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Title: "The Restructuring of Free Time in 1980s Communist Romania. The Case of the 23<sup>rd</sup> August Works"

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How to cite this article: Speteanu, Adriana. 2012. "The Restructuring of Free Time in 1980s Communist Romania. The Case of the 23rd August Works". *Martor* 17: 157-172.

Published by: *Editura MARTOR* (MARTOR Publishing House), *Muzeul Țăranului Român* (The Museum of the Romanian Peasant)

URL: <http://martor.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/archive/revista-martor-nr-17-din-2012/>

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# The Restructuring of Free Time in 1980s Communist Romania. The Case of the 23rd August Works

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## ABSTRACT

This paper represents an analysis of the nature, contextualization, and implications of the phenomenon of time restructuring in the industrial sector in late communist Romania in the context of difficult economic circumstances. These temporal modifications resulted from a channeling of resources and labor into various industrial activities that served to alter workers' control over their own free time.

## KEYWORDS

Time, industry, factory, working class, communism.

The structure of time in communist countries can be viewed within the parameters of a structural modification imposed by the ideologized targeting of resources and the workforce. The vision of advancement towards an egalitarian societal form led to a process of temporal remodeling in relation to a priori conclusions resulting from the problematic interpretation of segments of Marxist theory dealing with the theory of value.

The socio-economic particularities of communist systems gave rise to an intermediary category of time, beyond the ordinary patterns, such as work time and free time. This restructuring forms part of an ideologization of time. The first great temporal modifications in human society occurred during the Industrial Revolutions, when chronological space became subordinated to the mechanisms of production. It was at this point, around the 1790s (Thompson, 1967: 69), when time became structured at an individual level for the purpose of improving the structural efficiency of production activities through the connection established between temporal units and a factory-dependent "modus operandi". Beyond the compulsory nature of a salary-based workday, this new form of what I would call a

"time-bound consciousness" was established through the distribution of personal clocks and watches. This technologically determined modification of the worker's relationship to time served to stabilize a pre-existent category of time, whose delimitations had been flexible up to that point.

The attempt, in countries governed by Stalinist bureaucracies, to transpose radical socio-economic restructuring into reality, resulted in a different process in terms of temporal criteria. Given that social and spatial policies were subordinated to production imperatives (Sampson, 1984: 54), this represents a contextualization of a new category of time in which human relationships are neither individual nor collective, but alienating, for they presuppose the forced rallying to the utopian projects of the decision makers. We should note that this process, although apparently connected to a series of ideologically based decisions, is more related to certain economic processes, such as industrialization or the more recent corporatization of capitalism, all of which lead to various degrees of social alienation (Gupta, 2002: 70).

Any form of cultural analysis of time implies the social system in its entirety. In com-

munism, time for the first time becomes a form of capital in the possession of the state, a bureaucracy posing as a revolutionary actor that governs it, manipulates it, and restructures it. In 1980s Romania, far from being accelerated, time gradually slowed down, was flattened, immobilized and rendered non-linear (Verdery, 2003: 63). The non-linearity of time was anchored to a set of newly introduced milestones: the dates of official anniversaries, the commemorative days in the communist calendar, parades, and state sponsored holidays that emphasized, through their predictability, the pre-modern circularity of time<sup>1</sup>. Accordingly, the forms of official discourse had a recurrent nature that suggested the same conclusion. On account of the cyclical nature of time, the present as manifested in the official discourse was a corporeal present with a spatial dimension.

Is there a dynamics in the compression of time? How did people relate to individual and collective time? What did the communist conception of time presuppose? The theoretical approach to time as a social construct must

state the political context in which time is experienced and the policy by which it is created. From a cultural point of view, the social construct of time must be understood as a political process (Verdery, 2003: 71). Therefore, political and economic constraints in the later stages of the Ceaușescu regime led to new typologies of control.

Norman Manea proposes the term “stati-zation” of time, in the sense of a planned seizure by the state of the private time belonging to the ordinary citizens (Manea, in Verdery, 2003: 72). Similarly Verdery defines the effort invested in the partitioning of time as a struggle between the authorities and the general population. The communist party dominated, through various means, a large part of the time people would normally have allocated to their personal use. Through parades, official visits to production facilities, Party meetings, daily work schedules, and decrees, the state apparatus imposed its control over time itself, obliging people to become involved in certain activities. The feeling of time monopolization is experienced differently in

1) For communist holidays, see S. I. Ducaru, “Religia cincinală – funcțiile sărbătorilor comuniste”, in L. Boia (ed.), *Miturile comunismului românesc*, Bucharest: Editura Universității din București, 1995.



