

Agitation as Education: Instances of the Romanian People's Democracy State in "May 1st" Oil Equipment Enterprise (1948-1953)

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"What did the working-class do when it worked?" This paraphrase of Gorän Therborn's title-question in his 1976 article on the reproduction of power¹ represents one of the main starting points of my inquiries into the presence of the Socialist state in the enterprise during 1948-1953; it is at the same time a question that has been paid disturbingly little attention by social scientists in Romania after the collapse of state socialism in 1989. Indeed, in the case of Romania, one of the two academics that have thus far touched upon issues concerning workers during Socialist rule wrote in 2009 that "[n]ew scholarship on the Romanian working class is almost non-existent [...]."² Similarly, Raluca Mărgărit argued that workers constituted a socio-professional category neglected by the literature on Romanian Communism.³ The reasons for this omission could perhaps constitute an article on power relations on their own and one cannot speculate on them here. What can be said is that the discursively-privileged "working people" appear to catch the eye of post-Socialist research trends only when they mounted some form of public, collective opposition to the regime, especially towards its final stages. These research trends have been following in-depth the evolution of the *nomenklatura*, the political and legal aspects of the constitution of the Socialist state and the physical violence unleashed by the said state on its citizens throughout its existence (with a particular focus on its incipient stages, since a significant part of the deportations, political imprisonments

¹ Gorän Therborn, *What Does the Ruling Class Do When It Rules? Some Reflections on Different Approaches to the Study of Power in Society*, "Insurgent Sociologist" 6 (1976), 3.

² Peter Heumos, *Workers under Communist Rule: Research in the Former Socialist Countries of Eastern-Central and South-Eastern Europe and in the Federal Republic of Germany*, "International Review of Social History" 55 (2010), p. 102. The statement quoted belongs to Dragoș Petrescu. The only other scholar is Raluca Mărgărit, who has very recently published two articles based on research similar to that which I will conduct: *Ipostaze ale întreprinderii socialiste în anii '80. Studiu de caz: Combinatul Siderurgic Călărași*, "Studia Politica. Romanian Political Science Review" 2 (2011), p. 286-308, and *Întreprinderea socialistă - loc de producere a regimului comunist. Combinatul Siderurgic Hunedoara în primele două decenii comuniste*, "Studia Politica. Romanian Political Science Review" 1 (2012), p. 63-90.

³ R. Mărgărit, *Ipostaze cit.*, p. 290.

and state-orchestrated tortures occurred during the Dej period⁴), situating themselves within the so-called “totalitarian model”. However, the precious information uncovered by such studies has not been further used to map and historicize the social effects of institutional practices on different social groups during state socialism in Romania, social effects which in turn influenced the institutional practices in the long run. The question which arises, therefore, does not concern the ultimate dismissal of the political (the totalitarian model) and the crowning of the social history approach (the so-called “revisionist model”) as the best way of tackling the issue, but rather sets up the possibility that the latter use the former in order to avoid both the exclusion of the political from social processes and the top-down determinism of the all-encompassing totalitarian approach. I argue that the tracing of the totalitarian precepts in their embodied form, i.e. as institutional practices at the level of the enterprise – the main unit of economic production, but also of jobs, creativity, culture, solidarities and ways of life⁵ – can help identify less physical types of state violence than the ones put forward by the totalitarian models, map the infrastructural aspect of Socialist state power, not just the despotic one,⁶ and reveal the extent to which the workers also influenced those practices, thus limiting the control of the state.

The type of social history I wish to make a case for in my paper does not exclude the political – as has often been the case with revisionist social history – but gives the Socialist state a central role in the evolution of society precisely due to the penetration of the latter by the former. While Sheila Fitzpatrick rightly lamented that “we have been strongly conditioned to see everything in terms of ‘The State’”⁷, to do the opposite and completely leave the socialist state (especially in its Stalinist period) out of the effects of the social processes it itself had accelerated (urbanization, forced industrialization and collectivization etc.) would mean to paint only half a picture. As Jean-Paul Depretto has argued in his review, it would be difficult to completely abandon the notion of totalitarianism, since it has placed the emphasis on a common feature of Nazism and Stalinism: state violence⁸. He goes on to add that

“[h]istorians cannot comprehend the history of the USSR by limiting themselves to a view ‘from below’. The social processes require an analysis that is at the same time ‘from above’ and ‘from below’: in fact, this is what the best of scholars have actually done, for instance Moshe Lewin or Sheila Fitzpatrick. This is why it is necessary to overcome the opposition between ‘the totalitarian school’ and social history. Far from ‘leaving politics outside’, the latter must do

⁴ See, among others, Dennis Deletant, *Communist Terror in Romania: Gheorghiu-Dej and the Police State*, London, 1999.

⁵ R. Mărgărit, *op. cit.*, p. 289, apud Renaud Sainsaulieu, *Sociologie de l'entreprise. Organisation, culture et développement*, Paris, 1997, p. 189-191.

⁶ Michael Mann, *The Autonomous Power of the State. Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results*, “Archives européennes de sociologie” 25 (1984), p. 113.

⁷ Jean-Paul Depretto, “Pour une histoire sociale de la dictature soviétique”, *Le mouvement social*, 2001, no. 196, p. 9.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

the opposite and offer central importance to relations of power [...]. The study of a dictatorship presupposes a double undertaking: analyzing the social bases of political processes and pointing out the social consequences of the decisions taken by the authorities."⁹

Furthermore, it is important to give credit to Communist officials – both in the Soviet Union and in the post-war Socialist countries in Eastern Europe – who constantly emphasized “the party’s long-established belief that it must aim to carry its message to the *entire* population.”¹⁰ The intrusiveness of Soviet methods (“[t]he principle of embracing the entire population in a single ideological influence continues to be of pressing importance during the period of mature socialism [...],” as one Soviet official declared in 1984¹¹) raises the question of tracing the actual effects of this totalizing approach. In what concerns the state enterprise (“May 1st” Oil Equipment Enterprise in the city of Ploiesti, in my case – one of the few industrialized areas in Romania prior to World War 2, located 60 km north of Bucharest, in the Prahova Valley), I follow this precept of political domination as social practice first of all because it is necessary to “take into account the internal contradictions of the state apparatus”¹², and second of all due to the fact that “[...] domination [...] must be analyzed as an exchange, albeit an uneven one, between those who exercise power [...] and are in possession of the means of repression and propaganda, and those who are subjected to them, but who are not devoid of resources.”¹³ This is why I am guided by Alf Lüdtke’s conceptualization of the G.D.R. as a “*durchherrschte Gesellschaft*” (society traversed by domination).¹⁴ “In the G.D.R.,” Lüdtke elaborates,

“[d]aily life was *comparatively* more under the dependence of power than in industrialized societies where the media constituted a public space of expression – despite the restrictions imposed – and where judicial and parliamentary checks and balances were imposed on governments and bureaucracies. [...] In the case of the G.D.R., the striking fact is not the success of the strategies of power, but the importance of the relations entertained with the latter.”¹⁵

One can extrapolate this assessment to interwar Soviet Union – especially after 1929, with Stalin’s change of course and the adoption of the first Five-Year Plan – and to early Socialist Romania. But what kind of state would this be and what

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 12-13.

¹⁰ David Wedgwood Benn, *Persuasion and Soviet Politics*, Oxford, 1989, p. 34.

