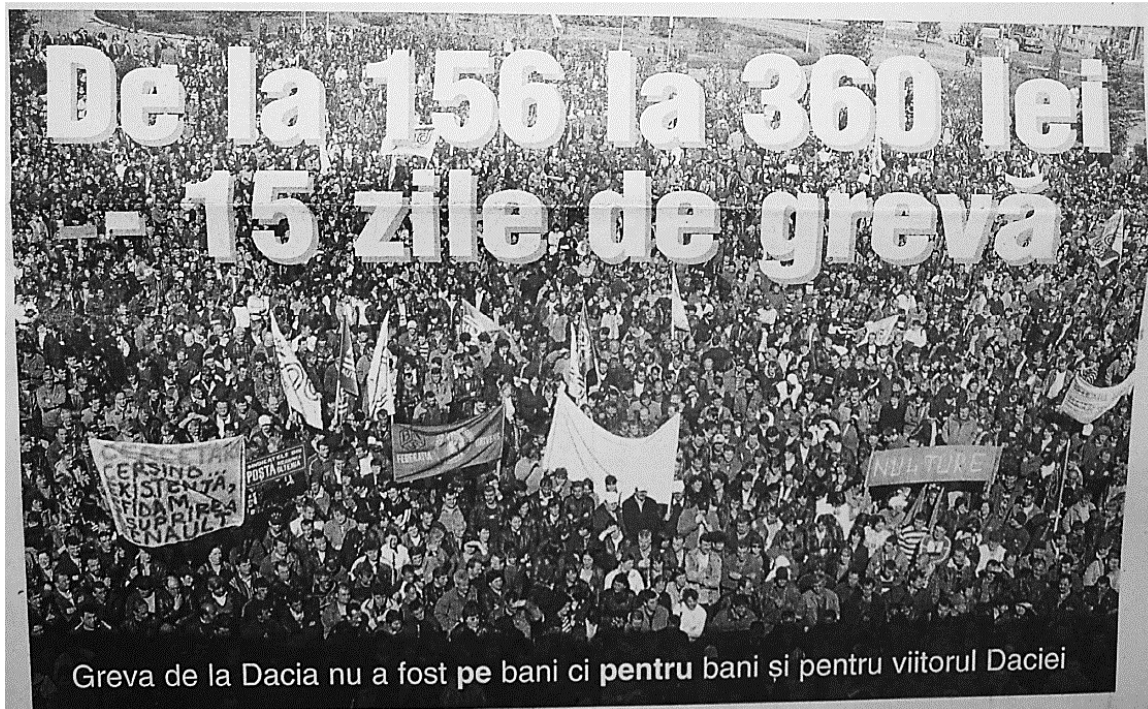


FIGURE I.39. “From 156 to 360 lei—15 days of striking. The strike at Dacia was not paid for, it was for pay and for Dacia’s future.” A photograph of the Mioveni rally serves as background.

Source: *InfoAutoturism* 207, April 2008.

workers, which SAD had included in its initial list of demands, were likewise agreed upon, as was the withdrawing of all court cases filed by both sides during the strike and the refraining from any future action against participants in the strike.²³⁶ Emphasizing that a majority of strikers supported the agreement, SAD leaders put an end to the strike and proclaimed the union’s unequivocal victory in its most important battle yet (figure I.39).

The offensive defense of a wage–productivity compromise

The immediate aftermath of the strike was filled with commentaries on its outcome and potential implications. Despite union leaders’ claims, with only 60 to 70% of strikers agreeing to restart work, it was unavoidable that some would insist more could have been obtained and that leaders gave in to the management because of cowardice or corruption. Offering a foretaste of the media offensive to come, pundits focused especially on these voices, while surreptitiously warranting even the most implausible anti-union theories regarding the development and outcome of the strike. Such criticism was not yet the product of management’s infant strategy of completely drawing the media to its side, though the strike triggered a scramble to permanently mobilize as many external forces as possible against SAD. Coming relatively soon after Romania’s EU accession, it was the so-called European dimension of the strike which drew the most attention. Picking up on the much-vaunted threats of delocalization to Russia, India, Morocco or other parts of Northern Africa, critics pointed to the severe threat to the competitive advantage of the Romanian automobile industry and, given a potentially growing wave of labor unrest, to the developmental policy of using cheap labor reserves to attract foreign investment. In this scenario, Romania was set to lose against its

²³⁶ “Acord pentru începerea lucrului.” *InfoAutoturism* 207, April 2008.

neighbors or, if this was more a regional matter than a national one, Central and Eastern Europe was set to lose against cheaper production locations outside the EU. Pointing at Dacia's soaring production and financial figures, SAD leaders dismissed any such hypothesis and stressed workers' entitlement to a share in the success for which they were primarily responsible. Supporting the claim that Romanian and CEE workers more generally deserved a good living were French trade unionists, occasional left-leaning commentators (of which almost none could be found in Romania), and several high-profile PSD representatives. Though this realignment of forces shortly after the strike was notable—and, as we will see shortly, consequential—the debate was entirely hypothetical and seemed out of sync with local developments.

The strike was a milestone for SAD's post-2003 trajectory. The newfound position of strength in relation to management was undeniable and the strike had extended this standing from the negotiations table to the shop floor, where recognition of SAD's presence and acumen could no longer be ignored. Despite occasional criticisms, members' trust in the union was at an all-time high, with membership quickly growing from 14 to 16 thousand—12,000 from Dacia and the rest from suppliers. SAD's victory was followed by its success in obtaining substantial pay raises in most supplier companies in which it negotiated collective labor contracts. This proved rather partial, despite an apparent willingness to go all the way. Though warning strikes happened in at least two supplier companies and in one case a two-week general strike was organized at the beginning of May, SAD was in a notably less advantageous position. While suppliers' managers could make their threats reality far quicker and to a much fuller extent—indeed, a few had already demonstrated their ability to do so—SAD could muster much fewer resources for small scale industrial actions.²³⁷ The bifurcating trajectory of Dacia and its surrounding economic environment (more on this below) and the accompanying differentiation of SAD's position at Dacia and at supplier companies marked the onset of a deep segmentation of the local labor market. From now on, Dacia increasingly stood out as the most attractive employer in the region.²³⁸ The 2008 strike triggered a change that in less than half a decade would congeal into an almost entirely new social and economic landscape that workers had to navigate.

²³⁷ Local media and politicians were clearly not as interested in, nor as sympathetic toward, the two-week general strike SAD organized at Leoni, Dacia's wiring supplier. Notwithstanding unionists' threats, attempts at holding mass rallies in support of a few hundred strikers from a relatively unknown company would have most likely failed miserably. In Wright's (2000) terms, here SAD lacked the sheer structural and associational strengths it could readily make use of at Dacia. While Descolonges (2011:chapter 4) is correct that SAD's leaders at times tended to sweep under the carpet the frequently direr problems faced by workers from supplier companies and emphasized the situation of Dacia workers, whose earned rights were claimed to eventually trickle down to suppliers, she is wrong in attributing this to strategic shortsightedness. The significantly narrower strategic horizon unionists faced in companies like Leoni made such sleight of hand tactics look more like the result of turning necessity into virtue than of ignorance. Otherwise, SAD's strong footing in supplier companies is quite exceptional in the CEE context, where unionization is much less common for suppliers (e.g., Bohle and Greskovits 2006:20).

²³⁸ I deal with the segmentation of the local labor market in part II. Not all suppliers had the same fate after the 2008 strike. Contrasting with the "best practice" principles of the industry, Dacia eventually insourced several of the operations it had outsourced during the post-privatization restructuring. With other suppliers who ran large scale operations and were less accommodating of high labor turnover, SAD was successful in keeping the gap between Dacia workers' rights and supplier workers' rights to a minimum. In a company like Leoni, however, a huge chasm grew over the years in comparison to Dacia.

At Dacia, the strike offered a spectacular vindication of SAD's post-2003 strategy of accepting management-imposed production targets while ensuring that speedups are handled in a reasonably humane manner, that the union got a say in the constant rationalizing of the labor process, and, above all, that workers mandatorily receive better payment for their increased efforts. If before 2008 the SAD leadership had struggled to get management to recognize the union's strategic position, the strike managed to guarantee such recognition for years to come. Put differently, the 2008 strike sealed a kind of "productivity bargain" not unlike those characteristic of industrial relations in core countries during the 1960s (see Crouch 1978:214-7; McKersie and Hunter 197). Accordingly, while SAD accepted speedups and process rationalization measures meant to increase productivity, management accepted to grant regular wage increases and substantial benefits packages. As a result, even though an oppositional atmosphere persisted, with disputes and the occasional (ambiguously instrumentalized) wildcat remaining routine, a lapse into an all-out confrontation like in 2003 or 2008 became all but impossible. It was not just SAD's post-2003 strategic goals that prefigured such a development, but also the tactical choices made during the 2008 strike. While stressing the importance of wages above all other issues and downplaying the extra-monetary implications of productivity increases (see Descolonges 2011:101; 201:92), SAD adamantly rejected any proposal infringing upon workers' overtime payment—more precisely, management's offer of higher wages at the cost of implementing a four-shift work schedule—and insisted that special bonuses be granted in lump sums—while management preferred a spreading of sums across the entire year. The resulting wages and benefits package would soon enough make Dacia workers the envy of the entire Argeş region and, in critical moments, of a considerable part of the country's workers and trade unionists: above-average base wages, stable opportunities for significant income boosts by putting in weekly overtime, several large one-off bonuses received throughout the year, and a substantial set of fringe benefits. Heeding to the effervescence surrounding the events of March–May 2008, all these could be claimed as objectives for all Romanian workers and trade union members. Given enough patience and willingness to organize, they were also claimed as possible future achievements.

The onset of the Great Recession dashed any hopes of the 2008 strike acting as a harbinger of a wider positive development. Starting with 2009, all labor movements on the continent would be on the defense and, under heavy attacks from employers and governments (e.g., Marginson 2015), trade unionists and leftist pundits would quickly put aside any plans for a unified continental union movement fighting for upward wage equalization. Indeed, from being one of several possible scenarios for the future, the very idea that the Dacia strike represented a first major step in this direction quickly became uncouth. Even the somewhat more reasonable hypothesis of an emerging wave of workers' mobilization in some of Romania's leading economic sectors was quickly scrapped, as the crisis catalyzed a turn to an eminently vicious neoliberal regime (see Ban 2016), whose austerity and anti-labor policies crippled the union movement, reducing organized labor opposition to a historical low and eliminating much of the modicum of formal rights employees had gained since the adoption of the 2003 Labor Code (see Guga 2016; Guga and Constantin 2015). Even without their standout victory in the general strike, Dacia workers and their union would have found themselves increasingly isolated in such rapidly decaying social and economic surroundings.

At Dacia, the initial impact of the crisis was severe. Just months after the strike, regular production stoppages were being scheduled, as automobile markets slumped across the continent. SAD leaders were now busy drawing up plans for defending job security—virtually a nonissue since the end of restructuring—and maintaining union discipline: there was a danger that, still enticed by the success of earlier that year, some shop floor union officials would not recognize the gravity of the situation and haphazardly act against the broader interests of the union membership.²³⁹ These nascent fears were swiftly dispelled by Dacia's ensuing success on Western European markets, which, starting with 2009, was more than able to compensate for the almost total collapse of the until then vital domestic market (figure I.24). As a result, the company's production and financial situation continued to improve (figures I.24 and I.25) during the crisis, regardless of the opposite direction taken by its proximate environment. The crisis accelerated the labor market segmentation effects of the 2008 general strike and completely reversed the pre-2008 tendency of growing labor shortage (see chapter 11).

For SAD, the crisis brought a new set of strategic dilemmas. The strike marked a successful transition from the predominantly defensive stance it was forced to adopt in 2003 to an eminently offensive position—in Silver's (2003) terms, SAD shifted from a Polanyi-type to a Marx-type opposition. In doing this, the union could capitalize on an advantageous structural position, a solid policy of organizational consolidation, and a reasonable amount of experience in handling industrial conflict. While the resulting productivity bargain might not have been an ideal solution given SAD's former prerogatives in handling labor affairs and administering the production process, it was enough to push the union out of the post-privatization existential crisis and grant its leadership sufficient recognition from both management and members. Regardless of whether this outcome was or was not foreseen by union officials, the crisis and its impact were not. Dacia's new market situation combined with the changed position of its workers on the labor market meant that SAD would have to struggle to maintain and, indeed, to defend the bargain immediately after it had succeeded in setting it up. If success in the strike gave SAD a strong offensive impetus, at the beginning of 2009 the crisis was already forcing the union on the defense—an ambiguous situation requiring both defensive and offensive tactics. While management remained the primary adversary in this offensive defense of the productivity bargain, the crisis bluntly revealed the impact of adverse product and labor market conditions. These issues could not be tackled within the confines of SAD's confrontation with Dacia's management. They called for active involvement in affairs that had been deemed external to the enterprise and, in the aftermath of the disastrous 2000 elections, also outside SAD's purview. In other words, they required the opening of a second front of struggle, similar to the 1990s, only this time under vastly different political-economic and organizational conditions.

²³⁹ "Dacia va rămâne la fel de puternică." *InfoAutoturism* 210, December 2008. "2008—Un an bun pentru Dacia." *InfoAutoturism* 210, December 2008.

CHAPTER 5

THE SECOND TWO-FRONT WAR, 2008–...

Counteroffensive: the crisis as opportunity

The negotiations for the 2009 collective labor contract stood in the starkest contrast possible to the outstanding displays of resoluteness from a few months earlier. They were by far the most anticlimactic in many years, with virtually no threats being exchanged and with a conspicuous absence of any media frenzy whatsoever. Though wages remained the most important issue on the agenda, the modest results of the negotiations were unceremoniously declared fitting for the tough times the company had run into starting with the second half of 2008. The 110-lei pay raise, meager even by pre-2008 standards, was said to be a simple “compensation,” instead of an actual raise, and an insufficient one at that.²⁴⁰ To be sure, the situation looked dire, with the increasingly longer and more common production stoppages apparently curtailing the leverage SAD had so painstakingly accumulated over the previous years. Worst case scenarios were discussed and plans of action were drafted in case markets continued to plummet. From the glory of the previous months’ struggle, trade unionists now suddenly needed to come up with solutions for damage control, which first and foremost meant guaranteeing job security and avoiding layoffs for workers on open-ended contracts.²⁴¹ Taking cue from the successful rallies held during the 2008 strike, SAD leaders threatened to organize similar protests in order to promote the changing of the extant taxation policy for the sales and acquisition of personal cars. SAD demanded that the state deter the acquisition of used imported cars, giving an advantage to vehicle manufacturers and jump-starting the crippled domestic market.²⁴² Job security and the need for a state policy of protection of “the national product” were the major themes of the mass rally organized by SAD in Mioveni on January 13, 2009. Dacia’s importance for the national economy—as a major manufacturer, exporter, and employer—was presented as a good enough argument for politicians to favor the company if they were indeed concerned with the greater good of the country as a whole. In this regard, the agreement between SAD and Dacia’s management was quite explicit: not only did management endorse the protest, but trade unionists and managers jointly pressured the government to act against the “invasion” of the market by imported second-hand vehicles.²⁴³ Even though by spring the

²⁴⁰ “La Dacia s-au dat compensații, în loc de majorări.” *Curierul zilei*, February 18, 2009.

²⁴¹ During late-2008 and early-2009, SAD did not contest management’s policy of not renewing fixed-term contracts for hundreds of workers.

²⁴² The issue of the so-called “car tax” [*taxa auto*] had been on and off the government’s agenda since at least as early as 2007. The onset of the crisis renewed the interest in discouraging the acquisition of used vehicles. Notwithstanding considerable political support in favor of changing the tax, there was also plenty of controversy, as the proposed modifications were said to be incompatible with EU regulations. SAD’s intervention was prompted by the realization that opposition to the change was strong enough to block it.

²⁴³ While SAD leaders threatened to upscale their actions, Dacia’s top managers gave extensive interviews in the local and central press insisting that the job security of Dacia employees depended on the fate of the domestic market and on the government’s attitude. See, e.g., “Nici un angajat Dacia nu poate dormi liniștit.” *Curierul zilei*, February 2, 2009. In a gesture reminiscent of the 1990s, the prime minister visited the Dacia platform on February 10, guaranteeing the government’s full support. This opened the floodgates for a flurry of heavily publicized visits

taxation issue was (temporarily) rendered irrelevant and all fears were dispelled by Dacia's near-total reorientation toward export markets, the first weeks of 2009 announced the strategic dilemmas to come once the full effects of the crisis settled in.

Brisk export demand for its low-cost cars allowed Dacia to quickly return to pre-crisis growth figures and by autumn it was clear that 2009 would be yet another record year in terms of output and productivity and that soon the plant would reach its full production capacity of 350,000 assembled cars per year. With all disaster scenarios behind, the SAD leadership could take full advantage of its 2008 victory by pushing management to grant substantial wage raises. In September 2009, SAD demanded a renegotiation of the year's collective labor contract, in light of the company's change of fortunes, and quickly secured a doubling of the raise from a few months earlier. For the next two years, the union managed to trade acceptance of productivity increases for wage raises only marginally lower than the one for which it had had to struggle so energetically in 2008. A general strike was now entirely out of the question and the occasional strike threat was sufficient to maintain what was perceived as a mutually advantageous compromise between wages and productivity levels (figure I.40). Fresh memory of the 2008 strike gave authenticity to SAD's threats, boosted by the atmosphere of permanent

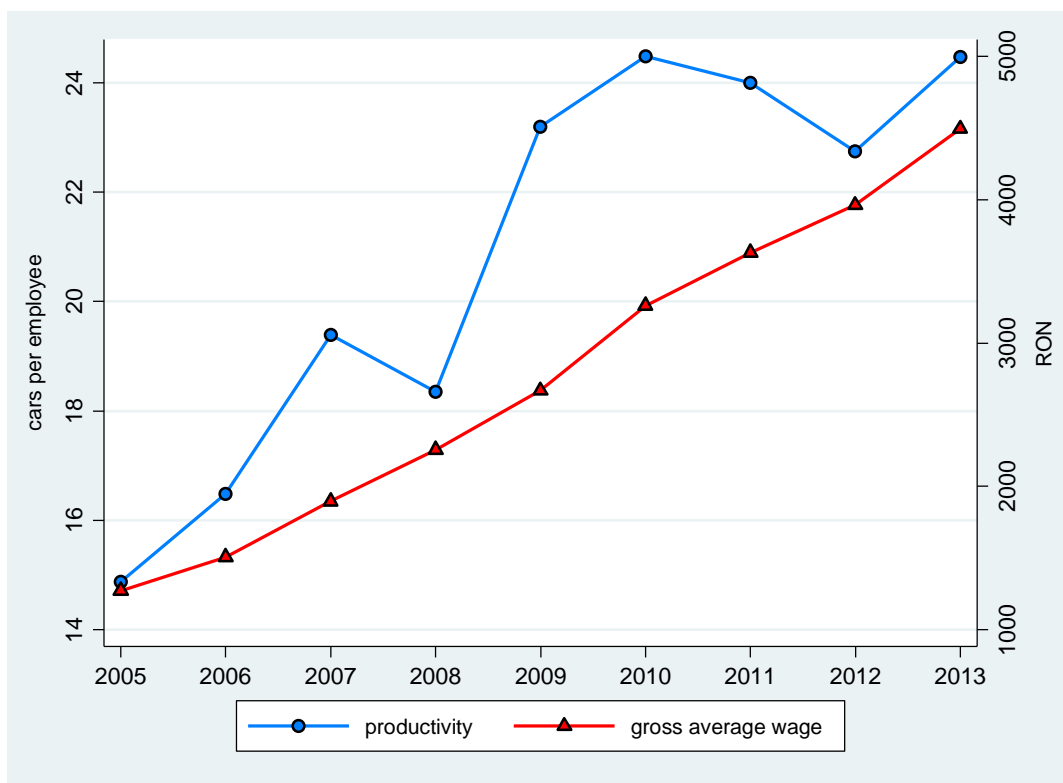


FIGURE I.40. Productivity and wages at Dacia, 2005–2013.

Sources: Company data, *Ziarul financiar* (various articles), ACAROM.

Note: Wage figures are nominal. Productivity is calculated as number of cars assembled per employee. This concerns only the Dacia assembly plant and does not include the production of CKD kits and components such as engines and gearboxes, which are also produced in Mioveni and have similarly witnessed substantial increases in productivity. Calculated as turnover per employee, annual productivity has increased from 0.1 million euros/employee in 2005 to approximately 0.3 million euros/employee in 2013 and 2014. For a different version of this graph, see Adăscăliței and Guga (2015:10).

by high-profile politicians—presidents and presidential candidates, prime-ministers, ministers, leaders of political parties etc.—in the following years.

mobilization cultivated by trade unionists during this period. Between 2009 and 2012, protest threats were routinely used in various situations outside the annual negotiations: from management's unwillingness to distribute mineral water to employees in the aluminum foundry throughout the year or the unsatisfactory quality of the food served at the plant's canteens, to the blocking of attempts at granting extraordinary wage raises and bonuses to managerial personnel only, or the maintaining of bonuses for those working in difficult conditions. By the early 2010s, such threats had become a standard feature of union–management relations, and SAD had on more than one occasion demonstrated it was both willing and capable to follow up on its threats. This seemed all the more unusual given the disastrous toll the crisis was taking on Romania's economy and above all on its employees: by the beginning of 2010, the Romanian trade union movement was in tatters and the days of constant wage growth and offensive struggle seemed long gone; at Dacia, on the other hand, SAD seemed stronger than ever and the fate of workers witnessed a marked improvement from one year to the next. As the crisis peaked during 2009 and 2010, so did SAD's success in defending the interests of its members within the confines of the extant productivity bargain (figure I.41).

This did not last for long and, by early 2011, the crisis seemed to be catching up to SAD. Admittedly, it was not the crisis per se which threatened to put the brakes on the rapid bifurcation between Dacia and its economic surroundings, but rather the government's ferocious austerity measures and especially the push for an overwhelmingly employer-friendly labor legislation. In early January 2011, two years after the protest in support of changing the



FIGURE I.41. Nominal gross average wage (RON) and annual wage growth (%) at Dacia in comparison to the national gross average wage and annual wage growth.

Data sources: Company data, *Ziarul financiar* (various articles), the National Institute of Statistics. Author's calculations.

Note: Growth rates are calculated in comparison to the previous year. The caveats for figure I.18 (see above) also apply here. For a different version of this graph, see Adăscăliței and Guga (2015:8).

automobile taxation policy, SAD's leaders announced their intention to organize another protest, this time against the proposal for a new Labor Code. In doing this, they wanted to offer an example of solidarity and proper action to all Romanian employees and especially to union confederations, which, they insisted, had failed to mount any meaningful opposition to the government's systematic attacks on workers' rights.²⁴⁴ Indeed, 2010 had witnessed the imposition of an brutal austerity package—which, among other things, included a 25% wage cut for public sector employees—with relatively meager and spectacularly ineffective opposition by trade unions generally speaking. The new labor laws came in a long line of interventions meant to consolidate employers' superior bargaining position both within enterprises and in the labor market. At the core of this wider offensive, the new Labor Code was ostensibly aimed at making employment relations more flexible, by easing the firing and hiring of employees and extending the usage of fixed-term, part-time, and temporary work agency contracts. At least from this standpoint, the discontent of Dacia trade unionists was not entirely altruistic, as the new law jeopardized one of the pillars of SAD's strategy. Job security, which included the restricting of fixed-term contracts and the virtual banning of temporary work agency contracts, was the bedrock of the post-2008 productivity compromise, and “flexibilization” threatened to turn the tables on SAD by significantly weakening its bargaining position. Though union leaders stressed the protest held on January 25, 2011 was not against Dacia's management, it was certainly meant to prevent it from getting the upper hand.

Such covert tactics notwithstanding, a protest by Dacia workers looked entirely exceptional in the landscape of Romanian organized labor at the time and claims of wanting to give a boost to the national union movement had to be given at least some credibility. Throughout 2010, government officials had marketed the austerity package as affecting public sector workers alone, who allegedly had for many years demanded (and, in collusion with self-serving politicians, repeatedly obtained) unreasonable and undeserved pay raises that had turned them into parasites living off the work of private sector employees—in the emphatic words of Romania's president at the time, the public sector “fat man” could no longer be carried on the shoulders of the private sector “thin man.” While the austerity measures impacted a labor market in which all employees shared participation, such divide and conquer tactics succeeded in isolating the discontent and sporadic street protests of public sector employees and made the adoption of austerity measures surprisingly easy. A crucial element in this victory over labor were the starkly different degrees of unionization in the public and private sectors of the economy coupled with the inability of union confederations to mobilize public sector employees occupying strategic positions and capable of inflicting significant harm if they stopped work (Guga and Constantin 2015; Varga and Freyberg-Inan 2015). It was therefore hardly surprising that opposition to austerity came largely from public sector workers and that what numerically might have looked like a strong countermovement quickly proved entirely innocuous in the overall scheme of things. Originating in one of the most important private enterprises in the country, whose workforce had witnessed an unprecedented increase in wellbeing at the peak of the crisis, the protest organized by SAD seemed entirely foreign to the

²⁴⁴ For a detailed account of the events of 2010 and 2011 and the government's brutal attacks on the trade union movement and attempts at deregulating labor relations, see Guga (2014). Varga and Freyberg-Inan (2015) put these aggressions into a historical context of relations between the Romanian state and the union movement.



FIGURE I.42. Picture from the protest against the government's proposal for a new Labor Code held in Mioveni on January 25, 2011. Apart from slogans, banners signal the presence of SAD's organizations. Source: Mediafax Foto.

realignment of battlements that had taken place during 2010. Declarations of wanting to jump-start the national union movement proved even more troublesome.

On January 25, 2011, over ten thousand people were reported to have gathered in the square in front of the Trade Unions' House of Culture in Mioveni (figure I.42). SAD was joined by other local unions and by representatives of several trade unions from across the country who responded to BNS's call for joining the protest. Just like during the grim days of early 2009, the defense of job security was the major theme of the protest, even though the vivid atmosphere was more reminiscent of the proud offensive rallies from the Spring of 2008. In contrast to the latter, however, outside the several unions who had sent delegates on the scene, SAD could count on very few allies, if any. For the first time in its history, SAD confronted an alliance of politicians and media outlets who were set on delegitimizing the protest by any means necessary. Though Dacia's management officially abstained from taking sides and declared itself entirely neutral, internal documents detailing the wages and benefits received by Dacia employees—wage grids and the collective labor contract, which are typically confidential—were leaked into the media, fueling frenzied attacks on Dacia workers and union leaders for not minding their own business and not being content with a situation in which they were supposedly far better off than most Romanian employees. Adding to this were the various scenarios—from the protest being just another dirty tactic in the negotiations of the collective labor contract to speculations on the ulterior political ambitions of SAD's leadership—meant to demonstrate that Dacia workers were not really entitled to protest. Unlike with the previous protest actions, it quickly became apparent that SAD faced an uphill battle in which it could rely on far fewer allies. The crisis had made the ideological terrain much less conducive to any kind of trade union struggle, while management's post-2008 strategy of peremptorily drawing the bulk of politicians and mass media outlets on its side was beginning to pay off. Hence, it was not surprising that, despite considerable publicity, the protest did not spark any broader reaction against the proposed labor legislation and eventually failed in preventing it from being adopted via special emergency procedure in Parliament.

Notwithstanding this failure, the 2011 protest was a landmark in SAD's trajectory, as it rendered explicit several strategic mutations that had been brooding since the advent of the crisis. First and foremost, it was now clear that, despite all temporary appearances, SAD could not achieve its goals independent of developments outside the enterprise and that the political and economic volatility brought by the crisis would, eventually, through one mechanism or another, weaken the unions' position below a minimum threshold required for the adequate representation of its members' interests. While SAD had to keep its guard up in dealing with management, it now also needed to wage struggle on a second front, against the government and its allies. This situation was partially similar to the 1990s, when state ownership was considered a direct limitation of managerial and union prerogatives. An important difference was that SAD could now count on far fewer allies and certainly no longer had to worry about imposing its demands on the BNS agenda, since, like all union confederations, BNS's ability to play a role in national politics had been severely diminished in the meantime. Rather than SAD being forced to seek alternative channels of political influence due to BNS's unwillingness to take heed of its wants, after 2010 it was the latter which became increasingly dependent on SAD's actions, as it appeared to be one of the very few organizations still able to raise the fears of employers and politicians. In opening this second front of struggle, however, SAD would have to confront the ghosts of its past, as the controversies surrounding the so-called "political involvement" of trade unions still loomed large. And if the inherited confusion was not enough, SAD's many adversaries seemed ready to denounce any public gesture as being motivated by its leaders' political conniving, further pushing unionists' toward a stark rejection of the very possibility of political unionism. Accordingly, on the occasion of the January 2011 protest, SAD's leaders did not refrain from engaging in the major political debates of the day while at the same time furiously denying any sort of involvement in politics. Far from expressing hypocrisy, this was a reiteration of the strategic ambiguity that had marked SAD's existence throughout the 1990s and which had subsided during the 2000s. Moreover, two novel issues compounded the importance of the January 2011 protest: one was the immediate national visibility of SAD's actions and the intense (and by and large intensely hostile) public discussion of Dacia workers' wages in light of the overall situation in the country; the other was the practical institutionalization of the usage of mass rallies in attempting to obtain influence with the government. When combined, these realignments led to a fundamental shift in SAD's position and strategy, a shift which, though already visible during the uncertain period of late 2008 and early 2009, only became established in the aftermath of the January 2011 protest.

Into uncertainty

As a direct result of the changed labor legislation, SAD found itself on the defensive in the 2012 negotiations as it attempted to prevent management from capitalizing on its newfound legal freedom in handling personnel-related affairs.²⁴⁵ Even if the union obtained another satisfactory wage raise and despite the fact that small protests and threats remained a feature

²⁴⁵ "Liderii de sindicat nu vor să ajungă șomeri." *Curierul zilei*, March 10, 2012. The new Labor Code made firing and hiring procedures easier, encouraged the use of various types of "flexible" work contracts, loosened work quota regulations, and severely curtailed the legal protection offered to trade union leaders.

of union–management relations throughout the year, the awaited opening of a new Renault plant in Tangiers meant to produce Dacia automobiles for the North African and European markets starting with February 2012 threatened to weaken SAD’s position even further and was expected to present the union with a number of problems it had never faced before. While the possibility of delocalization had been occasionally vaunted by management ever since the 2008 strike, such threats would from now on no longer seem that far-fetched. With uncertainty creeping into its ranks, the objectives laid out before members in anticipation of the upcoming elections for the leaders’ positions remained clear: ensuring the company remained profitable, that profitability was tied to proper wages, and that the union was permanently mobilized to strike if necessary.²⁴⁶ The extant leadership secured another four-year mandate by a landslide.

The beginning of 2013 gave leaders an opportunity to test the union’s capability of pursuing the above goals. The year began with a new controversy surrounding the so-called “car tax,” which the government had announced its intention to modify once again. Just like in early 2009, SAD and Dacia’s management joined hands in pressuring the government to adopt a manufacturer-friendly taxation policy. In a well-rehearsed move, union leaders threatened to organize multiple protests if the government chose to put locally produced automobiles on equal tax footing with imported second-hand vehicles, while Dacia’s representatives made free use of the media to outline the possibly disastrous consequences this would have for the Romanian car industry. As opposed to 2009 and 2011, the announced protests never took place, as the government rushed to fulfill Dacia’s demands. The usage of street protests could thus be at least partly vindicated after the previous years’ failures. Reaching a climax with the wildcat strike of March 20–21 (see chapter 1), the 2013 negotiations clearly indicated that the space for offensive maneuvers SAD had gained in 2008 was rapidly shrinking. While union officials remained adamant in their pursuit of higher wages and appeared willing to go all the way to a general strike, management seemed to have found renewed strength, enabling a display of resilience as of yet atypical for the post-2008 compromise. Indeed, this was the first time when management made full use of the so-called “Moroccan threat” in countering SAD’s wage demands. It was also the first time since 2008 when the company pushed forward with a serious proposal for “labor flexibilization” in exchange for higher wages. Furthermore, rumors of impending automation were circulating by this time: the installation of a new automated production line in stamping was already well underway, while reports of jobs being eliminated in the paint shop for similar reasons were at the origins of the March wildcat strike. These new threats (delocalization, flexibilization, and automation), which management now seemed inclined to make unrestrained use of, posed serious challenges to the extant productivity bargain, which depended not just on high degrees of job security, but also on the ready availability of overtime opportunities and substantial overtime pay. The effectiveness of these new threats was obvious from workers’ half-outraged, half-worried reactions and from union leaders’ acknowledgment that a reassessment of the situation was needed. Having already acquiesced to the managerial imperative of cutting costs to maintain the plant’s “competitive advantage” and being confronted with allegedly objective threats against it, SAD’s leaders now needed to make a convincing case that cost cutting should not be done at the expense of labor.

²⁴⁶ “Obiectivele esențiale ale SAD.” *InfoAutoturism* 223, September 2012.

Strictly looking at wage negotiations, during the next three years SAD witnessed a progressive weakening of its bargaining position. Though the 2014, 2015, and 2016 negotiations followed the same pattern—disagreement over wages, strike threats, and the reaching of an agreement before any serious conflict occurred—the wage raises conceded by management were notably lower than in the half-decade after the 2008 strike. Another telling difference was the virtually complete disappearance of the year-round small protests that had become customary during the same period. Though strike threats were used just as readily as before, 2008 had by now become a distant memory whose repeatability grew more and more questionable, especially as the livelihood of Dacia workers kept witnessing a relative improvement in comparison to their immediate peers and management's new threats made victory less probable and the potential toll of defeat much more significant than during the 2000s. By the time of the 2016 negotiations, Ion Iordache, SAD's spokesperson and the official in charge with internal organizational issues publicly appealed to workers "to wake up and face the realities of the day, to become the workers I knew in my youth, to regain their resoluteness, to give up on the complacency induced by the current wage."²⁴⁷ In case this was not going to happen, he continued, "now, eight years after the 2008 strike, (...) they will witness severe transformations in what concerns the workforce and its configuration. These are not previsions, but concrete realities."²⁴⁸ The last statement could hardly be denied: Renault continued to boost production at the Tangiers plant and, with a growing overlap of models produced between the two plants, the issue of maintaining Mioveni's "competitive advantage" appeared to be more stringent than ever; with the 2011 Labor Code still in place, SAD found it increasingly difficult to stave off management's push for substituting fixed-term for open-ended contracts, with periodic buyout programs targeting entrenched older employees for replacement (see part II); negotiating a generous buyout, on the other hand, was SAD's response to the announced policy of raising the plant's automation level from 5% in 2014 to 20% by 2018.²⁴⁹

As threats turned into "concrete reality", SAD's response gained increasing coherence. Automation was largely accepted (and deemed to spell "progress" for workers as well), though on condition that eventual layoffs happen gradually and with voluntary acceptance of substantial buyout packages. SAD leaders acquiesced to the rationalization of production, but only insofar as it did not imply the forceful imposition of "flexibilization" policies. The more general goal of cutting costs to maintain the plant's competitive advantage was also something SAD's leaders agreed was necessary, though they emphasized this could be achieved without threatening job security or wages. Due to Tangiers' proximity to export markets in Western Europe, the domestic market was considered of paramount importance. A strong domestic market, the argument went, would have constituted an important advantage for the Mioveni

²⁴⁷ "Mesajul viceliderului de sindicat de la Dacia pentru angajați: 'Să se trezească la realitate!'" *Ziarul Top de Argeș*, February 2, 2016.

²⁴⁸ "Dacia fierbe din nou după anunțul reducerii producției în 2016." *Jurnalul de Argeș*, December 10, 2015.

²⁴⁹ A buyout package was offered to 500 employees in 2015, ostensibly as part of the plant's automation program. Union leaders warned the buyout was also about replacing open-ended with fixed-term contracts and that, if management had its way, the latter would end up taking as much as 40% of the total number of work contracts in the plant. "Lider sindical: 'Forța de muncă cu contract nedeterminat de la Dacia o să înceapă să dispară!'" *Ziarul Top de Argeș*, January 26, 2016. In 2012-2013, the number of fixed-term contracts was of around 10% of the total. SAD's ability to prevent management from making more extensive use of fixed-term contracts was a direct result of the 2008 victory, when the maintaining of open-ended contracts figured among SAD's chief demands.

plant, while also mitigating the role of the generous infrastructure arrangements offered to Renault by the Moroccan state. As the 2013 success regarding the car taxation policy failed to materialize in improved sales, it nonetheless became increasingly harder to believe that such salvation could come from a recovery of the domestic market. Notwithstanding such unmet expectations and despite the very different implications, this was the sort of calculation that SAD leaders and Dacia's top managers agreed upon starting with 2013.

Inefficient efforts to boost the crisis-stricken domestic market soon gave way to a new major objective. In late 2013, rumors began circulating of a planned protest in response to the government's announced intention to sideline plans to build a freeway between the cities of Pitești and Sibiu. By the end of the year, the freeway question had lapsed into a major political controversy, as union leaders and top managers got involved in an increasingly aggressive exchange between the country's prime minister and the president. The joint claim of SAD and Dacia representatives was that the freeway would reduce costs by no less than 30 euros per vehicle, giving the plant an extra edge in countering the threat of delocalization and proving that the Romanian state could fully follow in the footsteps of its more sagacious Moroccan counterpart. For SAD, it also meant that wage raises could be demanded and that pressures on job security would partly subside. A protest against the potential dropping of the freeway project eventually took place in early March 2014, when SAD again managed to gather several thousand union members in the square in front of the Trade Unions' House of Culture in Mioveni. With no tangible result in sight, it was repeated in the spring of 2015 (figure I.43) and again in the spring of 2016. In the meantime, the freeway question sparked another highly visible exchange of blows between the two most important candidates in the 2014 presidential electoral campaign who competed for the appeasing of Dacia's managers and trade unionists. The changing of the Labor Code and the need for the state to support the domestic car market also figured among SAD's main demands in the 2014–16 protests, alongside a new interest for reinvesting in mass vocational education programs in order to address the shortage of skilled labor that SAD leaders claimed hurt employees both directly (since their bargain power depended on their degree of skilling) and indirectly (since the shortage of skilled labor acted as a disincentive for foreign investors and favored delocalization). Somewhat cynically, union leaders reminded protesters that foreign investors like Renault favored production locations depending on their cost advantages and that labor figured prominently in this equation. The freeway, under which all other demands were subsumed, was assumed to provide a temporary alleviation of this insurmountable quandary, while giving union leaders, workers, and, as protesters called out, the Romanian people enough time to rise up and fight.

Such battle cries notwithstanding, the paramount strategic question of adequately identifying the enemies in the new two-front war lacked a clear answer. Was it the multinational corporation, who sought profit above all else and did not refrain from capitalizing on the cheaper labor of one group of workers to the detriment of the more expensive yet fully entitled labor of another group? Though their existence was openly asserted as such, SAD's position toward such practices proved at this time to be remarkably neutral and management was the party least targeted by the protests. To be sure, the objective circumstances—most importantly, the genuine, or at least genuinely convincing threat with delocalization—as well as SAD's near-genetic commitment to the company's profitability—dating back to the adoption of a



FIGURE I.43. The protest held in Mioveni on April 16, 2015 in support of building the Pitești–Sibiu freeway.

Source: Mediafax Foto.

business model of unionism during the 1990s and its strong reinforcement in the 2000s—increasingly made the employer look like an uncanny spectator to SAD’s struggle. Management could even be considered among SAD’s very few allies on the second front, even though this alliance was much more precarious and tricky than any of its preceding instances.

Was it, then, the “people,” who refused to “wake up” to the realities of the day and failed to recognize their common interest? Surely, this was far more complicated an issue by this time. Not only did Dacia unionists face an overwhelming hostility from the mass media and from political parties, but SAD’s effervescent push for the freeway project and its brief involvement in the debate on the botched project for a new administrative organization of the country were openly claimed to primarily defend the interests of Mioveni and the automotive industry in and around the Argeș region more generally, and not those of Romanian workers generically speaking. Though leaders still emphasized the national import of their struggle, the argument was no longer that SAD could serve as a beacon for a renewed popular movement able to secure proper rights through struggle—this, of course, being the argument that had sparked so much excitement at the time of the 2008 general strike. Though such hopes were still seldom voiced during the 2014–16 protests, the dominant point was now rather that what was good for Dacia was good for the national economy and so the benefits of a project like the Pitești–Sibiu freeway would eventually trickle down to the rest of the population. This, however, could hardly be convincing given the continuously growing chasm between the work and life situations of Dacia employees and those of workers from across the country to whom SAD leaders appealed. While management and the vast majority of pundits rushed to catch any

opportunity of using this difference in attempting to isolate SAD from potential allies and even from its own members, the dissolving effects were most clearly visible locally, where an increasingly more segmented labor market drained many of the resources of solidarity that Dacia workers and SAD could count upon before the 2010s. Moreover, the external organizational resources were by the middle of this decade at an all-time low, with the labor movement still reeling from the effects of the crisis and the concerted attacks of 2010–11. Under such circumstances, identifying allies was just as difficult as pointing out the enemies.

Finally, was it the state who bore primary responsibility for SAD's binding dilemmas and was it the foremost party capable of turning things around? To be sure, when accepting the cost-cutting profitability calculation while refraining from concessions regarding wages and employment conditions, demanding that the government provide better transportation infrastructure, secure proper provision of skilled labor, or switch to a less employer-friendly labor legislation seemed like one of the few, if not the only, strategic options left on the table. Inheritances of old, once again, as well as the extant hostile environment raised serious question marks as to how effective this could actually be. Staunchly denying any sort of political involvement while at the same time openly demanding political intervention seemed to be having perverse consequences. As it became obvious due to the rather frequent political turnarounds Romania witnessed in the 2010s, while protesting workers and union leaders denounced all politicians and political parties (and, along with them, "politics" as such), the latter did not shy away from repeatedly making promises they would immediately withdraw once they could no longer be instrumentalized in their favor. Although this was blatantly transparent and contributed to increasing the frequency of the protests, it could also induce the idea that such an avenue of action was a dead end after all. The even more disconcerting implication of this third choice for an adversary was that, even with a built freeway and a highly solicitous government, it could not make for anything more than a temporary solution. The productivity bargain that had been sealed with SAD's victory in the 2008 general strike was based on allowing management to continue its pursuit for reduced costs. For several years, this could be achieved by labor intensification and labor process rationalization. As it increasingly became apparent that further intensification and rationalization—e.g., adopting a more flexible work schedule or diminishing the share of open-ended work contracts—were essentially incompatible with the compromise currently in place, its maintenance became increasingly contentious. Indeed, the new threats mobilized by management—flexibilization, automation, delocalization—were meant either to push the compromise to its limits or to eventually break it in the employer's favor, effectively ending the war of attrition that had set in at the end of the 2000s. Hence, by the mid-2010s, SAD's leaders and their worker majority constituency once again found themselves facing a major strategic dilemma in having to decide whether the existing compromise was exhausted or not and, depending on the answer, whether to continue fighting to defend it or rather struggle for a realignment attuned to the material and symbolic standing they had over the years strived so hard to achieve.



ON THE ASSEMBLY LINE, MID-/LATE-1990S

Source: "Peste un milion de mașini Dacia, achiziționate înainte de 1990, sunt încă în circulație [Over one million Dacia cars, bought before 1990, are still in use]." *Ziarul financiar*, 11 March 2013.



FLEA MARKET SPARE PARTS TRADE IN THE MID-2000S

Source: "Traficanții de piese auto noi pentru Logan [The smugglers of new spare parts for the Logan]." *România liberă*, 22 September 2008.

Finally had a breakthrough yesterday. I went out at around two o'clock to hang out at the shop corner. Plant workers are on vacation, so the town's pretty much deserted. The three-shift routine I got used to in the previous weeks is useless at this time, so I've been hanging out mostly with a bunch of guys who do odd-jobs and don't seem to have a regular enough schedule for me to adjust my routine to theirs. Though they appear to be much less skeptical of my presence and don't become immediately suspicious once I tell them what I'm doing here (or, better said, what I'd like to do), they also seem to be much less interested. Blending in seems easy but getting noticed is difficult. Yesterday was entirely different. I met this guy who seemed neither disinterested nor suspicious of my presence and declared purposes. We ended up spending the entire day together, playing pool at 'Central' (he's actually a pretty skilled player—definitely better than I am) and in the evening we went to eat in the center where another three-day celebration is being held. Conversation was mostly chitchat, with me trying to quench my thirst for elementary local knowledge. He's the first person I've met here with whom I've felt reasonably comfortable during a longer conversation. One thing left me profoundly disturbed. At one point, when we were about to head home, he asked me (in as polite and friendly a manner as possible, which did little to alleviate the shock) to help him get a job at the plant in whatever way I can. The funny thing is that I could have asked him the same; and I most likely would have, had I found an appropriate moment. I froze instantly and, after swallowing the irony of the situation, tried to explain that I am probably the last person to be able to help with that in any way and that I am as helpless in this regard as a person can be. Still, he insisted that if during my stay here I met people "higher up" I should put in a good word for him (he seemed to suggest that the "if" was merely a matter of "when"). He confessed that he had wanted a job at the plant for years and that all his attempts had failed. He believed that it would solve all his problems. It seems like I have a long way to go in overcoming my persistent naïveté as to what role the plant plays locally and what it means for people here. It also compounds the difficulty of permanently having to manage a situation in which people seem to think I am the exact opposite of what I actually am.

- Compiled from my notes, mid-August 2012. Emil was the first person I met in the field who genuinely trusted me. With its ups and downs, our relationship became stronger and stronger over the next year and a half. As things progressed for me and as I found more refined solutions to and ways of coping with my dilemmas, things got only worse for Emil. As I learned to live with my anxieties, his uncertainties gained existential proportions. Looking back at the period between our first encounter and the time of writing, I realize that I have witnessed his entire life unravel. Only after I had left the field did he fully agree that there was little I could have done to help in turning things around for him.

PART II

DURABLE INEQUALITY: LABOR CONTROL AND THE TWISTS AND TURNS OF THE LOCAL LABOR MARKET

Labor markets are key structures in explaining labor unrest. Workers' position on the labor market determines their structural bargaining power, while their capacity to organize collectively and enroll allies in their struggle hinges on relations mediated by labor markets. In a given geohistorical context, the dynamics of inequality between capital and labor and especially within labor's ranks greatly depend on the structure and history of labor markets pertaining to that particular context. The material and symbolic politics of inequality, or the political and moral economies of labor, necessarily entail acting within and upon labor markets understood as concrete—local or regional—terrains of and for struggle. Organized labor unrest is but one of many facets of this politics, itself determined by and determining for the structure and trajectory of local and regional labor markets.

The relatively abundant literature on CEE industrial workers and post-89 labor markets stresses the importance of livelihood-centered individualization during the 1990s, followed by capital-driven segmentation starting with the mid-2000s. Although linking workers' weakening position on labor markets with their incapacity or unwillingness to mobilize collectively, the labor-market-centered politics of labor are more often than not marginal for this literature, and labor markets per se rarely make the object of systematic inquiry. This stands in stark contrast with the literature on state socialist labor, for which labor markets were a paramount object of interest. Scholars of labor under state socialism emphasized the importance of inter-enterprise competition for attracting workers, under systemic conditions of chronic labor shortage. Compounded by guaranteed employment security and objective requirements for flexibility in production, they insisted, this bolstered workers' bargaining power within the enterprise, contributing to the characteristic autonomy of state socialist workers on the shop floor. This autonomy and bargaining power allowed industrial workers to participate in the so-called "second economy" and alleviate the wage insecurity that was endemic to state socialist labor relations. The complex entanglements of the first and second economies spanned the inside and the outside of enterprises, regulating labor markets and ensuring a modicum of control over labor in production. The dynamics of labor markets, labor control, and inequality were intimately intertwined; one could not be fully understood without the others.

After 1989, this sort of analysis no longer seemed justified. Instead of reproducing the complex balancing act of first and second economies, postsocialist labor markets went through two historical phases. First, there was economic involution, the collapse of industry, and the disappearance of industrial jobs. In such a context, the informality typical of the former second economy persisted and even became dominant, serving as an avenue of original capital accumulation for a select few and as a lifeline in attempting to secure a livelihood for the many. The later coming of dependent development boosted the formalization of property and labor relations, although in quite uneven fashion. Labor markets were segmented, with workers in privileged export sectors distancing themselves from the rest, who still struggled to get by via precarious, formal or informal labor expenditure. Albeit still driving inequality, formalization and segmentation appear to have rendered irrelevant the previous entanglements between the regulation of labor markets and control over labor in production.

From Dacia workers' standpoint, things look somewhat different. Even though the structural history of the local labor market could be said to have mirrored the above two phases, a closer look reveals a less straightforward story. Neither car manufacturing nor the second economy of spare parts trafficking collapsed after 1989. Profiting from booming automobile and parts markets, both in fact expanded. And while this was made possible by the resilience of key prerequisites from the state socialist political economy of automobile production and distribution, several essential features did not survive regime change. Crucially, chronic labor shortage was replaced by spiraling unemployment, the struggle over enterprise autonomy gave more leverage to management in dealing with labor, and the newfound imperative of trade union authority depended on the elimination of alternative bargaining chips and avenues. These factors fueled a renewed struggle over labor control within the enterprise, which was intrinsically tied to attempts at creating and securing positions of power in the labor market. At Dacia, therefore, the intertwined political and moral economies of car manufacturing and parts trafficking remained at the heart of struggles between managers, workers, and trade union officials. All attempted to deal with the organizational challenges brought by the market economy on their own terms. Partly due to alliances analyzed in part I, and partly due to an objective alignment of their interests, management and the union leadership jointly struggled for the control of labor in production by attempting to render work in industry into a scarce resource that was worth monopolizing and which they could monopolize. In order to do this, they had to alleviate the still endemic wage insecurity, establish their authority on the shop floor, and instill an exclusionary logic of solidarity based on a division between worthy and unworthy workers. In pursuing these objectives, managers and union leaders came against various obstacles, the most important of which being workers' attempts at tapping into alternative material and symbolic resources in pursuit of their own economic and moral imperatives of survival. As a result, low wages, weak hierarchical control, and failures in imposing a top-down exclusionary logic of solidarity based on the value of industrial labor characterized the 1990s. Persistently weak control over labor in production was accompanied by the consolidation of a duopoly in the labor market between manufacturing and the parts trafficking economy. The bifurcation of trajectories between workers and professional traffickers exemplified the new configuration of the labor market on an individual level.

Though inconclusive at the time, these struggles proved decisive for the post-privatization course of events. While the exclusionary discourse of worthiness remained conspicuously abstract during the 1990s, it provided moral justification to massive layoffs in the first half of the 2000s. The consequences of privatization were thus much less problematic than they might have seemed at first, not least because it promised to restore labor control in production while providing workers with adequate material and symbolic rewards. Labor control was indeed quickly established, but at the sacrifice of both workers' and SAD's standing on the shop floor and with no noticeable improvement in the remuneration, working conditions, or status of manual labor. As evidenced in part I, one reaction was the rekindling of the relationship between union leaders and the rank and file, culminating in the general strikes of 2003 and 2008. The other was the seeking of alternatives, on individual and group bases: many workers accepted buyouts with alacrity, while others successfully participated in the parts trafficking economy well into the mid-2000s. A booming economy and increased opportunities of finding work abroad eventually led to a snowballing shortage of labor, which weighed heavily in deciding the outcome of the 2008 strike. In combination with the Great Recession, the ensuing productivity compromise accomplished what almost two decades of struggle had not: jobs at Dacia were now not only scarce, but immensely valuable, trumping anything else available on the local and regional labor markets. The resulting labor market segmentation set a clear boundary between Dacia workers and their peers, finally dealing the killing blow to the parts trafficking economy and replacing the waning duopoly of the 1990s with Dacia's virtual monopoly over opportunities for making a proper living. High wages, strong managerial authority on the shop floor, and the alignment of the political and moral economies of labor rendered the separation particularly durable. Apparent seamlessness aside, workers' accompanying entrenchment did not happen along clear-cut lines and without its share of contradictions. As they participated in the upholding of this monopoly, remobilizing social ties previously required to access the trafficking economy to broker access to scarce jobs, stark inequalities became apparent not just between autoworkers and nonautoworkers, but also within the ranks of the former. One concrete outcome is the raising of significant obstacles to social reproduction, which seem insurmountable to many autoworkers themselves. The second is the dissolving of the structures and infrastructures of solidarity that previously spanned the boundaries of the plant and permitted collective struggle.

CHAPTER 6

PRELUDE: EMBODIED HISTORIES ENACTED

Shallowed play

Saturdays in the neighborhood are always very different from any other day of the week. Since for most workers Sunday shifts are rare and week-end night shifts are entirely exceptional, Saturday evening is the only time when people can stay out without having to worry about waking up early the next day, performing at work up to requirements or risking failure on the zero-tolerance alcohol testing at the plant gates. Saturdays are also the only occasion when all three shifts have a chance to meet and hang out, this synergy giving a very distinctive content and dynamic to these end-of-the-week rituals. The difference is obvious in that most of the usual hang out spots are packed with people and the atmosphere is visibly more relaxed than on any given day of the week—when things are not only much more rushed but also more noticeably filled with the drudgery of a seemingly never-ending fixed routine. Otherwise, apart from the occasional inebriation of those who usually keep their drinking under strict control, Saturdays are usually just as uneventful as any regular working day.

One such evening at the end of my first summer in the field decidedly broke with this scripted break of routine. Most of the corner shop regulars were present, so the terrace overflowed with about thirty people split in smaller groups, shuffled more or less at random, with the usual age-group segregation applying. An instant rearrangement took place as soon as someone took out a pair of dice and called out for volunteers for a game of *barbut*. The several smaller circles quickly merged into one large circle with a varying number of six to eight players in the center, a smaller number of people who regularly went in and out of the game or took part in the side betting without playing, and a large number of spectators displaying different levels of interest and approval for what was happening. Critics and skeptics notwithstanding, the dice game monopolized the entire evening and, for about half of the main players and a handful of spectators, it was prolonged until Sunday morning when remaining participants went home after a brief but intense gambling spree at the slot machines of a non-stop bar across town. The evening's spoils: about five hundred lei for the big winner and a couple of hundred for the runners up, with a bonus of several food vouchers for each; excepting the three or four men who went home while they were ahead or because they had a good enough reason to force themselves to limit their losses, the rest of those who entered the game ended up ratcheting up the losses and swallowing their pride. Declaredly petty cash for some, big money for others; harmless and entirely forgettable entertainment for most, an important ego battle won or lost for a select few.

Special money and the labor/action calculation

In Mioveni, gambling is widespread among males of all ages, for the simple reason that it represents one of the few opportunities to experience the thrills and excitement of temporary

yet brisk fatefulness—of “action”, as Goffman ([1967] 1982:149-270) puts it.²⁵⁰ There are, of course, many opportunities to experience action vicariously, with sports (and especially football) fandom being the traditional means to do so; delving into the countless tabloid TV shows is a more recent and highly competitive alternative to sports spectating.²⁵¹ In contrast, gambling has the obvious advantage of direct involvement. Beyond this basic principle of directly experiencing fatefulness, however, there is no such thing as gambling “in general.” When seeking action in this way one is confronted with a whole space of possibles, structured according to the degree to which risk can be calculated and alleviated by skill. At one extreme lies sports betting, where taking non-calculated risks constitutes the exception and, indeed, seems to defeat the whole purpose of the gamble. It is quite common for avid sport betters to invest considerable amounts of time and effort into acquiring necessary knowledge for calculating odds and possible outcomes and they routinely employ more or less sophisticated schemes of spreading the risk over multiple bets and options, while also keeping tabs on their overall earnings or losses over longer periods of time. Directly opposed to the dedication and attempts at acquiring mastery of the sports better lies the inherent recklessness of the slot machine gambler. Slot machines offer no means of calculation and leave no room for the gambler to control the gamble. One can, of course, voluntarily set the stakes, but playing with very small stakes, again, defeats the whole purpose and turns slot machine gambling into the dulllest activity possible, devoid of any real action.²⁵² The high stakes, high risks and, consequently, high action loading of this sort of gambling makes it a common object of scorn, with the regular—that is, addict—slot machine gambler constituting the perfect example of human material and moral decrepitude. Gambling, of whatever kind, invariably and simultaneously carries this double risk involving both material and moral stakes. The more money you lose, the less respect you show for its value—and, implicitly, for the hard labor money takes to be earned. Winning too much with too little effort is, apart from dumb luck, likewise infringing of the moral ties between money and labor—a threat which gains substance

²⁵⁰ “By the term *action* I mean activities that are consequential, problematic, and undertaken for what is felt to be their own sake. The degree of action—its seriousness or realness—depends on how fully these properties are accentuated (...). It is here that the individual releases himself to the passing moment, wagering his future estate on what transpires precariously in the seconds to come. At such moments a special affective state is likely to be aroused, emerging transformed into excitement” (Goffman [1967] 1982:185).

²⁵¹ Goffman ([1967] 1982:262) describes the rising popularity of “vicarious fatefulness” as an expanding commercial activity providing low-cost thrills, or fatefulness without chanciness: “These may entail make-belief, biography, or a view of someone else’s currently ongoing fateful activity. But always the same dead catalogue of lively displays seems to be presented. Everywhere opportunity is provided for us to identify with real or fictive persons engaging in fatefulness of various kinds, and to participate vicariously in these situations.” With the practical disappearance of local and regional sports teams and the decline in performance of Romanian football, the thrills of sports fandom have diminished significantly. Since they systematically combine the orchestration of fatefulness with blatant reaffirmations of class boundaries and infringements of working-class standards of morality (as well as gender boundaries and standards of masculinity), tabloid TV shows are much less effective in facilitating the identification process Goffman speaks of and so their status remains permanently ambiguous: while they elicit curiosity and excitement, they also oftentimes provoke anger and violent rejection.

²⁵² This is not the case with sports betting, where one can immediately aim at considerable winnings with small stakes; experienced gamblers go for such bets on the side, as an addition to their regular bets, just for the kicks. The difference between sports betting and slot machine gambling is also reflected in the fact that the former can be (and oftentimes is) approached instrumentally—that is, not for its own sake, not for the action, but primarily for the money—while the latter cannot credibly be approached in this way.

with new risks accompanying the sudden reaping of a large sum of money that does not directly correspond to labor expenditure.²⁵³

Between the two extremes of the sports bet and the slot machine, local gambling establishments offer a whole gamut of opportunities for experiencing action with different degrees of control over risk. Deciding on what type of gamble to get involved in or whether to gamble at all depends on a balancing act between the thrill of action and the value of labor. Action in the form of gambling appears simultaneously as a necessary complement to the everyday grind of work and as an anathema of its dignity. This is why, while many workers refuse to gamble and some have an explicit aversion toward the very idea of gambling, the temptation never disappears completely and the danger of “catching the bug” or “getting the taste” always lurks around the corner. The regulation of gambling in recent years—consisting in the elimination of informal gambling practices and establishments and the confinement of action to dedicated spaces, which have mushroomed on both sides of the town’s main boulevard—merely yielded a partial displacement of this dilemma rather than removing it altogether. Regulation and confinement have, on the one hand, almost completely eliminated the dangers supposedly springing from the collective character of informal gambling—with temptation allegedly being heightened by “entourage” and mutual entrainment and risks being heightened by the increased possibility of being cheated and by the promiscuity of informal gambling and its association with other activities characterized by high degrees of material and moral risk. On the other hand, they have democratized gambling, to the extent that now anyone can safely place a bet as they please regardless of how much money they want to wager. Regulated gambling involves an individual transaction between a customer and a service provider. In theory, it is as safe as the gambler wants it to be.²⁵⁴

Barbut as character contest

This individualization is inscribed in the very organization of regulated gambling: from the sports bet to the slot machine, you always gamble against the house and not against other players.²⁵⁵ Informal or street gambling is, almost as a rule, exactly the opposite: not confined action, but loose “interpersonal action” (Goffman [1967] 1982:207)—action in which each gambler is an integral part of the “fields of action” of others—always involving the exercise of some sort of skill, even when the formal rules of the game stipulate total equality between

²⁵³ This largely depends on what one does with the money. Winning a large sum does not necessarily “make you a man.” It merely grants you the chance to prove that you are one. Most of the time, it is said, rampant and wasteful consumption and being cheated by others can rapidly turn one’s fate from being chosen to being damned. This reinforces the ubiquitous principle that “money that doesn’t come from your own labor brings only trouble”—see also Verdery (1996:182). If you waste such opportunities, however, regardless of the reasons, you do not necessarily become worthy of contempt—as the addict gambler is—and are rather regarded as naïve or, at worst, plain stupid. Losing what one has not earned through one’s labor constitutes much less of a moral infringement than willingly losing what one has earned through hard work, regardless of how disproportionately large the former loss is moneywise in comparison to the latter. Things get fuzzier once past labor is involved—either someone else’s, as in the case of inheritance, or one’s own, as happens with the buyout lump sums. In short, gambling money is always “special” (Zelizer 1989), though how different it is from money earned through labor depends on its exact source and quantity.

²⁵⁴ The regulation of gambling was part of the plan of creating a proper urban environment and clearing public (and sometimes even private) space of undesirable people and practices (see part III).

²⁵⁵ Except for poker, which is not among the popular games in Mioveni.

players. As opposed to regulated gambling, street gambling thus routinely takes the form of a contest between participants.²⁵⁶ This can make for an entirely different dynamic both inside and outside the game and, for the initiated, can considerably up the ante.

Take the evening's dice game of *barbut*. The formal rules are simple: two players throw the dice in turn and the winning combination gets the pot, to which players contributed equally in advance; the one who throws first decides what rule the current throw is based on.²⁵⁷ Players have mathematically equal chances of winning. If there are more than two present (and there usually are, since having only two players reduces intensity and thus largely removes the purpose of the game), they take turns in throwing the dice; all the while, spectators or those waiting for their turn have the option of participating in side bets. This makes for a very simple yet highly dynamic game in which, depending on the stakes, large amounts of money can change hands in a matter of minutes. With all players having equal chances, *barbut* is, at least objectively, a game of pure chance and provides a much more fertile soil for superstition than games in which players have a certain degree of control over their fates. Apart from sticking to the formal rules, players therefore routinely engage in self-encouragement and each has a personalized set of rituals for conjuring fate. More importantly, players employ various tactics in attempting to discourage others, ruin their luck, make them angry so they bet recklessly, or distract their attention from the current bet or throw. This turns *barbut* from a simple game of dice-throwing into a highly complex exchange based on constant argument, mutual harassment, bullying, and intimidation. Indeed, what makes *barbut* into such an attractive game for some and such a loathsome one for others is precisely this drastically simple setup ensuring formal equality combined with the back-and-forth hustling that oftentimes far exceeds the comfort zone of regular social interaction.²⁵⁸ The formal rules of *barbut* allow no room for skill; its unspoken rules and real-life social dynamic nonetheless presuppose enough room for maneuver on the part of those skilled in social interaction of a particular kind to make the game appear like more than just a mathematically pure play on chance.

The game can, of course, be played without the hustling and, on this occasion, this is how the spectators and occasional players who briefly dared to enter the game preferred to approach it. For them, the point of honor lay in finding an adequate balance between action

²⁵⁶ "While one person is providing a field of action for another, that other can in turn use the first individual as his field of action. When this reciprocity of use is found and the object is to exercise a skill or ability of some kind, we speak of a contest or duel. What occurs at these scenes might be called *interpersonal action*" (Goffman [1967] 1982:207).

²⁵⁷ The commonly accepted rules, as presented by Bollman (2014:145-6), are for so-called "clean" or simple *barbut*, in which three pairs (3-3, 5-5, 6-6) win and the other three (1-1, 2-2, 4-4) lose. As Bollman demonstrates, in such a game players have mathematically equal chances of winning. The street rules, which are not fixed and may vary from game to game, are much more complex and include multiple combinations for winning and losing, possibilities of extending a challenge beyond a single throw, etc. The supplementary rules are not meant to introduce any sort of in-built handicap favoring one player or another. They simply add diversity to the game and provide extra room for maneuver in acting upon other players.

²⁵⁸ The formal rules offer little room for hustling. As with other gambling games involving interpersonal action, a player with very little money left can easily be pushed out of the game by simply raising the stakes to the maximum. "Dice cutting," which consists of voluntarily stopping the dice before they would have on their own, is the only way to intervene in a throw without violating the rules. Dice cutting serves no other purpose than intimidation, distraction, and conjuring misfortune (by interrupting a winning streak, for example). For maximum effect, repeated dice cutting can be employed, though abusing this method without sparking confrontation is a privilege only respected players have.

and labor, of dipping into just the right amount of the former in order not to infringe upon the latter. In such tempting situations, the strength of character associated with dedication to hard work is reaffirmed most forcefully by rejecting temptation altogether. Even more so in this particular instance, given that *barbut* comes with the added hassle and danger of being hustled and that its public character and unnecessary exposure risks adding insult to financial injury. This almost abhorrent character of *barbut* in the eyes of some stands in direct contrast with the passion it provokes in others.

The stark boundary between spectators and players separated two very different methods of calculating the stakes of the game. For core players—that is, for those who entered the game from the very beginning and who did as much as they could to stay in it—it was precisely this increase of the stakes far beyond what can be gauged by the usual action/labor calculation that constituted the main point of attraction. They actively sought both the publicness and the opportunity of entering the hustle, since the point of honor for them lied not in staying out of the game or prudently participating, but rather in giving it everything necessary to come out on top. Participation, and not refusal, was necessary proof of one's strength of character; sufficient proof consisted in holding one's ground and staying ahead of the others. Though within this logic money and action maintain a crucial importance for their own sake, they become intrinsically tied to the competition for honorability: money is necessary to participate and to intimidate; action is sought not just for the thrill but also for proving that you can handle it more than others (players and spectators). The larger the pot, the more intense the action becomes and the stronger you prove yourself to be by playing, hustling, and winning.

Such “character contests,” says Goffman ([1967] 1982:239-58), emerge when the honor of individual participants becomes the stake of interpersonal action, turning gambles into “moral games,” rather than simply more or less expensive ways of seeking thrills.²⁵⁹ When played properly, *barbut* thus resembles a case of “deep play” (Geertz 1973). Though less dramatic, certainly less elaborate and far less scripted than the Balinese cockfight, serious gambling like *barbut* also requires for participants to keep the strictly utilitarian aspects of the gamble at bay and focus on the foregrounded moral game. As Geertz (1973:434) argues, on such occasions, money, though massively important in itself, gains an added significance: “the more of it one risks, the more of a lot of other things, such as one's pride, one's poise, one's dispassion, one's masculinity, one also risks, again only momentarily but again very publicly as well.” In contrast to the deep play Geertz found in Bali, in Mioveni the contest is not mediated by anything resembling the cockfight; while the dice do offer a partial substitute, to a considerable extent the game involves direct confrontation and measurements of character. This is why intense games such as the one I witnessed harbor a direct and immediate threat of physical violence to a degree of persistency and plausibility otherwise unseen in other types of

²⁵⁹ In such situations, “[e]ach person will be at least incidentally concerned with establishing evidence of strong character, and conditions will be such as to allow this only at the expense of the character of the other participants. The very field that the one uses to express character may be the other's character expression. And at times the primary properties at play may themselves be openly made a convenience, pointedly serving merely as an occasion for doing battle by and for character. A *character contest* results; a special kind of moral game” (Goffman [1967] 1982:240, emphasis in original). This is the case only with interpersonal action, and cannot happen when action is sought and elicited individually. While regulated gambling excludes direct character contests, street gambling openly favors such rivalry.

interaction rituals between the same participants.²⁶⁰ This only adds to the dangerous character of a deep game of *barbut* and reinforces the taboo around participation.

The social foundations of deep play and the hysteresis effect

Barbut is not for everyone. Though it is inherently democratic (with its simple rules and not needing more than a pair of dice for equipment), it holds a quasi-legendary reputation of being a game strongly tied to immoral (and oftentimes outright criminal) behavior and total personal ruination. Apart from its deepness, what was notable in the case of this particular evening's game was the setting up of a clear boundary between players and spectators, cutting across the smaller groups previously assembled at the corner and separating between those for whom the game offered a spectacle worthy of fear, contempt or, at most, well-tempered interest and those for whom it offered a chance to prove courage and strength of character. A brutal and undignified free-for-all for most, the chance of playing was nonetheless embraced as matter of duty by a select few. For the former, the money won at gambling carries no honor and only increases exposure to temptation and vulnerability; for the latter, the same money is primarily a carrier of honor and proves that one is strong enough to embrace temptation and handle whatever others throw at him. From a present-day perspective, it was impossible to grasp what lay behind these almost diametrically opposed stances on the stakes at hand, as they appeared relatively arbitrary. What in fact distinguished core players from spectators was the decisive shaping of their life trajectories (as well as their *habitus*) by their previous commitments to the informal economy of car parts trafficking that by this time had completely disappeared as a viable alternative to earning a living via formal labor expenditure in manufacturing.

The strong relationship between gambling, as interpersonal action and deep play, and the parts trafficking economy was neither random nor a matter of perilous extravagance or immoral caprice—even if this is precisely what it looked like to outsiders. Intense interaction rituals such as the evening's game of *barbut* served as catalysts for the smooth operation of trafficking networks and were key occasions for the setting up and sealing of transactions. Just as importantly, they buttressed interpersonal and intergroup rivalries and hierarchies and served as a mechanism for the public display and enhancement of reputation. Having money, handling the risk and the constant pressure, being a good hustler and commanding physical force (either your own or that of others) when needed were the skills that made a difference in the parts trafficking profession—they were at the same time a signal and a guarantee of success. While locally unique and highly distinctive, this intertwinement of rituals involving a considerable degree of risk and the daily affairs of the world of work is a regular occurrence when work itself elicits and implies action through its very object and organizational characteristics. “A very special relationship to the world of work” (Goffman [1967] 1982:181-8) takes shape when daily work is inseparable from action, where risk-taking is sought and embraced both for its own sake and for its practical purposes, since it constitutes the chance to practice or at least improve upon one's own trade. More than skill, reputation or the easement of transactions, and beyond the turning of necessity into virtue that comes with performing risky work (Goffman [1967] 1982:182), such intense rituals conveyed an experience of collective effervescence and

²⁶⁰ Though honor is only exceptionally not a stake in regular interaction between male peers, in everyday situations verbalized or suggested threats of physical aggression result only from severe breaks with protocol.

produced the necessary emotional energy that, when transferred outside the immediate situation of the game itself and into the realm of work proper, allowed participants to handle risk taking as business as usual, with heightened senses and fates that stood up to the test.²⁶¹

At its peak, this sort of deep gambling was embedded in the proximate everyday affairs of its participants.²⁶² With the transformation of these affairs—that is, with the disappearance of the parts trafficking economy—this ritual lost its immediate economic support and function as well as its role in highlighting and reproducing hierarchies outside the immediate ritual situation.²⁶³ The action pertaining to it remained an attraction, but its separation from work rendered it vulnerable to the passing of judgment made by the likes of the evening’s spectators, against whom players can no longer credibly claim to have a material upper hand—since now they perform the same type of work others do—nor for that matter any kind of unequivocal symbolic leverage—since they themselves have come to internalize the action/labor calculation in similar fashion to the ones they called out for being too afraid to play. Consequently, for core players the game appeared, in this particular instance, to be, if not entirely shallow, not quite as deep as they would have wanted it to be; beyond the momentary excitement, in the aftermath they readily expressed their disappointment with the evening’s overall failure in meeting up to the expectations. This happened for several reasons, all having to do with their different present-day livelihoods: some would have gone deeper if more players had joined in; others purposively invested less than they could afford and retreated while they were ahead, in explicit defiance of the restraint on instrumental calculation; finally, the worst off were those frustrated because they could not afford to put their money where their mouths were, who were also inclined to long most for the game’s symbolic profits and to see the extraordinary repetition of this ritual of old as a way of seeking at least temporary redemption.

The material and symbolic orders of the parts trafficking economy, on the one hand, and industrial labor, on the other, endowed players and spectators with different dispositions, allowing them to see the game as either natural or scandalous. This, however, in a present environment in which industrial labor was undoubtedly dominant in terms of both material and symbolic profits. The source of collective disappointment with the game’s quality, players’ individual strategies of coping with the “hysteresis effect” (Bourdieu 1977b:78) produced by this discrepancy between acquired dispositions (geared toward deep play, favoring action) and the situation at hand (in which such deep play was negatively sanctioned, favoring labor) consisted in either insufficient or exaggerated investment, depending on the extent of their integration into the dominant material and symbolic order of industrial labor. Hence, in the spectators’ eyes some managed to remain honorable in spite of their participation, while others merely reconfirmed to everyone that they got what they deserved.

Confronted at the corner shop table that evening were not two clearly distinguished perspectives on the stakes of the game (each grounded in two distinct and almost mutually

²⁶¹ On interaction ritual intensity, collective effervescence, emotional energy and its persistence and transfer beyond immediate ritual situations see Collins (2004).

²⁶² In contrast to the Balinese cockfight analyzed by Geertz, which was separated and clearly delineated from everyday life.

²⁶³ Especially after 2000, gambling and other public interaction rituals associated with the trafficking economy were targeted for regulation and elimination by local authorities, with support from at least a part of the town’s residents (see part III).

exclusive valuations of money and risk, in their turn rooted in two apparently very different yet intimately intertwined economies), but rather the remnants of one in a context in which it had been materially eliminated and symbolically encroached upon by the other. Far from always being a clear-cut matter of either/or, simultaneously investing one's labor in the formal and in the informal economies was for many years a highly desirable and relatively common strategy for making a living. What today appear as unquestionable material and symbolic asymmetries in fact represent the congealment of a long-term, convoluted process of transformation of the local labor market, during which formal and informal work opportunities repeatedly traded places when it came to offering the most opportunities and highest foreseeable rewards.²⁶⁴ During this historical transformation of the labor market, individuals like the ones playing and spectating the evening's game of *barbut* were faced with different opportunities and made different choices, the various combinations of which ended up shaping their futures sometimes in ways they could never have calculated even if they had regarded their choices and futures as pristine objects of such long-term calculation. In retrospect, and outside the immediate situation of the game, what really differentiated players from spectators was not that much the extent to which they were into gambling but more importantly what kind of gambles they had made over the years in the labor market. Though unanimously considered the safest bet possible at present, over the past decades persistence in investing one's labor only in working in the plant had not always seemed to be so; conversely, investing in the trafficking economy had not always seemed such a dead end. Though only in extreme circumstances had these two strategies been part of a zero-sum game, the ensuing vindication of the former did end up supplying necessary and sufficient proof of the pointlessness of the latter. And what better way to show this than having living proof in the person of a dedicated player who is unable to play?

Misplaced investments and the weakness of “strong play”

Emil had a particularly bad time that evening, which began with promising excitement and ended in terrible disappointment. He was one of the initiators of the game and, to his despair, among the first to abandon it against his own will. While still in, he was one of the game's main agitators, constantly ranting against his opponents and loudly proclaiming imminent victory on the next throw. After maintaining a positive balance for a few hours, managing to wipe out a couple of occasional players in the process, Emil quickly lost his winnings in a short series of large bets which, instead of toning down his aggressive enthusiasm, made him force himself out of the game by voluntarily doubling the stakes.²⁶⁵ With very little money left, Emil

²⁶⁴ I use Tilly and Tilly's (1998:24-6) understanding of labor markets as combinations of “workers, employers, firms, jobs, hiring, employment networks, and contracts.” Labor markets are not only historically circumscribed, but are also spatially bounded phenomena. Since the local scale is where labor is usually incorporated, allocated, controlled and reproduced, it is more adequate to speak of the existence of local labor markets than national or even regional labor markets (Peck 1996). I also follow Tilly and Tilly in emphasizing that labor markets have both institutional and historical logics and that these might not always be in sync. Though labor markets are capitalist phenomena par excellence, it can be said that, to a limited extent and if we stick close to the above definition, it is also valid to speak of labor markets existing in state socialism. On the broader process of labor commodification in state socialism, with or without labor markets, see Lampland (1995).

²⁶⁵ The loser of one throw can request the chance to win his money back in a second throw (“la pace”—literally, “calling it peace”). At the end of the second throw the first loser can either win his money back or lose twice the initial stakes. “La pace” thus doubles a most likely already high risk (since losing a small bet offers little incentive to try to immediately win one's money back, while losing a large one does).

had nothing else to do but confine himself to small bets and was eventually pushed out of the game by the players who had by then amassed much larger winnings and could easily afford to match whatever Emil could put in. Just before his money ran out he started asking if anyone was willing to lend him money so that he could continue playing. Notwithstanding his promises of giving back every penny and repeated assurances that he could alter the odds in his favor if given the opportunity to “play strongly”—that is, to bully his opponents in a similar way in which he had just been bullied—all his attempts at obtaining a loan failed. Publicly humiliated, Emil refused to hang around without playing and decided to head home early, angrily shouting that he would have won had he been given the chance to play strongly.

It was not just the taboo against *barbut* that made the others wary of lending money to Emil and allow him to prove himself. Most would not lend him money out of principle, since they knew they would most likely have problems getting it back and would have no way of pressuring Emil into keeping his promise—“You don’t want to mess with the madman” is something established regulars say when referring to Emil in his absence, that it is better to leave him be and not get into an argument with him even when he is clearly wrong or out of line. Even so, Emil is not one of those marginals whose presence can be dismissed or acknowledged as one pleases. Partly because he is very assertive and outgoing and partly because he can hold his own in everyday interpersonal interaction, he maintains a relatively good standing among the regulars. Still, keeping up with the slickness and easygoingness of these routine exchanges, which come more or less naturally for the regulars, is a daily struggle slowly draining his resources of self-respect. His exaggerated public displays of masculinity, of toughness, aggressiveness and physical prowess are veiled attempts at concealing and compensating for what in private he sometimes confesses about, not without a tint of desperation: that he is down, that he is ashamed of where he ended up and that he has no idea how to make up for all the wrong choices that he has made across the years. What he does not admit to is that he constantly chooses the worst ways to make up for his shame and ends up only making things worse for himself by producing an entirely different type of wariness in others than the one that paid off in the days when things seemed less foreclosed for him.

At the time of the game of *barbut* described above, Emil had been unemployed for several weeks. His contract with one of Dacia’s suppliers had recently expired and he waited for activity to pick up again at the end of the summer. He was relatively confident he would be called back to his old job starting with September and all he needed was to temporarily keep up with daily expenses on a drastically reduced income—which is quite a challenge for families depending on a single income, like Emil’s was at the time, and almost automatically means going into debt. He soon got his job back, as he expected, but on very different terms: no longer on a company contract, he was hired through a third party—a temporary employment agency from Pitești. Even though he had previously also been employed on a fixed-term contract, now the contract had to be renewed every month. The second shock came when he received his first paycheck and realized he earned about half of what he had previously made doing the same work and, worst of all, half of what his co-workers made, despite working side by side with him.²⁶⁶ His protests were of no use and management insisted that agency work was needed to

²⁶⁶ The 2011 Labor Code allowed for such differential payment schemes.

cut costs as the company faced increased pressure from Dacia and that it would in any case have to let go of a large part of its labor force in the following months. As rumors surrounding the company's relocation became more and more plausible, others concerning the fate of employees to be laid off piled up, only to raise false hopes for Emil that he might somehow manage a transfer to Dacia, together with old employees who had a long time ago been transferred from Dacia as part of the post-privatization outsourcing plan and who were now going back to the assembler as a result of an arrangement secured by the union. At the beginning of 2013, when all these things finally happened, he was left without a job and again felt cheated and suspected foul play, since some of his colleagues had allegedly obtained the much-desired transfer without previously being Dacia employees. Throughout the following months Emil applied for several jobs, which he did not get, occasionally made some money working as a day laborer on makeshift construction sites and got by mostly on what his wife made working at a pastry shop in Pitești. A few months after I left the field he took up on a promise for a job in Italy only to end up being cheated out of a lot of money and barely managing to make it back home. By early 2015 he had found a stable job at a local warehouse. His wife had left him and had filed for divorce, which, apart from the personal drama, left him without anyone to rely upon and completely exposed to any future mishap.

In the span of just a few months beginning with the summer of 2012, Emil experienced the shock of going from a job in the privileged sector represented by Dacia and several of its first-tier suppliers to having to fend for himself in the competition for fixed-term, low-pay and scarce-benefits jobs outside car manufacturing. This proved particularly harsh in his case, since it was the last position a man in his late thirties with two school-age children wanted to be in. Starting with a precarious job in hope of eventually moving at Dacia or one of its main suppliers might work for a man in his early twenties, but someone of Emil's age has little reason to hope for a future change of fate. Too old to reasonably plan for things to somehow get better on their own, he is also far too young to even consider retirement—which workers with secure and well-paid jobs begin thinking about, planning for, and looking forward to by the time they reach their late forties—and he does not have the option of retreating to the countryside. On top of this, the reputation of being a troublemaker and the confrontational demeanor that for years had made Emil proud of himself had gradually turned against him. Finding a job while lacking trustworthy connections proved a daunting task; it also meant that relying on debt during the interim was a no-go. Accepting that he will most likely have to indefinitely live with much less than he had become used to proved extremely difficult. As time passed, his failure to get back on his feet, his increasing spitefulness toward others and continued displays of aggressiveness considerably worsened his already shaky status among those he would have liked to think of as his peers. While his everyday drinking partners increasingly attributed Emil's failures to his inability to swallow his pride and somehow adapt to the situation, he became more and more nostalgic for his youth and constantly emphasized the opportunities he believed to have lost along the way and the choices he now regretted making.