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the rural environment in comparison with the urban environment. It can be said that the tendency of the decision makers to manipulate the segmentation of time itself was unavoidable, given that the artificial economic crisis occurred in a political space still dominated by the Stalinist paradigm.

In light of these considerations, it is necessary to perform an analysis of the various meanings attributed to the time spent in a large factory. This can be achieved by extrapolating on the representations of memories formed within the private sphere by different socio-professional categories, both in urban and rural environments (i.e. commuting workers). This type of analysis is made possible by an understanding of the relationship between the different hierarchies of bureaucracy and the informal structures of society. The nature of this relationship could vary from being parasitic to being a complementary manifestation of socio-economic interaction (Sampson, 1991: 18). Conclusions can also be drawn by ascertaining the extent to which the possible consequences of the arrhythmicity characteristic of late Romanian communism were, in fact, the maintaining of the people in a state of continuous imbalance, the undermining of a rational societal order, and the establishment of uncertainty as an existential reality. In the context of an integrated functionality of socio-economic elements, temporality, as well as space, can be transformed from a natural element into a political project (Verdery, 2003: 63), for they are susceptible to manipulation through decisions emanating from the political sphere.

In understanding the self as an ideological construct that institutionally binds individuals to social environments through normative restrictions and distinguishing them from the surrounding world, Verdery observes that "temporality can be deeply implicated in definitions and redefinitions of the self, as selves become defined or redefined in part through temporal patterns that mark them as persons of a particular kind" (Verdery, 2003: 93).

The reconfiguration of time in the context of ideologically motivated economic decisions led to the erosion of sociability and had a negative impact in terms of relations between those in positions of socio-economic proximity. In the case of Romania, this change can be considered to be the result of ideological assumptions, but when taking into account the same alienating effects of present economic realities, such as corporate capitalism (Perelman, 2005: 21), this ideologized world view appears only an ad-stratum to what were pre-existent objective economic realities.

The economic condition of Romania in the 1980s determined, through the contracting of large loans and the attempt to repay them within an unreasonably short period, a modification of cognitive patterns developed in relation to a fluctuating typology of time. The logic of production of late communism contradicted the paradigm of a relationship to time as it is allocated in the West based on criteria determined by the absorption of products resulting from economic processes.

The crisis, which resulted from the erroneous long term calculations of economic planners, reversed the way people related to the daily rhythm of life. The concentration of economic activity on the production sectors of heavy industry led to a form of restructuring of the socio-economic system and a changing of temporal reference points. Anthropologists like Gerald Creed emphasize the constant tensions and contradictions resulting from the integration of the political, economic, and social structures into a bureaucratic network of coordination. The paradoxical nature of this determinism lies in the fact that the attempt to stabilize certain sectors and to find solutions was intrinsically related to the condition of other areas of society (Creed, 1995: 531). Romania's economy in the 1980s can be placed in the heterodox category of economies centered on the production of goods that were non-assimilable on the internal market. This directing of goods towards export with the purpose of eliminating the foreign debt led to the birth of a shortage economy and an alteration of the

internal consumer market.

Under normal circumstances, the level of production of consumer goods determines the nature, structure, and contextualization of leisure time. This relational typology, implied by the prioritizing of certain economic activities, led to a restructuring of the notion of free time. The practical impossibility of reducing the salaries of workers imposed the need to develop artificial means of avoiding a rise in the inflation rate. This was generally achieved through increases applied to durable consumer goods. It is important to note these issues, given that free time also signifies a monetary exchange implying the acquisition of symbolic or utilitarian products.

The general policy of concentrating production by following the logic of extensive growth determined an increase in the number of hours spent at the workplace and led to the paradoxical situation of state monopolization imposed on a type of time that would otherwise be used for other types of economic activity and monetary exchange. This negation of the potentiality of another type of productive behavior, albeit a consumerist one, in the sense of the production and assimilation of consumer goods, was made possible by the emphasis placed on the production of industrial goods destined for export as a means to generate hard currency. Thus, the workers were faced with an intrusive adjustment to their free time, in which they could have been engaged in certain types of absorptive economic activity, based on the results of their own labor.