¹¹ See *Ibidem*.

¹² Sandrine Kott, *Le communisme au quotidien. L'entreprise d'État dans la société est-allemande*, Paris, 2001, p. 16.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ See J.-P. Depretto, *op. cit.*, p. 13. Depretto’s translation into French is: “*société traversée par la domination*”.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

types of power did it deploy throughout society in general (“*durchherrschte Gesellschaft*”) and throughout the enterprise in particular?

Charles Tilly has come up with an influential definition of states as “coercion wielding organizations that are distinct from households and kinship groups and exercise clear priority in some respects over all other organizations within substantial territories.”¹⁶ But in the case of a state whose ideological pillars would require these organizations to reach “the entire population” and be “everywhere”, this definition simply will not suffice, regardless of how broad a definition of “coercion” one employs. The institutions developed by the Romanian Workers’ Party in the late 1940s and early 1950s during its penetration of the workplace¹⁷ – Party base organizations, Party schools, Socialist contests, literacy schools, artistic groups, workers’ clubs, wall newspapers or mobilizations for local or national events – are part of a process of state-formation that involves the dissemination of ideas. Steinmetz is careful to point out that “states are never ‘formed’ once and for all. It is more fruitful to view state formation as an ongoing process of structural change and not as a one-time event.”¹⁸ In the case I chose, this process is part and parcel of the above-mentioned concept of domination as social practice and is also dependent on the practices enacted by the workers as knowledgeable social actors who engage with those institutions.

In what regards the context of the Romanian workers at the time, the Romanian working-class was not a strong one. One of the main reasons for this was the low industrialization level of the country. Although the total number of employees in the big industry rose from 152,198 in 1932 to 289,117 in 1938, the industry itself was concentrated and isolated in a few areas (Bucharest, the Prahova Valley – petroleum, my area of research, the Jiu Valley – coal mining, Hunedoara and Reșița – metallurgy)¹⁹. Petrescu quotes Henry Roberts in his assessment of Romania’s industrialization:

“In Bucarest [sic!] one is startled by the abrupt transitions from modernity to backwardness. The oil wells and refineries at Ploesti [sic] spring out of a peasant landscape. Discussions on Romanian industry revolve not around branches of industry, but around specific large enterprises, Reșița, Malaxa, I.A.R. – isolated spots in the economy. In both Rumanian agriculture and industry there is lacking a ‘middle ground.’ a diversified, intensive peasant farming and the complex of intermediate industrial activities.”²⁰

¹⁶ See George Steinmetz, *Introduction: Culture and the State*, in *State/Culture. State Formation after the Cultural Turn* (ed. by George Steinmetz), Ithaca, 1999, p. 8.

¹⁷ See Anthony Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism: The Nation State and Violence*, London, 1987, p. 181-192. I will later explain my use of Giddens in this context.

¹⁸ G. Steinmetz, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

¹⁹ See Dragos Petrescu, *A Threat from Below? Workers’ Protests in Communist Romania*, CEU History Department Masters Thesis, 1998/10, p. 42.

²⁰ In *Ibidem*, p. 43.

“May 1st” enterprise was located in the southern part of the industrial city of Ploiești, 60 km north of the capital city of Bucharest, in what is now Prahova County (in 1952 it became part of the wider Ploiești Region). It was the second largest of its kind in Europe and was classified as an enterprise “of Republican importance.”²¹ Due to its oil resources, the so-called Prahova Valley was one of the few heavily industrialized areas in Romania prior to World War 2.²² During the industrialization drive of early state socialism, the percentage of the urban population in the county grew from 26.9% in January 1948 (150.218 people out of 557.776) to 46% in February 1956.²³ In the enterprise itself, the number of employees rose from 3.200 in 1949 to 5.671 in March 1951 (but with the instability of the workforce making the number constantly fluctuating), out of which 1.276 were party members, organized in 22 party base organizations, each one corresponding to a shop-floor²⁴. According to a local official at a meeting of the Department of Propaganda and Agitation in March 1950, there were 1871 youths working at “May 1st” Enterprise, “most of them undisciplined rural elements.”²⁵ This was the environment in which agitation was deployed by the Socialist state in order to “discipline” the workforce.

Agitation as Education

The amount of resources invested by the Soviet Union and by post-World War 2 Soviet-inspired “people’s democracies” into the work of propaganda and agitation requires continuous nuances guided by an understanding of local contexts and by the process of translation of ideology enacted both by the recipients of that ideology and by its rank-and-file disseminators. Ideas, after all, can only function in certain situations which arise from specific social structures and are applied and received by actual people, who may use them in ways different from the ones envisaged by their creators. The attitudes of Communist officials towards the dissemination of ideology, its materializations in society and its social consequences can perhaps be better grasped if one turns to some of the basic tenets of achieving and maintaining power (inextricably linked to propaganda and agitation) set forth by Vladimir Ilich Lenin. In Lenin’s adaptation of Marxism, a revolutionary minority could seize power and then persuade the majority to support it by “enlightening” the latter:

“Suppose that a small number of people are waging a struggle against a hideous evil of which the mass of slumbering people are unaware, or towards which they are indifferent. What is the main task of those waging the struggle? [It is] (1) to

²¹ Adrian Atineu et alii, *Prahova. Monografie*. Bucharest, 1981, p. 164.

²² “The analysis of the censuses of 1901 and 1930 indicated the concentration of industrial activity to Ilfov and Prahova counties”, according to D. Petrescu. *op. cit.*, p. 42.

²³ A. Atineu, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

²⁴ Arhivele Naționale ale României [hereafter, ANR], fond CC of the P.C.R., Department of Economics, file 18/1949, 96, and Idem, Direcția Județeană Prahova [DJAN Prahova], fond 58 (City Committee of P.M.R. Ploiesti 1950-1951), file 3/1950, 35. In the Bucharest office of the archives, the enterprise was occasionally found listed with its pre-1949 name, Concordia.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, 1.

awaken as many of the slumberers as possible; (2) to enlighten them about the task and conditions of the struggle; (3) to organize them into a force capable of achieving victory; (4) to teach them how to make *correct* use²⁶ of the fruits of victory. Naturally, (1) must precede (2)-(4), which without (1) are impossible."²⁷

The question which subsequently arises is how this "correct" use of this achievement of power turned out to be implemented in Romania. This is a legitimate line of inquiry since the emphasis Lenin places on propaganda is a necessary precondition for the accomplishment of other things. As Benn puts it, "[i]mplicit in this passage is the notion that the Bolshevik message was merely drawing attention to an objective reality; and also that the target audience would be sympathetic, once the message had been properly explained and understood."²⁸ In enterprises in Romania during the so-called Stalinist period, national and local level officials would have to constantly renew the message in order for the state to be able to shape the workplace.