Emil's parents moved to Mioveni from a village in a nearby county in the second half of the 1970s. Like thousands other young families, they were attracted by the availability of jobs at the rapidly growing car plant and the promise of modern living conditions in what in a near future was supposed to become a fully-fledged urban environment (see part III). He went

to the local vocational school and, as it was customary at the time, was on track to get a job at the car plant and become a worker just like his parents. By the time he finished school in the early 1990s, he was well acquainted with neighborhood youth gangs and entered the lucrative trade of car components trafficking. His hulking physique came as an advantage in the world of professional smugglers and at the peak of his trafficking career he worked as “a sort of personal bodyguard” (as he puts it) for the head of a trafficking network and local big shot. He spent most of his time on the town’s streets, hanging out around the dozens of car parts shops and prowling for merchandise both on the outside and on the inside of the plant, while evenings were reserved for gatherings in the bars in the town center, where drinking and gambling prolonged the business day late into the night. Apart from falling out with his parents, Emil’s personal life was uneventful, as he got married at 20 and started a family at the proper age to do so. He remembers his days as a parts trafficker as the best of his life: he had plenty of money, drank imported whiskey, his wife did not have to work and he could afford to get his kids everything they needed. Things started going bad toward the mid-2000s, with parts trafficking progressively becoming less lucrative and more dangerous. After a failed attempt to find work abroad, Emil decided to leave the parts trade and get a job in manufacturing, which is how he ended up working for the company that let him go seven years later, when employment opportunities were dramatically scarcer than at the time he was hired. “I didn’t have a job until I was thirty, if you can imagine that,” Emil insists, as retrospectively he himself seems to find it difficult to believe he managed to pull something like this off in a social environment in which the expectancy for young people to find a job immediately after finishing high school is still quite salient. Things did not go so well in the second half of the 2000s, when the annual pay raises negotiated by the union had yet to add up to significant improvements in workers’ welfare. The part of his savings that did not go into daily expenses he lost on a bad loan to some of his former business partners and in trying to maintain his gambling habits. Faced with severe problems in paying rent, at the end of 2008 Emil and his family moved in the town’s social housing building; he still considers not buying an apartment when he had the money to be one of his biggest failures. What he regrets even more is the decision to leave his job in pursuit of a relative’s promise that he could get a job in Spain and do better than at home, which added up to nothing in the end. After this, getting his old job back was not a big problem, though the terms of his new contract were typical for the period after the adoption of the new Labor Code in 2011: he had to sign a fixed-term contract, potentially rendering him vulnerable to periodic unemployment and eventually allowing for a swift unilateral termination of the long-term relationship with his employer.

One way of grasping the different fortunes forged by long-term investments with uncertain foreseeable returns at particular points in time is to contrast Emil’s winding downward trajectory with that of Bogdan, which at first appears ascending and largely conventional. Bogdan is the same age as Emil. They were in fact classmates at the vocational school in the late 1980s and early 1990s, only Bogdan got a job at the plant immediately after finishing high school, while Emil went into the parts trafficking business. Bogdan made it through the 1990s by supplementing his wages with what he made by fixing cars after work and by pooling resources within his extended family. Things changed only after privatization, when he jumped at the opportunities offered by the plant’s reorganization, changed jobs

multiple times and rapidly moved up the shop floor hierarchy. After taking extramural undergraduate courses, he got a degree in engineering from the Pitești University, which allowed him to “get his robe”—that is, to move up into the ranks of TESA.²⁶⁷ After 2010 he and his family moved out of their cramped two-room apartment in Mioveni into a new detached house at the outskirts of Pitești, something unimaginable just five years before, when wages at the plant had not yet soared. As opposed to Emil, for whom it is only reasonable to expect the worst in the following years, Bogdan has little reason to think things will stop improving for him any time soon. His fate is and always has been intimately and directly intertwined with that of industrial labor in the local car industry.

Bogdan’s advancement from regular worker to successful engineer and Emil’s fall from the heights of the trafficking economy to marginalization and destitution represent two extremes in a finely-grained spectrum in which the in-betweens are vastly more numerous. To be sure, the radical differences between these two trajectories can be retrospectively accounted for in terms of differences in crucial economic and social resources: cultivated as opposed to severed extended family ties, a relatively large and solid household with several wage-earners as opposed to one with a single breadwinner, investment in cultural capital aiming at vertical mobility in the internal labor market of the plant versus job abandonment aiming at horizontal mobility on the external labor market, etc. More importantly, these trajectories exemplify the opportunities available to and choices made by second-generation workers that came of age in the 1990s and were confronted with a labor market that was significantly different from that with which their parents had been accustomed. Work in the plant and work in the informal car parts economy constituted the two pillars of the local labor market at the time. For anyone living in Mioveni in the 1990s and even in the early 2000s, predicting even with a moderate degree of accuracy the situation of the 2010s would have been nothing short of impossible. At the time, Emil’s investment in the trafficking economy most likely looked to be at least on a par with Bogdan’s pursuit of work at the plant. These two sets of opportunities were neither mutually disjunctive on an individual level, nor independent when it came to their social conditions of possibility. If Bogdan’s move from the classroom to the shop floor continued a decades-long tradition with roots in the pre-89 political economy, the same was the case for parts trafficking, whose buoyancy during the 1990s was at the same time a perpetuation and a revaluation of the practices, networks and opportunities that composed the informal trade in automobile components during state socialism.

The political economy of state socialism and the entwinement of the world of industrial work with the second economy of spare parts

The sources of supply and demand

The history of Dacia spare parts trafficking goes as far back as the car has been produced. Far from being a marginal or sporadic phenomenon disconnected from the formal economy of

²⁶⁷ TESA is an acronym for “technical, economic, and social-administrative” personnel, widely used in Romania since before 1989. At Dacia, TESA personnel are easily distinguishable from workers by their different work clothes: workers have gray work pants and coats, while TESA personnel have longer robes of the same color, which they wear over their street clothes.

automobile production, distribution and consumption, between the late 1960s and the end of the 1980s it constituted a systemic byproduct of the state socialist political economy (see Kornai 1992). A burgeoning spare parts second economy was not specific to Dacia, nor was it a Romanian peculiarity; it was common for all state socialist countries that boosted car production and tried to turn the automobile from a luxury good into an object of mass consumption starting with the 1960s (Gronow and Zhuravlev 2010; Siegelbaum 2011). Automobile factories spearheaded the attempted shift from extensive to intensive sources of growth during the second half of the twentieth century, for which it was paramount to develop large domestic markets in consumer goods (Kornai 1992:chapter 9; Wilczynski 1971). The spare parts second economy was tied not only to the demand fueled by the consumption aspirations of ordinary citizens and the distributional (dys)functionalities of state socialism, but also to the opportunity presented to the personnel of automobile factories of acting as suppliers ready to meet this demand. Its conditions of possibility thus comprised the aggregate shortages endemic to state socialist economies as well as the micro-level struggles over the functioning of labor markets and the organization of the shop floor. Inquiring into these conditions of possibility opens up the question of labor in the formal economy and points to the systemic intertwining of industrial work and the second economy of spare parts. While most of these conditions were not specific to the automobile industry, those that gave this relationship a peculiar flavor and a particularly high degree of intensity.

Despite the industry's primary focus on volume and due to the successful promotion of the automobile as a chief symbol of socialist modernity and object of consumer desire, state socialist car markets were notoriously undersupplied, turning distribution into a process laden with both official and unofficial political significance (Gătejel 2010). Initially meant to be mass produced for the Romanian market, Dacia cars became a primary export product during the

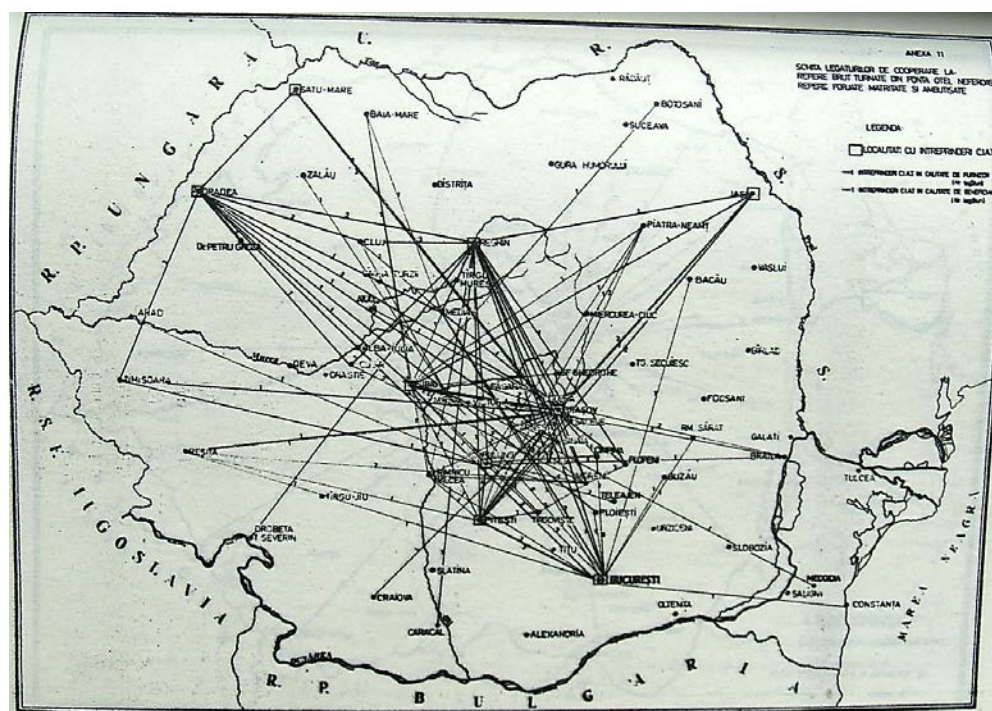


FIGURE II.1. “Outline of cooperation links for cast iron, nonferrous, forged, molded and stamped parts” (for CIAT).

Source: Appendix 11 in Stoianovici (1978).

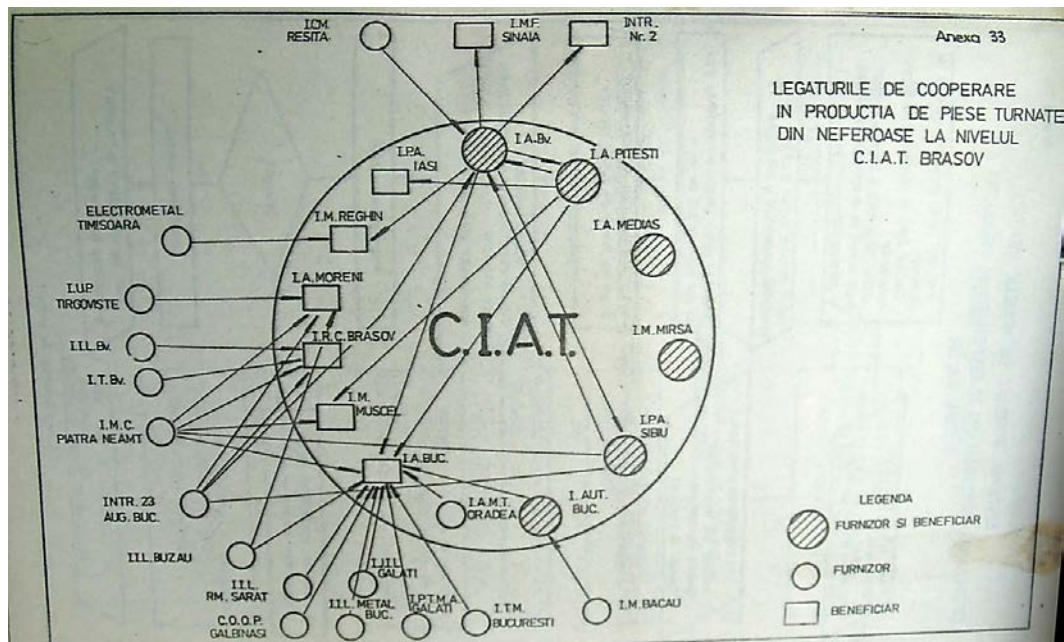


FIGURE II.2. “Cooperation links in the production of nonferrous cast parts at the level of C.I.A.T. Braşov.”

Source: Appendix 33 in Stoianovici (1978).

1980s’ rush for foreign currency (Ban 2012b), progressively adding to the scarcity of automobiles available for sale. If in 1981 only 15 to 20% of assembled automobiles were planned for export, by 1985 the number had increased to 65-70%.²⁶⁸ This massive and persistent shortage led to widespread usage of buyers’ waiting lists and preferential distribution schemes favoring certain social categories; it also created a “shadow economy” comprised of “a complicated and opaque network of illegal and semi-legal practices,” of “hidden transactions on the side [that] came to impersonate more and more the socialist economy per se (...) [instead of] the official planning process” (Gătejel 2010:4). These informal practices proliferated and remained highly lucrative regardless of central authorities’ attempts at curtailing possibilities for sidestepping formal distribution mechanisms. Due to its strategic location and the underdevelopment of a country-wide distribution system, the plant was the social and spatial center of gravity of both formal and informal distribution networks.

Fully assembled cars were only half the story, however, and, considering the difficult-to-embezzle nature of the product, they were definitely the less dynamic one. As demand for spares increased in direct proportion with vehicle assembly, so did the shortages (Siegelbaum 2008:7). This happened first of all because, like with everything else tied to the use and maintenance of personal automobiles (from fuel to infrastructures), spare parts production was significantly neglected in comparison to vehicle assembly: while the production of Dacias regularly surpassed plan targets, the production of spare parts was just as regularly short of the planned output. Demand for parts was further supplemented by the characteristics of the vehicle itself. Plagued by quality problems, the socialist automobile required regular maintenance and parts replacement. Just as important, the design itself allowed users to do their

²⁶⁸ Unless stated otherwise, all the information regarding Dacia production before 1989 used in this section comes from Ion Rîpeanu’s (1985) PhD dissertation on workers’ self-management and the organization of production at the “Piteşti Automobile Enterprise”.

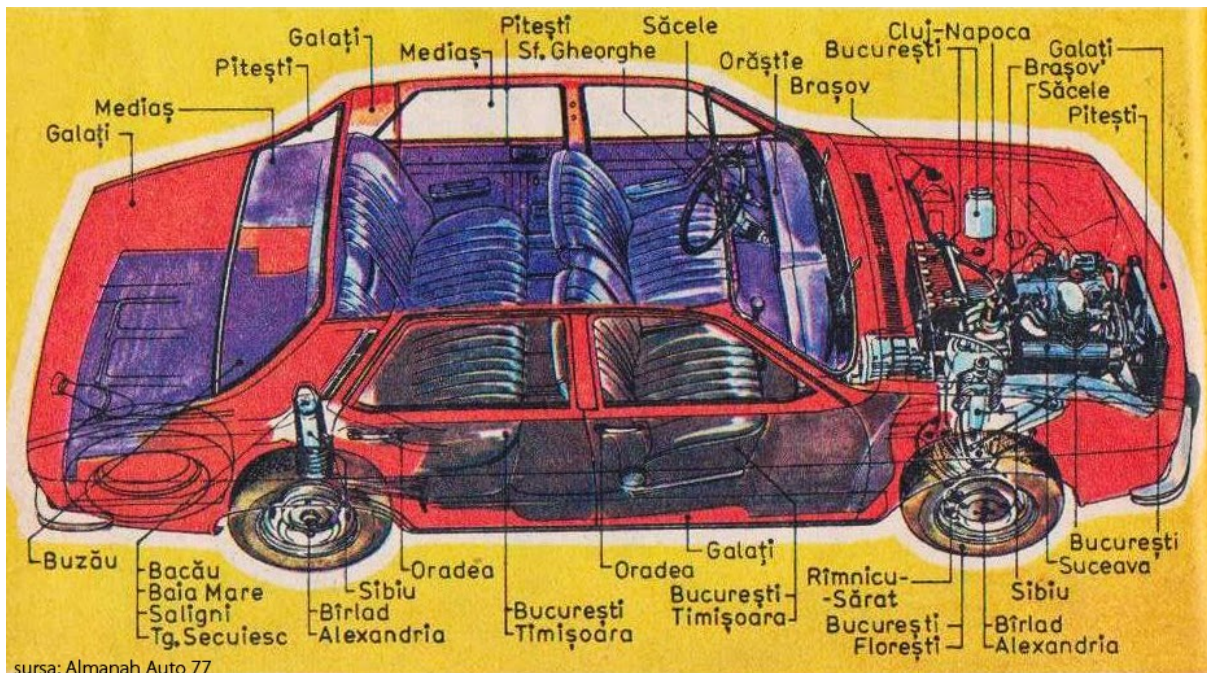


FIGURE II.3. Different parts of the car and the geographical locations where they were produced.
Source: *Almanah Auto*, 1977, online (retrieved March 1, 2015): <http://romaniancar.com/dacia-1310/>.

own maintenance and repair, which authorities actively encouraged them to do.²⁶⁹ This not only led to the mass proliferation of everyday tinkering with cars and parts (Möser 2013) but also allowed ordinary users to seek out needed parts on their own on the black market, without having to go through company- or state-controlled intermediaries. Buyers and sellers could thus transact via personal connections, engage in under-the-counter exchanges at official points of sale, or meet in the “unofficial and sometimes illegal markets” that became a common sight in cities where the informal spare parts economy thrived (French 1995:115). Even though the relatively high degree of criminalization of the second economy by the Romanian government (see Sampson 1988) made such occurrences rather rare in comparison to other state socialist countries, informal buying and selling of car parts flourished via less overt mechanisms of linking supply and demand, along with the rest of the informal trade in basic and less basic consumption goods (see Brezinski and Petersen 1990; Siani-Davies 2006:33).

A typical product of the state socialist political economy, the endemic shortage of spare parts was to a considerable extent an aggregate effect of systemic misallocation. Adding to the fact that necessary parts were not produced in sufficient quantities, those that were available were oftentimes not in the right hands, in the right place and at the right time, as a consequence of widespread, constant hoarding along the production chain. In such a context, insisting on spreading the production chain across as many enterprises and geographical locations as possible only made things worse. This is precisely what Romanian central planners did (see Stoianovici 1978) in their attempt at increasing volumes, sharpening the division of labor between enterprises and creating economies of scale not at the level of individual companies, but rather at the national level and especially at the level of industrial groups—called

²⁶⁹ The idea of producing cars mechanically simple enough for users themselves to be able to service was characteristic for the volume strategy adopted by all state socialist countries and had been pioneered by Ford in the early twentieth century (see Borg 2007).

centrale—that bundled enterprises depending on their contribution to the production of a specific type of product.²⁷⁰ While these groups gathered only a handful of enterprises, the number of external transaction partners was considerably larger (figure II.1), while their geographical spread and multiplication of back-and-forth relationships led to an exponential increase of the complexity of the supply chain (figures II.2 and II.3).²⁷¹ In the mid-1980s, with only 1800 out of the 5250 parts that went into the final product being produced internally, the Pitești Automobile Enterprise maintained direct relationships with approximately 200 separate companies and had approximately 600 suppliers in total. Suppliers' failure to meet deadlines and managers' inability to control the relationship with suppliers due to their geographical spread systematically produced supply problems and jeopardized the output. From a grassroots perspective, for whom they were within arm's reach, the persistence of bottlenecks at particular points in the production chain offered ample opportunities for syphoning parts into the second economy. The assembly plant itself was, again, the most advantageous location, since this is where all types of parts eventually piled up into large, "super-normative" stocks. Hence, such bottlenecks were at the same time a bane for those concerned with plan efficiency and a boon for those interested in making some money on the side.

Workers' autonomy and the convergence of supply and demand

Spare parts hoarding, bottlenecks along the production chain and difficulties in streamlining the supply flow were not the only characteristics of the state socialist political economy favoring informal parts trading. Workers had to have access to these goods and exploiting opportunities had to be possible with a degree of risk that was manageable and compatible with their standing in the enterprise. As analyses of the state socialist second economy (Sabel and Stark 1982) have shown, these preconditions were met due to the systematic buttressing of workers' relatively high bargaining power in relation to managers, springing from a situation akin to permanently tight labor markets, in its turn produced within a triangle of relations of cooperation and conflict between central planners, enterprise managers and workers over the allocation of labor power. The proliferation of generalized bargaining between these three sets of actors gave workers enough leverage and allowed them enough room for maneuver to invest part of their efforts in the informal economy and thus supplement their incomes.

Chronic aggregate shortages and persistent difficulties in allocating labor power according to planners' vision of efficiency partly resulted from enterprise managers and workers pursuing their own immediate interests. Managers hoarded labor power to attract larger subsidies, increase their political influence on a local level, and create buffers they could

²⁷⁰ The production of Dacias was at first part of the Brașov Industrial Group for Vehicles and Automobiles (*Centrala industrială pentru autovehicule și autoturisme*—CIAT). Founded in 1969 and reorganized in 1973, CIAT was split in the spring of 1978 into the Industrial Group for Transport Vehicles (*Centrala industrială de autovehicule pentru transport*), with the headquarters in Brașov, and the Industrial Group for Automobiles (*Centrala industrială de autoturisme*), with the headquarters in Mioveni (then "Pitești-Colibași"). Brus (1986:222-8) discusses this type of organization in the context of Romanian economic reforms of the 1960s and 1970s. While these reforms were declaredly aimed at giving more autonomy to enterprise management, they also entailed the strengthening central control over local economic affairs (Brus 1986; Kaser and Spigler 1982). For an English-language account of the organization of the state socialist car industry, see Pavlínek (2008:36-45).

²⁷¹ For an early description of the internal and external connections along the supply chain, see Ștefănescu, Moroșan, and Soare (1972:95-103).

readily throw into production on the frequent occasions when planners suddenly increased plan targets. For these reasons, enterprises competed with each other over labor power. To planners' dismay, this meant that "what is functional for one enterprise becomes dysfunctional for another"—which was, of course, considered "theoretically abnormal for a planned economy" (Cernea 1973:321). One way to try to curb this was to pressure managers into sticking to the plan, as Rîpeanu (1985) suggested after finding that Dacia had approximately 10% more workers than stipulated in the plan, although he also stressed the enterprise faced a persistent shortage of highly skilled employees, which made coping with the yearly average of 5 to 6 apparently arbitrary changes of plan figures a considerably difficult task. A complementary approach to curbing labor turnover consisted in addressing inter-enterprise mobility from the workers' perspective (see Cernea 1973), though planners had very few direct means of addressing workers' main motivations and ended up adopting measures of forced stabilization of the labor force consisting in disincentives for mobility doubled by indirect incentives for stability.²⁷² As Cernea shows, over time aggregate labor turnover increased constantly and new enterprises with relatively young labor forces such as Dacia were particularly affected by this.

Enterprise managers also struggled with workers' mobility, as for them turnover was a double-edged sword: it allowed them to supplement their worker contingents while at the same time threatening to lower them and put their standing at risk. Despite planners' attempts at imposing negative sanctions on workers' movement, workers retained a certain degree of control over their own mobility, allowing them to at least consider moving between enterprises that competed for the hoarding of labor power.²⁷³ Though there were many reasons for workers wanting to change employers, several surveys in Romanian factories (Cernea 1973) found that obtaining higher incomes was by far the dominant one, resulting from the fact that, in spite of their not having to face fears regarding employment, workers had to deal with permanent uncertainty in regard to their earnings (Burawoy 1985:171; Burawoy and Lukács 1992:66; Stark 1986:495).²⁷⁴ Managers had limited direct control over wages, so enterprises could compete overtly mostly via competitive fringe benefits. Less overt was managers' (differential) willingness to bargain with workers, first, over piece rates, work norms and bonuses, and, second, over the usage of various company resources (including labor expenditure) in supplementing their incomes by participating in the second economy (Sabel and Stark 1982). At the enterprise level, managers and workers thus sealed a "fragile cooperation" (Sabel and

²⁷² These measures, as they applied in the 1980s, are discussed in Rîpeanu (1985). See also Kaser and Spigler (1982) and Brus (1986:224-5).

²⁷³ Cernea (1973) points out that the number of those who considered moving to another enterprise was considerably larger than those accounted for by aggregate turnover statistics.

²⁷⁴ Importantly, "enjoying a better regime" on the job ranked third in these surveys, behind wages and working closer to the place of residence. This was not random, as "a better regime" meant "more autonomy on the shop floor". As Durand and Hatzfeld (2002:24, 235) show, the "working atmosphere," or *ambiance*, is the main object in "the play of co-operation, negotiation, conflict and readjustment between those directly concerned"—that is, between workers and management from across the hierarchy. The "it's not like it used to be" formula, which Durand and Hatzfeld heard very often at the Peugeot plant in Sochaux in the 1990s, is also common among older Dacia workers when it comes to comparing the pre- and post-privatization periods. Just like at Peugeot, this should not be interpreted merely as yet another instance of nostalgia, since it does indeed speak to the changing atmosphere on the shop floor. The dissolution of relatively autonomous networks on the shop floor was central to this change of lived and perceived *ambiance*. Since it depended on the functioning of these networks and was deeply anchored in workers' autonomy, the parts trafficking economy was imbued with the overall positive work atmosphere, to which it contributed by adding elements of play and reward.

Stark 1982:443) through which they could pursue their separate interests in collusion with one another. The price for managers securing necessary contingents of labor was their indulgence toward various acts of indiscipline and pilferage of enterprise resources. For workers, the possibility of earning an income on the side resulted from “a form of disguised collective bargaining” that was “no less collective or conflictive for being disguised.” Operating as a systemic mechanism of labor regulation in the state socialist system, participation in the second economy was thus “both a partial result and a prop of the shop-floor power of workers in the core enterprises covered by the plan” (Sabel and Stark 1982:457; 61).²⁷⁵

In trying to cope with shortages, managers not only needed to hoard labor, but also had to secure the active cooperation of the workforce in meeting plan targets in a situation of endemic supply flow problems and constant changes of plan targets. Active cooperation could not be obtained via an exercise of centralized power and the enforcement of strict hierarchical supervision, as the endemic shortages and sudden changes in expected output and necessary labor input blunted these instruments of labor control.²⁷⁶ Shop-floor flexibility, autonomy and self-management were prerequisites in meeting plan targets in such a context (see Burawoy and Lukács 1992; Stark 1986). Worker control over the labor process translated into the emergence of strong informal groups on the shop floor, which then acted as an organizational basis for bargaining with management. As Stark (1986:496) puts it, in a state socialist enterprise “it is personal membership in a group and not impersonal membership in a formal category that makes the individual a potential beneficiary of the informal bargaining.” Workers did not enjoy equal access to group membership, however, nor did members have an equal standing within these groups. Personal ability to engage in and benefit from informal bargaining depended on having control over strategic positions in the labor process (e.g., where bottlenecks needed to be cleared up quickly), control over scarce technical and “political” skills (Stark 1986:496), as well as command over social capital.

Informal bargaining of this kind was not universal and egalitarian but selective, delineating stark inequalities between workers: what mattered most was “not human capital but social capital, not the credential but the credit, not seniority on the employee’s workbook but the connections that can be acquired over the years” (Stark 1986:503). The selectivity of membership and the asymmetries internal to these networks led to the formation of informal

²⁷⁵ According to one director of the Pitești Automobile Enterprise, those caught stealing were “punished on the job,” meaning they had to do overtime to pay for what they had stolen. Despite widespread rumors of extraordinary amounts of money being made off spare parts smuggling, very few employees were actually caught and the deeds of big names seem to have remained the stuff of legends. See “Mihai Dumitru despre Nicolae Ceaușescu, ‘metrul cub de bani’ și ‘gura lui Mihai’.” *Puls*, June 23-28, 1998. “Mihai’s mouth” was, apparently, a place in the plant where parts were “swallowed up”, disappearing from the books and from the premises. Dumitru also talks about the embezzling of fully assembled vehicles and the endemic problems of keeping track of accounts and actual physical output. Rîpeanu speaks of significant discrepancies between the accounting of planners, that of the central enterprise management, and what was actually on the books further down the enterprise hierarchy.

²⁷⁶ Burawoy and Lukács (1992:103-5, 30-31) show how the introduction of computer systems in the management of production was severely hampered by permanent shortages and bottlenecks along the production chain. Centralized control was precluded by the difficulty of obtaining accurate knowledge of the movement of materials and products in the labor process. This also gave employees considerable leeway to manipulate permanent stocks as well as impromptu pile-ups to their own advantage. The difficulty of ensuring even the most basic monitoring of the production flow by upper-level management contributed to the radical opacity of shop-floor dynamics, thus undergirding workers’ autonomy (see Durand and Hatzfeld 2002).

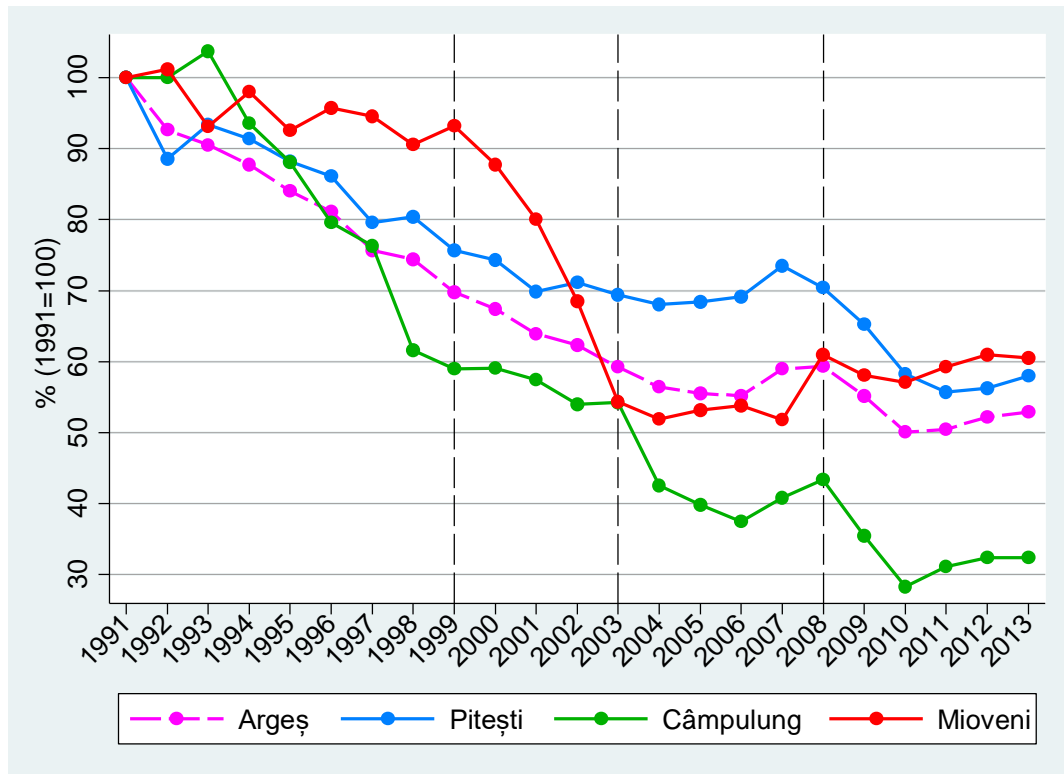


FIGURE II.4. Employees in Mioveni, Pitești, Câmpulung, and Argeș County (% , 1991= 100%), 1991–2013.

Data source: National Institute of Statistics. Author's calculations.

hierarchies that paralleled and even trumped the formal organization of the shop floor. While marginalized workers like Miklós Haraszti (1978) were bound to experience the shop floor as a despotic and alienating environment, where the most escapist gesture available was the production of “homers” with little to no value on the black market, those with a good standing in the informal hierarchy had considerable space of maneuver in bargaining over work norms, trying to obtain transfers to better jobs, and engaging in income-producing activities on the side.²⁷⁷ This resulted in an overlap between formal and informal hierarchies as well as between returns from formal and informal activities, thus reinforcing inequalities between workers (Burawoy 1985:194). For those who were well established within shop floor networks, performance in the formal economy came together with increased opportunities for participation in the informal economy. In a context of shop floor self-management, lack of centralized control and a “squeezing” of middle management (Burawoy and Lukács 1992:96-100), the making of homers was not at all as vital as Haraszti believed and merely supplemented the experience of a shop-floor climate of cooperation and solidarity (Burawoy and Lukács 1992:102). Such a climate was more resembling of a “mock bureaucracy” (Gouldner [1954]

²⁷⁷ For a comparison between these two very different types of experiences, see (Burawoy 1985:chapter 4; Burawoy and Lukács 1992:8ff). “Homers” were objects without any particular utility or market value, which workers made on the side in order to alleviate the drudgery of work routines by experimentation and creativity (see Gille 2007:69-77; Haraszti 1978:138-46). Workers at the Dacia plant also engaged in making such objects, though they were not entirely devoid of practical use—they varied from knives to Christmas tree lights.

1964:182-7) than of a “bureaucratic despotism” where workers are at the whim of supervisors and are confined within rigid formal rules outside their control.²⁷⁸

Wither state socialism

The pre-89 second economy of spare parts was deeply embedded in the functioning of the state socialist political economy and operated as a mechanism for regulating labor by supplying consumption opportunities and income supplementation. It was buttressed by key features of this political economy: the promotion of relatively autonomous users; a low quality product requiring constant repair and maintenance; constantly growing demand for both cars and parts coupled with persistent undersupply due to the prioritization of exports instead of the internal market and the production of assembled vehicles at the sacrifice of spare parts production; inefficient and underdeveloped official distribution networks; a relatively decentralized production chain favoring hoarding and shortages; relations of mutual dependence between planners, managers and workers in which the latter benefitted from the chronic aggregate shortage of labor power and from enterprises competing over attracting workers on top of the limits set by planners; a relatively autonomous, informal organization of the shop floor, involving the formation and reproduction of strong networks whose principles of internal differentiation were not those of the formal hierarchy and which simultaneously produced at least a partial overlap between formal and informal shop floor hierarchies and a blurring of these hierarchies by engendering fraternity and solidarity among workers as well as between workers and low-level supervisors. These were the conditions of possibility for the emergence and expanded reproduction of the second economy of spare parts before 1989. As such, during this period there was no clear boundary between formal industrial work and informal engagement in the parts trade, neither network-wise, nor temporal and not even spatial.

After the change of regime, it took no less than two decades for the informal parts trade to completely cease playing a role on the local labor market. This drawn-out process was a rather unique local feature. Contrary to the standard narrative of postsocialist labor decline, in the 1990s the parts trade did not die out with industrial work, as industry in Mioveni managed to survive relatively intact and employment in the formal sector did not witness a decline like in its neighboring cities of Pitești or Câmpulung (figure II.4). In contrast to the well-known narrative in which the second economy was rapidly severed from the formal sector and turned into a precarious appendage offering opportunities primarily for the outcast (see Bodnár 1998), the parts trade in Mioveni remained strong and even flourished in the first decade after 1989. While ensuring its persistence, the changing conditions of existence of the informal parts economy also triggered its sequential transformation and final disappearance. Given its umbilical ties with the plant, the fate of the informal parts trade depended on the shifting fortunes of work in industry. Together, these two intertwined trajectories point toward a more

²⁷⁸ As Burawoy and Lukács (1992:8) argue, the situation was characterized by “the potentiality but not the reality of bureaucratic despotism,” which, in exceptional situations, could become reality for all those involved and not just for marginalized workers. For a more general perspective, with a particular focus on Romania, on the relationship between official bureaucracy and informal practices in state socialism, as well as the place of the informal sector developing around factories producing consumer goods see Sampson (1985; 1987; 1988). “Mock bureaucracy” in factories was an instance of the broader “judicial informality” widespread under state socialism (see Böröcz 2000).

encompassing history of regulation of the local labor market. From this perspective, the post-89 era comprised four distinct periods in which the parts trade evolved in close relation to the transformation of industrial work in regulating the local labor market: the ambivalently prosperous 1990s, lasting up to the plant's privatization in the second half of 1999 (chapters 7–9); the period of deep restructuring, lasting for four years between 2000–2003 (chapter 10); the uncertain mid-2000s and the post-2008/9 segmentation and stabilization during the economic crisis (chapter 11). The move from one period to another was marked by significant changes of work in the plant, of the conditions of existence of the informal parts trade, and of the overall structure of the local labor market. By offering distinct opportunities for employment and putting people on diverging professional trajectories, each historical segment yielded contrasting personal histories—both intragenerational, like the ones of Emil and Bogdan outlined above, and intergenerational. Behind such stories lies a structural history of labor market regulation in which the trafficking economy and the industrial economy grew further and further apart. In other words, this succession entailed a deepening separation between work in industry and the spare parts trade as an increasingly stark boundary between the formal and informal activities emerged and triggered a realignment of their relationship.²⁷⁹ This separation was a chief object of controversy throughout this entire period, and it acted as a major stake in struggles waged both inside and outside the plant. Conflict over the imposition of such a boundary was sparked in the very first days of 1990.

²⁷⁹ For a general view on changes in the relationship between formal and informal economic sectors, see Castells and Portes (1989:12-3).

CHAPTER 7

GREAT EXPECTATIONS, AMBIVALENT REALITIES: CONFRONTING THE MARKET IN THE 1990S

The auspices of survival

The Romanian worker of the past 42 years has gone through periods in which wages fluctuated depending on political options, the political climate and, especially, the rapaciousness of the ruling cliques and not least to his belonging to a certain social class. These antagonisms “were waged” under the pretext of class struggle and were followed by the levelling of wages during the past 15 years. We should set aside that which has been and focus on what has to be done to overcome the paradox orchestrated by the [discrepancy between] incomes from wages and the expenses necessary as minimum conditions for living. Will we still have to work only to exist, as if we were robots restricted to precise functions, or do we have to recreate, to cultivate ourselves and recover our capacity to labor. What percentage can someone living strictly off wages reserve for books, theaters, films, concerts, opera shows, traveling in the country, a holiday in some resort, sports, and, why not, enjoying the week-ends and maybe even for a trip abroad? Until now these privileges belonged to the “*nomenclatura*,” actually feeding off our labor. Today it seems only “slicks” [*descurcăreții*] (profiteering [*bișniță*], theft [*hoție*]) can afford them, since we can’t really believe that one can fulfill such needs from wages alone. We should think of how to bring those struggling to meet the minimum requirements for existence ([those living off] wages) to a decent standard of living, so labor no longer appears as a burden, but as a necessity and, ultimately, a pleasure, since every man is in love with his profession. In a climate devoid of stress and of the permanent struggle for existence, one yields a different output, one has a different perspective on the world and on life, one works differently when feeling that one’s labor is repaid and especially if it offers social and spiritual satisfaction, when sensing in fact one’s usefulness in society.

In reality, until the December 1989 Revolution, those tributary to the wage only had OBLIGATIONS, without being able to meet the standard of decent living and while having all their rights restricted through all sorts of laws and decrees, with nominal incomes constantly diminished to the point of despair.

Unshackled from the marginalization which subjected him for decades, man has come to reconsider earnings from labor and tries to become a *descurcăreț*. It seems like we didn’t have a legal framework adequate for a proper working climate and in some periods WAGES were OFFERED, without OBLIGATIONS, a path chosen by the Administrative boards (protected by the Government), with implicit repercussions for the standard of living. By increasing work rates under certain pressures, by shortening the time of production, the quantity of products on the market shrinks, leading to an environment conducive to profiteering [*speculă*], theft and the proliferation of “*descurcăreți*” (...). We have a long way to go until we understand the downsides of democracy and demand the rights corresponding to labor as such.

Do we really believe that by boycotting labor, by blackmailing leaders, through strikes (...) we will put our products on the market and we will have the ability to pay for what is required for the decent standard of living? I think not. Still, something has to be done. Let’s give up on BUREAUCRACY, on past restraints and grant credit to the principle of PROFITABILITY, to each work team [*formație*], each job [*post*], so they produce according to CAPACITIES, to divide tasks as concrete reality requires, with direct payment weighed according to finished output (piecework with payment only for good parts), and those who blunder should not be paid, thus eliminating themselves, leading to earnings comparable to market prices. We believe the time has come for us to wake up and convince ourselves that through work we can surpass many shortcomings... We should first mind what’s happening in our own yard and only then

look at others. For this a rallying of all forces is needed, a coordination of all actions, in order not to teach others to become “*descurcăreți*” (...), we should spell out each person’s desire for self-realization, a solid link in the chain of values pertaining to progress and licit earnings. Then we will have won our rights.²⁸⁰

Such candid synoptic views of the past, present and future were not uncommon in the first months after December 1989. The starting point was a decided affirmation of the need to break with the political economy of industrial labor under state socialism, with its endemic wage insecurity (depicted here as a discrepancy between work and wages), its pushing of people into seeking an income in the second economy, and its generalized shortages, which further denied ordinary workers the possibility of self-realization and fueled the demand side of the second economy. There was also a need to break with the systemic distortions of the moral economy of industrial labor, which had become materially and symbolically devalued, a far cry from its true potential of bringing about workers’ self-realization.²⁸¹ The coming of the market unshackled this potential, providing an opportunity to (re)establish a virtuous circle between profitability, productivity, work obligations, and a fully meaningful human existence. This, however, would not come about automatically, since there was a risk of repeating the mistakes of the past in futile attempts at compensation—especially by offering payment without work, wages without obligations. The only solution was to rise up to the stringencies of the market: profitability, the existence of value-producing labor, and the social valuation of labor were one and the same thing; there were no shortcuts to the latter. More concretely, this implied an individual and collective dedication to work above everything else and an adaptation of everyday activity to the requirements of production for the market; this dedication had to be repaid accordingly, by realigning obligations and wages, leading to the “self-elimination” of those who did not work properly (or at all), and eventually cancelling out the existence of *descurcăreți*—those who, not unlike the state socialist *nomenclatura*, apparently managed to get by without labor expenditure, or, better said, without labor expenditure of their own.

These were the great expectations that, immediately after (and possibly even before) December 1989 concerned not the second economy (Bodnár 1998), but the first, less the marketplace as a site of exchange and entrepreneurship, than the plant as a place of production and wealth creation. Nonetheless, as it would quickly become apparent, confronting the market in real life was much less straightforward. First, because transforming the industrial bureaucracy would prove not only immensely difficult, but also radically different from the imagined path going from the state socialist mock dictatorship to a representative system based on a fundamental agreement across the hierarchy as to the basic rules of the market and their implication for production. Such an agreement, the editors of the union newspaper believed, should have provided a basis of trust between management and workers, allowing for a substantially democratic organization of the production process. Instead, both management and union came to realize that what was needed was rather something akin to a punishment-centered bureaucracy, with those lower down the hierarchy being in one way or another

²⁸⁰ “Obligații fără salarii, sau salarii fără obligații!?” *Autoturism* 7, September 2, 1990. Capitalized words in the original.

²⁸¹ Such calls for a revaluation of labor via proper remuneration and decent living conditions were a staple feature of Romanian public life in the aftermath of the events of December 1989. They were part of a broader conjuring of professional competence and moral rectitude (Siani-Davies 2006:215-9).



FIGURE II.5. “Dacia’s apocalypse and its four horsemen”: enthusiasm, cunning [*șiretenie*], hunger, and despair.

Source: *Autoturism* 30, December 1993.

constrained into following pre-set rules they did not willingly accept nor understand even if, given the implacability of the market, they were allegedly of paramount importance for ensuring their own survival.²⁸² It soon became clear that the state socialist industrial bureaucracy would not go away on its own and explicit measures would have to be taken for it to be broken down. Most importantly, this would not take the form of a joint project of management, union and employees, since, more than anything, it required fighting against enemies on the inside—a particularly difficult task not only because it decidedly broke with the ideals of an all-encompassing democracy and a common fate, but especially because it was not at all clear who these enemies actually were.

Second, the new problems brought by the market—“the downsides of democracy”—were not going to go away so soon and on their own. Apart from the burdensome legacies of state socialism, the market itself was proving to be fundamentally ambivalent in its effects: on the one hand, it functioned as a civilizational force, with the ability to set right both political and moral economies; on the other, it functioned as a destructive force, pushing previously-existing pathologies to unprecedented heights. Low wages and unmitigated exploitation sat side by side with profiteering and theft; more generally, the chasm between labor retribution and labor expenditure seemed to be widening. A composite discourse quickly became established, made up of opposite interpretations of the meaning of the market and highlighting the thin line between salvation and damnation.²⁸³ In such a situation, plunging head on and embracing the market, out of enthusiasm or desperation, could be just as dangerous as the cunning of the profiteers (figure II.5). Yet, in the last analysis, this was the only option. This

²⁸² On mock, representative, and punishment-centered industrial bureaucracies, see Gouldner ([1954] 1964).

²⁸³ The archetypes of these positive and negative interpretations of the market are discussed in Hirschman (1982). For a more contemporary and theoretically up to date perspective, see Fourcade and Healy (2007).

ambivalence characterized practically every discussion of the present and future of automobile production in Mioveni during the 1990s. The unavoidable question of survival was particularly laden with such ambiguities: if long-term survival was only possible through the market, meeting up to its requirements meant facing life-threatening measures in the short term, since survival in the present seemed to largely depend on fending off the market.

Survival in transition—a justificatory expression to which we have grown accustomed and which is meant to summarize our passing, of the people and the plant, through these times in which we had invested so many hopes. Justificatory for the low wages or wages with less and less value, for the extraordinary thefts, for the poor quality of our products (which sell nonetheless), for the more and more numerous personnel working with decreased efficiency, for the unproductive expenditures, for the good of some or others. Justificatory for the largely illegal collaborations with many LLCs [*s.r.l.-uri*] or, better said, with their owners [*patronii*] or managers [*directorii*], be they locals or not. (...) Our ship is big, for us it is bigger than the Titanic. From the waves of transition, because of too much trust in its (the plant's) safety, too few will be saved. After capsizing. And among those lost there will not only be those who are mature [*cei maturi*], but also many who are dear to both them and us.²⁸⁴

Survival, labor control, and failed separations

Strongly related to the issue of survival in the face of the market and similarly ambivalent to it was that of the *descurcăreți*, those “slick” enough to make a living in the absence of labor expenditure. While condemnations of the *descurcăreți* routinely emphasized their enrichment on the backs of others’ labor, in reality *a te descurca* (“to get by”) was not so much the monopoly of profiteers who willingly rejected labor as it was the only option for a growing number of people who were now increasingly denied the opportunity to labor.²⁸⁵ This was not even the biggest source of difficulties in establishing a clear opposition between workers and *descurcăreți*, since getting by was necessary not just in the absence of labor, but also when labor did not yield an income sufficient for survival. The latter was, in fact, the norm: appealing to extra-work sources of income to secure a living was not just for the overly corrupt and the overly destitute, but seemed to have become second nature for industrial workers themselves.

The impossibility of drawing a clear line separating work in industry from getting by was a direct implication of labor not functioning as a resource that could be monopolized to the advantage of those who possessed it, whose loyalty therefore could not be called upon and whose willing adherence to the rules set up for market success was difficult to entice. This had to be the case, since work in industry was neither sufficiently valuable in itself—it yielded insufficient material rewards and had a weakening symbolic ascendance over its alternatives—nor clearly distinguishable from other economic activities, given that the extra-work surplus could not be eliminated without threatening the very conditions of existence of work itself—that is, without endangering the reproduction of labor power. These obstacles to monopolization were of crucial importance, since rendering industrial work into a desirable

²⁸⁴ “Sănătate, sau moarte lentă?” *InfoAutoturism* 47, October 1994.

²⁸⁵ This latter meaning of “getting by” provides the main framing of Kideckel’s (2008) ethnography of Romanian coal miners in Valea Jiului. Given a context in which the opportunity to labor became virtually extinct for a large number of people, it is understandable that Kideckel downplays the ambiguity of *descurcare/descurcăreți*. If getting by indeed pertained to a “frustrated agency,” as Kideckel puts it, it could just as well be said that it pertained to a “frustrating agency,” a necessary and necessarily parasitical undertaking.

resource whose supply was strictly controlled and to which individuals would have access only on condition of their dedication to the newly set rules and goals was the major solution, adhered to by both management and union, to the organizational problems brought by the encounter with the market in the 1990s. Put differently, as the previous set of relations regulating the labor market were profoundly destabilized, this constituted an attempt at establishing a new mode of labor control for automobile production in Mioveni.

Success required more than just complex moral exhortations. Active measures were necessary to make labor into such a scarce and valuable resource, or at least to make people believe it was so. This was not an easy task since the shattering of the state socialist labor compromise produced an environment prone to antagonism over the organization and management of production. To be sure, the market was a given, but what requirements and effects it had in practice, what opportunities were up for grabs and who was entitled to do the grabbing were anything but agreed upon. The company's relationship with the state, the relationships between enterprises, the shape of the local labor market, and, above all else, control over the shop floor were reproblematicized. Even though planners fell off the grid and the free-for-all of the market had allegedly replaced planned coordination in governing inter-enterprise relations, this did not mean managers now enjoyed unlimited leeway in handling the enterprise's external affairs. If, under such conditions, management could draw on new strengths and was subject to different weaknesses within the enterprise, workers were far from disempowered and could likewise discover new bargaining cards or simply reuse some of the old. The union, of course, was a new major actor at the enterprise level, significantly complicating the new dynamics of force and negotiation. Just as importantly, managers, union leaders and workers faced not only each other, but also had to deal with steadfast opponents within their own ranks. The main outcome of these confrontations was the striking of a new setup of labor control specific to the post-89 pre-privatization period, which had two defining features: the practically intact reproduction of industrial work in an overall context of accelerated industrial decline, mirrored by an unprecedented proliferation of the parts trafficking economy, this time embedded less in a predominantly redistributive political economy than in one permanently haunted by the specter of a ruthless market.

The puzzle of resilience

Dacia had a very peculiar trajectory in the 1990s, as it went through the entire decade without mass layoffs and without any consistent program of personnel reduction. This cannot be explained by a different starting point, since before 1989 Dacia closely approximated the model of continuous planned expansion of production and unplanned labor hoarding. If, according to Rîpeanu (1985), in 1984 the plant employed 20,719 people (with a surplus of around 9%), by 1991 the number of employees had risen to just under 30,000, a threshold reached in 1993, when the entire platform peaked at 30,045 employees.²⁸⁶ Though two years later it would go down to 28,290 and subsequently to 27,429, by 1997 the number of employees was back up to

²⁸⁶ "Rezultate economice." *InfoAutoturism* 61, July 1995. "Pentru a ne edifica." *Autoturism* 15, April 1993.

approximately 29,500.²⁸⁷ At the time of securing the sale to Renault, in 1999, the plant had approximately 28,800 employees.²⁸⁸ One year earlier, the general manager had announced that the plant had 28,302 employees, merely a few hundred less than the 28,706 it employed in September 1994.²⁸⁹ This difference was claimed to be entirely due to “natural losses”—retirements and deaths—with layoffs being avoided by diligent managerial action, appeasing both individual and household needs of survival during hard times and the broader need of maintaining social peace in Mioveni and the Argeş region. Surprisingly or not, union officials routinely attributed the same merit to themselves, instead of management. Right before privatization, and also for a long time after, both representatives of management and union officials claimed for themselves the achievement of maintaining the labor force throughout the 1990s. Nonetheless, in line with the salient ambivalence of the times, managers and union leaders commonly shifted from portraying themselves as valiant defenders of job security to making profuse denunciations of overstaffing and accusations of mismanagement.²⁹⁰

A closer look at the dynamics of the labor force in this decade reveals that, regardless how decisive the actions of managers and union leaders might have been, they were anything but self-denying. Apart from the blatant voluntarism, the heroic account of collective survival in the 1990s was based on three assumptions: that most, if not all of those employed at the end of the decade were already employed at the beginning of “transition”; that most, if not all of those employed first and foremost wanted to keep their jobs at the plant; that the entire decade was characterized, at best, by stagnation and, more realistically, by slow and deadening decline. All heroic belief notwithstanding, these assumptions were false. A glance at the figures in the previous paragraph is sufficient for an immediate invalidation, since they show significant labor turnover persisted throughout the decade. Even more so, these numbers actually underestimate the extent of labor turnover—a major phenomenon, which, instead of being dictated by managerial policy or union strategy, could just as well be said to have dictated both.

The “natural causes” that had allegedly shrunk the labor force by no more than four hundred had in fact accounted for thousands of departures.²⁹¹ Despite reports of people clinging to their jobs and refusing to retire when reaching the age threshold, resistance to retirement was not ubiquitous and plenty did in fact retire, either forcedly or voluntarily.²⁹² More generally, this applied to the entire workforce: though many workers insisted on keeping their jobs, plenty did not. In such conditions, if overstaffing was indeed a mere appendage of the past, a managerial concession, or a union victory against all odds, the labor force should have

²⁸⁷ “Şeful, secretara, şoferul şi canapeaua.” *InfoAutoturism* 53, February 1995. “Indexarea salariilor.” *InfoAutoturism* 61, July 1995. “Raport de activitate al consiliului Sindicatului Autoturisme Dacia pe anul 1997.” *InfoAutoturism* 107, January 1998.

²⁸⁸ “Dacia, o nouă marcă a grupului Renault şi platformă pilot pentru un vehicul nou.” *InfoAutoturism* 132, October 1999.

²⁸⁹ “Raport al managerului general şi al echipei manageriale privind activitatea desfăşurată în perioada 1.01.1994 – 31.08.1998.” *InfoAutoturism* 117, September 1998.

²⁹⁰ It was no problem, for example, for the general manager to characterize the avoidance of mass layoffs as a great success of management and, at the same time, as a big mistake, also of management. “Căderea ‘Daciei’ ar fi un dezastru pentru România.” *InfoAutoturism* 57, April 1995.

²⁹¹ The claim that the shrinking was due only to “natural causes” was also false, since individual firings, as we will see, were not uncommon.

²⁹² A 1996 article mentions that approximately 5,000 people had retired in the previous ten years (a larger part of them, we can assume, toward the end of this period). “Nu am fost uitaţi.” *InfoAutoturism* 81, January 1996.

registered a more significant decline than merely several hundred. Instead, most of those who were forced to leave or did so of their own will were replaced by new hires.²⁹³ From this point of view, the company's personnel policy could appear as somewhat schizophrenic: periods in which overstaffing was lambasted and stops to any sort of hiring and overtime were announced repeatedly (and closely) alternated with periods in which new jobs were made available by the hundreds and overtime was pushed to the maximum and sometimes even made mandatory. Indeed, another remarkable aspect of Dacia's trajectory in the 1990s, apart from the virtual absence of collective firings, was the large number of new employees joining its ranks, repeatedly making the company "a champion of new hires"—the first in the county and one of the largest in the country.²⁹⁴ Somewhat ironically, it was not the layoffs that sparked most controversies—since it was widely accepted that they would follow at one point in the future while remaining hypothetical in the present—but the new hirings, which, not by accident, became a stake in the struggles over the control of the production process. Though managers, union leaders and workers did make the history of industrial work at Dacia during the 1990s, they did not make it as they pleased, as not all circumstances were of their own choosing.

"Money is available, so all we need is cars!"²⁹⁵

For most of the 1990s, the peculiarities of the market for automobiles distinguished car assembly from other industries. The state of the market set the stage for struggles both inside and outside the enterprise, while at the same time being in part determined by these struggles. The exact role the automobile market would end up playing was anything but obvious from the start, since the situation in the first months after the fall of the state socialist regime looked quite dire: adding to the massive losses incurred in the previous years, the enterprise was now bound to lose most of its external customers, which, given the prioritization of exports in the 1980s, would have quickly spelled disaster. While scrambling for securing external contracts, salvation seemed to come from the domestic market, where decades of undersupply had by then produced a queue of more than half a million people who had signed up to receive a Dacia car sometime in the future. This, it was claimed at the time, was enough to keep the plant operating at full capacity for at least five years.²⁹⁶ If leftover engagements and the aggressive pursuit of external contracts paid off especially in the first half of the 1990s, by the end of the decade practically all cars were sold domestically and Dacia acquired market dominance by a very large margin (figure II.6). Not only did production figures not drop or stagnate during this time, but the company recovered from the slump of the early 1990s and in 1997/98 even surpassed its record output from the late 1980s.

Though domestic demand far exceeded production capacities, this was considered a fragile and temporary situation, requiring proactive measures to secure the company's long-term future. In the words of the general manager, fully supported by the union leadership, the

²⁹³ It sometimes happened that the newly hired were in fact old employees who wanted to return to the plant. Then there were those subject to individual dismissals who won their jobs back in court.

²⁹⁴ E.g., "Bilanțul angajărilor la S.C. Automobile Dacia, SA în 1995." *InfoAutoturism* 69-70, December 1995. "Calendar 'Automobile Dacia' SA în anul 1995." *InfoAutoturism* 89-90, December 1996.

²⁹⁵ "Rezultatele unui dialog." *InfoAutoturism* 53, February 1995.

²⁹⁶ "Redacția întreabă, liderii răspund." *Autoturism* 1, March 1990. "Precizări privind colaborarea cu firma 'Renault'—Franța." *Autoturism*, supplement, May 1990.

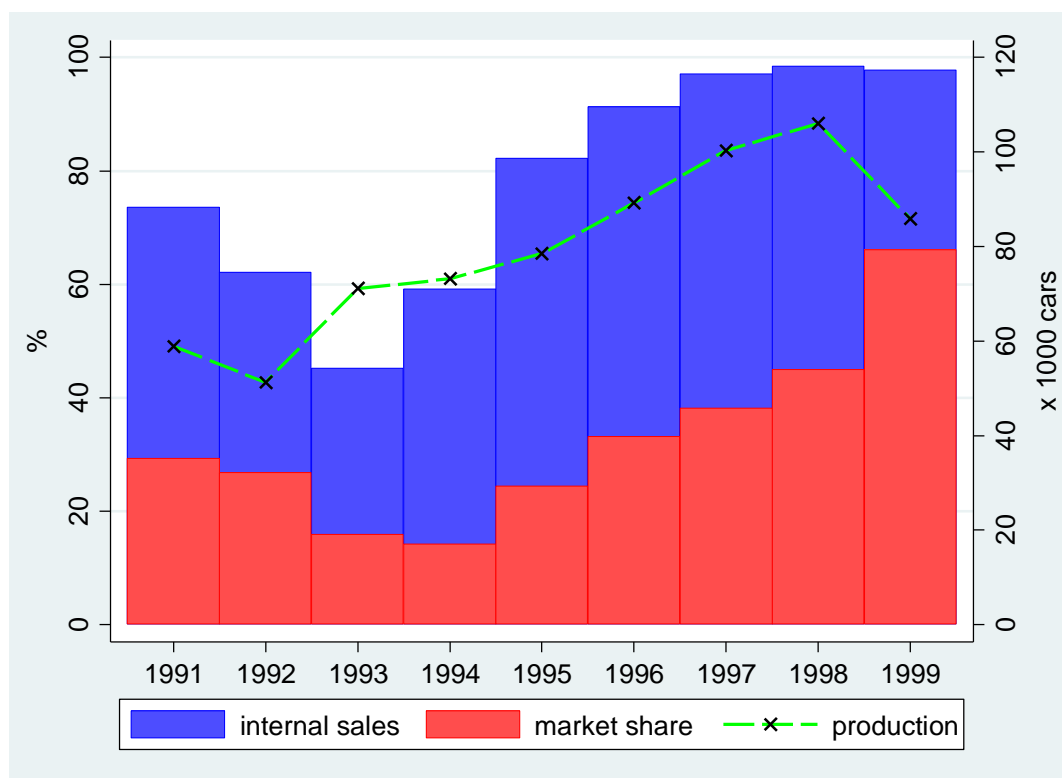


FIGURE II.6. Production (thousands of assembled cars), domestic sales (% of production), and market share (% of new Dacias in total newly registered cars), 1991–1999.

For example, in 1995 Dacia produced approximately 78,520 thousand cars, 82.1% of which were sold on the internal market, adding up to a market share of 24.4%.

Data sources: “Privind în urmă, se poate gândi optimist despre viitor.” *InfoAutoturism* 115, August 1998; Vardie (2009); Debrosse (2007); *Romanian Statistical Yearbook, 1990-1999 Time Series* (2000). Author’s calculations.

market was “deceiving” and offered no reason for slacking: despite a solid performance at present, the future was always in question.²⁹⁷ More concretely, the domestic market was thought to be too vulnerable to rampant inflation and the accelerated devaluation of incomes and too susceptible to unfair competition, coming either from local or foreign producers. Two types of measures were needed to circumvent these insecurities: seeking protection against the market and mustering enough forces to conquer it.

By spring 1990, imports had emerged as a novel threat whose growth seemed geometric (figure II.7).²⁹⁸ Consequently, one of the goals that management and the union jointly pursued throughout the 1990s was the restriction of imports via the imposition of tariffs. The struggle to convince government representatives was rife with ambiguity. First, because the indiscriminate imposition of tariffs in fact risked harming Dacia’s interests, since a part of the components used in assembly were bought from abroad.²⁹⁹ And second, because a distinction had to be made between second-hand cars and new ones, which was more a matter of principle than economic calculation: the mass import of second-hand vehicles, which was considered pathological, was different from competition between producers of new vehicles on the local

²⁹⁷ “Două interviuri în consens.” *Autoturism* 36, April 1994.

²⁹⁸ According to Constantin Stroe, by May 1990 over 60 thousand second-hand cars had been imported, putting Dacia’s future in jeopardy. “Precizări privind colaborarea cu firma ‘Renault’—Franța.”

²⁹⁹ “Sindicatul Autoturisme Dacia a invitat parlamentarii din Argeș la dialog.” *InfoAutoturism* 91, January 1997.

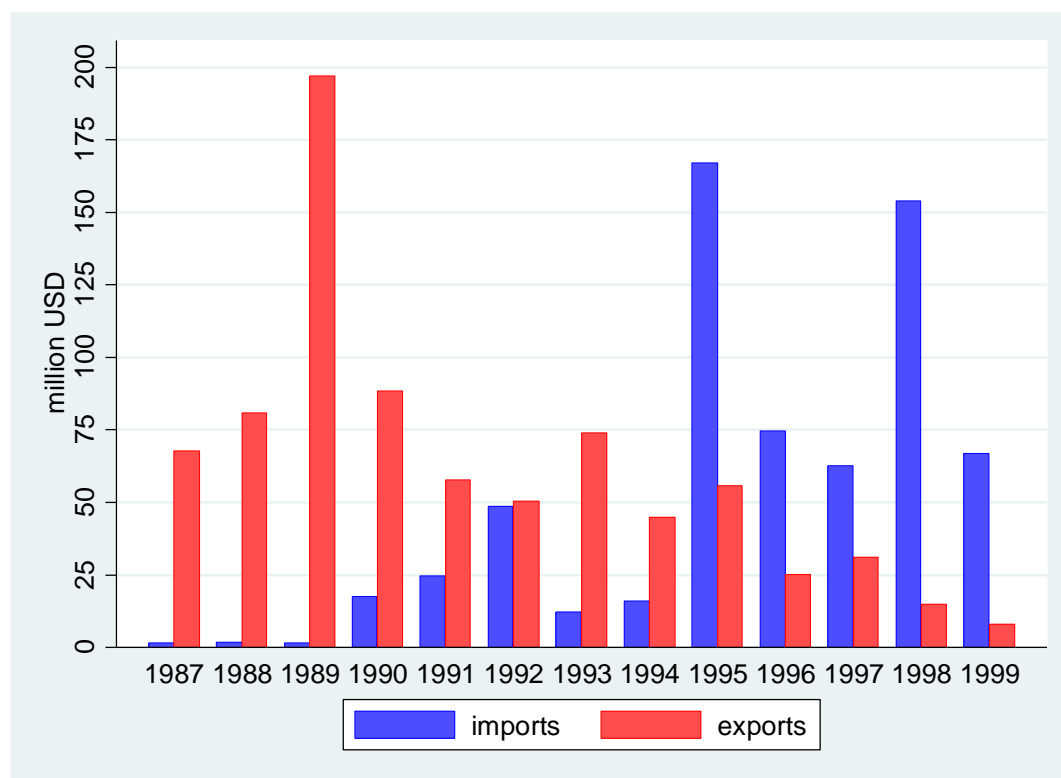


FIGURE II.7. Value of Romania's imports and exports of cars, 1987–1999 (million USD).

Data source: The Atlas of Economic Complexity, <http://atlas.cid.harvard.edu/>, SITC4 classification.

market, seen as desirable and necessary for development.³⁰⁰ Since this separation was not always made in public discourse and in the various actions of managers and union officials, conflict ensued with members of government and representatives of other business interests.³⁰¹ This ambiguity was most obvious in the case of Dacia's only domestic competitor, the joint venture between Automobile Craiova and Daewoo. The contract signed in late 1994 offered various fiscal advantages to the Korean investor, including exemption from tariffs for knock-down kits imported for assembly. This resulted in the spiking of imports starting with 1995 (figure II.7), leading to a back-and-forth confrontation between the two companies, sometimes waged via trade union proxy.³⁰² The conflict eventually died out toward the end of the decade, as Daewoo's investment showed signs of faltering and Dacia representatives sought to obtain similar advantages, including tariff exemptions, for the deal with Renault.³⁰³

Apart from defensive moves to secure protection from free trade, a more aggressive stance was required, based on an acceptance of the market and aimed at rising up to its standards. The first such measure implied maintaining a foothold on export markets, considered

³⁰⁰ "Mai este sau nu mai este necesară Centrala Industrială de Autoturisme?" *Autoturism* 1, March 1990. "Pe lungimile de undă ale unei noi... Speranțe." *InfoAutoturism* 58, May 1995.

³⁰¹ Chief among these were companies selling new imported cars, which had their own channels of political influence. See "Fără Dacia Salonul Auto ar fi fost incomplet." *InfoAutoturism* 45, September 1994.

³⁰² "Lipsă de profesionalism, sau rea intenție?" *InfoAutoturism* 45, September 1994. "Din cuvântul participanților la miting." *InfoAutoturism* 55, March 1995.

³⁰³ After the terms of Dacia's privatization contract were made public, it was Daewoo's turn to denounce injustice and ask for equal treatment from the Romanian state, sparking a lengthy and, at times, dramatic controversy. "Contractul Renault-Dacia strică ploile Daewoo." *Capital*, 25 February 1999. "Daewoo dezgroapă securea războiului" *Capital*, 12 August 1999. "Pleacă Daewoo?" *Capital*, 2 November 2000.

to be much more reliable than the allegedly difficult to predict domestic market. Surprisingly or not, this did pay off for a while and, until the second half of the decade, a significant number of automobiles were exported to countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East (Vardie 2009).³⁰⁴ This was undoubtedly an uphill battle, and management was quick to identify the source of the problem in the product itself: Dacias were not only of abysmal quality—an old problem, especially when it came to selling abroad—but also severely outdated. On the export markets of the 1990s, the Dacia looked like an alien from a time long gone (figure II.8).

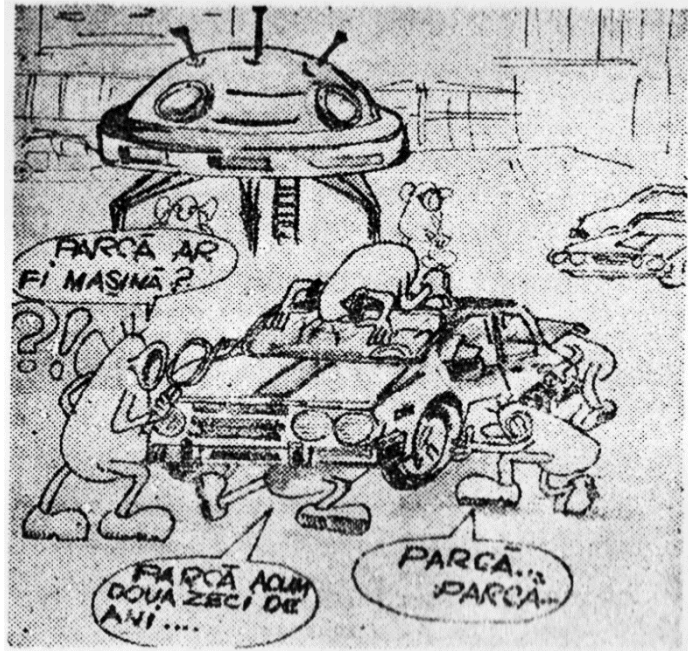


FIGURE II.8. “‘It looks like it’s a car’, ‘It looks like twenty years ago’, ‘It looks like... It looks like...’”
Source: *Autoturism* 1, March 1990.

Though much less forcefully, these problems took their toll on the internal market, where nonetheless customers could not as easily just buy something else, if they indeed wanted and afforded to. It came as no surprise that the controversies around tariffs routinely boiled down to heated discussions of Dacia’s “moral obsolescence,” with pundits, representatives of local government, and even members of parliament expressing their discontent with the outdatedness of the “national car.”³⁰⁵ While this sparked violent reactions from management and union representatives denouncing the denunciators for attacking the security of a large number jobs, potentially squandering massive sunk investments, and disrespecting “Romanian intelligence”, Dacia officials also agreed that the future of the company depended on substantial upgrading, quality improvements, and the development of up to date models. On top of this, success on the internal market depended on significantly increasing output.

Both quantity and quality required significant interventions in production, thus directly factoring the dynamics of the car market into the ongoing struggles over the control of the production chain and the labor process. To be sure, the proper organization of production was just as vital to Dacia’s survival as a booming domestic market was. By the end of the 1990s, it was clear that what had saved Dacia—and ensured failure for the likes of Daewoo—was precisely the cheapness of its cars—no doubt partly incurred by so-called quality compromises and moral obsolescence—which had allowed it to significantly expand its market share in times of massive inflation.³⁰⁶ Production had to be properly set up in order to ensure that costs were

³⁰⁴ While some of these connections were passed over from before 1989, others were not. The most important of these new markets was China, which, with help from the Romanian government, became Dacia’s biggest foreign market during this time,

³⁰⁵ “Un avansat grad de uzură morală.” *Autoturism* 16, April 1992. “Lacrimi de crocodile pentru săracul român.” *InfoAutoturism* 45, September 1994. “Strănută națiunea.” *InfoAutoturism* 67, November 1996.

³⁰⁶ “Ieșirea neșifonată a Daciei din labirintul tranziției prelungite a economiei românești.” *InfoAutoturism* 110, March 1998.

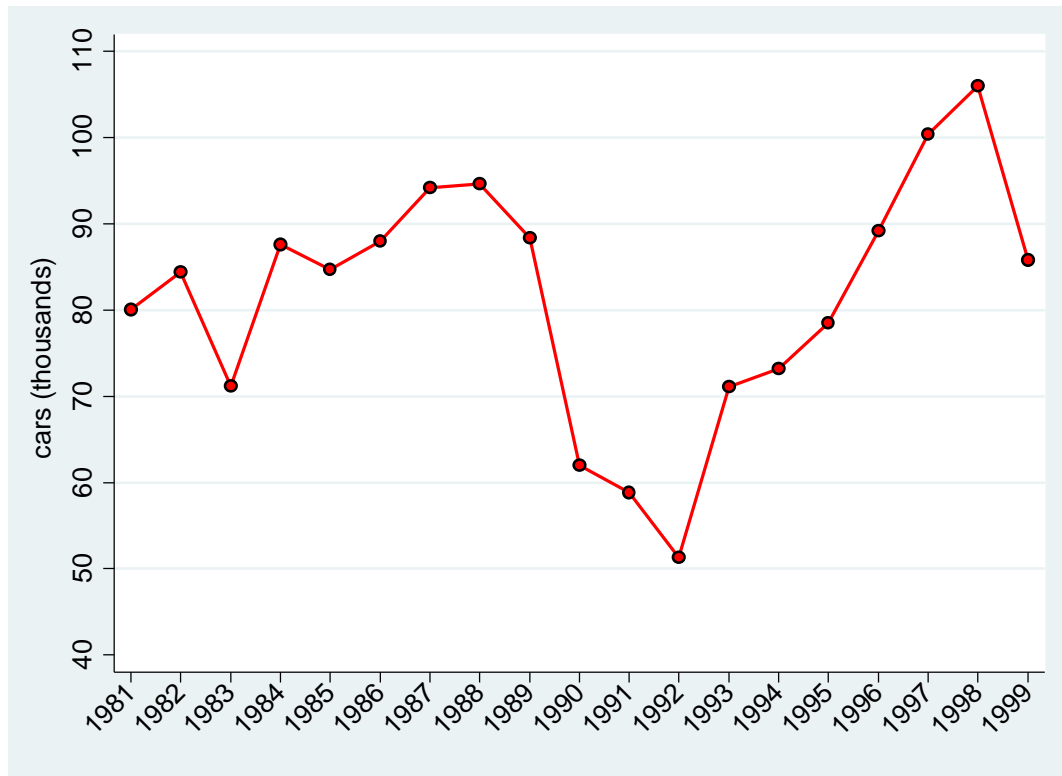


FIGURE II.9. Dacia production (thousands of assembled cars), 1981-1999.

Data source: Vardie (2009).

kept under control and output at least tended to converge with the soaring demand. Somewhat ironically, this worked especially in the second half of the 1990s, when the overall economic situation got worse, albeit things started falling apart quite violently in 1999 when both sales and production figures registered a sudden and steep decline (figure II.9).

While 1999 showed the exhaustion of the post-89 market arrangement, the beginning of the decade had put in question the very possibility of such an arrangement being established. Just like the alleged heroics of some manager or union official cannot explain Dacia's atypical trajectory in the 1990s, this early period, with its severe production slump alongside waiting lists of hundreds of thousands, cannot be accounted for simply by looking at how supply met demand on the automobile market. Throughout this period, managers and union representatives openly recognized the existence of what they thought was a genuine paradox: demand was abundant, production capacities were sufficient, yet output remained far below expectations.³⁰⁷ If an explanation of Dacia's relatively unscathed survival in the first postsocialist decade cannot circumvent its peculiar market situation, it also cannot avoid leaving this restricted realm of exchange and inquiring into transformations in production. Though excessive demand made things very different for Dacia, putting cars on the market entailed confronting a situation all enterprises had to deal with in the first years after 1989: chaos in production (Siani-Davies 2006:221) and the devastating disorganization of supply and distribution chains (Pop 2006). Unruliness engulfed not just the relationship between Dacia and other enterprises, but also labor relations within the enterprise. Both directly interacted on the external labor market.

³⁰⁷ "Cuvântul de deschidere a mitingului." *InfoAutoturism* 55, March 1995. "Rezultatele unui dialog." *InfoAutoturism* 53, February 1995.

The specter of unemployment

Excess demand greatly mitigated the impact of the alleged shift from planned allocation, which practically guaranteed that all cars were sold, to market mechanisms requiring certain prerequisites for sales to happen. Another important shift—whose effects were, one would expect, less toned down—was the relatively rapid turning of the chronic labor shortage typical for state socialism into a chronic job shortage specific to the first postsocialist decade. Job loss in the 1990s was extensive throughout the Argeș region, the employment rate dropping from 53.74% in 1992 to 39.98% in 1999 (figure II.10).³⁰⁸ If a large city like Pitești was less affected (70.26% in 1992, 54.99% in 1999), the impact in smaller industrial cities like Câmpulung was devastating (91.84% in 1992, 51.23% in 1999). Newspapers across the county routinely reported on enterprises diminishing their activity, closing down, or being privatized, each followed by collective layoffs and a bump to unemployment figures. No alternatives appeared that could absorb labor power on this scale, though programs and policies meant to stimulate entrepreneurship, reskilling and job creation abounded and were announced with great pomp. In such a context, Dacia's regional importance as an employer grew exponentially.

Largely due to Dacia, the employment rate in Mioveni remained well above 100% for the rest of the 1990s, albeit there was a significant decline from almost double this at the beginning of the decade. This latter development was due partly to the mitigation of underurbanization through the growth of the town in the first half of the decade (see part III)

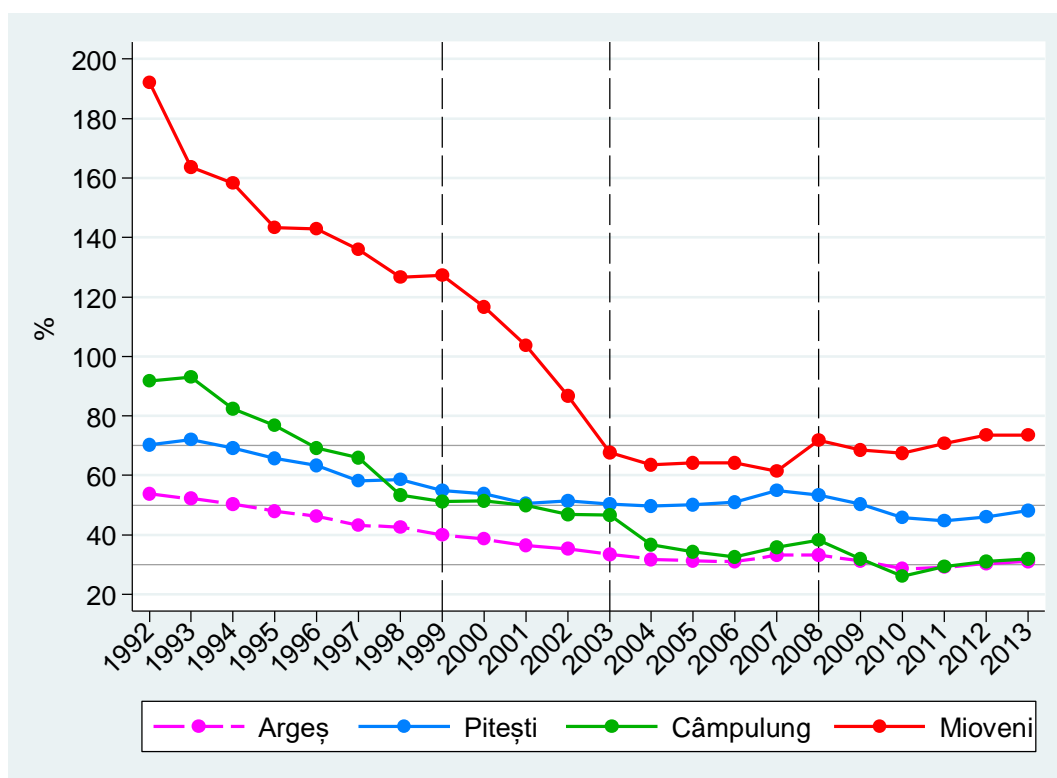


FIGURE II.10. Employment rate* in Mioveni, Câmpulung, Pitești, and Argeș County, 1992–2013.

* Calculated as percentage of employees in the active population between 15 and 60 years of age.

Data source: National Institute of Statistics. Author's calculations.

³⁰⁸ No data is available for the period 1989–1991, though it can be assumed that the employment rate began declining immediately after 1989. The total employment rate (including self-employed workers and unpaid family workers) for the Argeș county was 86.4% in 1990 and dropped to 82.4% in 1992; by 1999, it reached 69.6%.

and partly to an accelerated loss of jobs outside car manufacturing.³⁰⁹ While Mioveni continued to house about half of Dacia's labor force, its second largest employer, the Institute of Nuclear Research went from 4000 employees in the mid-1980s to barely above 700 in late 1999, sharing the regular wage arrears and bleak perspectives with most large employers in the county.³¹⁰ In terms of employment, therefore, while the region became more and more dependent on Mioveni, the town itself exacerbated its dependence on the car plant.

The mitigation of labor shortage due to the contraction of industry was accompanied by the virtual disappearance of strong regional inter-enterprise competition of whatever kind. In such a situation, one would expect Dacia to become a huge attraction for job seekers throughout the region and for its employees to cling to their jobs above all else. Yet the scale of labor turnover (see above) showed that things were not entirely so. Moreover, the supply of skilled labor continued to be a problem; though candidates constantly and significantly outnumbered available positions, they oftentimes proved unfit for the job, forcing management



FIGURE II.11. “Gigel, you’ll get a kiss and a chewing gum if you guess what the stork is bringing...?” ‘A new colleague for kindergarten?’ ‘Not even close! The stork carries THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT.’ ‘How do you know that?’ ‘I know my way around. It [the stork] comes from the direction of the plant. Children are born of sin. See what happens if you miss the religion classes?’”

Source: *InfoAutoturism* 38, May 1994.

³⁰⁹ Mioveni's active population (15-60 years of age) numbered 17,555 people in 1992 and 24,422 in 1999. The number of employees in 1992 was 33,715, while in 1999 it had dropped to 31,056, with a minimum of 30,169 in 1998. Rather than continuously declining, the number of employees oscillated from year to year throughout the decade (see also figure II.3). Approximately 15,000 inhabitants were autoworkers, with the rest of the plant's employees being commuters. While the plant accounted for approximately 87% of wage employment in Mioveni in 1992, by 1999 around 10% more of the total number of registered employees belonged to it. On plant employees living in Mioveni, see “Modificarea hotărârii guvernului nr. 1177/1990.” *Autoturism* 4, August 1992. “De automobilul Dacia depind 500 000 salariați.” *InfoAutoturism* 79, June 1996.

³¹⁰ “Centrul de greutate al tehnologiilor nucleare se află la Mioveni.” *Jurnal Puls*, 2-8 June 1998. “ICN Mioveni, un Cernobil al Argeșului.” *Jurnalul de Argeș*, 2-8 October 1999. According to local authorities, in July 1995 3,634 persons were registered as unemployed. “Uniunea Europeană la Mioveni!” *InfoAutoturism* 78, May 1996.

to advertise skilled positions internally.³¹¹ Despite plenty of signs suggesting otherwise—labor turnover and the systematic hampering of recruitment being among the most obvious and important—and regardless of occasional pleas for abandoning “the unjustified psychosis” concerning personnel restructuring, the specter of unemployment—both as an abstract possibility, and as concrete reality whose full destructive potential could be witnessed firsthand in places like the nearby city of Câmpulung—haunted public discourse both inside and outside the plant for the entire decade.³¹² Far from circumstantial or irrational, the external threat of unemployment was systematically used by managers and union officials in trying to turn the tables in their favor in relation to the government and to workers. The voluntarist narrative of heroic salvation was thus not simply a reflection of personal vanity, but an effective weapon in dealing with the newfound opportunities provided by the alleviation of chronic labor shortage in the region. If in relation to workers the threat of unemployment was used to entice self-discipline (figure II.11), in relation to the government it was used to push for management autonomy and political influence. The idea that in spite of an apparently good situation everything could go down the drain with the first mistake functioned in both directions.