A decree issued in 1981 emphasized the need for discipline in the state enterprises, and industrial units were managed in strict fashion. Incentives for the boosting of production were increased, salaries at all professional institutions were linked strictly to output, and the minimum wage was discarded, a measure that stood in contradiction to the principles of socialism. Although levels of pay were determined by production efficiency, this decision did not affect individual salaries, which remained on a similar level, because state enterprises were obliged to accept a global

agreement that set wages based on a general factory contract. This meant that more highly productive workers, who exceeded the required output, did not obtain higher salaries than their peers, but contributed to a general rise in salaries in their section or factory. Absenteeism was also penalized through pay. As a result of these measures, worker productivity was supposed to rise by 10% between 1982 and 1983 (Durandin, 1998: 334). According to the Official State Bulletin of 1983, while on paper a worker could have an unlimited income, in reality his earnings were limited to the provisions stipulated in the individual contract and depended on the fulfilling of the "Target" itself by the factory where he worked. The "stabilizing" component of the contract presupposed provisions through which workers had their employment guaranteed for five years, but the socio-economic conditioning was pre-existent to the employment itself. By restricting the choice available to young people, the authorities channeled them in the direction of production activities, be this secondary education mixed with labor or obligatory postings to a factory after completion of vocational school (Kornai, 1992: 216). During the "trial" period, which lasted for one or two months, a new employee received only half of a Category I salary, the other half being stored in the bank by the factory management and withdrawn only if the worker did not leave the factory during this period. This latter situation, although rare, would have meant a loss of this amount of money in terms of cumulated salaries, but also the years of experience as recorded on the work permit (Shafir, 1985: 121).

The discursive function in the process of reconstructing social and individual space is essential as a justification mechanism of the assumed economic choices. Chris Hann rejects the idea of an analysis in terms of "discourse" for communist Europe, believing that the relationship between practice and discourse can be applied to any society, without negating the specific characteristics of communist discourse and ideology (Hann, 1994).



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Also important is the way in which such a discourse can affect social practice. Even if there are common characteristics in communist ideology, there are also differences in its implementation among Eastern European countries. Hann suggests that a model of separating the practices of different communist parties can be undermined by closely inspecting the activities of ordinary citizens against communist regimes. The difficulty of establishing a generic model of late communism also relates to the problems of correlating factors, such as the economic conditions in Hungary and those in Romania during the 1980s.

Time in late communist Romania was of a paradoxical nature: while apparently static at a macro level, it was unpredictable on an individual level in the sense that it modified the plans and perceptions of ordinary people. For the Party, time was conceptualized as flowing to an undefined chronological moment, as the grand project of achieving, through socio-economic engineering, the ideal of a communist reality gradually became more and more distant. Pavel Câmpeanu describes the sentiment of temporal accumulation and transformation:

“Becoming was replaced by unending repetition. Emptied of substance, history itself becomes atemporal. The perpetual movement is replaced by perpetual immobility. [...] History [...] loses its lasting quality.” (Câmpeanu, in Verdery, 2003: 99).

The rhythm of the “new man” was not characterized by religious holidays, but by secular holidays, like the National Day of 23rd August, New Year’s Eve, 1st May, Woman’s Day, and Mother’s Day, to which were added the anniversaries of Ceaușescu, other communist leaders, war heroes, and various rulers from Romania’s past.

Recurrent parades, a typical means of communist symbolic justification, represent a structuring factor of time in the proximity of the sphere of industrial production. By replacing the time dedicated to labor, the parades represented an attempt to emphasize the worker’s necessary solidarity with a system whose aim was the achievement of communism, but they also underlined the presupposed intrinsic connection between the working class and the Party. The employees of the 23rd August Works participated in parades