A corollary to this assertion would be the emphasis placed by Soviet officials on the proper organization of propaganda and agitation²⁹ work as being in and of itself sufficient to ensure the success of implanting the political ideas of the Party. In its widest sense, according to a Soviet textbook, propaganda denoted "a special kind of social activity whose basic function is to disseminate knowledge, ideas, artistic values or other information for the purposes of moulding definitive views, notions or emotions and thereby exerting influence on people's behavior."³⁰ Indeed, the directives sent by the central office of the Propaganda and Agitation department within the Central Committee of the P.M.R. (Partidul Muncitoresc Român – Romanian Workers' Party, which in 1965 became the Romanian Communist Party – P.C.R.) to the county, local and base organizations in the enterprises and collective farms, and the reports it in turn received, are loaded with issues of organizing ideological work for better results. In a meeting of the central office of the Propaganda and Agitation department which took place in September 1948, a certain "comrade" Cotiga pointed out that "from an organizational point of view [...] in Constanța, which is one of the counties where guidance work is relatively well performed, the secretary of one of the Party base organizations in the naval shipyards is also in charge of guidance work, thus he reports to himself and nobody has any responsibility. This must be improved."³¹ This Romanian example

²⁶ Emphasis mine.

²⁷ In D. W. Benn, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 58-59.

²⁹ The initial distinction between "propaganda" and "agitation" posited by Gheorghii Plekhanov and used also by V. I. Lenin gradually became obsolete in Soviet state systems, which is why I use the terms interchangeably (the distinction was between propaganda as the presentation of complex ideas to a small group of politically-aware people, while agitation meant the presentation of a few simple ideas to large groups of people). See Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization. 1917-1929*, Cambridge, 1985, p. 7-8.

³⁰ D. W. Benn, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

³¹ ANR, fond C.C. of the P.C.R., Department of Propaganda and Agitation, file 9/1948, 231.

would correspond to well-known Soviet precepts on the matter dating back to the time of the first industrialization drive in the early 1930s which continued to be invoked well into the 1970s; the Editor of *Pravda* wrote in 1977 that “the effectiveness of information work, of ideological activity as a whole, depends on who plans, organizes and controls it; and this is the prerogative of the party,”³² while Mikhail Nenashnev, future head of the *Goskomizdat*, was more forthright and stated that “[...] after a correct political line has been drawn up, organizational work decides everything, including the fate of the political line itself.”³³

These organizational strategies do not, however, fully explain the intrusiveness of propaganda and the authorities' desire to penetrate every area of society – to reach literally everyone, as I mentioned in the theoretical aspects above. Neither does the obvious desire of the Communist Party to maintain and legitimate its rule offer sufficient grounds for the enormous amount of resources invested in mass propaganda. While there was an exaggerated preoccupation with the planning and organization of propaganda and agitation, I claim that the stake was for propaganda mechanisms to shape and organize the “mobilization” of “the working people” towards the building of socialism. Indeed, the Soviet system

“[...] has never been based on the notion of control by a ruling elite over a purely passive citizenry. The Soviet system derives its entire *raison d'être* from a programme of far-reaching social and economic transformation; and the system cannot achieve these goals merely by neutralizing opposition or protecting itself from overthrow. The attainment of these stated goals ultimately depends on the fulfillment of a further vital precondition – namely affirmative public action in pursuit of these goals. This, in turn, ultimately depends on the existence of conscious, motivated commitment to the goals at the grassroots level.”³⁴

This is why I posited that in the enterprise it is infrastructural power – “the capacity of the state actually to penetrate civil society and to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm”³⁵ – that takes precedence over despotic power – “the range of actions which the elite is empowered to undertake without routine, institutionalized negotiation with civil society groups.”³⁶ Similarly, this complements the approach to the Socialist state's penetration of the enterprise during the late 1940s and early 1950s as part of a process of state-formation³⁷ which entailed the development of institutional forms such as Socialist shop-floor contests, wall newspapers, workers' clubs and the dissemination of legislation within the ideological effort in the enterprise. In what follows I will present these institutional

³² See D. W. Benn, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 53.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 66.

³⁵ M. Mann, *The Autonomous Power* *cit.*, p. 113.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ See G. Steinmetz, *op. cit.*, p. 8-9.

forms in “May 1st Oil Equipment Enterprise” in Ploiești during the so-called Stalinist period and the way they were shaped by agitators and workers alike.

The institutional forms for the ideological dissemination within the enterprise were foreshadowed already in the speech that Miron Constantinescu – then-editor of party newspaper *Scînteia* (“The Spark”) and future director of the Committee for State Planning – gave to the new members of the party in June 1945. Constantinescu assessed that due to its previous illegal status, the party was threatened by sectarianism³⁸. It nonetheless had to overcome that burden and create “the link with the masses” that was “the essential task of each Party member.”³⁹ Setting the political line for the years when the Communist Party would become the only political force of the country (from 1948 until 1989), he added that “to be linked with the masses means to live permanently in their midst” and “to have an exemplary behavior in all circumstances, both when performing Party labor and in the private realm.”⁴⁰ He further put forward a precept that rank-and-file members and agitators would have difficulties with, namely that

“a leading organ of the Party, such as a Party committee in a big enterprise [...] must at all times be aware of the Party work throughout the sector and of the way in which the cadres and the mass of the Party apply the Party line in the given conditions [...] In Party information reports, an organization must not simply present the situation of the Party, but reveal the concrete measures that were taken in order to do away with the weaknesses [...] Minutes of meetings, reports and notes are important, but the best means of information is direct contact with the people from both larger and smaller Party organizations.”⁴¹

In his general assessment of the propaganda work of Party base organizations in enterprises three years later, the same comrade Cotiga pointed out serious shortcomings in this area. He complained that “as far as work method is concerned, what goes out from the center trickles down to the field as if it were a stencil. That’s how they work in enterprises.”⁴² He specifies that he “talked to an agitator⁴³ who was looking after 3 machines which were used by 7-8 men who were sometimes missing, came late or came drunk. He said he mobilized them only by telling them it was in the interest of the People’s Republic, he didn’t know anything else. He didn’t even read *Scînteia*, to be aware of the issues at hand.”⁴⁴ The recommendations comrade Cotiga gives are relevant for the party’s approach to ideological work in the enterprise, in the sense of a formally declared preoccupation with concrete local issues. He mentions that “[...] in order to know people, you need to talk to everyone of them, and it is above all politically aware workers that must

³⁸ ANR, fond CC of the P.C.R., Department of Propaganda and Agitation, file 35/1945, 2.

³⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, 3.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, 5.

⁴² *Ibidem*, file 9/1948, 231.

⁴³ At the time they were also called “guidance workers” (*indrumători*).

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, 231-232.

accomplish this task. [...]. It is not enough for 3-4 workers to do good work and not be preoccupied with the other workers."⁴⁵ Following Cotiga's intervention, Leonte Răutu, head of the Department of Propaganda and Agitation, emphasized and exemplified the issue of "little hiccups that often become serious problems"⁴⁶ by revealing how everyday social organization would prevent the enforcement of party decisions in the enterprise. Răutu pointed out that "the agitator must spot the little hiccups, because [...] our Party may be good, just and come with important improvements, but in the meantime someone might step on the worker's toes and the smallest of hiccups ends up causing the greatest of discontents."⁴⁷ He specified that "at an enterprise, it was noticed that the workers go to get drunk after they get their paychecks on Saturday. When they thought of giving out the paychecks on Mondays to prevent this, it caused an uproar and the Party base organization had to step in; the workers' wives were complaining that in these conditions, they could not go to the market on Sundays."⁴⁸

This meant some form of institutionalization of ideological efforts in the workplace was required. The plenary of the CC of the P.M.R. from January 23-24 1950 provided a legal framework for the party shop-floor organizations in the large enterprises through the establishment of party base organizations. These organizations were officially empowered to oversee the activities of the management of the enterprise⁴⁹. But this did not mean that the institutions whose existence was channeled and shaped through these organizations – Socialist shop-floor contests, wall newspapers, workers' clubs, Red Corners and the dissemination of legislation being the ones which I discuss in this paper – were shaped exclusively by top-down directives that reached an amorphous mass. As Newman and Clarke put it, "[e]ven where changes are experienced as imposed 'from above', actors have to find ways of translating them that are more or less congruent with 'local' contexts."⁵⁰ While in this Romanian case, the instances of collective public contestation of central directives are rare⁵¹, the practices of the ideology in "May 1st" Oil Equipment Enterprise reveal stoppages, negotiations and reshuffling⁵².