The ironies of enterprise autonomy

From the standpoint of the state socialist compromise between planners, managers and workers, an even more rapid change than the alleviation of labor shortage was the ostensible disappearance of the plan and of planners as such. This did not give managers free rein over enterprises, as previous relations of dependence were recast in new terms. Shortly after December 1989, Dacia became a “commercial enterprise” (*societate comercială*), a limited company in which the state would maintain controlling interest until its eventual privatization. This meant that the government no longer prescribed production targets, nor controlled distribution via plan fiat. At least nominally, managers were granted full autonomy in handling these tasks, just like they allegedly had been given extensive control over the production process and the labor force.³¹³ On top of this, managers retained their vantage in relation to government representatives, since the economy remained dependent on exports for hard currency and control over labor was still hugely important politically, though this time around because of the potentially disastrous economic and political consequences of unemployment. Managers thus continued to compete with each other over political influence and they did so on similarly skewed terms as before 1989, as some enterprises were deemed more important than others. Some were granted special status (as *regii autonome*) from the very beginning and enjoyed the benefits of simultaneous recognition of autonomy and protection from privatization (and thus of their political importance). Having failed to secure such a status, the managers of commercial enterprises used their control over increasingly scarce export opportunities and their ability to maintain fragile social peace to secure various advantages, including temporary protection from privatization. At least for some time, the management of large companies such as Dacia could thus claim that enterprises were too big to privatize.

³¹¹ These incongruities produced mutual frustration and sometimes sparked violent episodes. “Angajări sub teroarea pumnilor?!” *InfoAutoturism* 77, May 1996.

³¹² “Concluzii la adunarea generală a SAD din 17 august 1994.” *Autoturism* 43, August 1994.

³¹³ See, e.g., Law 15/1990 on the reorganization of state enterprises and Law 66/1993 on the management contract.

Despite the declared autonomy, state-owned enterprises were usually dependent on the government for funding investments in fixed capital and, most crucially in Dacia's case, had to cope with administrative constraints on their wage policies. The setting up of the State Property Fund (Fondul Proprietății de Stat—FPS) as a separate entity controlling 70% of shares in each state-owned company provided Dacia's management (as well as SAD) with a tangible enemy in the struggle for autonomy.³¹⁴ Throughout the decade, FPS and its representatives on the company board were routinely blamed for administrative sabotage and decapitalization due to their cashing in profit dividends and limiting investments. Alongside the obtaining of protection from privatization, both management and SAD lambasted FPS for acting as a parallel managerial authority exercising “bureaucratic control” over the enterprise and blocking efficiency-inducing market mechanisms.³¹⁵

Struggle on one front focused on enhancing enterprise autonomy from the government and FPS, supposedly allowing for the market economy to take over and for management to exercise its full competence in securing the company's wellbeing. Since the planned economy involved not only government control over enterprise affairs but also a strict central coordination of inter-enterprise relations, full autonomy became synonymous with generalized decentralization (figure II.12), which, at least in theory, should have been quickly followed by enterprises' mutual adjustment via the quasi-automatic mechanism of supply and demand. On these terms, suppliers were expected to deliver both quantity and quality, thus alleviating the major shortcomings of car production under state socialism. One of the preconditions for the market to take over the coordination of the production chain was the dismantling of the Industrial Group for Automobiles, an objective aggressively pursued by the managers of larger enterprises belonging to it.³¹⁶

Dacia's managers, who had been particularly vocal in criticizing centralized coordination, got much more than they had bargained for: to ease future privatization, alongside the dismantling of the Industrial Group, the enterprise was split into seven independent companies (see chapter 2), thus simultaneously enhancing and fragmenting managers' authority over the production process. Adding to this unforeseen development was the disastrous impact of decentralization on the organization of the production chain. Rather than boosting efficiency, the attempted overnight move from plan to market coordination led to cascading failures of interenterprise transactions and, as enterprises rapidly accumulated both debt and credit, to an endemic and generalized “financial blockage” (*blocaj financiar*).³¹⁷ This forced managers to circumvent market transactions and fall back on informal networks to secure the fulfilment of contracts by suppliers (Pop 2006; Stark and Bruszt 1998). No longer oiling the links of the central plan, systematic recourse to informal relations and non-monetary

³¹⁴ The functioning of FPS and the broader conflict between government representatives and the managers of state owned enterprises are analyzed in detail in Pop (2006).

³¹⁵ “‘Nimeni nu e mai presus de lege.’ Dar în afara ei?” *Autoturism* 27, October 1993. Capital investments and wages were said to depend on the whims of corrupt and incompetent FPS representatives.

³¹⁶ “Mai este sau nu mai este necesară Centrala Industrială de Autoturisme?” *Autoturism* 1, March 1990. The Group represented a direct and explicit threat to enterprise-level managerial autonomy. While enterprise managers denounced the power-hungry management of the Group, their reasons were anything but altruistic.

³¹⁷ For an analysis of how these developments appeared in the eyes of policy makers and representatives of central government institutions, see Gabor (2011) and Ban (2014). See also Verdery (1996:179-80).

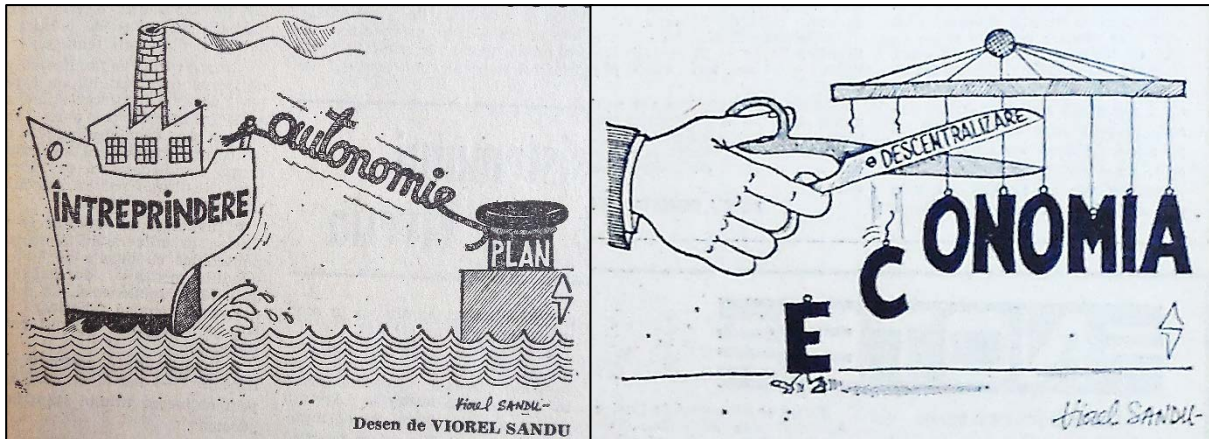


FIGURE II.12. Enterprise autonomy vs. the economic effects of decentralization.

Source: *România Muncitoare* 31, 2 March 1990; 60, 28 October 1990.

transactions in an ostensibly market environment put production on a decidedly “involutionary” path (Burawoy 1996), as shortages and bottlenecks proliferated to an unprecedented extent, leading to massive disruptions of the supply flow and severely threatening the viability of automobile assembly (figure II.13).³¹⁸

More often than not, these problems were regarded as “lagging effects” of the plan (e.g., Pop 2006) and not as genuine products of sudden economic decentralization, which meant that one could simply ask for even more radical policies of marketization.³¹⁹ Notwithstanding that beyond a certain threshold such claims tended to actually undermine management authority, even when they did function properly the rules of supply and demand seemed to produce similarly deleterious outcomes. To the despair of Dacia’s management, suppliers now had no formal obligation to continue selling their products locally and could independently pursue their business on external markets, or wherever else they considered to be most advantageous. Since suppliers enjoyed virtual monopoly, such an exercise of managerial autonomy could prove disastrous.³²⁰ Worse yet, similar exploits downstream could seriously obstruct market realization, as it indeed happened once relationships with the now autonomous company handling the dealership and service networks suddenly went cold.

Supplier diversification was one way of circumventing plan inertia and impromptu market discord, though given the involutionary context of the early 1990s it was more a matter of wishful thinking than an actual possibility. Somewhat ironically, the only apparent way to alleviate the crippling effects of generalized economic disorganization was rapid recentralization.³²¹ To be sure, this could not happen on the same terms of the central plan and the Industrial Group, since these were incompatible with enterprise autonomy. Rather, recentralization implied vertical integration and the creation of far more extensive enterprise-level economies of scale than under state socialism. One of the early postsocialist critiques of the centrally planned economy coming from Dacia’s management was aimed precisely at

³¹⁸ “‘Dacia’ ar putea deveni o mașină europeană.” *Adevărul*, 14 August 1990.

³¹⁹ “Sănătate, sau moarte lentă?” *InfoAutoturism* 47, October 1994.

³²⁰ “Ne gândim la cei ce trăiesc din salariu?” *Autoturism* 6, August 1990.

³²¹ For a more general discussion of the paradoxes of decentralization and the reaction in favor of recentralization in 1990s Romania, see Verdery (1996:chapter 8).



FIGURE II.13. “The only solution...!” Wooden wheels on the “Liberta” model, whose name betokened the overbearing enthusiasm of the early-1990s. Launched in 1995, the subsequent Nova model was initially named “Hope,” in line with the newfound uncertainty that had by then become the norm. Source: *Autoturism* 8, December 1990.

planners’ fostering of economic fragmentation via horizontal specialization at the expense of direct centralized control over the entire production chain (see above and Stoianovici 1978). Spatial fragmentation compounded this problem and further contributed in creating the allegedly unnecessary bottlenecks and unjustified increase of production costs. Instead of removing these shortcomings, the shift to market relations had exacerbated them. The argument for recentralization was thus based on a simultaneous critique of central planning and the market, painting vertical integration as a major management goal for the new decade, to which the union rallied with alacrity.³²² The first step in this direction was the reunification of the platform under a single administrative entity, eventually accomplished in 1995 (see chapter 2). Other tasks proved extremely daunting, not least because they required significant government intervention at the expense of other economic interests. Despite constant pleas, in the absence of reintegration via governmental fiat and with insufficient resources to fund large-scale investment, the development of adequate distribution and service infrastructures were two major objectives that were not met. At the end of 1997, when it was by and large clear that privatization was imminent, the company still had around three hundred suppliers and held control over a very limited and still highly centralized dealership network.³²³ If relations with the outside were this problematic, the accompanying requirement of controlling labor was even more so, especially since this was practically *the* condition for vertical integration to work.

³²² “Cooperarea—una dintre formele eficiente de rentabilizare a producției de autoturisme.” *Autoturism* 1, March 1990. “Ne gândim la cei ce trăiesc din salariu?” *Autoturism* 6, August 1990.

³²³ “Bravo, Dacia!” *InfoAutoturism* 106, December 1997.

CHAPTER 8

THE TROUBLES WITH LABOR CONTROL

The drive for vertical integration counted on a critique of the unpredictability of the horizontal industry, the unreliability of both market and plan transactions, and, consequently, the lack of managerial control over all things external. In contrast to external control, internal control was assumed to be largely unproblematic; and this not just over the significant internal reorganization accompanying integration, but over everything that was, at least on paper, under the direct authority of the enterprise management. In this equation, labor control was nonetheless much more of a problem than management would have wanted. While changes in the external labor market and the alleviation of chronic labor shortage gave management a new impetus in controlling labor, other conditions necessary for overpowering it inside the enterprise had not witnessed such unequivocal transformations. The lack of funds for investment in fixed capital meant production remained highly labor intensive, so increases in productivity could only be achieved by labor intensification. Likewise, the persistence of systemic disruptions of the production chain and the exacerbation of shortages ensured continued dependence on quantitative and qualitative labor flexibility: handling unpredictable flow irregularities required keeping labor reserves on hand and prevented subordination through deskilling. Finally, management faced severe constraints in devising a labor incentive system fit for the expectations of the times. Reliance on the exercise of coercion (the enforcement of hierarchy) and the eliciting of commitment (the consolidation of a solidarity-based coalition with workers) was paramount, as compensation (pecuniary reward) was ineffective and met with restrictions from government authorities.³²⁴

Compensation as redistribution

Limitations on compensation as a viable mechanism of labor control during the 1990s were a direct outcome of a back and forth conflict between government representatives and enterprise managers: while the latter required full control over wage policy in order to secure labor's allegiance, the former attempted to centralize control over wages in order to curb a potentially disastrous spiral of high inflation and nominal wage growth. Neither were fully successful, leading to a permanent increase in nominal wages accompanied by a similarly permanent decline of real wages. By 1999, the national nominal gross average wage was 480 times higher than in 1990, while the real average wage had decreased to 57% of its value (figure II.14). Endemic wage insecurity thus persisted; what distinguished it from the one typical of state socialism was not only its main underlying mechanism, but also its deepening severity. Since wage insecurity was one of many problems the market was expected to swiftly make right, its

³²⁴ I am using Tilly and Tilly's (1998) classification of labor incentives: coercion, whose primary type of transaction is hierarchy; compensation, corresponding to market transactions; and commitment, which underpins coalitions. As they insist, most often in reality there is no clear-cut correspondence between types of incentives and types of transactions, as incentive systems combine all three pairs (though the proportion given to each differs from case to case).

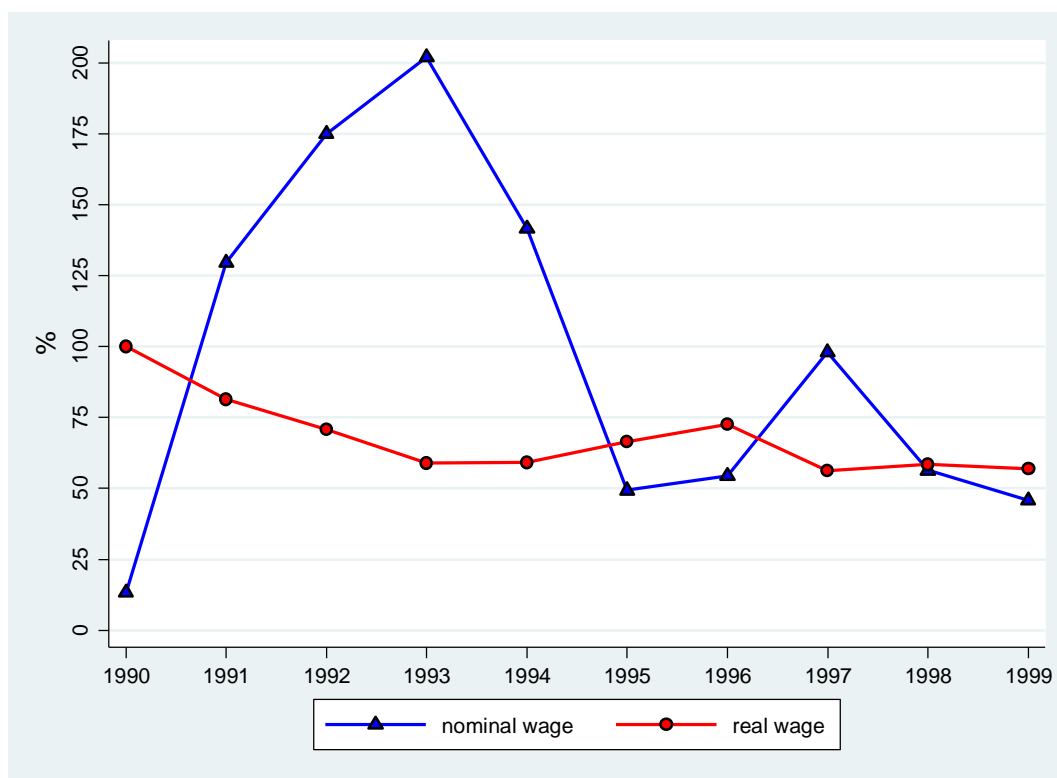


FIGURE II.14. Annual nominal wage growth (as % of previous year) and real wage index (as % of 1990), Romania, 1990-1999.

Data source: National Institute of Statistics. Author's calculations.

exacerbation led to widespread disillusionment and, given the absence of alternatives and the feeling that advancing commodification went hand in hand with the ever-increasing scarcity of money, an encroaching fatalism. Moreover, wage insecurity created a serious legitimization problem for management and union representatives, who nonetheless continued to promise to deliver adequate wages to all employees. To compensate for state-imposed limits on raising wages, they made full use of their available room for maneuver and pushed the enterprise's remuneration autonomy to the maximum. Instead of raising the base wage, considerable effort went toward manipulating bonuses and benefits in order to maximize incomes. On average, these eventually made up approximately one third of gross incomes, equivalent to raising the average income of a Dacia employee above the average national wage by about the same proportion.³²⁵ Nonetheless, limitations on income-increasing mechanisms that were partly under the control of employees themselves—such as piece-work rates or overtime—came and went, more often than not in direct contradiction with management's constant pleas for increased productivity. Under such conditions, talk of employees' declining standard of living and the unprecedented decline into poverty became common currency.

Behind the picture of generalized insecurity, however, attempts were made to render compensation into an effective mechanism of control. Since this could not be done simply by increasing the payroll, the solution entailed finding a more adequate distribution of the existing wage fund. Both management and union agreed that increasing the relevance of compensation could be achieved only by giving more to some and less to others. This fundamental agreement

³²⁵ "De unde vom pleca la negocierea CCM." *Autoturism* 36, April 1994. "De automobilul Dacia depind 500000 salariați." *InfoAutoturism* 79, June 1996.

notwithstanding, the struggle over establishing who exactly deserved more—given identical claims to economic and moral deservedness—became a defining feature of enterprise-level relations in the 1990s. As such, this represented a decisive break with *de facto* relations extant before 1989, since it meant establishing a functional internal labor market, with significant differentiations between positions and clear rules for promotion.³²⁶ Or at least in the eyes of the upper management and the union leadership it did.

The first step in this direction was to develop an entirely new pay scale, replacing the largely dysfunctional, state-imposed pre-89 system, which, with its hundreds of different categories, was difficult to maintain control of by either employer or employee. After protracted and, apparently, permanently provisional negotiations, an agreement was reached to move from an 880-category system to an allegedly more manageable system of 50 to 60 categories, with each individual slotted in a specific wage category (*clasă de salarizare*).³²⁷ Complicating things, however, was the separate system of job classification assigning a category range to each job and stipulated its corresponding bonuses (e.g., for difficult working conditions). Then came bonuses granted according to certain standard attributes (e.g., seniority). Even all this was only half the story, since for things to actually work each job and each employee had to go through an extensive evaluation procedure to establish the base pay and corresponding bonuses. Ideally, this three-pronged classification was supposed to produce substantial enough differences between individuals while remaining fair to everyone. There was no apparent contradiction in pursuing these two goals simultaneously, since a fair distribution would follow the principle of performance or merit. In other words, more than being compatible with the new market economy, unequal payment was a way to ensure just compensation corresponding to unequal contributions to the common good.

In practice, the insufficiency of the wage fund to be redistributed was the biggest obstacle in making this system functional. First and directly, because it set a ceiling to any sort of pay-based incentive. Second and indirectly, because generalized money scarcity bolstered claims and contestations from all sides. Management itself pushed for a distribution as favorable as possible to managers and TESA personnel and, contrary to the constant denunciations made by the union leadership on this account, there was much more to this than a blind pursuit of personal interest or a perverted managerial *esprit de corps* (though these certainly played a part). To be sure, while the favoring of TESA was directly detrimental to workers, it could also be argued that it was a rational personnel policy, since properly trained candidates for TESA positions were not only more difficult to find but also much more mobile than workers. More importantly, as we will see shortly, the favoring of TESA was part of an attempt at strengthening hierarchy and curbing workers' autonomy on the shop floor.

³²⁶ Ironically, this stance was very similar to that of state socialist central authorities, who wanted to enforce clear rules of promotion and compensation in order to break factory coalitions between managers, supervisors and workers. From this point of view, this is more an issue of historical continuity than rupture, especially for the trade union, as it reproduced one of the roles of state socialist unions. I thank Adrian Grama for pointing this out to me.

³²⁷ "Negocierea este posibilă, dar trebuie bunăvoință." *InfoAutoturism* 62, August 1995. "Directori... salarii... și... confidențialitate." *Autoturism* 35, March 1994. "Clasele de salarizare." *Autoturism* 40, June 1994. "În această săptămână, actul adițional la CCM se va semna!" *InfoAutoturism* 63, September 1995. "Limite de salarizare." *InfoAutoturism* 79, June 1996. "Metodologia de evaluare a competenței profesionale a salariaților." *InfoAutoturism* 48, November 1994.

As soon as this strategy became apparent, union leaders began decrying the pay asymmetries between workers and TESA and pleaded for a more equal distribution of wages—or “of poverty,” which, given the lack of money, meant the same thing (figure II.15).³²⁸ On the surface, SAD simply acted in defense of its core constituency of skilled workers against both TESA and unskilled workers.³²⁹ A closer look reveals a less consistent and somewhat contradictory stance of the union leadership in regard to wage asymmetries. First, there is the question of why union leaders militated relentlessly for the universalization of performance-



Gâsca sindicalistului

— Am amenințat-o mai întâi cu „vârful de lance”; n-a dat rezultate. Strânsă de gât, mi-a slobozit o găgălice de ou, nici măcar pe sfert cât al ADMINISTRATIEI.

FIGURE II.15. “The trade unionist’s goose: ‘First I threatened it with “the spearhead”; to no avail. When strangled, it made me this puny egg, not even a quarter the size of the one management received.’”

Source: *InfoAutoturism* 74, March 1996.

it with legitimacy in front of management. Put differently, the emphasis on wages and the necessity of unequal distribution was meant to secure SAD’s legitimacy in front of both management and employees, as a guarantor of interest representation for the latter and of labor control for the former. All this depended on the union maintaining considerable control over the wage policy, pushing leaders to oppose managers’ attempts at unilaterally using the classification system to their own ends as well as the introduction of individual labor contracts, which were formally outside union control.³³⁰ In effect, unionists constantly oscillated from vigorous conjurings of wage asymmetries to scathing denunciations of undeserved inequality.

The battleground on which the union and management confronted each other was that of collective bargaining over the classification system itself. The ensuing compromise ensured the relative containment of TESA–worker pay asymmetries and kept skilled workers at a

based wage differentiation. Though this was in full agreement with management, the reasons behind the union’s support for pay asymmetries were somewhat different. On the one hand, in order to establish itself as legitimate in front of employees, SAD had to make itself indispensable when it came to the securing of livelihood, which meant that despite the circumstances it could not dispense with focusing most of its efforts into bolstering wage compensation. On the other hand, leaders hoped merit-based pay asymmetries would push workers into dedicating themselves to formal work requirements and the pursuit of promotions, which, assuming SAD’s monopoly over representation in collective bargaining, would secure its control over the labor force and provide

³²⁸ “Informarea Consiliului SAD la Adunarea Generală Extraordinară privind statutul negocierilor noilor contracte de muncă. Altfel spus, Cum să ne împărțim sărăcia?...” *Autoturism* 38, May 1994.

³²⁹ Apart from the classification system, differences between skilled and unskilled workers were bolstered by the differential indexation of wages, which clearly disfavored the latter. However, unskilled workers were an ultraminority in enterprises like Dacia.

³³⁰ On “the humiliation” of signing individual contracts, see “Domnule ‘Licurici’.” *Autoturism* 40, June 1994.

considerable distance from unskilled ones, while also leaving wide gaps between various categories of skilled workers.³³¹ Once this formal setup was established, however, struggles over its manipulation ensued, as attempts were made to bracket or circumvent its rules and put its efficiency into question. This was already apparent in the negotiations over the exact shape of the classification system. As they pledged their allegiance to (limited) wage asymmetries and performance-based promotions, union negotiators would ask for simplified promotion procedures and less strict evaluation policies, or would condition the signing of the collective labor contract on management's acceptance of mass promotions.³³² Even in the absence of such concessions from management, the union could still intervene in the evaluation of both jobs and employees, which was handled by joint management–union commissions. The result was a tiered struggle waged both at the bargaining table as well as farther down the company and union hierarchies, in the evaluation commissions that were directly linked to shop-floor or office dynamics. Since the actions of commission members did not always align with the declared intentions of their respective sides, this resulted in systematic discrepancies between the official discourse of a merit-based system of classification and promotion and the deluge of mutual accusations of sabotage and corruption either via overt disregard for the rules meant to serve the common interest or, more commonly, via covert informal transactions and the insidious workings of ever-present subterranean cliques.

This idea of widespread cabals bent on overturning the wage system reflected less some of the leaders' preference for paranoia-induced and inducing populist discourses (though there was plenty of this to go around, to be sure) than the actual existence of strong informal networks cutting across formal organizational hierarchies and providing alternative avenues for individuals to turn the wage distribution system to their advantage. The question of manipulation hence transcended management–union relations strictly speaking and was far from exhausted by the various acts of usurpation coming from the ranks of the officialdom. It harked back to the broad question of discipline on the shop floor, the very issue union leaders and upper management hoped could be fixed via adequate compensation. In contrast to union leaders, who placed most of their belief in the potential for workers' self-discipline, managers opted for enforcing supervision and increasing the functionality of hierarchical control.

Blunt rules, parallel hierarchies, and the indiscipline–autonomy nexus

The major difference between compensation and hierarchy as mechanisms of labor control lay in their implications for workers' autonomy on the shop floor: while the former was geared toward eliciting and channeling autonomy, the latter was meant to curtail it as much as possible. Just like with compensation, however, any attempt at rendering hierarchy into an efficient mechanism of control faced severe limitations from the outset, since it had to overcome not only a legacy of weak hierarchical control and enhanced autonomy typical of the state socialist compromise between managers and workers but also the continued relevance of workers' flexible self-adjustment to the new and old vagaries of production. Notwithstanding these

³³¹ "Considerații pe marginea negocierii contractelor colective de muncă." *Autoturism* 40, June 1994. "S-au negociat contractele colective de muncă." *InfoAutoturism* 59, June 1995.

³³² "Adunarea generală a salariaților." *InfoAutoturism* 75, April 1996. "Agenda SAD." *InfoAutoturism* 102, October 1997.

difficulties, management did attempt hierarchy enforcement, which above all required work relations to be transparent to those in the supervisory echelons.³³³ Two complementary sets of measures were attempted to reduce the opacity of shop floor ties and transactions: the concentration of means of control, aimed at providing upper management with unmediated command over the entire production process; and strengthening the chain of command, and relying primarily on successful mediation by cadres lower down the managerial hierarchy.

Centralized surveillance of the production process topped the list of means of direct control. Proper accounting and inventory-keeping had to be developed, departing from the notoriously unreliable knowledge of the flow of material along the production chain during state socialism. From a managerial standpoint, the lack of a functional accounting system made keeping track of costs extremely difficult, while loopholes and opportunities for abuse and embezzlement abounded in the absence of effective ways to establish accountability. Matching what existed on paper with what existed in reality required a computer system, an outstanding investment at least from the mid-1980s (Rîpeanu 1985:33-7), if not from the second half of the 1960s.³³⁴ Loudly decried in the first postrevolutionary days and designated as top priority in the second half of the decade, the problem of real-time computerized accounting lingered on until the 2000s. Among the obstacles were, of course, the lack of adequate funds for acquiring hardware and developing software, but also a widespread “fear of the computer,” which appeared even more irrational than before, since computerized management was becoming a tangible possibility. Indeed, this apparently bizarre “fear of the known” (contrasting with the previously justified “fear of the unknown”) could only hide a widespread rejection of “the consequence of using computers”—in other words, of their use as an instrument of control in the hands of management.³³⁵ The same happened with mechanisms of direct control such as auditing, which was introduced in the second half of the 1990s: notwithstanding the acknowledged imperfections of auditing procedures, a bigger problem was that employees seemed to be systematically sabotaging the auditing process, which ended up being just another cumbersome inefficiency, one of the very problems it was supposed to provide a solution for.³³⁶ More broadly speaking, computerized accounting and regular auditing were part of a larger attempt at rationalizing the production process and updating it to what management considered the latest organizational standards, including things like just-in-time delivery. Like “the financial responsabilization of individual departments,” this second set of measures for direct control assumed a functioning accounting system and were meant to serve as quasi-automatic steering mechanisms of production.³³⁷ They never got to function as such, since implementation required the very resource whose scarcity they were intended to circumvent:

³³³ For a detailed analysis of the strong connection between workers’ autonomy/heteronomy on the shop floor and the transparency/opacity of interactions in the labor process, see Durand and Hatzfeld (2002).

³³⁴ “1965-1998 sau drumul de la prelucrarea mecanografică a datelor la sistemul informatic.” *InfoAutoturism* 115, August 1998. Aside from the lack of funds and know-how, the source of many difficulties in using computers in the organization of production during state socialism was precisely the requirement of flexibility and autonomy, which proved incompatible with standard management IT systems (see Burawoy and Lukács 1992:103-5, 30-31).

³³⁵ “Există încă teama de calculator.” *InfoAutoturism* 111, April 1998.

³³⁶ “Auditurile interne ale calității.” *InfoAutoturism* 80, July 1996. “Asigurarea calității.” *InfoAutoturism* 84, September 1996.

³³⁷ On “financial responsibility” across the production chain, see “Programul de modernizare a secției Presaj.” *InfoAutoturism* 110, March 1998.

workers' full cooperation. From this standpoint, the problematic character of workers' autonomy on the shop floor resulted from much more than an abstract managerial will to power. If autonomy appeared necessary in keeping production going, it also seemed to constantly threaten efficiency and, at times, even the existence of any output at all; and while management encountered significant resistance to measures aimed at updating the organization of production, it also faced mounting difficulties in keeping the old ways of doing things working.

Occasional descriptions of everyday life in the plant in the 1990s portray a desolate scenery, with visible degradation of buildings and machinery, packs of stray dogs roaming around dilapidated premises, abysmal working conditions, and an overall feeling of neglect. If such negligence could be attributed to objective circumstances, given the severely restricted funds available for maintenance and investment, it also seemed to result from willful acts and, worse yet, from concerted ones. Portrayals of the "chaos" and generalized disorder engulfing factory life harked back to the alleged utter lack of human responsibility, offering detailed evidence that negligence had reached inconceivable levels: from sleeping and drinking on the job, to using industrial ovens in the foundry to fry meat and throwing parties (with a music band, drinks, and all the rest of it) on the third shift in vehicle assembly (of all departments!).³³⁸ An occasional visit to the body shop or the paint shop might have led an outside observer to believe that "there's a daily strike happening," since at any one time dozens of people could be seen strolling around the shop without any apparent purpose whatsoever, smoking casually and engaging in conversation with one another. Still, the most pressing problem was not that too many people were not really working while technically on the job, but that too many did not even show up for work in the first place. Apparently in full disregard of new market stringencies, absenteeism proliferated from the very first days after December 1989, when many workers abruptly took an unexpected "postrevolutionary vacation," to its stabilization toward the middle of the decade as a mass phenomenon outside any sort of control.³³⁹ Even keeping track of it proved difficult, since workers frequently missed work unannounced or left surreptitiously during working hours. Obviously underestimating the scale of the phenomenon, the number of absences attributed to illness paints an almost unimaginable picture for those concerned with keeping workers' behavior under a bare minimum of control. A report on 1996 mentioned that 307,408 days of work had been lost due to sick leave (excluding 85,300 days of maternity and child care leaves), corresponding to 23,737 medical certificates (0.83 certificates per employee on average); 12.95 days had been lost per employee in this way, equivalent to 1219 employees missing work each day, adding up to 4.25% of total working days (during which the plant could have been thought of as shut down entirely).³⁴⁰

Management's immediate reaction to the apparently absurd levels of absenteeism was a strengthening of attendance and sick leave regulations. Attendance sheets and the monitoring of entries and exits through the plant gates were introduced, along with restrictions on obtaining medical certificates, which now required registration, payment of a certain fee, and a stamp

³³⁸ "Cine ar trebui să toarne în viața turnătorilor mai mult interes? *InfoAutoturism* 71, January 1996. "Hai la joc, la joc, la joc!" *Autoturism* 5, July 1990. "Din nou despre furturi." *Autoturism* 8, December 1990.

³³⁹ "Scaunele." *Autoturism* 5, July 1990.

³⁴⁰ "O întrebare, fără a pune la îndoială competența." *InfoAutoturism* 92, February 1997. 1996 was not exceptional in this respect. "Starea de sănătate a salariaților." *InfoAutoturism* 99, August 1997. A 1995 report pointed out that only 10-20% of those on sick leave were in fact ill. "Certificate și certificate..." *InfoAutoturism* 60, June 1995.

from both heads of department and union officials.³⁴¹ Nonetheless, with indiscipline believed to originate in widespread corruption in workers' ranks (figure II.16) and loopholes resurfacing again and again, simply setting new rules was deemed insufficient, as they could always be twisted under the endemic propensity toward abuse on the part of those they were meant to discipline.³⁴² Once this was acknowledged, it became clear that rules in themselves were useless in the absence of oversight and active enforcement by supervisors across the hierarchy. The strengthening of the managerial chain of command, subsequently became major objectives in curbing indiscipline and obtaining control over labor. Just like setting up mechanisms for direct centralized control, this task proved daunting. Behind attempts at euphemizing the problem in terms of the need for a new, rule-based organizational culture, another heavy historical legacy had to be overcome: the so-called "squeezing" of middle-management and the strong solidarity between shop-floor managers and workers, which had been central to the state socialist labor compromise (Burawoy and Lukács 1992:96ff).³⁴³

Manifest in daily hierarchical interaction, the weakness of the chain of command was a structural characteristic of the labor force. In 1984, out of 20,719 employees, 88.2% (18,276) were workers and just 11.8% were TESA (Rîpeanu 1985). By early 1999, TESA personnel represented 19.83% of the total work force, with workers taking up 80.17%, or 22,488 out of 28,050 (Debrosse 2007).³⁴⁴ This change reflected upper management's attempts at changing the structure of the work force as well as the organization of the production process in order to strengthen the position of management to the detriment of workers' autonomy.³⁴⁵ Since many of these plans were unsuccessful, management hoarded TESA employees in hope for more TESA jobs to be made available in the future.³⁴⁶ This quantitative boost of management functions across the board was supplemented by attempts at strengthening and multiplying mechanisms of supervisory control, either by reorganizing the production process or by adopting new rules and regulations. Then came the relentless exhortations of proper supervision, giving up on leniency, and the virtues of hierarchical authority. Despite these efforts, by the end of the first postsocialist decade the shop floor still appeared to operate under "chaotic management", functioning according to its own rules and sidelining official management to the point where it seemed almost entirely redundant.³⁴⁷

³⁴¹ "Decizie privind reglementarea circuitului foilor colective de prezență și asigurarea continuității proceselor de producție și muncă." *InfoAutoturism* 58, May 1995; 59, June 1995. "Decizie privind eliberarea, înregistrarea și plata certificatelor medicale." *InfoAutoturism* 86, October 1996. "Noi reglementări privind accesul, circulația mijloacelor de transport și a salariaților." *InfoAutoturism* 107, January 1998.

³⁴² In spite of the new sick leave regulations, medical certificates continued to be forged. "Precizări privind plata certificatelor medicale." *InfoAutoturism* 101, September 1997.

³⁴³ On the need for a new organizational culture, see "Cultura organizației." *InfoAutoturism* 98, July 1997.

³⁴⁴ In the summer of 1998 approximately 82.5% of employees were workers (23,435 out of 28,406). An assessment from November 1998 put the number at 80.26% (22,609 out of 28,169). "Evoluția resurselor umane." *InfoAutoturism* 115, August 1998. "Structura de personal a uzinei." *Curierul zilei*, 11 November 1998.

³⁴⁵ Such changes in the organization of the production process are also visible in the decreasing proportion of directly productive workers as opposed to indirectly productive ones: if in the mid-1980s Rîpeanu reported that approximately 82.38% of workers were directly productive (72.67% of the total work force), by the end of 1998 they added up to just 77.42% of the total number of workers (62.14% of the total work force). See "Structura de personal a uzinei." *Curierul zilei*, 11 November 1998.

³⁴⁶ "Întâlnire cu absolvenții de învățământ superior." *InfoAutoturism* 92, February 1997. "Avem o bogăție pe care nu știm să o folosim și să o prețuim suficient." *InfoAutoturism* 69-70, December 1995.

³⁴⁷ "Cum este posibil?" *InfoAutoturism* 109, March 1998.

SAD had a significant contribution in hampering hierarchy enforcement. Just like with compensation, its stance in relation to hierarchy was highly ambiguous. On the one hand, union leaders constantly decried the generalized lack of discipline, which figured high up on the union's official agenda throughout the decade. On the other hand, they denounced attempts by management to unilaterally discipline the work force, making the struggle against "management dictatorship" and "authoritarianism" across the



FIGURE II.16. "Sick leave?! Let's see what you have..." "One moment, it's in my coat..."

Source: *InfoAutoturism* 72, February 1996.

organizational hierarchy top priority in both discourse and practice.³⁴⁸ Despite proclaiming their allegiance to the managerial project of strengthening discipline, union leaders also claimed primacy in controlling the shop floor. They insisted on management sharing decision making power regarding the work force—resulting in the omnipresence of joint commissions—but they also emphasized the enhanced efficiency of disciplining mechanisms that uniquely pertained to the union as a collective organism of workers' democratic representation. Thus, if arbitrary management decisions—that is, decisions made without union consultation—were denounced as dangerous and unnecessary warmongering on the part of self-serving managers, SAD's alleged organic capacity to organize workers—in stark contrast with management's doomed attempt at separating the managerial function from workers—meant that it was the only actor able to mobilize the rank and file in pursuit of self-discipline.³⁴⁹ The union was thus in explicit agreement with management on the paramount importance of combating indiscipline, but fiercely disagreed over how this was to be achieved. In the resulting tug of war, each side claimed ascendancy over the other in the enforcing of discipline and at the same time renounced responsibility and condemned the other for cowardice and lack of interest.³⁵⁰ While this set the stage for constant mutual sabotage, it also spoke to the similar difficulties the two sides encountered in dealing with employee autonomy.

The case of disciplinary firings clearly exemplifies this struggle over who controlled the shop floor, while also painting a more nuanced picture of the lack of dismissals than in the heroic narratives promoted by both management and union representatives. The ambiguity of the union's position in regard to maintaining discipline on the job allowed its leaders to

³⁴⁸ "Două interviuri la nivel de vârf." *Autoturism* 21, July 1993. "Siguranța locului de muncă gătită de frica șomajului." *Autoturism* 31, January 1994. "Schimbarea locului de muncă." *Autoturism* 34, March 1994.

³⁴⁹ "Dacă se vrea, se găsește și omul." *Autoturism* 16, April 1993. "Bilanț și noi direcții de acțiune." *InfoAutoturism* 89-90, December 1996. "Adunările generale ale organizațiilor sindicale la nivelul secțiilor de producție." *InfoAutoturism* 106, December 1997. "Agenda SAD." *InfoAutoturism* 118, October 1998.

³⁵⁰ "Spectrul grevei." *Autoturism* 36, April 1994. "Contractul Colectiv de Muncă este o sumă de principii și reguli." *InfoAutoturism* 111, July 1998. "Despre sindicate, ca ultimă soluție." *InfoAutoturism* 118, October 1998.

simultaneously posit „no layoffs” as the primary objective of the union in the post-89 era while insisting on the necessity of giving up on those who did not keep up with disciplinary requirements.³⁵¹ Union leaders thus posed as the main protectors of job security and the first ones to take action against it becoming unconditional. Accordingly, on more than one occasion union leaders initiated discussions of and even set up procedures for laying off undisciplined employees. One such plan, announced with great pomp in the summer of 1993, claimed that the removal of the undisciplined would lead to a 2 to 3% reduction of the work force and proposed that each work group draw up lists with individuals to be fired, under the shared supervision of managers and union officials.³⁵² Insistence on shared supervision allowed the union to again position itself as an mandatory mediator between management and workers—a position leaders fiercely defended by keeping permanent watch against „abusive layoffs” and quickly condemning and even sabotaging any attempt from management to unilaterally take over the firing procedure.³⁵³ When lists with proposals for individual firings did start to circulate publicly, controversy abounded as to their real authorship: union leaders accused managers of unilateral abuse, while managers accused union leaders of non-involvement; at the same time, each declared the need for the other side to become more involved.³⁵⁴ Subsequent attempts at „restructuring” (figure II.17) met with a similar fate, as an agreement on exact procedures was difficult to reach, and formal agreement was almost as a rule immediately followed by disagreement in practice.

Beyond leaders’ insistence on shared control over procedures, in time the union’s position toward disciplinary firings witnessed a significant mutation: if initial restructuring plans were founded primarily on the idea that workers themselves were to collectively decide who would be fired, later attempts emphasized the ultimate importance of the collective labor contract, which contained standard layoff procedures for cases of indiscipline.³⁵⁵ This shift carried an implicit recognition of union leaders’ inability to control the shop floor and to unconditionally rally workers to their cause. From the outset, leaders insisted that even though collective layoffs were out the question, individual ones were permitted and even desirable. Hence, they pictured the union as a guarantor of collective responsibility, a role believed to fully correspond to and be legitimized by employee solidarity—the very solidarity to which union leaders appealed in order to establish individual responsibility, which was claimed to be separate from the collective one. This, it was said, would have made firings unproblematic insofar as they effectively represented the will of the collective. The replacement of direct deliberation by workers with the bureaucratic stipulations of the collective labor contract constituted a tacit departure from the overarching claim that the union identified with the spontaneous solidarity of workers. As we will see below, closing this gap required constant appeals to commitment and the conjuring of a different kind of solidarity than the real existing one of informal shop floor networks; the latter was, in fact, quickly identified as anathema to

³⁵¹ “Raport privind activitatea Sindicatului Autoturism Dacia în anul 1994.” *InfoAutoturism* 49, November 1994.

³⁵² “Două analize de producție, aceeași temă—calitatea.” *Autoturism* 22, August 1993.

³⁵³ “Către Consiliul de Administrație al S.C. Automobile S.A.” *Autoturism* 25, September 1993.

³⁵⁴ “Raport privind activitatea Consiliului Sindicatului Autoturism Dacia–Pitești, în perioada ianuarie 1993 – ianuarie 1994.” *Autoturism* 32, February 1994.

³⁵⁵ “Desfacerea contractului de muncă fără preaviz (Extrase din CCM).” *InfoAutoturism* 97, June 1997. “Câteva din principalele completări aduse la Contractul Colectiv de Muncă 1997|1998.” *InfoAutoturism* 97, June 1997.

both discipline and official hierarchy (figure II.18). Before attempting to elicit commitment, however, union leaders could still attempt to impose discipline by making recourse to overt threats with firings, using the collective labor contract not only to protect workers from management, but also to frighten the rank and file.

Periods of excitement about a potential restructuring were accompanied by the circulation of multiple lists with names proposed for firing.³⁵⁶ On one level, this pointed to the disagreement between union and management concerning procedures, which harked back to their conflicting claims over control of the shop floor and the right to manage the labor force. On a closer look, however, things were much more complicated, as union attacks did not simply highlight management's bureaucratic authoritarianism, nor did management just challenge the union's encroachment on attributions formally not pertaining to it. Mutual accusations were not limited to this struggle over the explicit function of managing the labor force but as a rule included denunciations of widespread favoritisms that were said to hijack the very mechanisms aimed at their elimination, implicitly leading to a bitterly ironical acknowledgment of their irrelevant and even counterproductive character (figure II.18). In any case, management's exercises of authority and the union's acts of usurpation did not have straightforward manifestations, as they always appeared to be conjoined with the informal exchange of favors.

Apart from the back-and-forth mutual sabotage, behind this frustration was an implicit recognition that, no matter the exact methodology, the idea of individual nominations suffered from a fundamental epistemic flaw: so-called indiscipline was not an individual affair, but an intrinsically collective one; the result not of isolated actions, but of nonresidual interaction founded on well-established social ties spanning the shop floor. Any attempt at establishing guilt was hence bound to produce partial results at best, corresponding either to half-baked measures (needing constant revision) or to systematic overturning by conniving potential targets (needing constant policing). Union leaders' calls for an abstract solidarity specific to workers as a generic group therefore faced up against the concrete solidarities of structured networks that cut across the formal boundaries of both managerial and union organization.

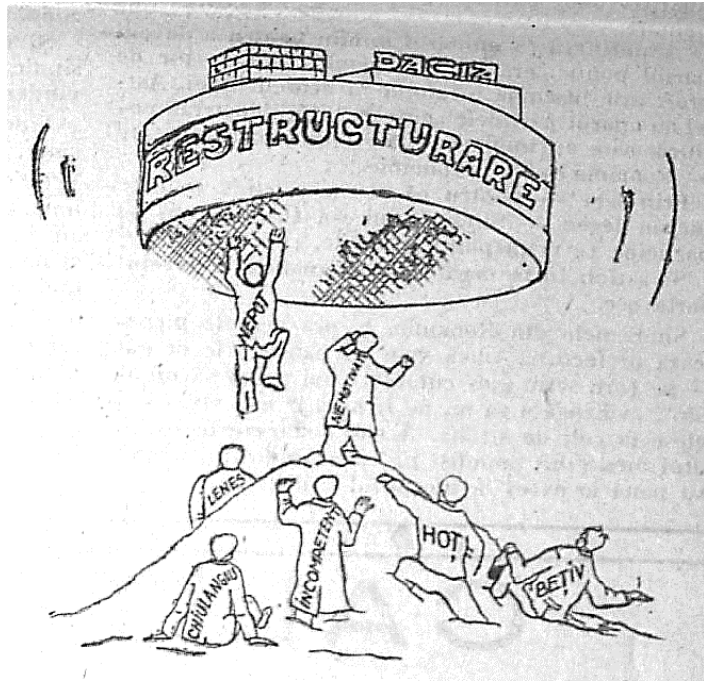


FIGURE II.17. “Restructuring”, leaving behind the lazy, the absentee, the incompetent, the undecided, the thief, and the drunk; the nephew nonetheless manages to hang on, barely. Source: *InfoAutoturism* 101, September 1997.

³⁵⁶ Numbering from just a handful to, on exceptional occasions, over a thousand names. “Două interviuri în consens.” *Autoturism* 36, April 1994.

This pervasive promiscuity created problems across the board. If explicit hints of parallel hierarchies and backstage arrangements in the union ranks were immediately hushed up with lavish verbal displays of formal democratic virtues, the oft encountered episodes in which supervisors themselves committed more or less defying acts of indiscipline commonly sparked controversy and were readily used by the union in its struggle against management's alleged nepotistic dictatorship, quickly prompting similar defensive responses.³⁵⁷ These fueled the smoldering conflict between management and the union, but also fostered their impromptu alliance against the workings of informal shop floor networks. Insofar as the latter elicited their own solidarities and created allegiances evading the official hierarchy, their salience meant that rule enforcement remained largely a matter of bargaining. The turning of disciplinary lists from a purportedly collaborative project into an explicitly top-down, punitive instrument meant more to demonstrate the discretionary power of formal hierarchy than elicit willing recognition of its legitimacy was a direct consequence of the relatively weak position both the upper management and the top union leadership found themselves in when it came to exercising control over the shop floor. It also pointed to the endemic opacity of actually existing relations in production, whose logic seemed to permanently escape the grasp of outsiders, leading to sometimes incomprehensible challenges. One such challenge was particularly difficult to even be acknowledged as such: in spite of all hardship, everyday life on the shop floor was permeated by a predominantly benign atmosphere—an apparent paradox that spoke to the enduring autonomy of informal transactions and social ties on the shop floor.

Regardless of their source, denunciations of indiscipline always appealed to its allegedly deleterious effects on (honest and good) employees' state of mind. For management,



FIGURE II.18. The cart with unemployed and the vacant job for dragging it outside. “Grin and bear it: With the cart, day by day, strictly and relentlessly / ‘Cleaning dust’ will be spread across departments / For the ones without ‘connections’ (having made no offerings) / Places have already been booked in the cart of the unemployed.”

Source: *InfoAutoturism* 40, June 1994.

³⁵⁷ On official disavowals of parallel hierarchies extending across the union organization, see “Vocația facerii.” *InfoAutoturism* 72, February 1996.

the lack of sufficient opportunities for TESA personnel was equivalent to insufficient pay and unsatisfactory work relative to professional qualifications, making valuable personnel disgruntled and threatening the viability of upgrading plans. Contrary to management's exhortations of meritocracy, a survey by a sociologist working in the personnel department revealed that only a small minority of newly hired university graduates wanted to leave the plant and, despite wage- and job-related problems, the "more than satisfactory" "psychosocial climate of the work group" (indicating "a high degree of cohesion") was most appreciated, making "integration" largely unproblematic (from both employees' and management's perspective) regardless of face-value obstacles.³⁵⁸ While management could simply ignore the mismatch and even profit from it, for the union the discrepancy between expectations of workers' discontent and the reality of the shop floor experience was exponentially more problematic. The union's claim to legitimacy was based precisely on its allegedly organic connection to workers, on its springing from workers' solidarity and leaders' intimate knowledge of life on the shop floor, as opposed to management, which union leaders insisted had no clue as to what was really going on in production. Like others of its kind, this claim was meant to render the union indispensable in front of both management—who could not control labor in a situation of profound disconnect—and workers themselves—who could thus be sure of adequate, virtually unmediated representation. However, since the union also depended on monopolizing the sources of workers' bargaining power, it was structurally hostile toward autonomous informal networks, which could buttress such power in the absence of formal organization and thus bypass the need for explicit collective representation. This complicated things to the point where union leaders insisted on denouncing even the pettiest expression of autonomy as indiscipline, while constantly highlighting the "bad atmosphere" and feelings of injustice raised by systemic indiscipline, all in favor of rigid affirmations of an abstract morality of labor that was said to be intrinsic to the workers' condition as such.³⁵⁹ A closer look into this struggle over the legitimate moral economy of the shop floor takes us to the third mechanism of labor control: the eliciting of commitment.

Conflicting solidarities and the mismatch of survival imperatives

Implementing a functional system of compensation and devising a functional bureaucratic hierarchy both implied the separation of the worthy from the unworthy, via internal differentiation or, respectively, exclusion. Both mechanisms were thus accompanied by morally laden discourses of deservedness and undeservedness, which in their turn functioned as elements of the more encompassing populist politics in which management and the union once again engaged side by side.³⁶⁰ While there was a significant overlap between this populist

³⁵⁸ "Câteva concluzii privind integrarea în muncă a absolvenților." *InfoAutoturism* 29, October 1997.

³⁵⁹ Reasons for firings ranged from not paying for one's transportation pass or "stealing" a piece of toilet coupling to simply spreading allegedly false and dangerous rumors among one's co-workers. "Prezentăm cazurile de desfacere a contractului de muncă, pe luna Octombrie 1994." *InfoAutoturism* 48, November 1994. "Racordat la D.C.M." *InfoAutoturism* 80, July 1996. "De ultimă oră." *InfoAutoturism* 106, December 1997.

³⁶⁰ By populism I mean "an anti-status quo discourse that simplifies the political space by symbolically dividing society between 'the people' (as the 'underdogs') and its 'other'. (...) [T]he identity of both 'the people' and 'the other' are political constructs, symbolically constituted through the relation of antagonism, rather than sociological categories. (...) An anti-status quo dimension is essential to populism, as the full constitution of

politics and compensation and hierarchy, it stood on its own as a mechanism of labor control aimed neither at differential material reward, nor at rule enforcement, but rather at the construction of workers' solidarity around the idea of labor's symbolic value. Far from ecumenical, the relentless rhetoric of the righteousness of labor was explicitly geared toward drawing clear symbolic boundaries between, first of all, the inside and the outside of the plant, and, second but just as importantly, the worthy and the unworthy on the inside.

The threat of exclusion through disciplinary firing already contained an implicit attempt at establishing a stark line between what lay outside the plant gates and the possibilities available for those who remained. Regardless of the admitted dwindling of the latter, opting out—by leaving voluntarily or committing acts of indiscipline—was said to inevitably bring about one's doom, as the alternatives were utterly hopeless (figure II.19). This, however, with an important implicit caveat: it was the case only for those who kept close to the world of industry and manual labor, and not for those who were keen to leave it behind in order to dedicate themselves body and soul to the newly flourishing world of commerce. In giving up on labor in industry in order to invest one's efforts into trade or financial speculation, one risked not only utter material demise—as the guarantees on one's efforts were, to say the least, uncertain—but also irreversible moral corruption—without which success would have been, in any case, doubtful, since one could not make it in a fundamentally corrupt world without becoming corrupt in the first place. The apparent abundance of money and of opportunities to make money outside the world of industry was thus at the same time a consequence and a source of corruption. On top of this, one was now faced with the symbolic debasement of production, as exchange seemed to take away both its material and symbolic value (figure II.20). The outside world was thus pictured as structurally hostile to industrial labor, both materially and symbolically, while at the same time offering no genuinely viable alternative, and thus exponentially increasing the importance of survival through labor. Undoubtedly, this was an uphill struggle. In an apparent paradox, within such a framing, surviving the market economy through labor alone implied fighting against its pathologies, while at the same time proving that an uncompromising alternative was indeed possible only within the confines of the market. Survival was simultaneously pictured as opposed to the market and as equivalent with market efficiency. Since this could only be achieved collectively, the company's success came first and, with it, each individual's subordination.

If external dangers were not enough, things were just as complicated inside the plant, as corruption seemed to be lurking everywhere. The crucial difference was that, instead of cautious retreat, here it required aggressive eradication. More specifically, what hampered all-out collective mobilization was the spreading of a rampant individualism, manifest in employees' claims to their own piece of the plant's resources (figure II.21), one too many times exceeding their fair share, and thus putting everyone's future at risk. The existence of a host of such internal enemies required urgent attention. Two avenues of action were available: relentless exhortations of the imperative of collective survival (if the issue was merely one of shortsightedness), or a constant pursuit of their outright elimination (if the issue was indeed one of ill will and moral corruption). Internal enemies pilfered company resources, decreasing

popular identities necessitates the political defeat of 'the other' that is deemed to oppress and exploit the people and therefore to impede its full presence." (Panizza 2005:3-4).

efficiency, damaging the collective good and threatening livelihoods other than their own. But before being dealt with they had to be identified.

Such ideas were readily instrumentalized by union leaders in denouncing alleged managerial pilfering. This first concerned the plant's very organization and formal distribution of resources, as management was said to have created a host of useless positions, special wage classes, and other formal privileges, with no correspondence to managers' contribution to production, and so encroached on the livelihood of workers—the real producers of value. Second, managers were said to be peculiarly prone to abusing company resources, due to their advantageous positions.³⁶¹ Not only did they benefit from various luxuries, like the use of company cars, but they systematically sought to extend these privileges beyond the realm of work proper—by using company

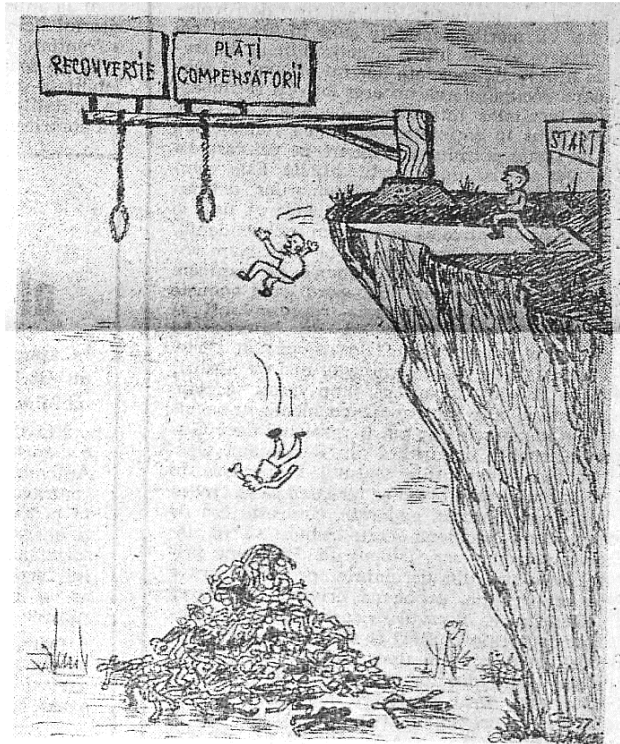


FIGURE II.19. The folly of taking a buyout or attempting professional “reconversion”—in reality, a choice between death by falling off a cliff and death by hanging. Neither were real possibilities for Dacia workers at the time.

Source: *InfoAutoturism* 103, October 1997.

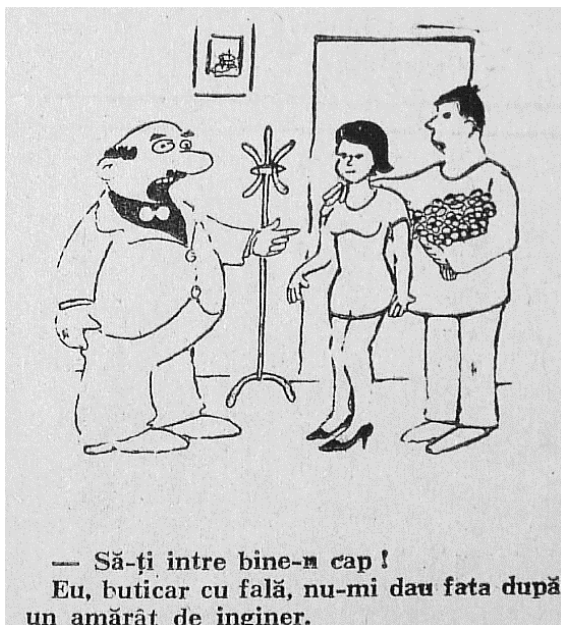


FIGURE II.20. Lopsided social valuation as market pathology: “You should get this through your head: I, a proud petty shopkeeper, will not give my girl away to a sorry engineer.”

Source: *InfoAutoturism* 84, September 1996.

cars for personal affairs, for example. In regard to material resources and even to workers themselves, managers tended to act as if the plant belonged to them, in direct offense to the true right of ownership, which was held by workers as a collective. Again, this was meant to render the union indispensable to workers in their relationship with management. The heated rhetoric notwithstanding, in reality it all added up to the same ambiguous yet solid alliance between union and management typical for the 1990s.

The most prominent manifestation of this alliance was precisely the aggressive promotion of a Manichean discourse meant to divide workers themselves into good and bad. Pompously announced by the leadership as foundational for union policy, the alleged existence of two separate groups of workers

³⁶¹ “Șeful, secretara, șoferul și canapeaua.” *InfoAutoturism* 53, February 1995.

recurrently haunted the plant's public sphere for the entire decade.³⁶² What supposedly characterized the first group was the acceptance of disorder and indiscipline, accompanied by the lack of any real concern for wages, which could only mean they had other sources of income on hand. The other group allegedly comprised workers who did not accept the existing situation, had no alternative to wage incomes and, consequently, were genuinely afraid of unemployment. To put it in the commonly used shorthand of the time, the difference was between nonwork (*nemuncă*) and work (*muncă*).³⁶³ The latter required union protection, necessarily implying the elimination of the former—the explanation being that, even though nonwork originated in an individual refusal of work, its consequences were anything but individual, as its very existence impinged on the collective welfare of those who worked, by reducing economic efficiency and thus lowering the wage fund.³⁶⁴ In other words, nonwork jeopardized the livelihoods of those who worked, and this to the point in which it could be routinely portrayed as the primary cause of all major misfortunes, from persistently low wages to a potentially catastrophic future closure of the plant.

As if such an infringement was not enough, nonwork was even more reprehensible, as it was intrinsically geared toward personal profit. Surpassing simple indiscipline, nonwork represented nothing less than the poaching of the labor of honest workers. Accordingly, it came in myriad shapes and sizes, from more obvious ones—such as resting during work hours in anticipation of the annual the harvest, disregarding quality and basic work tasks, or seeking undeserved bonuses (figure II.22)—to those requiring a more symptomatic reading—like forging a bus pass, too eagerly seeking promotion, or embezzling raw material.³⁶⁵ Being so protean, it was not readily identifiable, making the adoption of trenchant criteria necessary in attempting to separate nonwork from work: in short, what differentiated those who preferred nonwork to work was the availability of other sources of livelihood than work itself.³⁶⁶ Even when it was not an outcome of nonwork per se (like it could be said to be the



FIGURE II.21. Everyone wants a piece of the plant. Even the lion showed up to claim his share. Source: *Autoturism* 3, April–May 1990.

³⁶² "Scrisoare deschisă adresată membrilor Sindicatului Autoturisme Dacia." *Autoturism* 28, November 1993.

³⁶³ E.g., "Primăvara pătimirii noastre." *Autoturism* 17, May 1993.

³⁶⁴ Fictitious sick leaves were said to constitute "a double theft": from the enterprise and from the pockets of workers. "Certificate și certificate..." *InfoAutoturism* 60, June 1995.

³⁶⁵ A famous case of such alleged spoilage was that of Romică Sandu, an engineer who in the late 1990s claimed authorship of a rear spoiler for a facelift of the 1310 model. By suing the plant for massive financial compensation, Sandu sparked a huge scandal that lasted well into the 2000s. He gained a quasi-legendary status in the process, attracting the revilement of some and the admiration of others through his persistence and ultimate success.

³⁶⁶ E.g., "Opinii către publicația constructorilor de autoturisme 'Dacia'." *Autoturism* 28, November 1998.

case with embezzlement), such independence was labeled as inherently corrupting, the case of those who did agricultural work on the side being paradigmatic in this sense. As opposed to those who could relish in the patently immoral luxury of nonwork, honest laborers made do off work in the plant and work in the plant alone. For them, discipline was a must, since they literally could not afford otherwise; falling into the temptation of nonwork was deemed fatal, which was not the case with their nemesis. Nonwork not only lived off the collective welfare, but was also founded on the possibility to eschew its fate. Work, on the other hand, represented the unbreakable intertwinement of collective and individual welfares, endowing it with the moral right to claim ownership over the plant itself. It also implied an existential sacrifice against overwhelming odds, from where its explicit aura of heroism.

At the heart of the populist politics aimed at eliciting commitment lay such a rancorous-cum-promiseful affirmation of the value of industrial labor, denouncing the corruption and new temptations of the market while at the same time proclaiming the inevitable last laugh of the righteous, who would ultimately be vindicated by the same perilous market. Both outside and inside the plant, the efficacy of this populist project hinged on it providing an adequate interpretive lens for grasping the massive transformations in workers' experience of everyday life on and off the job. Indeed, the motif of work versus nonwork did not come

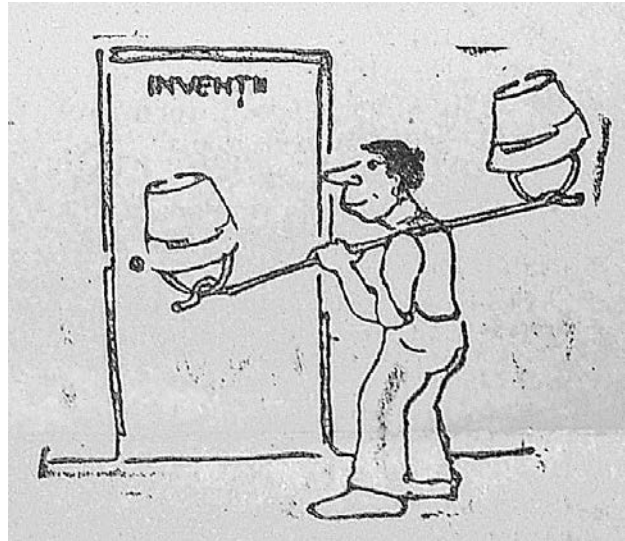


FIGURE II.22. In search of undeserved benefits.
Source: *InfoAutoturism* 83, September 1996.

out of nowhere, as it linked a host of more or less disparate elements of this everyday experience into a coherent discursive construct.³⁶⁷ It was precisely this rigid epistemic coherence and moral intransigence that bounded its efficacy, as things seemed much more ambiguous and contradictory when they were really looked at from below.

Take the paramount case of emergent inequalities. As discussed already, the market distribution of both material and symbolic rewards appeared entirely abnormal, since

³⁶⁷ The discourse of “work” versus “nonwork” was anything but new during the 1990s. The official state socialist “cult of work” was similarly meant to ensure labor discipline and profitability. Workers nonetheless had their own ideas of how labor was to be rewarded materially and symbolically, going as far as developing “an oppositional cult of nonwork, (...) trying to do as little as possible for their paychecks” (Verdery 1996:23). Such official discursive categories were subsequently reappropriated at Dacia in attempting to elicit commitment and divide the labor force. It is important to understand that by distinguishing between “work” and “nonwork” party and, later, trade union officials tried to make sense of (and impose meaning upon) a reality that to them was particularly opaque and that was certainly not split along such rigid lines. For workers themselves, the distinction between work and nonwork probably made little sense, especially from a moral standpoint—“nonwork”-like behavior could very well be backed by affirmations of the value of labor. Acknowledging this complicates discussions of labor under state socialism and after. For example, Kideckel’s (2008) emphasis on the effectiveness of the “cult of labor” in shaping miners’ beliefs about themselves and their labor is questionable and probably has more to do with post-89 nostalgia as well as discursive reappropriations in attempting to mount a defense against ongoing socioeconomic onslaught. For an analysis of attempts at boosting productivity in 1950s Romania, which included the discursive pinpointing of such pathologies as “nonwork”, see Grama (2016:chapter 5).

opportunities for enrichment by evading labor abounded. Highlighting the injustice of extra-labor enrichment sitting side by side with labor's deepening impoverishment was a major component of the populist discourse of commitment. The proposed solution was the purification of work through the elimination of nonwork—that is, the physical separation of honest laborers from corrupt profiteers, corresponding to the moral divide between them. But these clear cut boundaries did not fit the fundamental ambiguities of life in the plant during the 1990s. First, because engaging in profiteering activities could not be equated with a lack of workmanship and a chronic avoidance of work itself. Ironically, there was a higher probability for a juxtaposition of work and nonwork, since, just like the various acts of indiscipline, profiteering was a collective endeavor par excellence and its availability depended on how advantageous a position an individual held within the informal networks spanning the production chain. No matter how paradoxical and frustrating it might have seemed from the point of view of the union leadership and the upper management, given the intrinsic connection between the strength of these networks and productive efficiency, it was more likely that the best workers, and definitely not the worst, had the best opportunities for tapping into alternative sources of income. Second, and even more troubling, because the moral divide between work and nonwork was anything but transparent, and, ironically, attempts at clarifying it tended to backfire unexpectedly. Insofar as labor incomes alone remained systematically below the requirements of survival, the explicit positing of labor as the only justified means of survival became problematic. If labor did indeed imply a sacrifice for the collective welfare, the meaning of the latter mutated when it seemed to cancel out individual welfares. In other words, when the sacrifice required from individuals was total, thus revealing that the juxtaposition between individual and collective livelihoods was partial at most, a boundary had to be set beyond which the imperative of collective survival could no longer encroach upon the imperative of individual survival. While this might have seemed highly schizophrenic from the standpoint of the discourse of commitment, implying the existence of a moral gray zone in need of purging, for workers' it fed right into their own claims of entitlement and ownership over the plant itself.³⁶⁸ This was most obvious when it came to addressing the question of theft, one of the most pressing symptoms of the endemic lack of labor control during the 1990s, which proved most troubling to deal with in terms of either compensation, hierarchy, or commitment.

³⁶⁸ Analyzing a similar situation, Mateescu (2005) shows that not only did workers' highly developed sense of ownership over the enterprise not prevent them from overturning its resources to support their individual livelihoods, but it in fact fueled such activities and provided them with a moral justification strongly grounded in the assertion of the value of their labor. For the possible roots of this sense of entitlement in informal practices during state socialism, see Sampson (1985:56-7).

CHAPTER 9

THE POLITICAL AND MORAL ECONOMIES OF THEFT

Slippery standards and gray areas

“Theft and thieves (...), this plague eating away at the body of the plant and the labor substance [*substanța muncii*] of tens of thousands of honest employees (...) has no cure or, better said, is not handed the proper cure. (...) From the way things stand now, we are under the impression that, willingly or not, here, on the platform, the wolf quite easily ends up guarding the sheep.”³⁶⁹ Such denunciations were a staple presence in the pages of the plant newspaper. This unflinching characterization was followed by the likewise typical and flamboyant enumeration of declaredly undisputable facts, meant to demonstrate the soundness of such sardonic moral and economic judgments: in the first nine months of 1996, 134 crimes of theft had been reported with the local police, involving dozens of individuals and causing massive losses, of which only 60% had been recovered. The limitless inventiveness of thieves, who “acted in extremely well organized structures, as a genuine Mafia,” made them difficult to catch, while the incompetence, indiscipline and shortsightedness of employees in key positions—guards, warehouse employees etc.—rendered the task impossible. Given the extent of the phenomenon, the editor continued, it unavoidably impinged on the price of the final product and on wages, making it absolutely necessary for everyone, and especially for decision makers, to adopt “an attitude of intransigence and responsibility” in showing no mercy toward theft and thieves. As an example, the article was accompanied by a list of eleven names, complete with jobs and departments where they worked, of people fired for theft during the last week of October.

Thus portrayed, parts trafficking—or theft, as it was labeled by union officials, managers, and media pundits alike—was nonwork par excellence (figure II.23). Accordingly, it was said, nothing was more incompatible with the economic and moral world of industrial labor than thieving parts from the plant, which justified the alignment of responsibility and intransigence and allowed neither an economic nor a moral middle ground between work and theft. A scourge haunting the entire Romanian industry, theft was a symptom of the chronic corruption and the drive for enrichment at all costs that characterized not ordinary people trying to make a slightly better living, but the sleazy (*șmecheri*) few, those who had been rich from the very beginning (*băieții cu bani*) and in whose stead those who could only count on their labor—the “tens of thousands of honest laborers,” in Dacia’s case—were forced to pay.³⁷⁰ Within such a framing, survival was primarily a struggle between us, the workers, and them, the thieves. The former’s strive for dignity was at the same time their only lifeline and a severe setback in the struggle against the latter, for whom nothing was holy.

Notwithstanding any discursive borrowings, this marked a clear break with the portrayal of parts trafficking and traffickers before 1989, or of “indiscipline” more generally

³⁶⁹ “Furtul—o plagă care nu poate fi eradicată?” *InfoAutoturism* 87, November 1996.

³⁷⁰ “Furtul, un flagel care bântuie la Colibași.” *Autoturism* 18, May 1993.

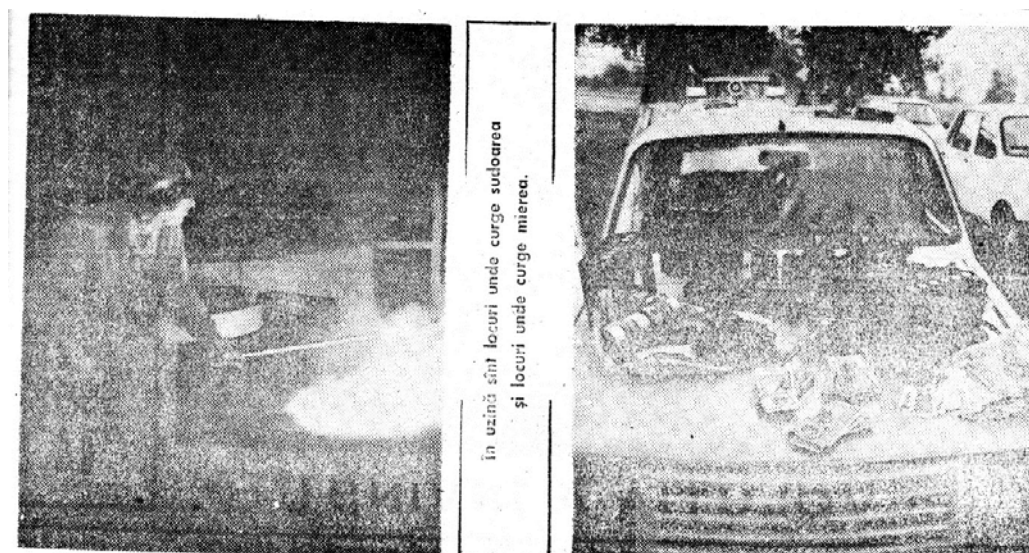


FIGURE II.23. “In the plant, there are places where sweat flows and places where honey flows”—work in the foundry compared to petty trafficking of car parts.

Source: *Autoturism* 5, July 1990.

speaking (figure II.24).³⁷¹ Not only was the discourse against theft and indiscipline much more euphemized during state socialism, but it was also constitutively geared toward the (moral) question of integration and (the possibility of) reintegration of the individual into the collectivity of workers. This aligned with the mock bureaucracy in the plant, which included relatively mild punishment for acts of indiscipline and pilferage (see chapter 6), and stood in stark contrast with the spiteful discourse against theft and “nonwork” after 1989, in which the issue of perpetrators’ integration was replaced by the allegedly existential threats they brought for honest workers and their collectivity. The move to a punishment-centered bureaucracy implied thieves being eliminated outright, rendering any discussion of rehabilitation doubly naïve: first, because such behaviors espoused deep-seated traits of character that could not be changed easily; and, second, because no such resources could be spared given the imperative of survival and the threat such wrongdoers posed to it. Corresponding to this elimination of any kind of ethical middle ground, no leniency was to be granted to thieves.

And yet, despite the self-assured righteousness of this profuse anti-theft discourse, confrontations with reality, actively pursued for the sake of both vindictiveness and vindication, quickly blurred the clear-cut boundaries it was meant to instill in the minds of workers and in the organization of the labor process. One such false opportunity presented itself when an employee in the paint shop sent a signed letter to the editor accusing several supervisors and TESA personnel of systematic embezzlement of parts and raw material.³⁷² Following an extensive inquiry, the Human Resources department dismissed all accusations, making allegations of the plaintiff’s “unbecoming attitude” toward other employees in the paint shop. Worse yet, her declared reasons were considered dubious: the firing of a colleague caught stealing five liters of metallic paint, which she regarded as profoundly unjust, since her

³⁷¹ Note the aesthetic differences between figure II.24 and portrayals of theft and indiscipline after 1989. In the former, perpetrators are depicted as average individuals who espouse no inherently inappropriate character features whatsoever, while interaction with authorities is portrayed in a playful and rather ingenuous manner.

³⁷² “Se piteau prin secții ca șobolanii.” *Autoturism* 39, May 1994. “Și totuși, chiar nimic nu este adevărat?” *Autoturism* 40, June 1994.

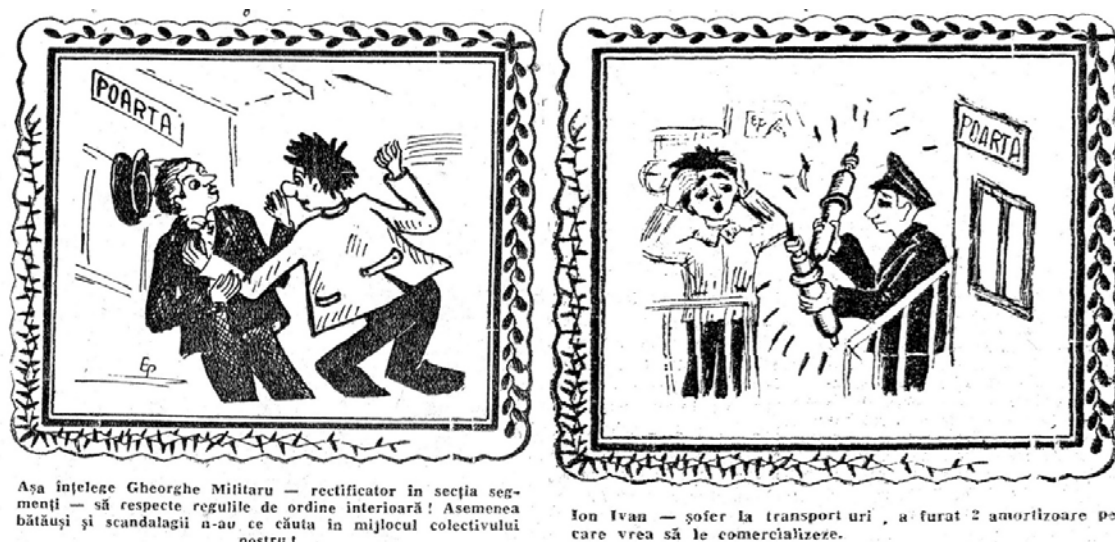


FIGURE II.24. Indiscipline, theft, and “mock bureaucracy”: “This is how Gheorghe Militaru—a honer in the ball-bearing department—understands respecting the internal regulations policy! There is no room for such brawlers in our collective!”; “Ion Ivan—driver in the transportation department—stole two shock absorbers which he wanted to sell.”

Source: *Avântul. Organ al Comitetului de Partid şi al Comitetului Sindicatului din Uzina de Automobile Piteşti* 230, 20 February 1974; 234, 15 April 1974.

colleague was “a downtrodden woman with a particularly difficult family situation.” The response openly incriminated the author of the letter and recommended an immediate disciplinary transfer. Agreeing with the incrimination of the initial plaintiff, the editors nonetheless portrayed her as a victim of organized scapegoating, since it was obvious she could not be the only guilty party and at least some supervisors had to have been either perpetrators of or accomplices to theft. The standard policy of indiscriminately imputing financial losses incurred through theft to all employees in the department had not been applied in the paint shop for more than a year, allegedly voiding the woman’s claim that she would willingly pay from her wages for what her colleague had stolen in trying to make ends meet.

Such occurrences revealed the incompatibility between the anti-theft discourse, stressing the preying of a powerful few on the oppressed many, and the reality of widespread embezzlement within the ranks of honest workers themselves. They also exemplified the convoluted efforts required to combat the public assertion of what might have been considered double standards, whereby some thefts were in fact economically and morally justified. More generally, they rendered visible the disconnect between the official position of those claiming to represent workers’ interests and the reality of workers’ everyday life, where the economic and moral imperative of survival trumped any absolute allegiance to work-related duties. Finally, they pointed to the role of theft in ongoing struggles on the shop floor, struggles which cut across official hierarchies and prevented the eliciting of any such across-the-board solidarity and commitment as the crusade against theft attempted to conjure.

Tackling the trafficking maelstrom

This episode from the spring of 1994 was anything but unique or exceptional. The problem was not just that thefts could not be attributed to readily identifiable bigshots, since proven

perpetrators often came from the ranks of honest laborers. What mattered most was that the scale of theft had by then taken entirely unprecedented proportions: parts theft had become an “endemic and “spectacular” everyday occurrence. Despite the feigned outrage, the several dozen people caught and sanctioned each year were just the tip of the iceberg, as being caught red-handed could happen only to those who were not able to circumvent the risks that were theoretically associated with parts trafficking.³⁷³ As the occasional special investigation revealed, standard reports tended to grossly underestimate the real extent of theft.³⁷⁴

Behind the appearance of generalized theft lay a significant diversity of reasons for engaging in trafficking, of products stolen, and of methods used to acquire them. Between the ones struggling to secure their own and their families’ livelihood and those who genuinely sought personal enrichment and saw trafficking as an opportunity for big business—or, to use a common expression at the time, between the ones who stole by the bagload and those who did it by the truckload—was an entire gamut of individual motivations, including many that did not easily line up to the two moral extremes of survival and profiteering.³⁷⁵ The variety of objects stolen was similarly vast, ranging from small ball bearings or meaningless toilet couplings to entire engines and, to everyone’s astonishment, even fully assembled cars.³⁷⁶ Imported and exported parts were regarded as particularly valuable, since they were assumed to be more rare and of higher quality than the ones produced locally for the internal market.



FIGURE II.25. Bursting out the gate, in blatant disregard of any security measures.
Source: *InfoAutoturism* 71, January 1996.

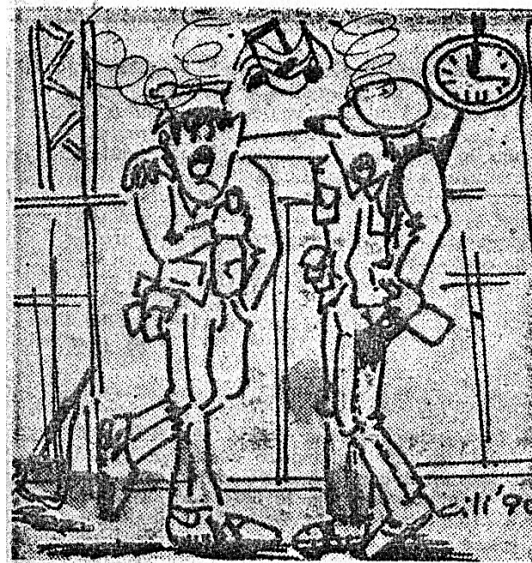


FIGURE II.26. “What guards?... they’re just some people who are painfully aware of what a hundred lei means.”
Source: *Autoturism* 7, September 1990.

³⁷³ In the first five months of 1995, 122 employees were caught stealing, while “in previous years” around 1150 had been sanctioned for the same offence. “Hoții și vardiștii.” *InfoAutoturism* 61, July 1995. Judging by official figures, the number of people caught stealing ranged from 100 to 200 per year.