in impressive numbers. The staging of a parade was organized in advance, usually a month before the event, by the Party secretaries and by those of the U.T.C. At factory level, some 7,000-8,000 people participated, the lists being drawn up by the Party secretaries and by the president of the union. Those exempted from participating in these events were pregnant women or elderly or sick workers. In theory, in one form or another, everyone was obliged to participate. Those selected were taken from their various production sectors to specially designated places for rehearsals. Usually, these were also Party members. The clothing permitted did not include flamboyant colors: men, for example, had to wear dark trousers and white shirts. The most important parades were those held to mark 23rd August and 1st May, alongside those held in stadiums for the commemoration of historical events. The meeting point was Piața Aviatorilor, where the official viewing platform was set up. The parades began with members of the army and the Patriotic Guards, who were followed by the main sequences composed of workers and sportsmen. Although they began at 9 am, the participants had to assemble much earlier, at 5 or 6 in the morning, at various different meeting points, either at the factory or along the parade route. As a propaganda symbol of solidarity and unity, the parades were broadcast on national television, almost in their entirety, until around 1-1:30 pm. After the parade, the rest of the day was free, but participants had to return to work the following day.

As the factory was closely monitored by Ceaușescu's party apparatus, the parade had to proceed without incident. The spectacle created during the parades implied an appropriate direction, the script being developed by professional choreographers, supervised by the Party secretary.

In the following section of this article, by using a selection of excerpts from a series of interviews, conducted in the period 2004-2010 with former employees of the 23rd August Works, I will establish the structure of per-

sonal relationships to the temporal modifications inherent to the abstracted socio-economic directions of the 1980s in the case of former employees of the factory.

The stringent control of time within the parameters of the bureaucratic organization of activities, with their planning and purpose, had a series of consequences in the event of non-participation in these parades, predominantly on a professional level. This might affect the frequency of promotion exams or the position on the waiting list for apartments – a worker's absence met with the negative consequence of losing the points he had accumulated. A. R., a locksmith, describes the constraints imposed by the absurd logic of "voluntaristic" participation:

*It was a constraint. If there was a promotion coming up, it wouldn't be given before 23rd August. The economist would come to you and say: "You have to be there; otherwise you can kiss your promotion goodbye!" Or anyone who needed a place to stay, even if he or she worked on the Oltenița Line. They would blackmail you, give you the thumbs down. Everybody would attend out of obligation.*

The repercussions are also described by S. S. and N. B. The former talks of the consequences on a professional level, while the latter describes the way in which a refusal to respect the rules of participation could contribute to stigmatization by fellow workers. There was a fear that failure to participate could affect group cohesion and placed a certain section of employees in a delicate situation in relation to the administrative and Party authorities:

*They would keep an eye on you, you know... They would often give you trouble... if you wanted a promotion, they would say: "Well, you didn't come to the Party meetings or the parades."*

*Wait till you hear what happened to me there, in the Locomotives section. This guy comes to me, a Gypsy from my neighborhood, who used to be part of one of the work teams, and says: "Hey, B., we're in the same row!" "See you there, then!" But, in the end, I didn't go. He*

*kept on saying to me, every day for a month: "Hey, you're in row 3!" "Row 3, mister!" But when the day came, I didn't go. Afterwards, I went to work, I was on the night shift; this is how the shift was. [...] I get to my machine, and I see 100 men who'd come for a trade union meeting. It was as if I were on death row. "Where were you? What were you up to? Who were you talking to?"*

M. P., a foreman in the factory's Motor department, recalls other types of public gatherings people were forced to attend against their will. In spite of the glorifying images of a society advancing towards a utopian ideal, the practical result of the presumed "proletarian solidarity" manifested itself in the effect of alienation, which could be seen as paradoxical in a societal model supposedly opposed to the values of competition inherent to capitalism. It was a time of waiting, an intermediary space, neither work nor leisure related:

*Then, there were the parades held in stadiums, where you had to wear certain clothes, a white shirt if it was too hot, a coat and trousers in dark colors, and a tie.... It wasn't to everyone's liking. Sometimes you would get sleepy, tired, all sweaty, but you had to stand still. We'd often wait a whole hour for Ceaușescu to come; we weren't allowed to move, drink water, or go to the toilet; some would literally pee on themselves.*

From the account given by the engineer G. A., conflicts of interest resulted from the non-participation in parades. Consequently, despite the Party's intention to strengthen social solidarity through public gatherings at which the achievements of the 23rd August Works were presented as constituent elements of the process of moving forward towards communism, the practical result was exactly the opposite: the emergence of a conflictual situation between those who participated in the events and those who were absent from them:

*For instance, people would sometimes refuse to go, but then the others would come and say: "He didn't go, how come I have to go even though I'm older and he gets away with it?"*

*You should remember that when handing*

*out bonuses!"*

Commuting workers were also not exempt from participating in the parades. Here the mill operator N. B. again describes, with a certain amount of humor, his only participation in such an event, which didn't even span on the entirety of the parade:

*When the Patriotic Guards were established in '68, they put me on the list for the parade. "Hey, B., you have to come, too, there's no one else left!" So I went. When I got to Dinamo, at the Calea Floreasca crossroads, we were standing together in a wedge-shaped formation, when Tram 24 pulled up, and I said: "What if I get into the tram!?" I went to the front of the tram,*



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*and who do you think I see at the back? The very boss who'd called me. "Well, son, where do you think you're going?" "You should be ashamed of yourself?! You call me "from Bulgaria", and then you go home yourself?" "Shut the hell up! Let's go home!" After that I didn't go anymore, that was the first and the last time.*

If parades represent one of the systemic niches for the ideologized monopolization of time, especially in the sphere of those involved in industrial activities, then queues for foodstuffs and other household products can be viewed as a determining factor for the spending of even the small quantity of free time that still remained. This situation came about as a result of the inefficiency of the aforementioned economic activities. Consequently, it



can be said that Romanians found themselves in the paradoxical situation of being obliged to glorify, by means of a parade that took place in the first half of the day, the economic achievements of the system – only later, during the same day, to be obliged to spend a number of hours standing in queues, something which in fact contradicted the presumptions made during the parade itself.

Queues for food products in big cities were among the most frequently published images in the Western press during the 1980s in respect of the situation in Romania. According to Pavel Câmpeanu, queues functioned as agents of accumulation, reducing the opportunities when money could be spent. They also consolidated the power of the administrative centre, reducing the number of occasions in which money could be spent, and served wider central accumulation processes through an unequal exchange, which was their practical content (Câmpeanu, 1994). Another reason was to avoid growth in the inflation rate. The artificial economy resulted in this shortage of consumer products that unavoidably led to long queues. A large section of the urban population, with the notable exception of Party or Securitate members, was obliged to allocate a significant part of its free time to standing in queues. The procurement of food imposed on many Romanians the necessity of developing a system of relations through which overpriced products that were non-existent or scarce on the market could be obtained. Because the economic system was unable to cope with demand, and because of corruption, the Securitate tacitly accepted this illicit commerce, which eventually became a parallel economy. After the compulsory introduction of ration cards in the early 1980s, access to food products<sup>2</sup>, in the sense of staple foods like bread, milk, sugar, oil, and eggs, became a constant problem for Romanians. G. A., an engineer, describes this state of precariousness and the reality of the creation of underground trade that ensured access to certain products, simultaneously creating a new category of time dedicated to the search for and

establishing of relations:

*... It was difficult, we had no food, we had to stand in the line, as you know, or read; the stores were almost empty. But the strange thing is everybody had a full fridge. [...] Everybody had a fridge full of everything that could be found. There was an underground supply system. If you had a "connection" at a restaurant – a waiter, a cook – they would sell you pork for 100 lei per kg, when the official price was 38 lei.*

The paradox of the command economy centered on exports is that, although the level of remuneration was relatively high relative to general prices, money earned this way could not be spent. Another engineer, N. D., acknowledges that the system of relations offered everything that was needed. In this way, informal relations became a form of social capital, possession of which influenced the structuring of time at an individual level, having the capacity to eliminate the hours lost spent queuing in front of grocery stores:

*I can't say I ever went hungry. The paradox was that we had the money, but there was nothing decent to buy; people had to wait in long queues, but they would manage. This was a community in which you could always find people with connections. [...] Although the food was scarce, everybody had everything they needed in their fridge, due to these connections. You were able to buy anything if you had a connection.*

The importance of connections in terms of access to foodstuffs is also emphasized by E. C., an engineer, and M.P., a foreman:

*You came to realize what it meant not to have this kind of connection at a food store or a cafeteria. Even if you had the money, you were likely not to find what you needed unless you had such connections...*

*People would wait in the line from evening until the next morning, when the store got a delivery of cooking oil. What could you do? Kill each other over a bottle of oil? So, instead of 11 lei you paid 20 lei. This was what you spent your money on, and, God forbid, you had to make a choice. I needed one connection to buy my coffee from, another to buy my meat from...*

2) See the analysis on the meaning of food and eating habits by S. Vultur, "Daily Life and Constraints in the Communist Romania of the Late 80s. From the semiotics of food to the semiotics of power", [www.rememberingcommunism.org](http://www.rememberingcommunism.org).