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, 232.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, 260.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁹ Raia Vidrașcu, *Problemele producției în centrul preocupărilor organizațiilor de partid din industrie*, "Lupta de clasă", series V, no. 5 (May 1952), p. 39-40.

⁵⁰ Janet Newman, John Clarke, *Publics, Politics, Power: Remaking the Public in Public Services*, London, 2009, p. 20.

⁵¹ The factory-scale strike of July 1951 and the larger-scale strikes of February 1952 (after the monetary reform) in the refineries and rigs around the enterprise. I did not find enough information on either of these events.

⁵² See Douglas Haynes, Gyal Prakash, *Introduction: The Entanglement of Power and Resistance*, in *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South-East Asia* (ed. by Douglas Haynes, Gyal Prakash), Berkeley, 1992 [1991], p. 1-23 (especially 2-4 and 15-16).

The Socialist Shop-Floor Contests

Among the effects of I.V. Stalin's change of course in the Soviet Union and the commencement of the first Five-Year Plan was the reappearance in the factories of "traditional characteristics of production and social organization" that would "shape industrial reconstruction in ways the state could neither overcome nor entirely control."⁵³ Shearer sees the shop-floor contests as "pre-revolutionary practices of shop contracting."⁵⁴ Put briefly, Socialist contests consisted of agreements – often arrived at after 'challenges' from the workers of one factory or shop to the workers of another – between enterprises, shops, brigades or individual workers to improve on various production indicators such as gross output, production price reductions or quality of parts⁵⁵. But the mobilization for the fulfillment of these plan indicators during these contests went beyond economic aspects and played a key role in the propaganda effort. Individual workers, as well as shop-floors, were encouraged to "make commitments" to fulfill and pass the planned norm, which resulted in the rewarding of the most skilled of them (the so-called Stakhanovites). However, the rewards (financial and social bonuses) were not always distributed, in spite of the normative provisions set up by the party. As we will see, either the various decision-levels within the enterprise would decide on the form of those bonuses or on the possibility of actually offering them, or the center would interfere in the final standings of the contests in order to favor certain industries.

In 1930, during the building of the dam that would facilitate the supply of the Magnitogorsk steelworks, Socialist contests were meant to mobilize workers allegedly to improve poor performances by "racing" with the construction of the dam towards the middle of the river; whoever reached the middle first would be declared the "winner"⁵⁶. The idea of working faster and risking a faulty construction dissatisfied both the American consultants in charge of overseeing the building of the dam and the workers themselves. The former "protested vehemently (to no avail) that there would be serious consequences if the two sides [of the dam] did not meet properly." The latter (both "new brigades" and older "peasants") expressed their discontent by mocking the competition with one of their own: who could eat the most bread⁵⁷. Kotkin writes that one Soviet official reported talking about the competition with the leader of an *artel*⁵⁸ – "a strong tough old guy." He "listened to us with a reserved expression on his face. It seemed that he understood everything, and was

⁵³ David Shearer, *Factories within Factories: Changes in the Structure of Work and Management in Soviet Machine Building Factories, 1926-34*, in *Social Dimensions of Soviet Industrialization* (ed. by William G. Rosenberg and Lewis H. Siegelbaum), Indianapolis, 1993, p. 194.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁵ Donald Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization*, London, 1986, p. 70.

⁵⁶ More on the difficult working conditions in Magnitostroi and the political involvement in the project in Stephen Kotkin, *Peopling Magnitostroi: The Politics of Demography*, in *Social Dimensions* cit., p. 63-105.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 79.

⁵⁸ In Russia and the Ukraine, *artels* were traditionally semi-formal associations of workers that often worked far from their homes and lived as a commune. Kotkin mentions that "their leaders were generally older peasants, men who commanded absolute loyalty from other members and brooked no incursions into their authority", see *Ibidem*, p. 77.

agreed... and then the old carpenter exclaimed: 'It's not your business to teach me how to work faster. With my axe I've brought forth dozens of churches and no one hurried me, nor told me that I worked slowly.'⁵⁹

In the contest occasioned by the celebration of May 1st 1949, the "May 1st" enterprise passed the factory planned target by 13%⁶⁰. The shortage of materials is already felt, being cited as one of the main issues in impeding the unfolding of the contests: "The raw and auxiliary materials needed did not reach the workplaces on time, we needed more special steel, welding electrodes, axels, tin iron [...]"⁶¹ Many enterprises did not even take part in the contests because of the lack of raw materials⁶². Another hindrance was the number of holidays in April. It is mentioned that "the third day after Easter, roughly 60% of the employees did not turn up for work, even though it was a working day [...] and in areas where there are other ethnicities, Easter was held twice."⁶³ The evaluation of the information in the report on the contests reveals that there were tensions even after the awards were given, when the central authority (The General Confederation of Labor – C.G.M.) tried to intervene in favor of the heavy industry. "Comrade" Stoica of the central office of Propaganda and Agitation said that

"[i]n what regards the handing of the Red Flags to the performing enterprises, I think there have been some mishaps [...] that must be corrected in the future. When we calculated who would get the Red Flags, we noticed the heavy industry was not represented. [...] I don't believe we'll be able to make any concrete changes in favor of the heavy industry now, since the C.G.M. has already tried to take two flags away from the textile industry and failed, because [they] somehow found out about it and sent a delegation to C.G.M. to protest."⁶⁴

"Comrade" Vass disagreed and claimed that there was "a big difference between cotton, wool or silk filing and oil extraction equipment, for example, and the textiles should give up two flags to the heavy industry in order to correct the mistake."⁶⁵ Compromise is eventually reached with everyone in the meeting agreeing to the manufacturing of more Red Flags and to the fact that, despite all the issues, these Socialist contests constitute a solid base on which agitators can build on in their mobilizations for future contests⁶⁶. A difficult task for the 30 agitators assigned to Prahova County for 1950 to coordinate the work of the base organizations, out of

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 79.

⁶⁰ ANR, fond CC of the P.C.R., Propaganda and Agitation, file 21/1949, 4. The numbers in these reports are based on information from the local organizations. While the numbers sometimes contain exaggerations, details about work methods and about how those numbers were reached were more likely to be given as a result of on-site inspections.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*.

⁶² *Ibidem*, 11.

⁶³ *Ibidem*. The reference is to the customary one-week gap between Catholic and Orthodox Easter.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, 17-18.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, 19.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, 22.

which only 21 were active and out of these 21, 7 were just attending their first Marxism-Leninism night classes.