³⁷⁴ For example, if an initial report mentioned 20 imported radiators missing from inventories, a subsequent investigation discovered that 535 had actually disappeared. “Ce s-a mai întâmplat la S.C. Automobile Dacia.” *Autoturism* 34, March 1994. Since they were expensive and could not be acquired without appealing to the government, the disappearance of imported parts prompted such extraordinary investigations on top of standard procedures. Cases involving products meant for export likewise became highly publicized and were granted priority in attempting to curb theft.

³⁷⁵ The mitigation of drudgery was one such reason, and making homers remained common during the 1990s.

³⁷⁶ “Hoții!!!” *InfoAutoturism* 55, March 1995. “Lupii paznici.” *InfoAutoturism* 56, April 1995.

Hence, considerable efforts were expended in coming up with methods of trafficking parts meant for export: from plain robbery within the plant premises or during transportation to more sophisticated arrangements in which an individual part (or a certain batch of parts, or even an entire car) was falsely labeled as defect or not up to the export quality standards in order for it to go on sale locally, from where it could be embezzled more easily.³⁷⁷ Both simple robbery and the hijacking of official procedures, as well as manifold practical combinations could be undertaken either in plain sight or more subtly, by groups with different degrees of organization or, rather exceptionally, given the resources required and risks involved, by individuals acting on their own. Somewhat paradoxically, organized groups operating in plain sight were particularly difficult to counter, as they readily made recourse to physical violence (figure II.25).³⁷⁸ Just as frightening, albeit for very different reasons, were the covert assailants who made full use of the much more peaceful mechanisms of market exchange by setting up informal markets inside the plant, complete with functional pricing systems and fully developed exchange circuits and including under-the-counter sales of products to both ordinary and extraordinary customers, entirely circumventing the official distribution chain.³⁷⁹

Aside from displays of moral outrage and exhortations of solidarity in fighting against theft, to the coalition of managers and union officials—which in this regard was presented as particularly solid—the problem presented itself above all in terms of an urgent need to counter the concrete manifestations of parts trafficking: the direct countering of methods, the closing of loopholes, and the elimination of opportunities. More generally, direct action against theft required the strengthening of discipline and hierarchical control, since theft was diagnosed as both symptom and cause of indiscipline. Theft was said to go hand in hand with a lack of concern for work as such, which, apart from the question of morality, had very specific implications: it involved conspiracy, which probably meant socialization during working hours (at worst, with music and alcohol), a disregard for time discipline, insubordination, etc. (figure II.26). This, it was hoped, could at least partially be fixed by force.

Fitting this diagnostic, measures meant to strengthen discipline were at least in part also aimed at reducing trafficking: buttressing bureaucratic mechanisms, formalizing transactions across the production chain, enforcing supervision and overall efforts at making inventory-keeping functional had this as an explicit target. The recurring surprise of impromptu discovering large quantities of parts produced entirely off the books, which obviously had to be circulated through complex yet obscure chains of exchange, constituted more than enough evidence of inefficiency in this regard, prompting both reactions of resignation and promises of an immediate doubling of efforts. Adequate punishment also figured high on the list of anti-theft measures: so-called “black lists” with names and jobs of those caught stealing were a regular feature in the plant newspaper; since they never went beyond a handful of entries, it was nevertheless obvious they were meant more to intimidate than credibly reflect the institutionalization of proper security. Though contract termination was unavoidable for

³⁷⁷ “Declarație pe cont propriu.” *Autoturism* 10, January 1993. “Descalificări care descalifică un director.” *Autoturism* 21, July 1993.

³⁷⁸ “Stimate domnule director.” *Autoturism* 36, April 1994. “Adunarea generală a SAD.” *InfoAutoturism* 52, February 1995.

³⁷⁹ “Zvonuri.” *Autoturism* 4, June 1990. “Grijile și necazurile unui lider de sindicat.” *Autoturism* 17, May 1993.

whoever ended up on these lists, this was far from the rule for all those caught red-handed. It appeared that, with the proper resources, one could avoid penalties and, given that anything short of maximum punishment was officially deemed reprehensible, a common complaint concerned the allegedly improper measures taken against proven perpetrators. Corresponding to managers' knowledge of vulnerabilities, investigations and forced personnel replacement (either via contract termination or disciplinary transfer) were especially targeted at ostensible strategic positions like transportation or warehousing.³⁸⁰ Somewhat paradoxically, however, the more thorough the measures, the vaguer they seemed: rescheduling production in order not to manufacture valuable parts during the last day of the week, for example, was based more on guesswork than on knowledge of how things actually worked.³⁸¹

Even the most sophisticated policies could backfire, ultimately fostering trafficking instead of deterring it. Take the example of the “Dacia National Sales Center” (“Centrul Național de Comercializare Dacia”—CNCD), meant to function as an autonomous unit in charge of automobile and parts distribution. Located in Pitești, the purpose of CNCD was, on the one hand, to counter dealers' corruption, by maintaining strict control over the merchandise they received to put on sale and, more importantly, over how they received it; accordingly, CNCD was to maintain and enforce strict written agreements with its customers and eliminate any informal bargaining and transaction.³⁸² On the other hand, CNCD was supposed to remove all retail and distribution activities from the premises of the plant, so that people could work undisturbed and without temptations from “self-interested” third parties. These intentions notwithstanding, accusations of rampant corruption, with bribery and favoritisms denounced as the normal state of affairs, became commonplace just a few months after CNCD was opened.³⁸³ Reactions from its supporters ranged from declarations of disbelief in the face of people's irrational preference for receiving bribes instead of high wages, to attempts at whitewashing, which immediately sparked criticism and sometimes even violent reactions.³⁸⁴ If no later than 1995 management was openly acknowledging that not all things were going as planned, by 1996 the idea of ensuring a high degree of autonomy for CNCD in handling distribution operations was scrapped.³⁸⁵

Such general measures of reducing theft by countering indiscipline were only half the story. The other half comprised an extensive security apparatus complete with a host of specific paraphernalia—fences, gates etc.—and dedicated personnel—a contingent of guards supplementing the standard police force, employees acting as “duty officers” on top of their regular work duties, as well as informal policing by the union, whose leaders repeatedly decried the blatant security problems, which they attributed to the unreliability of the official security apparatus (figure II.27), and insisted on taking matters into their own hands. On top of the

³⁸⁰ Apart from various TESA positions, jobs in warehousing and the guard service were practically the only ones posted regularly in the ad section of the newspaper, occasionally in large numbers at a time.

³⁸¹ “Stimate domnule director.” *Autoturism* 36, April 1994.

³⁸² “Clientul să intre în posesia mașinii într-un mod civilizat.” *InfoAutoturism* 69-70, December 1995. “Foarte important!” *InfoAutoturism* 66, October 1995. “Directorul general Constantin Stroe avertizează: Cei care vor fura din Uzina de autoturisme Dacia vor plăti cu prețul locului de muncă.” *Jurnalul de Argeș*, 2-8 May 1994.

³⁸³ “De ce mă furi, frate?” *InfoAutoturism* 48, November 1994.

³⁸⁴ “Cuvântul de deschidere a mitingului.” *InfoAutoturism* 55, March 1995. “În semn de protest!” *InfoAutoturism* 61, July 1995.

³⁸⁵ “Strategia de comercializare.” *InfoAutoturism* 82, August 1996.

dedicated police service inherited from before 1989, by 1993 the plant's own contingent of guards had grown to approximately 400, peaking at around 500 at the end of the decade.³⁸⁶ These measures, understandably considered excessive at face value, constantly failed at yielding expected results, prompting, in yet another ironic twist, a crusade against guards themselves, who were *en masse* blamed for, of course, corruption and lack of discipline. Names of guards regularly featured in the black lists, and the plant newspaper gave ample space to descriptions of concrete examples of guards' criminal activities. Guards were themselves thieves and, even when they did not steal, they seemed to care very little for their designated duties (figure II.27). Even when they did catch thieves in the act, they easily accepted bribes (figure II.26) or simply robbed the robbers and pocketed hefty profits for almost no effort at all. This question of disciplining the discipliners was even more troubling, since in many cases the involvement of guards could not be proven, even though their complicity was obvious. As emphasized in a police report, while some thefts did happen against the will of guards and employees and succeeded through cunning or violence, many would not have been possible had guards and entire work teams not silently agreed on staying silent and not acting against perpetrators in any way whatsoever.³⁸⁷ Initially bolstered by righteous enthusiasm, when coming up against the realities of generalized complicity and blurred boundaries between rule breakers and rule enforcers, attempts at curbing theft through hierarchical control led to constant frustration.



FIGURE II.27. The thief's New Year wishes (for the sleeping guard): “Let it tickle your nose. / The spirit of Satan / Should perish from your voice / So you sleep like a log. / You will not be my accomplice / If you “cop out” in your sleep / To everyone you’d tell / Of your great ‘heroism’. / If you were to catch me stealing / —God forbid— / Ten years in a row. / You’ll be unemployed.”
Source: *InfoAutoturism* 30, December 1993.

Compensation as short-circuiting and the profits therein

If attempts at eliciting commitment against trafficking sprang from the convoluted moral economy of industrial labor in the face of emerging market realities and the idea of forcefully combating trafficking through bureaucratic mechanisms of evaluation and punishment targeted its concrete manifestations, the mobilization of compensation operated on yet another level and directly addressed the issue of why so many people needed to engage in trafficking in the first place. As discussed already, the connection between wage insecurity and the proliferation of

³⁸⁶ “Furtul, un flagel care bântuie la Colibași.” *Autoturism* 18, May 1993. “Cum este posibil?” *InfoAutoturism* 109, March 1998.

³⁸⁷ “Furtul, un flagel care bântuie la Colibași.” *Autoturism* 18, May 1993.

trafficking—or the mismatch between the requirements of production and those of basic social reproduction—was transparent enough for it to be explicitly problematized in the very early days after December 1989. Since the company's wage policy was severely restricted, raising wages to an adequate level was out of the question (see previous chapter). The only alternative was to offer employees a direct share in the plant's physical output. Giving employees the opportunity to acquire highly-desired vehicles and badly needed spare parts with a discount was assumed to alleviate at least part of the income problem. In its more elaborate instantiations, this was also meant to reduce theft by putting cheap cars and parts on the market legally and at the same time cheaper than what official dealers offered, eventually reducing demand for parts on the black market at least locally. No matter how good they sounded on paper, recurring attempts at making car and parts distribution a substitute for wage compensation were marred with contradictions and ended up being absorbed and used as an instrument in the very struggles and by the very informal networks they were meant to curtail.

In the aftermath of yet another disappointing round of negotiations with the government over the company's wage policy, in the spring of 1995, a union group leader (a position equivalent to that of a shop steward) wrote a letter to the newspaper explaining that, despite the apparent cul-de-sac, a solution to the problem of employees' drastically insufficient remuneration did in fact exist.³⁸⁸ The proposition, backed up by evidence of similar practices from abroad, included selling cars to employees at a discount and on a regular basis, as well as offering them the opportunity to buy spare parts up to 40% cheaper than the retail prices, and even cheaper for those meant for "morally obsolete" models. Anticipating criticism that under such conditions employees would simply sell their cars and parts for a profit and indulge in petty smuggling [*bișniță*], the author of the proposal pointed out that, after all, each car owner was free to make use of his property as he saw fit, the right to put one's car on the market being indissociable from the right of ownership itself. Those who did not acknowledge this right, the group leader continued, were precisely the ones who sought undeserved personal profit above all else. Finally, the proposal was meant not just to increase wages, but also to deal a blow to the black market for parts and take counterfeiters out of business. Despite attempts to anticipate and dismiss criticism, the contradictions were all there in the initial proposal: while the market allowed and even presupposed full control over personal property, living off the profit one made from buying cheap and selling dear was regarded as utterly unacceptable; such a policy risked turning trafficking from a hidden dishonest practice into an officially sanctioned one. Furthermore, since the plant's bargaining position in relationship to the government depended on its financial results, regularly selling a large quantity of products at a considerable discount risked weakening this position, leading to an even more accelerated decline of wages in the future. As long as the market for cars and parts remained severely undersupplied, such a policy was economically questionable and could prove disastrous for labor control, as it risked reducing the effectiveness of compensation. Insofar as it implied an official acknowledgment of the need to live off extra-labor incomes, it was morally condemnable and could again diminish labor control, as it risked lowering employees' commitment and favoring indiscipline. Hence, what made this solution extreme was not the idea itself of distributing cars and parts to employees, but rather that it implied regularity and an explicit recognition of employees'

³⁸⁸ „Există o soluție!” *InfoAutoturism* 128, May 1995.

systematic syphoning of the final product. Aside from these reasons, the so-called solution should have seemed entirely unextraordinary and, indeed, by that time it could just as well be regarded as simply more of the same.

Five years earlier, in early May 1990, the government had approved for 1% of the plant's planned monthly output and 25% of what was produced above preset targets to be sold to employees, putting the union in charge of distribution.³⁸⁹ By November, the quota was bumped to 2%, with the added restriction that buyers were not allowed to sell the cars earlier than five years after receiving them. The employee discount—the “incentive” [*stimulent*—was set at around 16% of the retail price. The problem was that 1% or 2% of the monthly output was little more than a drop in the bucket, especially when demand grew exponentially and hundreds of thousands of requests for automobiles piled up on waiting lists. Since owning a car yielded huge profits, either symbolic or material, the few hundred vehicles per month to be distributed among the almost 30 thousand employees were far from satisfactory. Finding an appropriate method of distribution was thus first priority: 10% were reserved for upper management, union leaders and other employees undertaking “special activities,” to be used on the job; the rest were to be distributed to departments and from there to employees, according to seemingly strict criteria: work

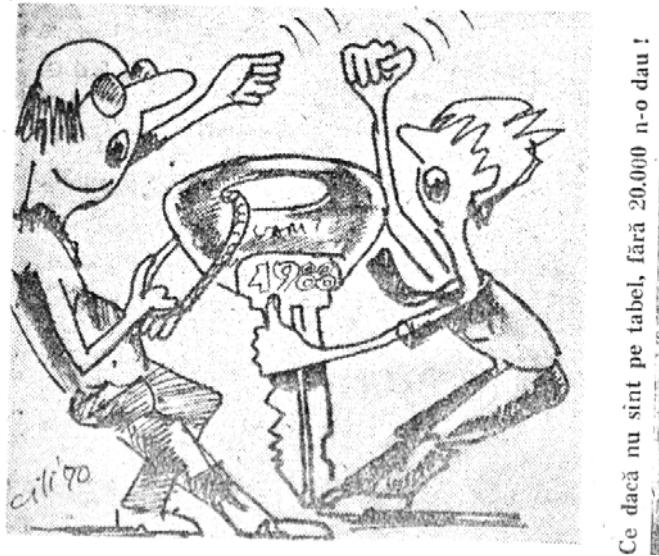


FIGURE II.28. “So what if I’m not on the list? Without 20,000 [lei], I’m not handing it over!”

Source: *Autoturism* 7, September 1990.

performance, seniority, days of unpaid vacation during the previous year, inventions and innovations, lack of disciplinary sanctions, etc. To ensure equitable results, joint union-management commissions were tasked with undertaking individual evaluations and, for the sake of transparency, lists with the names of those selected were to be made public. Like so many other issues addressed in this manner, conflict ensued immediately, to such an extent that by August 1990 union officials considered car distribution to be “the number one problem in the plant,” as it had produced constant talk of irregularities in distribution, generalized discontent among the workforce, and a flurry of rumors, gossip and back and forth accusations fueling one controversy after another (figure II.28).³⁹⁰ Examples of entire departments in which supervisors and TESA more generally had used their positions to allocate vehicles only among themselves, of abuses committed by the very people in charge of compiling the lists, or of situations in which several lists circulated in parallel further fed speculations of endemic dishonesty and embezzlement.³⁹¹ This first attempt at using alternative means of compensation

³⁸⁹ “Anunțuri” *Autoturism*, supplement, May 1990. “Repartizarea autoturismelor pentru I.A.P.” *Autoturism* 4, June 1990. “Precizări privind acordarea cu prioritate a autoturismelor Dacia pentru salariații I. A. Pitești.” *Autoturism* 8, December 1990.

³⁹⁰ “Problema numărul 1 în uzină.” *Autoturism* 6, August 1990.

³⁹¹ “Informații.” *Autoturism* 7, September 1990. “Bumerangul.” *Autoturism* 7, September 1990.

thus failed in the face of the same mechanisms that eventually led to the faltering of most attempts at securing labor control. Nothing made failure clearer than discovering that resourceful employees had in fact found ways to buy what they needed straight off the production line, without having to go through the allocation scheme that had been set up with so much care. The problem persisted throughout the decade and devising a proper methodology to distribute discounted cars and parts to employees remained high on the union agenda well into the second part of the decade.

Meanwhile, however, SAD had already come up with a different strategy. Profiting from the union's advantageous position and the highly lucrative business of car distribution, by early 1993 plans had already been drawn up for a separate union-run commercial enterprise to handle sales to workers.³⁹² Up and running later that year, Getica's initial purpose was to provide employees with basic goods below market prices, on top of which came trading in cars and spare parts. Pictured as "the first step toward the great privatization [*marea privatizare*]," it took less than a year for it to risk becoming a massive disappointment.³⁹³ The main reason for slow business was identified in the unfair competition from authorized dealers and from the booming spare parts trade in Mioveni. Since it could not compete on the market under normal conditions, Getica representatives requested that Dacia's management grant the company the status of "most favored dealer," meaning preferential prices and, crucially, priority in receiving merchandise from the producer.³⁹⁴ Having obtained these advantages from Dacia, plus machinery for a new service station, Getica flourished and, by the fall of 1996, was declared the most promising small enterprise in the county.³⁹⁵

Getica's success depended on an agreement with upper management, consolidating the alliance and division of labor between union and management when it came to securing labor control. Even here things nonetheless strayed from the initial plan. Soon after Getica's success seemed guaranteed, it again risked facing undesired competition, this time from inside the plant itself. In early 1996, SSC, SAD's only significant competitor during the 1990s, started operating its own retail company—the Prima Nova—and promised to provide cars and spare parts not to all employees, as Getica was doing, but only to its own members. As the danger became apparent, the initial welcoming of Prima Nova as benign competition turned into an all-out war against SSC and its leader, demonized for seeking personal profit instead of serving the interests of all employees. Capitalizing on its relationship with upper management, the SAD leadership managed to obtain a public statement from the general manager condemning Prima Nova and defending Getica.³⁹⁶ Prima Nova later disappeared off the list of nuisances along with SSC (see chapter 3). More unsettling was the need to admit that the righteousness of Getica's mission—that is, to provide cash-strapped employees with much needed spare parts and highly desired automobiles—was not really deserved in full, since it had no significant

³⁹² "Proiect: Statutul societății comerciale cu capital privat 'SAD' S.A." *Autoturism* 14, March 1993.

³⁹³ "Două interviuri la nivel de vârf." *Autoturism* 21, July 1993.

³⁹⁴ "Scrisoare deschisă către Consiliul de Administrație al SC Automobile Dacia SA." *Autoturism* 32, February 1994. "Pentru unii mumă..." *Autoturism* 36, April 1994.

³⁹⁵ "S.C. 'Getica' S.A.: Investiții de aproximativ 70 de milioane lei în utilaje." *InfoAutoturism* 66, October 1995. "'Getica' S.A., Locul 1 în Topul județean." *InfoAutoturism* 86, October 1996.

³⁹⁶ "Concurență... loială." *InfoAutoturism* 71, January 1996. "'Concurență loială', dar informație incorectă!" *InfoAutoturism* 72, February 1996. "Le-a pus Dumnezeu mâna în cap!" *InfoAutoturism* 74, March 1996.

impact on the broader issues of insufficient wages and widespread trafficking, nor did it prove itself as an essential fixture that workers could not circumvent. Ironically and to some pundits' dismay, Getica's best customers were not impoverished workers wanting to benefit from the much deserved comfort and pride that came with owning an automobile, but a host of "millionaires" who had no problem whatsoever in paying for their cars with the cash up front and who, it was assumed, lived a life of luxury and corruption.³⁹⁷ Despite the generalized wage insecurity, there seemed to be plenty of money to go around, especially when it came to cars and spare parts. Getica's economic success thus came at the price of it entering the maelstrom created by the permanent struggle between management, union and employees, with its full gamut of parallel hierarchies, conspiracies, and cloak and dagger tactics.

The double truth of anti-theft crusades

Apart from automobile and spare parts distribution, the conflict between SAD and SSC was also waged on the terrain of the anti-theft campaign centered around the eliciting of commitment and the enforcement of hierarchy. News of SSC's leader, Iulian Nițulescu, being caught red-handed with stolen parts surfaced as early as September 1993, with the case lingering in court for at least a year.³⁹⁸ Attacks on Nițulescu included depictions of how he managed to get through multiple checkpoints before finally being caught (implying that he was in cahoots with guards and possibly involved in a broader conspiracy) as well as quick dismissals of his claims of being framed.³⁹⁹ Given the widespread nature of trafficking, most likely both sides of the story were at least partially true. Indeed, sadly but tolerantly admitting that even SAD leaders "had their flaws" was not uncommon in critical moments, nor was it a problem for such inferred confessions to stand alongside the ubiquitous back-and-forth allegations of involvement in parts theft. Such accusations were in fact common currency during the 1990s, functioning as weapons meant to discredit and even remove opponents altogether. Importantly, expectations of these effects remained largely independent of the truth value of such assertions, the ascertainment of which, consequently, seemed to carry minuscule weight in the flurry of indictments. The attempted discrediting and removal of a rival leader was far from exceptional, as accusations of theft were used not only against other unions, but also in trying to take internal contenders and the occasional rogue official out of the picture.⁴⁰⁰ Fully explicit or thinly veiled accusations of theft were a constant fixture in the pages of the plant newspaper, which rival camps routinely used as both weapon and battleground. What mattered in such exchanges was less the comparison of arguments meant to prove or disprove that certain deeds had indeed been committed, than the performative function of assertion and the conjuring of the appearance of popular justice (figure II.29).

Struggles within the union movement were nonetheless secondary to those between union officials, managers, and workers themselves. Union leaders constantly pointed out or alluded to the disproportionately damaging and devious misdeeds of managers, while stressing

³⁹⁷ "Sunt invidios!" *InfoAutoturism* 64, September 1995.

³⁹⁸ "Mi-am reluat misia." *Autoturism* 24, September 1993.

³⁹⁹ "O sesizare ieșită din comun." *Autoturism* 40, June 1994.

⁴⁰⁰ "Din opiniile unui participant la congres." *InfoAutoturism* 67, November 1995. "Comunicat." *InfoAutoturism* 97, June 1997.

that any genuine attempt to curb theft should primarily target “large scale thieves” (*hoții de mare calibru*), the “big fish” who occupied “warm positions” in the company hierarchy, while enjoying the protection of so-called “disinterested benefactors” from even higher up the command chain.⁴⁰¹ Denunciations of managers’ corruption and systematic engagement in parts trafficking thus joined the permanent reminders of workers’ duty to purge thieves and pilferers from their own ranks. In one type of instance, black lists were used to demonstrate to workers



FIGURE II.29. “What are you concocting there, Mr. Nae, in the cabin-office of the department boss? – My reply, boys. – Do you by any chance also mention the cars they say you obtained through influence peddling? – God forbid! How could I shoot myself in the foot?”

Source: *InfoAutoturism* 57, April 1995.

the folly of nonwork and to managers the leaders’ willingness to align themselves to the broader goal of securing profitability. In other situations, however, they were used to highlight the corruption of TESA personnel and of management’s disciplinary henchmen (that is, guards and supervisors) and with this the union’s capability to pose a real threat to management and to effectively defend workers’ interests. Concrete examples—ranging from comprehensive evidence and court reports to conspicuous innuendos of willing or unwilling complicity to theft, climaxing with matter-of-principle vituperations of simple passivity—were thus used to justify sweeping claims on the material and moral states of entire categories. And even if union leaders were particularly vocal in this regard, workers and even managers themselves were anything but strangers to the handling of power struggles through public accusations of theft. The attacks on Nițulescu and other union officials were not confined to the internal trade union politics, but based their effectiveness on accusers’ ability to enlist both managers and workers against particular trade union

figures—who, after all, belonged to a category just as susceptible to falling victim to temptation and corruption as any other. In each situation, therefore, each side could count on forging circumstantial alliances with representatives of the others. And while in this sense accusations of theft were meant to function as rallying cries, attempts at mustering one’s forces always carried the risk of spinning out of control and sooner or later turning against the accuser.

A series of events happening in the engine department in early 1993 exemplify the risks of using public accusations of theft as instruments in the struggle over control of the shop floor.⁴⁰² To begin with, thirteen employees signed a letter addressed to the union leadership, accusing a foreman and a setter of abusive behavior toward workers, drinking on the job and, most seriously, stealing six cylinder heads and being in cahoots with shady smugglers hanging around the plant premises. No doubt, the goal was to remove the two alleged perpetrators, for

⁴⁰¹ “În numărul viitor.” *InfoAutoturism* 43, August 1994.

⁴⁰² “Învățămintele unei epistole.” *Autoturism* 16, April 1993.

which the signees used the most efficient means available: they publicly appealed to the union leadership to defend them against their abusive-cum-thieving supervisors. The letter prompted an investigation by a joint union-management commission, the results of which were, from the accusers' standpoint, rather ambivalent. The foreman was not fired, but only transferred to a different department. The reason for the transfer was not theft, but his lack of "moral authority" in imposing discipline and curbing thefts in the department. While this was attributed to the foreman's drinking problems, thus vindicating at least a part of the accusers' claims, it was also clear that someone who had been publicly accused of theft could not be expected to be kept in charge of countering theft itself. Put differently, the foreman was not punished because he had stolen, but rather because he could no longer be counted upon in preventing those he supervised from stealing. All this was not based on abstract judgment, but on the troubling findings of the investigation. The accusation of stealing six cylinder heads seemed remarkably puny in comparison to the two to three hundred pieces that the commission established had been stolen on a monthly basis during the past years. The sheer scale of the matter absolved the accused of any suspicion of being the only perpetrators. Instead, the investigation concluded thefts were "endemic" and that things looked as if "each employee comes to work to play cops and robbers, with the robbers ultimately winning"—an unavoidable outcome, given the "flourishing of indiscipline and corruption" and the general "atmosphere governed by the rule of 'let me, so I let you' [*lasă-mă, ca să te las*]." Though no evidence was found to incriminate any one person in particular, it was not unreasonable to suspect everyone, including the signatories of the initial complaint themselves. Correspondingly, the commission recommended the strengthening of supervision and the elaboration of stricter bureaucratic mechanisms of control in the engine department, with the explicit purpose of making life harder for those who engaged in parts trafficking. Rather than falling victim to such shop floor conspiracies, the accused foreman ended up being a collateral victim in this larger plan, which in fact targeted the likes of those who proclaimed their innocence and sought to scapegoat their direct adversaries.

Such episodes brought to light the volatility of shop floor politics, in which the pristine weapon of public denunciation could immediately turn against the denouncers and even the discursively strongest alliances—as was the one between workers and the union leadership against supervisors—oftentimes proved fragile and susceptible to being overturned.⁴⁰³ Far from random, such oscillations originated in the major difficulties encountered in establishing clear boundaries between those who worked and those who smuggled parts, which became particularly obvious in moments in which relatively rigid classificatory discourses were called upon to confront highly ambiguous states of affairs. Paradoxically, given the relentless attempts at making a clear-cut separation between the guilty and the innocent, the overall result was a climate of generalized suspicion in which everyone was potentially guilty unless proven innocent and in which the most effective way for someone to proclaim innocence was indirect, by explicit association with the righteous cause. In other words, in a conflict you were most likely better off accusing others before they accused you.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰³ A similar episode, though not as full of drama and irony, from the paint shop was presented in the same issue of the newspaper. "Dacă se vrea, se găsește și omul." *Autoturism* 16, April 1993.

⁴⁰⁴ Openly affirming one's own or even someone else's innocence was looked at with suspicion and commonly attracted criticism and even outright protest. This created additional problems for the implementation of anti-theft

The rootedness of trafficking in production

From a different angle, there is no surprise that separating between thieves and honest workers proved cumbersome, as the separation between work and trafficking was quite impossible to achieve. Parts trafficking was not a mere surplus that, given enough will and constraint, could be eliminated or reduced to irrelevance. Instead, it played an integral part in balancing the needs of production and those of labor reproduction and served as a key element in regulating the local labor market. Moreover, it remained embedded in the political economy of automobile production—an inheritance from the state socialist era that was consolidated during the 1990s. This happened not against the new context, but was rather catalyzed by it. The endemic undersupply of car and spare parts markets, the severely underdeveloped distribution network, the constant quality problems prompting frequent parts replacement, or the high degree of consumer autonomy when it came to repair and servicing persisted and became even more prominent during the 1990s. In production, shortages, lack of control over the production chain, labor intensiveness, wage insecurity and a high degree of autonomy at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy likewise survived the first postsocialist decade despite manifold efforts to eliminate such sources of managerial distress. No doubt, the mitigation of labor shortage and the increased leeway granted by the government boosted management's leverage on workers, sparking a smoldering conflict over the control of the labor process. Attempts at controlling labor either through better compensation, strengthened hierarchy or heightened commitment were frustrated by the workings of strong informal networks cutting across formal organizational boundaries, along which opportunities for bonuses and promotion were traded, dispensations regarding inflexible rules were granted, and complex relations of mutual dependence and subordination were forged, together with accompanying solidarities. This resulted in a highly tense situation in which such “mafias” were visible enough to be denounced, yet opaque enough to prevent an adequate grasping of their weaknesses. Crucially, these networks were not simply parasitical offshoots to be sooner or later purified by the market, as management and union officials commonly portrayed them to be. They in fact functioned as the backbone of both production and trafficking, which is why a permanent state of outrage over the existence of such networks could coexist over the long term with constant gestures of tolerance and appeals to self-governance. While this could be said to have simply reproduced the pre-89 status quo, the relative stalemate of the 1990s was highly dynamic. An apparently paradoxical outcome given



FIGURE II.30. “They call me out in the classroom about you, dad, telling me that up on the hill, in the plant, you are... a tainted man, that you are a ‘lifter’, that you have no character, that they kicked you out and now you are... unemployed.” Source: *InfoAutoturism* 68, November 1995.

measures that depended on setting up theft-free organizational innovations. Management’s insistence that CNCD was free of corruption and operated solely based on formal contracts sparked violent reactions from workers who regarded this as an attempt at whitewashing. “În semn de protest!” *InfoAutoturism* 61, July 1995.

the strengthened position of management, the vastly increased opportunities provided by the market, and the newfound purpose of trade unions, the trademark of the 1990s was the expanded reproduction of both automobile manufacturing and the parts trafficking economy.

Though they remained intimately intertwined, the symbiosis of manufacturing and trafficking did begin to incorporate a certain degree of tension, as the latter could no longer be considered *de facto* risk free for practically everyone. Heightened risks involved either falling victim to adversaries' direct attacks, unwillingly ending up a sacrificial lamb in the struggles over the control of production, or simply being caught off guard without a plan B. These risks were unevenly distributed. First, because finding oneself in either of these situations often meant already having a relatively weak position within the networks across which trafficking operated. And, second, because only those poorest in money and connections were forced to bear the full brunt of being caught, which included not just being left out of a job, but also stigmatization and loss of respect (figure II.30). For the rest, lucrative alternatives of obtaining an apparently inexplicable pardon, securing a disciplinary transfer or temporary layoff, or even quitting altogether and making it big outside the world of production remained available.

Professionalization and the new horizons in the realm of exchange

At times proud and full of himself, other times disheartened and in a bad mood. With the cigarette in the corner of his mouth, smiling at you when his business pans out, cursing when something or someone hampers his schedule. You run into him where and when you would expect less. You never know what shift he's on. Today you run into him in the morning, tomorrow in the afternoon, and the day after tomorrow he comes on third shift, so he can make a killing. He is his own boss and he never likes being at anyone's orders.

You're out of luck at the service station, you have no chance with the spare parts shops. With him you always find what you need. He has everything: ball joints and con rods, engine sets and headlights, linings and pistons! Prices are negotiable, depending on the customer.

Sometimes risk must be paid for. To acquire merchandise, he uses any means possible. Today he will bribe the guard at the gate. Tomorrow he will make recourse to all sorts of stunts: jumping the fence, going up the ramp, using the railway... in a nutshell, he'll go through wherever he can.

The darkness, the silence of the night, focusing too much and all of a sudden the cry he was afraid of: "Stop! Security!" And then he has to make a choice: either he stays, or he runs. And he has always chosen to run.⁴⁰⁵

This was one type of instance in which the porosity of the boundary between the plant and the outside world manifested itself. Workers, regardless of their callousness or degree of dedication to work duties, could tap with relative ease into the plethora of opportunities available on the outside for those with access to and insider's knowledge of the plant (figure II.31). Employees who, in one way or another, bridged opportunities of obtaining parts on the inside and those of sale on the outside nonetheless comprised only half the story; professional traffickers were the other. The professionalization of the trafficking economy and the transformation of spare parts smuggling into a full time occupation were entirely new phenomena in the 1990s. Professional traffickers did not hold jobs in the plant but had more or less direct access to a supply of spare

⁴⁰⁵ "Accidentul." *Autoturism* 6, August 1990.

parts and even automobiles.⁴⁰⁶ Access could be obtained via various means, giving the world of professional trafficking its diversity: from those who simply hanged around the plant gates all day long waiting for employees to come out and sell them parts, or those who used bribery and violence to enter the plant themselves in order to steal or buy, to those who could count on more systematic collaborations with employees silently delivering products for them to put on the market. The professional trafficker most commonly operated as part of a network of variable size and efficiency across which money, connections and the means of physical violence could be accumulated and mobilized as needed. The division of labor and hierarchical structure of such networks produced both peddlers and local kingpins, as well as a myriad of auxiliaries like bodyguards, front men, or informers—figures that in the early days of the 1990s quickly went from exotic to typical. Such professionals were the main suppliers of a burgeoning black market.



FIGURE II.31. “Where are you coming from [with that bag across your shoulder]?” “From work.”

Source: *InfoAutoturism* 123, January 1999.

Just like before 1989, the black market for spare parts thrived in a context of endemic undersupply and inefficient distribution through formal channels, only now it had free rein to expand. The spare parts “hunger system” persisted throughout the 1990s and turned the area surrounding the plant (especially Mioveni, but also Pitești and other nearby localities) into a cauldron of trade in cars, spare parts and associated services, with locals taking full advantage of geographical asymmetries created by the company’s troubles with securing nationwide distribution.⁴⁰⁷ On a local level, the geography of trafficking was as diverse as it was encompassing: from the “sharks” hanging around the plant gates and public space loiterers who made up Mioveni’s new “street mafia” (*mafia străzii*) to the Pitești flea market (figure II.32), people’s private homes serving as warehouses and impromptu points of sale, and a plethora of dedicated parts shops that opened in Mioveni in the early 1990s—numbering up to a staggering one hundred, according to the local press.⁴⁰⁸ The trafficking economy engulfed Mioveni and radically transformed its townscape and public life. Several other economies developed around parts trafficking, including an unusually vivid nightlife, a complex criminal underworld, and a flurry of formal and informal providers of car repair services. The trafficking economy also provided vital support to the booming formal trade in parts and cars. Since fluctuations in supply made business both highly profitable and highly volatile, parts shops and even car dealers were dependent on maintaining stable footholds in the trafficking economy, which

⁴⁰⁶ Well-connected ex-employees, for example, could buy cars and parts directly from the plant, circumventing the undersupplied shops and gargantuan waiting lists. “Cum a reușit firma ‘Aralex’ SRL-Pitești să achiziționeze 21 de autoturisme într-o singură zi?” *Autoturism* 6, October 1992.

⁴⁰⁷ “Planetarele.” *Autoturism* 4, June 1990.

⁴⁰⁸ On the flurry of commercial activity in Mioveni as “street mafia”, see “Vocația politiciii.” *Autoturism* 17, May 1993. On “mafia” as reality and discursive trope during the 1990s, see Verdery (1996: chapter 8).



FIGURE II.32. “Every Sunday, between 6:00 and 12:00, you can visit the sales exhibition for car parts (and other things) in the Pitești flea market. Private trading houses exhibit a wide variety of products for negotiable prices. You will not leave with an empty bag!”

Source: *Autoturism* 5, July 1990.

of descriptions of economic chaos and asset plundering across the country.⁴¹¹

While such occurrences were only sporadic, stories of trafficking were a standard fixture in the local media. Contrasting with the generic descriptions of trafficking from the national media, local reports oftentimes focused on specific episodes and were especially keen on highlighting the guilt of managers and union officials. The importance of pointing fingers was particularly salient in the coverage of the occasional high profile case claiming to expose bafflingly elaborate schemes of large scale embezzlement.⁴¹² Despite harsh condemnations of endemic corruption at the heights of the trafficking economy, these scandals were distinctively

served an all-important function of brokerage in supplying the formal economy of parts and cars.⁴⁰⁹ A multitude of chains of transactions based on buying cheap and selling dear thus connected the shop floor with both formal and informal retail. For customers, this meant not only they could find what they needed and at far better prices than in the badly supplied shops outside the region, but also that they accepted the risk of being swindled with forgeries, defect parts, or bogus agreements. Regardless of the real extent of these practices, which understandably enjoyed great popularity in denunciations of trafficking, the trafficking economy remained highly lucrative both for the multitude of smugglers-cum-entrepreneurs and for scores of customers from across the country.

Mirroring the situation in the plant, the extent and routine character of the trafficking economy in the region made it at the same time tolerable and outrageous. Every once in a while, scathing reports on parts theft and its relation to the black market appeared in the national media (figure II.33), prompting quick dismissals from company and union representatives, likely due to concerns regarding the consequences such reports might have on the company’s relationship with the government.⁴¹⁰ At least in the first half of the decade, reports of spare parts trafficking in the national media, though spectacular, tended to get lost in a flurry

⁴⁰⁹ Frequent cases in which local companies were found stocking massive quantities of parts whose origins could not be ascertained sparked considerable outrage. “Piese auto, în valoare de sute de milioane de lei, furate de pe platforma Colibași.” *InfoAutoturism* 55, March 1995. “Să te crucești!” *InfoAutoturism* 72, February 1996. “La Mioveni—gaură de peste un miliard din comerțul cu piese auto.” *Puls*, 30 June – 6 July 1998.

⁴¹⁰ “Suntem în stare...?” *Autoturism* 8, December 1990. “Mass-media cu și despre Dacia.” *InfoAutoturism* 96, May 1997.

⁴¹¹ “Durerile Daciei în drum spre Europa.” *Adevărul*, 6 September 1990.

⁴¹² “Doctorul Grigorescu continuă să atace conducerea Uzinei Dacia.” *Jurnalul de Argeș*, 20-26 June 1998. „După cât se fură, Dacia e cea mai profitabilă uzină de autoturisme din lume” *Jurnalul de Argeș*, 11-17 July 1998.

not permeated by a priori denunciations of the inherent immorality of the market at the behest of the glorification of production, which was central to the condemnation of theft inside the plant. Instead, alongside stories of corruption, the market was also presented as a genuinely viable alternative for the common folk, with entrepreneurship (or “privatization”) as the quintessential way forward, no matter how petty or dubious it might have seemed in the short term.⁴¹³ Accompanying this were omnipresent displays of awe at the newfound power of money and of fascination with the bewildering world of commodities. While it admittedly involved giving up on the old ways and morals of making a living, the promise of money, of material fulfillment, and even of excess, of luxury and promiscuity, could be pictured as both vain and natural, risky and rightfully desirable. In this interpretation, trafficking was not altogether condemnable. Symbolic profits automatically followed material ones, with the exact means of obtaining the latter being less important. Trafficking could, from this perspective, be regarded as a real alternative to work in industry, and one with at least a modicum of legitimacy, beyond that granted by the imperative of immediate survival.



FIGURE II.33. A corrupt guard carelessly watching the ransacking of a factory: “There is ‘vigilance’ and it works for... everyone.”

Source: *Adevărul*, 15 August 1990.

Reproduction and bifurcation

The onset of these massive transformations of the labor market and the incipient realization of the new possibilities and constraints brought by the market raised a plethora of previously unforeseen issues that seemed as problematic as they were vital. One such issue was that of youth, of the fate of new generations in the new context. If the fate of those who had reached adulthood by the time of regime change was thought to have been sealed by the protracted birth pangs of the coming capitalist-cum-democratic social order, the question of youth was entirely different. Not plagued by the habits of state socialism and too young to morally justify their inclusion in the “generation of sacrifice” to which their parents and older siblings were considered to unwillingly (albeit not entirely unrightfully) belong, those in their twenties and late teens, just now entering the labor market, were portrayed as undeservedly becoming the main victims of the transition from autocratic state socialism to democratic capitalism. The youth question thus encapsulated the new labor politics that had taken over and brought together the old world of production and the novel world of apparently limitless exchange.

The specter of unemployment was most disconcerting, as workers were no longer assured their children would follow in their footsteps, if not stand on their shoulders and enter

⁴¹³ The popular meaning of “privatization” (*privatizare*) was much more encompassing than the transfer of state assets and public services into private hands. Simply put, privatization meant “going private”, by starting a business or taking over an already existing one. Alongside the unemployed, those who “privatized themselves” (*s-au privatizat*) represented a new social category, allegedly made up of many ex-workers.

the lower ranks of the technical intelligentsia. Announced at the beginning of 1992, the transfer of the Colibași vocational school from the Ministry of Industry to the Ministry of Education was a symbolic marker of the dire situation of youth who could no longer count on having jobs in the plant immediately after graduation.⁴¹⁴ This was regarded as a terrible omen, as the trajectory of local vocational education and that of automobile manufacturing had until then been the same. More troubling were the anticipated turbulences in the labor market, as the impending shift from chronic labor shortage to chronic job shortage rendered young people's prospects entirely bleak. Instead of the promised maximum profits drawn from democracy and the market, in the absence of work, youth were bound to experience both material and moral debasement, corresponding to industry's double function of securing livelihood and righteousness. This provided a supplementary framing for the issue of overstaffing, oftentimes attributed to old workers who held on to their jobs at all costs, in defiance of the plight of many young and valuable potential employees, who were more entitled to and more in tune with the kind of work needed to secure a future for the plant.⁴¹⁵ Correspondingly, the youth motif popped up in all discussions of employment policy: the need to hire more youth was proclaimed when it came to debating wage levels (low wages were said to be a disincentive for the intrepid and highly skilled), maintaining discipline (indiscipline was said to spring from employees not realizing how lucky they were and how unjust the times were proving for so many fully capable youth), and affirming the duty of solidarity when facing destructive times (hiring youth was allegedly the only way forward for the plant and, with it, for the workers' community).

Boosted by the prospective crumbling of industrial activities in the region, the effectiveness of such arguments was compounded by the disconcerting lack of new employment alternatives. The newspeak of reskilling, training courses, entrepreneurial job seeking, and job creation through entrepreneurship faced up against the utter absence of employment opportunities that could reasonably be thought of as befitting the situation. In Mioveni, the sole opportunity of taking nursing school classes at the House of Culture was as improbable as it was heavily advertised. Apart from this, the only formally sanctioned option was to go into business and thus enter a free for all which only the excessively gutsy and the lucky could survive. Confused by the endemic uncertainty and abandoned by politicians and other decision makers, young people were said to lose their moral bearings and turn their attention to illegitimate and hazardous activities like gambling and commerce, which, moreover, they began to regard as legitimate full-time occupations.⁴¹⁶

Though springing from tangible changes in the political economy of labor, the portrayal of youth as existentially jeopardized only partially reflected the real experiences of young people during the 1990s and fell short of grasping the full implications of the choices they were actually faced with. To be sure, not all young people were denied employment in the plant and overstaffing certainly was not about old workers successfully entrenching their positions of privilege. Given the significant labor turnover, the plant remained an option for young people

⁴¹⁴ "Cine se joacă de-a baba-oarba cu Grupul Școlar de la Colibași." *Autoturism* 2, June 1992.

⁴¹⁵ "Cui e frică de testare?!" *InfoAutoturism* 56, April 1995. "Căderea 'Daciei' ar fi un dezastru pentru România." *InfoAutoturism* 57, April 1995.

⁴¹⁶ "Ce fac tinerii noștri?" *InfoAutoturism* 72, February 1996. "Ce așteaptă tinerii de la 'aleșii' orașului nostru." *InfoAutoturism* 78, May 1996.

who had the necessary credentials and connections; the vocational school remained tied to the plant and the tradition of hiring employees' children persisted. Even if jobs were no longer guaranteed for everyone from the get-go, they were far from impossible to obtain and plenty of young people joined the plant's labor force during this decade. A factory job had the advantages of job security, high autonomy, and the possibility of making some money on the side; conversely, it came with low wages, abysmal working conditions, very short career ladders for those lacking connections, and, crucially, the feeling that one was simply delaying the inevitable, as the specter of plant closure and total economic transformation loomed large. In such conditions, it was understandable that many young people fostered ambivalent feelings toward work in the plant and were not as eager to become industrial workers as their parents would have liked them to be. For those who grabbed the opportunity, trafficking offered much-wanted compensation without too many complications, so many preferred maintaining a foothold on both ends of the local labor market. For others, however, plant work retained little more than a veneer of respectability and could not compete with the rewards available in the new private economy, especially in the booming trafficking sector. For young people who became professional traffickers, their occupation seemed able to fulfill the promises of regime change—the availability of money, the capacity to consume as one pleased, the joy of conquering public space etc.—in stark contrast with the frustrated expectations of older workers. Hence, professional traffickers could participate in the symbolic struggles in which claims to future vindication were made, and they could do so with the full backing of the present. As it grew, the trafficking economy appeared increasingly able to offer what manufacturing seemed less and less capable of guaranteeing: a sufficient income, symbolic capital, and positive prospects. The avenue of entry into the trafficking economy was not the family, but participation in the intense social life that had quickly flourished in Mioveni's public spaces. For those growing up and coming of age during this period, and especially for those who, for one reason or another, invested more into social life outside the home, trafficking was a more viable option than others.

Trajectory bifurcation between manufacturing and trafficking was most obvious with generations now entering the labor market and revealed an emerging process of labor market segmentation, as manufacturing no longer held a *de facto* monopoly on employment opportunities. Segmentation was key in regulating the local labor market and balancing the needs of production and those of reproduction. In the plant, it allowed for a vital modicum of labor control that went against and even overturned the manifold attempts at securing it via compensation, hierarchy and commitment. Indeed, this was only possible because of the failure of separating those who worked in manufacturing from those who took part in the trafficking economy, the physical, social and moral worlds of industry from those of commerce. The constitutively porous and persistently fuzzy boundaries between these two realms were the foundation of a new status quo that, despite continuities with the state socialist political economy of labor, was characteristic to the 1990s. If a change of fortunes would become apparent in the 2000s, it took another turbulent decade for this status quo to be replaced by a similarly solid arrangement, also growing on the disintegrating material and symbolic scaffolding of its predecessor. This was triggered by the next major event after the regime change of December 1989: Dacia's long anticipated and feared sale to a foreign investor.

CHAPTER 10

FROM VIRTUOUS TO VICIOUS CIRCLES: EXPECTATIONS OF PRIVATIZATION (II)

Anticipating privatization: a genuine encounter with the market?

In the months prior to privatization, while the details of the deal with Renault were being settled, the caprices of the new economy appeared to finally be catching up with Dacia, and its allegedly miraculous survival since 1989 seemed to be coming to an abrupt end. Signs of a weakening car market were already visible at the end of 1998 and Dacia experienced its first ever sales slump in the early months of 1999. For management, the rapid shift from customers having to give bribes to having to be bribed in order to buy cars came as a shock.⁴¹⁷ Likewise, the black market for cars was reeling, though smugglers somehow managed to undersell official dealers with prices far below the retail standard.⁴¹⁸ While upper management had for several years been warning of an impending disaster, they had always claimed things would go bad only during the 2000s, largely due to Dacia's inability to put out a product meeting up to the design and technological expectations of the times. This prospective diagnostic did not anticipate the extent of the country's economic problems at the end of the decade, when the shock therapy measures adopted after 1996 took a severe toll on the internal market for expensive goods such as automobiles. With exports having dropped to a measly 1.3% of sales in 1998, this time Dacia's fate no longer seemed discordant with its environment.

The end of 1998 and the first half of 1999 were marked by attempts at finding short-term solutions to these new problems, while preparing for the upcoming takeover by Renault. Even though wages were increased several times to keep up with rampant inflation, generalized "austerity" and cost cutting were deemed top priority. Production stoppages were announced and, for the first time, SAD had to negotiate for employees to receive at least some payment during these periods. Measures aimed at updating the organization of production were announced, including some staple elements of so-called flexible production: just-in-time delivery, statistical process control, increased employee involvement across the hierarchy, etc. In anticipation of privatization, internal job mobility was restricted, the Renault teamwork organization (the UEL—*Unitate Elementară de Lucru / Unité Élémentaire de Travail*—system) was discussed, and concerns with the unavoidable upcoming personnel restructuring were voiced from all sides. Rumors of imminent closure and utter collapse enjoyed wide circulation, alongside rather pollyannaish proclamations of salvation and apparently more realistic stances stressing the need for patience and continued sacrifice. Apart from these novelties and renewed expectations, the usual scenario unfolded seamlessly: institutionalized bribery at CNCD, endemic quality problems, large scale absenteeism and countless abuses in

⁴¹⁷ "Adunarea Generală a Sindicatului Autoturisme Dacia—10 februarie 1999." *InfoAutoturism* 124. February 1999.

⁴¹⁸ "Prețul Daciei a scăzut cu 2 milioane pe piața neagră"; "Bișnițarii din județ vând Dacii noi-nouțe cu 1,2 milioane lei sub prețul de pe factură." *Jurnalul de Argeș*, 20-26 February 1999.

taking sick leaves, generalized indiscipline together with its corollary of massive theft, routinized scapegoating, and the struggle of the union leadership and upper management against shop floor conspiracies all remained high on the agenda. If anything, they were now discussed more openly and with much less emotion than before.

Outside the plant, the future of automobile manufacturing in the region was as hot a topic as the economic and social disaster the country seemed to have plunged into. Laughs at the “passing times of ‘heave-ho’ [*hei-rup*] and of Stakhanovite enthusiasm (of [producing] a lot and cheap), under the lee of which each and every Dacia employee, from managers to the guards at the gate, stole as much as he could carry [*fura cât îl țineau curelele*],” were accompanied by doubting remarks on the difficulties “the French” would face in dealing with “the bureaucratic and patronage networks from the plant and with the managers who will fight to the teeth to keep their privileges.”⁴¹⁹ Otherwise, pessimism regarding the layoffs that would follow privatization loomed large. And while spiteful celebrations of the impending downfall of the trafficking economy abounded alongside deriding reports of panicking spare parts traffickers, fearful questions were raised as to the social impact the disappearance of the trafficking economy would have in the region, and especially in Mioveni, since the livelihood of so many people depended on it.⁴²⁰ Striking a similar note, union leaders publicly emphasized that, even though employees were sick of uncertainty and unanimously regarded privatization the only solution, not all were ready for what it meant to work under Renault.⁴²¹ While not “physically prepared,” they were definitely “morally prepared” for “transitioning to a purely capitalist economy.” A precapitalist limbo protecting the intertwined realms of manufacturing and trafficking—such was the meaning of the 1990s transpiring from these evaluations and according to which future plans had to be agreed upon. Up to that moment, the market had allegedly been staved off. Now it was time to embrace it, willingly or not.

Plus ça change

Corroborating such views of being stuck in time for at least a decade, in the eyes of French managers visiting Dacia ahead of privatization, the plant looked as if it came straight from the industry’s history books.⁴²² The results of a “social audit” (Debrosse 2007:287-8) undertaken ahead of privatization revealed that, on the 1st of January 1999, out of the 28,050 employees (excluding the sales, service, and insurance divisions), 22,488 were workers—a staggering figure speaking to a grossly inefficient and highly labor intensive production process. Between 50 and 70% of employees had another family member working in the plant, and the 16.95 years of seniority on average pointed to the considerable labor turnover of the previous decade. The wage issue was deemed “extremely sensitive, and potentially disastrous for the social climate”. Varying from individual to individual, the base wage comprised between 53 and 75% of the total wage (67% on average), with various bonuses taking up the rest. In spite of such variation,

⁴¹⁹ “Venirea Renault va dărâma dictatura claxonului la Colibași.” *Jurnalul de Argeș*, 9-15 January 1999.

⁴²⁰ “Renault ante portas.” *Curierul zilei*, 4 November 1998. “Ce se va întâmpla cu orașul Mioveni??”; “Bișnițarii de piese au intrat în panică.” *Curierul zilei*, 11 November 1998.

⁴²¹ “Despre sindicate ca ultimă soluție.” *InfoAutoturism* 118, October 1998.

⁴²² In this section, I rely heavily on Daniel Debrosse’s (2007) comprehensive account of Dacia’s privatization, as it was seen from the standpoint of Renault and through the eyes of various officials of the French company.

the auditors emphasized that the “individualization” of wages was nonexistent, as wages were settled only via annual collective bargaining. Working conditions were disastrous and constituted a threat to the health and even lives of a large number of employees; over 34% of employees worked in conditions classified as “difficult” or “very difficult.” Since these came with substantial bonuses, rather than keeping away from jobs implying dangerous working conditions, employees tended to seek them out. As far as the organization of production was concerned, though 46.8% of employees had officially gone through a training program during 1998, the real figure was of approximately 5%. Officially, the absenteeism rate varied from 4.5 to 10%, depending on department and method of accounting. Hierarchical relations were highly dysfunctional, dominated by a “culture of the boss” (*culture du chef*) (Debrosse 2007:337) that systematically led to miscommunication and ruptures between levels. Worse yet, the organization of key functions, such as logistics, primarily reflected a concern with theft prevention, which severely impacted the efficiency of productive activities. Excessive measures notwithstanding, both individual and organized theft of spare parts and raw material was rampant, as anyone could go in and out the plant gates at any time with no trouble at all.

Outside production, things were just as bad, with a distribution system laden with cronyism and almost entirely taken over by more or less covert networks of patronage spanning both sides of the physical and organizational boundaries of the plant. As one French manager charged with mapping out a new distribution network recalled,

Across the whole of Romania, with suitcases full of banknotes, customers headed for Pitești, by train or by bus, to purchase their Dacia. A host of touts and middlemen waited at the train stations or at the factory gates. Many dealers did not have an after-sale service station, let alone one for pre-sale setups. Cars were sold in exactly the same state as they were when they went off the assembly line. Dealers’ offices could be located in squalid warehouses at the end of dark passageways, or, just as well, in your average apartment building. One could become a Dacia dealer by using one’s family ties with the factory managers, one’s political connections, one’s links with the Securitate, one’s relations with the police, with the army or with the local football club. This large number of dealers, based in Pitești, literally drained the market of vehicles, at the expense of extra-local dealers. The shortage of vehicles benefited this entire “mafia” that gravitated in and around the plant. Even for official dealers, high commissions were necessary to receive vehicles to be sold to customers. (Debrosse 2007:546-7)

This situation was described as highly deleterious for the economic wellbeing of the plant. It deterred customers from buying Dacias due to inflated prices, dubious quality, and risks attached to the quasi-legal or illegal arrangements required by such dealers. It also implied that a significant part of the money meant to circulate between exchange and production was systematically syphoned into the pockets of dubious businessmen who in reality did nothing to improve the product or its standing on the market. Furthermore, it distorted the price system, undermining any effort at market forecasting and production planning. As another French manager reported, in the broader picture, this severely corrupted distribution system nonetheless fit in perfectly with the unpredictable economic environment and the extreme flexibility encountered in production:

At that time, I discovered the distribution network was several billion lei in debt to Dacia due to failures in paying for new vehicles. Dealers bought their cars from the manufacturer with a 14-day payment delay, but since they had not cash, they did not pay. Moreover, since cars were expensive, there were only a few vehicles in stock, and the distribution resembled a “cash

and carry” system. The manufacturing process was what I would call “side-of-the-line” [*bord de chaîne*], meaning that on the side of the assembly line they had boxes with gages, boxes with plastic tanks, boxes with aluminum radiators, etc. When these boxes went empty, instead of a gage, one put in a plastic cover; instead of a plastic tank, one put in a tin tank; instead of an aluminum radiator, one put in a copper one! All cars were handcrafted [*fabriquées artisanalement*], of a mediocre quality. What worked very well was the accounting system keeping track of every piece that went into each car, so that each had its own price. If I were to add the annual inflation rate of 50%, we would have an idea of a landscape of new vehicles in which the prices and specificities depended on the different commercial actions of each particular dealer. (Debrosse 2007:547)

Systemic shortages of money, cars, and parts side by side with ubiquitous under-the-counter and sometimes nonmonetary exchanges, widespread informal hierarchies that disregarded any sort of boundary between the inside and the outside of the company, and immense resources of adaptability and flexibility in the face of uncertainty. If at first they declared themselves amazed that things could indeed function under such conditions, French managers also expressed their concern with the extent of the changes needed to achieve the goals imagined at Renault. This was the purpose of a comprehensive restructuring program to be implemented gradually over the years following privatization. Obtaining adequate labor control was paramount.

At the beginning of the 2000s, the balance of power in the struggle over labor control had once again shifted significantly during a relatively short period of time, partly as a result of privatization, and partly as a result of developments circumstantial to the transfer of ownership. Even though privatization was conditioned upon Renault making investments and maintaining a gradual layoff schedule, Dacia no longer depended on the government in settling the details of its personnel policy. Continuing to hold significant leverage with the government due to the company’s economic, social and symbolic importance, management no longer depended on government investment decisions and resource allocation mechanisms and could now count on the availability of financial means, as well as of organizational and technological know-how that seemed gargantuan in comparison to the dismal resources available during the 1990s. Moreover, the new management team had obtained the collaboration of the union in handling labor-related aspects of restructuring, including an agreement that SAD would not intervene in matters concerning the reorganization of production. Finally, in relation to workers themselves, management could now play the card of survival much more forcefully, since Renault had from the very beginning been endowed with an aura of messiahship that met with little contestation. Compounding all this was the steep economic decline Romania was experiencing at the time, which on the ground entailed a spiraling loss of jobs. Rendering the specter of unemployment and destitution even more tangible were newfound problems the plant encountered around the turn of the millennium: from a historical peak of 106 thousand cars in 1998, annual production figures dropped to 85 thousand in 1999, 55 thousand in 2000, and 52 thousand in 2001. While this strongly resembled the slump of the early 1990s, this time around there were no waiting lists to speak of, there was little to no leverage to be obtained by appeal to government or party politics, and, most importantly, there was no uncertainty as to the impending overhaul of labor relations in the company. Hence, a new stage was set for the struggle between management, union and employees, which would in time reconfigure the local labor market and reshape the individual trajectories therein.

Restructuring and the reworking of labor control

The personnel restructuring program was the paramount issue on the agenda in the first half of the 2000s. On acquiring Dacia's majority portfolio, Renault agreed to a 5-year program involving the gradual departure of 11,280 employees in 20 stages, every three months starting with December 1999.⁴²³ Personnel reduction was mainly supposed to occur through retirement, voluntary layoffs, and transfers to companies taking over outsourced operations. This arrangement seemed to accommodate the restructuring goals of Renault's management, SAD's purpose of defending jobs and providing a modicum of protection for those who left, and the government's desires of avoiding a post-privatization political debacle. While Renault agreed to distribute departures over a long period of time, the government committed to offering compensatory payments to those who left, effectively turning the restructuring process into a large scale buyout.⁴²⁴ In its turn, SAD committed to managing the daily affairs of personnel restructuring, in order to mitigate discontent and avoid conflict. Recalling the failed restructuring attempts of the 1990s, decisions were to be handled by joint commissions in each department, though this time around employees were no longer asked to nominate individuals to be laid off against their will. Layoffs were primarily going to happen on a voluntary basis, and the commissions' alleged role was to decide whether individual requests were legitimate from the standpoint of both those wanting to leave and the needs of the company.

If the number of layoffs was set during pre-privatization negotiations and was considered a given when restructuring actually began, the criteria for deciding who got to leave and who got to stay remained to be settled. Although voluntary departures were allegedly given priority, initial discussions focused, in similar fashion to the confrontational discourses of the 1990s, on separating between good and bad, as well as between needed and unneeded employees.⁴²⁵ Apart from those whose jobs were deemed redundant during reorganization, several criteria emphasized employees' loyalty toward the company: having a second job, owning a business or simply being "associated" with other companies, as well as having previous contract terminations due to indiscipline were good enough reasons for being laid off. "Indiscipline" comprised the full array of well-known misdeeds: theft (either proven, or implied, as it happened with employees responsible for inventories), disregard for work tasks, preference for conflictual relationships, absenteeism, drinking on the job, etc. Alongside these came a series of "social protection" criteria: priority was to be given to employees without children in their care and to those who were not the only breadwinners in the family; as so many families had both spouses employed at Dacia, in order to alleviate the potentially disastrous effects of unemployment on family life, only one member from each family would be eligible for leaving. Since the call for voluntary departures proved far more successful than expected, with requests quickly surpassing the few hundred availabilities in the first stages, supplementary criteria stressed seniority, age, health status, and distance to home.⁴²⁶ Somewhat

⁴²³ "Colaborarea cu Renault asigură Daciei un viitor sigur." *InfoAutoturism* 130, August 1999.

⁴²⁴ "Prezentarea ordonanței 98/99." *InfoAutoturism* 130, August 1999.

⁴²⁵ "Adunarea Generală Extraordinară a SAD a adoptat următorul Program de Restructurare." *InfoAutoturism* 131, September 1999.

⁴²⁶ "Ghid informativ pentru salariații care vor fi disponibilizați." *InfoAutoturism*, special issue, November 1999. "Comisia Paritară Administrație-Sindicat a stabilit criteriile de selectare a cererilor de disponibilizare." *InfoAutoturism* 132, October 1999.

paradoxically, the addition emphasized that employees with disciplinary problems were not be eligible for the buyout, nor were those with less than three years of seniority. Those deemed unworthy were, on the one hand, supposed to leave first and, on the other hand, given the large number of requests for voluntary dismissal, declared illegible for the buyout that had surprisingly become a prized objective for thousands of employees. Recognized as having considerable leverage in handling layoff procedures, union leaders saw this as an opportunity to vindicate threats that had previously fallen moot: commitment was the number one criterion according to which the waters would be split. As before, those lacking commitment were primarily the ones who, for one reason or another, preferred nonwork to work; the number of employees who allegedly were mere “observers” contributing nothing to the collective welfare of the workers’ community was said to go as high as 10,000.⁴²⁷ Then there were those whose loyalty was questionable simply because they wanted to leave and, for this reason, regardless of their work performance, had to be able to do so without obstacles. While leaders took positions against any sort of benefits being granted to those showing disregard for work, they militated for extending the rights of those who wanted to leave of their own will. As a result, in 2002 the layoff program was boosted through an additional buyout scheme offered by the company on top of the one granted by the government. By that time, it was clear that most employees left voluntarily, highlighting the ostensible success of restructuring.⁴²⁸

Despite rehashing discursive categories from the previous decade, SAD’s position in regard to restructuring witnessed a significant shift. Deciding who left and who stayed was no longer a collective responsibility, but an unequivocally individual one. If during the 1990s calls for restructuring stressed the need for honest employees to expose the dishonest from within their own ranks and, when this failed, put the blame on the allegedly generalized passivity and self-centeredness of the rank-and-file, leaders now emphasized the importance of each and every individual minding her own business and her own business alone. Whistleblowing and mutual policing were no longer the preferred solutions; soul searching and self-discipline were. This shift from collective to individual responsibility was fully congruent with the general principle of securing labor control as seen from the standpoint of management. If this match between SAD’s position and that of management was less obvious when it came to eliciting commitment, since the union remained primarily responsible with this mechanism of control, with compensation and hierarchy it became fully explicit.

Adopting a new wage classification system became an issue shortly after privatization. Devised by management, this change was supported by the union for its potential to “eliminate injustice” and stop payments for nonwork.⁴²⁹ Though finalized only five years later, the principles of the new system were clear from the very beginning.⁴³⁰ It was meant to be much simpler and to function according to much clearer rules than the previous one. On the one hand,

⁴²⁷ “Adunarea Generală a Sindicatului Autoturism Dacia.” *InfoAutoturism* 138, February 2000. “10 ani de la înființarea SAD.” *InfoAutoturism* 138, February 2000.

⁴²⁸ Approximately 90% of the layoffs that had been completed by the beginning of 2002 had been voluntary. “Preocupări.” *InfoAutoturism* 162, February 2002. “Agenda SAD.” *InfoAutoturism* 164, March 2002.

⁴²⁹ “Editorial.” *InfoAutoturism* 149, November 2000. “Să respectăm regulile!” *InfoAutoturism* 153, February 2001. “Salariații Daciei merită să fie tratați cu respect.” *InfoAutoturism* 154, April 2001.

⁴³⁰ “Contractul colectiv de muncă 2000–2001.” *InfoAutoturism* 141, May 2000. “Noua salarizare.” *InfoAutoturism* 188, November 2005.

the number of categories had to be reduced, thus flattening job ladders, which were considered to be too convoluted and inflexible. On the other hand, clear boundaries had to be drawn between categories, marking corresponding differences in payment and limiting the possibility of career advancement to a specific number of subcategories. Education became a main criterion for separating between categories and the “level of responsibility” corresponding to each job a criterion for making distinctions within each category. In effect, the new system marked a clear separation between workers and TESA and set them on entirely distinct career ladders, limiting the possibilities of moving from one category to another. On top of this formal system agreed upon in the collective labor contract and applying to all employees in equal measure, management introduced a policy of individual wage setting (see also Debrosse 2007:306-7), meant to further differentiate between workers belonging to the same category and level of responsibility. This second mechanism was outside union control and circumvented collective bargaining, endowing management with a certain degree of direct control in differentiating between employees.⁴³¹ As much as possible, the role of bonuses was to be limited and their role in compensating for unsatisfactory base wages was to be curtailed. Promotions were to be likewise limited and a cap was quickly put on the previous habit of mass promotion, which was also meant to compensate for the low base pay.⁴³² Wage-related sanctions, like those concerning theft, were individualized, with SAD proving particularly militant in this regard. All these changes implied the removal of mechanisms that had previously compensated for low base wages, along with the recalibration of the entire compensation system in order to emphasize loyalty to the company and performance on the job. Crucially, these were no longer seen in collective terms, but rather strictly individual ones.

The revised wage system also brought two important contributions to hierarchical control over production: the elimination of piecework, aimed at decoupling wages from supply flow problems; and the clear-cut separation of remuneration and promotion schemes between workers and shop-floor supervisors, meant to strengthen direct supervision and mitigate ambiguity in the relationship between supervisor and supervised. These issues harked back to the two core problems of hierarchical control encountered in the 1990s: maintaining macro-coordination via centralized control and self-enforcing steering mechanisms, and obtaining micro-compliance via a stable and functional chain of command. Macro-level coordination spanned the entire chain of production and distribution. Apart from overhauling the dealership and spare parts distribution infrastructures, an important objective of restructuring was the setting up of relationships with suppliers that Dacia could predict and control. While this came as a shock to some of Dacia’s traditional suppliers, who were used to benefiting from monopolies dating back to before 1989, the real controversy began once Dacia gave out ultimatums to local companies and eventually replaced a considerable part of its core suppliers with foreign collaborators setting up local operations. Adding to this was the reversal of push for vertical integration from the 1990s, since, by Renault’s standards, Dacia had an unusually high degree of integration at the time of privatization.⁴³³ Departments until then considered

⁴³¹ “Contractul colectiv de muncă—între bună credință și dispreț.” *InfoAutoturism* 175, May 2003.

⁴³² “Contractul colectiv de muncă 2000–2001.” *InfoAutoturism* 141, May 2000.

⁴³³ While the Renault average was 40%, Dacia’s degree of integration was 56%. “Colaborarea cu Renault asigură Daciei un viitor sigur.” *InfoAutoturism* 130, August 1999.



FIGURE II.34. Dacia's central pavilion, in the 1980s and in the 2000s.

Note the change of symbolic markers (from “Long live the Romanian Communist Party” to the Renault insignia) and of security paraphernalia (conspicuously absent in the 1980s, ubiquitous in the 2000s).

Sources: *Pitești* (1988), Online: http://sanuuitam.blogspot.ro/2013/12/asa-cum-fost_6154.html; Sămărescu (2007).

crucial were now targeted for externalization, including some, like the wiring department, that had been set up in the 1990s in response to endemic supply problems.⁴³⁴ This came with setting clear standards regarding quality and deadlines that had to be met by all suppliers. Just-in-time production, meant to reduce both shortages and buffer stocks, was supplemented by a revamping of internal logistics, which included computerized accounting keeping track of the physical flow and allowing for a strict management of costs across the production chain. Steering mechanisms like nested budgeting were introduced in order to further streamline intra- and interdepartmental transactions.⁴³⁵ As for the chain of command, privatization was followed by an overhaul of upper and middle management, involving personnel replacement as well as new organizational structures and methods of operation (see Angelescu 2007; Debrosse 2007).⁴³⁶ Along with this came a spreading out of responsibilities and a strengthening of middle management and of mechanisms meant to connect the upper and lower echelons of the bureaucracy, which included an organizational and spatial decentralization that would by the

end of the 2000s receive a striking consecration in the demolition of the plant’s “central pavilion”, a massive building that had until privatization housed the higher offices of the factory bureaucracy (figure II.34).⁴³⁷ The HR department gained new prominence in administering personnel recruitment and management, including the handling of discipline-related problems and training. A new set of internal regulations was adopted and the existing teamwork system was adapted to Renault rules, setting specific objectives and responsibilities for the team leader, now renamed from foreman (*maistru*) to UEL boss (*șef de UEL*).

⁴³⁴ “Cablaje Dacia: unul din atelierele model de pe platforma Dacia.” *InfoAutoturism* 157, September 2001.

⁴³⁵ “Reduceți cheltuielile întreprinderii ca să vă protejați buzunarele.” *InfoAutoturism* 134, November 1999.

⁴³⁶ On the troubles encountered in securing the allegiance of Romanian middle management and supervisors and the ultimate success in achieving this, see chapter 3.

⁴³⁷ The demolition of the pavilion on 14 February 2009 received ample coverage in the national media and was given a ceremonious treatment locally, as Dacia employees and locals flocked to see the end of the plant’s and the town’s most important landmark.

All these had consequences for workers' autonomy on the shop floor. Knowledge-based streamlining of production removed the objective requirement for labor autonomy, as shortages were to be phased out. Though flexibility was heralded as the way forward for the organization of labor expenditure, it was no longer supposed to keep things going in what for those higher up the command chain looked like a highly uncertain environment, but rather to cope with an environment primarily controlled by those in the middle and upper organizational echelons. The standardization of the labor process came with an increased scripting of shop floor transactions and a mitigation of the dependence on workers' specific local knowledge, which had until then been vital currency in the informal social ties established on the shop floor.⁴³⁸ Furthermore, restructuring aimed to deal a blow to the social infrastructure of autonomy, as the reorganization of production implied the more or less forceful dismantling of preexisting formal and informal networks. Apart from the strengthening of hierarchical mechanisms and the standardization of work operations, the massive job cuts, employee departures, and frequent transfers threatened to dissolve both strong and weak shop floor ties that had been cemented over many years, if not decades. Just like in the 1990s, all this could be advocated from the standpoint of both efficiency and meritocracy, once again brought together under the banner of work discipline. And just like in the 1990s, management could count on the union's cooperation in fighting against indiscipline and keeping workers on a shorter leash.⁴³⁹ This, however, only in the first phase, when union officials still believed they could maintain the same leverage they had enjoyed during the 1990s and when many workers still believed the benefits of restructuring would sooner or later trickle down into their own pockets, thus vindicating the promises of privatization and dissipating the bitter discontent that had set in after the wearing off of the initial excitement and existential worries concerning privatization.

Disenchantment and an unexpected exit

At least on an individual level, discontent with restructuring was voiced from very early on. A survey among workers in late-1999, just a few months after Renault had taken over, showed many felt they had been fooled into believing that privatization would change things for the better. Instead, working conditions remained disastrous, real wages were still falling, indiscipline of all kinds was rampant, and shortages were an everyday occurrence.⁴⁴⁰ Compounding these old problems was the distressing uncertainty in regard to the future, constant rumors of plant closure, and difficulties in dealing with the new foreign employees who had settled in quickly after the privatization contract had been signed. Corresponding to its role of managing personnel restructuring in such a way as to alleviate the social fallout and counter impromptu attempts at resistance, SAD condemned such reactions for lacking patience, fostering exaggerated expectations, and ignoring the need for individuals to first look at themselves in triggering change for the better.⁴⁴¹ Such exhortations notwithstanding, the ghosts

⁴³⁸ For the differences between scripting and local knowledge as bases of social ties, see Tilly (1998:53-8). Standardization was a major goal of the "Renault Production System" introduced at Dacia after privatization.

⁴³⁹ "Organizația SAD – Vopsitorii." *InfoAutoturism* 137, February 2000. "Să respectăm regulile!" *InfoAutoturism* 153, February 2001.

⁴⁴⁰ "Prin reorganizarea, atât a producției cât și a desfacerii, cred că și salariile vor crește." *InfoAutoturism* 133, November 1999.

⁴⁴¹ "Mentalitatea, bat-o vina, ăsta-i oful cu pricina." *InfoAutoturism* 133, November 1999.

of the past could not be dispelled too easily, and this became obvious with the layoff program itself. Even though the criteria for deciding who was going to leave and who was going to stay seemed clear enough, as they mostly reaffirmed the discursive lines of force of the previous decade, how they were supposed to work in practice was far from certain. As some public complaints pointed out, if theft was supposed to be a criterion, what about all those who had stolen but had not been caught? And if competence was supposed to be a criterion, how could it be assessed if so many had been hired purely based on connections (*pile*) in the first place?⁴⁴²

If such occasional public criticism was silenced during the first year and a half after privatization, serious shortcomings in the actual implementation of the restructuring program began to surface in the first months of 2001. Complaints of abusive practices became common, including management's pressuring of employees into agreeing to leave and the circumventing of procedures agreed upon in advance with union representatives. Overall, the pace of personnel restructuring appeared too high, leaving both those who departed and those who stayed with too little time to adjust. Even worse, as the initial restructuring program was drawing to a close, managers claimed that more than two thousand extra jobs had to be cut, for the first time provoking SAD's open protest and contestation in regard to the very legitimacy of personnel restructuring.⁴⁴³ Reports from several departments highlighted that the exact number of layoffs appeared to depend on arbitrary fixed quotas and were not in line with technical or organizational needs.⁴⁴⁴ While this created a stressful and uncertain situation for workers, union officials expressed their concern over the consequences such apparently arbitrary personnel policies would eventually have over production.⁴⁴⁵ Such problems, as well as the criticisms they attracted spoke to an entirely novel situation, as management was no longer inclined to share control over the labor process with workers and the union. To be sure, this was the source of the appearance of arbitrariness in the eyes of workers and union officials, as well as of the need to reassert the legitimacy and even necessity of the union's claims to managerial functions from the standpoint of management itself. That the vast majority of those laid off were workers strengthened the case against management's attempt at taking control over the minutiae of life on the shop floor, allowing for renewed accusations of favoritism, injustice and even conspiracy.⁴⁴⁶ And while SAD's position began to approximate workers' early complaints of stress and abuse at the hands of the new management, the dismantling of the post-privatization compromise (see chapter 3) seemed to reproduce the struggles of the 1990s, in which management, union and workers confronted each other over the stakes of autonomy, only this time without the smoke and mirrors typical of the first postsocialist decade.

Attempts at bypassing the union occurred not just when it came to personnel reduction, but also in establishing individual wages and in the management of everyday shop floor

⁴⁴² "Adunarea Generală Extraordinară a Sindicatului Autoturisme Dacia." *InfoAutoturism* 131, September 1999.

⁴⁴³ "Viitorul salariaților de la Dacia este astăzi!" *InfoAutoturism* 173, February 2003. "Adunarea Generală Extraordinară." *InfoAutoturism* 173, February 2003. "Adunarea Generală a Sindicatului Autoturisme Dacia." *InfoAutoturism* 174, April 2003. "Protest împotriva abuzurilor administrației de la Dacia." *InfoAutoturism* 176, August 2003. For a detailed account of SAD's reaction, see chapter 3.

⁴⁴⁴ "Agenda SAD." *InfoAutoturism* 154, April 2001. "Disponibilizarea procentuală provoacă nenorociri." *InfoAutoturism* 156, July 2001. "Montaj General: puncte de vedere." *InfoAutoturism* 157, September 2001.

⁴⁴⁵ "Preocupări." *InfoAutoturism* 162, February 2002.

⁴⁴⁶ "Adunarea Generală a Sindicatului Autoturisme Dacia. Opoziția constructivă—o nouă strategie." *InfoAutoturism* 153, February 2003. "Din intervențiile patricipanților." *InfoAutoturism* 153, February 2003.



FIGURE II.35. Paralyzing overcrowding at the end of the first shift after the introduction of a new entry/exit security system.

Source: *InfoAutoturism* 158, October 2001.

affairs.⁴⁴⁷ Consequently, some of the more radical measures undertaken by management seemed excessive and even absurd to workers and union representatives. Incomprehensible promotions were routinely signaled as a problem, as were the new security arrangements, which, apart from being inefficient (figure II.35), were depicted as a direct assault on the dignity of honest employees, now forced to submit themselves to random frisking for stolen company property on leaving for home.⁴⁴⁸ Investment and outsourcing policies also seemed questionable, as departments until recently considered vital now appeared entirely abandoned until other investors would eventually take them over.⁴⁴⁹ In these departments, disinvestment and uncertainty in regard to the future proved traumatic for the oftentimes highly skilled workers who enjoyed high degrees of prestige and had previously been considered indispensable. Some of these departments would indeed close down, while others were eventually outsourced to foreign companies. Though in the latter cases many workers managed to keep their jobs as well as their wages, they soon found out that working for Dacia's suppliers involved unprecedented work intensification, a stressful work environment, regular abuse from supervisors, as well as competition from new hires working on fixed-term and temporary agency contracts. By comparison, the situation in departments not targeted for externalization was not that far off. As time passed, daily harassment by supervisors, various types of abuses, such as unpaid overtime or the inconsiderate elimination of relief workers, as well as the uncertainty packaged with fixed-term contracts acquired a steady footing on the daily agenda. Even more severe seemed management's willingness to break the already shrinking strength

⁴⁴⁷ "Contractul colectiv de muncă—între bună credință și dispreț." *InfoAutoturism* 175, May 2003.

⁴⁴⁸ "Picături în paharul... nemulțumirilor." *InfoAutoturism* 182, September 2004.

⁴⁴⁹ Notably, reports from these departments emphasized the close relationships that had been established between managers, union officials, and workers, now materialized in declarations of solidarity in the face of uncertainty. "Pentru oamenii de la Mașini Unelte, viitorul înseamnă continuitate." *InfoAutoturism* 147, September 2000. "Scule Verificatoare: Așa nu se mai poate." *InfoAutoturism* 179, March 2004.

of the union by targeting leaders (figure II.36) and reward workers' refusal to participate in protest activities.⁴⁵⁰ On the shop floor, constant work intensification began to take its toll on older workers, who found themselves increasingly incapable of facing up to the requirements; this happened especially in departments like final assembly, which previously required a comparatively light workload. Overall, criticism emphasized the shock of moving from chronic overstaffing to similarly chronic understaffing in a relatively short period of time.

By the time of the February 2003 strike, the relationship between management and SAD had shifted from explicit collaboration in handling labor to conflict and competition over labor control and representation. If initially the restructuring program entailed an agreed-upon division of labor, the compromise was broken once management pushed its labor policy on the terrain claimed by the union and once union leaders realized that giving up on their managerial claims proved highly deleterious in the absence of institutionalized compensatory mechanisms. For workers, management's attempt at

monopolizing control over the labor process translated into a severe reduction of autonomy, accompanied by a major change of the everyday work atmosphere. While union leaders denounced the instituting of "terror" on the shop floor, which, together with the establishing of "feudal" social relations were more resembling of a "prison system" than of an "appropriate social climate" and had traumatic consequences on individual livelihoods, for workers this implied a permanent need to deal with everyday conflict that was a far cry from the relatively relaxed and almost familial atmosphere of the 1990s.⁴⁵¹ From the standpoint of labor control, this rendered commitment much more problematic than it had ever been in the previous decade. As things progressed toward the worse, the plea for patience and the conjuring of solidarity centered around present sacrifice and deferral in hope of a better future were making less and less sense in the face of apparently even bleaker prospects, especially since any major expectation of future salvation had by then already been spent. In such a context, survival no longer functioned as a watchword of solidarity in resisting a corrupt status quo and tended to hark back to its literal meaning of getting by in an increasingly hostile environment. Survival was no longer about the collective defense of the dignity granted by work. Instead, it came to signify the individual indignity of having to work without being able to secure one's livelihood.