M.Ş., an engineer, remembers the problems of procuring and preparing food in a context of mono-alimentation:

*Problems with the supply; I'm not one to take pride in the fact I used to eat soya salami: I didn't eat it because I liked it. But, sometimes I'd manage to get hold of food through connections; I used to eat a lot of poultry, as it was the main source available, but I had no idea how to cook it differently, so it would look different.*

S. D., an electrician, expresses the same general state of powerlessness caused by the large amounts of time spent procuring food. This situation affected the time reserved for other activities, like time spent with the family. In these circumstances, queues became an atypical space of socialization, of conversation, and even of spending time with the children:

*We all used to wait in queues a lot, sometimes several queues at a time, and then wait until the next delivery... [...] Even in ...'88-89, we used to switch queues. My daughter grew up carrying the basket from one queue to another.*

The memory of never ending queues in which all the family members would stand is also described by the worker L. N.:

*Don't mention the queues! I had to wait in them with my kids, sometimes getting something on the run. [...] You had to stand in the cold for your ration, to get your ration of sugar or oil, and only from the food store you had been allocated to. Sometimes, the kids would stand in the queue, too...*

P. I., an engineer, describes this uncertain rhythm of life in his own words:

*You'd be up at 5 in the morning to get your milk at 7; you'd have to stand several hours in line for 1 kg of cheese or chicken legs, wings and necks.*

E. C., also an engineer, recalls the feeling that people were reaching the limit of their endurance:

*It felt like we were always waiting: how much longer could we take it? There were many restrictions. There was no hope. You would stand in those queues like a fool; I remember I once waited four hours for a box of detergent, four hours in the rain!*

Nonetheless, opinions as to the insecurity of life tend to differ from case to case, depending on the occupation of the interviewee. For example, E. P., a worker, believes that standing in queues allowed people to procure enough food to last a long time:

*Somehow, we managed to get by, despite all the restrictions... The stores were full, but we had to stand in immense queues... and that's what we did, we would get our supplies for two weeks, a month... We used to put everything in the fridge, and then buy more still, if we could find it...*

The systemic inefficiencies of economic planning and the imperative of a high export rate led to the reality of a shortage economy. This became a generalized condition of centrally planned economies during the 1980s, due to the chronic imbalance between supply and demand at the micro and macroeconomic levels (van Brabant, 1990: 161). The 23rd August Works also featured the phenomenon of parallel networks for supplying workers with products such as meat, coffee, and cigarettes. M.P., a foreman, describes the proliferation of this form of commerce, which represented a form of social capital extended to an organizational level:

*Do you want to know how we used to get our food? There were these guys at work, at 23rd August, who brought steak. [...] 100 lei per kg. They would bring 3,5, or 10 kg, however much you wanted. They would trade anything, coffee, instant coffee and other things; you could buy anything if you had the money. Prices were how they were...*

Another means of supply, especially for those from the rural environment, was provided by trips to the villages to procure meat. This presupposed the dedication of a certain amount of time to travelling, on weak infrastructure, and, last but not least, the possession of an automobile and the fuel it required. N.D., an engineer, is conclusive in this matter:

*They [the workers] used to go to their relatives in the countryside to slaughter sheep, lambs, pigs, or a calf – in the latter case illegally. So, nobody went hungry, let's be serious! We*



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*shouldn't complain about it...*

The phenomenon of commuting was also a constant feature of life in Ceaușescu's Romania. The unrelenting pace at which industrialization proceeded, through the procurement of a large labor force from the rural environment, was typical of the policies put into practice by the Romanian Communist Party. The lack of housing in Bucharest meant that more than half of the factory workers came to work from the rural environment, mainly via the Oltenița to Bucharest rail connection. A considerable proportion of the population of the villages lying along this route also worked at the 23rd August Works. The asymmetry of labor time, occurring as a consequence of the interaction between intervals of inactivity and periods of intense activity dedicated to meeting the requirements of the "Target", led to feelings of dissatisfaction, especially among workers living outside the capital. Many of these had plots of agricultural land in their villages, the cultivation of which required time and effort.