Subsequent Socialist contests in “May 1st” enterprise are reported to have gone well – in the generalist fashion that Miron Constantinescu had warned against – and to have engaged “a considerable number of workers.”⁶⁷ It becomes specific when it mentions the number of unjustified absences that prevented a better performance in the contests. For January 1951 they amounted to 5,676 and for February they totaled an impressive 10,616⁶⁸.

Individual commitments and achievements were highly valued during this period⁶⁹ and these performers were considered the most valuable agitators of the workforce. For instance, comrade D.C. took the commitment to “make the bronze parts required for the globular cast-iron prototype pumps that are in the commitment of the enterprise outside his planned work program and also do maintenance work on his machine, while comrade I.N. has committed to passing his norm by 50% and so far he has managed to do it by 70% and there are many comrades like them.”⁷⁰ Notwithstanding the likely exaggerations, for the skilled workers who also engaged in agitation work the party had more than just eternal gratitude and individual Red Flags; it had economic and social incentives. A “leader in production” (*fruntaș în producție*) who maintained his/her achievements for six months would officially receive a deduction of 25-75% for a vacation in a villa of the C.G.M., a reduction of school taxes for his/her children enrolled in any form of middle or higher education and 50% deduction on tickets for nine theater performances, films or sporting events for the following semester⁷¹.

The Wall Newspaper

The wall newspaper (*gazeta de perete*) was meant to be the grass-roots press organ for each shop-floor in every enterprise. Workers were constantly mobilized to write about factory innovators, “leaders in production” or point out improper conduct noticed in other colleagues’ work behavior. The institution of the wall newspaper is perhaps a good example of Kharkhordin’s second aspect of individualization, namely “individualization proper.” There are instances of the worker engaging in self-perfection and self-training – “working on oneself” (*rabota nad soboi* being the original term in Russian)⁷². The concept of labor is thus not limited to the areas of production, but incorporates that of the personal as well.

In 1948, Leonte Răutu elaborated on the propagandistic purpose of the newspaper and its potential misuse:

⁶⁷ ANR, DJAN Prahova, fond 58, file 14/1951, 80.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁹ A trait also present in the German Democratic Republic. See S. Kott, *op. cit.*, p. 119-126.

⁷⁰ ANR, DJAN Prahova, fond 58, file 14/1951, 73.

⁷¹ *Idem*, fond CC of the P.C.R., Propaganda and Agitation, file 43/1951, 1.

⁷² See Oleg Kharkhordin. *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices*, Berkeley, 1999, p. 231.

"We must use the wall newspaper. but it will not play that [agitation] role if it handles issues that are completely cut off from current problems. Most wall newspapers are in the habit of dealing with 'planetary' issues, general articles concerning a national or international matter, but of little or no concern for the respective enterprise. It should also have short poems, workers like that and it may attract them. But it has to be placed in an appropriate place, since more often than not people don't even know it's there. The task of the agitator is to use the wall newspaper like in the Soviet Union, where they even have special issues. Someone been singled out for his good work? Put out a special issue and it's of great influence."⁷³

A 1949 analysis of several such newspapers underlined the improvements they had made, in line with the approach outlined above. "The fictitious editorial boards of the wall newspapers have been replaced with actual ones, and they are beginning to come to life."⁷⁴ Although praised for its focus on the local aspects of the Socialist contests⁷⁵, the case of "May 1st" enterprise, with 24 wall newspapers and one factory-scale central newspaper would only accomplish that two years later, when the situation was assessed to be "relatively poor."⁷⁶ The 1951 report of the Central Gazette (the factory-scale newspaper) for the first trimester of 1951 mentioned nine major themes that needed to be tackled by June 15 and they all cover the agitation themes that were meant to get people to be more actively involved in the building of socialism in the enterprise: popularizing party schools, literacy schools and education in general; mobilizing workers for the fulfillment of the production plan; innovations, inventions and rationing; popularizing the activity of the Committee for the Struggle for Peace; handling the wall newspapers in each department during the Socialist contests between departments; drawing critical cartoons; popularizing June 1st, International Children's Day⁷⁷.

Articles and cartoons ranged from singling out leaders in production to "critical and self-critical" pieces on inebriated workers. A piece by 'comrade' N.S. praised "comrade" R.S.'s smelting brigade from the Cast Iron department, who had made the commitment to produce

"three extra tons in addition to the planned seven in honor of the Youth Days. Similarly, the brigade of comrade E.N. from printing and comrade. M.P. from cores made the commitment to pass the norm assigned to them for work in the villages. The brigade of comrade D.I. in Mechanics 3 made the commitment to apply the Nina Nezarova Soviet method in building the roller drills. All this is the living expression of our working people fighting for a better life [...] and for the building of socialism in our country."⁷⁸

⁷³ ANR, fond CC of the P.C.R., Propaganda and Agitation, file 9/1948, 261.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, file 28/1949, 1.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, 3.

⁷⁶ ANR, DJAN Prahova, fond 58, file 14/1951, 61.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, 61-62.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, 63.

The cartoons were an integral part of the effort to “work on the self”. “Comrade” N.C. was shown manufacturing reject spare parts and then tossing them away in a hole “so that no one might know about it.”⁷⁹ Two days later, the “comrade” wrote a “self-critical piece” and placed it next to the cartoon, “showing where his mistake might lead to now that we are at the beginning of the five-year plan.”⁸⁰ The commitment he subsequently made was followed-up by his fellow colleagues, who testified that “he has made good on his commitment and is now indeed an example, since his is the cleanest machine in the department and he is also tutoring 2 comrades for qualification. After the scheduled eight hours, he is cleaning his machine and oiling it.”⁸¹

However, mobilization was hardly an easy task. On the one hand, the rationing system in place at the time made paper a rare commodity outside the official network of newspapers, and on the other, many “comrades” were reluctant to offer their support to the wall newspapers. The report mentions that some workers asked to write about issues in their department would constantly postpone their piece and would then become annoyed when pressed with a deadline. This happened in the case of comrade I.G., who “even though [he] promised to write about the results of the Socialist contests, to this day he hasn’t sent anything. I even put an empty page in the wall newspaper saying it was the place of comrade I.’s article and called on Comrade Secretary S. from the party organization to plead with him, but he just said: ‘Leave me the hell alone, I got loads of work to do.’”⁸²

Workers’ Clubs and Red Corners

The workers’ clubs and the red corners – the latter functioned in enterprises where there were no clubs and would be subsequently integrated into a club after it was established – were spaces that hosted work-related activities as well as leisurely ones. Agitation work was carried out by leaders in production disseminating Soviet methods related to production improvement and “building socialism,” doing book reviews in order to popularize Soviet and socialist realist literature and holding brigade or shop meetings.

At the meeting of the central office of the Department of Propaganda and Agitation held in June 1948, Leonte Răutu revealed the propagandistic and educational relevance of such institutions:

“There is a relatively high number of clubs, but in certain enterprises there are none. [...] What do we do where there’s no club? A Red Corner must be created. There the worker should find a newspaper, a record player and stuff. A guidance worker must be there to make a good atmosphere. They should read *Scinteia* there. [...] Reading the paper is so important, that Kalinin showed how during

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, 9.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*.

⁸² *Ibidem*, 67.