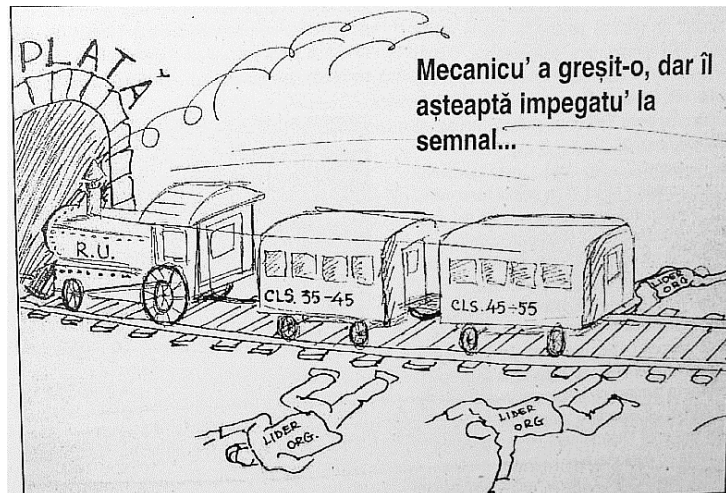


FIGURE II.36. Discrimination against union leaders concerning wages and promotions. Union organization leaders thrown off the running train of wage classification, driven by the HR (*Resurse umane*—R.U.) locomotive, just before entering the tunnel of "payment": "The mechanic got it wrong, but the signalman is waiting for him..."

Source: *InfoAutoturism* 175, May 2003.

⁴⁵⁰ "Opinii." *InfoAutoturism* 174, April 2003.

⁴⁵¹ "Montaj General: Teroare pe bandă." *InfoAutoturism* 165, April 2002. "Recurs la justiție." *InfoAutoturism* 177, November 2003. "Nu mor caii când vor câinii!" *InfoAutoturism* 201, May 2007.

From an instrument of entrenchment and pacification, the appeal to the imperative of survival became a central motif for both individual and collective protest.

Finally, the effectiveness of compensation was similarly rendered moot, with real wages remaining low and offsetting mechanisms—mass promotions and bonuses, piecework etc.—being barred as part of restructuring. The opportunity for employees to buy cars at a discount remained available, but weak overall demand meant that reselling no longer yielded profits that could alleviate the insufficiency of wages. Furthermore, despite initial hopes that the new wage system would result in a more equal distribution of the wage fund, management's favoring of TESA personnel, the apparently arbitrary promotions and individual pay raises, as well as the flurry of transfers between and within departments resulted in pay inequalities that sparked public denunciations of injustice and pleas for "equity, but not equality" in regard to remuneration.⁴⁵² While this may have resembled the outcries of the 1990s, this time the situation was significantly worse. According to annual reports presented in the plant newspaper, the number of requests for social aid from the union had increased from 530 in 1997, to 840 in 1998, 1500 in 1999 and 1600 in 2000. This tendency reflected both the dire overall economic situation and the negative consequences of the restructuring program on workers' livelihood. A speaker at the union's 2002 general assembly fittingly depicted the desperate nature of the situation through the following anecdote:

An important boss [*un mare șef*] from Dacia walks into a restaurant in downtown Pitești. Here, the waiter respectfully greets him:

– How do you do, Mister Director?

– How come you know who I am?

– Well, I also used to be a Dacia employee.

Going to a pastry shop, the girl who brings him the cake says to him:

– Bon appetit, Mister Director!

– Where do you know me from?

– I also used to be a Dacia employee.

On exiting a pedestrian passageway, a beggar asks him:

– Help a poor, stricken man, Mister Director!

– But where do you know me from?

– Well, I am also a Dacia employee!⁴⁵³

Face-value exaggerations notwithstanding, this spoke to the unprecedented material and symbolic debasement that came with having a job at Dacia. Just as importantly, and certainly far more extraordinary, was the portrayal of Dacia employees' inferiority not when compared to the perverted world of exchange, where one's existence depended on buying cheap and selling dear, but in relation to entirely legitimate occupations. It was not just that work as such no longer paid off, but that work at Dacia did not. If in the first half of the decade such a conclusion might have seemed far-fetched, since the alacrity with which people left the plant with or without the buyout could have been attributed to many other factors, by the middle of the 2000s labor turnover began to be signaled as a problem and, soon after, labor shortage resurfaced as a serious problem for the first time since 1989. Exit was emerging as a viable

⁴⁵² "Târâș, pe drumul cel bun." *InfoAutoturism* 171, November 2002. As part of the restructuring agreement, transfers took place without cuts in wages and benefits.

⁴⁵³ "Adunarea Generală a Sindicatului Autoturisme Dacia." *InfoAutoturism* 163, February 2002.

alternative, although not toward the world of spare parts trafficking, which, despite remaining lively, also witnessed significant mutations in the years following privatization.

The separation and specialization of parts trafficking and industrial labor

Though pre-privatization surveys highlighted the importance of parts theft both for the overall economic situation of the plant and for everyday life on the shop floor, shortly after the privatization contract was signed, the newly arrived French managers realized the scale of the phenomenon surpassed “anything previously imagined.”⁴⁵⁴ Responding to the new management’s call for “general mobilization” against theft, the editors of the plant newspaper admitted that “truth hurts, but this is it: there is a lot of theft, and things can no longer go on like this.” Union leaders soon called for general assemblies at the level of each department and demanded that all union officials get involved in curbing theft.⁴⁵⁵ While highlighting the need for a better management of spare parts in preventing theft, SAD’s position also stressed the requirement of adequate wages, without which the issue could not be addressed properly. Having reiterated the by now standard exhortations of work and their accompanying castigations of nonwork, the union leadership pointed to the political economy of theft (it functioning as a counterweight to low wages) and its accompanying moral economy (the imperative of survival trumping work discipline and loyalty). Accordingly, theft allegedly no longer had the same meaning as before privatization, since people could no longer behave as if “everything at the same time belonged to the state and to no one.”⁴⁵⁶ Having crept in workers’ minds during the 1990s, this belief was now said to put individuals, and not the collectivity, at risk of remaining out of a job, since the managers of the collective welfare—a group from which workers were now conspicuously, albeit tacitly, excluded—could no longer tolerate such infringements. Hence, theft was depicted as a thoroughly anachronistic offshoot of state socialism, and with it so was the entire previous decade, which in this logic appeared simply as a protracted hiatus in the transition from state socialism to genuine capitalism. Despite considerable efforts, such a brutal disavowal of the immediate past had to face up to realities that, at least in the first years after privatization, proved remarkably resilient.

By the second half of the 2000s, the failures of restructuring were visible not only in the unexpected exit of the increasingly scarcer labor force, but also in the inability to fully deliver on a considerable part of its explicit goals pertaining to labor control. Though severely impacted by the aggressive policies of the restructuring program, the curtailing of workers’ autonomy on the shop floor, together with its associated problems of indiscipline, absenteeism, and theft were not de facto achieved until after the 2008 general strike. What did change was the official coverage they received in the public sphere, which subsided considerably as the back-and-forth conflict between union officials and managers received formal consecration and was channeled through standard institutional mechanisms, no longer requiring the permanent informal mustering of forces that was staple during the 1990s. Though no longer prime objects of public controversy, theft and indiscipline remained on the official restructuring agenda until

⁴⁵⁴ “Manuel Roldan a solicitat sprijinul sindicatului pentru stoparea furturilor din uzină.” *InfoAutoturism* 133, November 1989.

⁴⁵⁵ “Adunările Generale ale organizațiilor sindicale componente ale SAD.” *InfoAutoturism* 135, December 1999.

⁴⁵⁶ “Mentalitatea, bat-o vina, ăsta-i oful cu pricina.” *InfoAutoturism* 133, November 1999.

the end of the layoff program in 2003 and continued popping up on the scene occasionally until 2008. Especially during the first half of the decade, the rhetorical devices of the 1990s—black lists, casuistry, public shaming, etc.—remained in use, after which union officials and especially representatives of management adopted a strategy of denial whenever cases of theft were presented in the regional or national media. This virtual disappearance of car parts trafficking from the plant’s official public sphere did not reflect its disappearance on the shop floor or outside the plant gates. From workers’ recollections, both basic acts of indiscipline, such as absenteeism and drinking on the job, and theft of spare parts, petty or otherwise, persisted, even though pulling such things off now required considerable more cunning and resources. Calls for general mobilization notwithstanding, parts trafficking was not rendered extinct shortly after privatization and certainly kept representing more than just a ghost of the past haunting the layoff process (see above), or a skeleton in the closet, brought out by ill-willed detractors in particularly critical moments.⁴⁵⁷ The opportunity of engaging in spare parts trafficking remained available, though only for an increasingly select few.

Calls for general mobilization and conjurings of the moral duty to fight against nonwork were accompanied by an entire battery of measures that were in one way or another aimed at curbing theft. Overhauling the security system was the most obvious of these, with things like CCTV, alarm systems, magnetic ID cards being introduced along with the restructuring of the security department to increase efficiency with far fewer guards than the several hundred employed before privatization.⁴⁵⁸ Massive improvements to the management of the supply flow across the production chain were aimed at removing opportunities for embezzlement and allowing for quick and precise estimates of shortages that could be attributed to theft. And while the new distribution system was supposed to provide an effective formal channel for servicing the demand for parts, enforcing discipline and hierarchy on the shop floor—which included the breakup of informal networks—were meant to uproot trafficking from the organization of production. Most certainly, all these were rather long-term goals and did not happen overnight. The slow decline of the trafficking economy during the 2000s speaks to this temporal horizon, just as it does to other factors that rendered the achievements of restructuring permanently incomplete until the end of the decade. Far from being automatically eradicated, workers’ autonomy on the shop floor, together with its infrastructure of informal social ties, now made a primary object of everyday struggle, requiring the permanent mobilization of opposition to restructuring. Even if no longer guaranteed in the face of concerted attacks, shop floor autonomy and informal social ties were not objectively incompatible with the new plans for organizing the labor process. On the contrary, the persistence of labor intensiveness (and of the requirement of labor flexibility, though to a far less extent than during the 1990s) provided enough room for autonomy to be fought over. Endemically low wages combined with plummeting levels of commitment and management’s aggressive attempts at monopolizing

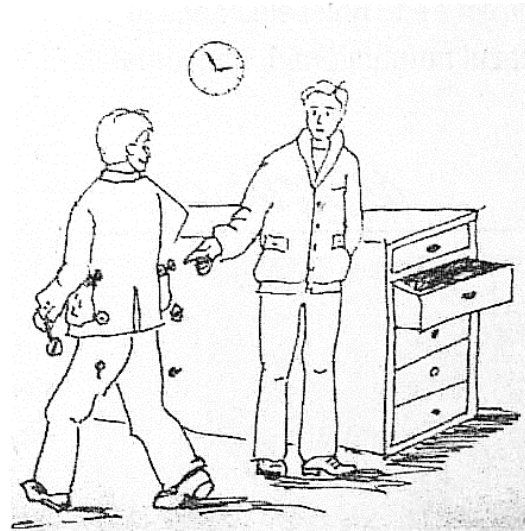
⁴⁵⁷ During a talk show on national television concerning the 2003 strike, the union’s claim that workers could no longer be patient after more than a decade of poverty and mishaps were dismissed by an economist and soon-to-be Minister of Public Finances as unfounded, since “most Dacia employees” had for years lived off spare parts trafficking. See the *Marius Tucă Show*, 25 February 2003, available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vBPwKIFDnYw> (Retrieved, March 13, 2015).

⁴⁵⁸ A 2007 article mentions 87 people being employed in the security department, while also hinting that the black market for spare parts was still lucrative at the time. “Protest.” *InfoAutoturism* 203, September 2007. “Noul sistem de acces pe platforma Dacia.” *InfoAutoturism* 157, September 2001.

control over the labor process were reasons enough for workers to want to engage in this fight. Even though the struggle over autonomy and maintenance of informal networks was not necessarily purposely geared toward securing opportunities for trafficking, in certain situations it did serve this function, among others.

Apart from the protracted nature of the restructuring process and the requirements of labor intensiveness and flexibility, another factor favoring the resilience of the trafficking economy was the peaking demand for parts in the first half of the 2000s, as the record number of cars sold on the internal market in the previous decade aged rapidly. Just as importantly, the economic slump and the toll of restructuring took on workers' welfare during this time led to a high point in the material and symbolic standing of the trafficking economy in comparison to work in industry. In spite of its dwindling presence in the official discourse of managers and union representatives, reports of the lavish trafficking economy continued to hold a solid presence in the local media and traffickers gained unprecedented visibility on the streets of Mioveni as well as in the town's bars and shops (see part III). People still

came from across the country to buy cheap parts and smugglers were still to be found around the plant gates, loitering along Mioveni's main boulevard and congregating around the dozens of car parts shops, where business continued to flourish during this time. This improvement in the relative standing of the trafficking economy came at the cost of an increasingly pronounced separation between the professional world of parts smuggling and that of industrial work. While networks of professional traffickers maintained some kind of foothold behind the factory gates, and while some continued to engage in robbery and counterfeiting, trafficking bore increasingly higher risks and required more and more significant resources, to which the average worker had less and less access. Thus, even if they remained in close social and spatial proximity to one another, the by then natural juxtaposition of the worlds of manufacturing and trafficking gave way to their disjunction and, consequently, individuals were increasingly constrained to pick one or the other. Far from an obvious choice, this required coping with severe uncertainty and fluctuating expectations as to the future of one's occupation. If in the first part of the decade trafficking appeared to fare increasingly well in comparison to work in the plant, by the middle of the decade the permanence of the latter seemed more or less guaranteed while the extinction of the former became a concrete possibility. In part, the shift came as a result of the accumulating effects of restructuring, though a crucial role was played



- Ce faci vere, te-ai apucat de furat acu', la batrănețe?
- N-am reușit să intru în DIREF și am auzit că singura soluție e să furi, că te bagă automat !

FIGURE II.37. “– What are you doing, man? You’ve started stealing only now, when you’re old? – I didn’t get into DIREF* and I heard the only solution is to steal, since they automatically put you in!”

*DIREF (*Dispositif de réduction des effectifs* / *Dispozitiv de reducere a efectivelor*) was a supplementary buyout program meant to accelerate personnel restructuring (see above). Introduced in 2002, DIREF met with considerable success, as employees readily accepted the extra money in exchange for their jobs.

Source: *InfoAutoturism* 171, December 2002.

by the introduction of an entirely new range of car models starting with 2004. The mechanical design of the new cars reduced user autonomy in regard to repair and maintenance to a minimum, forcing consumers to rely on authorized dealers and mechanics. Even if the transition was not instant, this struck a crippling blow to the trafficking economy and restricted opportunities even further. Still, individuals could accommodate such shifting expectations by using resources—that is, the money and connections—accumulated in one economy to obtain a transfer to the other. And while such career transitions could still happen with relative ease during this entire time, they were not always as desirable as they might seem in retrospect. Though fictional depictions of employees planning to be caught stealing in order to obtain the buyout money were admittedly exaggerated (figure II.37), they did point to an apparently highly ironic situation in which the plant jobs that had been allegedly held in so high esteem were now beginning to lose ground—this time around, justifiably—to the most downtrodden occupations. Despite the changing of fortunes for both work in the plant and parts smuggling during the second half of the decade, by that time several alternatives had become available and promised to break the labor market duopoly of manufacturing and trafficking for the first time in the post-89 era.

CHAPTER 11

THE TWISTS AND TURNS OF THE LOCAL LABOR MARKET

The post-privatization personnel restructuring program at Dacia was anticipated to cause a major shock for the local labor market. A massive number of layoffs in a relatively short period of time and in a severe economic downturn was estimated to produce unprecedented levels of unemployment, leading to the proliferation of “social problems” and, possibly, unrest. This is why both the government and SAD asked Renault to adopt a gradual approach and spread the layoffs over several years. As restructuring progressed, the union made supplementary demands that at least half the jobs targeted for outsourcing remain in Mioveni. Otherwise, within the framework of the restructuring program, little could be accomplished for those who left the plant, whose options were known from the beginning: retirement (early or not), setting up small businesses (and attempting to fulfill the much-touted dream of “transition”), seeking new employment (the more conservative and admittedly most desirable path), or migration (possible only for those who had maintained their ties with their localities of origin or, for locals, with the surrounding villages).

Accompanying restructuring, several plans were drawn up by local authorities, the company’s management, SAD and BNS to secure such successful individual transitions for as many of those laid off as possible. For things to seem as consequential as possible, many of these involved either bipartite or tripartite collaborations and involved a large variety of measures: from mass reskilling programs and extensive aid for job seeking to small business counseling and lobbying to attract investors in the region. An abundant new landscape of job fairs, job clubs, unemployment clubs, reskilling programs, “development” policies and other such activities ostensibly focused on matching people with jobs quickly became established and persisted until the end of the decade. Despite the claimed successes, the results were relatively modest, especially from the standpoint of the triumphant rhetoric with which each program was announced. Even though on paper the number of individual “solved cases” indicated the impact of the layoffs was largely absorbed, a closer look revealed only a very small minority of those laid off managed to find jobs. According to a report from the state agency in charge of employment, only 0.9% of those who had been laid off until March 2001 had found jobs through the agency, 0.3% had bought agricultural equipment, 8.2% had retired and 15% had opened a business. The vast majority (75.6%) had not even asked the agency for help.⁴⁵⁹ A November 2002 report from Dacia’s bureau tasked with aiding those who were laid off mentioned that out of 4500 cases on record, 2306 had been solved, out of which only 649 had found jobs (545 with support from the program), 140 new businesses had been opened (33 with support from the program), with retirement comprising a majority of 1517.⁴⁶⁰ Another source (Debrosse 2007:303) mentions that in May 2003, with over three quarters of the initial personnel restructuring program completed, the company-run “reinsertion” program had

⁴⁵⁹ “Programul social—anticiparea consecințelor.” *InfoAutoturism* 153, February 2001.

⁴⁶⁰ “UTR—MAC, un an de împliniri.” *InfoAutoturism* 172, December 2002.

approximately 6000 cases on record, approximately 2600 less than the number of layoffs undertaken until that moment. Out of these, only 3228 cases had been solved and the program was responsible for only 808 of these, with 746 persons finding new jobs and 62 new businesses being created with its help. Reports from Mioveni's local authorities indicated even more modest results for their own reskilling programs, with beneficiaries numbering in the dozens.

Strangely or not, the partial successes or failures of these programs were not always attributed to the dire overall economic situation and chronic shortage of jobs and recourse was commonly made to people's alleged unwillingness to take jobs that were said to be abundantly available. This was implicit in company reports highlighting the disproportionately large number of jobs offered through its so-called reinsertion program in comparison to the number of jobs actually taken by those who were laid off.⁴⁶¹ Local media pundits were more explicit and did not refrain from using such numbers to justify accusations of widespread laziness and disinterest in making an honest living.⁴⁶² Others nonetheless stressed the lack of quality jobs in comparison to people's expectations and plans for a secure future.⁴⁶³ The reported reticence of former Dacia employees to becoming tailors, which might have made some of them skip reskilling classes and refuse available jobs, was not a random example. Across the country, the textile industry had by then experienced considerable and sustained growth, as a result of its appetite for cheap and abundant labor matching Romania's reeling economy and crumbling labor markets (Haar 2010). Mioveni was no stranger to this development, as proved by the opening of a lohn textile plant at the beginning of 2003 (figure II.38).⁴⁶⁴ A festive occasion, this was declared a harbinger of a new era for a town in which, apart from the automobile factory and the Institute for Nuclear Research, the local administration was the largest employer. Though planning to create no more than two hundred jobs reserved for women, the 100-thousand-euro investment was regarded with overwhelming optimism and the declared intention of the Italian management to expand their operations with an additional factory



FIGURE II.38. “An inaugural moment”: the mayor and local officials greeting foreign investors at the opening of the textile factory in Mioveni.

Source: *Miovenii* 36, February 2003.

⁴⁶¹ The November 2002 report mentioned above speaks of 2694 identified available jobs and 3095 different job proposals forwarded to workers, though only 545 individuals had found jobs through the program.

⁴⁶² “Drept sau obligație. Cheful de muncă la români.” *Jurnalul de Argeș*, 16-22 March 2001.

⁴⁶³ “Disponibilizații de la Dacia nu vor să se facă croitori.” *Jurnalul de Argeș*, 16-22 March 2001.

⁴⁶⁴ “O investiție de 100.000 de euro.” *Miovenii* 36, February 2003.

providing employment to an additional four hundred of the town's female inhabitants was said to mark the beginning of Mioveni's "slow industrialization."⁴⁶⁵ Given such an unequivocally positive standpoint, initial concerns with working conditions and high labor turnover were said to originate in workers' inability to adapt to the generic exigencies of the real market economy, which were typical for other foreign investors to come.⁴⁶⁶ The minimum wages paid to workers were likewise interpreted as an incentive to work more and defer easy money in favor of truly deserved earnings.⁴⁶⁷ Further, evidence of the makeshift nature of the whole arrangement—months after setting up shop in an old timber factory outside town, the owners did not even put a sign at the gate and did not bother to remove the old name—was dismissed as irrelevant, though it was admittedly thought to be rather unusual. By the fall of 2004 these concerns added up to a somewhat erratic questioning of the previously indisputable good faith of the owners of the textile factory, as reports of low wages, delayed payments, improper working conditions, abuses and anti-union tactics were piling up.⁴⁶⁸ At the end of the year, there was little optimism left as the factory shut down, leading to condemnations of the immorality of lying to workers and throwing them back in the throes of insecurity.⁴⁶⁹ Local authorities' brief romance with foreign investors putatively bringing market prosperity came to an abrupt end.

The failure of this early attempt at breaking the labor market duopoly was particularly worrying, especially since nothing worthy of the initial optimism seemed to come in its wake. In the first half of the 2000s, Mioveni remained dependent on an automobile factory where jobs were cut by the hundreds at a time, wages were kept low, and the future was highly uncertain. During these years, Dacia rather constituted an additional source of hopelessness than a herald of the virtuous circle of the market economy.⁴⁷⁰ Given the deepening job shortage, a somewhat paradoxical situation emerged: though many outsiders wanted a job in the plant and might even have been willing to bear significant costs to do so (figure II.39), many Dacia employees rushed to leave the plant and look for opportunities elsewhere (see previous chapter). While an announcement made in late-2004 that

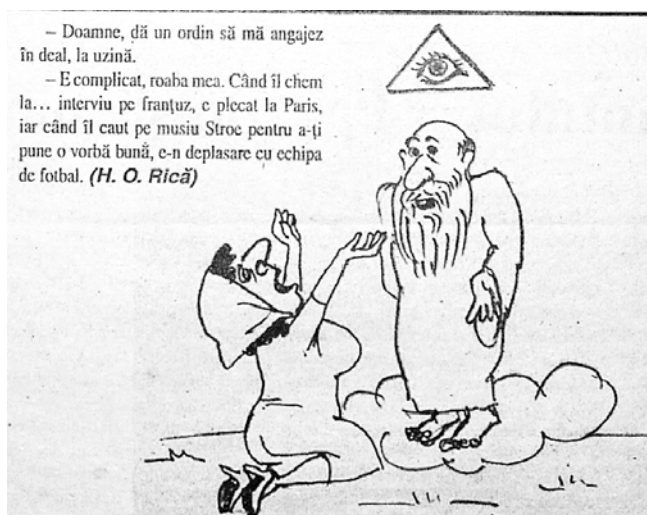


FIGURE II.39. “— God, give an order so I can get a job up on the hill, at the plant. — It’s complicated. When I ask the Frenchman for... an interview, he’s gone to Paris, and when I look for monsieur Stroe to put in a good word for you, he’s on an away match with the football team.”

Source: *Miovenii* 25, May 2002.

⁴⁶⁵ “Încet, încet orașul se industrializează mai mult.” *Miovenii* 66, July 2004.

⁴⁶⁶ “Italianii cer seriozitate.” *Miovenii* 37, March 2003. “O fabricuță...” *Miovenii* 45, July 2003. “La Clucereasa, o investiție care se impune: S.C. Maglificio S.R.L.” *Miovenii* 50, September 2003.

⁴⁶⁷ “O investiție de amploare.” *Miovenii* 59, March 2004.

⁴⁶⁸ “Știri amare: De la S.C. Maglificio Clucereasa.” *Miovenii* 73, October 2004. “Scrisoare deschisă către d-nul administrator Romaldini Amleto.” *Miovenii* 74, November 2004. “În loc de... drept la replica.” *Miovenii* 75, November 2004.

⁴⁶⁹ “Porți închise: Bunul simț al... colaborării.” *Miovenii* 77, December 2004.

⁴⁷⁰ “Discoteca de la Mioveni, o fabrică de îmbătrânit urât școlăria juvenală.” *Miovenii* 32, November 2002.

eight hundred new jobs would be made available with the reinstituting of the third shift received no less than five thousand applications, this was not the result of a protracted draught of jobs in the plant.⁴⁷¹ On the contrary, according to a June 2003 report (Debrosse 2007:301), since privatization no more than 2460 employees had left without participating in the buyout program, which accounted for another 9224 departures. Meanwhile, 919 people had been hired, which was far from negligible given the focus on layoffs during restructuring and considering the number of 14823 employees reached in mid-2003. While turnover unaccounted by restructuring might have been considered contingent and largely piecemeal, the situation from 2004 onwards looked entirely different. The first 800 new jobs for the third shift were a year later followed by another 1200 and new investments yielded an extra of up to 3000 jobs, as announced in the local media in the spring of 2006.⁴⁷² That the number of employees continued to drop from just below 14000 at the end of 2003 to just over 12000 in 2004 and stabilized at approximately 11500 starting with 2005 indicates a significant acceleration of labor turnover after the official end of the restructuring program.

The importance of labor turnover was exacerbated by renewed concerns with social reproduction. Giving hiring priority to youth was high on the agenda of both managers and union officials. While SAD militated for the children of laid off employees to be hired for the third shift, management seemed to programmatically favor the hiring of youth less for servicing a just cause than to add a couple extra bricks to the edifice of labor control.⁴⁷³ If managers emphasized their appeasement of union demands in hiring the children of ex-workers, they also explicitly portrayed younger employees as more adaptable, less resilient in the face of reorganization, and more in line with new requirements of job flexibility than older workers were.⁴⁷⁴ Though such scaremongering tactics sparked occasional accusations of discrimination against older employees, union officials were more keen to show that, paradoxically or not, it was precisely young people who wanted to leave because of the tough working conditions and low wages and benefits.⁴⁷⁵ As a result, despite all efforts at employing youth, the question of social reproduction remained particularly acute until the end of the decade (see chapter 15). Starting from calls to hire more workers voiced more seriously in 2006, by early 2007 there were already indications a possible labor shortage. During the first six months of 2007, 1567 people were hired, though without any significant modification in the total number of employees.⁴⁷⁶ By the end of the year, union representatives were decrying the lack of skilled labor and denounced management's inability to deal with the accelerating labor turnover. The diagnostic was without precedent in the post-89 era: "It is clear that we are confronted with a crisis of labor power, especially when it comes to skilled labor. Was the recruiting budget only sufficient for writing on the commuters' buses that Dacia is hiring workers?"⁴⁷⁷ In the eyes of the union leadership the source of the problem was obvious enough: low wages, bad working

⁴⁷¹ "Viitorul e pe mâini bune." *InfoAutoturism* 186, April 2005.

⁴⁷² "Raport de activitate al Consiliului SAD pe anul 2005." *InfoAutoturism* 191, February 2006. "Uzina Dacia-Renault are nevoie de forță de muncă." *Miovenii* 108, April 2006.

⁴⁷³ Raport de activitate al Consiliului SAD pe anul 2004." *InfoAutoturism* 184, January 2005. "Proiect Program de Hotărâri al Adunării Generale a SAD 2006." *InfoAutoturism* 190, January 2006.

⁴⁷⁴ E.g., "Printre oamenii de la Dacia." *InfoAutoturism* 165, April 2002.

⁴⁷⁵ "Adunarea Generală a Sindicatului Autoturisme Dacia." *InfoAutoturism* 163, February 2002.

⁴⁷⁶ "Dacia întinerește." *InfoAutoturism* 202, July 2007.

⁴⁷⁷ "Puncte de vedere." *InfoAutoturism* 205, December 2007.



FIGURE II.40. “We hire workers, send your CVs!” written on commuters' buses waiting at the plant gates, spring of 2008.

Photograph by Jerome Sessini, “Romania, Bucharest. Dacia car factory. 2008”. Available online: http://www.magnumphotos.com/C.aspx?VP3=SearchResult_VPage&STID=2TYRYDCGFZVA (Retrieved March 12, 2015).

conditions, constant work intensification, routine abuses, and an overall defiant stance of management when it came to sharing by-now significant profits. At this time, the events leading up to the 2008 strike were unfolding rapidly. Within a relatively short time span, the situation on the local labor market had once again shifted dramatically and gone were the times when high labor turnover could be ignored without fears of endangering the labor supply.

During the spring of 2008, observers of the general strike also noticed the highly visible ads on the commuters’ buses (figure II.40) as well as the broader context in which they had become a constant presence on the roads surrounding the plant:

While the “old ones” make up about two thirds of the production workers, more than 3,500 young people have been employed in the past year. Skills are not important. They take anybody. On the buses which transport most of the workers to the factory every day there is a big advertisement: “We are hiring!” The new contracts are limited to 3 or 6 months. Lay-offs and new recruitments happen daily. However, young workers are also resigning: “When somebody stays at Dacia, it means that she/he has family, or debts, or could not find anything better in other countries,” said Radu, who works in the assembly sector. (“Strike at the Dacia-Renault Plant in Romania, 2008” 2009)

If such a degree of labor turnover and youth departures from the plant might have been difficult to explain just half a decade earlier, at the end of the 2000s they reflected a series of deep and rapid mutations of the labor market. The alternatives to working in the plant were no longer limited to early retirement, entrepreneurship, rural migration or various types of informal occupations, including the parts trafficking economy. The economic boom of the second half

of the 2000s came with increased investment in manufacturing and construction, along with the rise of the consumer service sector, with prospects at least comparable to those of working at Dacia. Finding something better to do within commuting distance was no longer the stuff of fantasy, as it could have more or less rightfully been considered in the first years of the new millennium. More importantly, the newfound opportunity of obtaining a job abroad with unprecedented ease trumped all alternatives. As it happened across Romania (Ban 2012a; Sandu 2010; Stan and Erne 2014) and, indeed, across Central and Eastern Europe (Meardi 2012) during this period, the migrating abroad for work began appealing to more and more workers and ex-workers, disgruntled with the local lack of jobs offering decent pay and proper working conditions. By the time the crisis struck, at the end of the decade, ongoing mass migration had produced endemic labor shortages. Dacia's increasing troubles with finding workers was proof enough that Mioveni and, for that matter, the entire Argeş region were no strangers to this broader phenomenon. And while the 2008 strike exemplified the implications for workers' bargaining power in truly spectacular fashion, it also decisively contributed to yet another turning of fortunes for Dacia workers and their labor market peers alike. In combination with the severe economic crisis that hit Romania in 2009, the strike made the messages written in capital letters on the commuters' buses seem like a distant and rather implausible memory.

The weight of the past and the bonds of the present

On a sunny day in the spring of 2013, Silviu asked me to run what I at first thought was a highly unusual errand. He called me from work and, in a distinctively urgent tone, asked if I could do him a favor. He then told me the names of half a dozen different car parts and asked me to go to all the shops lining the main boulevard in Mioveni, ask for the prices, and write them down on a piece of paper which he would collect later in the afternoon, when he got off from work. By this time, I was quite familiar with the local parts shops, most of which were concentrated at the southwestern end of town, in what was believed to be Mioveni's best area to live in outside the immediate proximity of the civic center (figure II.41). Though far from the lush retail industry of old, about which one could nonetheless still hear plenty of stories, at the time of my fieldwork this area was populated with around a dozen parts shops of different sizes. It took me less than an hour to search for Silviu's parts, though not all shops had them in stock and the minuscule price differences seem to not justify the effort. As I met with Silviu to give him the list of prices I had collected, he expressed his disappointment and surprise at how high the prices were in comparison to his expectations. After satisfying his need to double check for himself with some of the bigger shops, he finally explained what the whole thing was about, or at least what he had hoped would come out of it. Through one of his acquaintances he had got in touch with someone from out of town who wanted to buy several types of spare parts and Silviu had promised to obtain them at a good price. Unbeknownst to his potential customer, Silviu never intended to obtain the parts from the plant, nor indeed could he have obtained them if he had wanted to. Instead he thought he could try his luck with the Mioveni part shops, which he believed were still connected to the parts trafficking economy, or at least should have sold parts at lower prices than elsewhere, since Mioveni was, after all, their place of origin. As he found out, neither of these was the case, as prices in Mioveni and those from out of town were marginally different and certainly did not justify wasting any effort on cutting such a deal.

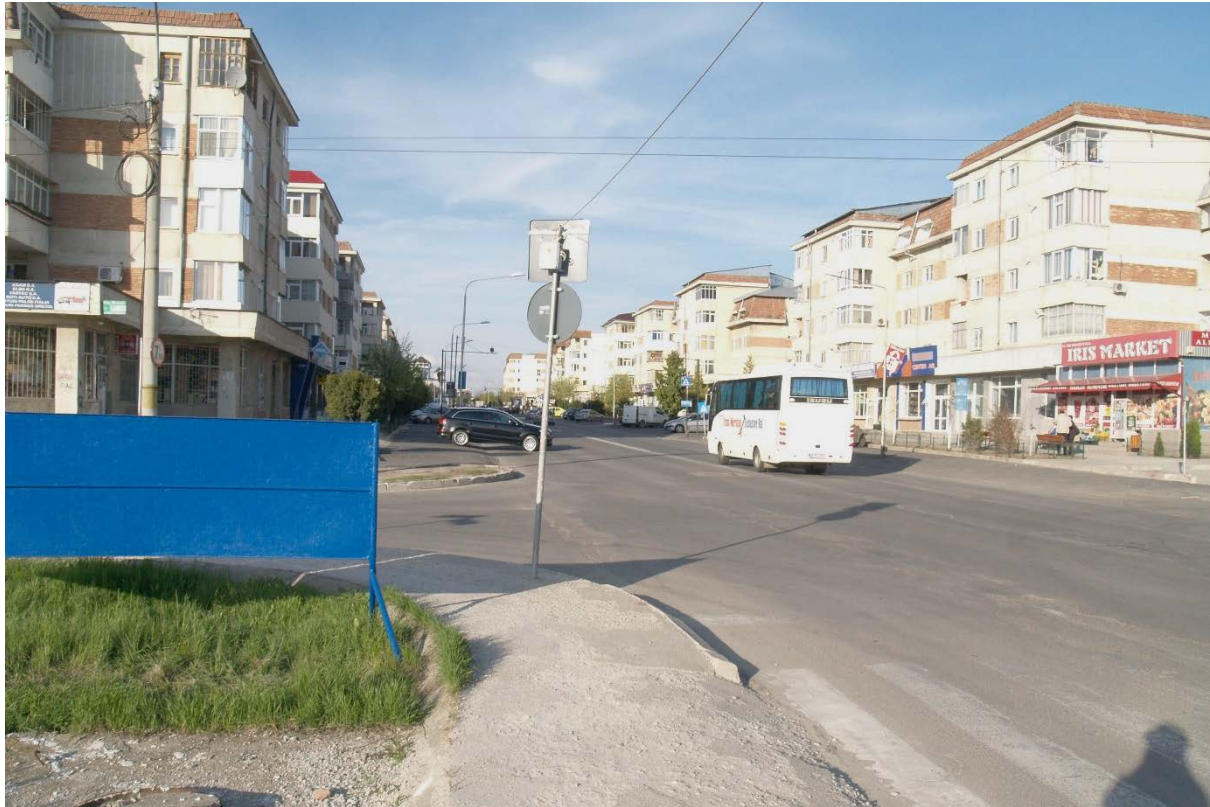


FIGURE II.41. The “Dacia” Boulevard, looking into Mioveni from the southwestern end of town. Photograph by the author, summer of 2012.

The disappointment was compounded by the surprise of finding out how out of touch he had become with the everyday affairs of the car parts trade. The realization that a previously lucrative avenue had become closed for good was genuinely painful, considering that this time around he would have gone for it out of sheer need, and not for the sake of the fun and luxury which he says characterized his days as a parts smuggler.

Silviu was almost 30 years old when I met him. Though working in the plant for several years, his life as an autoworker got off to a relatively late start, only toward his mid-20s. Before that he had done all sorts of jobs, from selling clothes to driving a taxi. Sometime in 2006 a relative asked him if he wanted to try out a job at Dacia, which he went for without expecting much and believing he would only stay there for a few months. He soon started smuggling parts out of the plant, a highly lucrative business that he claims could sometimes earn him a month's pay in just a couple of days. He spent most of the money on having fun: long nights out in town, drinking, and, most of all, casino gambling. Although it did not last for very long, he refers to this period as the happiest of his life, in stark contrast to the present. All things considered, Silviu is content with his job, as it offers him a decent wage and a secure prospect for the future; he is aware this is much more than many people around him can hope for. He feels protected but at the same time estranged: the pace of work drains him of energy and leaves him sulking at the end of the workday and, more importantly, despite still being young he has little hope that things will change in any significant way for him in the future. Having never cared for a university education, there is no way forward for him in the plant, as he has already reached the top of a very short worker's career ladder. The only things he can realistically look forward to are pay raises from collective bargaining and various seniority bonuses for which

he will eventually become eligible; a less demanding job, offering at least some degree of protection from the relentless pace he currently has to keep up with, is also something he can still hope for. Worse yet, he complains of deepening isolation, as he finds it tough to build relationships outside work. This is particularly important, since he describes the shop floor as imbued with favoritism and laden with traps and opportunities for betrayal. Like so many other workers, he portrays the atmosphere in the plant as highly unfriendly, with the hurtful effects of the speed of production compounded by a deep-seated rancor prevalent among coworkers.

Outside work, among his relatives, neighbors, and occasional drinking partners, Silviu is considered to have done quite well for himself. Not only does he hold a highly desired job that grants him considerable peace of mind in regard to the future and pays much better than anything a young worker like him could make outside Dacia, but Silviu has also managed to obtain a loan for an apartment, he owns an automobile and has a wife and two small children. By the standards of his generation, this is close to the best one could hope for, and there are plenty of young men his age who can only dream of being in the same situation. Yet Silviu is not so sure of his standing and future prospects. Between paying for his house loan, keeping up with the growing expenses of raising two small children, and his wife's frequent bouts of unemployment, he oftentimes finds himself struggling to make ends meet. The need for extra money has pushed him back to gambling and trying to secure spare parts deals. In an apparent paradox, he considers his past as a worker-cum-smuggler to have been the better part of his life, despite his job offering at the time neither the wages, nor the security that Dacia jobs are now considered so precious for. Even more so, in this broader transition triggered by the dispute of early 2008, Silviu came out relatively unscathed, neither losing his job nor giving it away, like so many of his age peers did, unaware of what they would lose in the years to come.

The parts trafficking economy between personal memory and folklore

Despite its previous resilience, the disappearance of the trafficking economy in the aftermath of the 2008 strike was relatively sudden and practically complete. Trafficking has effectively been removed from the daily experience of workers and occasionally resurfaces as a reminiscence of the past or as a feat that can only be accomplished by unknown others, who dispose of the sort of resources a regular worker never could and never did command. In workers' everyday parlance, while the trafficking of the past pertained to "us," the ones who lack power and can relate to one another directly, within the same horizon of experience, the trafficking of the present pertains strictly to "them," those in positions of power and with whom we can only relate indirectly, through the mediation of the factory bureaucracy, and who therefore remain impersonal figures that can only be referred to in the most abstract of terms. The clearest expression of this chasm lies in the opposite manners in which the labor involved in trafficking is described: while for us it involved creativity, sometimes excessive physical effort, personal involvement and a certain degree of risk, for them it is bureaucratic, involves no physical effort nor does it yield anything except profit, and involves a minimal degree of risk. In other words, while we struggled to circumvent security, to manipulate extensive social ties and go against the grain of the factory bureaucracy, they can make use of the bureaucracy itself, by fixing the books and stealing legit, "with papers" (*fură cu acte*)—an activity so covert and happening on such large scale that it remains imperceptible to our eyes and ears.

The disappearance of the trafficking economy as an integral part of everyday life left behind a highly diverse social landscape. Among workers, dispassionate narratives of the trafficking economy of the past are extremely rare: one either recalls it with joy, as a source of youthful fun and enthusiasm (when one could afford to take an extended lunch break and go to one of the restaurants downtown, or when one forgot to collect one's wages for several days or even weeks at a time) that bears no resemblance whatsoever with the present; or one recalls it disaffectedly, like Silviu does, as the source of a carefree life for which one now longs pointlessly. Among ex-workers, one can find those very few who are still around from the ones unlucky enough to be scapegoated during the anti-theft crusades of the 1990s, for whom it is difficult to establish if present marginalization is a cause or an effect of misfortune. The category of former professional traffickers comprises disaffected marginals like Emil, repented workers who prefer not to speak of their past, and many who have used their accumulated money and connections to start an actual business and turn themselves into more or less successful entrepreneurs. Only among the very old and the much younger generations one does not encounter stories of trafficking as soon as memories of the past are invoked. The majority of others recall trafficking in as vivid terms as possible, though they are divided when it comes to what role it ended up playing in their lives: success or ruin, action or ignorance.

The specificities of these personal stories of trafficking seem borderline unimaginable from a present standpoint. For an outsider, relating to such stories detailing a plethora of highly elaborate and at the same time highly risky methods, the images of entire engines and even cars being taken out of the plant in parts only to be reassembled in apartments and garages around Mioveni, the flurry of out-of-town visitors, the commonplace nature of street violence, the visibility of a burgeoning underworld in the towns' nightlife, the highly organized groups of different shapes and sizes, or the amounts of money circulating within the trafficking economy requires a certain suspension of disbelief. Personal stories are oftentimes supplemented by narratives of figures who have achieved quasi-legendary status, such as underworld "clans" that have fallen into misery, or professional traffickers who managed to accomplish apparently otherworldly feats—like visiting every country on the globe, as it is said a particularly successful trafficker did. Adding to this, trafficking is routinely described as a source of original accumulation of capital in the case of local entrepreneurs who have set up businesses in retail, tourism or real estate. The virtually ubiquitous lore of parts trafficking is thus much more encompassing than the belief that large backstage deals are still being done "with papers," under the full cover of the law. Against such a background, Silviu's confidence that, with a certain degree of effort, he could briefly reconnect to the world of trafficking does not seem so foolish after all, even if it remains thoroughly anachronistic.

Along with trafficking, indiscipline on the job has also become a thing of the past, or has survived merely as the gest of an irresponsible few. Absenteeism, abusing medical leaves, repeatedly coming to work late, drinking on the job or coming to work drunk (see chapter 15), and any other flagrant disregard for rules concerning workers' behavior on the job are likewise discussed as things of the past, which one would not dare indulge in at present. Since both trafficking and indiscipline were rooted in workers' autonomy on the shop floor and in their control over the labor process, the restriction of the latter necessarily entailed the elimination of the former. Also determined by this loss of autonomy is another major change workers often

mention: the transition from a relaxed, friendly work atmosphere permeated by solidarity to an essentially tense, inimical environment where cutthroat competition over what are more often than not admitted to be meaningless advantages predominates. The experience of the loss of control is still salient for workers who were employed in the plant before the 2008 strike. Their victory brought them both the wages and standing they had been craving for almost two decades and the loss of control they had until then been so eager to cling on to.

Entrenchment and the consolidation of labor control

At the end of the 2000s the balance of power manifest in everyday shop floor relations was clearly shifting in favor of management. After witnessing a retrenchment during restructuring followed by a boost in the years of labor shortage preceding the 2008 strike, workers' control over the labor process dwindled to the point where rules could no longer be contested through individual acts of indiscipline and voiced protest and could only be handled via the limited bureaucratic channels offered by the union. Paradoxically, this change was not triggered by renewed efforts to secure labor control by management, but rather by the combined effects of the 2008 strike and the crisis that struck soon after, which led to a mutual strengthening of compensation, hierarchy, and commitment—a significant shift from previous periods in which these mechanisms had been out of sync. This is not to say that the strike was simply a pyrrhic victory for workers. Instead, the loss of autonomy and control was part of a tradeoff, securing objectives that had gone back at least as far as the 1990s and reversing the unprecedented relative disparagement that work in the automobile plant had witnessed in the 2000s.

The overhaul of compensation was the most notable and immediate consequence of the 2008 strike. Wage demands represented the chief issue driving the conflict and it was the most notable success obtained by the strikers (see chapter 4). While pay raises secured in 2008 were not enough to make a clear-cut difference, the subsequent productivity bargain entailed continued increases that by the first half of the 2010 added up to an unprecedented boost to workers' welfare based on wages alone; both in absolute and relative terms, as the wages of Dacia workers soared in comparison to the average wage in the country and the Argeş region as a whole (table 1). This was accompanied by the completion of the separation between the career ladders of workers and nonworkers within the plant, as any significant opportunities of vertical mobility for the former became *de facto* unavailable. While this had been a major

	total	manufacturing	Dacia*
2008	1713	1656	2256
2009	1858	1996	2668
2010	1966	2353	3262
2011	2021	2467	3632
2012	2123	2572	3965
2013	2267	2819	4496
2014	2449	2967	-

TABLE 1. Gross average wage in the Argeş county, 2008–2014.

*For Dacia, including overtime and other bonuses.

Data source: National Institute of Statistics, *Ziarul financiar* (various articles).

objective of restructuring in the first half of the 2000s (see chapter 10), the difficulties of matching personnel with jobs during reorganization, compounded by labor shortage, led to a flurry of promotions from workers' ranks to those of low- and even mid-level TESA. With the drastic curtailing of labor turnover and the tightening of hierarchical relations at the turn of the decade, such transitions became entirely exceptional.

The discontent leading to the strike was not just about wages, but about low wages in combination with repeated speedups and attempts at enforcing hierarchy by all means possible. The abuses of shop-floor managers were loudly condemned during the strike and part of the demands focused on obtaining a more lenient work regime. While keeping open the option of accepting even tougher hierarchical relations in exchange for wage increases, workers were thus not opposed to management replacing supervisors in the aftermath of the conflict. In the years following the strike, speedups were just as substantial and as regular as wage increases, exacerbating the phasing out of older employees from jobs whose pace they could no longer keep up with. Younger supervisors were promoted from within workers' ranks, while older ones accepted demotions, transfers, or the occasional buyout.⁴⁷⁸ Keeping workers in line in achieving increasingly stringent production targets was an explicit mandate of this new generation of supervisors and the readiness of candidates contrasted directly with the reticence of older supervisors to enforce a work regime they themselves considered physically and morally inappropriate. Previously protested against, security measures were heightened, a tighter leash was kept on absenteeism, and a random breath alcohol test was introduced for workers on entry through the plant gates. Dealing a killing blow to workers' autonomy, the dismantling of informal shop floor networks could now be regarded as complete: low-level supervisors, especially team leaders, were increasingly no longer considered (and no longer considered themselves) part of the workers' collective; job transfers continued apace, removing or straining the possibility of maintaining unmediated contact; the economic rationale of strong social ties, be it to keep production going despite the caprices of the supply flow or to siphon parts out of the plant, was undermined entirely; and, finally, the reproduction of these ties via interaction rituals outside the plant was severely curtailed (see part III). Some of these changes were initially traded for higher wages. Others could be enforced afresh once the crisis struck. These two factors also turned commitment into an effective mechanism of labor control, a task at which all the threats and moral exhortations of the previous two decades had failed.

Regardless of the toughening of hierarchy and the removal of promotion opportunities, jobs at Dacia became much more valuable than they had ever been in previous years as a result of accumulated wage increases. Job security started gaining a whole new importance, while calls for loyalty to the company were now backed by increasingly satisfactory rewards. The onset of the crisis led to the tightening of the local and regional labor markets, the augmenting of the differences in wages and working conditions between the plant and other employers, and the partial impeding of exit via migration (see Stănculescu and Stoiciu 2012). As opportunities for employment that had expanded during the economic boom of the second half of the 2000s dwindled, so did the material and symbolic returns on holding a job in the plant increase. The

⁴⁷⁸ As during restructuring, transfers and voluntary demotions happened without a loss of individual wages or benefits. This provided a substantial incentive for older employees to move into jobs they considered less demanding or demeaning.

austerity measures that followed the contraction of the private sector of the economy and the employer-friendly labor legislation adopted in early 2011 signaled the establishment of a new regional status quo characterized by the crowning of Dacia as the most favorable place to work by an outstanding margin. This was reflected in the paramount role now played by job security for SAD (see chapter 5) and in the behavior of workers themselves. Both individually and collectively, the entrenchment of Dacia workers became the most distinguishing mark of loyalty in the post-strike era, reflecting and reinforcing major mutations in the labor market at the end of the 2000s.

Labor market (re)segmentation: from a broken duopoly to a robust monopoly

By the second half of 2008, Dacia appeared to have surpassed the tense moments of the March strike only to encounter new problems caused by turbulences in the export markets the plant had by then become wholly dependent upon compounded by the decline of the domestic market. While the full effects of the crisis were yet to be ascertained in Romania, workers and union officials confronted the uncertainty of planned stoppages lasting for weeks on end, which threatened the sustained increase in production figures since the middle of the decade and, in the worst case scenario that some managers insisted upon, could end up jeopardizing a large number of jobs.⁴⁷⁹ This tense situation was nonetheless short-lived, as the crisis quickly proved to be a boon for the low-cost market segment over which Dacia held a virtual monopoly. Barring another stoppage in the first weeks of the year, 2009 brought an almost total reversal,

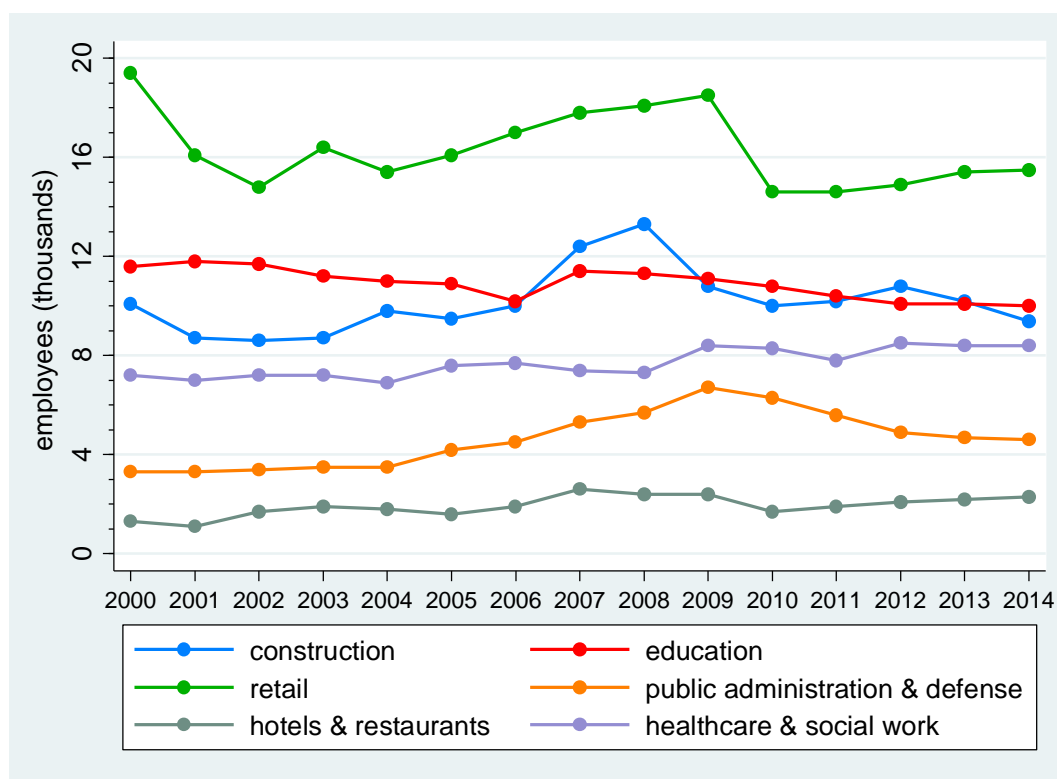


FIGURE II.42. Number of employees in selected economic sectors in the Argeș county, 2000–2014. Data source: National Institute of Statistics.

⁴⁷⁹ “Constantin Stroe: Situația de la Dacia e vecină cu drama.” *Evenimentul zilei*, 12 November 2008. “Dacia rămâne la fel de puternică.” *InfoAutoturism* 210. December 2008.

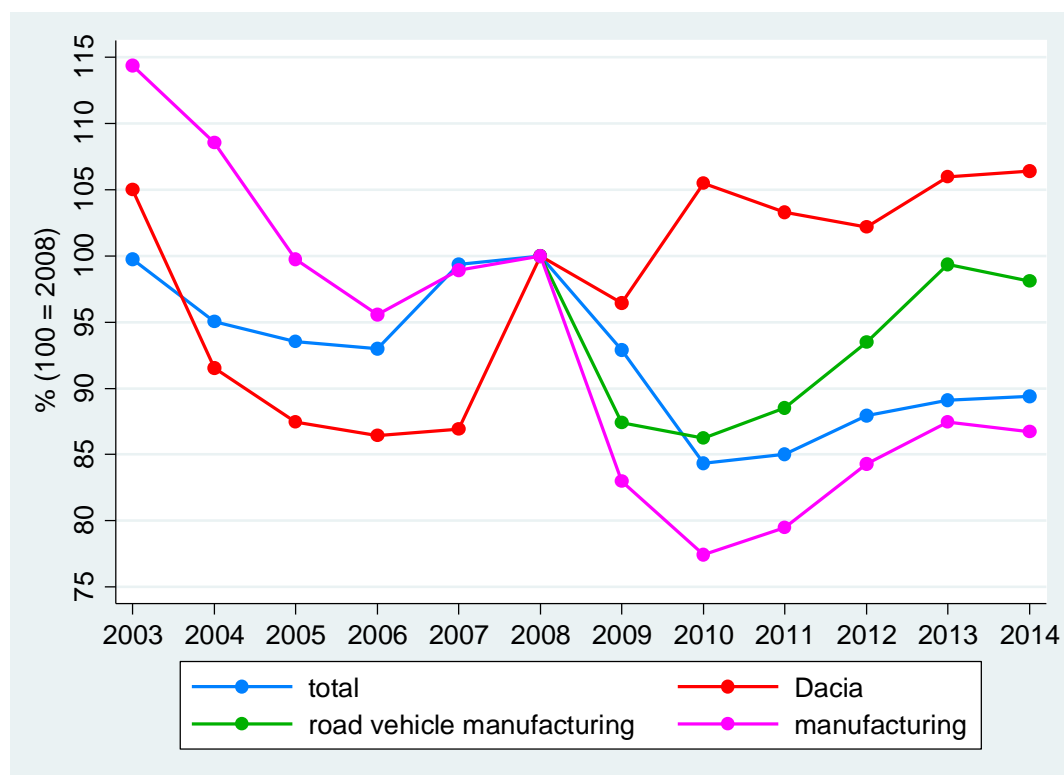


FIGURE II.43. Number of employees (as % of 2008) in the Argeș region, 2003–2014: county total, manufacturing industry, road vehicle manufacturing*, and the Dacia company.

*Including spare parts production. Data unavailable for 2003–2007.

Data source: National Institute of Statistics, Vardie (2009), company reports (various years). Author's calculations.

as the production plan had to be stepped up in advance to meet the brisk export demand.⁴⁸⁰ Toward the end of 2009, the initial optimism that Romania's economy would not be affected by the crisis unfolding in its economic surroundings gave in to severe economic contraction and draconic austerity measures.

The combination of crisis and austerity led to a reversal of the upward trend of employment in sectors that had benefitted most from the previous period of accelerated economic growth: retail, construction, leisure, and the public sector overall (figure II.42). For the Argeș county, the crisis wiped out over 15% of jobs between 2008 and 2010, with the total number of employees reaching a record low point after the brief apparent recovery of the previous years (see table 2). At the peak of the crisis the unemployment rate reached levels unseen since the disastrous late 1990s. But, although manufacturing was overall hit particularly hard by the crisis, the reverse was the case for the road vehicle industry and especially for Dacia, whose weight in terms of employment in the county reached levels comparable to 2002, when the personnel restructuring program was still in full swing. The crisis thus marked another decisive turning point for the local and regional labor markets as Dacia and a few of its local suppliers took on a new role as primary job providers, at the same time promising higher wages, more stable working conditions, better job security, and less uncertainty in regard to the future than the mostly ailing rest of the regional economy. In spite of the slump of 2009, the automobile industry picked up considerable momentum in the 2010s, as it came to dominate

⁴⁸⁰ "80% din producția Dacia va merge la export." *Business24*, 25 May 2009.

	employees (thousands)	unemployment rate (%)	manufacturing (%)	road vehicle manufacturing (%)	Dacia (%)
2000	166.8	7	47.9	-	14.4
2001	158.0	6.4	48.3	-	13.6
2002	154.1	6.6	48.3	-	10.9
2003	146.5	6.2	45.5	-	9.5
2004	139.6	6.8	45.3	-	8.7
2005	137.3	5.2	42.3	-	8.4
2006	136.5	6.1	40.8	-	8.4
2007	145.9	4.8	39.5	-	7.9
2008	146.8	4.9	39.7	18.3	9.0
2009	136.4	9.5	35.4	17.2	9.3
2010	123.8	7.6	36.4	18.7	11.3
2011	124.9	5.7	37.1	19.0	10.9
2012	129.1	6.1	38.1	19.4	10.5
2013	130.9	7	39.0	20.4	10.7
2014	131.3	5.9	38.5	20.0	10.7

TABLE 2. The number of employees and the rate of unemployment for the Argeş county; number of employees in manufacturing and the road vehicle industry* for the county and at Dacia (as % of total number of employees for the county), 2000–2014.

*Including spare parts production. Data unavailable for 2000–2007.

Data source: National Institute of Statistics, Vardie (2009), company reports (various years). Author's calculations.

the county's manufacturing sector, all the while maintaining employment levels comparable to the pre-crisis years (figure II.43). In 2014, 9 out of the first 20 employers in the county belonged to the automobile industry, employing approximately 26.6 thousand employees out of a total of around 35.6 thousand.⁴⁸¹ The situation in Mioveni was extreme: in 2011 approximately 80% of jobs were in manufacturing, with Dacia and a handful of its local suppliers accounting for almost 16 thousand jobs out of a total of just 20 thousand.⁴⁸² Apart from the Institute for Nuclear Research, the largest employer outside the car industry was still the local administration; otherwise, the private sector comprised a large number of small businesses providing consumer goods and services that flourished only insofar as they exacerbated their dependence on the earnings of autoworkers.

These quantitative changes were correlated with qualitative ones, thus transforming the structure of the local labor market from the waning duopoly of manufacturing and trafficking that characterized the mid-to-late 2000s to a consolidated monopoly over the most desirable

⁴⁸¹ "HR Insider Piteşti: Ce tendinţe sunt pe piaţa muncii într-o zonă dominată de industria auto." *Ziarul financiar*, 24 September 2015.

⁴⁸² See "Strategia de dezvoltare durabilă a oraşului Mioveni pentru anii 2014–2020." Available online: http://primariamioveni.ro/poze_reprezentative/strategie_Mioveni%20_2016.pdf (Retrieved March 3, 2016).

jobs held by the automobile plant and several of its first tier suppliers, which became established in the first half of the 2010s. On the ground, the increasingly stark boundary between the plant and its labor market surroundings was actively reinforced via workers' unprecedented entrenchment. Both individually and collectively, workers, who increasingly insisted on holding on to their jobs at all cost, took up an important role in boundary maintenance and control. While collective bargaining kept increasing the distance between the two segments of the labor market, the new situation presented workers with novel challenges and opportunities for securing and sometimes even increasing their own and their families' welfare. Since this once again depended on the availability of unequally distributed resources, the stage was set for a new conflict that transgressed and at the same time realigned the boundaries of between the plant and its environment. As in previous decades, one of the chief terrains on which this conflict was waged was that of social reproduction.

The historical fault lines of social reproduction

The new status quo established in the first half of the 2010s put the generational differences of the previous two decades into an entirely different perspective. The new labor market inequalities evinced an accumulated history of inter- and intragenerational cleavages grafted on the winding trajectory of the local labor market since 1989. For the generation that came of age during the 1990s, the differences between the ones who joined the ranks of autoworkers and those who chose the at the time rewarding life of professional trafficking now gained expression in the regrets of those like Emil (see chapter 6), who decries his own lack of understanding of how things would turn out and the world's lack of willingness to grant him a second chance. Emil is, however, a rare case, as he did not take the entrepreneurial path out of the trafficking economy, did not manage to successfully convert himself into an autoworker despite trying, and yet remained in town and maintained a presence in his neighborhood's public life. Many professional traffickers, including the quasi-legendary figures of old, have disappeared from sight and now only make the occasional object of rumor and speculation. Wanting to turn time around to make different choices also characterizes those belonging to the generation that came of age during the 2000s who, in line with the opportunities available at the time, refused work in the plant, only to helplessly see the tables suddenly being turned toward the end of the decade. In contrast to Emil and his peers, young people of Silviu's age who found themselves in this situation after 2008 are still very present and visible. Silviu himself admits he had no intention of staying in the plant for too long and his thoughts shifted only once the post-2008 changes became obvious. Unable to anticipate transformations to come, many were not as slow in deciding: while some refused work in the plant from the very beginning, many tried it out only to give up after periods as short as a few months or, in some cases, even a single day. Even though some managed to pull themselves through the crisis, others ended up deeply regretting what in retrospect they justifiably see as unthinkable folly.

Those in their thirties and forties who now find themselves severely marginalized by the rise of their autoworker peers with whom they had previously been at least on a par have little to look forward to. At their age, they can lament their past choices and their present predicament, but they realize they can do little to change things for the better in the future. Things stand quite differently with the third post-89 generation, those coming of age in the

late-2000s and early-2010s. Pressured by their parents to either follow in their footsteps or not make the same mistakes and seeing for themselves how downtrodden some of their older friends and neighbors have become, youth in their late teens and early twenties are pushed from all sides to seek out employment in the plant or, at worst, with one of the unionized first tier suppliers offering somewhat similar wages and working conditions. Accompanying this rush for factory jobs is the entrenchment of workers from previous generations, who prize the security of their jobs as much as their wages and benefits. The extent of workers' entrenchment can be grasped if we consider that before privatization, in January 1999, the average age of Dacia employees was approximately 37 years (Debrosse 2007:287), while in early 2015 it had increased to approximately 44–45 years.⁴⁸³ A slight tendency in this direction was already obvious in the mid-2000s, as the average age had increased to 38 and even 39 years (Angelescu 2007:334), despite management's preference for a younger workforce. This reflected the diminishing desirability of Dacia jobs during the 2000s, in contrast to the increase from the second half of the 2000s and the 2010s, caused by their soaring desirability. The dwindling of labor turnover and the resulting aging of the workforce pushed management to devise a generous buyout scheme, which in early-2013 allowed older workers with enough seniority to voluntarily leave their jobs with lump payments of up to 76,000 lei (≈17,000 euros). This combined dynamic of workers' entrenchment and growing ranks of outsiders seeking jobs has produced a new set of intergenerational and intragenerational tensions permeating everyday life on the shop floor, in the family, and in the neighborhood.

If leaving the plant now mostly happens under special conditions, it is even more so with getting in. Most of the people I encountered in the field were to a certain extent preoccupied with this issue; with few exceptions, they insisted that getting a job in the plant requires special resources, which are wanted by everyone and commanded only by a few. Going the official way—that is, dropping off your CV at the plant gate and waiting for a phone call—will not do at all and, as it is openly remarked upon by those who have done it repeatedly, it is nothing more than a waste of time. Instead, it is said, only connections and money will get you close to getting a job in the plant, and even then nothing is really guaranteed unless one is connected with the right people—the UEL chief is the worst option, as it is better to know someone higher up the shop floor hierarchy, someone in the HR department, someone “in the offices” (*la birouri*), or a “Frenchman”—or if one can dispense with large amounts of money that one subsequently recovers from wages in a couple of years' time—allegedly, the sums can go up to several thousand euros, far beyond what the average worker can save up without additional income and long-term planning. Among workers and nonworkers alike, the frequent discussions concerning plant hirings are plagued by rumormongering, accusations, innuendos, and constant expressions of frustration and outrage. To be sure, like many other topics that concern the automobile plant, there is just as much lore to such stories as there is truth and, while all-out bribery appears to be a rather distant possibility, the mobilization of connections is actively sought both by those who want to get a job in the plant and by workers who, for one reason or another, have an interest in aiding them to do so.

⁴⁸³ According to an interview with Anca Oreviceanu, Communications Manager for Dacia and Renault Romania, on the show “La vama vremii,” broadcast by the local TV station Absolut TV on 29 April 2015.

As the new labor market status quo became established, the informal networks spanning the physical and social boundaries of the plant witnessed a forceful resurgence. Talk of mafia-like “families” assembling on the shop floor is rather routine among workers and makes occasional appearances in the trade union newspaper.⁴⁸⁴ As an older union official confessed to me in the fall of 2012, practices he had thought long gone—such as “the envelope” (*plicul*), consisting of unsolicited gifts in money and in kind made to supervisors—regained significant prominence. No longer organized around the trafficking of spare parts and automobiles, the rekindled social ties have become an instrument in managing the monopoly over jobs. Though in some respects they might resemble the informal ties of old (e.g., given the sometimes-massive differences between jobs when it comes to physical and moral exhaustion, workers still seek to win the favor of supervisors with the intention of securing better jobs for themselves), these new networks are radically different in essential respects and have entirely opposite implications when it comes to labor control. While the previous type of social ties sprang from and at the same time bolstered workers’ autonomy on the shop floor, the new ones are based upon and at the same time strengthen workers’ dependence. While the former where hierarchy dissolving, the latter are hierarchy enforcing; and while the former required collaboration and developed relations of patronage mainly at the fringes, in the latter case patronage and competition lie at the core, while disinterested actions and equal exchanges are entirely exceptional. If in the labor market these networks create a tightly controlled avenue for accessing factory jobs, inside the plant they make a substantial contribution to labor control, by directly strengthening hierarchy and commitment. This enforcement of labor control applies both to employees who act as job brokers as well as to newcomer clients. Given that kinship is indeed a structuring principle of such shop floor “families,” all this leads to a situation in which compensation is also rendered more effective, albeit indirectly, via the pooling of resources within the household.

Relations of patronage have thus become a chief instrument in securing social reproduction, as workers seek to find jobs for their close relatives and especially for their own children. Nonetheless, access to such networks is scarce and does not always yield desired results, since it is not the availability of jobs that is traded but the allocation of specific individuals to jobs made available through departures, productive reorganization, new investments, etc. This means that, while opportunities to obtain employment for one’s next of kin are available only to a few, even those who can tap into such informal social ties sometimes have to wait around for months or even years for things to happen and also risk failing entirely. Households’ differential capacities to accumulate resources of major importance—jobs and, subsequently, wages and a whole series of direct and indirect benefits—have heightened inequalities between workers and nonworkers as well as among workers themselves. If on the shop floor the latter is obvious in the everyday marginalization and discontent of isolated workers, outside the plant stark livelihood asymmetries are visible between households in which only one breadwinner is employed in the plant and those in which two or more members have jobs at Dacia.⁴⁸⁵ Since it concerns the most dire material and symbolic aspects of what it

⁴⁸⁴ “Până când, domnilor manageri?!” *InfoAutoturism* 227, November 2013.

⁴⁸⁵ This is not due just to the operation of informal networks, but also a result of the history of employment within each household. Especially in the case of workers already employed at the time of privatization, it was not

means to achieve something in life (securing a proper living for one's family and a future for one's children, fulfilling basic prescriptions of personal worth, etc.), this situation produces constant tensions, as mounting frustration on the part of isolated workers and their children leads them to adopt fiercely competitive stances and to routinely suspect and even accuse their respective peers of foul play.

Even though youth who end up getting jobs in the plant may be regarded by those less lucky as having struck gold, in many cases this is far from the case, as employment arrangements at the beginning of the 2010s came with plenty of caveats. The fact that young workers are oftentimes treated with contempt by their older colleagues is not only due to suspicions of unfair privilege, but also because they are considered to represent a direct threat to the job security of older employees. In combination with the implication of them being relatively well connected, this makes for a highly tense environment when older and younger workers work side by side.⁴⁸⁶ This is the case because younger workers have little choice in proving their flexibility and willingness to put up with things from which older workers are usually protected. For the newly employed, the much dreaded fixed-term contracts are a rule, and the rumor goes that open-ended contracts are entirely extinct for new hires. Very much loathed even before the “flexible” labor laws adopted in 2011, fixed-term contracts offer medium-term security at best, as they constrain young employees into behaving on the job as best as possible and come with the added worry that one will be made redundant if production targets are cut. Management exploits these fears with constant talk of possible relocation (see part I) and by renewing contracts on the day before they are supposed to expire and sometimes waiting several months to offer an employee a new contract after the old one has expired.

This is virtually standard practice in the case of so-called “Saturday-and-Sunday” workers (*sâmbătă și duminică*—known as SD) who work 12-hour rotating shifts only on week-ends and are used to being hired at the beginning of the year on one- or two-months contracts usually renewed only until the end of summer or the fall, for who is lucky. Since it is practically the only type of hiring that happens collectively and regularly enough to be visible to workers and potential candidates, a stint as an SD worker is regarded as a possible stepping stone in becoming a regular autoworker. According to two SD workers I talked with in the summer of 2013, several dozen SD workers had been hired in the first months of the year, most of whom would be gone as early as September, though rumors circulated that their contracts would be renewed until November. Even among these cohorts, claiming one managed to land the job without connections with someone on the inside is met with derision and mild criticism. Though they don't dare to directly ask each other who got them hired, they all tacitly acknowledge someone had been there for each of them. This, however, only in the initial stage, in which such mutual conniving came only natural for those who knew they had gone beyond

uncommon for both spouses or at least one other family member to work in the plant. According to a pre-privatization assessment, at the beginning of 1999 between 50% and 70% of employees had at least one other family member working at Dacia (Debrosse 2007:287). After privatization, layoffs were supposed to affect just one family member when both spouses were employed in the plant, meaning there was a bigger chance for layoffs to target these families.

⁴⁸⁶ While conflict may take the shape of overt confrontation, as older workers react with condescension or unrestrained disdain, tacit withdrawal and hidden grudges are not uncommon, as proper risk assessment is difficult (“one does not always know to whom the guy you say something to belongs”).

a threshold so many on the outside wanted to cross. In the months to follow, such relatively playful innuendos shifted toward suspicion, spiteful accusations and, eventually, genuine enmity, as small groups of select few were once every three or four months moved to a regular Monday-to-Friday schedule, suggesting they had chances to become regular workers, while others remained on the weekend schedule, aware they would end up unemployed in a few months' time at best. While connections got you in, the quality and strength of each person's connections were said to be decisive in such critical moments. If in some cases becoming an SD worker for a few months or for two years in a row might function like an unavoidable running of the gauntlet at the end of which, despite remaining on a fixed-term contract, one can join the respected ranks of autoworkers, for the majority of SD workers, who find themselves out of a job after several months, it is a highly frustrating experience that nonetheless harbors some hope that next year might be different. Those who have been doing this for years—with a few going as far back as 2008—by now cynically regard their ostensibly uncertain situation as a sort of seasonal routine.

The tensions permeating everyday shop-floor interactions between old and new workers speak to the threats the new labor market status quo harbors for the livelihood and status of individuals from both sides. The pressure felt by parents who want their children to follow in their footsteps and that felt by children who want to live up to both their parents' and their own expectations speak to the obstacles the new status quo raises to social reproduction within the family. The smoldering conflict between older and younger workers and their respective peers that occasionally bursts in the open in interactions outside the workplace speaks to the internal fracturing of the old workers' community. The simultaneous restructuring of the realms of the shop floor, the family, and the neighborhood has decisively contributed to the congealment of relations of inequality characteristic of the new labor market status quo. And while they might highlight the unprecedented durability of such inequalities in comparison to those accompanying previous transformations of the local labor market, they also point to dilemmas inherent to the present status quo and the implications of it being circumvented individually or swept aside collectively in the foreseeable future.

The making of a “labor aristocracy”?

“You know, them, the ones from Dacia, they are the aristocracy [*nobilimea*], they make the most money, they can afford all sorts of things, they have everything. They think they are better than everyone else, they are arrogant, and they are envied. (...) Everyone wants to work in the plant.” There was a traceable dose of resentment in Silvia's voice as she uttered these words. A college graduate in her late thirties, at the time of my fieldwork she had to hold two jobs to make ends meet, with everyday expenses compounded by the monthly installments on her apartment in Pitești. She insists a job at Dacia would have made a significantly positive difference in this regard, but she also says that, after several failed attempts, she has given up on trying to get one. Though she is far better off than the average person not working at Dacia, Silvia's outspoken envy and spitefulness is widespread among the many who in recent years have felt increasingly left out in the labor market. On the other side of the factory gates, feelings of entitlement and understandings of the need for preservation are similarly common. Stances toward one's present and future—and, with this, toward others'—have thus been altered

significantly along with the segmentation of the labor market and the bifurcation of individual and family life trajectories in the post-2008 era.

Less than a decade and a half after the plant had been taken over by a foreign investor, the overall picture of the Dacia workforce bears a striking resemblance to the descriptions of the so-called labor aristocracy that sparked so many controversies among historians of the nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century working class in capitalist Western Europe and, to a lesser extent, the Soviet Union (see Hobsbawm 1984:chapters 12-14; Straus 1997). The “labor aristocracy” comprised relatively highly paid workers enjoying a clearly better standing in relation to employers due to their control over the work process, separated from workers of lower standing through boundaries they themselves policed collectively (via unionization, monopolies over skills, permanent urban residence, etc.), exhibiting particular lifestyles and espousing their own political agenda. According to the same historians, as industrialization and state building picked up pace in the first decades of the twentieth century, the working classes on both sides of the continent were homogenized to such an extent that, even though significant differences persisted, such an aristocratic stratum could no longer be identified within the ranks of manual workers. Discarding stricter formulations of the labor aristocracy thesis, these coordinates indeed highlight the present core differences between Dacia workers and their labor market significant others.

Wages are the most visible and important criterion differentiating Dacia workers in the local and regional labor markets; supplemented by an entire battery of on- and off-the-job benefits, improved working conditions, and job security, the position of Dacia workers bears almost no comparison to the vast majority of other workers in Mioveni and in the Argeş region. Catalyzed by this difference, the entrenchment of Dacia workers has resulted in unprecedented degrees of loyalty and work discipline, despite massive work intensification and a constant push for cost cutting and productivity growth. Despite no longer having direct control over the labor process, this has rendered workers considerably indispensable, given the combined requirements of quantity and quality that became standard in the post-2008 era. The securing of labor control was accompanied by the likewise unprecedented enforcement of boundaries between the plant and its immediate spatial and social environment. Since intensification and the loss of control over the labor process came packaged with an upward redistribution of skill requirements, effectively leading to workers’ deskilling, workers’ control over these boundaries is not based on skill monopolies but rather on their entering into relationships of patronage that span these boundaries and allow them to act as job brokers. The partial juxtaposition of these ties with kinship relations has created an avenue for achieving the reproduction of inequalities along hereditary lines, as the children of nonworkers have drastically lower chances of obtaining jobs in the plant. And while this intergenerational reproduction is far from automatic—indeed, for many it remains rather theoretical—and though it has yet to reach an observable tipping point at the time of writing, present differences in livelihood between workers’ and nonworkers’ families are clearly discernable even to the most superficial observer. Mioveni’s renaissance from the second half of the 2000s (see part III) came with a flurry of new opportunities for consumption that are difficult to access on the money earned in the petty informal economy that still exists, in the public administration, or in the small retail trade that has flourished alongside the growth of factory wages. The same

dynamic is responsible for the soaring number of cars on the streets of Mioveni. While other inhabitants found it increasingly difficult to keep up with the costs of utilities, let alone with paying rent or installments on an apartment, the large contingent of workers who sought to settle themselves in Mioveni or those who had already lived in town who could now afford better housing arrangements kept up a booming real estate market that fared particularly well through the crisis. The extent of Dacia workers' dominance of public space is obvious not only in the favoring of formally commodified consumption and dissuading of practices thought incompatible with work discipline (see chapter 15), but also in the spectacular change in the town's everyday public life that takes place annually toward the end of summer. As car production is stopped for month for repairs and maintenance, workers, having received a substantial vacation bonus, head en masse for the seaside, either with union-sponsored vacation tickets or on their own. Life on Mioveni's streets grinds to a halt, the generous parking spaces are left empty, and the owners of local shops and bars brace for a tough month as they must cope with the lesser possibilities of those not working in the plant. Finally, even more striking are differences in collective organization and militancy, where Dacia workers are unanimously regarded as excelling by a very large margin, both regionally and nationally (see chapter 5).

Though far from absolute, these boundaries and differences separating Dacia workers from those with jobs in other industries, services, public administration, or the now severely marginalized informal economy are clear-cut and have tended to cumulate over time. As I show throughout this dissertation, neither when it comes to collective militancy, nor to labor market regulation, nor everyday interaction rituals can we speak of this division lacking gradation and ambiguity on both sides of the divide. While nuanced interpretations are necessary in grasping the structural and experiential dimensions of this separation, its importance as such can hardly be overstated, as it has increasingly permeated the material and the symbolic infrastructures of everyday life, for which it has become a major structuring principle. Indeed, one of the more striking characteristics of the post-2008 status quo is the appearance of increasing durability and routinization. The consequences of families' unprecedented obstacles in achieving intergenerational social reproduction and increasing talk of delocalization of a significant part of the production capacities have yet to leave a consistent mark on the labor market status quo, though they have impacted SAD's strategy (see chapter 5) and certainly make themselves felt in everyday interactions and personal narratives (see part III). Despite these ambiguities and question marks, trust in the persistence of the current situation is obvious when considering that many university graduates prefer manual workers' positions in the plant to white collar careers outside it and parents increasingly direct their children toward factory jobs, in stark contrast to how things stood during the 2000s (see chapter 15).

Apart from present self-evidence and orientations toward the future, this appearance of durability is further bolstered by a form of historical revisionism linking the production figures and wages of the 2010s to the virtuous circle of the market. Even if managers and union officials refer to the first decade and a half after regime change as an interim between state socialist material and mental inefficiency and the edification of capitalist proficiency on all fronts, workers' personal histories and the generational fault lines they still must cope with on an everyday basis point to a convoluted history devoid of teleology and unblemished righteousness. Paradoxically, it was the scale and swiftness of the transition to the post-2008

status quo that endowed it with a tint of atemporality and contributed most to its appearance of durability. Beyond the image of the market having finally delivered on its promises, lie the winding collective and individual trajectories highlighting fragility and contingency just as much as persistence and necessity.

The bifurcation between an autoworkers' "aristocracy" and a large mass of workers holding jobs with significantly inferior pay, working conditions, and job security stands in stark contrast with the position of autoworkers in the labor market during state socialism. As Straus (1997) has shown, the state socialist political economy of labor was inherently antagonistic to the formation of anything like a labor aristocracy and in fact dissolved of any such stark preexisting divisions between workers. Asserting that until the beginning of the 1990s Dacia workers were part of a relatively homogeneous industrial workforce does not imply brushing aside the question of inequality between workers. To be sure, ethnicity, skilling and, especially, the capacity to establish, cultivate, and tap into various social ties functioned as criteria of material and symbolic differentiation.⁴⁸⁷ Nonetheless, these did not lead to the rise of a separate segment of workers holding a monopoly in the labor market, which was a practical impossibility given the systemically high labor turnover and intense competition between enterprises over the allocation of scarce labor resources. The factory itself operated like "a social melting pot," as Straus calls it, in which external differences were to a great extent cancelled out. Though the extensive informal networks required in production produced their own parallel hierarchies, and even if severely marginalized workers did exist, the majority enjoyed consistent participation in the rich social life that flourished on the shop floor. Based on this participation, the functioning of the so-called second economy was another factor that could potentially differentiate between workers; survival on wages alone and genuine affluence were nonetheless rather exceptional, with most workers falling somewhere in between. There were no radical cleavages within workers' ranks when it came to wages or net incomes, nor when it came to lifestyle, ideology, or militancy. While the labor market, through interenterprise competition, and the factory, through informal hierarchies and the differential participation in the second economy, fostered differentiation between workers, both also fostered homogenization. Inequality among workers was a fact, but a "labor aristocracy" rising within their ranks was not even a remote potentiality.