[the Bolsheviks'] underground days, intense guidance work was done by collectively reading newspapers."⁸³

Similarly, a report from 1952 outlining measures for the improvement of agitation work in the enterprises stressed the importance of these institutions in the translation of decisions into practice at a local level:

"In the area of mass cultural work, we must control cultural work in clubs and Red Corners in large enterprises to ensure the application of the Party's and Government's decision regarding the popularization of Stakhanovites and leaders in production. We will analyze the deficiencies in the clubs' work in large metallurgical and oil enterprises and help organize them, the Red Corners and union libraries. We will consider issuing of a magazine that would guide the activities of clubs and Red Corners, something like the Soviet magazine *Klub*. We will organize a contest between all union artistic bands."⁸⁴

This outreach, however, did not always find itself translated into practice at a local level. A report of the Ploiești office of Propaganda and Agitation from 1950 mentioned that "workers' clubs in enterprises throughout the city are visited by 15% of the workers."⁸⁵ In the leading refineries around the city, the situation was hardly any better. An inspection from the center criticized the state of affairs at Băicoi-Țintea oil rig complex, reporting that at Băicoi, "even though they had the material means to do it for a long time," the "comrades" there had only just thought it necessary to start a workers' club⁸⁶, while at Țintea, "even though they have a club, it barely has any activity. This is proven by the fact that on average, only 50 workers per month - out of the 3000 - read books from the club library."⁸⁷ Emphasizing the importance of education, the reporting agitator also decried the lack of reading groups or conferences, claiming that all cultural activity there was "limited to the choir and the dancing team."⁸⁸ There was no knowledge of the national contests between clubs and Red Corners, "and in this matter, Băicoi only has one Red Corner. It is well furnished, but there's no book on the shelves. Țintea has no such Red Corner."⁸⁹

The fact that these institutions had not yet managed to penetrate the workplace reveals the problems of policy translation. The agitator coupled this issue

⁸³ ANR, fond CC of the P.C.R., Propaganda and Agitation, file 9/1948, 261.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, file 1/1952, 40.

⁸⁵ ANR DJAN Prahova, fond 58, file 3/1950, 14.

⁸⁶ ANR, fond CC of the P.C.R., Propaganda and Agitation, file 44/1950, 105.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*. The artistic sections of the workers' clubs part of the Sovrompetrol would engage in performances that contained a mixture of traditional and ideologically-charged works. In July 1950, the artistic club of the union of the first regional office performed in Stăncești village songs such as "Holy Flag", "Song of Stalin", "Transylvanian Girl", "Labor", "Around the New Village", "Boloboc the Prophet", "Nothing is Better than Peace" or "The Sorrow of the Kulak". ANR, DJAN Prahova, fond Sovrompetrol Regional Office I Ploiești, file 12/1949, 85.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*.

with that of worker discontent due to economic hardships. He reported that "the two base organizations were not actively supported in their party work by the county and regional committees"⁹⁰ and because Băicoi held the Red Flag of national leader in production, the "political atmosphere" was very tense. "In all meetings, workers ask if theirs is the home of oil and they're the ones extracting it, why is there nothing for them and they still have to raise their children to torch or candlelight."⁹¹

Larger than the rig sites – both spatially and workforce-wise - and located within the city limits, by 1950 the "May 1st" enterprise benefited from a workers' club consisting of: a reading room, comprising books and magazines, a conference hall for meetings and discussions held by foremen and leaders in production where they present their work methods, the library, the model planes room, the children's room and the table-tennis room⁹². The multi-functionality of the space allowed agitation to penetrate an increasing number of realms of socialization and institutionalizing them, enabling further direct exposure to state ideology.

The work done in this regard at the clubs and Red Corners is visible in several base organizations' reports. The goal was to "raise the cultural level of the workers" and to that effect, a 1951 report points out that "the Party Committee, the Union and the management organized conferences in our enterprise club and they bought books every month and distributed them to every Red Corner."⁹³ But even if by October 1951 the number of books in enterprise libraries reached 19,461, the number of books actually read circled around 1200-1300, with the number of readers roughly the same⁹⁴. The agitator in charge of cultural issues made sure to write reviews of the books to be discussed in the meetings with the leaders in production.

Most of the knowledge produced in such meetings was disseminated from technical literature with ideological layers and the number of employees in attendance was usually not spectacular. At the Central Tool Workshop, after discussions on books such as "Quick Metal-Cutting", "The Foreman's Word" and "The Workshop of Fire", led by leaders in production, innovators and agitators over a period of 3 months in the presence of roughly two hundred workers, "a few of the comrades took these books from our club library for further study."⁹⁵ Further books planned for review and discussion were 'The Socialist Contest,' 'Machine-building' and 'The Soviet Experience Lights the Road to Socialism for Us'. At the beginning of July 1950, "comrade D.D., head-foreman in the Mechanics 1 Department, discussed at the workers' club with the leaders in production and mechanics the book 'Quick Metal-Cutting.' Ninety comrades were present."⁹⁶ After several other similar meetings, the agitator reported that "for the first time in our enterprise, the Soviet quick metal-cutting technique was applied, leading to an average 90% increase in

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*, 106.

⁹² ANR, DJAN Prahova, fond 58, file 14/1950, 11.

⁹³ *Ibidem*, file 14/1951, 161.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, file 34/1951, 3.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, file 14/1951, 3.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*.

norms above the planned target."⁹⁷ The production issues in this department for 1951, detailed at a Red Corner meeting that I discuss below, make the number seem exaggerated.

The Red Corners were occasionally the sites for official shop-floor meetings where factory issues were discussed. During one of these meetings in January 1952, the achievements and failures of the Mechanics 1 department were mulled over and labor discipline (or lack thereof) was the main issue. The secretary of the party base organization explained that "the department managed to reach and even pass the plan target for November, even though there were delays in the supplies from the Drills department. [...] We worked well, but we noticed shortcomings in the behavior of people from management and even in workers, many of whom refuse to process the urgently-needed parts and work as they are paid or as they see fit."⁹⁸ In all likelihood, many workers simply chose to dedicate more time to work that they were most skilled at while having to adapt to shortages and "shock work" during Socialist contests. This approach would lead them to a quicker fulfillment of their individual norm.

In the report of an engineer, shortages and absenteeism combined to make adequate work almost impossible:

"Comrade Engineer A. also showed that he is missing caliber-parts in the department and work is sloppy. People are often absent from work and they often work without any stencils."⁹⁹

The norm forms – the official sheets on which individual norms were mentioned and where workers would write down the amount of work performed – were also of high significance to the party agitators, since on the one hand they would reflect which individual worker, brigade or department were eligible for praise or reprimand, and on the other, control output norms. "Comrade Foreman C. says he doesn't get along with his men from the drilling machines, but he fails to mention that he doesn't assign them any norm forms. He also complains about the lack of bonuses, even though the department passed the plan every month."¹⁰⁰ This subterfuge of avoiding the norm form in order to bypass controls was one of many informal understandings between foremen and shop-floor workers

The Dissemination of Legislation:

The Monetary Reform and the Constitution in the Enterprise

The infrastructural power of the early Romanian Socialist state relied on "the act of will" that had to be constantly renewed, as I previously pointed out. Subscribing to Bourdieu's line of thought, the social relations in the enterprise were at a point where they had to be kept up by a process of continuous creation wherein

⁹⁷ *Ibidem.*

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, file 5/1951, 246.

⁹⁹ *Ibidem.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem.*

dominant agents had to “work directly, daily, personally, to produce and reproduce conditions of domination.”¹⁰¹ The political and the economic being intertwined in their action on the social space of the enterprise, tracing the dissemination of legislation to the level of the individual worker— the Constitution of 1952 and the monetary reform of January that same year – would be revealing for mapping the issues of translation of ideas to the local level and their transformation in the process.

In November 1952, an article in the party monthly *Lupta de clasă* outlined the approach to the translation into practice of party decisions by the local and regional committees. After the plenary of January 23-24 1950 had allegedly “cleared the air in what concerns the attributions of the party apparatus”¹⁰², Gheorghe Roșu stated that “the task of the party activist is to apply the line of the party when solving all practical problems arising in everyday work.”¹⁰³ Considering that party decisions were supposed to be “very specific” and their carrying out “based on the concrete situation on the ground”, decisions that were “general”, “lacked precision” and “mostly remained only on paper” were seen as serious flaws¹⁰⁴. Roșu gave the example of the regional committee of Bârlad, where the meeting discussing the organization of the Constitution debate by local party organizations concluded with the remark that “members of the regional committee should receive concrete tasks that will help them in their support for local party organizations in the debate of the constitutional project.’ Instead of taking concrete steps to ensure a proper organization of the debate, the committee made a vague decision, whose translation into life could not be traced in practice.”¹⁰⁵

It was such a “translation into life”¹⁰⁶ that was the main objective of the party when it came to the dissemination of far-reaching legislation. In the matter of “consolidating the success of the monetary reform,” the instructions for the Agitprop organs are laid out in a memo from January 1952. “In the large enterprises”, stated the guidelines, “agitators are instructed to focus on the broadening of the Socialist contests, the application of the advanced Soviet work methods, as well as those of our Stakhanovites, increasing the savings and reducing production costs.”¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, in the fifteen largest industrial centers (which included the “May 1st” enterprise), agitators were supposed to take part in three sessions of instructions during which they would receive lessons on, among other things, “the beneficial effects of the monetary reform for the working masses, the need for a strict savings

¹⁰¹ Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov, *The Social Life of the State in Subarctic Siberia*. Stanford, 2003, p. 10.

¹⁰² Gheorghe Roșu, *Organizarea și controlul executării hotărârilor de partid*, “Lupta de clasă”, series V, no. 11 (Nov. 1952), p. 53-54. See also the information from Raia Vidrașcu’s article mentioned earlier with regards to the “clearing of the air” around party attributions (footnote 27).

¹⁰³ Gh. Roșu, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 56.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁶ Literal translation of the wooden-tongue concept of *traducerea în viață*. I chose not to adapt it in my translation because I see it as suggestive for the authorities’ desired approach to state policies.

¹⁰⁷ ANR, fond CC of the P.C.R., Propaganda and Agitation, file 5/1952, 36.

regime to reduce production costs" or "organizing conversations with workers on issues of work productivity and doing away with *temps morts*."¹⁰⁸

Judging from the reactions documented in the union newspaper, the agitation work might appear to have gone smoothly. The pages of the daily *Viața sindicală* (Union Life) abounded in accounts of workers praising the monetary reform. "Workers all over the country praised the decision to enact the monetary reform and lower prices," titled the newspaper on its front page the day after the adoption of the law¹⁰⁹. At Timpuri Noi plant, workers were caught in a moment of "proletarian rage" against the kulaks and the speculators, "the shrews that had collected heaps of money at our expense. No more!"¹¹⁰ Stakhanovite agitator N.V. reassured them that "the government's and the party's decision gives a lethal blow to the class enemy. Certain temporary sacrifices will be rewarded with lower prices."¹¹¹

In the "May 1st" enterprise, the monetary reform is reported to have been "inspirational" for the way "comrade" D.I. built socialism. Together with "comrade" V.M., he developed a device for the drilling pumps that would "considerably reduce work-time" and passed their plan by over 100%¹¹².

Constant mobilization for the "consolidation of the reform" required the continuous Durkheimian renewal of the message. The "Grivița" can factory in Bucharest was criticized for not having done so and for passively expecting instructions "from above"¹¹³.

"The president of the enterprise committee answered very calmly: 'Well, we did do something about it, still. When the decision was published, we disseminated it among our workers the very next day, we pointed out its relevance and then people went about their business...' 'But it's been more than two weeks ever since,' we replied. 'In other enterprises, workers have made concrete commitments in support of the reform and we've already had worthy accomplishments.' 'That may well be,' the comrade retorted, 'but you see, we didn't receive any instructions, so...' '...you did nothing!' we completed the sentence."¹¹⁴

Bringing the decision and its provisions to the attention of the workers was not enough; the process was meant to mobilize all the institutions in the enterprise: "Nothing has changed in the schedule of the Red Corner. The comrades in the cultural sector did not feel the need to act and neither did the wall newspaper have any articles to point out concrete commitments."¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, 36-37.

¹⁰⁹ "Viața sindicală", series II, no. 1339, January 29, 1952, p. 1.

¹¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹¹² *Ibidem*, no. 1343, February 2 1952, p. 1.

¹¹³ *Ibidem*, no. 1353, February 14 1952, p. 3.

¹¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

Party reports painted a different picture of agitation work in enterprises, revealing the “temporary sacrifices” that “comrade” N.V. had mentioned. In Prahova, certain enterprises were late with the paychecks due to the fact that the bills had to be exchanged and there was discontent amongst workers. In the “May 1st” enterprise, wages were paid only on January 26¹¹⁶ when the customary date was the 15th of each month. On January 28, most of the agitators are reported to be at the exchange centers maintaining order instead of performing guidance work¹¹⁷. Workers were said to have had a low attendance rate at the brief guidance meetings held in enterprises due to the fact that they left immediately after working hours to exchange the money¹¹⁸.

An inspection report for the month of February mentions that at all enterprises in the city, workers are reported to have begun labor according to the new norms¹¹⁹. However, at the “May 1st” enterprise, Atelierele Centrale and Refinery no. 1, “part of the workers” requested the revision of the norms before proceeding any further with work and 150 workers from the Tools workshop at the “May 1st” enterprise requested to proceed with the new norms only from March 20 onwards¹²⁰. At the same time, several lathe operators were reported to have passed the new norms by 150%¹²¹. The same report assessed that the Agitprop departments in enterprises did not consider as a central preoccupation “measures for the consolidation of the monetary reform.”¹²²

In Grivița Roșie neighborhood in Bucharest, a Communist stronghold, tensions were reportedly high. At an exchange center, agitator D.S. caused an uproar after telling people that “if they didn’t quiet down, he would use other methods.”¹²³ At the neighborhood grocery store, there were “hoards of people and there was a high demand for cooking oil and when the supplies ran out, the crowd shouted that because of this reform, soon there will be nothing left to buy.”¹²⁴ Visual agitation had also been poorly organized in the area, since there were very few posters with the reform in the neighborhood¹²⁵.

The dissemination of the constitutional project entailed a slightly different approach to agitation than that of the monetary reform, due to the fact that it was a project and the state authorities mandated the organization of debates on its provisions in enterprises¹²⁶. In spite of this difference, the reports reveal that the goal

¹¹⁶ ANR, fond CC of the P.C.R., Propaganda and Agitation, file 1/1952, 20.