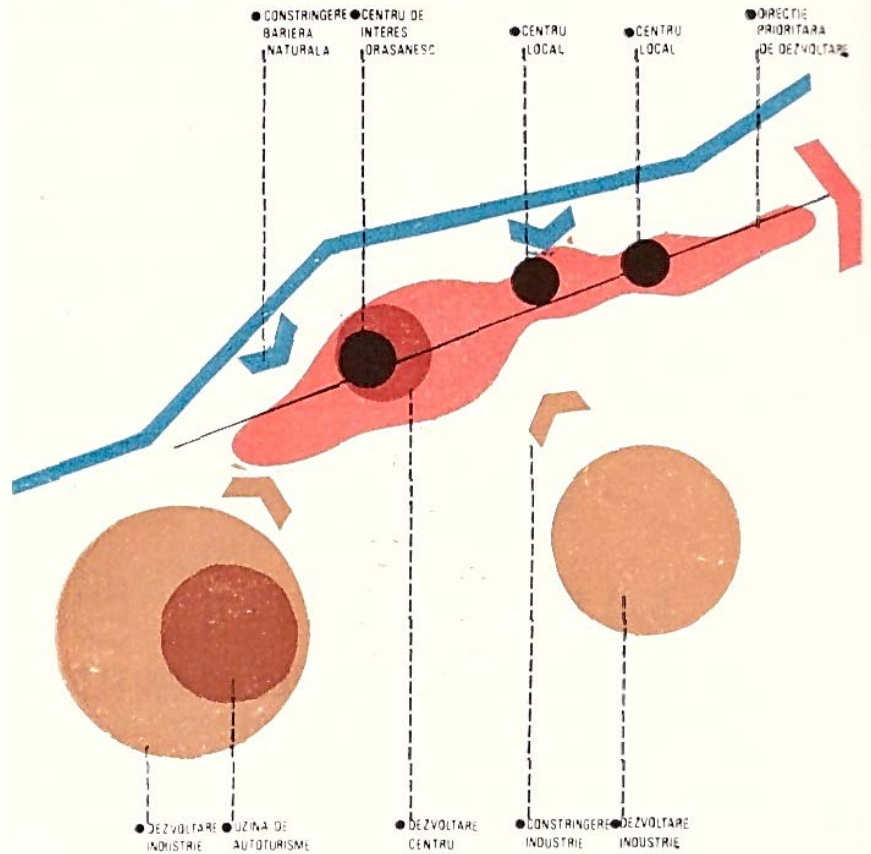
The transition from this relative homogeneity both inside and outside the factory to the stark asymmetries of the 2010s was not straightforward, nor was it inherent to postsocialist socio-economic transformation or to the post-privatization restructuring of the plant. The shift was finally decided by the juxtaposition of the skyrocketing market success of the new Logan range, workers' victory in the strike of March 2008, and the onset of the Great Recession. These allowed for the transformation of plant jobs into scarce and desirable resources that could be monopolized and were worth monopolizing. The elimination of parts trafficking and the material and symbolic separation of work in the automobile plant from what had until then been its relatively flourishing alternatives were adequate responses to the organizational problems raised by the three developments converging at the end of the 2000s. The separation bolstered labor control and, for the first time in the post-89 era, set up a relationship of mutual

⁴⁸⁷ On postsocialist forms of inequality tied to the remobilization of social ties and the reorientation of informal economic activities during the 1990s, together with the accompanying "specter of mafia", see Sampson (1994).

enforcement between compensation, hierarchy, and commitment. Ambiguities and trade-offs aside, this was experienced as a coordination of the political and moral economies of labor, whose absence had constantly been decried during the previous two decades.

The back-and-forth struggles to enforce labor control in the face of organizational problems produced by the shift from plan to market coordination during the 1990s and the deep restructuring of the first half of the 2000s had ripened the conditions for both the victory of workers in the 2008 strike and the unprecedented success of the low-cost models produced starting with the mid-2000s. By that time, failures at eliminating parts trafficking and raising work in the plant above its labor market environment compounded by the removal of previously vital compensatory mechanisms catalyzed the events that consolidated the monopolistic separation beginning with 2008. Be that as it may, the trajectory of labor resilience coupled with flourishing spare parts trafficking during the 1990s, of this duopoly's accelerated decline and eventual breakup during the 2000s, and of the establishing of a durable monopoly by the beginning of the 2010s comprises just as many points of rupture as it does continuities. While these might be hidden in the structural history of the labor market, they are highly visible in everyday interactions and in the life histories of those now standing on the two sides of the labor market divide, pointing to both the synchronic and the diachronic ambivalences of separation. Notwithstanding the clashing feelings of envy and entitlement, nor the overbearing feeling that this is how things stand, should have stood, and will stand in the foreseeable future, the spiking of intragenerational and intergenerational cleavages are more signs of contingency and persistent mutual dependence than of clear separation and "aristocratization". The bedrock of effervescent solidarity, which made the victories of the late 2000s possible to a considerable extent precisely because it stretched far beyond the confines of the plant (see part I), was greatly dependent on the existence of a still relatively uniform labor market situation, in which shared feelings of injustice were compounded by a likewise widely shared perception of a common future still intimately tied to the towering edifice of the automobile plant. There was far fewer room for envy and rancor among peers, while the combination of an aging workforce and labor market segmentation had not yet produced the kind of generalized anxieties regarding social reproduction that were so widespread among both older and younger generations at the time of my fieldwork. Buttressing workers' structural bargaining power in their struggle for an improved material and symbolic standing, labor market conditions also favored their coming together and their ability to rally outside help in doing so. With its genetic prerequisites so radically transformed, the aloofness of this "aristocracy" might eventually prove too ephemeral to justify the term.

COLIBASI



URBANIZATION PLAN FOR "THE CITY OF THE MAKERS OF THE ROMANIAN AUTOMOBILE", SPECIFYING THE MAJOR GEOGRAPHICAL CONFIGURATION OF THE TOWN'S PLANNED EXPANSION IN RELATION TO INDUSTRY AND EVERYDAY URBAN LIFE.

Source: *Arhitectura RPR* 1, 1976.



BEHIND THE APARTMENT BUILDINGS IN MIOVENI'S TOWN CENTER. IN THE BACKGROUND, TWO DOMES FROM THE CATHEDRAL CAN BE SEEN.

Photograph by the author, July 2012.

“So, you say you’re a sociologist, right? Then you must understand that there are different social classes, that people are different, and that each has his own problems in the family and at work. I had to learn this as a foreman: if you want things to go well and to do your job properly, you must know each of your workers personally, so you can understand when they’re having a bad day and why, so you can talk to them and treat them accordingly. You must understand people to be able to work with them. This is what you need to do if you’re a sociologist. If you just sit here all day long and hang out over beers, you won’t be able to say much: ‘Oh, Nicu came from work, bought a beer, sat down and drank it. Then he bought another one and drank it as well’. This isn’t enough. There are more things happening than just this. You need to get to know people, to understand them. That’s what you need to do if you say you’re a sociologist!”

– Nicu, stirring up some early fieldwork anxieties in his usual caring manner, on a hot summer day, long before we became friends and when it was still quite clear to both of us what we wanted from each other.

PART III

DEBTS AND DUTIES: DRINKING, RESPECTABILITY, AND INEQUALITY IN MIOVENI

Urban politics is the third piece of the puzzle of class and labor politics. While partly reflecting trade union and labor market politics, it is a separate realm, with its own dynamics, contradictions, and flavor. In the city, inequality plays out differently than in the factory, while labor market asymmetries here gain material consistency and visibility, by being mapped out in space and experienced in everyday interaction. Confrontations in public space, as well as struggles over the meanings and boundaries of public space extend the reach of the political and moral economies of labor outside the factory and beyond the realm of work proper, into everyday urban life. Struggles over the shape of the labor market as well as organized labor unrest depend heavily on the urban experience, if only because the built environment and urban social life comprise an essential part of the structure and infrastructure of solidarity that can tilt the scale for labor in one direction or the other.

Different types of urban settlements can engender sometimes radically different urban politics, and even more so when it comes to industrial workers and workers' communities. This is probably most obvious in former state socialist countries, where there a stark difference can be observed between large cities in which industrial workers did not make up a dominant majority of the population, nor did they make their mark on cities as whole, or at least not as profoundly as they did in the smaller, single-industry towns that mushroomed along with industrialization. As idiosyncratic instances of the particular urban form of the company town, these settlements faced their own existential questions of survival after 1989, alongside those confronting industrial labor. This engendered a specific type of politics, with very different pressures, means, and outcomes than in large cities where industry and industrial labor did not have such a uniform and overbearing presence.

Mioveni was such a state socialist company town from its inception as an urban settlement in the mid-1970s, with its fate hanging on that of the automobile factory. To a great extent, the same is the case today, though it is no longer a company town where factory affairs are directly reflected in the minutiae of urban life and vice versa, for the simple reason that the material

and institutional underpinnings of this entanglement are no longer there. During the 1990s, while these still existed, they facilitated the emergence of a peculiar type of charismatic politics centered around the double objective of asserting the value of labor and achieving urban modernity. The trade union split of the mid-1990s, between supporters of the business and social movement models of unionism, had a deep impact on local politics in Mioveni. As the latter redeployed their forces from the factory to the town, a new hegemonic project was born, similar to the union politics from which it sprang, yet markedly different from it. On the one hand, this project played on the same attempts at drawing boundaries between the worthy and the worthless and excluding the latter as trade union politics did. On the other hand, it was notably inclusive from the very beginning when it came to workers as such: those to be excluded were the geographical and social outsiders, against whom a united workers' collective had to struggle. Controversies over enterprise autonomy here aligned with a history of marginalization experienced by local intellectuals and representatives of the technical intelligentsia in giving a stark localist flavor to this hegemonic project. Likewise, the isomorphism between factory and urban hierarchies and the orchestration of political representation in front of a hostile exterior endowed it with a distinctly paternalist flavor. Though the realities of the 1990s—state ownership over industry and heavy urban administrative dependence on the center coexisting with planned and impromptu decentralization—granted considerable credibility to this project, they also prevented the realization of its much-desired goals of urban modernity and labor value.

As with organized labor and the regulation of the labor market, privatization was a watershed, harboring both a massive promise and a massive threat. By that time, the hegemonic project had gained significant momentum, securing the allegiance of both workers and those who thought of themselves as local “elites”, as both chosen and worthy to lead. While in the factory and in the labor market privatization harbored expectations of finally setting straight both the political and the moral economies of labor that had allegedly been perverted in previous decades, in town it gave a new impetus to hopes of escaping the uneven geographical development at the losing end of which Mioveni had found itself for decades. On the other hand, however, privatization jeopardized this project, as its material and institutional bedrock slipped away. The town and the automobile plant were now parting ways as Mioveni was bound to lose its company town status. Moreover, heightened inequality and insecurity made inclusion less and less feasible; as inequality was progressively evacuated from the plant and displaced in the labor market, it played an increasingly important role in public space and in urban life more generally speaking. Privatization rendered problematic the core categories of “workers” and “workers’ collective”. Despite all exhortations, it was obvious that, in time, Mioveni could no longer be unproblematically considered a workers’ town.

The solution to this double challenge of privatization was a shift from inclusion to exclusion within the workers’ collective, mirroring (and, indeed, adapting) the separation of “work” and “nonwork” inside the plant, though with an altered dynamic, using different discursive resources, and with more radical implications. The accumulation of debt for utilities proved decisive in catalyzing this shift, which, at the end of a highly convoluted process, emerged as essentially unproblematic. At the end of debt wars of the first half of the 2000s, the exclusion of unworthy insiders was not only permitted, but also desirable and necessary. The

restructuration of public service provision accomplished a transfer of responsibility from the shoulders of the community to those of individuals. While the imperative of urban modernity remained a collective affair, it was now to be accomplished primarily via the fulfillment of individual duties. Individual character—assessed in terms of individual financial-cum-moral solvency—became the paramount criterion for membership in the community and for legitimate participation in the collective pursuit of urban modernity.

Tackling debt accumulation provided the solution of exclusion as well as the means to implement it. It also offered a blueprint for generalization. The charismatic politics of the 1990s and the ideal of urban modernity and labor value were fully realigned to operate the separation of the worthy and unworthy, as individual duties were extended into the realms of the family, the school, and public space broadly understood. The hegemonic project of paternalist localism was overhauled via the coupling of multiple such strategic urban sites through which wedges were driven on the basis of individual worth. The urban politics of the 2000s were marked by struggles to operate this separation in the breadth and depth of everyday life.

By the end of the 2000s and the beginning of the 2010s, things had been radically transformed. Coupled with the effects of the 2008 strike and the transformation of the labor market that followed, everyday life in Mioveni now boasted a clear division between fully entitled members—the established—and those on the spatial and social margins of the urban community—the outsiders; inequality permeated both the built environment and the interaction order of everyday life. The charismatic politics that had dominated public life for a decade now became a routinized affair, dealing with boundary drawing and enforcement in almost purely bureaucratic terms. Dacia's success and autoworkers' relative affluence had finally brought urban modernity within reach, quicker and more forcefully than possibly imagined before, and in obvious correspondence to the ostensible alignment of the political and moral economies of industrial labor in the automobile plant. The costs were nonetheless considerable. The individualization of duty and the reorientation of conflict toward the inside persisted and now impregnated urban life entirely, rendering the search for respectability fraught with existential insecurities on both sides of the divide between the established and the outsiders. This took a severe toll on interaction rituals incompatible with such pervasive inequalities and insecurities, which now entered a vicious circle of self-destructuration, jeopardizing the most basic resources of solidarity on which both the affirmation of the value of labor and the pursuit of urban modernity were initially based.

CHAPTER 12

PRELUDE: FRIENDSHIP, CAUTION

Hidden injuries

“You know, in all the years we’ve known each other, I’ve never been to his place. Not even once. I don’t even know his wife. I don’t know what she looks like,” Cornel says to me all of a sudden while Nicu is inside taking a piss. This candid remark seemed less of an attempt at eliciting a direct response, since the situation itself forbade any reaction apart from a silent nod, than him thinking out loud or fulfilling the need to make a confession. It was less of a reproach on Cornel’s part than a rare overt expression of his own uneasiness and uncertainty regarding his relationship with Nicu. He would have never said this to Nicu directly, not even on one of those many occasions when inebriation allowed them to speak of the most serious things in an apparently joking and playful manner. The chord struck would have been too sensitive. As I have been told innumerable times, “what happens in one’s home is nobody else’s business,” and, apart from the occasional sexually-loaded jokes, men’s wives and their marriages are almost never a subject of real discussion between drinking partners. Adding to these, a confession would have violated the unspoken rules of the drinking ritual, which disallow for one to be directly put on the spot. Even more so with Cornel and Nicu, whose relationship is in many respects odd. In the local order of things, their friendship is a rather unlikely one.

It is half past four in the afternoon and we are already on our second beer. Cornel and Nicu were on the first shift and, as they do every day, they stopped for a drink before heading home. At this hour, we are the only customers left at one of the more popular drinking spots in the town’s north-eastern neighborhood. As with all areas outside the immediate proximity of the town center and the main boulevard, the neighborhood is populated by a host of small grocery stores located at the ground floor of every other apartment building. Depending on where they live or, on more rare occasions, on what after-work drinking allegiances they might have, male workers regularly congregate around these places for drinks after each shift or during weekend afternoons, when public life in the neighborhood reaches its daily and weekly peaks of intensity. What makes the shop we are at particularly popular is its advantageous location, at a widely circulated street juncture, the fact that the owners have set up a terrace with tables and benches outside the store, where customers can sit in the shade during the summer and be somewhat protected from the chilly wind during the winter, and, of course, that they still quite liberally offer informal credit to the regulars.⁴⁸⁸ Though they live just a couple of hundred meters from each other, Cornel and Nicu met here for the first time four years ago and since then they have been hanging out almost every workday.

⁴⁸⁸ Even if informal credit (*a vinde pe caiet, a da pe datorie*) is said to be less widespread today than in the 1990s and early 2000s, in Mioveni it is relatively common for owners of neighborhood stores to offer informal credit to customers with whom they have built a modicum of personal rapport. On informal credit in Romania in the 1990s, see Chelcea and Lăţea (2003).

On first impression, Nicu bears the appearance of the typical local middle-aged labor aristocrat. Now in his mid-forties, he was trained as a foreman and has worked in the plant for his entire adult life, accumulating seniority and everything else that comes with being a long-time worker at Dacia—a substantially above-average wage, more days of vacation and increased benefits, a certain degree of voice and leverage in his relationship with the lower management, and, most importantly, the privilege of not having to worry about whether he will be out of a job any time soon. Nicu's dress code is characteristic for the respectable senior male worker: on workdays, he wears immaculate shirts, dark-colored cloth trousers or blue jeans, and "no-frills" black shoes or boots; he keeps his sporty and more relaxed clothes for weekend outings or the occasional fishing trip. His bodily hexis gives off self-confidence and being-in-control; on hot summer days he will be among the first to unbutton his shirt and proudly expose his prominent potbelly—one of the many displays of manliness in which others are quick to follow.⁴⁸⁹ He often boasts a pair of mirrored sunglasses and likes to chew on toothpicks he carries in his cigarette pack—always Kent Deluxe 100's in a soft pack, by far the most common brand of cigarettes smoked by men like Nicu, yesterday's "sign of a big shot" (Thurow 1986) and today's proof of being able to provide only what is best for oneself.⁴⁹⁰ He is a master of the joke—"the art of making fun without raising anger", which Bourdieu (1984:183) saw as typical of working-class male sociability—and, in the continuous mutual exchange of jokes accompanying the daily sharing of drinks amongst the same people, he is one of the predators—always on the lookout for opportunities to have a laugh, regardless of whether he is aiming at the veiled acceptance of happenstance acts or gestures or the putting-down of those who happen to go out of line. From the confines of the terrace table, Nicu enjoys spectating on and commenting about passers-by, about whom he has acquired a rather unusual amount of knowledge over the years. One of his many trademarks, he gets particularly heated up when a woman he finds attractive happens to enter his visual field—an opportunity for him to dream up all sorts of plans about what he would like to do if only he could.

Cornel seems to belong to a completely different category. In his late thirties, he works for a local entrepreneur who has a subcontracting agreement with one of Dacia's suppliers. Although he enters and exits through the plant gates like any other worker, he receives the minimum wage, has no say over when he can take a day off, rarely has the opportunity to do regular overtime (though he puts in a double shift every now and then, when he is told he has

⁴⁸⁹ The bodily hexis, says Bourdieu (2001:64), "includes both the strictly physical shape of the body ('physique') and the way it is 'carried', deportment, bearing, is assumed to express the 'deep being', the true 'nature' of the 'person', in accordance with the postulate of the correspondence between the 'physical' and the 'moral'." When it comes to drinking rituals among middle-aged workers, the body and the way it is carried are two key ways of asserting one's masculinity and respectability, intimately tied to the position one simultaneously occupies in the industrial hierarchy and the domestic economy. It is different with younger males in their twenties, many of whom invest heavily (long hours in the gym, going on a diet etc.) in shaping their bodies to ostentatiously give off both physical and sexual prowess—something which older workers are quick to criticize by pointing out that, despite all appearances, without performing at work and bringing money into the home the cultivation of the masculine body for its own sake is a rather feminine undertaking.

⁴⁹⁰ Kent 100's cigarettes were one of those everyday products that, due to their association with "the West", became luxury goods for citizens of state socialist countries (Berdahl 1999:124). One of my informants who preferred not to smoke Kent cigarettes because of their taste and higher price insisted on treating himself to a pack of Kent 100's for his birthday and other special occasions. On Kent cigarettes as a sign of distinction in socialist and postsocialist Romania, see Ger, Belk and Lascu (1993); on Kents as a form of currency and the "Kent economy" during state socialism, see Sampson (1985:57; 1988:146).

to fill in for someone), and is generally at the mercy of his boss. Since he cannot afford otherwise, he lives with his two brothers in a single room in the social housing building down the street. In the summer, he wears cargo shorts and bright-colored t-shirts—he prefers football team and rock band t-shirts, which don't sell that well at the local second-hand shops and are thus cheaper. He never leaves home without his trusted cap, always tilted toward the back of his head and never even close to covering his forehead. Though a heavy smoker, he cannot afford regular cigarettes, so he smokes half-priced contraband cigarettes from the Russian and Turkish truck drivers usually stationed right outside town. When the terrace is too crowded, he prefers to sit by himself way in the back, near the stacks of empty beer crates, or on the steps outside. Even if on a one-to-one basis he is as cheerful as any other regular, he never seems to fully get the practical hang of the complicated rules of joke exchange, a collective game in which he is most of the time neither predator nor victim but rather a spectator. His statements of male prowess lack the playful aggressiveness immediately felt in Nicu's case, which renders them somewhat stunted, and his sexually-loaded innuendos about the women passing by—which he could not entirely avoid making even if he wanted to—are almost never formulated in the first-person singular: “Quick, look there! She's just perfect for you, isn't she?”

As strange as it might appear to an outsider, Nicu and Cornel's friendship is stronger than regular relationships between regulars. They call each other on the phone if one of them does not show up for the daily drink, when it comes to each other they refrain from engaging in the usual gossiping sprees, and they know they can count on one another to share a drink when no one else would be willing to—this is how they end up spending plenty of time with each other on Christmas and Easter. As opposed to most of the other regulars, they like to linger over beers for at least a couple of hours after work, so they are quite often the only ones to be found at the terrace after four o'clock. Both say that every year less and less people stay for drinks after work and that companionship is becoming scarcer. The effects of the recent police raid against drinking around neighborhood stores and outside apartment buildings' entrances has certainly shown them to be right, at least for a while. Nevertheless, there is more to understanding this unlikely relationship than the long hours spent together or the diminishing number of people around. Nor can it be simply attributed to the alleged temporary cancelling-out of inequalities as a “constructive” effect of alcohol consumption (Douglas 1987), which, in any case, is only half the story, since social drinking also involves the sometimes quite brutal reinforcing of differences and boundaries. Nicu and Cornel's friendship is so solid because it offers them a degree of comfort they cannot otherwise obtain with their respective peers.

In search of respect: divergent trajectories and conjoint relief

Although their younger neighbors oftentimes lump them together as irredeemable old drunkards, the relationship between Cornel and Nicu crosses the boundary between those who remained “established” and those who became “outsiders” as the concurrent histories of labor struggle and labor market transformation unfolded. Even if their friendship depends on participation in drinking rituals, it does not draw strength merely from the equalization effect of sociability. It is pressures external to the ritual situation that make possible and at the same time threaten their relationship. In their personal quests for respectability, Cornel and Nicu

experience and cope with these pressures in quite different ways. What they offer each other is an opportunity for temporarily escaping these pressures and obtain unconditional recognition.

Having finished his mandatory military service in the early 1990s, Cornel immediately took a job in the plant. His parents were employed there, so it was only normal and easy to follow in their footsteps. (He was also old enough to be able to do so; his younger brothers never got this chance.) At the time, the plant's cultural infrastructure was still operational—with its music and sports clubs, a library, and everything else that during state socialism had made the factory much more than just a simple production facility—and Cornel joined the boxing team. He soon proved to be a quite formidable boxer so he ended up spending more time in the gym than in production, from where he was given leave of absence with full pay and benefits. He married a beautiful woman and had a baby. He did all the things he was supposed and wanted to do, so life seemed to be very much on track.

Cornel's reversal of fortunes began, as for so many others, with the privatization of the plant. His boxing career suffered an abrupt ending, since cutting costs could not accommodate activities that were not even remotely connected to production. If this was somehow still bearable, the debt wars of the 2000s (see chapter 14) made Cornel lose almost everything. He worked in the energy department, which shrunk substantially when Dacia stopped providing heat and hot water for Mioveni. He took the buyout and moved in with his wife's family in the countryside, where he hoped to start a small business. He soon realized that the buyout money would not last long and that his business plan would never make it past a vague idea. Using his boxing credentials, he found a job as a security guard, which paid nothing, but also did not require anything of him, so he did not mind it that much, especially since in the countryside any money was good money. He doesn't remember those days very well; what he does recall is that he quickly spent all his money, had some fun here and there working as a guard, and separated from his wife, who left him and moved in with a man from Pitești, taking their small daughter with her. With nowhere else to go, he tried to return to his family in Mioveni. Much had changed in the seven or eight years he had been away. His parents had both lost their jobs because of restructuring and his father had died soon after from an occupational lung disease. His family ran into debt, were evicted from their four-room apartment, and, after becoming a publicized "social case," were eventually given a single room in the new social housing building just a hundred meters from their old home. Cornel's mother died shortly thereafter of the same ailment as her husband, so when Cornel came back it was only his brothers who were waiting for him. At the time of my fieldwork, they had been sharing the same room in the social housing building for about four years.

Cornel found his current job soon after he came back. His work is not that demanding, but the pay is also kept to a minimum. He would like to have a better job, but he has neither the credentials nor the connections to do so. He earns a bit of extra pay over the counter by replacing regular workers on the line, but this does not happen nearly as often as he would like. He was once sent on the line for three months straight and that is the only time he remembers he could make ends meet. Earning almost double what he usually makes, he could afford to close his credit account at the store, smoke regular cigarettes, contribute more to the family's living expenses, and buy some presents for his teenage daughter. The work was hard but he

says he liked it and takes pride in how amazed his coworkers were by his strength. During those months, he talked about his new job all the time; he would have liked to keep it, but his boss had it reserved for one of his favorite employees and in the end Cornel had to return to his usual work. It didn't take long for his debt at the store to grow back to several hundred lei, which he is not sure he will be able to pay back any time soon. He no longer stops for beers every day and even when he does he usually does not have the money to buy more than one or two bottles; he also went back on those throat-scraping cigarettes. His wife recently told him she wants to wrap up their divorce, but he says he will not show up in court because he cannot afford to pay for the basic costs of the whole procedure. He rarely picks up when his daughter calls on the phone; he says she wants pocket money. He has also ended his on and off relationship with a woman from the countryside he's been seeing for a couple of years. Since they did not have a place of their own, they used to have sex in the woods behind a small bar at the edge of town. He thinks the relationship lasted long enough and, in any case, he finds this to be the least of his problems.

To his more well-off neighbors, Cornel epitomizes the decrepitude of those who "had something once but didn't know what to do with it." His reputation and funky looks don't help him much. Those who know his family's history often point at the retrospectively almost unbelievable fact that Cornel used to have a factory job, which he gave away for quick cash and plenty of booze. Since his current standing, appearance, and behavior indicate little repentance, he is not regarded as someone to be sorry for, but rather as having brought everything onto himself. Indeed, he is seen by everyone who cares for such judgments as one of the neighborhood drunkards who drank away every chance and opportunity life gave to him—a stigma he shares with his parents, who are said to have lost their jobs, their home, and eventually their lives because of alcohol abuse; his brothers don't fare much better either. To be sure, Cornel likes to drink and seems at peace with the stories people tell about him. He likes it so much that one wouldn't be wrong saying that having a beer is the thing he enjoys doing most, though he doesn't think there are that many other things to enjoy about his life. Hanging out at the neighborhood store is a chance for him to avoid going home early; nothing awaits him there except for the TV, about which he doesn't care as much as most people do, some old photographs with his wife and parents, which he proudly shows to visitors, and his brothers, with whom he argues almost daily. When they don't work Saturdays, they often get drunk before noon and stroll around the neighborhood aimlessly before going home and ending up arguing with each other quite badly by the afternoon. These weekend escapades with his brothers only add up to his disreputable image, though these are also occasions for him to escape the feeling of entrapment he is otherwise accustomed to living with. For Cornel, the beers he has after work are the high point of the day, when, regardless of him not being the best performer, he can carelessly revel in the drinking ritual. It is a way for him to step aside, no matter how temporarily, from the ennui of the everyday and experience feelings of participation, recognition, and belonging that he can get nowhere else.

As opposed to Cornel, who is a native of Mioveni and whose family came from the old village demolished to make room for apartment buildings, Nicu moved here from the countryside in the mid-1980s. He started working in the plant right after he turned 18, graduated from the foremen's school in the early 1990s, and by the end of the decade had already

accumulated a few years among the workers' elite. He married young and had two children before he turned 25. He says he enjoys working with people and that being a foreman is rewarding despite the difficulties and stressfulness of coordinating a large group of people. For men like Nicu, who did not go to university, being a foreman was pretty much the best thing to hope for in terms of climbing the factory hierarchy. The job came with increased prestige, better connections and, at least in his case, work satisfactions not available to regular workers.

These advantages began dwindling after privatization. Relentless cost-cutting measures and speedups eventually made him lose his position as a foreman. In the scramble to reorganize each department as well as the plant as a whole, Nicu's old team was dismantled: some took the buyout, others retired, and remaining workers were shuffled across departments, according to managerial requirements and individual requests. Nicu also decided to move to a different department where he thought work would be less demanding. Things did not go very well and he was eventually demoted to senior operator, with a young man in his twenties taking over as team leader. Nicu says it was he who decided to give up, since requirements had become absurd and he simply could not work with less and less people and increase productivity at the same time without pushing his workers beyond a limit he was not willing to cross. Increased pressure led to arguments with his superiors, so in the end he switched jobs. He is still not entirely happy with having to boss people around—as he says, “with a whip”—and sometimes ponders dropping his responsibilities and going back to being a regular worker, which would be a big step backwards but would also mean not having to deal with “everyone giving me shit when something's not working properly because there aren't enough people.” He oftentimes comes back from work very angry, decrying management policies sacrificing people's physical and psychological welfare for the sake of increased output. He says the young team leaders promoted in the past years are different from the old foremen they replaced, that they are willing to do things that before were considered unacceptable, and that they care more about promotions and kissing up to the upper shop-floor management than about the people they supervise and with whom they work every day. For his drinking companions who know Nicu's story of demotion it is difficult to ascertain how free he really was in giving up on his position as a foreman. He avoided telling them about it for a few months and, when he finally confessed, the righteousness with which he made his case was overshadowed by suspicions that he was merely attempting to make a virtue out of necessity. For Nicu, changes at work have rendered the previously unconceivable idea of being shamed into a daily reality. Hiding this shame is something he would rather not do, but nonetheless feels strongly compelled to.

Like many workers his age, Nicu is already thinking about retirement, even though he has many years left before becoming eligible. He says he would give up his job in a second if that is what it would take for his son to be employed at the plant with a permanent contract like his own. His son's future is Nicu's most serious concern and biggest source of frustration. At 23, he has had only dead-end jobs so far, which Nicu finds inconceivable considering that he started his own career in the plant when he was still a teenager. Not being able to arrange a factory contract for his son has been a huge disappointment. Whatever attempts he made, connections he tried to mobilize, and promises he received failed to materialize. His frustration often lapses into outspoken condemnations of what he thinks are unfair family-based employment practices (“Whenever someone gets into a better position he hires his whole

family, that's why you don't even know who you're talking to anymore; you have to watch out because everyone is someone's son, niece, godson..."). In a last-ditch effort, he agreed to his son trying to find work abroad, only to see him returning after less than a month when he realized his pay was not what he had been promised and that he would have barely been able to secure his own living. This left Nicu in debt, as he had borrowed a considerable amount of money to arrange for his son's departure. Though his wage is high in comparison to most workers, he finds it hard to support a family on a single paycheck. His wife stopped working many years ago, when the state-owned store she worked in closed down, and his daughter moved away after she got married, so he is the only one in the family with a regular income. They manage to get by, but any unexpected expense, such as a wedding invitation or the car breaking down, can set Nicu back for up to several months. The only time he says he managed comfortably was when he won a few thousand lei in the lottery and did not have to borrow money anymore. He would like more than anything for his son to have a stable income that would ease off the family's financial burden and eventually enable him to make a life on his own. His son's situation and the inability to keep up with what he considers basic need fulfillment are constant sources of frustration he has difficulties in learning to live with. Seeing others succeed where he fails is a constant source of shame.

Nicu is probably the most loyal customer drinking at the store. He keeps a regular schedule and maintains a strict drinking ethic in trying not to consume as much alcohol as to let his behavior get out of line. Just like with Cornel, the drinking ritual offers him a kind of enjoyment he cannot experience otherwise. He is mildly nostalgic for the days when he used to drink with members of his team after work, and it was only after his old team was disbanded that the neighborhood store became his preferred place for the daily after-work drink. He derides men who refuse to drink because of their wives and likes to boast about how understanding his wife by comparison. He says he would not know what to do if he did not go out of the house and insists that wasting all his time in front of the TV, like most people do, is out of the question, since he finds most TV programs to be of no relevance to his life. In the neighborhood, Nicu has tried to maintain an image of respectability, though he knows that over the years he has accumulated plenty of disadvantages when it comes to meeting up to the standards. In sharp contrast to Cornel's apparent immunity, Nicu is much more exposed when it comes to maintaining respectability and avoiding being shamed. He tries to dampen his vulnerability by being overly protective of his private life, about which he usually rejects even the most random joke or inquiry. Compounded by the sight of others' success, Nicu's shame of failure oftentimes morphs into outbursts of anger that have over time gained him a reputation of being conflictual and difficult to relate to even in casual interaction.⁴⁹¹

Being in each other's company allows these two men to achieve a degree of comfort in interaction that they cannot obtain in the presence of their ostensible equals. They offer each other the chance to temporarily escape necessity, to feel less exposed to shaming, and to gain recognition with fewer strings attached than they are used to otherwise. Paradoxically, it is their starkly unequal positions which allow them to enact the principles of equality inscribed in the drinking ritual. This combination requires a permanent balancing act as a result of which their

⁴⁹¹ On the mechanisms behind the transformation of shame into anger see Scheff (1990:chapter 5; 2014).

relationship tends to oscillate between displays of strength and fragility. Nicu insists Cornel is “a good man and a different kind of person than his brothers,” but he strongly disapproves of his weekend drinking sprees and believes he could do better at finding a job if he really tried to. Though he is much more open when it comes to discussing his private life with Cornel, Nicu keeps his guard up and often seems to prefer his companion’s discretion to his capacity for empathy. Cornel, however, does not care that much about being discreet in the presence of people of lower standing or when he gets overly drunk. His studied discretion toward Nicu is just as much a matter of deference as it is of the two of them trying to maintain their interaction on equal footing. The latter task bears much more difficulty for Cornel than it does for Nicu. He cannot be as free of vulnerability as Nicu is in front of him, since he bears the burden of a much longer list of troubles and frustrations. Nor can he ignore the material costs of maintaining constant participation in the drinking ritual. Though Nicu always offers to buy him a beer when he doesn’t have the money, the lack of even the most modest sums and the need to repay his debts periodically put Cornel on the retreat as he finds his failure at ensuring ritual reciprocity unbearable. This kind of shaming Cornel has not yet learned to accept in silence.

Regardless of their being on opposite sides of the boundary separating the established from the outsiders, the drinking ritual offers Nicu and Cornel a stable pocket of relief from everyday struggles to secure personal dignity in the face of things they perceive as outside their control. Their lives have been fundamentally altered by the social wars of the first decade after privatization, and together they bear witness to the diverging ways in which these upheavals were survived, although at the cost of dealing with permanent injuries. From within the confines of the drinking ritual, the convulsed history that lies behind their current troubles remains largely hidden. Its traces can be discerned only in those minute gestures and exchanges that betray deeper, simultaneously constructive and destructive feelings of insecurity and existential discomfort. More visible is their growing helplessness in the face of the relentless proliferation of an administratively-planned urban environment and of formalized rituals hostile to the self-crafted world of drinking they feel so at home in. In his usual restrained yet direct manner, Cornel looks around at the wave upon wave of larger and pettier investments in the built environment and says that “too many things have been done in this town.” Exiled in the social housing building, it is difficult for him to relate to the benefits of urban civilization as preached by the local administration, things which were, in any case, not designed with the likes of him in mind. Nicu’s experience of dispossession, on the other hand, is much more ambivalent. Though he insists the town has undoubtedly changed for the better, when it comes to the mushrooming leisure facilities and endless succession of festivals and public celebrations, he quickly accepts the role of a simple spectator. While Cornel can be explicit about his being left on the side, Nicu finds it difficult to refuse what he nonetheless somehow feels he is being refused. Instead of engagement and participation, he contends himself with an aesthetic judgment from afar, with which he always tries to cut the discussion short: “Just look at it! Everything is clean, civilized, properly arranged... As it should be! It’s beautiful!”

Upward and outward: individual histories, urban history

Considering such a profound shaping of the form and content of drinks sharing by pervasive forms of social inequality, it is somewhat striking that so many ethnographers of social drinking

stress the temporary bracketing of inequalities with little or no mentioning of the structuring of drinking rituals by inequalities pertaining to both sociable situations themselves and to what lies outside these situations.⁴⁹² Indeed, what can be observed with the changing nature of interactions among male workers in Mioveni is that the sharing of drinks within groups affected by stark asymmetries has given increased situational relevance to the “content” of “real life,” as Simmel (1949) calls those relations and attributes that individuals bracket when entering sociable situations. Though all scholars of drinking rituals emphasize their inherently democratic structure, almost none pay attention to the fact that the temporary cancelling out of inequalities is a historical achievement dependent on a number of prerequisites. Simmel points out that despite their egalitarian principles, sociability rituals are not suspended above the rest of the social world, but rather tend to symbolize it—as he puts it, they constitute a way of “being released from life but having it still” (1949:261), and their appearance of pure form is structured by the content of relations established between participants outside sociable situations. The symbolization of extra-situational pressures, which may include euphemization tactics or attempts at rendering them irrelevant, is one mechanism through which domination makes its presence felt, alongside specifically situational dominance (Collins 2004:chapter 7). Though they tend to align, there is a great chance for conflict to spark in the relatively rare situations in which these two mechanisms operate against each other—that is, when those who are dominated outside sociable situations attempt to assert dominance within them. There is a threshold beyond which the exacerbation of inequalities erodes the given equilibrium between content and form to such an extent as to make interaction unpleasant. Both Cornel and Nicu experienced such unpleasantness in interacting with their respective peers, while they learned to cope with its persistent potentiality in their own relationship.

Accounting for why this is so—explaining how such an inevitably unlikely and fragile relationship remains relatively stable and why this is not just a happenstance occurrence—goes beyond the immediate situation described above. As their divergent personal histories and different points of reference suggest, finding an adequate explanation entails an analytical opening toward much broader and long-lasting social processes. In other words, it requires an understanding of a convoluted hidden history assembled from shifting class alliances, the shaping of urbanization in a small town trying to come to terms with its industrial parentage, and the changing practices and meanings of drinking and male sociability, all underpinned by manifold attempts at securing personal dignity and asserting collective identity. Social drinking among male workers does not take place in a social or geographical vacuum and is rather part of a more encompassing configuration of social relations and spatial arrangements which make up and are made up by everyday urban life in Mioveni. The convoluted history of organized labor and labor market transformation analyzed in the previous two parts was accompanied by deep mutations of Mioveni’s urban fabric and everyday life. These mutations have been in part determined by the shifting relationship between the town and the automobile plant and in part by separate political dynamics that have in time congealed around the question of urban propriety in all its possible aspects—the administrative, urbanistic and architectural characteristics of the town, as well as the behavior of its residents. In this respect, privatization was the moment in which these two determinations separated and intersected most severely, as

⁴⁹² Randall Collins’s (2004) work on interaction rituals offers a necessary corrective, on which I rely heavily.

Mioveni was confronted with the prospect of losing the company town status that had shaped it—both positively and negatively, from the standpoint of the ideal of urban propriety—since the beginning. In chapter 13, I analyze this meaning of privatization by looking at the legacy it threatened to destroy and the hopes it brought for solving age-old problems related to Mioveni's perceived lack of urbanity. More than anything, privatization foregrounded an entirely novel tension between those who managed to “get by” due to their continued ability to expend labor in exchange for wages and those increasingly many who now found themselves without the means to do so. This existential question for what had until then been known as an all-worker community found its solution in the convoluted struggles surrounding one of the major organizational problems brought by privatization: maintaining heating and water provision despite the mismatch of institutional and infrastructural ties between the plant and the town, which I discuss in detail in chapter 14. The issue of debts for public utilities served as a linchpin for a broader hegemonic rearticulation in which ideals of urban propriety were readjusted to the closures and openings offered by privatization. As I show in chapter 15, this involved new manners of regulating interaction in public space generally speaking, as attempts were made to bring multiple sites of interaction in line with it. Drinking spaces and drinking rituals were chief among these. Finally, in chapter 16 I look at what urban politics and urban everyday life in Mioveni looked like as the productivity compromise struck with the 2008 general strike and the deep segmentation of the labor market solidified in the 2010s.

Going back to Nicu and Cornel and their peculiar interaction predicament, it is not only their divergent biographies that have been shaped by the post-privatization social and economic upheaval in Mioveni, but also the complex dynamics and inherent tensions of their relationship. Looked at from this particular standpoint, what follows is an attempt at understanding why friendship between adult male workers in Mioveni, to the extent I can call it like this, seemed to me one too many times to resemble walking on a high-wire. I proceed by way of a long detour detailing the universe of bigger and smaller struggles that produced the reality I have just described as it confronted me at the time of my fieldwork. In doing so, I intend to put together a sort of sociologically grounded genealogy of the standards of respectability that lie behind the specific dynamic of deference and demeanor I could observe from across the table.

CHAPTER 13

EXPECTATIONS OF URBANIZATION

Elite longings

When I asked what he thought of Mioveni, one of SAD's leaders was quick to provide a version of what I had learned was the standard story: "So many things have changed for the better. Many things have been done, a lot of money has been invested. A few years ago, there was nothing to do in Mioveni, there was garbage everywhere. The face of the city has now changed entirely." After pondering for another few seconds, he laconically added: "One of this town's biggest problems is that it never had its own elites." This was puzzling from more than just one point of view. What kind of "elites" was he thinking of? And how exactly does "the lack of elites" constitute a problem, and for whom? To be sure, he could not have been talking about the new entrepreneurs or "people with money"—one of the main references for workers when they think of the powerful—nor of a strong contingent of "elite" workers—which the town can be said to have more of now than it has ever had. Instead, Mioveni's main problem, according to my interlocutor, was that it lacked the kind of elites who could provide workers with what Gramsci (1971:55ff) called "intellectual and moral leadership," the kind of elites who could at the same time rule over, ally with, and steer workers toward an improved intellectual and moral condition. Moreover, the felt lack referred not to individuals but to a local elite organized as a self-conscious corporate body able to withstand attacks from both inside and outside and whose vocation as a collective would be to render leadership as systematic and efficient as possible.⁴⁹³ After all, the union leader who so explicitly decried the problem of elites was one of the more remarkable local individuals—one of the dominant figures of a powerful organization, a well-known public speaker, contributor to local newspapers, and, in private, an amateur fiction writer. This apparent paradox of, as it were, elites longing for elites can only be understood by looking at the peculiar history of Mioveni as a product of state socialist urbanization: a small town that grew in the shadow of its larger urban neighbor, having to face a deep and almost existential crisis in the 1990s and early 2000s, from which it emerged both with "a new face" and with deep scars visible today only in the lives of workers like Nicu and Cornel. Much of the way the town and everyday life look like in the present has to do with past attempts at putting together a collective leadership project on the part of the existing local elites. Contrary to my initial impression, this is just as much a story of such elites as it is of dealing with the garbage everyone remembers started piling up on the streets soon after 1989.

⁴⁹³ These are usual relata for the lay usage of the notion of "elite" (Marcus 1983). I will continue to use the term as a shorthand for "self-ascribed" or "self-declared elite," understood in its non-scholarly, half-theological (the chosen), half-agnostic (the worthy) sense. I do this while trying not to cross the blurred line separating the lay meaning from its associated research tradition. Despite the ambiguity and required caution, this ad hoc usage is more acceptable than appealing to awkward, if not outright mistaken, contraptions—such as "local dominant class"—or terms lacking a degree of specificity imposed by the case at hand—such as "(Gramscian) intellectuals."

“The town where nothing happens”

In 1970, two years after the plant started producing cars under the Renault license, the first plans to urbanize Mioveni (then named Colibași, after the commune’s most populated village) were drawn up by planners, who envisioned it as eventually becoming a fully-fledged suburban neighborhood of Pitești—a city of over 100,000 inhabitants located just ten kilometers south of Colibași and from where the plant drew a significant part of its workforce. In 1971 Colibași had just over 6300 inhabitants, with 3250 out of 3960 men and women of working age employed in the car plant. Planners proposed to transform the rural commune into a “microcity” tailored to autoworkers’ needs. They envisioned it would evolve into much more than a rural suburb of Pitești and insisted on the advantages its inhabitants were going to have, especially as Colibași would grow and accumulate all the urban services and amenities characteristic of bigger cities. At first, the plan involved constructing apartment buildings in the central village of Mioveni, where existing houses were to be demolished. Four hundred apartments were planned to be built by 1975 (figure III.1), accompanied by a new school, healthcare services, houses of culture, kindergartens, shops, sports amenities, and plenty of urban greenery.⁴⁹⁴ The initial plan also included a new civic center, an administrative building, a high school, a commercial complex, as well as running water and sewage systems and an autonomous central heating system. As planners insisted, these would have made Colibași just as modern an urban settlement as any of the big cities and would have brought it on a par with the rapidly growing city of Pitești (Săvulescu 1972:227). The population was planned to increase to 15,000 by 1980 and 20,000 by 1990. For this to happen, 880 apartments had to be built each year on average, “including the utilities and socio-cultural, educational, healthcare and commercial amenities corresponding to an industrial city of its designated profile.”⁴⁹⁵ If things went well in the long run, urban planners insisted, Colibași could become a large city with over 50,000 inhabitants. By that time, a dam would be constructed on the nearby Doamnei River and connections with the region would be ensured via a new high-speed road and electrified railway.

Over the next two decades this image of a modern and autonomous “microcity” never materialized. By 1989, when it formally became an urban settlement, Colibași was much larger than what planners had envisioned, though it was regarded as nothing more than a “dormitory” town: the home of many autoworkers, but at the same time a place lacking in even the most basic urban amenities and services. At the beginning of the 1990s, Colibași was a place where “there was nothing to do”, “where nothing happened”, a town heavily dependent on its much larger neighbor for its urban basics (figure III.2). Why this was so was no mystery: since 1974, when the construction of the first apartment buildings started, more than nine thousand apartments had been built, but investments in urban services were a far cry from the initial promises of the planners. Inhabitants would thus go to work in the plant, come home to sleep, and otherwise be forced to look elsewhere for a complete urban experience.

The urbanization of Colibași suffered greatly from the town’s position in the state socialist redistributive hierarchy, its proximity to an important urban center, and its taking place

⁴⁹⁴ “Microorașul constructorilor de automobile.” *Secera și ciocanul*, XXI, April 7, 1971.

⁴⁹⁵ “Relația oraș-industrie: Orașul constructorilor autoturismului românesc.” *Arhitectura RPR* 1, 1976. See also Ștefănescu, Moroșan, and Soare (1972:115).



FIGURE III.1. “Systematization plan for the Pitești municipality. The microcity of automobile makers.”
Source: *Secera și Ciocanul*, April 7, 1971.

mostly during the austere 1980s. Law no. 2 from 1968 on the territorial organization of the country classified Colibași as a “suburban commune,” a satellite locality of Pitești, which was at that time quickly becoming one of the country’s most important industrial and urban hubs. Pitești had more than doubled its population between the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s (Ronnås 1984:80), when construction had barely begun in Colibași. The latter took place under the unfriendly auspices of the system set up in the late 1960s, which skewed investments of both capital and labor resources in favor of large municipalities and left small towns at a severe disadvantage in the networks of resource redistribution (Zamfir, Tălângă, and Stoica 2009). In the state socialist geography of uneven development, the fate of small localities situated close to large urban agglomerations was in certain ways even worse than that of isolated towns, since it was thought that many of their urban functions and institutions could be supplied by the nearby cities, thus toning down the effects of the lacking investments beyond the most basic living arrangements. By 1989, more than twenty-four thousand people were living in Mioveni, most of them in the new apartment buildings, but there was no new high school, no sports amenities, the civic center comprised just the imposing house of culture built in the mid-1980s, the inhabitants had to rely on the old rural hospital, the existing shops, or restaurants and bars that were never meant to service a locality of this size. To the dismay of many of its inhabitants, there was no greenery whatsoever to be found in town.

The so-called “lack of elites” in satellite settlements like Mioveni was a direct consequence of these policies. As Szelényi (1981; 1983) has shown, under state socialism the differences between large cities, small towns and rural settlements were not confined to the

unequal redistribution of investments but translated into quite pronounced class divides: especially since the 1970s, when new regional management systems were devised across the state socialist bloc, big cities tended to become more and more middle-class and white-collar, while unskilled industrial workers were largely stuck in the countryside. As part of this process, not only was the development of satellite localities impeded, but they also lost many of their existing functions and institutions. Moreover, and “more significantly, they started to lose professional inhabitants, who could potentially articulate and represent their interests; doctors, teachers, local government officials, and social workers moved out of the satellite villages to the central communities to be nearer their relocated workplace and the people of their own kind on whom their professional career and personal life depends” (Szelényi 1981:197-8).

Things took on a somewhat different flavor in Colibași, since it was not just any other satellite settlement: the presence of the automobile plant and of the Institute for Nuclear Reactors meant that around thirty thousand employees needed to commute to the suburban commune daily. Relocating as many of them close to the plant and the institute would have cut costs while fulfilling the regime’s declared goals of maintaining a steep urbanization rate and improving the standard of living. The initial plan included the



- „Rex“, nu mai fluiera, nu vezi că nu te bagă-n seamă! Nu-i de nasul tău. Mioveni-ui Mioveni, Piteștiul e Pitești.

FIGURE III.2. “Rex, stop whistling. Can’t you see she doesn’t care?! She’s not for the likes of you. Mioveni is Mioveni, and Pitești is Pitești.”

Source: *Puls* 2, 5-11 May 1998.

building of apartments for the factory’s upper- and middle-management and for other highly qualified specialists working in the plant. These apartments were to be larger in size, with better quality finish of their interiors, more aesthetically appealing façades, and they were all to be located near the town’s new civic center. A similar plan was drawn up for managers and specialists from the INR, who were to live in a neighborhood of semi-detached villas to be built in the forest surrounding the institute. The apartments for managers and highly qualified personnel were among the first to be built. The only problem was that most of those for whom they were built were not at all eager to renounce their living arrangements in Pitești and move to Colibași, where they would indeed have lived in four- or even five-room apartments right next to what was planned to become the town center, but where they were sure to lack many of the privileges of living in the fully-serviced and lively urban center that Pitești had by then become. It soon became clear that factory elites would not relocate to Colibași and, for the same reasons, the INR villa project never made it beyond the drawing board. In a 1999 interview (Badiu 2004:180), Nicolae Matea, the plant’s director from the 1980s, recalled how difficult it sometimes was for managers to pull off maintaining their Pitești accommodations:

Elena and Nicolae Ceaușescu came to visit the plant. I was careless enough to show them the scale model of the new town, although I felt it would bring trouble. “What’s this?” asked Elena.

“A housing neighborhood,” I told her. “How many people live here?” she asked. “20-22 thousand people,” I replied. “What? And you call this a neighborhood? This is a fully-fledged town. Where do you live? You, Matea, where do you live?” [Nicolae] Ceaușescu tried to intervene, to come to our defense, but she was adamant about it: “Starting tomorrow, you will all move to Mioveni.” There was a big quarrel. The next day we all received contracts for apartments in Mioveni and we were supposed to move in and give up on the ones we already had in Pitești. The problem was solved in the end by appealing to the law, and the court acknowledged our contracts for the Pitești apartments to be valid, so we didn’t have to move out.⁴⁹⁶

Even more so, many of those who did not manage to keep their Pitești apartments and were forced to move to Mioveni allegedly sold their new living spaces soon after December 1989 and moved to Pitești.⁴⁹⁷ Under such circumstances, it came as no surprise that during the acute housing shortage of the early 1990s, the distribution of Pitești apartments remained the most disputed.⁴⁹⁸ Throughout the 1990s, this ostentatious “lack of loyalty” espoused by leading industrial cadres was still a vivid and distinctly “unpleasant” memory in the minds of trade unionists.⁴⁹⁹ Contrary to initial plans, therefore, Colibași remained largely a workers’ settlement, a so-called “dormitory” town where the new class of technocrats and intellectuals (Konrád and Szelényi 1979; Pasti 2006) refused to live because of the lack of urban amenities and the alternative of living in the much less parochial city of Pitești without having to give up on their jobs in Colibași. Compounded with being refused the material benefits of big city life, for the small contingent of technocrats and professionals who did end up living in Colibași this entailed dealing with relative isolation and marginalization by their peers. At least for some of them, 1989 made it possible to escape the confines of the small industrial town by migrating to the city. For others, however, the fall of state socialism brought the opportunity of making a virtue out of what was previously considered sheer necessity, of vindicating their sacrifice and coming to terms with the frustrations of town life by asserting their role as its leading intellectual and moral figures in what they envisioned to be a new collective project meant to secure the unmet promises of urban modernity.

Making (some) things happen

The first postsocialist decade exacerbated many already acute problems. As with many other urban settlements, in the immediately after 1989 Colibași witnessed a strong influx of migrants from surrounding villages, most of whom were people whose movement had been restricted under the old regime. By 1993 the town’s population comprised more than thirty thousand people, up from a little over twenty-four thousand in 1990, and it would peak at around thirty-six thousand at the beginning of the 2000s. At first fueled by newly available apartments finalized in the early 1990s and then by what appeared to be a comparatively unusual capacity of the plant to maintain its full contingent of employees, this increased number of people living in town put even more pressure on what were already insufficient infrastructures and services.⁵⁰⁰ Coupled with renewed difficulties in securing an adequate budget (Bănică et al.

⁴⁹⁶ See also “Elena Ceaușescu l-a mutat pe Nicolae Matea cu casa la Mioveni.” *Puls*, August 18-24, 1998.

⁴⁹⁷ “Dacă ‘ieși la interval’ ai success fenomenal!” *Autoturism* 37, April 1994.

⁴⁹⁸ E.g., “Disensiuni în sânul biroului executiv al SAD.” *Autoturism* 15, April 1993.

⁴⁹⁹ “Privatizații și contractele colective de muncă.” *Autoturism* 7, November 1992.

⁵⁰⁰ This decade-long in-migration was atypical at the time and it was even less likely to happen in the case of small settlements dependent on a single industry (see Bănică, Istrate, and Tudora 2013; Sandu 2000:172ff).

2013), this meant the local administration faced severe problems in maintaining existing services and the few planned investments did little in catching up with the rapid increase in population and accelerated decay of infrastructures and the built environment. Though educational facilities were practically unchanged since 1980 and only one school serviced the entire population, it took more than six years for a new school to be built and this only took part of the pressure off the shoulders of the old one, which still needed to operate in three shifts with a reduced class duration. This was a minor success in comparison to the diversity and sheer scale of the issues Mioveni and its inhabitants were confronted with in the early 1990s:

It would seem that, in recent years, in our case, the original meaning of the notion of the city has been lost and has turned into something simplistic—nothing more than an agglomeration of housing. Gradually, the meanings tied to civilized cohabitation, culture, relaxation, pleasant appearance, and everything else that make cities worthy of the name have been removed.

This was the spirit in which the town of Colibași was planned and built. But times have changed and we all claim out loud that we want to return to civilized life. From saying to doing is, however, a long way, and Colibași continues to remain [sic] as it was before. Local authorities have promised, from the first month after the Revolution, they would build areas of recreation and green spaces, together with promises of building a school and other institutions of social interest, but no one has raised the issue of the town's cleanliness.

To the mud spread across the streets by builders' vehicles and the overfilled and unmaintained garbage containers from which the wind spreads paper, filth and fetid smells we can successfully add the contribution of some of the inhabitants. As anything else that's done properly, this contribution comes in many shapes and sizes. Most make recourse to the innocent gesture of throwing their cigarette butts or other leftovers on the sidewalk. I said innocent gesture because the ones who are to blame are those who refuse to install trash bins in town. Others, more enthusiastically and imaginatively, throw away their garbage directly in the spaces surrounding their apartment buildings. The town hall does nothing to stimulate them, if not materially, at least morally. It should do so if only because these spaces in-between buildings are the only ones in which children can play, where discarded spray cans and empty packs of Marlboro are their only toys. It is likely that swings and other such accessories are now considered "old practices of sad remembrance" [*practici învechite de tristă amintire*], and children must acquire "a new conception of the world and of life" by playing among the neighborhood's garbage.

Green spaces, which could mitigate the overwhelming aspect of the concrete cubes supposedly exemplifying modern architecture, are gloriously represented by a few saplings planted every year on the side of the street, which get dry by summer. The only form of natural life that has adapted to living in Colibași are the increasingly numerous packs of stray dogs. According to the latest information, if authorities remain in good faith, two-footed inhabitants will soon be numerically on a par with four-footed ones. The peaceful cohabitation of these urban dwellers is nonetheless put in question, especially since public lighting at night remains just a promise.⁵⁰¹

If these were not enough, heating infrastructures, medical care, the utter lack of any leisure and cultural facilities, as well as inappropriate food supply were also of considerable concern in attempting to "bring the town to a superior level of comfort, culture and civilization."⁵⁰² From this standpoint, the joys of urban life after 1989 were limited: the opening of a gas station was a notable rare event in which something finally happened (figure III.3); the opening of a "supermarket" by SAD's company, Getica, was another.⁵⁰³ Otherwise, except for the school, most major issues remained entirely unaddressed throughout the first half of the 1990s.

⁵⁰¹ "Curat... Murdar!" *Autoturism* 3, April–May 1990.

⁵⁰² "Primăria nu mai face politică." *Autoturism* 6, August 1990.

⁵⁰³ "Supermarket 'Getica' S.A." *Autoturism* 35, March 1994.

Under such circumstances, it came as no surprise that, by the time of the 1996 local elections, the question of the town's very urbanity became a central motif in what would prove to be a very one-sided electoral episode. The surprise candidate, who, despite running as an independent, immediately became a favorite to win the elections, was none other than Vasile Costescu, who since 1992 had served as leader of the

largest trade union from the automobile plant. Born and raised in Mioveni and trained as an engineer in Braşov, Costescu organized his campaign for the mayor's office around what he claimed were his advantages in comparison to the nine other competitors: first, he took pride in his activity as an engineer and especially as a union leader, he insisted on the importance of the town's umbilical ties to the plant, emphasized that the vast majority of electors were also workers in the plant, and pushed for people to exercise their voting rights on the basis of their collective solidarity as workers; he insisted his trustworthiness sprang from his local roots and intimate ties with both town and factory.⁵⁰⁴ SAD's officials supported his candidature en masse (see part I), while similarly stressing the impossibility of separating urban from industrial citizenship in Mioveni's particular

case (figure III.4). Along with asserting his personal worth as a man of the town and the plant, Costescu mocked the false promises of electoral democracy and market economy, and promised to take a firm grip on the spending of public money (which, he repeatedly emphasized, mostly came from the plant), and to solve the town's biggest problem: its absent "urban institutions."⁵⁰⁵ Concretely, Costescu's promised to build a sports stadium, a new city



FIGURE III.3. The inauguration of the town's first gas station: "The town where nothing happens?! And yet it happens! A few days ago the most modern gas station was opened."

Source: *Autoturism* 41, July 1994.

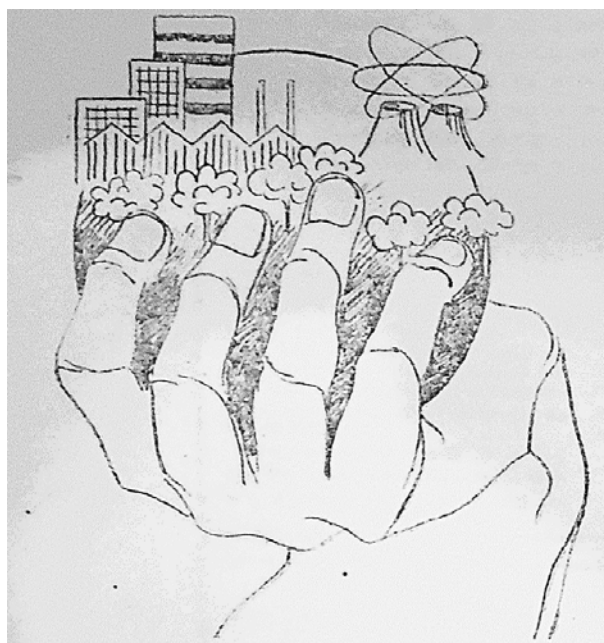


FIGURE III.4. Longing for harmony between industry and urbanity.

Source: *Miovenii* 1, August 1996.

⁵⁰⁴ Emphasizing Costescu's belonging to the town would later become a main tactic for discrediting other candidates in the 2000 electoral campaign. His competitors were said to be lacking in local ties and support, this being why they had to make recourse to the mobilization of party structures in either Piteşti or Bucharest.

⁵⁰⁵ "Din eşichierul alegerilor locale, vă prezentăm două nume de marcă." *InfoAutoturism* 77, May 1996.



FIGURE III.5. “Transhumant sheep grazing alongside vandal-rats,” with “mountains of garbage” and apartment buildings in the background.

Source: *Înscăunări: Mică publicație de probă pentru funcția de primar*, 1996.

hall and a cathedral, install a public phone system, solve the problem of lacking green spaces, and curb the urban decay epitomized by the piling up of garbage and rampant rat infestation. A cartoon from his electoral pamphlet (figure III.5) depicted the fragility of Mioveni’s identity as an urban settlement: a shepherd is shown bringing his flock of sheep to graze in a field right next to several apartment buildings with “mountains of garbage” and “hordes” of “vandal-rats” in-between. Mioveni was not only plagued by decaying services and infrastructures, it was also haunted by the specter of ruralization exemplified by the presence of the adventurous sheep and shepherd at the gates of town, in utter disregard of what was ostensibly an urban environment. A host of other such menacing features had by now become common, adding to the pre-1989 legacies and the immediate post-1989 disarray:

We encounter attacks on our health all across town: squalor in apartment buildings’ basements; green spaces (the few that exist) are not maintained and are mostly used as parking spaces; insanitary playgrounds for children; dogs everywhere; on the sidewalks, you are afraid to walk with a child by the hand for fear of being hit by vehicles belonging to the flurry of small businesses and their customers (under the indulgent eyes of the police who, allegedly, have no legal ground for disciplining them!); animals grazing and going about freely on the greenery (moreover, we have seen cows “grazing” from dumpsters); those of our own kind who look for

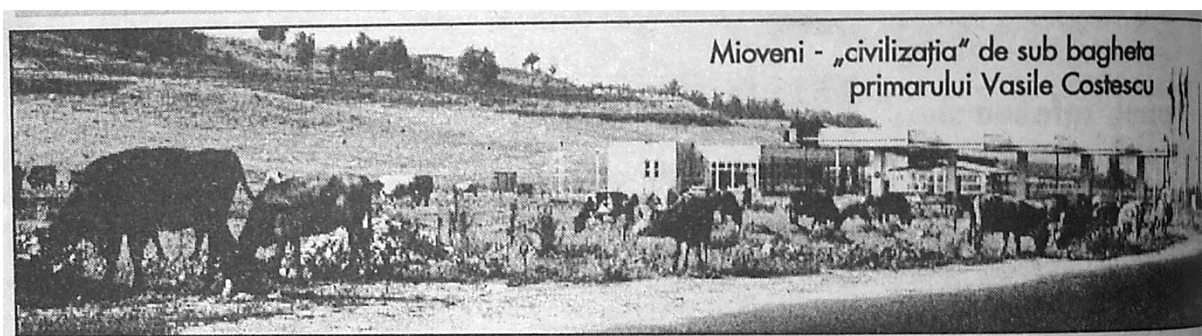


FIGURE III.6. Cows grazing in front of the new gas station: “Mioveni—‘civilization’ under the wand of mayor Vasile Costescu.”

Source: “18 francezi din Landerneau, sub eclipsă, la Mioveni.” *Puls*, 10-16 August 1999.

things they need in the dumpsters; in the market, not all sellers respect hygiene regulations; noise pollution from the discos held by entrepreneurs flocking around the House of (in)Culture; clogged sewers; “terraces” selling alcoholic drinks where squalor reigns and pieces of broken glass reaching children’s playgrounds; bars where minors consume alcoholic drinks and smoke more maturely than the mature (by the way: do you know, dear entrepreneurs, that there is a decision by the local council prohibiting the access of minors in these establishments?) etc. etc.⁵⁰⁶

Costescu attributed the proliferation of such threats to the corruption, unwillingness and inability to act of the former local administration, all of which he contrasted to his own industriousness as plant technocrat and union leader. He obtained a landslide victory, with 58.25% of the votes in the second round, against the incumbent and without party backing.

In contrast to the deepening problems the town faced on all fronts, Costescu’s first mandate was marked less by attempts at dealing with the issues of garbage and vandal-rats than by the taking over of an existing project of building a massive orthodox cathedral in the town’s center, the moving of the local administration in an imposing new building right next to the house of culture, the opening of a still-unfinished (but nonetheless “functional”) stadium, and the setting up of a series of public rituals aimed at asserting the town’s distinct identity and local traditions—though modest at first, the town’s anniversary, children’s day, youth day, labor day and a number of other holidays were established as annual occasions for public celebrations in the town’s center.⁵⁰⁷ The overall objective of edifying the town’s urbanity was nonetheless not achieved, and Costescu’s newfound adversaries, among which his former trade union colleagues now found themselves (see chapter 3), were quick to point out that things had not really changed much in comparison to the mid-1990s (figures III.5 and III.6).

Still, despite the relatively modest achievements, Costescu’s 1996 campaign and his first mandate set the standard of local politics for the next decade, a fact to which his sound victory in the 2000s elections clearly stood witness. By insisting on the dependence of the town on the plant’s provision of jobs, wages, infrastructure and basic services, he set up an explicitly paternalistic position of town leaders in relation to workers, with himself as the main actor responsible for maintaining a functioning and harmonious relationship between town and factory.⁵⁰⁸ Coupled with his assertion of the importance of local identity defined in opposition

⁵⁰⁶ “Sănătate bolnavă.” *Miovenii* 1, June 1997.

⁵⁰⁷ The oscillations regarding the meaning of 1st of May celebrations exemplify the contradictory pressures felt by local elites after 1989 as a result of their having to simultaneously take position within two fields animated not only by entirely different stakes, but also by clearly opposed means of having a stake in what was at stake. On the one hand, openly affirming the importance of May 1st as “Labor Day” would have been entirely out of place, since they had to take position in extra-local intellectual and political fields where the explicit denigration of labor and industry remained a point of honor well into the 2000s. On the other hand, securing the allegiance of their worker constituency required the continued valuation of labor and the maintaining, in one form or another, of the established meaning of the holiday. Consequently, it was not always clear if May 1st should be celebrated as “Labor Day” or rather as “Spring Day,” the latter being coupled with somewhat shy attempts at condemning the artificiality of the old regime and redeeming what were believed to be pre-industrial popular traditions. See “De 1 mai (arminden).” *Miovenii* 41, May 2003. More broadly, this contradiction defined the position takings of local intellectuals after 1989 and underpinned their constant ambivalence in coming to terms with the perceived necessity of constructing a local identity by rewriting the history of the town and inventing local traditions.

⁵⁰⁸ This paternalist model of local politics—which the SAD leadership also boasted at the time of the 2000 elections (see chapter 3)—is something company towns are prone to developing. The strong dependence on a single industry endows factory managers and local officials not only with an unusual degree of control over material resources but also with the ability to accumulate symbolic capital to an extent that would hardly be possible otherwise (Lucas [1971]2008). Stephen Collier (2011:106) argues that Soviet towns were particularly

to Pitești and the capital city of Bucharest, Costescu's program of saving the town's urbanity appealed to a number of local intellectuals who in the next years rallied around the new mayor. The opportunity of steering the fate of the town and its inhabitants offered them a way to deal with frustrations accumulated over many years of isolation and marginalization. The proclaiming of local identity provided these intellectuals with the possibility of asserting their righteousness in confronting their big-city peers. The promise of a new project of achieving urban modernity gave them not only the chance to get back what they felt had been taken from them, but also a set of tangible terms of comparison and goals they could strive for. Costescu's run for the mayor's office and his paternalistic localism thus endowed the handful of local intellectuals and technocrats with a collective *raison d'être* they had previously been denied.

Dealing with false promises

By the time of the 2000 elections, Costescu was leading a much more aggressive, articulate and concerted project aimed at making town life truly urban and civilized. At the end of his second term in office, the local administration's overarching goal was for the town to become a municipality (figure III.7)—a rather outlandish idea every now and then brought forward during the second half of the 1990s, which now became an explicit objective. This implied Mioveni's full autonomy from Pitești, since it would host the full gamut of institutions, amenities and services of its bigger neighbor. Gradually, plans and investment projects for a football stadium, a modern marketplace, a park, open-air and indoor swimming pools, a courthouse, a hospital, a high school, and even a local university were drawn up. Infrastructures, basic services, and public transport were also targeted for modernization, while the improvement of the town's cultural life would be secured by reviving and developing what were claimed to be long-standing local traditions as well as finalizing the



FIGURE III.7. “This painter is practicing for changing our town’s name, to a MUNICIPALITY.”

Source: *Miovenii* 66, July 2004.

protracted building of the cathedral that would provide the town with a much needed dose of monumentality. It was hoped that sometime in the future Mioveni would have its own industrial park, an entirely new housing neighborhood, a hotel, a theater and maybe even a cinema, a zoo, and possibly even a tramway line to Pitești. Since not much had changed when it came to public finances, most of these plans either never materialized or seemed to be taking an indefinite amount of time to be finalized and Costescu's second term in office still looked like the local administration was barely keeping up with the maintenance of existing infrastructures and built

geared toward developing such a form of “industrial paternalism”; he also observes that in the 1990s the head of the local government tended to replace the factory director as the central paternal figure (2011:122-3). For a Polish account, see Domański (1997). On this new form of political authority and its mutation over time, see chapter 16.

environment. Nonetheless, the anxieties regarding the incomplete urbanity of Mioveni now appeared less baffling and more prone to being channeled toward a set of clearly defined pragmatic goals. As opposed to the first postsocialist decade, what the town's newly self-ascribed elites had gained was a sense of purpose, urgency, and enthusiasm.

In part mirroring the excitement of the early 1990s, a substantial part of this project of attaining urban propriety consisted in defining and promoting new ideas about what local politics should look like, ideas local elites hoped would eventually materialize in an authentically local version of democratic politics, devoid of the corruption plaguing national or, for that matter, extra-local politics tout court. This rendered Costescu's paternalism not only into an explicitly corporate affair, but also a much more systematic and assertive one. A crucial step in achieving this was the launching of a local newspaper (*Miovenii*) right after the 2000 elections, with Costescu serving as founding editor alongside Ion Horia Gliniastei, a self-made journalist, poet and long-time friend and collaborator of the mayor.⁵⁰⁹ According to the editors, the purpose of having a local newspaper was not just the sharing of news and information, but speaking out on the community's current problems, many of which, they insisted, were so common that citizens had gotten used to ignoring. The newspaper was to evaluate and sanction the state of town life, to suggest possible solutions to existing problems and shed light on future projects and perspectives; it was also to act as a "cultural messenger" by reviving and revaluing local traditions. An important additional task was "to impose a moral standard [that had been] neglected, especially as of late," something claimed to be easier said than done because the "motley" character of the local workers' population made it "impossible, at least for now, to impose the recipes of an auspicious civilization."⁵¹⁰ In contrast to the obstacles the mayor encountered in his solo attempts at imposing civilization during his first mandate, the editors called for help from the local church, the school and the police and declared their allegiance to the local administration, but only insofar as the latter's actions remained confined to promoting the well-being of the community as a whole.⁵¹¹ Though it was assumed the burden of the civilizing mission was mostly to be carried by this elite, success depended on obtaining as widespread a participation as possible from the citizenry. As a local sociologist explained on the occasion of the town's anniversary in 2000,

a part of Mioveni's inhabitants have an intense participation in the public life of the town in its entirety, in community manifestations and initiatives taken by the Town Hall. For this reason, they are important agents in the formation of the community's identity, in the strengthening of its public life. Without being creators in the spiritual sense of the word, they are still creators from a social point of view, they are creators of social life. (...) These people are the town's representative figures in all that concerns tradition, community life, the identity of the town. (...) The anatomy of the identity of the town of Mioveni is given not only by these representative figures, but also by the ones who do not have a rich public life, who remain isolated (...). By doing this they refuse the city, and refusing the city means they are not part of it. Since they comprise the majority of inhabitants, this is certainly a reason to worry on the part of the town's elite, who are trying their best to draw them toward public life. (...) They must be drawn toward

⁵⁰⁹ At least two other attempts to put out a regular newspaper with the same name were made in the mid-1990s. Both quickly failed. The success of 2000 speaks to the solidification of the urban modernization project rallied around Costescu's figure.

⁵¹⁰ "De ce este necesară apariția unui ziar local la Mioveni." *Miovenii* 3, August 2000.

⁵¹¹ On Costescu's failure due to the alleged utter absence of allies, see "Greu se mai fac oamenii, oameni." *Miovenii* 2, July 1997. "Bătălia Primarului cu tarabele din Piața 'Dacia'." *Miovenii* 1, August 1996.

a genuine community life, they must not simply be left to see “what else is going on,” to wait for things to be decided upon by others, while they only reap the profits, in one way or another.⁵¹²

Despite openly declaring the necessity of full membership and inclusion, such a depiction of community life contained an implicit threat. At the turn of the millennium, the localist paternalism espoused by those who believed themselves to be the town’s representative figures was being challenged by processes driving a powerful wedge through its constituency. In increasingly obvious fashion, the unflinching affirmation of plant-based solidarity that had set the stage for Costescu’s run for office in the mid-1990s was becoming untenable.

For both workers and local elites, privatization brought more dilemmas than it did certainties. The major trade-off was widely acknowledged and accepted: while regarded as an absolute necessity in securing both individual and collective futures, the takeover by Renault would lead to the disappearance of more than half of the existing factory jobs. Though the decisiveness of the moment could not have been more obvious, what was less clear were, first, the criteria according to which individual futures were to be decided upon, and, second, what the consequences would be for what until then had unproblematically been regarded as a collective fate.

For workers, things seemed simple enough at first: either hold on to one’s job in the factory and keep hoping things will eventually turn for the better, or take the buyout and look for alternative ways of securing one’s livelihood. When it came to actually making a choice, however, things were anything but simple. Despite the much awaited coming of a foreign investor, for workers’ everyday lives the first years after privatization translated into little more than vague promises of a prosperous future combined with the unrelenting pressures of getting by in the present. Seeing the promise of privatization finally realized only to have its long-awaited benefits deferred produced frustration, growing impatience, and exacerbated feelings of desperation and disillusionment (figure III.8). In comparison to the pre-privatization period, factory work was now more demanding, had the same benefits, and involved less hope.⁵¹³ A similar and related

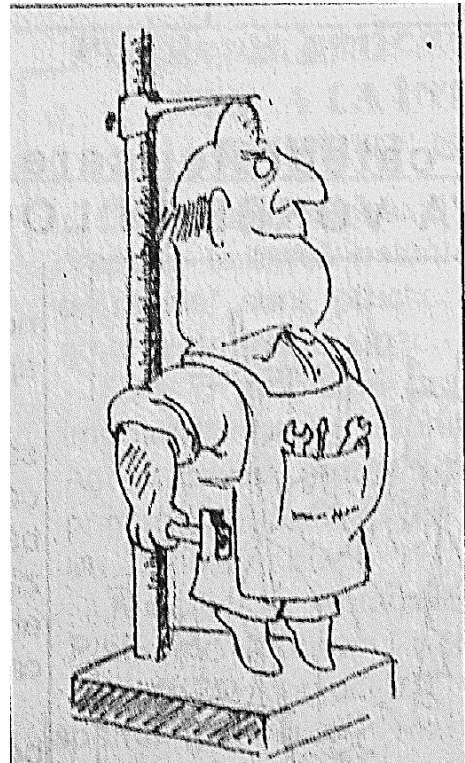


FIGURE III.8. “Since we have been working together with our francophone brothers, our standard of living has increased by yet another bump of suffering.”

Source: *Miovenii* 2, July 2000.

⁵¹² “Anatomia unei identități.” *Miovenii* 4, September 2000.

⁵¹³ In the hopeless times of the first postsocialist decade maintaining a minimal degree of hope was crucial for industrial workers. Following Zigon’s (2009:258) understanding of hope as “not simply a looking-forward-to-the-better-future, but more importantly (...) [as] a referencing back to the founding event that makes a certain kind of life possible,” we can say that, for workers, hope was intrinsically tied to the reaffirmation of the material and symbolic value of industrial labor. Kideckel’s (2008) comparative ethnography shows that this connected to different individual and collective stances on privatization and buyouts. As I discuss in parts I and II, privatization was a major instrument in rekindling hope during the second half of the 1990s, after the dwindling of the enthusiasm that characterized the first years after December 1989.

ambivalence surrounded the buyout: on the one hand, a considerable sum of money was involved and escaping the rekindled dread of factory life was inherently desirable; on the other hand, it involved a limited set of alternatives (moving to the countryside, trying one's luck on the practically non-existent job market, or taking the nebulous entrepreneurial pathway), all of which implied the preexistence of resources the buyout could not buy.⁵¹⁴ In such circumstances, the only certainty was that things were more uncertain than ever.

Life outside the plant seemed to be derailing at a similar pace. The privatization of the plant entailed its brutal breaking off from the town, meaning that previously known problems, which had been until then left mostly unaddressed, could no longer be avoided. Real estate and infrastructures that after 1989 had ended up under plant ownership could no longer be used by the town on the simple basis of what until then had been a taken-for-granted agreement between the local administration, the union and management. Forgotten were the times when SAD appealed to Dacia's management to intervene directly in the betterment of workers' living conditions outside the plant (by, for example, channeling resources for building the new school or the stadium, or by granting free heating and electricity to the Trade Unions' House of Culture in Mioveni), and the same happened with SAD's commitment to defend workers' interests in front of local and county authorities. Indeed, the SAD leadership insisted they could only continue to do so if they ran in the elections themselves; in their campaign (see chapter 3), they insisted that, now that the plant was privatized, the union remained the only direct link between the town and the automobile factory. More generally, both physical and symbolic boundaries between town and plant were now to be redrawn and enforced, and the extent to which the new plant owners were going to maintain any sort of direct relationship to the town was a big unknown.⁵¹⁵ Partly related to these developments was the increasing visibility of new

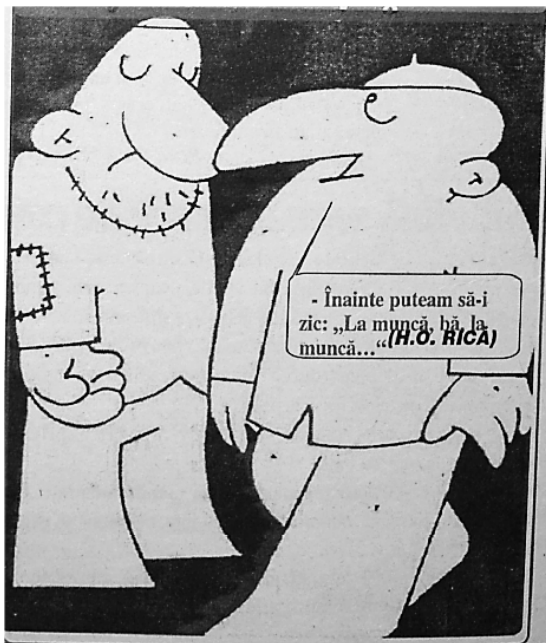


FIGURE III.9. “Before, I could tell him: ‘To work, man, to work...’”

Source: *Miovenii* 39, April 2003.

inequalities and the realization of the fact that Mioveni was no longer unequivocally and uniformly a workers' town: the presence in public space and the conspicuous consumption of the relatively prosperous entrepreneurs sitting at the top of the local food chain of the parts trafficking economy, along with their entourages and collaborators, were by now difficult to ignore; so was the new and, in more than one way, much more fearsome category of the jobless, many of whom appeared to quickly sink in utter destitution (figure III.9). All this translated into a progressive blurring of the isomorphism between the formal and informal plant hierarchies and those of town life, which had for so long been mutually reinforcing and constitutive for both workers' and elites' sense of their own selves and of each other.

⁵¹⁴ For a detailed description of available livelihood strategies, required resources and inequalities emerging out of the differential access industrial workers had to these resources, see Kideckel (2008).

⁵¹⁵ See the interview with union leader Nicolae Pavelescu in Badiu (2004:181-5).

These anxieties were about much more than sheer survival, new social asymmetries, or the reconfiguration of institutional boundaries. What brought these troubles together and gave them full depth was a fundamental ethical dilemma whose postponement had until then been the most precious and fragile achievement of the 1990s alliance between local elites and workers.⁵¹⁶ What had provided validity to the idea of plant-based solidarity, which underpinned the paternalist localism that had cemented that alliance, was the assertion of the value of being a worker and the pride of belonging to a collectivity of workers—in other words, the collective valuation of and the deriving of personal worth from industriousness and hard work. To a certain extent, this was a de facto local descendant of the official state socialist “cult of labor” built around the material benefits and symbolic profits that came with laboring in heavy industry (Kideckel 2008; Lampland 1995). The context of the 1990s was, however, very different: as Kideckel (2008) has shown, in stark contrast to the pervasiveness of the cult of labor under state socialism, industrial workers in postsocialist Romania were immediately confronted not only with the loss of jobs and severe material hardship, but also with the marginalization, symbolic devaluation and even stigmatization of industrial labor and workers’ individual and collective identities qua workers by intellectuals, mass-media and politicians alike. Mioveni was, in this sense, a somewhat exceptional case in which, at least for some time, the value of labor could be successfully reasserted—at least discursively, since the struggle over wages in the plant was not entirely successful during this whole time (see parts I and II)—via an alliance of workers and local elites. By securing their position as workers’ representatives, the latter obtained a degree of legitimacy and a certain feeling of righteousness in struggling with their cosmopolitan peers who after 1989 had either completely ignored or outrightly denounced the valuation of industrial labor as an artificial thing of the past. Though it was more than clear to them that times were changing for the worse—or, better said, precisely because of this—for workers this had been a vital opportunity to hold on to at least a minimum of ontological security. “[The] feeling that the self can survive whatever it encounters in the world,” that one has “the strength to become vulnerable” in relation to whatever the world has in store for both present and future (Sennett and Cobb [1972]1993:201), was in this case synonymous with having a sense that, despite all hardships and deprivations, dignity and personal worth could persist insofar as they remain securely fastened in the collective reinforcement of the values of industrial work and solidarity.⁵¹⁷

Soon after privatization this class alliance that had given substance to the hegemonic project of paternalist localism was in danger of coming undone. The blunt force that seemed to threaten the very possibility of individual and collective survival, the confident assertion of personal worth and of the continued relevance of broad-based solidarity, the fragile relationship

⁵¹⁶ On the notoriously underdefined notion of “class alliance,” see Hall et al. (1978:chapter 6).

⁵¹⁷ An “ontologically secure person will encounter all the hazards of life, social, ethical, spiritual, biological, from a centrally firm sense of his own and other people’s reality and identity” (Laing 1965:39). Giddens (1991:55) has unpacked this notion by showing how it refers to existential questions concerning the “basic parameters of human life, (...) ‘answered’ by everyone who ‘goes on’ in the context of social activity” via the practical utilization of existing frames of interpretation whose taken for grantedness and relative stability serve as a basis from which the world can be approached as being stable in a taken for granted manner. The public affirmation of workers’ collective identity couched in an explicit language of class continued to be a relatively common occurrence in Mioveni even more than a decade after 1989. See “A dispărut clasa muncitoare?” *Miovenii* 1, July 2000. Workers “patience” in the first postsocialist decade is commonly attributed to „labor weakness” (see Ashwin 1999b).

between the representing and represented, and the belief in the intrinsic ties between personal and collective fates raised existential questions that had until then been either swept under the carpet or simply unforeseen. As opposed to the similar hegemonic projects attempted by union leaders inside the plant and on the labor market, the paternalistic localism that dominated local politics at the turn of the millennium was fundamentally inclusionary.⁵¹⁸ As detailed in parts I and II, hegemonic discourses inside the plant were exclusionary from the very beginning, as they targeted a clear-cut separation of industrial work from other types of economic activity (and especially from “nonwork”) and the fostering of labor market inequality. Indeed, exiting the collective had been a perfectly legitimate possibility inside the plant throughout the 1990s: while layoffs were constantly delayed, the issue was on the table at all times and postponement was consciously pursued as a merely temporary solution. Moreover, privatization did not yield any significant challenge when it came to framing the separation between those who stayed and those who left, as old discursive categories could be readily redeployed. Outside the plant, in “the workers’ town” of Mioveni, things stood quite differently: not only did people linger on after leaving the plant, but industrial labor’s competitors (the trafficking and the service economies) were on full display. Inequality was here to stay and there was no immediate spatial and social exit to be had for the immoral and the stricken. And if all this could clearly be intimated during the 1990s, privatization greatly exacerbated both the scale and the visibility of the problem. At the beginning of the 2000s, therefore, answers were called for, even though none appeared to lack an overbearing dose of ambivalence. In the background, a little more than a year into the new millennium, the birth pangs of a resolution were slowly making their presence felt.

⁵¹⁸ This difference was visible in Costescu’s attempted shift from a strategy akin to business unionism (which, as I showed in parts I and II was inherently exclusionary given the objective conditions in which SAD found itself during the 1990s) to a social movement unionism, defending not just the narrow interests of well-behaved and productive industrial workers but also those who were, for one reason or another, set out to become the losers of the economic transformations necessary for making business unionism viable (see chapter 2). Most notably for the argument at hand, this shift marked Costescu’s conversion from trade union leader into mayor.

CHAPTER 14

DEBT WARS

Structures, infrastructures, restructurings

The catalyst for settling these existential problems in a manner clear and determinate enough to be impossible to anticipate in the first months after privatization had by then been long lurking in the background. Though it seemed of secondary importance at the enthusiastic time of the signing of the contract with Renault and in the widespread confusion of the months that followed, it was the accumulation of household debts for utilities that ultimately permitted the perpetuation of the above hegemonic configuration, along similar lines to conflicts waged inside the plant. This proved possible only by embracing the need to draw new, *intra*-local boundaries of worth and exclusion from the collective. The debt problem provided not only clear criteria according to which this could be accomplished, but made the task appear particularly urgent and, in due time, seemed to yield a quasi-automatic and ostensibly obvious answer to the personal and collective dilemmas of the day.

In retrospect, the explosion of the debt problem right after privatization should not have come as a surprise to anyone. It soon became the “the town’s most acute problem,” the number one priority for the local administration, and reason enough for the local newspaper to put together an all-out campaign against the accumulation of debt and for the bolstering of repayment.⁵¹⁹ As such, the problem was quite common and dated back to the construction of the town in the 1970s: to cut costs and reduce waste as much as possible, planning requirements for urban settlements starting with this decade stipulated that large industrial enterprises were to be the only producers and suppliers of water and heating for new towns built in their immediate surroundings. The proximity of spaces of work and spaces of living was to be accompanied by additional functional specialization: industries would provide urban areas with water, heating, energy and everything of shared usage, while towns provided the labor force, trade and “social-cultural” services; circulation between the two areas was to be enabled by various above- and below-ground infrastructures that were likewise shared and meant to be as short and cost-effective as possible (figure III.10).⁵²⁰ As a general principle, removing the (infrastructural and functional) boundaries between urban areas and their accompanying industries was a consciously pursued goal, as was the blurring of the boundary between work and living. In Colibași, production and individual household consumption of water and heating were connected via an underground infrastructure linking the plant with eight neighborhood substations spread across town, which redistributed heating and hot water coming from the plant. The provision of heating was supposed to be regulated centrally, to ensure indoor

⁵¹⁹ See *Miovenii*, special issue on the problem of debt, January 2001.

⁵²⁰ See the special issue of *Arhitectura RPR* (no. 1, 1976) on the relationship between industry and urban areas, which includes an article on the planning of the future town of Colibași. Where it was feasible and cost-effective, the sharing of water and heating (which included waste management) was to be supplemented by shared electricity supply, phone systems, and transportation infrastructures.

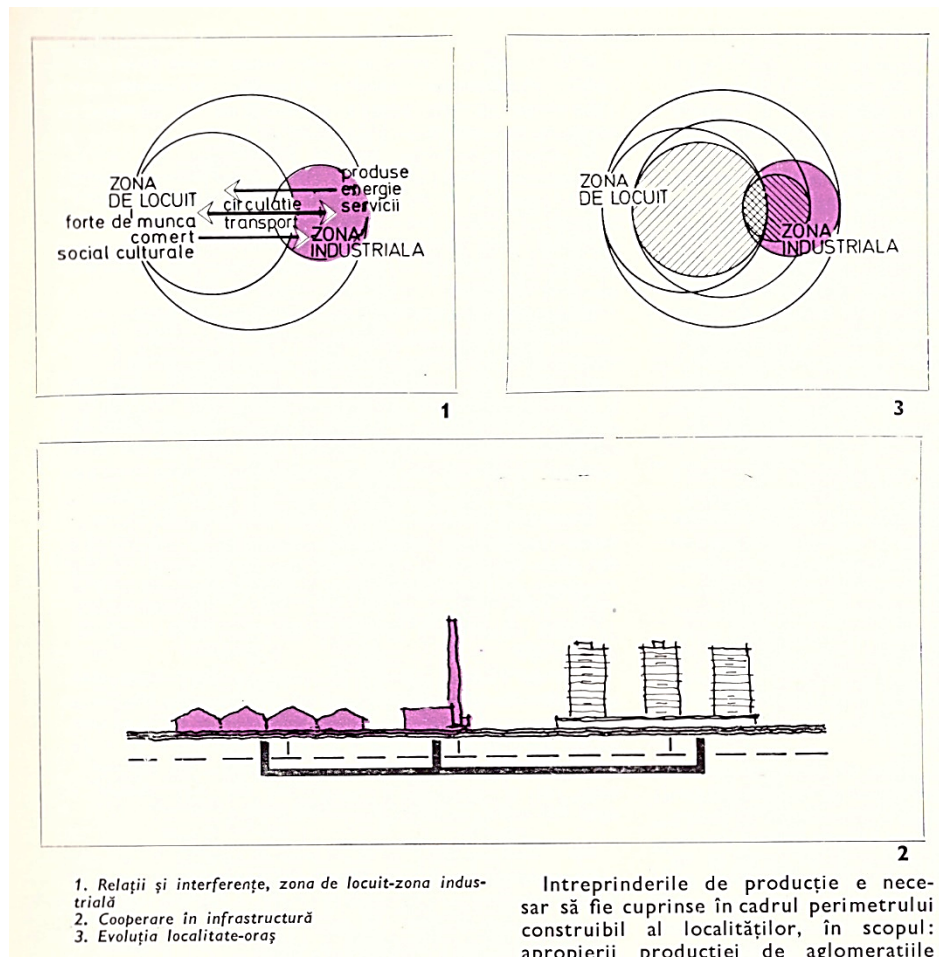


FIGURE III.10. Planned spatial and infrastructural relations between town and industry for industrial areas and industrial platforms: “1. Relations and interferences, living area–industrial area; 2. Infrastructural cooperation; 3. The settlement-town evolution.”

Source: *Arhitectura RPR* 1, 1976.

temperatures reached a predefined level—not more, nor less. Coverage was meant to be total: everyone benefitted equally from the service, and prices were set to make sure everyone afforded basic utilities. Mioveni was thus a typical example of what Collier (2011:96) calls “the ‘enterprise-centric’ pattern of urban development,” with the automobile plant serving as a “city-forming enterprise.”⁵²¹ Mioveni is, on the other hand, a significantly different case from that of Belaya Kalitva, which Collier analyzes, as it deviated quite dramatically from the standard depiction of the trajectory of state socialist company towns after 1989—in which the city-building enterprise fails, leading to the collapse of infrastructure and the near total and uniform demise of individual lives and collective feelings and identities.

Some important aspects of this arrangement changed after 1989, but overall things nonetheless kept functioning. Though heating and water utilities were issues of concern throughout this decade, they remained merely two out of many. Following the same trajectory as the rest of Mioveni’s urban services, the water and heating shortages that were common

⁵²¹ Since Collier provides an extensive account of the rise and fall of this pattern of urban development in the Soviet Union, there is no reason for me to go into too much detail here. My analysis is markedly different from Collier’s, since he is declaredly not interested in the nitty-gritty of local processes and struggles, and prefers to take refuge in a more distant Foucaultian analysis of governmentality, which renders his interpretation of limited use in understanding what all the fuss was about and what was at stake in Mioveni in the early 2000s.

during state socialism continued in the 1990s and gradually got worse (figure III.11). Until 1997, the main concern was with aging infrastructures falling in disrepair, as cold weather was a problem both at work and at home. Only thereafter, once the effects of the disastrous policies of the CDR government kicked in and Dacia's management announced its intention to drastically cut costs, did the debt issue spark some degree of controversy and appeared to threaten service provision more than the state of infrastructure did. Massive inflation in the 1990s and the inability of wages to keep up with prices meant that each year fewer and fewer



FIGURE III.11. “The town hall’s concern for protecting... people from the cold, is it... for real? – I have summoned you from outside apartment buildings for the current news: You will be able to live happily inside apartments as well!”

Source: *InfoAutoturism* 72, February 1996.

people could afford to pay for utilities, and especially for heating during the winter months. In the meantime, Dacia had turned for-profit and management was concerned with maintaining the company afloat; since the costs for servicing the town were no longer subsidized by the redistributive mechanisms of the plan, they were now considered a direct expenditure. In such conditions, the problems of maintaining service provision, costs, prices, debt rescheduling, as well as the exchange of heating debts for tax

obligations became important issues on the agenda of the negotiations between union and management, a fact with which both the pursuit of pacification by the SAD leadership and Costescu's early paternalist localism were in full congruity. Despite sometimes heated exchanges between managers, union leaders, and local representatives, negotiations routinely ended with the union pleading for leniency for the sake of employees' state of health and management ultimately “forgiving” Mioveni's inhabitants.⁵²² Notwithstanding the growing discontent, debts did not mount at an accelerated rate during most of this period, but tended to oscillate in the course of each year while remaining relatively stable overall. Hence, throughout the 1990s the debt problem was known to exist but it was kept at bay by moving things around, a strategy which for almost a decade seemed effective enough for everyone involved.

Even though privatization did not instantly erase the possibility of negotiating over the debt issue, it made it clear that the problem was only going to get worse and that soon enough the union would no longer be able to intervene for its postponement. Negotiations over the provision of heating between the local administration, Dacia's management and union officials turned out to be particularly tough shortly after Renault took over. The “truce” of December

⁵²² “De ce s-a întârziat livrarea energiei termice către REGOM-SERV-MIOVENI.” *InfoAutoturism* 120, December 1998. “Automobile Dacia S.A. este pregătită să livreze agent termic în Mioveni.” *InfoAutoturism* 132, October 1999. “Primarul Costescu a adunat parlamentarii din partidul său la o ședință de... apă caldă și căldură.” *Puls*, 3-9 November 1998. “În timp ce Piteștiul e în sărbătoare, la Mioveni continuă războiul apei calde.” *Puls*, 12-25 May 1998. “Mioveni are din nou căldură. SAD și conducerea Uzinei s-au hotărât să îi ierte din nou pe datornici.” *Curierul zilei*, 18 November 1998.

6th 2000 came only after sixty days of negotiations and provided nothing more than a belated short-term solution to what was rightfully regarded as a desperate situation. The agreement involved a mere three-month rescheduling of debts and full repayment by the end of the winter—an impossible task, which the local administration would in the next years repeatedly promise and repeatedly fail to fulfill. Rescheduling and negotiations no longer seemed to be an option, and the certainty of the union's stance and strength on the issue could no longer be depended upon indefinitely. As the local newspaper timidly preached, the conditions of the new market economy now rendered the union's populism untenable and required different ways of adapting and trying to find a solution.⁵²³ All this led to an accelerated snowballing of utilities debts: by August 2001 the total debt had reached an average of 1 million lei (ROL) per apartment. Since leniency from the main creditor could no longer be counted upon, local officials stressed that debts would continue to pile up every month and that this constituted a serious threat to the securing of heating provision for the next winter; this time around, the threat seemed as real as it could get.⁵²⁴ Solutions had to be found, but the root of the problem had first to be identified, the guilty parties had to be named and dealt with in one way or another. Since the debt issue sat on top of an incomprehensible thicket of infrastructures, institutional arrangements and established relationships, deciding on who was to blame and, subsequently, on what was to be done were not tasks for the lighthearted.

The circuit of heating, debt, and blame

Three groups of actors were quickly found responsible for the situation. First on the list was Regom, the company in charge of administering public utilities in Mioveni. More precisely, it was not the company itself that was considered guilty, but rather its employees and especially its board of directors. A bizarre child of the early 1990s, Regom was initially set up as a trading company in charge of public utilities, commercial spaces and publicly-owned apartments.⁵²⁵ The founding of Regom corresponded to the early 1990s national and regional legislation for the administration of publicly-owned services and real estate; locally, it was seen as a way to put some order in the institutional chaos of the early 1990s.⁵²⁶ 100% of its shares were owned

⁵²³ "E bine că s-a găsit un armistițiu", "În acest număr, despre... 'Comunicat la Comunicat'." *Miovenii* 7, December 2000. *Miovenii*, January 2001. On denunciations of trade union "populism", see part I.

⁵²⁴ "Barurile sunt pline de consumatori, iar magazinele din oraș au clienți care cumpără." *Miovenii* 15, August 2001. The national average net wage for 2000 was 2.1 million lei, increasing to 3 million for 2001, with an inflation rate (CPI) of 34.5% in 2001; nominally, until 2003, workers' wages at Dacia were below the average wage. At that time, there were approximately 9700 apartments in Mioveni, which put the total debt at around 10 billion lei—the sum would more than triple by the middle of the decade. By early 2002, when the debt had already reached 17 billion lei, Dacia's management flatly rejected any possibility of "forgiveness" on its part, despite pleas from SAD leaders and employees. "Adunarea Generală a SAD." *InfoAutoturism* 163, February 2002.

⁵²⁵ As it happened across Romania, apartments were sold to tenants on a large scale in the shortly after 1989. In Mioveni, several hundred apartments (a total of around 500 in 2002) remained in public ownership after 2000, creating a partly distinct and comparatively much smaller debt snowball on rents. "Conflicte de spațiu locativ—în instanță." *Miovenii* 23, March 2002. When it came to collecting rents, the local administration had much less trouble in dealing with tenants who ran into debt and quickly cracked down on those who could not pay. According to a 2004 decision of the local council, when the debt hysteria reached its peak, debtors who somehow did manage to pay were to be "monitored" for no less than three years, during which they could be evicted as soon as they accumulated any debt. see *Consilierul. Dezbateri, Proiecte și Hotărâri* 6, April 2004.

⁵²⁶ "Directorii autentici se nasc, sau se formează?" *Miovenii* 8, January 2001. "Modificarea Hotărârii Guvernului Nr. 1177/1990." *Autoturism* 4, August 1992.

by the local council, in relation to which the Regom board of directors nonetheless maintained full autonomy in deciding on how to administer assets and plan investments. Regom signed a new 15-year concession contract for public services with the local administration in 1998, the same year when the debt question first appeared to be turning into something serious. As far as debt accumulation was concerned, Regom played a central role. It was tasked with the maintenance and upgrading of existing infrastructures, which, due to their age and advanced state of disrepair, provoked periodic breakdowns, massive network losses and increased costs; as things tended to break down during the cold season, the frequent

emergency repairs were immensely frustrating (figure III.12). Regom was further responsible with installing metering systems that were considered absolute necessary for establishing who consumed what and how much.⁵²⁷ Before privatization, this was approximated and agreed upon between the plant and Regom; starting with 2001, metering systems were introduced in order to separate as precisely as possible the consumption of the town from the consumption of the plant. Thereafter, in the eyes of Dacia's management, what happened on the other side was strictly Regom's responsibility.⁵²⁸ Finally, Regom served as an interface between the producer and consumers of water and heating, which meant that it was legally responsible for providing Dacia with the necessary payment and Mioveni inhabitants with the proper services. Above all, this guaranteed its prominent role in the debt controversies of the early 2000s.

Though it was obvious that Regom was just one piece of a very complicated puzzle of contradictory pressures and interdependencies, it immediately came under vicious attacks from Costescu and his allies for not being able to come up with a solution to the problem of debt. Stepping outside the catch-22 of debt accumulation, as if by magic, the local newspaper blamed Regom for not having the necessary will to tackle the problem of debt and proceeded to relentlessly highlight the corruption and immorality of Regom administrators, their high salaries, lavish lifestyles, gross incompetence and irrational choice of investments.⁵²⁹ From late 2000 to 2004, the newspaper ran dozens of articles decrying the passivity and corruption of Regom administrators. At the high point of this crusade, after depicting Regom as a feudal institution and its directors as feudal lords poised on extorting money from otherwise honest townsfolk, a 2002 article (prematurely) announced the imminent demise of the company as

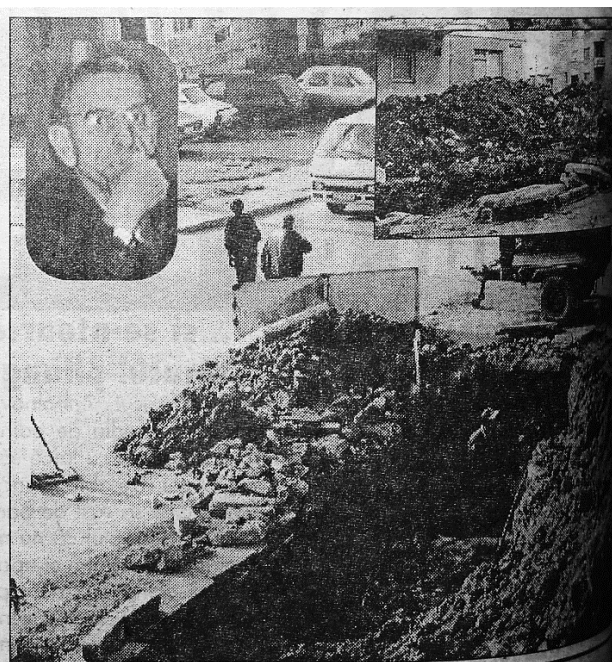


FIGURE III.12. Large diggings for infrastructure repair on the streets of Mioveni on the eve of winter. Source: *Puls*, 16-22 November 1999.

⁵²⁷ For the importance of these measuring and calculating devices, see Collier (2011).

⁵²⁸ "Căldura la Mioveni." *InfoAutoturism* 160, December 2001.

⁵²⁹ "Prin oglinzile de la 'locuința de intervenție' amenajată de REGOM, imaginea directorului Vițalariu (încă) șerpuiește cu viclenie." *Miovenii* 20, December 2001.

resembling a genuine liberation from slavery.⁵³⁰ Unsurprisingly, the symbolically violent *coup de grâce* consisted of reminding everyone that Regom directors came from outside town, that they did not organically belong to the community, and, therefore, that they had no interest in defending the interests of any of its members, which they were more than willing to sacrifice to their personal benefit.

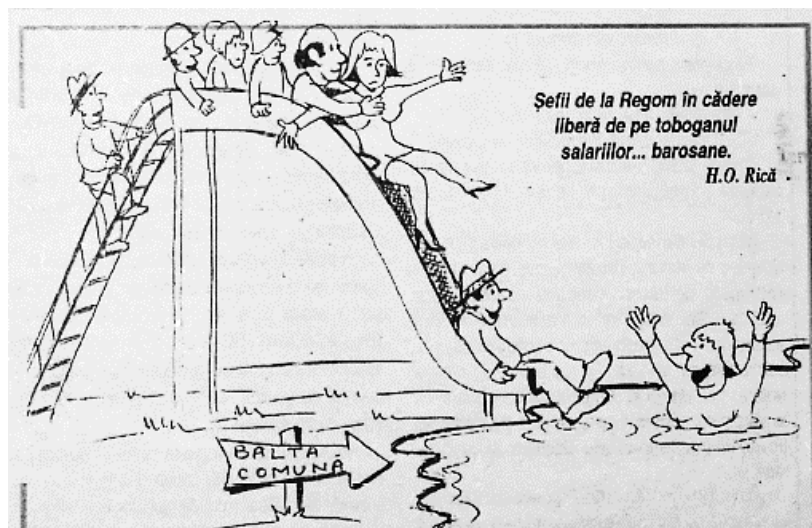


FIGURE III.13. “The Regom bosses in free fall on the slide of...jumbo salaries [straight into the common pool].”
Source: *Miovenii* 21, January 2002.

Under such auspices, the fate of Regom was short-lived. The passing of law 326/2001 on the administration of public services gave Costescu and his allies hope that they could somehow legally get rid of the Regom pollution (figure III.13). These hopes failed to materialize until the fall of 2003, almost three years after the local administration had begun scrambling to take control over a company for which it nonetheless had been the only shareholder from the very beginning. Despite its initial appeal, privatization was out of the question, so the administration decided to unilaterally cancel the contracts it had with Regom, take over the company’s assets and responsibilities and place them in the hands of a new company, ADP (Administratia Domeniului Public—The Administration of the Public Domain), this time under the direct control of the local government and manned by a trustworthy ex-technocrat from the automobile plant.⁵³¹ As expected, virtually nothing changed after ADP took over from Regom: debts continued to grow at a similar pace and there was little

⁵³⁰ “Scurtă poveste...adevărată, spusă prin gura (ţevuită) a caloriferului.” *Miovenii* 21, January 2002.

⁵³¹ “Administraţia Domeniului Public Mioveni are un nou director” *Miovenii* 72, October 2004. Costescu had initially planned to privatize Regom, only to change his mind when he pondered that no one would buy a company that was 50 billion in debt and, even if this were to happen, he considered profit-making and cheap service provision to be incompatible. Despite the mayor’s change of heart, strong voices still argued for the benefits of privatization, competition and anti-monopoly in public service provision. “Toţi banii pentru REGOM?! Măcar dacă locuitorii ar beneficia de servicii pe măsura banilor.” *Miovenii* 9, February 2001. “REGOM se află în faliment?” *Miovenii* 43, June 2003. “Ar fi o soluţie... (speranţă pentru evitarea falimentului).” *Miovenii* 45, July 2003. The specter of Regom and its maleficent directors loomed over the town’s public life long after the company was stripped of its assets and responsibilities. Local officials continued to blame the past misdeeds of Regom directors for the endless accumulation of debts and, in the 2004 electoral campaign, Costescu’s supporters used candidates’ previous ties to Regom in discrediting the incumbent’s competitors. “Cum staţi cu valorile morale, domnule Oprescu?” *Miovenii* 63, May 2004. The saga of Regom came to a close only in May 2007, when it was entirely taken over by the local administration and thus ceased to exist.

ADP managers could do but push the guilt around.⁵³² Since blaming the intermediary now implied blaming the local administration itself, by late 2003 there was no other administrative scapegoat to be found, nor one that could clearly be identified as an outsider.

Next up to share a piece of the blame were the lesser peers of the Regom directors: the administrators employed by the local inhabitants' and, later, owners' associations. They personified another institutional node in the circuit of debt accumulation: inhabitants' associations were the legal representatives of consumers and signatories of service contracts with Regom, so debts accumulated on Regom's books because they accumulated first on the associations' books; within these associations, administrators were responsible with collecting money from individual consumers and making payments to Regom. Starting with the second half of 2000, the local newspaper, representatives of the local administration, of Regom and ADP repeatedly condemned the passivity, corruption, illegitimate salaries, and immorality of administrators, who they claimed refused to play their part in the curtailing of debt accumulation. Open letters signed by "honest" citizens (that is, by people who could prove they were not in debt) described the propensity of administrators toward sexual promiscuity, blatant favoritism, and outright embezzlement of people's money (figure III.14); when this was not the case, administrators were still accused of not putting enough pressure on the members of their associations.⁵³³

Several attempts were made at either disciplining administrators or simply taking them out of the loop. Proposals for creating a separate public service of payment collection bypassing associations and administrators never made it past the drawing board, since they were costly and legally fuzzy.⁵³⁴ Instead, it was hoped a renewed legal status would lead to the proper functioning of these associations and their liberation from the petty feudal power of administrators. A series of new laws stipulated the necessity of transforming inhabitants' associations into owners' associations.⁵³⁵ Since the former were very large and did not have legal personality, it was hoped that transforming them into owners' associations would allow

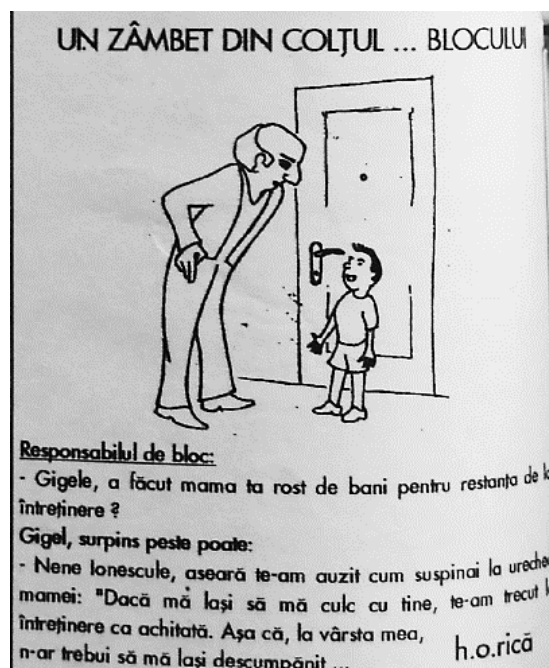


FIGURE III.14. "A smile from... the building's corner. The administrator: 'Gigel, has your mother found the money for the utilities bill?' Gigel, overcome with surprise: 'Mister Ionescu, last night I heard you sighing in my mother's ear: 'If you let me sleep with you, I'll put you on the list as having paid. So, considering my age, you shouldn't leave me disconcerted'..."

Source: *Miovenii* 3, August 2000.

⁵³² For a short while, Costescu did try to blame ADP as he had done Regom, but the stakes seemed to be much smaller and the results inconclusive. "Personalitatea juridică a ADP a fost retrasă." *Miovenii* 100, December 2005.

⁵³³ News of administrators stealing money from inhabitants showed up occasionally during the 1990s. E.g., "Aflăm de la organele de poliție ale orașului Colibași." *Autoturism* 5, July 1990. It was only during the 2000s that publishing on such cases became routine.

⁵³⁴ "Slalom printre cazuri." *Miovenii* 37, March 2003.

⁵³⁵ "Trebuie evitată degringolada de la asociațiile de proprietari." *Miovenii* 22, February 2002.

for easier litigation against associations in debt, the possibility of associations themselves pursuing legal action against their members, and the opportunity for the local administration to easily obtain knowledge on the financial situation of associations.⁵³⁶ Owners' associations were supposed to be smaller in size, which made them more manageable and would partly reduce the extent of the collective consequences of individual debt accumulation. This would be further facilitated, given that associations of owners allowed an easier introduction of individual contractual agreements, which, together with the new metering systems, permitted an effective management of individual debt while minimizing the collective impact.⁵³⁷ As for administrators, the new legislation stipulated the requirement of professionalization, making it much easier to remove incumbents and transgressors. Even if this transformation proved to be an extremely drawn-out process, by the mid-2000s it was becoming obvious that administrators could no longer be gratuitously blamed for their inability to turn the tide of debt.⁵³⁸ Though cases of corrupt administrators continued to be periodically presented in the local newspaper until the end of the decade, the local administration was by then in firm control of the activity of the administrators of debtor associations.⁵³⁹ The most important privileges that came with being an administrator had also dwindled quite severely: they were no longer in charge of collecting and holding on to large sums of money from a preponderantly impoverished population, nor could they maintain discretionary control over the all-important lists of debtors (figure III.14).⁵⁴⁰ Though building administrators were still very much in the debt loop, they could no longer be as easily said to be up to their necks in guilt.

Last, but definitely not least, on the list of blame were individual debtors themselves, together with their families. In July 2000, the editors of the local newspaper decided to pioneer a new "method" for securing debt repayment, which they claimed would quickly prove its effectiveness.⁵⁴¹ It consisted in the periodic publication of so-called lists or "tables of shame" in which, in "the first phase," the names of the biggest individual debtors would be published along with their addresses, the sums they owed, and the inhabitants' associations they belonged to. In "the second phase," each name was to be connected to a personal "business card" containing individual debtors' occupation and place of employment; later, these would be supplemented by debtors' telephone numbers, family size, alternate sources of income, as well as "reasons" for not paying. Actual tables of shame came in different shapes and sizes: the largest contained hundreds of names and were sometimes organized according to

⁵³⁶ The reverse was that they could also defend themselves in court against the local authorities' handling of the debt issue. "La Mioveni, se constituie Liga Asociațiilor de Proprietari." *Puls*, 25-31 January 2000.

⁵³⁷ Individual contracts were seen as having a double function: on the one hand, they would allow non-debtors to benefit from the services they were paying for—nothing less, nothing more; on the other hand, they would discipline debtors into paying their debts, since they would no longer benefit from services distributed uniformly to all members of the collective signatories of provision contracts. "Cum comentează, ce sugerează salariații Primăriei Mioveni despre încălzirea orașului pentru iarna 2003-2004." *Miovenii* 44, June 2003.

⁵³⁸ Not even at the time of my fieldwork had all inhabitants' associations been transformed into owners' associations, despite the relentless efforts of the local administration. e.g., "Necesitatea și obligativitatea constituirii asociațiilor de proprietari." *Miovenii* 179, May 2010.

⁵³⁹ "Situația asociațiilor de locatari/proprietari cu cele mai mari restanțe la plata facturilor către ADP Mioveni la data de 31.08.2007." *Miovenii* 138, October 2007.

⁵⁴⁰ But see the relatively late case of an administrator not putting his own name on the debtors' list in "În atenția membrilor asociațiilor de proprietari/locatari." *Miovenii* 143, February 2008.

⁵⁴¹ See *Miovenii* 2, July 2000.

administrators and associations. Regardless such variations, at least until 2006, they were given as much importance and were presented with as much pomp as possible. Their immediate purpose was, of course, to effectively shame people into paying their debts (figure III.15), by making known the names of debtors to those in their immediate proximity in the web of debt and responsibility: the lists of shame provided people with knowledge of their neighbor's misdeeds and thus facilitated the putting of direct neighborly pressure on individual debtors and their families—something which the local administration and Regom/ADP officials relentlessly urged people to do. Putting together the most effective lists of shame possible required making inquiries into the status of each person and her family, a task fulfilled at first by the local police and then by a specialized commission of “social inquiry.” The purpose of these inquiries was to establish with as much precision as possible not only the financial solvency of debtors, but also their moral and even legal solvencies.⁵⁴² Effectively, the lists of shame were instruments for drawing boundaries between debtors and non-debtors and, just as importantly, within the group of debtors themselves. They were a “method” of publicly identifying the shameless inside the collective body of the shamed.⁵⁴³



FIGURE III.15. “A reader struck with amazement: ‘God, your punishment is too cruel! I read the TABLE OF SHAME in the newspaper and I can’t believe how this is possible. All my three children have their names written here and they are not exactly helpless. I educated them badly and my face is marred with shame’.” Source: *Miovenii* 3, August 2000.

The discourse against debtors emphasized the existence of three categories of people. First, there were those who had no debts, the contingent of honest citizens who were being systematically cheated by Regom, administrators, and debtors, and on behalf of whom they undeservedly had to suffer. Typical accounts of the condition of non-debtors gave them an aura of heroism, behind which there lay a set of basic characteristics: the non-debtor had a stable source of income (which was largely synonymous with having a job at the plant); was not lazy and did not shy away from work (was disciplined enough to keep up with job requirements, or was able to find a job after only a brief period of unemployment); was able to overcome hardship by being thrifty, calculated and generally modest. All were required for the wise expenditure of the little money available, wise meaning they were able to pay for utilities every month and only exceptionally ran into debt; this, of course, came with the implication that families stuck together and got along well enough to be able to pool resources. Meeting these

⁵⁴² The text accompanying the list of shame published in October 2000 described the involvement of the police in verifying the information obtained on each debtor and claimed that “many of these people fall under the interest of the Police, since they are predisposed to engaging in crime and other antisocial behavior.” “Din nou despre TABELUL RUȘINII.” *Miovenii* 5, October 2000.

⁵⁴³ This became obvious especially in those situations in which debtors whose names had been mentioned in the newspaper actually did manage to pay their debts—an occasion for the editors to offer their public apologies. “Erată.” *Miovenii* 59, March 2004.

criteria, which entailed the practicing of a skilled “craftsmanship of survival”, granted one the privileged status of membership in the dependable hard core of the urban collective.⁵⁴⁴

Second, there were the so-called “social cases”, who did not pay because they could not pay. These people were not the heroes, but the stricken, the true victims of the times, those who were entirely worthy of sympathy and charity. Almost every issue of the local newspaper reserved space for the presentation of such individuals or families who would have paid if they only had had the means to do so. Just like the heroes, the stricken had clearly specified properties: they had either no source of income or their available resources could clearly not ensure their physical survival; though they were not able to keep afloat on their own, this was not of their own doing and had to do with problems they could not possibly control. They were the seriously ill, the disabled, the single unemployed parents, the very old. These “social cases” were depicted as fully and truly deserving the community’s help, which translated into job offers, access to social housing, debt rescheduling, donations, etc.

Between these two types there lay a vast and motley group of indebted people described as those who did not pay even though they were supposedly able to. These people were the “real” cause of collective suffering, and because of this they deserved neither sympathy, nor leniency. They were, in other words, the shameless.⁵⁴⁵ The list of characteristics classifying an individual and her family as shameless debtors was quite vast and involved anything rendering one unable to meet the necessary and sufficient conditions of either heroism or victimhood. To take the most common examples, the shameless could: have a job, but be unable to spend one’s money wisely (which included a list of unwise ways to spend one’s money: having a car, going on vacation etc.); not have a job but having been, so to speak, “on the job market” for too long (being able to do any kind of work, but not being willing to work; “too long” apparently meant anything beyond a month or two⁵⁴⁶); be the only breadwinner in the family, yet have children of working age; be seriously ill or incapacitated, but having brought this onto oneself (due to bad habits such as drinking, smoking, etc.).⁵⁴⁷ The tables of shame aimed, principally and as a matter of principle, at identifying the people who fell into this third category. Despite the sustained efforts, the discourse against shameless debtors remained shrouded in mystery, especially when it came to revealing exactly how many people were not able to repay their debts as well as, beyond a brief set of yes or no questions, what concrete difficulties debtors faced.⁵⁴⁸ Just as with Regom directors and associations’ administrators, what shameless debtors lacked was the will to act (or, in this case, to pay). It was not a question of being caught in a contradictory network of interdependencies, but rather one of moral character. Just like the

⁵⁴⁴ On survival (or “getting by”) as a skilled craft, see “Supraviețuirea este... o meserie?” *Miovenii* 25, May 2002.

⁵⁴⁵ This distinguished “antisocial” from “social” cases. “Între social și antisocial.” *Miovenii* 59, March 2004.

⁵⁴⁶ “La noi în oraș, cantina socială funcționează bine.” *Miovenii* 46, July 2003. “Rubrica cetățeanului.” *Miovenii* 153, September 2008.

⁵⁴⁷ As it happens in cases of moral panic, the local newspaper insisted on contrasting the best examples of heroism with the worst cases of shamelessness.

⁵⁴⁸ In a 2002 interview, Costescu approximated the ratio of non-debtors to debtors at around 80/20%. Since only a handful of “social cases” could be spoken of, it was safe to say that the vast majority of the 20% were in fact shameless debtors. The administration and the local newspaper engaged in sometimes quite awkward euphemistic descriptions of the debt problem, precisely in order to avoid revealing how many people were really in debt and why exactly they could not afford to pay—too large a number or too real the problems and the symbolic efficacy of the anti-debt campaign would have surely evaporated.

other two guilty parts, debtors who did not want to pay were portrayed as directly threatening the survival of the community. What made debtors special, however, was that they represented the enemy within, not readily identifiable and not that easily dealt with by legal fiat.

The anti-debtor campaign implied separating the shameless from the victims, then pressuring the shameless from all sides (the newspaper, the administrators, the neighbors, etc.) into becoming people of good faith, and, as a last resort, litigation, eviction and the confiscation of property to recover the money owed. Though it quickly became clear that public shaming would not yield expected results, taking the legal path proved to be more difficult than insinuated in the constant threats and warnings to the debtors. Leaving aside problems related to calculating who consumed how much and how individual legal responsibility was to be established in the absence of individual contracts, the immediate difficulty was establishing who exactly was responsible with suing the debtors—not exactly an easy thing to do since legal responsibility was constantly passed around between the local administration, Regom and associations. Second, only a few representatives of these institutions wanted to associate themselves with what was, at least for the first couple of years, still regarded as an objectionable thing to do; indeed, some even considered evictions as only making existing problems worse.⁵⁴⁹ For some time, the number of evictions paled in comparison to the extent of the debt problem, and even those that did happen concerned relatively extreme cases whose main purpose seemed to be that of being paraded as warnings.⁵⁵⁰ Third, litigation was a lengthy process that could spread over several years, so it was not very effective considering the urgency imposed by the implacable annual rhythm with which the debt problem asserted itself. Initially a solution of last resort, it took no less than half a decade for cracking down on debtors to appear as the only possible path to follow. By the mid-2000s, although it was still considered morally problematic, with Regom gone and administrators more or less under control, there was no other enemy in sight. As the debt problem dragged on, it became increasingly obvious that shameless debtors had to face the consequences. The collapse of alternative collective solutions for public service provision during the same period decisively tilted the balance in favor of solving the debt problem by way of individuals' judgment, followed by redemption or damnation.

The alternative of potential alternatives

While blame and responsibility were passed around the circuit of debt, both the local administration and individual consumers sought alternative solutions to ensure the supply and distribution of heating and hot water. Since the necessity of preventing conflict with and securing autonomy from Dacia seemed universally accepted, the primary question concerned whether efforts should be directed toward finding a collective solution or if individual systems were more adequate. The latter emerged as victorious only after the former collapsed, apparently under their own weight.

In Mioveni, attempts at finding alternate heating arrangements were at least as old as the 1996 elections for the mayor's office. During Costescu's first term in office, members of the local council had fought over whether to invest in staircase heating stations (Costescu's

⁵⁴⁹ "Recuperarea datoriilor de la populație trenează." *Miovenii* 85, April 2005.

⁵⁵⁰ "Evacuări forțate." *Miovenii* 27, July 2002.

proposal) or go for apartment building systems (the opposition's proposal, which, despite making life hard for Costescu and his allies, never left the drawing board). In 1999 the local administration experimented with two types of collective systems: it set up independent stations for six staircases (out of a total of 525) and installed boilers into one of the seven neighborhood substations (servicing a number of 1170 apartments in 25 of the town's 200 apartment buildings).⁵⁵¹ Beginning with 2000, when debts started accumulating at a vastly more threatening pace, investing in the staircase system seemed appealing, especially since it simplified matters considerably by removing many of the institutional actors contributing to the debt conundrum while emphasizing citizens' self-management of consumption, costs and debts. However, the staircase system never passed the experimental stage: it lacked full support in the local council, it had plenty of drawbacks, since it would most likely have led to major conflicts between non-debtors and debtors living on the same staircase, and, most importantly, it was immensely costly and the local administration quickly realized it could not afford it without asking for financial help from the town's massively indebted population.⁵⁵² As some local officials insisted, moreover, alternatives could only work if major overhauls of the institutional arrangement of heating provision were undertaken in advance; the staircase system, for example, made very little sense until other major problems were solved—in particular, the installing of individual metering systems and the signing of individual contracts, none of which were even close to being accomplished in the first half of the 2000s.

The only available collective alternative remained the installation of boilers in the old distribution substations, turning them into self-standing, gas-powered heating stations. Even though initial estimates stated that it would take approximately 8 or 9 years for such a system to be up and running, the local administration managed to install the necessary boilers in the remaining seven substations as early as October 2002.⁵⁵³ Great enthusiasm surrounded the new centralized system, which was hoped to accomplish several things at once: by removing Dacia from the picture, it would restrict the debt circuit and thus make it more manageable; it would provide direct quantitative control over heating provision, which was said to significantly contribute to more efficient cost management; though it did not directly impose new constraints on debtors, it was hoped that the initiative would in one way or another convince people to repay their debts. The result, however, was utterly disastrous. Not only did the new system not curtail the accumulation of debts, but it rendered the problem even more severe. Dacia was indeed taken out of the loop of heating debt accumulation, but, since the new system brought neither constraints nor incentives for debt repayment, a massive new debt immediately started accumulating, this time for gas. Unlike the automobile plant, Distrigaz, the gas supplier, had no extra-contractual ties with the town's administration and population, so it proved much stricter when it came to delayed payments. Consequently, less than a year after the new system

⁵⁵¹ "Semne bune... iarna are." *InfoAutoturism* 131, September 1999.

⁵⁵² "Proiectul de îmbunătățire a încălzirii, respins." *Curierul zilei*, 9 April 1999. "Primarului din Mioveni i-a dat cu zecimale la socoteala microcentralelor." *Puls*, 16-21 November 1999. "Primarul Costescu vrea să ne bage microcentrale de bloc ca să-și tragă el un comision baban!" *Puls*, 30 November – 6 December 1999. "Cum comentează, ce sugerează salariații Primăriei Mioveni despre încălzirea orașului pentru iarna 2003-2004." *Miovenii* 44, June 2003. "Participarea populației la investițiile necesare îmbunătățirii sistemului de încălzire a orașului." *Miovenii* 21, January 2001.

⁵⁵³ "Un interviu cu primarul orașului, ing. Vasile Costescu." *Miovenii* 5, October 2000.

had become operational there were already plenty of voices questioning its viability.⁵⁵⁴ The accumulation of gas debt seriously jeopardized its functioning during the next two winters and by the middle of the decade local authorities seemed to have entirely given up on the idea of having a centralized heating system and explicitly urged citizens to install individual systems.⁵⁵⁵ A big role in bringing down the new neighborhood heating system was played by another issue authorities had not foreseen: the cumulated effect of individual strategies of dealing with the problems of debt and heating.

Regardless of their solvency, individuals and their families could pursue their own options in trying to stay warm in the winter and overcome the consequences of debt. They first had to decide whether to remain connected to the centralized heating system(s). This option presented no insurance as to the stability of service provision: stoppages due to decaying infrastructure or debts to suppliers were exasperatingly frequent and each year the dread increased exponentially as winter approached. For debtors, this was often synonymous with having to choose between keeping one's home warm during the winter months and risk ending up homeless as debts increased. If in January 2001 only 160 apartments were disconnected from the central heating system, the number increased to 4000 in June 2003 and 5000 in November 2004; as a result of developments described above, by December 2005, 7950 out of the 9700 apartments were no longer connected to the centralized system maintained by the local administration.⁵⁵⁶ Disconnection came with three different options: either stay in the cold, set up (illegal and often deadly) improvisations (figure III.16), or install an apartment heating system.⁵⁵⁷ The latter was the only legal and safe way to make sure one's family did not freeze in the winter; it was also prohibitively expensive and few could afford it without borrowing money. In December 2003, out of approximately 4500 disconnected apartments, only 2600 had individual heating systems while the rest had to cope with "other" arrangements.⁵⁵⁸ Two years later, only 3500 apartments had individual systems



FIGURE III.16. "Boss, I found the solution for putting a stop to the improvised gas installations: we spare people from paying for what they consume."

Source: *Miovenii* 38, March 2003.

⁵⁵⁴ "Ca un sondaj de opinie." *Miovenii* 43, June 2003.

⁵⁵⁵ This was coupled with the Romanian government's Emergency Ordinance nr. 48/2004 stipulating the gradual cutting of subsidies for centralized heating systems to 0% by 2007.

⁵⁵⁶ There were at least two turning points that led to the soaring of disconnections. In December 2003, only 2350 tenants/owners had decided to renew their contracts with ADP, even though the requirement to do so had been announced as early as September that year, when ADP had taken over Regom's responsibilities of heating provision. Second, after the winter of 2004/5 there were no more questions as to whether the newly built neighborhood system would survive or collapse.

⁵⁵⁷ The local administration organized periodic raids to curb the proliferation of improvised heating systems. "Uneori ne procurăm moartea prin neglijență." *Miovenii* 38, March 2003; "Atenție la instalațiile de încălzire improvizate!" *Miovenii* 118, November 2006.

⁵⁵⁸ "Încălzirea termică (încălzirea locuințelor) la Mioveni a fost o problemă-handicap greu de depășit." *Miovenii* 52, December 2003.

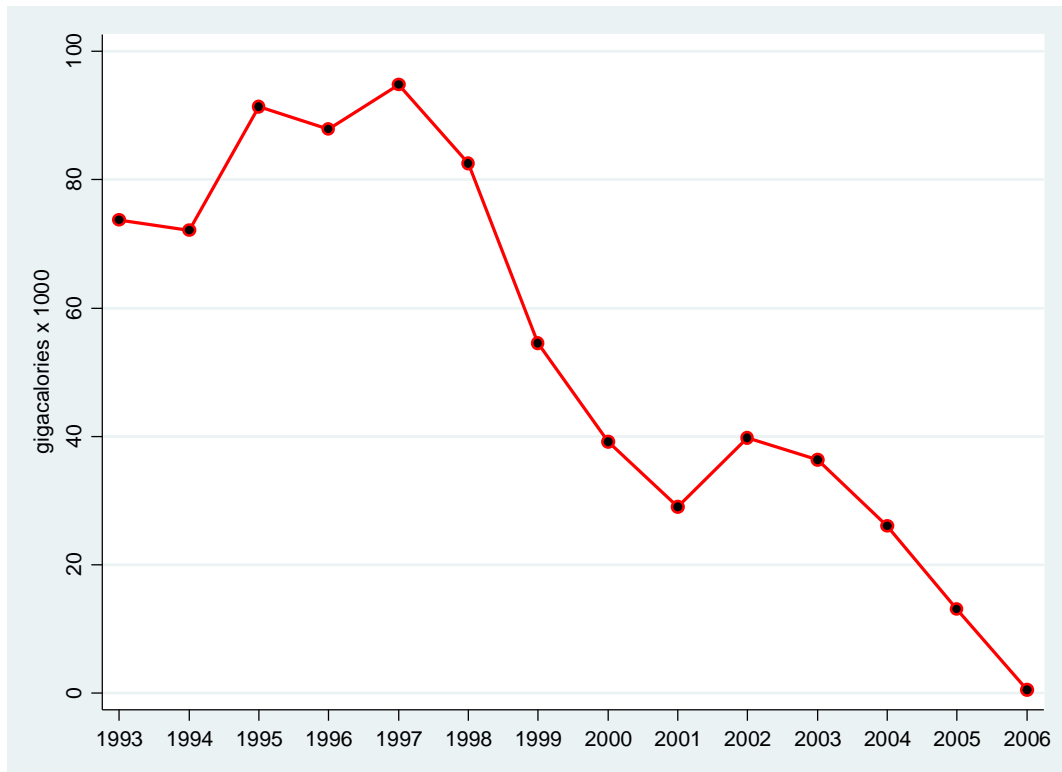


FIGURE III.17. Heating provided via centralized distribution systems in Mioveni, 1993–2006.
Data source: National Institute of Statistics.

installed and 1713 were still connected to the central heating system, which meant that 4500 apartments were disconnected and did not have individual heating systems.⁵⁵⁹ Starting with the 2002/3 winter, it was clear that the cumulated number of disconnections had rendered the new centralized system totally inefficient. Neighborhood stations were plagued by overcapacity and the inability to secure high enough demand, which compounded the problem of gas debt and, indeed, seemed to open up yet another vicious circuit of debt accumulation. Hopes that the disconnected would readily reconnect to the new system once it was up and running soon proved more than naïve and by January 2004 the local newspaper described the situation in terms of out-of-control “chain disconnections” (for which, of course, they blamed the by then practically defunct Regom).⁵⁶⁰

Nothing describes the unfolding of the heating debt problem until the crucial winters of 2003/4 and 2004/5, together with the underlying anxieties and dilemmas, as well as the enthusiasm brought by the possibility of finally having “normality” (Fehérváry 2013; Rausing 2002) within reach, better than an article published in the local newspaper in December 2003 in which the author triumphantly (and, once again, prematurely) announced that heating was “no longer a problem” and the wars had finally ended.

In the times when apartment buildings, necessary for the “tying to the land” of all those with positions of responsibility, were still being built in Mioveni, indoor temperatures were so high, because of the small number of buildings serviced by one substation; the windows could be kept open in the middle of the winter, to cool the atmosphere a bit.

⁵⁵⁹ “În județul Argeș, rata debransărilor este de 16,4%.” *Miovenii* 101, December 2005.

⁵⁶⁰ “Iarna 2004 e... pe buzunarele fiecăruia.” *Miovenii* 54, January 2004.

In time, the situation changed, as in the Mr. John joke: “How many degrees are there in the house? 15! And outside? 2!!! Open the window so the other two can come in!”

To blame was not only the “directive” setting the indoor temperature level to 18 degrees Celsius, but also the passing of time that led to the wear of various components of the heating system (pumps, convectors, pipes, insulations...).

His Majesty Time also brought novelties to the field: on the one hand, S.C. Automobile Dacia S.A. ceased producing the heating necessary for the population, thus taking its sole defining activity seriously: the production of automobiles; on the other hand, the gradual appearance on the internal market of building, staircase, and apartment heating systems. These two led to, first, the transformation of heating substations into gas heating stations and, second, even though they were initially very little or not at all known, individual systems little by little gaining the trust of both decision makers and the population.

And this is how time has proven generous, in the sense that it solves everything. This year the weather has also been—at least until now—unexpectedly soft. And even if winter comes into its own, there will be heat: the heating stations are ready to pump the heating agent according to one’s wishes, but also according to one’s purse. This assertion will be a shock to some, I am sure! It will shock those who still have not understood what the market economy means; and they are not just a few... They have not understood. Not that they do not want to, or that they do not have the capacity and the necessary knowledge! They have not understood, because the level of their families’ income has decreased day by day at a pace that easily surpasses that of the euro-leu exchange rate. Luckily, the Government aid for heating (and not only for heating) still exists for families with low incomes.

(...) But Time itself needs patience! It is important that we come out of this winter. There is heating, the grocery stores are full, Christmas is coming on its own along with all the holidays before and after, Easter will bring the warmth of spring, summer will be hot, autumn will bring

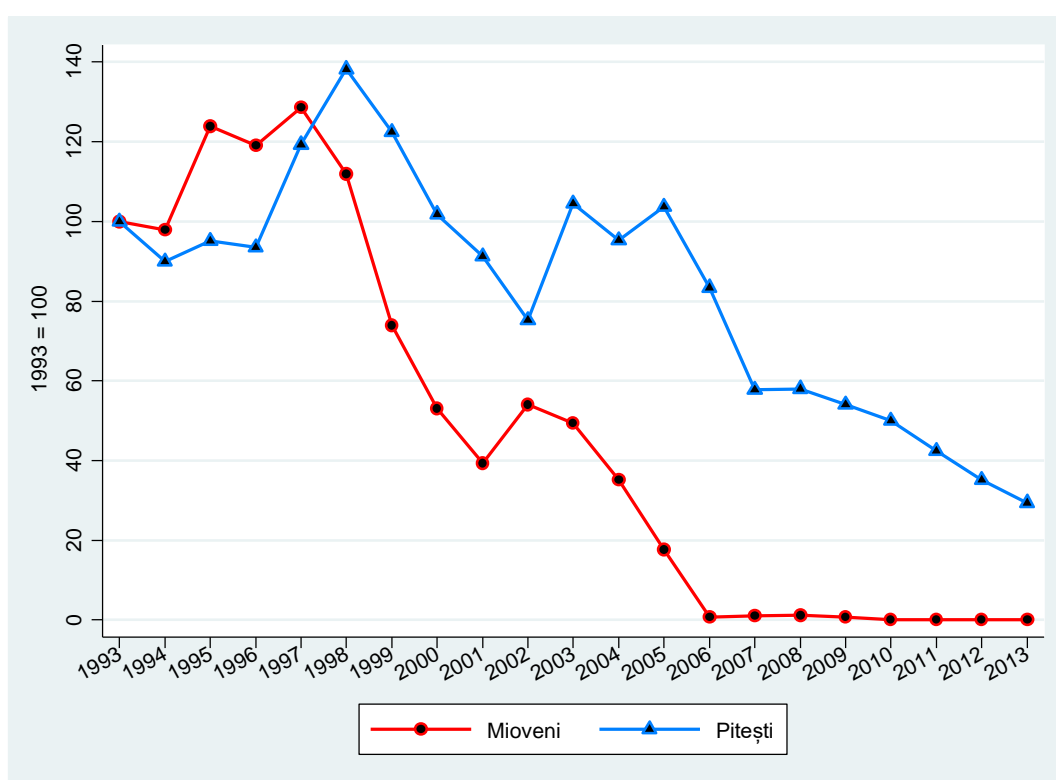


FIGURE III. 18. Heating provided via centralized distribution systems in Mioveni and Pitești, 1993–2013 (% , 1993=100).

Note: The much bigger city of Pitești was not directly dependent on any single industry—or, for that matter, on any industry at all, since heating systems were physically and economically separate from manufacturing sites. Data source: National Institute of Statistics. Author’s calculations.

the usual satisfactions, winter will come along with the elections, and until 2007 there is a long way to go! Sometimes there is still need for time, for patience, sometimes for sacrifice... Heating is no longer a problem.⁵⁶¹

Of course, heating was still a huge problem. And when, due to the massive number of disconnections, it stopped being a problem for good in the second half of the decade (figures III.17 and III.18), the accumulation of debts for water services started showing its teeth. The water debt had long co-existed with the heating debt, but, since it was a mere fraction of the latter, it could easily be ignored. As opposed to heating debts and even gas debts, water debts could no longer be shoved around, the alternative collective solutions were limited, and individual disconnections and improvisations brought infinitely more complications than they

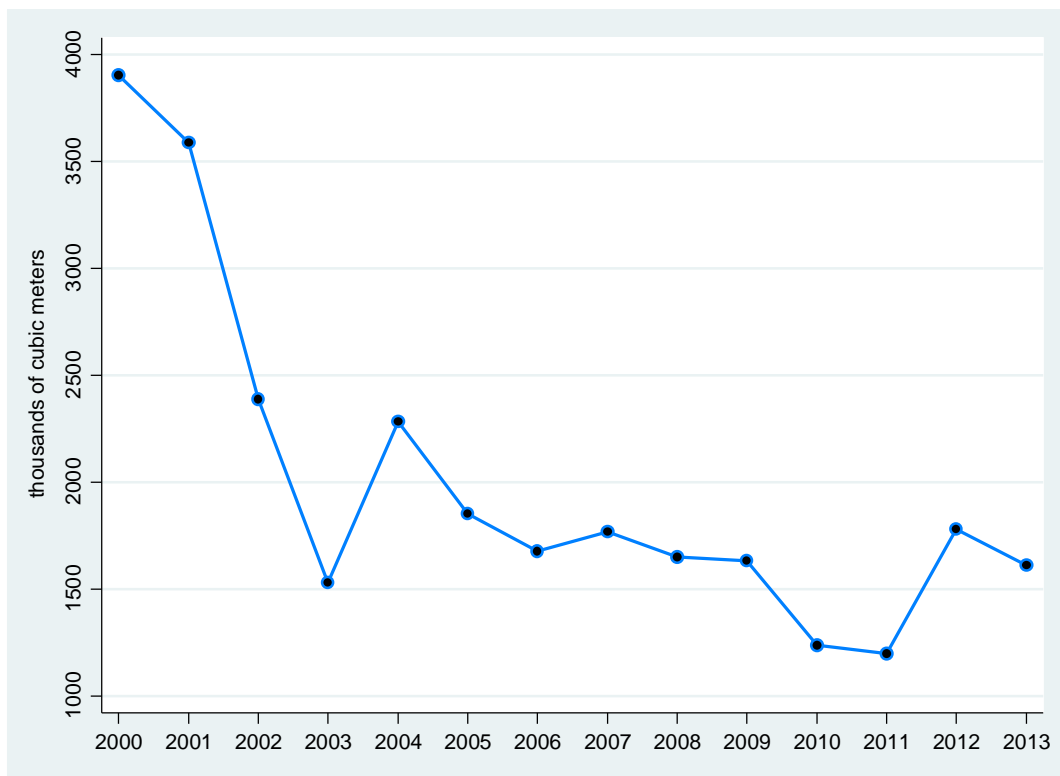


FIGURE III.19. Drinking water distributed to home users in Mioveni, 2000–2013 (thousands of m³). Data source: National Institute of Statistics.

did for heating provision. Hence, while water provision services registered a substantial decline in the early 2000s, in the end they did not have the same fate as centralized heating provision (figure III.19). The increased visibility of the accumulation of water debts put the final nail in the coffin of the debt controversies and debates of the early 2000s. Just as with the mutual blaming contests and the scrambling for alternative solutions, it pointed to what by then had appeared as the obviously and singularly guilty part: the shameless debtors—the ones who could pay, but did not want to. As the author of the above editorial insisted, the problem seemed to be much deeper than that of simple will. It concerned a more encompassing lack of understanding of the new conditions of the market economy or, in less euphemistic terms, of the new requirements for securing personal worth and membership in the community.

⁵⁶¹ “Căldura nu mai este o grijă pentru cartierul Mioveni.” *Miovenii* 52, December 2003. On the longing for “normality,” see “Despre... normalitate.” *Miovenii* 96, October 2005; “Normalitatea, încotro?” *Miovenii* 41, May 2003.

The meaning of debt

During the unfolding of these controversies, the problem of debt slowly emerged as the key mechanism in articulating a resolution to the existential dilemmas and ambivalences brought by privatization. Tackling large-scale indebtedness enabled a reconfiguration and reorientation of the old paternalist localism structured around the affirmation of the value of labor. Since the so-called craft of survival required a steady income, not running into debt became largely equivalent with maintaining one's job in the plant and, just as importantly, keeping up with the increased requirements of industrial discipline (see part II). A non-debtor was not just a worker, but a hard and "proactive" worker.⁵⁶² The non-debtor did not shy away from work, but considered it a moral duty to oneself and to the collective. Non-debtors were thus portrayed as benchmarks of morality in what were regarded as highly immoral times. Having debts became synonymous with being in moral debt—that is, not being able to fulfill one's fundamental duties toward oneself, one's family, and one's community. That the continued existence of the community was highly uncertain and seemed to be facing constant threats only strengthened the heroic aura of non-debtors. In this equation, the craft of survival was necessary for ensuring not only the biological continuity of the craftsman's person, but also the physical and moral continuity of the collective; by way of this, it also secured the personal worth of the individual. With most debtors, things went the opposite way.

Despite its bursting on the scene in the post-privatization era of rupture between town and plant, the debt problem resulted in the reassertion of the material and moral continuity of their ties; from both points of view, the image of dependence of the local community on the plant became as sharp as ever. Furthermore, dealing with debt allowed Costescu and his collaborators to strengthen their paternalism (as judges and executioners of all those who committed the crime of accumulating debt out of their own will) along with their localism (as brave defenders against external enemies). As I will show in the next chapter, the debt problem also facilitated the continuation of the project of achieving a local version of urban modernity in Mioveni.⁵⁶³ In coming to grips with the demise of collective solutions to the heating problem and accepting the individual one as ultimately necessary, Mioveni's self-ascribed elites shifted, albeit somewhat grudgingly, from a strong affirmation of the ideal of a social modernity incumbent upon the universal coverage of urban services such as heating and running water to an overtly exclusionary one in which individual heating arrangements constituted the path to civilization.⁵⁶⁴ In other words, the accumulation of debt paved the way for a rethinking of the political and material project of the urban community in response to the organizational challenges raised by privatization along very particular lines: if the imperative of inclusion

⁵⁶² As mentioned before, this applied just as well to people in search of a job. For a comparison between the fate of the proactive worker and that of his passive neighbor, see "De ce ni s-au năruit până când și speranțele [sic]?" *Miovenii* 22, February 2002.

⁵⁶³ The salience of heating and hot water indebtedness in Mioveni's everyday life and the story of debt accumulation and service provision problems feature relatively prominently in Radu Aldulescu's (2012) excellent novel *Cronicile genocidului*. Set in the fictional town of Frăsineni, but inspired by the author's experience of living of Mioveni, the novel depicts the troubled state of the town in the early 2000s, the repeated attempts at coming to grips with its decaying amenities, failing infrastructures, and chaotic public life, while establishing links between these issues and the broader questions of economic restructuring and urban propriety.

⁵⁶⁴ Compare, for example, "Căldura noastră, cea de toate iernile viitoare." *Miovenii* 33, December 2002 with "Iarna 2004 e... pe buzunarele fiecăruia" *Miovenii* 54, January 2004.

springing from the struggles of the early 1990s had driven it before, exclusion, backed by battle-hardened economic and moral arguments, would now become paramount.

Considerable costs had to be paid for hegemonic rearticulation in the new era in which the plant could no longer act as the town's "mother."⁵⁶⁵ It was not the Regom directors, nor the building administrators, nor the opposition in the local council who bore the material and symbolic brunt of this rearticulation. It was the composite figure of the internal enemy—the jobless "buyouter," shamelessly indebted, morally decrepit, incapable of understanding the workings of the new market economy, and thus predisposed to naively fall into its traps—who ended up being excluded with stringent righteousness and indefinitely damned to perdition (figure III.20). As I will show next, by refusing to fulfill the basic moral duties toward oneself and

toward the collective, the debtor not only refused work and household discipline, but also, to use the words of the local sociologist quoted above (pp. 299-300), insisted on "refusing the city". This time around, however, the town's "representative figures" no longer had to worry about drawing the debtor toward public life. On the contrary, the cluster of figures which the debtor articulated was to be marginalized and, as much as possible, removed entirely from the town's public life.



FIGURE III.20. "Toward the Inn of Perdition": "There are many like him in our town, in a situation of moral and material disequilibrium. After wrongheadedly spending the money from...the buyout, he went, inevitably, on the path... of despair."

Source: *Miovenii* 58, March 2004.

⁵⁶⁵ "Supraviețuirea este... o meserie?" *Miovenii* 25, May 2002.

CHAPTER 15

DRINKING IN TIMES OF PASSIVE REVOLUTION

War of position: the linchpin of public space

Many wars were waged in Mioveni in the first decade of the new millennium. It was not just the debt wars, but marketplace wars, noise wars, dog wars, sidewalk wars, barroom wars, school wars, apartment building wars, staircase wars, public transportation wars, or parking space wars, together with a plethora of other issues around which shorter battles were fought. All concerned either public services (such as heating, water, or transportation) or the shape of and behavior in public space. Many concerned newly emerging social asymmetries, and thus appeared novel; others seemed more radicalized versions of conflicts sparked by the troubles of small town urbanization under state socialism and urban decline in the first postsocialist decade. All were structured more or less the same: the town's administrative and intellectual elites and "good" citizens on one side fighting against a diverse crowd of "bad" citizens on the other. This, of course, was the ultimate alignment of the debt wars, which, due to their urgency, huge stakes, and dramatic outcomes, provided the paradigmatic interpretation according to which other wars were to be waged by the local elite in their pursuit of their self-ascribed civilizing mission. Debt was tied to the value of labor and the family, to moral character and to the ability to fulfill one's obligations toward oneself and the collective. From the standpoint of local elites, the debt wars shifted the terms of battle from the imperative of persuading the enemy into defecting to the necessity of marginalizing, coercing, and eventually eliminating perceived adversaries. The failed attempts at solving the debt problem made it clear that full membership and inclusion were no longer on the table for everyone and the survival of the community had to be accomplished at the expense of those who could not fulfill the criteria of membership imposed by the way reality was changing after the privatization of the plant.⁵⁶⁶ So was to be the case with all other contentious issues sparked by trying to come to grips with the mutations of everyday urban life.

The picture that emerges from those years is that of "a general scenario of conflict and crisis" (Hall et al. 1978:20) composed of disparate and not always easily relatable events and phenomena whose depiction in official public discourse nonetheless bore an obvious family resemblance. If debt did decisively catalyze hegemonic rearticulation, this did not happen on its own and rather took place by way of numerous and repeated battles fought over a multitude of strategic sites—the marketplace, local bars, the street, the apartment buildings, etc.⁵⁶⁷ As

⁵⁶⁶ This entailed an evaluation of the "degree of civilization" of a certain person or practice. As we saw in the case of the accumulation of heating debts, what "civilization" actually meant and what threshold had to be passed for things to be considered unacceptable were not stable notions and changed over time along with the circumstances and the outcomes of different battles.

⁵⁶⁷ By "strategic sites" I mean both important locations in geographical space as well as key institutional locations, as implied by the Gramscian notion of "war of position." I thus follow Gramsci's understanding of the relation between waging war over these sites and the articulation of hegemony: "War of position, in politics, is the concept of hegemony" (quoted in Thomas 2009:157). This is why I call these sites "strategic" and why my evoking of the

opposed to the workplace and the family, which were directly tied to the problem of debt and the management of financial resources, these sites were connected to debt primarily because their associated practices were interpreted through the lens of moral character and the duties one had to fulfill to be entitled to recognition as a member of the community. They thus put public space in the spotlight as the missing link between work and private life and provided an extra set of criteria according to which one's moral solvency could be assessed. The equivalences drawn between these multiple sites completed the portrait of the entitled member of the community. Apart from the primordial characteristics of the non-debtor (see the previous chapter), the entitled citizen also behaved adequately in public space, did not espouse any form of unruly or uncivil behavior, and, just as importantly, proved himself (and, more rarely, herself) to be an active collaborator in the collective project of building a proper town—s/he was not only disciplined, but also willing to discipline others. The entitled citizen was a composite figure made up of the good worker, the proper family man, the heroic non-debtor, the polite neighbor, and the civil urbanite. Behind each of these lay a thick cluster of themes associated with a set of geographic and institutional sites where deep trenches were dug and protracted wars were waged.

Drinking rituals and the right to the city

These themes were not given equal weight: debt accumulation was the primary issue and it trumped everything else; some were more salient than others and a few spanned multiple sites and encompassed more than just one type of anxiety. The drinking of alcohol was one such central issue, as it spanned the boundaries of life at work, at home and in town. The 1990s had seen not only the perpetuation of drinking patterns that came along with state socialist urbanization but also a significant proliferation of alcohol consumption. This had less to do with the development of alcoholism and pathological forms of drinking than with that of ritual drinking.⁵⁶⁸ Especially for adult males, drinking and its associated practices were constitutive for everyday interaction rituals in public space. The moralizing campaign against alcohol drinking that picked up in the early 2000 originated primarily on the side of those who did not take part in these rituals and who had until then been increasingly marginalized and situationally dominated in public space.⁵⁶⁹ It gained strength by tapping into several sources of insecurity and by bringing together struggles over multiple strategic sites.

picture of “a general scenario of conflict and crisis” is not merely impressionistic. What it all added up to was the establishing of a “chain of equivalences” (Laclau and Mouffe 2001) between these sites. The most visible way in which this chain of equivalences was forged was the compounding of different tests of morality in assessing an individual's moral character: the debtor was also an alcoholic, also rude to others, also a bad parent, etc.

⁵⁶⁸ Ritual drinking is “constructive,” in Mary Douglas's (1987) terms. While it is true that formal rituals declined in the first postsocialist decade, Mioveni witnessed a mushrooming of less formal rituals pertaining to everyday sociable situations. Scholars emphasizing ritual decline during the hard times of the 1990s (e.g., Creed 2002) operate with a very specific and circumscribed understanding of ritual—by and large, the more formal rituals pertaining to the functioning of kinship. Here I follow the Goffmanian understanding of everyday interaction as ritual. This approach, which has been given a recent boost by Randall Collins (2004), allows for a more nuanced understanding of ritual growth and decline after 1989.

⁵⁶⁹ On “situational stratification” and strategies of struggle for those who are dominated situationally, see Collins (2004:chapters 7 and 8).

Labor control and the enforcing of boundaries

It took almost a decade of struggle and the adoption of increasingly harsh measures for the new plant management to unequivocally and more or less definitively separate work in the plant from the drinking of alcohol. To be sure, this was an old problem, dating back to industrialization under state socialism.⁵⁷⁰ Before privatization, drinking and industrial labor were intertwined both spatially and temporally; one could drink not only after or before work but also during work hours within the plant. Despite apparently harsh measures taken by state socialist authorities to curb the consumption of alcohol at work and in the proximity of spaces of production, before 1989 drinking was prevalent both on the job and in its immediate spatiotemporal vicinities.⁵⁷¹ The factory “mock bureaucracy” (see chapters 6 and 9) operated here as well, and alcohol consumption on the job was a staple feature of factory work experience for workers and TESA personnel alike (figure III.21). From this standpoint, there was no significant distinction to be had between the socialist era and the first postsocialist decade. While the curtailing of alcohol consumption was targeted during the 1990s in the struggles over labor control (see chapter 8), as long as workers retained a considerable degree of autonomy on the shop floor and insofar as management still encountered severe difficulties in imposing discipline, drinking on the job remained a relatively routine affair for many.⁵⁷²

The divesting of state socialist restrictions on alcohol consumption in the 1990s allowed for the unrestricted mushrooming of drinking establishments outside the plant gates, from where workers could easily acquire drinks at all times—before, after, but also during work. If some of these places were solidly built and looked like they were there to stay, many were nothing more than makeshift barracks meant to quickly serve a burgeoning demand. The difference from the pre-89 era was, then, that drinking was now out in the open and increased in both scale and visibility, notwithstanding the displays of outrage by supporters of staunch industrial discipline. Since drinking on the job depended on a having the time and space to socialize in the plant and was possible only with the agreement of shop-floor supervisors, it was progressively curtailed after privatization: speedups, patrolling security guards, and the ever observant shop-floor supervision rendered sociability on the job scarce and drinking impossible. If the joining of foremen and workers in off-work drinking rituals had been a widespread pattern of sociable interaction established during state socialism (see Beck 1985; Kideckel 1985), the younger UEL bosses promoted especially since the late 2000s to bolster work discipline (see part II) no longer engaged in such routine social interaction with workers they supervised. This change was part of a broader process in which low-level supervisors and

⁵⁷⁰ Kideckel (1985) describes changing drinking patterns as industrialization and urbanization progressed.

⁵⁷¹ For accounts of authorities’ attempts and failures at curbing the consumption of alcohol at work, see Radio Free Europe Research (1987) and Tulbure (2010; 2012); for a framing of alcohol consumption within the broader question of “violence”, see Morar-Vulcu (2015). Notably, while workers ignored or circumvented measures taken under the banner of work safety and productivity, this happened according to a well-defined ethic that castigated excessive drinking—being drunk and out of control on the job was not tolerated among workers.

⁵⁷² Alcohol functioned as a chief currency in the exchanges of things and favors across the networks that spanned the shop floor. Overly zealous cadres bent on exposing such practices readily denounced them as immoral and inimical to the proper functioning of production. Of course, this made no sense whatsoever from a worker’s perspective. “Unde dai și unde crapă.” *Autoturism* 4, August 1992. Just like with parts trafficking, on the other hand, accusations of drinking on the job could just as well be used by workers against abusive supervisors. “Învățămintele unei epistole.” *Autoturism* 16, April 1993.

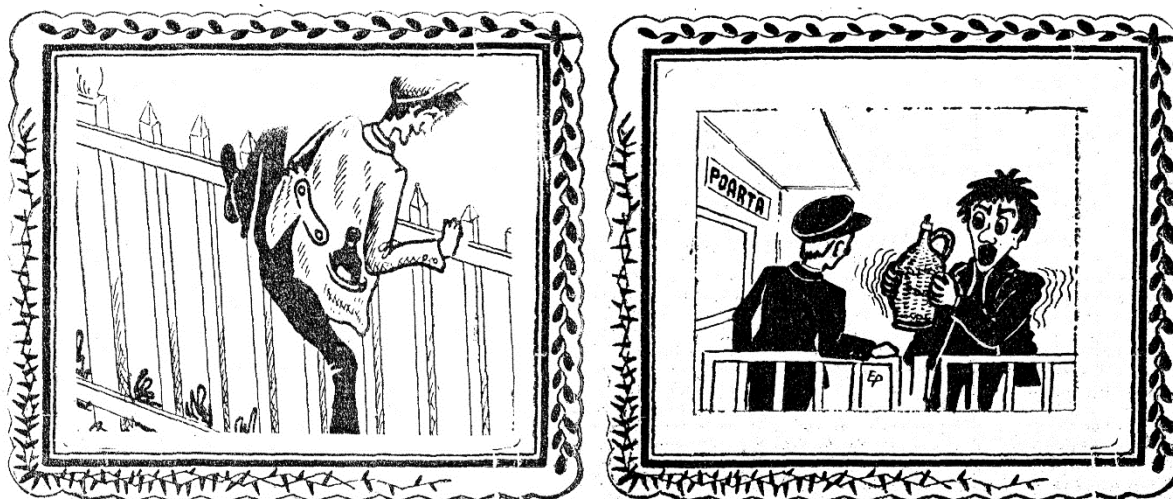


FIGURE III.21. “Spiridon Stelică, worker in the Estafette department jumps over the fence during the work schedule so he can get himself something to drink. What does the management of the department think about this?”; “Pink wine is good when drank in the evening, a bit late (especially on second shift) seems to say Nicolae Negrei—welder in the 506 department, who repeatedly consumes alcoholic drinks at work. Why don’t his work comrades take a firm attitude against this drunkard?”

Sources: *Avântul. Organ al Comitetului de Partid și al Comitetului Sindicatului din Uzina de Automobile Pitești* 228, 22 January 1974; 229, 31 January 1974.

workers became socially and physically distant, which was both determining for and determined by the strengthening of hierarchical control on the shop floor. Encompassing this change, well-cemented work groups were dismantled as a result of the restructuring process, dealing a serious blow to the social infrastructure of work-related drinking rituals.⁵⁷³

In such circumstances, drinking was pushed to the backstages of production, outside the plant gates, where it proved much more difficult to regulate than plant managers might have wanted it to be. Drinks could no longer be sold in the plant parking lots, but management had no direct way of restricting the sale of alcohol in many of the spaces that had popped up as drinking hubs in the 1990s. The strategy ultimately adopted aimed at restricting the demand and supply of alcohol by campaigning against drinking both on and off the job. Workers were permanently reminded of the dangers of alcohol for work safety and productivity and of the fact that the ones who dared drink before work risked losing their jobs—a dire prospect in the context of a tightening labor market. The decision to set up survey alcohol tests for workers as they entered the plant weighed heavily in pushing the consumption of alcohol outside the plant and its immediate surroundings and into the neighborhood.

No matter how hated alcohol tests were by workers, they proved extremely effective at disciplining them into being much more careful with drinking outside working hours. During my time in the field, I heard many stories of workers losing either a significant part of their wages or, in the worst cases, their jobs and I witnessed countless debates on the alcohol test, its draconic criteria, and devastating consequences if the result came out positive. Opinions were always divided as to how much one could actually drink and how long before going to

⁵⁷³ Durand and Hatzfeld (2002:91-92) describe the profoundly negative consequences labor process rationalization and the tightening of labor control had on drinking rituals among Peugeot workers in France. Dealing with the same development, Michel Pialoux (1992) offers the best accounts of the manner in which alcohol consumption went from being a core element of work relations to an entirely marginal—if not entirely nonexistent—one. Pialoux also examines the implications for workers’ sociability and solidarity on and off the job.

work one had to stop drinking in order to stay out of trouble. Rumors and stories of people getting caught and losing their jobs enjoyed wide circulation. Many workers cut their drinking habits short and refused to hang out over drinks for too long; others stopped drinking or restricted their consumption of alcohol to special occasions; still others opted to enjoy their after-work drinks on their own, in the privacy of their homes, where the lack of company prevented escalation and publicity. The alcohol test was eventually removed as a result of the negotiations for the 2013 collective labor contract, during which union representatives campaigned against the “militarization” of the plant and workers demanded its elimination during that year’s wildcat strike (see chapter 1). For the vitality of drinking rituals, however, this success proved largely symbolic and was not accompanied by any tangible rejuvenation.

Outside their jurisdiction proper, management put pressure on the local administration to remove drinking establishments located near the plant. Local officials set their sights on the removal of the so-called “Big market [piața Big]”—a dilapidated area close to gate 3, where some workers still gather especially after work around drinks bought from the several barracks encircling a relatively wide empty space where people drink and talk with friends and coworkers (figure III.22). According to reports in the local newspaper, the Big market was kept under police watch while the local administration devised strategies of “modernization” by selling or leasing the space and eliminating the existing sellers.⁵⁷⁴ Despite their insistence on describing the area as filthy, chaotic, “uncivilized” and harboring illegal

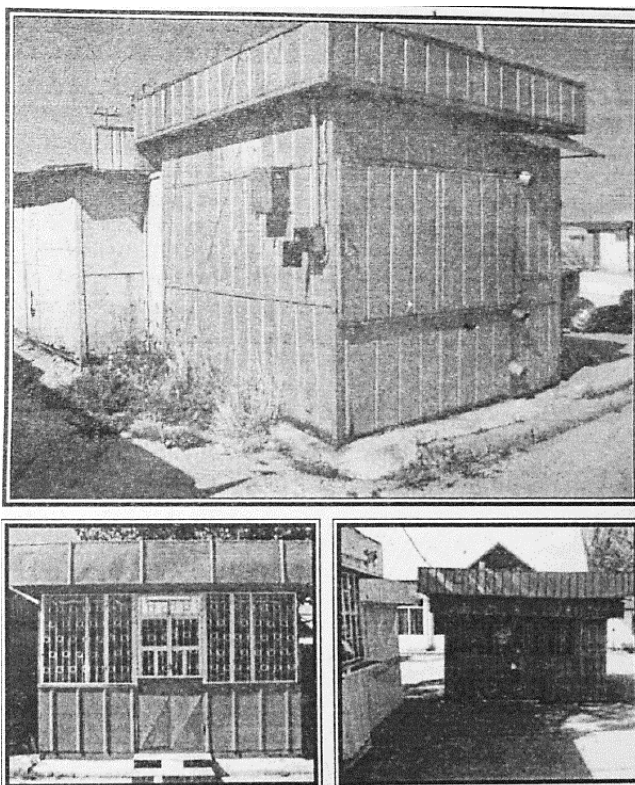


FIGURE III.22. Makeshift drinks shops at the Big market.

Source: *Miovenii* 97, October 2005.

activities, in the end there was little local officials could really do about it. By the early 2010s, they had still not managed to overcome issues related to jurisdiction and lack of coordination in taking decisions about the Big market.⁵⁷⁵ This was no big failure on their part, however, since the Big market was only one site out of many affected by attempts at regulating alcohol consumption. The curtailment of drinking rituals in Mioveni proved to be a drawn out process that expanded beyond the surroundings of the plant gates and emerged as an effect of the

⁵⁷⁴ “Așteptăm investitori cu surse sigure și garanții deopotrivă.” *Miovenii* 91, July 2005. “Măsuri menite să aducă... normalitatea.” *Miovenii* 64, June 2004. “Proprietăți cu temelii... pasagere.” *Miovenii* 97, October 2005.

⁵⁷⁵ “Raport și proiect de hotărâre inițiat de Primarul Orașului Mioveni privind interzicerea comercializării, desfacerii și consumului de băuturi alcoolice și bere în zona Platformei Dacia.” Minutes of the Mioveni Local Council, October 27, 2011. “Georgescu vrea să pună dop la sticlele cu alcool de la poarta Daciei.” *ProArges*, December 17, 2013. Online: <http://www.proarges.ro/georgescu-vrea-sa-puna-dop-la-sticlele-cu-alcool-de-la-poarta-daciei.html>.

alignment of goals on the part of the plant management and the town's administrative and intellectual elites.⁵⁷⁶

The imperative of urban civilization

In the summer of 2001 the local administration demolished several improvised drinking spaces located behind the town's "Dacia" marketplace. This was hailed in the local newspaper as an entirely legitimate and necessary thing to do. Much like the ones at the Big market, the makeshift taverns near the town's market were described as ugly and unhygienic. In the latter case, the aesthetic critique was compounded by the proximity of the marketplace: the presence of highly visible drinking spaces near one of the most circulated places in town was said to give an image of uncivilized and inadequate mixing—of "promiscuity," as some insisted.⁵⁷⁷ This was doubled by a moral critique of men's alcohol-induced passivity in front of life's problems and disrespect toward their families. Demolishing the "winter stables" behind the market and replacing them with a modern parking lot thus promised to bolster the town's aesthetics and functionality, while also disciplining its inhabitants (figure III.23).