¹¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹¹⁹ *Ibidem*, file 35/1952, 49.

¹²⁰ *Ibidem*. Besides the stoppages, in this period several nonn-related, small-scale strikes about which I have little detailed information took place in the oil refineries around Ploiești and in “May 1st” enterprise. See also D. Petrescu, *op. cit.*, p. 99-100.

¹²¹ ANR, fond CC of the P.C.R., Propaganda and Agitation, file 35/1952, 49.

¹²² *Ibidem*, 49-50.

¹²³ *Ibidem*, file 1/1952, 40.

¹²⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁶ None of the proposals put forward by local agitators or workers during these debates is likely to have influenced the Constitution in any way, even though what was considered one of its most

of the action was similar: the dissemination of legislation that theoretically benefited the “working people” in order for the state to “penetrate” the workplace ideologically and economically.

In the Ploiești region, the instructions sessions preparing the agitators for the dissemination of the constitutional project were reported to have begun on July 27 1952 and were claimed to be of low quality¹²⁷. “Comrade” Beu of the Regional Committee went on to say that the visual agitation in several enterprises (including “May 1st”) was well organized: “[t]exts of the Constitution are posted in visible places and there are also mobilizing banners that popularize the Constitution.”¹²⁸ The general atmosphere surrounding the dissemination of the project was characterized as “unsatisfactory”; the majority of the people “has not read the project and they do not know what it contains, while political work in this regard is not well organized.”¹²⁹

For the month of August, however, the same “comrade” Beu had a more soothing report¹³⁰. Twelve activists from the City Committee and from the base organizations had organized agitation spots in the city where the people could come ask questions and discuss the Constitution project. The consultants “are well prepared and give good answers.”¹³¹ Agitators were said to have begun political work with the citizens on the streets and in the enterprises. In “May 1st” the project was read in all the union groups, after which “workers asked questions and made commitments.”¹³² Throughout the city, most of the issues people raised were either of an economic nature or related to the poor activity of the deputies they elected: “[d]eputies do not talk to them about the hardships they face everyday and they propose that the Constitution is drafted in such a way to make sure the deputies do their job.”¹³³

The agitators had queries of their own. 350 of them (from “May 1st”, Refinery no. 1 and Atelierele CFR Ploiești) took part in one of the above-mentioned instructions sessions which took place at Refinery no. 1 and put forward questions about, and proposals for, the constitutional project. Many of the questions inquired about the newly-established Hungarian Autonomous Region¹³⁴. The agitators asked,

important provisions stated that the People's Republic of Romania was “the state of the working people from the cities and villages.” Indeed, even before the “debating” process got under way and the “working people” were informed of the existence of a constitutional project, an editorial from *Lupta de clasă* affirmed that “the project of the new Constitution [...] has been received with joy, enthusiasm and deep patriotic pride by the masses of working people.” See Editorial, *Constituția construirii socialismului*, “Lupta de clasă”, series V, no. 7 (July 1952), p. 54-55.

¹²⁷ ANR, fond CC of the P.C.R., Propaganda and Agitation, file 5/1952, 64.

¹²⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹³⁰ I exclude guidance work performed in the countryside.

¹³¹ *Ibidem*, 90.

¹³² *Ibidem*, 123. This is one example of the generalities in party reports that Gheorghe Roșu was lamenting.

¹³³ *Ibidem*, 124.

¹³⁴ The Hungarian Autonomous Region roughly corresponded to what is now known as *Szekélyföld/Tinutul Secuiesc* (“Land of the Szeklers”) – the counties of Harghita and Covasna and parts of Mureș county.

among other things, whether the region abided by its own laws or by those of the People's Republic of Romania, whether Romanian judicial authorities had jurisdiction in the region in case a crime was committed within its boundaries or whether there were any special formalities a Romanian citizen might need in order to enter this territory¹³⁵. However, most of the questions and proposals revolved around social and political issues: for instance,

- If the wife of an employee works only around the household, will she have to earn a living by entering production?

- If an employee who retired cannot live on his pension, is he allowed to have an extra income?

- If an employee falls ill, does he receive free medication?

- If the masses disagree with a law that is adopted by the Grand National Assembly, can it be changed?¹³⁶

"Comrade" G. S. from Atelierele CFR suggested that article 79 should include the right to social services for those crippled at birth, while "comrade" M.I. from "May 1st" proposed that article 78 mention the number of years an industrial worker is required to be active in production¹³⁷.

Confusions and mistakes were also part of the process of translation. To give just two examples, at "Macazul" enterprise in Ploiești, the secretary of the base organization in charge with handling the dissemination of the constitutional project was reported to have very little knowledge about the provisions. During one of the instructions sessions, he was asked by a worker-agitator what the Hungarian Autonomous Region entailed and he answered: "[t]his means that the Hungarian population in the region will build socialism according to the customs of their own language."¹³⁸ The official writing the report went on to criticize the same "comrade" for having implied that the provisions regarding the freedom of religion were a pure formality, "and in time, churches will be abolished."¹³⁹

Conclusions

The totalitarian aspiration to be "everywhere" and mobilize the workers for the building of socialism translated, at the level of the enterprise, into the development of institutions which did not result in the transformation of the workers according to some fixed ideological precepts, regardless of initial directives from the center. Every worker was supposed to be mobilized to work for the building of socialism, but every worker "built" it in a different way. The infrastructural power of the Romanian state did facilitate the development of the "civilization of the enterprise" that Barbu theorized as having instituted "the field of labor" as the sole area for the social validation of the individual during Romanian state socialism¹⁴⁰. But the "field of labor" for Barbu might be too narrowly understood as merely that of

¹³⁵ ANR, fond CC of the P.C.R., Propaganda and Agitation, file 35/1952, 174-175.

¹³⁶ *Ibidem*, 175.

¹³⁷ *Ibidem*, 175-176.

¹³⁸ *Ibidem*, 176-177.

¹³⁹ *Ibidem*, 177.

¹⁴⁰ See Daniel Barbu. *Republica absentă*, Bucharest, 1999, p. 88.

work. Industrial labor did, indeed, impose a discipline of the body until then unknown to “modern Romanian civilization”¹⁴¹; but the “inflexibility of individual time” that Barbu added in the mix is a questionable notion. As I believe I have shown in this paper, the field of labor encompasses more than time spent in production (and even this was often irregular and inconsistent, as one might grasp from the sub-chapter on Socialist contests). A leader in production did not simply pass the norm during Socialist contests, but also presented books at the workers’ clubs or wrote book reviews for technical journals. Other workers would write for the wall newspaper or join the artistic groups from the workers’ clubs. Many of them would be exposed and react to, the legislation disseminated by local agitators (the Constitution and the monetary reform are just two of the major examples) who, in their turn, would be more or less in possession of the ideas that trickled down from the higher echelons of the state. Therefore, the infrastructural power of the Romanian “people’s democracy” state in the “May 1st” enterprise in the late 1940s and early 1950s widened “the field of labor” to incorporate time outside production, but that was still connected to the enterprise and in this way to the state. Far from creating a collectivist utopia, the ideology of the state and its translation of ideas, embodied in the above-discussed institutions, enabled both an individual participation to power and a rejection of it.

¹⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 88-89.