Such was the equation of civilization as pursued by the local elite and repeated incessantly in the local newspaper: building a proper town involved new investments in the built environment coupled with the transformation of people's "mentalities" in such a way as to be able to properly use the amenities offered. As discussed already, Costescu's administration encountered huge problems with maintaining existing services and facilities, not to mention keeping up with investment goals. Alongside these issues, there was much to be done to improve the urban aesthetics of Mioveni. It was not just the piling of garbage and the decrepit infrastructures, but also various activities taking place in public space that did not seem to fit the image of modern urbanity. Stray dogs, people fixing or washing their cars in the parking lots next to apartment buildings, others washing carpets or hanging clothes on balconies, children playing football in the street, youth socialization around building staircases together with a host of other issues were all seen as examples of improper mixing in public space. Adding to the list, old troubles relating to living



FIGURE III.23. “The drunkard’s mourning: The torn down ‘winter stables’ sometimes go around me / (The frequented bars bear the stigma of... being crappy) / Where are you, blue nights with drunken moon / Withered happy moments, how well it used to be... once!”

Source: *Miovenii* 15, August 2001.

⁵⁷⁶ It was only relatively late, in the second half of the 2000s, after Costescu's death, that cooperation between the management of the plant and the administration of the town in regard to the alcohol consumption became explicit.

⁵⁷⁷ “Avem produse și negustori, ducem lipsa managerului.” *Miovenii* 24, April 2002. The Big market was not a real marketplace and did not serve the town in any way.

in apartment buildings constructed under state socialism persisted: the lack of maintenance of communal spaces, noise, or difficulties in securing privacy also constituted heated topics of critique and objects of intervention.⁵⁷⁸ The consumption of alcohol in particular was depicted as exacerbating these problems. Drunken neighbors could not be counted upon to not throw their garbage out the window and to try to maintain the green spaces around apartment buildings. Since alcohol was allegedly the main cause of loud arguing and fighting between family members, drunken neighbors constantly made details of their private lives public, to the dismay of their sober, etiquette-abiding neighbors.⁵⁷⁹ The ritual drinking of alcohol had a part to play in this scheme of civilization, so it needed to be put in its proper place. Overall, civilization meant public space had to be regimented and private space had to be protected.

Debt was, of course, the number one issue in these regards, and alcohol consumption was tied to it in more than one way. Indebtedness and poverty were visible enough to constitute aesthetic problems in themselves, but in this case moral judgment came before the judgment of taste. Though it was certainly acknowledged that in times of hardship alcohol offered a much needed escape from the immense stressfulness of getting by, it could also prove dangerous. Authorities commonly depicted the proliferation of drinking as determined by the lack of options in life, as an understandable reaction to deepening hardship. Adding to this therapeutic value, it could serve more immediate material goals, since the all-necessary jobs, services, and information were oftentimes exchanged over drinks. This notwithstanding, the risk of severe degradation of physical and moral health (and of family life and of society) always loomed in the background.⁵⁸⁰ Stories of alcohol abuse leading to the most grievous forms of destitution (losing one's home, ruining the future of one's children etc.) were given the widest circulation possible.⁵⁸¹ As a general principle, alcohol was presented as increasing the vulnerability of the already vulnerable, of the victims of the times.⁵⁸² In such cases, it appeared to be nothing more than a corrupting temptation, one of the many traps accompanying the new market economy.

It was different with so-called "non-social cases." For debtors who did not meet the criteria of victimhood, the consumption of alcohol only added to their shamelessness. Regular drinking was, in this case, irrational and undeserved. It was immoral because of its possibly disastrous effects for one's livelihood and because it prevented individuals from fulfilling their most urgent duties as family men and citizens. In a situation in which money was extremely scarce, anything beyond the basic means of survival (and alcohol was certainly not on the list) was depicted as luxury. Responsible husbands, fathers, neighbors and citizens had no problem in choosing whether "to fight liquor or life," giving up on unnecessary expenses like alcohol

⁵⁷⁸ On the problems and struggles that came with trying to make a life in state socialist apartment buildings, see Reid (2006) and Harris (2006; 2012:chapter 7).

⁵⁷⁹ "Vecinii." *Miovenii* 5, October 2000.

⁵⁸⁰ "Mai fuge omul..." *Miovenii* 31, October 2002.

⁵⁸¹ "Între OK și mișto." *Miovenii* 5, October 2000. "Caz social." *Miovenii* 60, April 2004. "Cutremur social în familia Luca." *Miovenii* 76, October 2004. "Consumul excesiv de alcool împinge destine în derivă." *Miovenii* 94, September 2005. Fears of the deleterious effects of alcohol consumption were exacerbated by the massive expansion of the informal economy surrounding the production and sale of counterfeit alcohol in the 1990s (see Chelcea, Lățeș, and Mateescu 2004; Tulbure 2006).

⁵⁸² Alcohol abuse on the part of these "social cases" further justified the direct intervention of public authorities into their private lives. The internal regulations of the new social housing building adopted at the end of 2004 included strict regulations against the consumption of alcohol within its premises and those who came home drunk were not allowed to enter the building.

or cigarettes to pay the bills and put food on the table.⁵⁸³ Doing otherwise implied the reckless spending of financial resources, the wasting of time, and the willful cultivation of passivity and defeatism (figure III.24). For the editors of the local newspaper, things were quite simple: “Why is it that month after month (especially when the utility bills are easier to pay) the Ionescu family from apartment building X remains in debt? Because Mr. Ionescu, each and every evening, is at the corner bar with booze [*cinzeacă*] under his nose.”⁵⁸⁴

Debt and alcohol went hand in hand in connecting work and private life. Alcohol was said to impede one's duties as a worker, husband, and father, and sociable drinking was portrayed as a refusal of these duties. In attempting to restrict the consumption of alcohol, the town's officials and intellectuals thus found allies both in managers from the plant and in the workers' wives. Though conflicts within the family over the impact alcohol consumption on household budgets and everyday relations between spouses had a long history dating back to the expansion of industrial wage labor during state socialism (see Tulbure 2010), their coupling with debt meant they now received considerable public attention. Alcohol was said to spark trouble in the family (figure III.25): it incapacitated adult males and aggravated the plight of women, who had to deal not only with

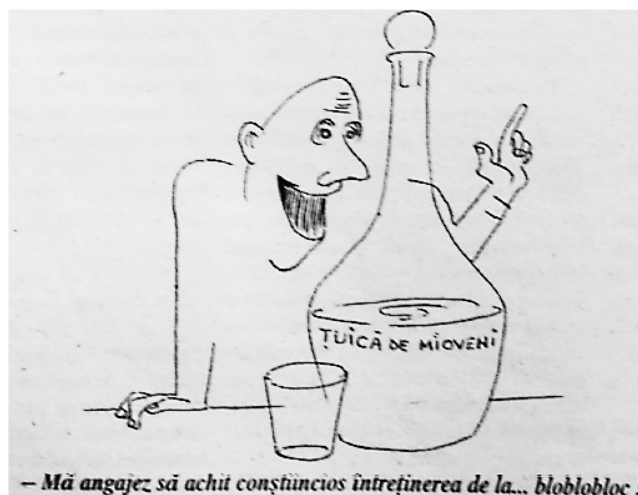


FIGURE III.24. Vows made over a bottle of “Mioveni brandy”: “I commit myself to conscientiously pay the utility... bilbilbills!”

Source: *Miovenii* 43, June 2003.



FIGURE III.25. “The drunkard, coming home late from the pub, tests his wife’s state of mind before entering, with cunning and with... his hat.”

Source: *Miovenii* 57, February 2004.

poverty but also with indolent and oftentimes violent husbands.⁵⁸⁵ In the spring of 2003 a strategy aimed at combating domestic violence was launched by the local administration in collaboration with its usual institutional allies (the local schools, church, police, and health clinic). The editors of the local newspaper emphasized the paramount necessity of such a strategy, since no less than two thirds of the families living in town were plagued by domestic violence; they stressed that all of these cases were in one way or another

⁵⁸³ “Speranța—socialul de lângă noi.” *Miovenii* 31, October 2002.

⁵⁸⁴ “Pentru ce și pentru că.” *Miovenii* 24, April 2002. In an interview for the local newspaper, a newly appointed Regom director claimed that people must have had money for utilities since bars in town had plenty of customers “Barurile sunt pline de consumatori, iar magazinele din oraș au clienți care cumpără.” *Miovenii* 15, August 2001.

⁵⁸⁵ “Femeia între... palma sărăciei și pumnii bărbatului.” *Miovenii* 25, May 2002.

related to alcohol consumption and that dealing with domestic violence implied first dealing with the proliferation of drinking.⁵⁸⁶ Regardless of the factual solidity of these assertions, the immediate implication was the enrolling of women and struggles within the family in a collective project of restricting the consumption of alcohol.⁵⁸⁷

Infringements on social reproduction

Apart from the relationship between spouses, drinking cast a long shadow over the much more sensitive issue of children's fortunes and upbringing. This could be summarized in quite straightforward terms: the family has been one of the major victims of the generalized confusion accompanying the new market economy; the father has lost his job and has become an alcoholic, the mother can't keep up with prices and expenses, and the children see no future in education and would rather take up after their neighbors who are either engaged in petty criminal activities or have migrated abroad.⁵⁸⁸ The bifurcation of life trajectories and the series of openings and closures on the labor market (see part II) were tragic occurrences from the standpoint of collective social reproduction. Privatization, unemployment, job insecurity and the continued contraction of demand for industrial labor meant that social and cultural reproduction could no longer be taken for granted. From "tomorrow's shift," workers' children had become "tomorrow's unemployed."⁵⁸⁹ There was little reason for parents to believe their children would inherit their industrial jobs, along with their penchant for discipline and respectability. Similarly, there was little reason for children to look up to their parents when it came to thinking about the future, since it was increasingly obvious that old lessons no longer applied (figure III.26). From this perspective, at the beginning of the 2000s things looked quite desperate: "Hunger... low wages... buyouts... fear of the future... destruction... the death of the town... what will children do?"⁵⁹⁰

These worries fueled an obsession with the upbringing of the younger generations that was second only to the one concerning debt. The

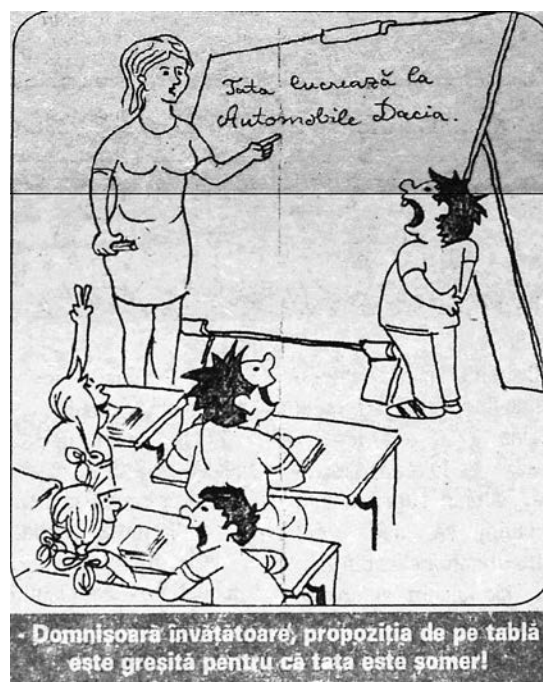


FIGURE III.26. "My dad works at Automobile Dacia". 'Miss teacher, the sentence on the board is wrong, because my father is unemployed!'"

Source: *Miovenii* 17, October 2001.

⁵⁸⁶ "Strategie pentru combaterea violenței din familie." *Miovenii* 37, March 2003. "Slalom printre cazuri." *Miovenii* 39, April 2003. "Alcoolul și violența—viciu și consecință." *Miovenii* 70, September 2004.

⁵⁸⁷ As I could observe during my time in the field, it is quite common for women to impose severe restrictions on their husbands' drinking. Many men stay for drinks after work only until their wives come home; others drink only when their wives are out of town or with their explicit permission. On any but the most exceptional of circumstances, drinking alcohol in public is taboo for women.

⁵⁸⁸ "Însemnări." *Miovenii* 5, October 2000.

⁵⁸⁹ "Joaca la întâmplare printre blocuri." *Miovenii* 2, July 2000. "Școala s-a sfârșit... dar nu și grijile." *Miovenii* 14, July 2001.

⁵⁹⁰ "Există, totuși, cineva." *Miovenii* 14, July 2001.

question of children's futures compounded the existential dilemmas brought by privatization: the value of industrial labor, the identity of workers as a collective, and the need to maintain a minimal degree of hope were all put under duress. With a present that looked incredibly bleak, deferring the promises of a coming normality was easier to live with if adults' hopes could hinge on their children's prospects for a better life. After their parents and now themselves, workers found it difficult to accept the possibility of their children becoming yet another "generation of sacrifice"; they were supposed to vindicate their parents' suffering, not repeat their misfortunes.⁵⁹¹

Young generations were therefore said to be immensely vulnerable and required increased attention and protection from the perils of the market economy. Claiming that hardship and poverty corrupted family life, local elites took it upon themselves to act as watchmen of the upbringing of children, who were placed under the triple tutelage of the family, the school, and the community.⁵⁹² Just like with all things considered problematic or lacking, proper citizens were called upon to collaborate in securing a proper future for the town's children. The question of children's futures quickly morphed into a permanent preoccupation with education as the only viable alternative to the disappearing prospects of manual factory labor. Though this was congruent with the views of local elites, most of whom had university degrees and intellectual aspirations, it was much more difficult for workers and their children to go against the odds by making substantial investments in education.⁵⁹³ Dissatisfaction with students' and parents' lack of discipline and failure to come to grips with the new educational requirements abounded in the pages of the local newspaper, alongside a considerable number of stories of success. In this way, the school was rendered as another strategic site of struggle; as in the family, here as well alcohol posed problems for the proper education of new generations.

Children were regarded as vulnerable everywhere and the school made no exception. In the early 2000s, the Colibași vocational school from the outskirts of town had become



FIGURE III.27. An inebriated schoolboy surrounded by empty glasses of "milk": "Struck by a devastating hunger: 'Two more and I'm going...'" Source: *Miovenii* 31, October 2002.

⁵⁹¹ "Iarna din sufletul școlarului." *Miovenii* 16, September 2001. "Cum s-a născut Iisus în ieslea cea săracă." *Miovenii* 20, December 2001. "Ferește-mă doamne de colegi că de dușmani mă feresc singur." *Miovenii* 24, April 2002.

⁵⁹² "Școala, în situații de criză și căutări." *Miovenii* 89, June 2005. The local newspaper periodically presented cases of irresponsible parents as prime examples of the new social pathologies.

⁵⁹³ The mechanisms behind this alignment of aspirations and perceived odds, the difficulties encountered by the misalignment of dispositions and changing life chances, and the differential ability to reconvert available forms of capital into necessary ones are discussed in detail by Bourdieu (1974; 1984:chapter 2). The emphasis on education appealed to both the intellectual and the technocratic members of the local elite. Intellectuals, most of whom were tied to the schooling system, tended to emphasize the importance of education in itself; more pragmatic goals were rarely and only superficially discussed.

somewhat out of place, geographically as well as educationally. Disconnected from the plant, it no longer served as a necessary passage point for obtaining a job in industry. Though it still attracted the majority of the town's children seeking secondary education, there was mounting dissatisfaction with the school on the side of local elites.⁵⁹⁴ Apart from its narrow educational profile, it had become one of the town's many problem areas: cases of vandalism were regularly vaunted in public and so were stories of minors drinking, smoking and having casual sex in and around the school (figure III.27). This fit neither with the image of a civilized educational system, which a civilized town obviously needed, nor with the new pressures bearing down on children's upbringing. The question of children's futures boiled down to who and what influenced them in their attempts at navigating the minefield they now had to cross to reach adulthood; future success via education and discipline or destitution via crime and debauchery depended on this. In this respect, dangers came from both inside and outside the school. Inside, a clear line came to be drawn separating students who accepted the new imperatives of setting high educational goals for themselves and maintaining strict discipline and those who preferred to resist school discipline and continued to hope for a life of manual labor.⁵⁹⁵ Debtors' children did not fare very well, as the stigma of debt was passed over from their parents and impacted interactions within school settings. Teachers themselves considered that the new market economy was bound to create winners and losers, and that differentiation was made at a very young age; it was no surprise to them if debtors' children had a backward work ethic and, when the time of judgment came, that they systematically failed.⁵⁹⁶ In parallel with developments in other strategic sites, a policy of zero tolerance toward deviant behavior in schools gradually gained ground. From enunciating complaints and voicing indignation over vandalism, drinking and promiscuity in schools, the town's administrative and intellectual elites moved toward explicit proposals aimed at policing and excluding the deviants.⁵⁹⁷

Countering baneful influences from outside the school was a much more complex affair. Outside the home and the school lay the biggest threats, which could at times enter and corrupt

⁵⁹⁴ For enrollment numbers by school, see *Miovenii* 28, August 2002.

⁵⁹⁵ Two developments illustrate this cleavage: the marginalization of the vocational school in the public sphere and its presentation as a site of trouble and not much else; and the conspicuous encouragement of new educational strategies and the downplaying of the relevance of vocational-industrial education. In the many interviews with school children in the local newspaper, concerning their hopes and plans for the future, the latter was almost entirely absent and the former was overwhelmingly present. None stated they wanted a factory job and all insisted on their plans to move on and get a university degree. Though at that time it was certainly strange to openly state one's desire to work in the plant, since no one could say for sure whether or not that opportunity would actually be available by the time children reached working age, it was also clear that the editors presented specific cases while systematically silencing others. A partial resolution of this cleavage was the proposal to build a proper high school in town, which, it was claimed, would offer a more adequate curriculum and generally fit better with what members of the local elite hoped the town would become. The new high school became functional in the fall of 2006 and institutionalized the opposition between "good" kids and the rest. Looking at police reports, by that time the vocational school had already become a regular place for staging raids and interventions. "Realități din cartierele orașului." *Miovenii* 35, February 2003. "La școala 'George Topârceanu', gimnaziștii, mereu piepțiș cu viața." *Miovenii* 55, January 2004. "Ultimul extemporal din viața de gimnazist." *Miovenii* 63, May 2004. "Orașul Mioveni—Vatra unde noi școlarii trudem și aspirăm." *Miovenii* 84, April 2005.

⁵⁹⁶ "Există, totuși, cineva." *Miovenii* 14, July 2001. "Școala s-a sfârșit... dar nu și grijile." *Miovenii* 14, July 2001.

⁵⁹⁷ As with attempts at solving the problem of debt, this took almost a decade and was anything but a streamlined process lacking in gray areas. In chapter 14, I analyzed the convoluted developments that led to the separation between the worthy and the worthless. The debt question provided a skeleton key for struggles in other strategic sites, such as the school.

both these sites.⁵⁹⁸ They comprised large parts of the new public life that had gradually developed in Mioveni in the 1990s and reached its peak in the first half of the 2000s. It was not just the market economy that was considered corrupting, but especially the new urban life as it was shaped by economic and social transformations after 1989. According to the goal of becoming a municipality, the town needed investments in things like a new hospital, a prestigious high school, a bookstore, a courthouse, a hotel, or the completion of the cathedral, together with many smaller and bigger things that local elites hoped to have in Mioveni and big cities like Pitești already had. Instead of a flurry of new amenities and services, the local newspaper decried, the town was plagued by

individuals who go about their business unimpeded, around apartment buildings, parking lots and various other places. Some of them, well inebriated, play *barbut* inside building staircases (some even urinate in the same places), in plain sight of children, while others you can see daily in the parking lot outside [the plant's] gate 3 without them being asked, either by the owners of this parking lot or by the police, what they are doing there.⁵⁹⁹

Young people fell somewhere in between these perpetrators and the children who were vulnerable to their corrupting influence. They could be both victims and perpetrators. While they had not reached adulthood, they were a foot out the door of both home and school. Unlike children, the question was not what they would do tomorrow, but rather of how they handled life today. As opposed to children, youth were thought to be already lacking in direction and facing a “crisis of identity.”⁶⁰⁰ They needed guidance, but in their case it was difficult to simply glorify education and the formative importance of the family and the school system. At the same time, they seemed to pose a danger for the upbringing of children and it was not always obvious both categories deserved the same degree of attention and help from the collective.⁶⁰¹ Young people embodied both hopes for the future and the bitterness of seeing these hopes dashed by the economic-cum-moral corruption of the times, a cause on its way to being lost but not getting there just yet.

Youth seemed to have fallen victim to the temptations of the new urban life: alcohol, sexual promiscuity, drugs, incivility, membership in neighborhood gangs, violence, vandalism, and general lack of respect for the traditional working-class way of life. Instead of trying to

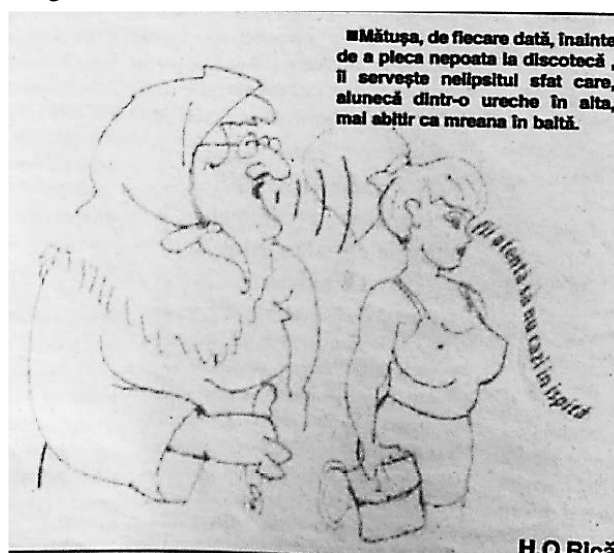


FIGURE III.28. “The aunt, each time before the niece goes to the disco, gives her the necessary advice [‘Be careful not to fall into temptation’], which slips from one ear to the other faster than fish in a pond.”

Source: *Miovenii* 70, September 2004.

⁵⁹⁸ “Un caz de mare rușine.” *Miovenii* 19, November 2001. “Un petic de... frescă de la școala ‘Liviu Rebreanu’.” *Miovenii* 41, May 2004.

⁵⁹⁹ “Prezența absenței.” *Miovenii* 12, May 2001.

⁶⁰⁰ “Între OK și mișto.” *Miovenii* 5, October 2000. “Tineretul și ceața.” *Miovenii* 93, August 2005.

⁶⁰¹ “Barbariei din parcul Casei de cultură.” *Miovenii* 98, November 2005. “Un petic de... frescă de la școala ‘Liviu Rebreanu’.” *Miovenii* 41, May 2004.

become more disciplined and competitive, as the new economic situation required, they preferred to waste their time loitering in the street, hanging out around building staircases, and spending their nights in bars and discos (figure III.28). To be sure, young people did benefit from previously unknown opportunities for leisure. In 2002, there were approximately 550 companies registered in town, many of which retailed in groceries and basic goods and services for individual consumption.⁶⁰² Several popular drinking establishments had been opened in town and the presence neighborhood stores turned apartment building staircases into informal spaces for regular congregation and hanging out. The town's civic center had become a main point of attraction for young people, with its wide open spaces now surrounded by bars, and the infamous Domino disco at the ground floor and basement of the House of Culture. With two discos, four non-stop bars in town, and a burgeoning neighborhood spirit, nightlife was another thing people in Mioveni were getting acquainted with, for the better or the worse.⁶⁰³

Inequality and the situational upper hand

Notwithstanding the permanent commotion in the pages of the local newspaper, youth, generically speaking, were not the primary users of most of these new leisure spaces. It was the booming parts trafficking economy that dominated the town's public life, both during the day and particularly during the night. The aesthetic critique emphasizing the image of a civilized town and the moral critique emphasizing the value of labor were here conjoined with a critique of situational dominance emphasizing civility and security in public space. For local intellectuals and administrators, the new public life spelled ugliness, immorality, incivility and plenty of fear. It was not proper urbanites with their studied penchant for "civil inattention" (Goffman 1963:83-8) who dominated public space, but those groups of people, especially younger men, who insisted on paying enough attention to others and to themselves as to make encounters in public space extremely unpleasant for what was deemed to be the town's respectable citizenry.⁶⁰⁴ Attempting to recover the category of "hooliganism," under which state socialist authorities filed those who behaved improperly in public space (Morar-Vulcu 2015), a local intellectual described the situation as follows:

Daytime hooligans in our town are ostentatiously making their presence felt, without giving any sign of being afraid of anyone; maybe they are really not afraid. They gather especially in front of some car parts shops, under the cover of an occupation—that of the manipulator—while in reality they block the sidewalk and pick on women passing by (the young ones), and sometimes even on [other] pedestrians. Most of them have a natural "tan", and their language is "black". Unabated by law or conscience (even one as faint as a dim light) they are the ones you see "at dawn" entering the pubs and "then coming out all warmed up" in the middle of the street in order

⁶⁰² "Satul cneazului Mihaela a devenit în zilele noastre un oraș cu cartiere." *Miovenii* 26, June 2002.

⁶⁰³ "De la poliția orașului." *Miovenii* 70, September 2004.

⁶⁰⁴ Civil inattention entails "that one gives to another enough visual notice to demonstrate that one appreciates that the other is present (...), while at the next moment withdrawing one's attention from him so as to express that he does not constitute a target of special curiosity or design. (...) By according civil inattention, the individual implies that he has no reason to suspect the intentions of the others present and no reason to fear the others, be hostile to them, or wish to avoid them. (...) This demonstrates that he has nothing to fear or avoid in being seen and being seen seeing, and that he is not ashamed of himself or of the place and company in which he finds himself" (Goffman 1963:84). Collins (2004:278-84) elaborates on the extreme discomfort experienced—"almost as in a Garfinkelian breaching experiment"—by those taking civil inattention for granted when encountering people espousing radically different interaction styles based on the explicit granting of deference and the display of "overt gestures of dominance and subordination, respect and disrespect."

to “plenarily” manifest their personality. Where do they find money on a daily basis? Petty scalping, selling “tips,” gambling. The practice of playing cards for money can still be found in some bars, in the shadows, where the owner closes one eye. “Come hunting!”, the “girls” in search of “values” tell each other (...). And thus emerges a subspecies of spoken and sartorial (flashy) hooliganism, which attracts bearers of values with its flashiness and vulgarity. And it’s not seldom that so many fall into their traps... Strange that “debt collectors” and “racketeers” have not shown up yet in Mioveni. Maybe they need some experience. You can “hear” the nighttime hooligans at around 1-2-3-4 o’clock, with their screams that they think of as songs, with the girls yelling (debauched giggles), with their noisy battles in front of the apartment buildings, waking up children from their sleep and scaring the living daylight out of those woken up. You ask yourself which gates of hell just opened and what demonic armies have invaded the town. We know: those of the discos and bars. More than upsetting is that there are children, of different ages, who also contribute to the nocturnal disorder. You can hear a thin 6-7-year-old voice cursing at two o’clock at night harder than the fiercest “specialist”. Where are the parents all this time? I am not making a complete x-ray of hooliganism, but we must say that it is a worrisome phenomenon that is growing on the grim and hallucinating background of some internal and international events.⁶⁰⁵

This was the other side of the growing inequalities in town. On the one hand, there were the destitute, the jobless, the people who fell so hard into debt as to lose their homes and destroy their families. On the other, there were the newly rich, many of whom engaged in conspicuous consumption and seemed to be able to make money out of thin air.⁶⁰⁶ For local elites and the constituency they were trying to interpellate, encounters in public space with individuals from each category sparked two very different types of fears. The poor were a constant reminder of what the near future could look like and of how important it was to discipline oneself. The newly rich were a similarly constant reminder of the diminishing material and symbolic returns of industrial labor and of the need to discipline others. Encountering the poor meant dealing with the danger of prospective shame; encountering the hooligan meant dealing with the experience of shame itself. Switching sides, for the poor the incivility of public encounters necessarily led to their own shaming, since they could not be civil despite wanting to. Drowned in debt and deprived of their means of subsistence, the poor had great difficulties in keeping up with the standards of respectability built upon the value of manual industrial labor. For the so-called hooligan, however, what local elites considered uncivil was oftentimes a matter of

⁶⁰⁵ “Huliganiada (II).” *Miovenii* 39, April 2003. “Huliganiada.” *Miovenii* 38, March 2003; “Huliganiada (III).” *Miovenii* 40, April 2003; “Un petic de... frescă de la școala ‘Liviu Rebreanu’.” *Miovenii* 41, May 2004; “Huliganiada...” *Miovenii* 75, November 2004. It falls outside the purpose of this dissertation to account for which discursive categories and repertoires used in the wars of the 2000s were borrowed from pre-1989 attempts at regulating the public realm. Despite the apparently striking similarities, which included subtler things such as the imagined role of local media or the genre of writing, the critique was radically different between the two periods. As with the quest for labor control (see part II), the difference boiled down to the fact that after 1989 labor could no longer be called upon to function as a force of inclusion; rather to the opposite. For a discussion of the protean category of “hooliganism” under state socialism, see LaPierre (2006). For an example of how the distinction between “social” and “antisocial” was made, see Lindenberger’s (2008) discussion of “asociality” in the GDR.

⁶⁰⁶ Hooligans were part of the second category, since they could afford to carelessly spend money and time. An article in the local newspaper compares the two groups: “we must make a distinction between ‘hooligans’ and ‘hobos’. Hooligans scream at night (so to speak, songs, just like the gentlemen dogs—for how long will they remain gentlemen?) the void of their conscience and the desolateness of a life without a bearing, while during the day they dally around shooting the blanks of barroom discussions. The hobos, on the other hand, are the minor floods, of course of a muddy social water, still undammed by certain coercive states of the law and that are not as dangerous as the hooligans. They come insurrectionally ‘from the darkness, from the blackest lack of hope’ (‘neglect of the divine project?’), probably from the bad administering of their own possibilities”. “Huliganiada (III).” *Miovenii* 40, April 2003.

maintaining respect and increasing one's reputation in front of one's peers. A clash of different standards of respectability thus unfolded in the most casual interactions in public space.

For a novice observer coming to Mioveni in the first years of the new millennium probably the most startling discovery would have been the abundance of car parts shops that had opened at the ground floor of apartment buildings on each side of the main boulevard.⁶⁰⁷ Indeed, by then the parts trade had exploded, with a deep impact on Mioveni's urban fabric and overall environment (figure III.29). Shops themselves were only part of the story: they were the formal façade of a burgeoning informal economy (see chapter 9). Traffickers corralled on sidewalks in the vicinity of these shops, which were always surrounded by "gangs" of men apparently lacking an occupation. The same happened in the parking lot outside gate 3, near the marketplace, and around the bars in the center of town. For those engaged in the informal trade, these were settled places for picking up customers, learning of new opportunities, planning deals, mutual buying and selling, and everything else that came with keeping things going for oneself in the trafficking economy. They functioned as clearinghouses and as settings for performing specific rituals that asserted domination and constructed solidarity. Trafficking dominated the townscape. Following recommendations vouched for by local authorities, these spaces were to be avoided, since one was bound to be picked on, insulted, cheated, or worse. In total contradiction with the style of restraint and civil inattention promoted by local elites as corresponding to civilization and respectability, it was the style of interaction espoused by traffickers, together with its associated symbols, that were so loathing.⁶⁰⁸

For car parts dealers, what appeared from the outside as the most spiteful form of loitering was in fact the proper way of doing business. Beneath the picture of indolence and

⁶⁰⁷ A young PhD student doing research on organizational learning at Dacia noted on her arrival in the summer of 2000: "Cette petite ville compte environ 35,500 habitants, dont 7,200 travaillent à l'usine (pour une population active de 19,000 individus). Partout dans la ville, on voit des magasins de pièces auto; un vrai commerce de pièces de rechange s'est développé" (Angelescu 2007:260).

⁶⁰⁸ We could just as well speak of different "cultures" here, if the term weren't so tainted by overuse and ambiguity. In using the notion of "interaction styles," I follow Collins's (2004:268) observation that "'culture' is not a reified thing but merely shorthand for referring to the style of micro-situational encounters." The association of "culture" and "style" is more explicitly made by Ferguson (1999:95): "I use the term cultural style to refer to practices that signify differences between social categories. Cultural styles in this usage do not pick out total modes of behavior but rather poles of social signification, cross-cutting and cross-cut by other such poles. (...) The performative enactment of social categories can thus be recognized and described in terms of a number of analytically distinct stylistic dimensions. I use the term style specifically to emphasize the accomplished, performative nature of such practices." Ferguson's insistence on the distinguishing function of social practices tends to bracket the maintaining of mutual focus and emotional entrainment characteristic for the collective performance of cultural styles. The reproduction of cultural styles depends on performers engaging in interaction rituals. Though Ferguson's ethnography (1999:chapter 6) touches upon this aspect, it falls short of grasping the full implications of dealing with culture in terms of style. It is not just a matter of sets of distinctive practices intertwined with a micropolitical economy but also of the formation of collective solidarities and the likewise collective defense of moral standards. A more comprehensive approach to cultural styles can be obtained by granting more room to the analysis of situations in themselves, which Ferguson rejects somewhat surreptitiously by denouncing the reductionist emphasis on the situational motives of performances. By putting situations ahead of individuals, Collins's radical microsociological approach sheds light on some of the mechanisms behind the reproduction of cultural styles that Ferguson is less prepared to deal with. The consideration of interaction rituals in themselves is thus a necessary complement to the analysis of cultural styles. This is even more obvious when it comes to the Mioveni car parts economy, in the case of which the performance of a cultural style is particularly difficult to disentangle from its associated micropolitical economic relations. With less explicit theoretical precision, Beck (1985) discusses differences in "styles of drinking" in pre-1989 Balkan countries.

rowdiness lay chains of interaction rituals on which the functioning of the trafficking economy depended. Trafficking entailed the maintenance of networks ensuring the circulation not only of parts and information, but also of reputation. Hooking up to the first two circuits required physical presence and the spending of a considerable amount of time in the above-mentioned places. Success in the parts business required the building and maintenance of reputation, on the basis of which one could accumulate commodities, knowledge of ongoing deals and existing opportunities, as well as allies and subordinates who

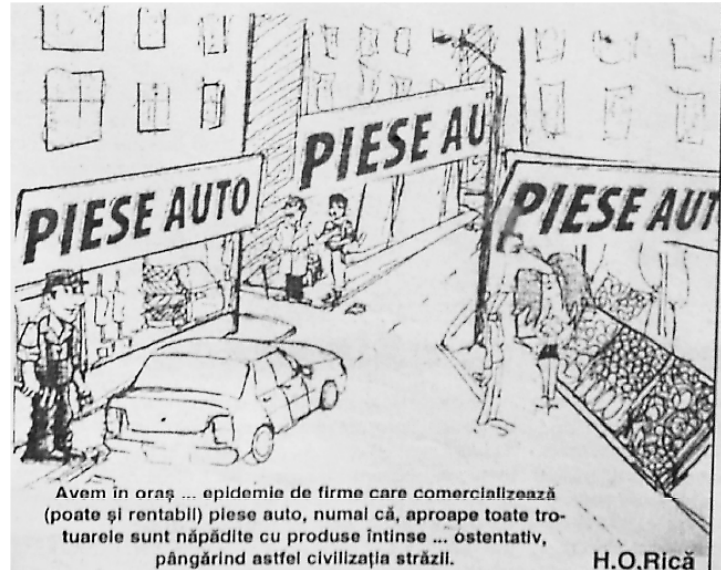


FIGURE III.29. “We have in town an epidemic of businesses trading (maybe even at a profit) in car parts [*piese auto*], but still almost all sidewalks are flooded with products laid out...conspicuously, defiling the civilization of the street.” Source: *Miovenii* 74, November 2004.

made things exponentially more lucrative. There were many ways for making a name for oneself in the parts trafficking business. Sealing big deals (and the ability to do so) and having money (and, above all, spending it) yielded the highest symbolic profits. One’s physical strength and fighting abilities were important, since trafficking oftentimes required the use of physical violence, or at least the credible threat of it. Gambling and swindling abilities also counted, both materially and symbolically. The interaction style espoused by traffickers was based on an exacerbated sense of masculinity: physical and verbal aggressiveness, displays of hostility, the command of respect and the ability to impose it by whatever means, a fascination with money and a strong penchant for conspicuous consumption, gambling, sex and excessive drinking made up the everyday world of parts traffickers, during the day and especially during the night. All this added up to a unique urban spectacle associated with a refurbished imagery of a rampant capitalism as harbinger of unprecedented opportunities for living large and even for getting rich, as long as one was willing to take risks and play hardball when necessary.⁶⁰⁹

It is not difficult to understand the aversion of local elites toward “hooliganism.” After all, it was by all appearances tainted with the devaluation of industrial labor and the utter disregard for traditional standards of morality; the constant threat of being shamed and abused

⁶⁰⁹ Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, Mioveni was referred to as “Texas” or, more often, “Dallas”, after the popular TV show imported from the US in the late 1970s. It was common at the time to describe urban life as a carbon copy of the capitalism known through popular Western TV series introduced before and shortly after 1989 (see Câmpănu, Steriade, and Radzai 1993:917). By far the most popular show of this kind in Romania, “Dallas” was “the booze-and-sex-soaked caricature of free enterprise and executive lifestyles (...) ushering in an era in which capitalism became cool, even though weighted with manifold moral quandaries” (Gillespie and Welch 2008). This sort of labeling was widespread in Mioveni. Concerned citizens wondered whether the dilapidated marginal areas of the town were a local version of Harlem. “Indolență sau amnezie?” *Miovenii* 56, February 2004. A popular tavern near the marketplace was named “Caracatița,” after the Italian TV series *La Piovra*, which portrayed the confrontation between law enforcement and an all-powerful Mafia. No doubt, crime and the profits it could supposedly yield were an object of fascination for many. The heroic figures circulating within parts trafficking circles were, therefore, quite different from that of the proper citizen hailed by the town’s elites.

only added to the unpleasantness. What mattered most was that in everyday interactions in public space the civilizing elites and the citizenry they permanently called upon were on the losing end of situational dominance.⁶¹⁰ Their moral crusade against unruly behavior in public was targeted less against the micropolitical economic entanglement of the parts economy than against the practices and places on which its associated interaction rituals were based.⁶¹¹ Hence, eliminating alcohol was much more important than curtailing the informal economy.

The brave new world of engineered public rituals

For local authorities, combating alcohol consumption was not just a matter of orchestrating public outrage and condemnation: their civilizing mission implied a combined role of rule creation and rule enforcement (Becker 1963:chapter 8). The critique of drinking in public was accompanied by concrete measures to curb it, while trying to provide alternative ways of spending leisure time and being sociable. These alternatives concerned replacing the dominant rituals of male sociability with what local elites considered proper ways of using public space. A clear difference was thus made between legitimate and illegitimate behavior in public: the latter comprised all of the rituals described above, in which alcohol played a constitutive part; the former was intrinsically associated with the order of civil inattention, decent family life, newly invented local traditions, and the fulfillment of the duty to work—since all leisure activity, and especially the (always moderate) consumption of alcohol, had to be deserved.⁶¹²

The removal of improvised drinking spaces and their replacement with parking spaces or other things considered necessary for a proper urban environment was a first step. It was followed by a progressive increase in police activity targeted at what began to be considered the town's problem areas: the vocational school, the Big market, the Dacia market, discos and night bars. As it happened with debt, the question of how to handle alcohol consumption in public was quite often translated into one about the necessity of maintaining law and order. The "Quiet streets, safe town" program launched by the Mioveni police put unruly behavior in public space on the same level of preoccupation as criminal behavior. Ad hoc male sociability happening on street corners, around apartment buildings, and inside staircases thus came under

⁶¹⁰ Condemnations of incivility contained an implicit interpellation—an operation of recruitment, as Althusser (1971:174) explains—of the proper citizen in all her dimensions (at work, at home, in public space). Its success depended on the ability of local elites to present their attempts at securing legitimation under the guise of multiple "calls to order"—calls for the reaffirmation of conformity (Bourdieu 1984:380-1)—that are otherwise typical of working-class life (see Hall et al. 1978:chapter 6). During the tumultuous 2000s, however, the situation was not always favorable for such tactics, since temptations were sometimes simply too high. This, for example, was the case with a plant worker in his late 30s who, after buying a second-hand foreign car, decided to sleep in it for several nights right in front of the apartment building where he lived, making a fool of himself in front of his neighbors and in the process, he hoped, gently striking a chord of envy, at least among some of them. No doubt, in such cases any calls for deferral or restraint were utterly pointless. Attempts at recruitment were oftentimes as explicit as they could have been. The local administration, police representatives, and editors of the local newspaper permanently called on the help of citizens of good faith to be proactive in countering improper public behavior. These calls for ensuring mutual discipline among the citizenry were largely unsuccessful, and the same actors constantly decried people's lack of "civic attitude". "Nevoia de atitudine civică." *Miovenii* 82, March 2005.

⁶¹¹ The considerable degree of aversion toward parts trafficking came mostly as a result of its conspicuous character and had less to do with the economics of trafficking as such. The protracted gymnastics undertaken by the editors of the local newspaper to avoid mentioning trafficking yet still talk about it suggest that making the trafficking economy an object of public debate was considered taboo.

⁶¹² "Merite recompensate." *Miovenii* 42, May 2003.

the attention of the police. The founding of the “community police”—the first of its kind in the country, as the authorities boasted—set a milestone for the strategy of civilizing public space.⁶¹³ Under the direct supervision of the local administration and functioning in parallel with the regular police, the community police was tasked with maintaining public order and countering such things as the public drinking of alcohol, gambling, informal trade, and even street loitering. The community police was to make sure everything was in its proper place.

The regimentation of space was seen as a big part of the solution. Drinking and sociability had to happen only in officially designated spaces. They also had to be prevented from overflowing into the streets, especially at night. Sidewalks were to be cleared and used for nothing but walking or strolling, for “happy faces” and “not the spectacle of groups who spit out seed shells, curse, and pick on passers-by.”⁶¹⁴ A new swimming pool and a small park were built, in the hope that it was the lack of leisure facilities that made youth fall prey to various temptations available in town.⁶¹⁵ The new stadium was also hoped to offer an opportunity to spend one’s free time in an orderly fashion, and the cathedral was to serve as proof of the importance religion in the remaking of the town’s public life; refurbishing the city center and the sidewalks along the main boulevard into spaces for promenade and relaxation were also deemed necessary.⁶¹⁶ Pursuing these alternatives involved the restricting of sociability both spatially and temporally and its replacement with an order of civil interaction



FIGURE III.30. French National Day celebrations in Mioveni, 14 July 2012.
Photograph by the author.

⁶¹³ “Vom avea mai multă liniște, mai multă siguranță în paza bunurilor de interes public și privat.” *Miovenii* 93, August 2005.

⁶¹⁴ “Educația orășenească.” *Miovenii* 31, October 2002.

⁶¹⁵ The park was named “Youth Park.” According to initial plans, its several alleys were named according to what local elites considered proper youth life to be about: “brides’ alley,” “lovers’ alley,” “high school alley,” “future’s alley,” and “flowers’ alley”. “Parcul Tineretului.” *Miovenii* 111, June 2006.

⁶¹⁶ “Cum va arăta Centrul Civic al orașului în 2011.” *Buletinul informativ al orașului Mioveni* 24, August 2010. Though plans to remake the Civic Center were on the agenda from as early as 2006, work started only in 2013.

based on mutual inattention. Moreover, within those spaces that were supposed to contain sociability, it was best for people to remain customers and not develop membership ties, the latter being associated with gangs, improper behavior, and undeserved leisure. Coupled with all this, the development of “culture” was necessary for achieving urbanity. This official notion of urban culture included, on the one hand, cultural institutions (the House of Culture, a planned cultural center and a palace of youth, a series of clubs) that were supposed to provide the town’s inhabitants with proper leisure preoccupations. On the other hand, the local administration pushed for the establishment of organized collective celebrations as the town’s main form of public ritual (figure III.30); throughout the 2000s such formal rituals multiplied significantly and became much more lavish.⁶¹⁷ This was the new, legitimate, official public life: orderly publics, traditional or at least non-vulgar music, cleanliness, propriety, the celebration of ostensibly distant rural traditions, religion, uneventful family life with an explicit emphasis on children, and feelings of membership and solidarity only to the extent to which they were compatible with, and could develop on the basis of the order of, civil inattention. Though not always successful, these engineered alternatives progressively stripped alcohol consumption of its centrality in public life and pushed its associated rituals to the margins of urban space.⁶¹⁸

An integral part of local elites’ rearticulation of a hegemonic project in the first decade of the new millennium consisted in the multipronged regulation of the public drinking of alcohol. As a result, drinking gradually lost its association with hard work and respectability that had gained ground among industrial workers during state socialism and flourished during the 1990s and began to denote improper conduct in public space and to connote flawed moral character. The efforts of the plant management to curb the consumption of alcohol among workers aligned with the efforts of local elites to regulate urban public space. The resulting war against alcohol focused on new and old anxieties concerning debt accumulation, social reproduction and family life (securing children’s future, responsible parenthood, maintaining adequate relationships between men and women), the enforcement of the value of industrial work (as opposed to laziness and what were labeled as dubious occupations—in particular, the trafficking in car parts), of modesty, restraint and responsibility in the face of economic hardship (as opposed to loitering and conspicuous consumption). All these composed the image of the proper citizen. In Mioveni, this multipronged attempt at regulating the sale and consumption of alcohol had a profound impact on public space, the geography of drinking, and the shrinking opportunities for sociability. The regulation of drinking had—and, at the time of completing this dissertation, still has—a significant role in restricting the spaces and practices of male sociability inside and especially outside the plant. Intertwined with these restrictions, the dominant idea of legitimate drinking has slowly changed from that of the daily routine of sociability to the occasional participation in the new official urban culture of public celebrations, dedicated spaces of leisure, “cultural” institutions, and regimented public space.

⁶¹⁷ To take a telling example, from barely two days of celebration of the town’s anniversary in the early 2000s, by the end of the decade the event was taking up no less than four days and was becoming increasingly lavish.

⁶¹⁸ The limited success in implementing these plans can be seen in the case of the Trade Unions’ House of Culture. Despite concerned citizens and local officials constantly criticizing the existence of the town’s most popular disco at the ground floor and basement of its most prominent building, little was actually done to change the situation. As with most attempts at civilizing urban space and the conduct of citizens, compromises had to be made.

CHAPTER 16

THE PARADOXES OF ROUTINIZATION

Behind the façades, thwarted hopes

Just like the debt wars, the controversies surrounding the consumption of alcohol congealed around the separation of the worthy from the worthless. This was the price paid for escaping the existential dilemmas that had arisen in the aftermath of Dacia's privatization. As it is obvious from the previous two chapters, such a separation was made possible only through of a substantial mutation of local politics: established in the mid-1990s, Costescu's paternalist localism survived the turmoil of the early 2000s at the cost of the exacerbation of its charismatic qualities. Under the pressure of changing economic and administrative needs, these traits were soon displaced by a more bureaucratic approach to government, which nonetheless remained truthful to its charismatic heritage. Aligning itself to the new configuration of the local labor market and to the newfound balance of forces inside the plant, this was the urban order of things that was brooding in the late 2000s and that would become characteristic for the 2010s.

In his first run for office, Costescu presented himself as the providential figure for securing Mioveni's future as a company town. Though his candidacy was based on expanding an already established tradition of industrial paternalism, Costescu also wagered that his education as an engineer, local origins, and success as union leader provided him with the extraordinary advantages needed in extraordinary times. The new mayor embodied the affirmation of workers' collective identity and the symbolic centrality of labor; since in this regard the overall context had turned hostile, the emphasis on localism was hardly surprising; last but not least, the promise of urban modernity rekindled old hopes, responded to new problems, and provided an orientation toward the future. This notwithstanding, it was only at the beginning of his second term as mayor that Costescu emerged as a true prophet surrounded by a staff of officials and intellectuals whose loyalty sometimes bordered on fanaticism. The thrust of Costescu's discourse at the time of the 1996 elections was essentially conservative: his promises focused primarily on preventing the dissolution of the existing order of things. In the first half of the 2000s, however, the mayor and his allies took a much more revolutionary stance and pleaded for massive transformations. The wars of the 2000s radicalized the combined valuation labor and urbanity and turned them from universally available assets that could only be threatened from outside to scarce objects of desire that could only be obtained by individual and collective sacrifice. Such previously unproblematic things like keeping a job, working hard, handling daily expenses and not falling into debt, or maintaining propriety at home and in public became just as many questions of duty. This was the "ethical prophecy" (Weber 1978:447) put forward by the local elite: redemption could only be achieved by maintaining strict watch over one's ordinary conduct in the face of spreading temptation and

corruption.⁶¹⁹ In this story, Costescu was not the only heroic figure; so were the followers who chose to fulfill the duties called upon them by the mayor's civilizing mission. Those who failed—the “delinquent in duty” (Weber 1978:242)—deserved little else than marginalization and exclusion. Hence, the outcome of such charismatic politics was a redrawing of material and symbolic boundaries according to people's ability to fulfill new obligations and come to terms with stringent standards of morality. Personal worth and the right to membership depended on this. At the same time, the recognition of duty implied the fulfillment of the duty of recognition of the overall goal of “the true city” and of the political authority promising it. This granted validity to Costescu's charismatic paternalism and sealed the new terms of the relationship of representation, thus closing the circle of hegemonic rearticulation.⁶²⁰

This prophetic moralization of everyday life stayed relentless until Costescu's death in 2006. By then the question of debt had already found an answer and the war against alcohol was in full swing. Finding a charismatic successor was an easy enough task, although it entailed the routinization of the civilizing mission pursued by the former mayor. Unlike in the 1996 elections, the candidacy of vice-mayor Ion Georgescu ten years later was anything but surprising. As the mayor's long-term right hand man, Georgescu held the privilege of being designated as successor by Costescu himself and, since he embodied the promise of continuity, he also benefitted from the support of Costescu's loyalists. With such a recipe, the character of the 2006 elections was typically charismatic: the question prior to the elections was not that of making a real choice between candidates but rather of formally acknowledging the claim to leadership made by the designated successor. Like so many other things, electing Georgescu was a matter duty fulfillment.⁶²¹

In contrast to the larger than life figure of his predecessor, who on most occasions was presented as singlehandedly capable of revolutionizing things for the better, Georgescu lacked both Costescu's supernatural traits (as local aristocrat-cum-plant-technocrat-turned-union-leader) and his calling (as member of a previously marginalized fraction of the state socialist new class of technocrats and intellectuals).⁶²² Georgescu did not have strong plant credentials, nor was he part of the local intelligentsia.⁶²³ Although he initially kept close to Costescu's

⁶¹⁹ This resembles Weber's description of the Jewish prophecy in the Old Testament: “The prophet and ethical prophecy laid the basis for a social critique of the social order which was a corrupt world; it was regarded as a profound departure from the social contract between God and his people. Prophecy called the people back to their social relationship with God and thereby devalued and criticized this world as a falling away or departure from the original code of morality which was the basis (...) of the world as such” (Holton and Turner 1989:54). Whereas “exemplary prophecy” is “apolitical because it abstains from relating the quest of salvation to the transformation of the inherited reality, the formation of movements, and the subversion of the established structure of domination (...), ethical prophecy encourages an active inner-worldly asceticism that relates the quest for redemption to the actual regulation of social conduct in the world, collective mobilization, and the radical transformation of the inherited reality” (Kalyvas 2008:56). The connection between charismatic politics and hegemonic articulation that I make here is largely based on this reading of Weber.

⁶²⁰ On the recognition of duty as a basis of legitimacy for charismatic leadership, see Weber (1978:242).

⁶²¹ On elections under the influence of charismatic leadership, see Weber (1978:1129).

⁶²² For an example of Costescu's heroic portrayal, see “Răsplata.” *Miovenii* 46, July 2003. During my fieldwork, many people spontaneously recalled the mythical deeds of the former mayor, not all of which pertained to his role in the local administration.

⁶²³ Though Georgescu had been a Dacia employee, the fact that he had not worked in production and had instead held a job in the plant's canteen facilities put him at a great disadvantage in comparison to the former mayor.

prophetic stance, during Georgescu's first term the mayor's office quickly took on the characteristics of a more purely bureaucratic position that nonetheless maintained a toned down charismatic component, this time pertaining not to Georgescu's person but to the office itself.⁶²⁴ Though the discourse of civilization retained its salience during Georgescu's first term as mayor, it lost much of its crusading aura, as the local administration tried to adapt its goals and priorities to the available financial and logistical means. No matter how feeble, critical views of the still unfinished cathedral project appeared for the first time in the local newspaper, while the ambition of turning the town into a municipality, which had for so long been regarded as tantamount to salvation, faded into the background.

Georgescu continued to wage Costescu's wars, but he did so with much more composure and ruthlessness. While debt accumulation and public drinking did not fade away as quickly as the mayor changed his demeanor, it was clear that Georgescu meant less talk and more doing.⁶²⁵ The new mayor accepted the goals of civilization upheld with so much pomp by his predecessor, but refused to engage in the theatrics of the permanent state of emergency that Costescu had fueled during his time in office. Things like debt, public drinking, or growing inequality were now treated primarily as administrative affairs, to which the overbearing moralization that had customarily accompanied the public discussion of such issues appeared purely incidental. In stark contrast with Costescu's charismatic politics, the new mayor gradually upheld an atmosphere of nonconflictuality and consensus, not by reintegrating what had begun to be excluded in the first half of the decade, but by fully accepting the necessity of exclusion and turning all that had previously constituted objects of impassioned moral critique into issues to be dealt with by bureaucratic instrumentation.⁶²⁶

Routinization officialized the distinction between those still entitled to full membership and the newly disenfranchised. The side-by-side public presence of the local administration's lush plans for urban modernization and beautification, on the one hand, and of the cutting of

From early on, Georgescu tried to establish his legitimacy as vice-mayor by appealing to his administrative competence. "De vorbă cu domnul Ion Georgescu." *Miovenii* 48, August 2003.

⁶²⁴ On the transformation of personal charisma into office charisma as one path routinization, see Weber (1978:1139). Costescu had already taken the first steps in depersonalizing his leadership in such a manner.

⁶²⁵ Georgescu was one of the early supporters of giving up on collective heating systems. He was also very keen on combating the consumption of alcohol. "Ca un sondaj de opinie." *Miovenii* 43, June 2003. "De vorbă cu domnul Ion Georgescu." *Miovenii* 48, August 2003. As for propriety in public space, Georgescu favored measures that were as restrictive as possible. Taking advice from the chief of police, he agreed to install a system of surveillance cameras across town, with the explicit purpose of combating "antisocial behavior" and disciplining the people working in public service provision, including policemen themselves. "Interviu cu Primarul orașului Mioveni." *Miovenii* 142, January 2008. The surveillance system became operational in early 2013.

⁶²⁶ Costescu maintained a permanent conflictual relationship with members of the local elite. It was common for those who happened to fall out of favor with the mayor to be excommunicated and publicly condemned for heresy. Some of these individuals regained public visibility after Georgescu became mayor. Nicolae Badiu, a former director of the House of Culture and one of Costescu's more notorious adversaries from the 1990s, returned from his exile in Pitești as a regular collaborator of the local newspaper. In contrast to the conspicuous absence of plant-related issues from official public discourse during Costescu's terms in office, Georgescu espoused a much more solicitous attitude when it came to the maintaining a relationship with Dacia's management. He also sought to establish a new basis of legitimacy for the local administration, devoid of the sense for duty that had been central during Costescu's mandates. The moralizing tone and genre of writing of the local newspaper gave way to a new obsession with administrative accountability, which entailed keeping the public permanently informed about the daily workings of local government. Laconic presentations of the state of investments, expenses, or new regulations replaced the reportages, editorials, and op-eds that had until then been the newspaper's trademarks.

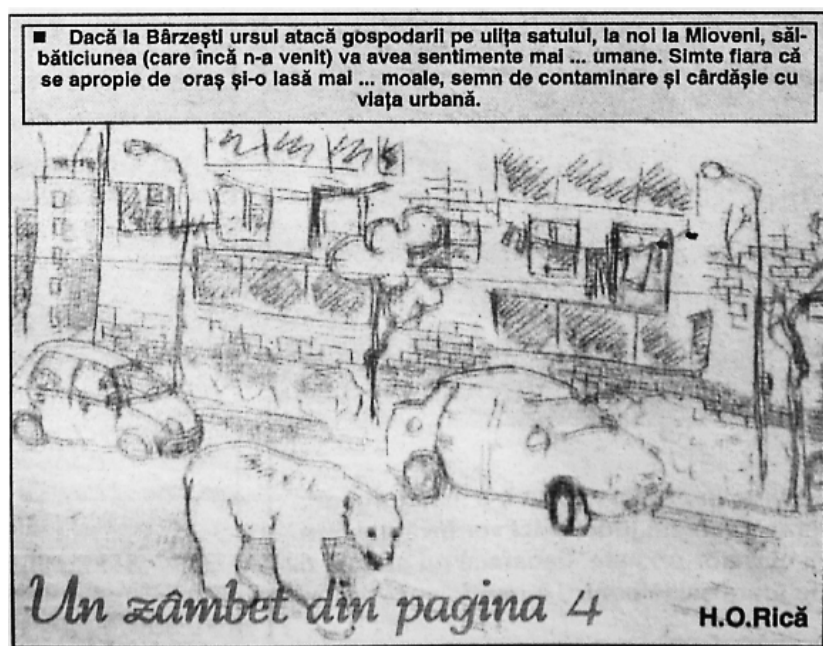


FIGURE III.31. “If in Bârzești the bear attacks the villagers on the village street, with us in Mioveni, the wild animal (that has not come yet) will prove to be more...humane at heart. The beast feels it is getting close to the city and...eases off, a sign of contamination and collusion with urban life.”
Source: *Miovenii* 76, December 2004.

basic services for people who could not afford to pay their bills, on the other, was no longer a reason for moral outrage, nor an opportunity for ethical pedagogy. It was simply taken as a matter of fact: this was the new order of things and it provided its own self-evident justification. This consecration was not made possible simply by virtue of the symbolic power wielded by the local administration. Its efficacy was based on the shift of fortunes that began to be experienced toward the end of the decade by those who had kept their jobs at the automobile factory. As increasingly significant wage increases piled up every year, plant workers began to show the first signs of what until then could only have been thought of as affluence.⁶²⁷ At least for some of them, it appeared that the much-longed-for normality was finally coming into reach; along with it, the long-lived ideas of sacrifice and deferral were rapidly shaking off their relevance. The years pushing for new investments and urban modernization were also beginning to pay off. In the local newspaper, purely positive descriptions of urban life in Mioveni, which had been extremely rare during Costescu’s time in office (figure III.31), were now becoming commonplace—a far cry from the days when the town was said to be under constant assault by “hordes of vandal-rats.” With only a brief hiatus of pessimism during Dacia’s sales slump in 2008/9, both in the public sphere and in the private lives of the chosen the need for holding on to hope began to disappear along with hopelessness, as the years of torment seemed to be giving in to the settling of a much-awaited-for ordinary orderliness.

⁶²⁷ At the beginning of 2008, Georgescu’s administration faced problems that would have been unimaginable five years before: how to accommodate the soaring number of vehicles registered in town, most of which were personal cars. 22,000 vehicles were registered in Mioveni in January 2008, as opposed to 15,000 one year earlier. “Interviu cu Primarul orașului Mioveni.” *Miovenii* 142, January 2008. The task of supplementing the number of parking spaces was quite different from that of patching leaky pipes and experimenting with emergency heating arrangements, problems which had given so many headaches to local officials less than half a decade before.

For someone visiting Mioveni for the first time only at the end of Georgescu's first full term in office, in the summer of 2012, it would have been impossible to fathom the turmoil that during the previous decade had set the stage for the existing state of things. On July 1st, thousands of people arrived in town to witness the consecration of the massive cathedral, a full two decades after construction had started.⁶²⁸ Though exceptional, this was just one in a series of celebrations local authorities had planned for that summer—next on the calendar was the French National Day, which enjoyed full support from Dacia's management and had by then become a regular fixture. As he always did on such occasions, the mayor publicly emphasized the preparedness and capability of local authorities to do what is necessary for things to run as smoothly as possible. Three weeks before, Georgescu had been reelected with an unprecedented 83.5% of the votes. The face of the city had changed so much that the lurid descriptions of the townscape from the 1990s and early 2000s were now inconceivable. Though some had survived, the main boulevard was no longer lined up with car parts shops, which had made room for several restaurants and bars, supermarkets, clothes' stores, banks, and a flurry of grocery stores, hairdresser's shops, hardware stores, and gambling establishments. Paraphrasing a Regom director who had just arrived in Mioveni eleven years earlier, it would have been easy to infer that a town in which "bars are full of consumers and shops have customers" must be doing quite well.⁶²⁹ Everything from the façades of the apartment buildings surrounding the civic center to the narrow and, for a new visitor, invisible streets behind them was impeccably clean, freshly painted, and nothing appeared out of place. A year earlier, national media had triumphantly announced that Mioveni was the first Romanian town to have surpassed the crisis: cars were rolling off the assembly faster than ever, business in town was booming, people were planning for vacations abroad, and the local administration kept busy planting palm trees.⁶³⁰ At least from the face of it, everything spelled success.

Though a decade and a half after Costescu's turn from union leader to town mayor the goal of achieving urban civilization might have been met, not all of the anxieties that had fed into the local elite's civilizing mission were brought to a calm. Mioveni did indeed boast an image of prosperity, order, and discipline, but this had been achieved by sacrificing the calling to lead that at the turn of the millennium had provoked so much enthusiasm and had managed to rally local intellectuals and administrative staff around Costescu's persona. Routinization dissolved the *raison d'être* of this charismatic movement and made room for a government less keen on warmongering. When coupled with symbolic consolidation and the all-out appearance of material success, this made for an environment hostile to giving center stage to prophets and self-declared "creators of social life." The idea of forging an organic connection between a local elite, willing and capable to provide intellectual and moral leadership, and a mass of working men and women, willing to recognize leadership and capable of stepping on the path of intellectual and moral progress, had been lost to such a degree that in spite of all its recent

⁶²⁸ Estimates of the number of participants ranged from a modest 3,000 in the central newspapers to a whopping 17,000 in the local media. Major political figures from across the country were invited to the ceremony, which required the efforts of no less than three hundred priests.

⁶²⁹ "Barurile sunt pline de consumatori, iar magazinele din oraș au clienți care cumpără." *Miovenii* 15, August 2001

⁶³⁰ "Palmieri printre blocuri, afaceri de success. Ce oraș ne-a scos din recesiune." 2011. *Știrile ProTV*, May 22. Online: <http://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/social/mioveni-primul-oras-din-tara-care-a-iesit-oficial-din-criza.html>.

history the town's founding story of marginalization and refusal by intellectuals and technocrats during state socialism still weighed heavily on the brains of the living. The now solitary longing for elites lost its enthusiasm and gained a tint of nostalgia for what could have been only if things had been done right from the very beginning.

The established and the outsiders

Far from constituting an affair of a locally dominant minority, the multipronged separation of the entitled from the disenfranchised was deeply anchored in the reality of everyday life. Regardless of how willing people were to fight these wars in the trenches, official discourse and public lambasting proved to be effective rallying cries by virtue of their being thematically rooted in workers' lifeworlds and because they translated everyday concerns and offered cognitive and interpretive material for solving harrowing daily troubles. The standards of respectability upheld so explicitly and so stringently in the public sphere stressed the absolute need, if not to achieve accomplishment, at least to maintain one's composure at home, in the neighborhood, and at work. Waging war rendered the mutual and self-valuation of people's differential abilities to meet up to these standards extremely salient in everyday life.

The mirror reflection of destitution and repugnance, respectability was tied to the capability of securing a future for one's children, presenting oneself adequately in public, as well as managing this on the basis of honest and hard work. No longer taken for granted, working at the automobile factory eventually came to yield the highest material and symbolic profits. Subsequently, being able to provide factory employment to family members, and especially to children, by whatever means, became synonymous with entering a virtuous circle of symbolic and material accomplishment. Neighborhood life changed dramatically as inequality heightened and acquired visibility either directly or via the continuous circulation of reputation.⁶³¹ The protracted war against those who could not pay their debts coupled with the gradually increasing affluence on the side of those who managed to hold on to their factory jobs and pool financial resources in the family led to the reshuffling of living arrangements. As the former were either evicted or decided to sell their apartments in exchange for debt repayment and a smaller flat or a house in the countryside, many of the latter bought the newly available flats either for themselves or for members of their families. While the newly affluent bought new cars and invested in individual service provision and aesthetic improvements to the interior and exterior of their apartments, their less fortunate neighbors, those who despite everything managed to hold on to their homes, were left in the cold, more often than not quite literally. Relative material deprivation was not their only source of debasement, since indebtedness also attracted public opprobrium and led to the quick dissolution of even the most solid neighborly relations. The intense circulation of personal reputations built up from these individual and family histories of success and failure compounded the plight of those who could not meet up to the requirements of respectability. Alongside the ability to perform in a given situation, the drawn-out, shared experience of heightened inequality led to reputation

⁶³¹ Small town life is synonymous with an exponential increase in the importance of reputation and the intensity of its circulation. In a former company town like Mioveni, reputation at work carries considerable weight for the ascertaining of reputation in the neighborhood, though in exceptional cases the two can diverge quite dramatically.

becoming the benchmark for gaining acceptance or rejection, on which pride and shame respectively depended. Under such circumstances, maintaining situational composure could no longer function as anything more than a mechanism of symbolic damage control.

The place of sociable drinking in neighborhood life changed along with these developments. As discussed in the previous chapter, drinking rituals contracted as a result of losing battles on multiple fronts and the symbolic reversal of alcohol from a necessary companion of a dignified existence to both symptom and cause of a wayward fate. One of the longer-term consequences of these struggles was the marked divergence between the ways in which younger and older generations relate to sociable drinking. At the time of my fieldwork, there was a conspicuous absence of young men from the interaction rituals in which males in their mid-thirties and older engaged as a matter of routine. These older generations grew up and joined the ranks of factory labor before 1989 or during the first postsocialist decade, when alcohol and its associated rituals enjoyed a rise in prestige and dovetailed the increased access to economic resources and the flourishing of urban lifestyles.⁶³² For these men, drinking offered the opportunity to forge friendships, exchange information and services, compete for situational standing, as well as a much needed backstage where they could share work-related grievances and family troubles. Men in their twenties and early thirties, on the other hand, grew up in the context of severe hardship and symbolic realignment of the 2000s. Their sociable encounters are far more erratic than the rigidly regular ones of older males. Territorially speaking, young men are less tied to the neighborhood itself and have a much more instrumental relationship to neighborhood stores and other places around which their older neighbors have developed relations of membership and where they spend most of their free time out of the house. They are more mobile and prefer to make use of the recently built leisure infrastructures; they would much rather have a night out in the clubs or bars in the town center or in Pitești every couple of weeks than spend a few hours every day at the corner store. In their case, alcohol only exceptionally plays the role of ritual substance and it certainly does not bear the aura of sacredness with which it is endowed by their older peers.⁶³³ On most occasions, young men either reject alcohol consumption entirely or relegate drinking to a matter of simple custom, refusing to engage in the cycle of substance ingestion and collective effervescence, and seeing no point in adopting what they consider to be an essentially abusive practice. For these young men, their older neighbors and relatives who spend their time socializing over drinks have little to offer in terms of looking up to. The latter are rather “the drunkards” who waste both time and money on an activity that brings little pleasure and carries plenty of risk.

On the part of those men who have maintained their sociable drinking habits, ritual participation has lost much of its prestige and potential to produce solidarity. Far from being on the cutting edge of urbanization, they are now forced on the defense. The effervescence characteristic for the sharing of drinks is no longer accompanied by a strong dose of self-assuredness and rather gets mixed in with feelings of isolation and erosion of symbolic profits. Compounded by marginalization and a decreasing numbers of participants, growing inequality has made keeping up with the requirements of the formally egalitarian structure of sociable

⁶³² Kideckel (1985) discusses these aspects in detail.

⁶³³ On interaction rituals and the consecration of objects and symbols, see Collins (2004).

drinking rituals increasingly difficult, as diverging trajectories and the increasing importance of reputation became significant extra-situational sources of situational tension. As the intertwined stories of Nicu and Cornel show (see chapter 12), the painstakingly established division between the established and the outsiders plays out most ambiguously, leading to simultaneous centrifugal and centripetal tendencies within what appear to be well-defined social categories. Face to face interactions have a key role in this. The impinging of extra-situational inequalities has transformed the majority of what could previously be considered fundamentally egalitarian, care-free interactions—among which the sharing of drinks featured most prominently—into ever-present opportunities of distressing exposure, of confrontation rather than congregation, in which one is more likely to risk shame and anger than participate in the alchemy of ritual effervescence and the forging of solidarity. Most uncanny, such a functioning of the ritual of drinks sharing not only effaces the convoluted history of its transformation but indeed seems to render such a history practically irrelevant, as it achingly works toward its own undoing and thus appears to set things on what few of those involved in the whole affair would disagree is an entirely normal footing.



THE BUILDING FOR THE NEW AUTOMATED STAMPING LINES UNDER CONSTRUCTION.
Photograph by the author, July 2012.



CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUND BETWEEN APARTMENT BUILDINGS IN MIOVENI. THE BLUE PLACARD EXPLAINS THE PURPOSE OF THE PLAYGROUND AND THE RULES TO BE FOLLOWED BY USERS.
Photograph by the author, July 2012.

EPILOGUE

THE ANTINOMIES OF CLASS

On the surface, the Romanian economy has fared particularly well since the official end of recession in 2012. Though paltry, GDP growth has been among the highest in Europe, exports have boomed, now ratcheting up more than 40% of GDP, government debt has been kept under control, official unemployment has slowly been decreasing, labor productivity has steadily risen, and nominal average and minimum wages have witnessed a constant increase. Behind this rosy macroeconomic picture, things are somewhat different. Romania has exited the crisis at the cost of deepening dependency, with a dismantled collective bargaining system, a plummeting wage share ratio and an income distribution increasingly skewed in favor of capital, the highest level of income inequalities in the EU, a soaring number of employees earning the minimum wage (over 30%, almost four times more than in 2011), unprecedented labor intensification and labor market “flexibility”, and, in an apparent paradox, diminishing levels of visible labor unrest.⁶³⁴ The exacerbation of dependency has been most visible in the major role played by the IMF, the EU or the World Bank (Delteil and Bănărescu 2013), who, alongside increasingly powerful representatives of foreign investors and decisively aided by a hard core of local preachers of neoliberalism (Ban 2016), have successfully championed austerity and pushed for a state crackdown on labor. These outcomes have seemingly vindicated Nölke and Vliegenthart’s (2009) analysis of the labor question in CEE dependent market economies: while capital has made isolated local concessions to labor, any significant pro-labor policy above the level of individual enterprises and beyond the most elementary issues (like the minimum wage) has remained out of the question. As a result, uneven development and labor fragmentation have reached new heights, dealing a severe blow to labor’s “associational power” (Silver 2003; Wright 2000) and confirming Ost’s (2009) hypothesis of the shaping of divided labor movements as dependent development advanced. The years of economic recovery have also reproduced what appears to be a systemic feature of CEE dependent market economies. As of the second half of 2016, “chronic labor shortage” has once again become an issue on the public agenda in Romania, as it had in the years preceding the crisis. How real and how severe this “shortage” actually is, whether it will endow workers with the “structural power” required to turn the tide at least slightly more in their favor, and how it will combine with their still crippled resources of organization and mobilization is too early to tell, though at present there are few reason for optimism.

Politically, the impression of exceptionalism has persisted, as Romania has yet to engender a neonationalist populist movement like the ones so spectacularly arriving on the scene across Europe and elsewhere in the aftermath of the Great Recession. But class has nonetheless remained thoroughly in the subtext of Romanian politics, while headlines have been almost entirely taken over by what Kalb (forthcoming) calls a “neoliberal-Darwinistic”

⁶³⁴ For detailed empirical illustrations of these developments see Guga and Constantin (2015), Guga (2016), Guga, Cincan and Constantin (2016).

type of right-wing populism—“primarily middle-class driven and cosmopolitan, in factual as well as imaginary ways”, and deploying “notions of meritocratic hierarchy interwoven with a glorification of capitalist discipline and efficiency against poorer and weaker classes of citizens, which it implicitly or explicitly threatens to turn into undeserving surplus populations”. So far, opposition to this has come—allegedly in perverted fashion, but otherwise entirely expectedly, under the banner of “social-democracy”—only in the guise of its combination with heavily diluted elements of what Kalb calls the “national-socialist *strictu sensu*” type of populism. In the meantime, all-out pro-capital policies have become doxa, including the imperative of maintaining labor costs low in order to attract foreign investment, side by side with constant pushes for labor productivity and flexibility, regressive taxation, decaying public services, and feeble redistribution via fiscal or collective bargaining mechanisms. Minimum wage policies, which have tended to monopolize the labor question entirely, have remained largely discretionary and have entailed only the smallest concessions to organized labor. Unionized or not, labor remains a chief target of political and, more generally, public hostility. It is an object of either open scorn or shallow paternalism.

In this political economic landscape, Dacia workers have emerged as having a very peculiar position. The unprecedented success of the company doubled by the spectacular successes of organized labor lie in stark contrast with the rest of the economy and the overall trajectory of trade unions across the country. Even more so, given that the increasingly acute conflicts between Dacia trade unionists and the government have been waged publicly and that management has consistently attempted to pit an overwhelmingly hostile public sphere against workers and union leaders. Unionists’ at least partial embracing of the managerial mantras of delocalization and automation in attempting to reduce costs via dedicated government investment in infrastructure has sparked more animosity than solidarity from organized labor outside Dacia and the Argeş region. To be sure, the struggle for the Piteşti–Sibiu freeway, to which SAD has fully committed in recent years, is not seen with good eyes by other trade unionists, for whom it seems to harbor factionary interests. As its “Marx-type” struggle failed to scale up on a national or even sectoral level, SAD has found itself increasingly concerned with defending existing achievements while attempting to preserve the scaffolding of the productivity compromise set up in 2008. Stretching Silver’s classification, we could say the struggle has shifted to a somewhat oxymoronic “Marx–Polanyi” type of unrest, in which the maintaining of local offensive capacity requires more and more defensive strategizing toward the extra-local. Organized or not, Dacia workers have thus been unable to escape their political economic and organizational environment. Labor fragmentation, manifest in pervasive local–national cleavages within the trade union movement and in deeply segmented labor markets, has rendered their struggle increasingly uphill, especially when it involves broader stakes and interests. The battle over the Labor Code—transversal and explicitly pro-labor—has by all appearances been lost, being largely replaced by those over state infrastructure and educational investments—explicitly more particularistic and pro-capital.

Paradoxically, therefore, this picture appears to absolve the various capital-logic or victimhood-centered accounts analyzed in the introduction of this dissertation, for which labor was either a simple factor of production, a weak force plagued above all by misrecognition, or a downtrodden victim struggling on the threshold of mere biological existence. Despite

appearances and rushed bottom-line assessments, as I have shown throughout this dissertation, the story is far more complex and ambiguous, in terms of both description and explanation, but also when it comes to politics. There is a hidden history of labor (or, better, multiple ones) behind all this, revealing labor's active role in the making of its own fate as well as in the development of capitalism in Central and Eastern Europe since the fall of state socialism. In this respect, collective organization and mobilization, the shaping and reshaping of labor markets, or struggles over everyday urban life serve as both means and ends. The erasure of this history—as it were, its concealment—is not a simple matter of scale, of how close or how far one looks from. On the contrary, as I have repeatedly highlighted throughout this dissertation, one of the most salient ethnographic realities of the 2010s at Dacia and in Mioveni was the overbearing phenomenal and narrative absence of this rich history from everyday life. In such a situation, ethnography's potential to genuinely question presentist and abstract accounts, be they scholarly or otherwise, depends on its ability to reveal the ways in which history lingers on as a “present absence” (Smith 2014:chapter 4): in personal desires and anxieties; in embodied practical senses and centrifugal or centripetal bearings toward interaction; or in strategic closures, tactical openings, and the existing space of possibles for individual and collective action.

Going further, historical ethnography proper reveals that the erasure of history represents a byproduct of outstanding successes registered by hegemonic projects in the interrelated realms of the factory, the labor market, and urban everyday life. Underpinning these hegemonic projects was the permanently tense relationship between workers and those claiming to represent them, be they trade union leaders, intellectuals, local officials or politicians. As the former attempted to secure their livelihood and respectability, the latter tried to establish and, subsequently, maintain their legitimacy in front of both workers and their peers and adversaries in local and central fields of power—the stakes of the struggles were, in other words, such multiple, and oftentimes contradictory, meanings of social reproduction. The dual nature of hegemony, as a combination of coercion (or control) and consent (or solidarity), is evidenced by the delicate relationship between what I have referred to as the political and, respectively, the moral economies of labor. The success of a hegemonic project depends on the alignment of these two economies of labor, or on the successful combination of market coercion, on the one hand, and the material and symbolic affirmation of the value of labor, on the other. In their turn, these two facets of the value of labor gained expression in the composite meaning of prized stakes such as wages and urban modernity: while hugely valuable, as it were, instrumentally, they also carried an overwhelming moral significance, which granted these struggles a persistent crusading aura.

If the affirmation of the value of labor was common to all hegemonic projects regardless of their immediate setting, so was the trajectory from (ultimately failed) attempts at achieving inclusion to (eventually successful) attempts at operating exclusion. In Smith's (2011; 2014:chapter 6) terms, the common trait of hegemonic projects in the factory, in the labor market, and in town was that they became “selective,” framing the workers' collective as non-inclusionary and industrial labor as a scarce resource meant to be represented separately, monopolized, and distinguished from its proximate and less proximate social and geographical environment. Though these projects espoused a pronounced degree of voluntarism, their

success depended on their correspondence with and ability to capitalize upon objective circumstances and processes largely outside their control—contradictory pushes for decentralization and centralization, privatization and restructuring, the success of the Logan range on export markets, the labor shortage of the late 2000s, the infrastructural arrangements for heating and water provision in Mioveni, etc. Moreover, hegemonic projects represented attempts at anticipating, fostering, or responding to various organizational challenges raised by the ebb and flow of capital accumulation and labor commodification, as well as by the accompanying realignments between capital and labor, state and economy, or factory and town. Their success depended on the articulation of multiple (material and discursive) elements that were immediately relevant for and consonant with workers' lived experience in the factory, in the labor market, at home and in the neighborhood.

Historically, I have shown that, for these reasons, hegemonic projects did not stick during the 1990s, despite discourses of exclusion surfacing early on. While state socialist legacies per se played a role in their emergence—as, for example old rivalries within the ranks of the technical intelligentsia were recast as struggles between trade union leaders, enterprise managers, and politicians, or as major state socialist discursive tropes (like “nonwork”) or rhetorical mechanisms were rehashed—it was above all the contradictory pressures of the political economy of postsocialism that fostered attempts at exclusion: simultaneous decentralization and centralization, the struggle over enterprise autonomy, the specter of unemployment, deepening uneven development, or trade union representation coexisting with other bargaining chips (notably, with workers' autonomy and bargaining power on the shop floor). While selective hegemonic projects failed systematically during the 1990s, they nonetheless produced a highly fertile ground for the successes to come during the 2000s, once dependent development kicked in. The advent of the latter rendered exclusion not just objectively necessary, but also objectively viable. Instead of going against the grain, attempts at establishing selective hegemony now in fact replicated and strengthened processes of exclusion, segmentation, and fragmentation inherent in the uneven dynamics of capital accumulation and labor commodification.

Hence, even though exclusion was preached from the very beginning by many of those claiming to represent workers, it was only toward the second half of the 2000s that it became, as Marx ([1843-44] 1992:251) once put it, a “material force”. Indeed, the more or less spectacular successes of the late 2000s—when SAD registered victory after victory, Dacia workers began feeling the taste of labor market “aristocracy”, and urban modernity became tangible for the first time—cannot be disassociated from the multipronged processes of exclusion that served as their background and which they consolidated both materially and symbolically. Nonetheless, as failure had done quite openly before, success harbored plenty of ambiguities, ironies, and paradoxes. Victorious labor organization and struggle, based so much and for so long on the struggle over autonomy and refusal of external engagement, can find few local answers to the triple challenge of automation, delocalization, and endless labor rationalization. As labor market developments move far quicker than the change of generations, durable inequality and enclosure have produced insurmountable difficulties of social reproduction, even for the apparently most established of Dacia's workers, while at the same time fostering conditions objectively inimical to solidarity both outside and inside the factory.

Achieving the long-desired goal of urban modernity in the former company town of Mioveni, along with its associated affluence and effervescence of consumption, has come at the cost of dismantling public life and diminishing organic resources of solidarity. Both inside and outside the boundary of exclusion, the “raw material of experience” has been altered to such an extent that the feeling of “an identity of interests”, the very feeling that makes class “happen” (Thompson 1966:9-11), lies muddled on both sides of the divide.

The implications of this argument are clear. Around the mid-2010s Dacia workers faced mounting challenges to which they could not respond as they had done in the past, either because past strategies and tactics—local strikes, pushes for autonomy—now appeared irrelevant, or because the (structural and associational) resources they could previously rely upon have been significantly diminished. Pessimism of the intellect aside, I hope my manner of tackling the questions of history and struggle in this dissertation will deter any haphazard speculations on future developments. Whatever the course of events—quiescence or unrest, exit or voice—and the ultimate outcome—defeat, victory or stalemate—this story lies unfinished and the end is not written here.

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