The large number of commuting workers that had to use buses or trains to reach the factory sometimes faced the problem of a lack of transport, the only alternatives being the bicycle, walking long distances, or, on rare occasions, a car. That being said, possession of a car presupposed access to fuel, which was also rationed. The commuter trains were, in turn, excessively crowded, most of the workers having

to travel in a state of physical discomfort. As P. I., an engineer, recalls:

*Half our men commuted. They were from the countryside. For instance, almost the entire village of Frumuseanu worked at our factory. There were entire villages of workers, some of them Romanians, some Gypsy.*

The 8-hour schedule was longer for those who commuted to get to work. It would take several extra hours for them to complete the journey by train, or by bus and train, depending on whether or not their village had a railway connection. For example, N. B., a mill operator, would get up at 3 in the morning in order to be at work by 7, thus spending four hours on his way to work and another four for the journey back home. He describes the commuting conditions:

*... I have been a daily commuter here for 30 years, on foot, through the rain, wind, storms...*

The irregularity of commuting times correlated to the degree of discomfort. This condition expanded the spectrum of existential uncertainty:

If the travel schedule was regular, it would take no longer than 45 minutes; but it could take as much as two hours with the Gypsies delaying it...

The irrational industrial decisions of the late Ceaușescu regime created dysfunctions between urban and rural sociability networks that could still be felt even after 1989. Many former commuters were made redundant and obliged by their new circumstances to concentrate solely on agriculture. For example, N. B., after 30 years of commuting to the 23rd August Work, defines himself as a farmer, and not a worker.

Beyond the relationship vis-à-vis ideological conditioning or the rationalization of non-durable goods, another form of perceiving time in 1980s Romania is constituted by the holiday-event-celebration triad, which provides a good viewpoint from which to analyze everyday life. Everyday life overlapped with public holidays and vacations, and represented the opposite of the daily work schedule, defined by routine. We have noted how, during

the 1980s, time was to a large extent confiscated under different forms by the authorities. As Sundays in some instances gradually became working days, the time spent at the factory amounted to a larger temporal entity than that dedicated to free time. While views on this problem vary from one group to another, workers as well as engineers were both confronted with the same chronic lack of time.

Time tends to be invested differently at a socio-professional level. Employees with a higher level of education were inclined to spend their free time reading, listening to music, going to concerts, the cinema, and the theatre, or practicing sports (this was one of the few activities where engineers and workers interacted). Workers also participated in group activities, like walks in the parks, day trips, or going to a bar or to the stadium to watch a football match. Individual activities consisted of holidays spent at seaside or mountain resorts, usually in accommodation provided by the factory through the system of trade union packages.

The factory itself in turn offered the possibility for employees to spend time in groups through activities organized by the Factory Club. This meant evenings of socializing, film screenings, concerts and day trips; however, this controlled environment was not to the liking of the younger employees, who preferred the seaside as of 1st May.

Although the number of destinations was limited, the holidays spent during the communist era are viewed positively by most respondents, given that most of them only rarely got to travel after 1989. The length of holiday was decided at the level of each work team by the foreman. Those with the most seniority enjoyed 30 days of holiday, while new employees got 15 days.

For some types of production activity, Sunday also became a work day, being compensated for by a free day during the week. The control exercised by the Party over time is exemplified by the fact that Romanians had the longest working week in Europe. Personal time was increasingly controlled and limited

in terms of the number of free days. An unstable work schedule affected the rhythm of everyday life, which was already affected by the lack of electricity, foodstuffs, and heating. As noted, those who worked on Sundays got a free day during the week in return. Despite the regulatory eight-hour work schedule of three shifts (7 am-3 pm, 3 pm-11 pm, 11 pm-7 am), the administrative staff, the foremen and the team leaders usually worked overtime. However, not all employees of the plant went to work on Sundays. For example, as N. B. and B. R., both workers, the former also a commuter, recall:

*I didn't go to work on Sundays that often. [...] Working on Sundays was a mess...*

*This was the logic of the Party. I used to tell them at work: "Leave me the hell alone, why should I come to work on a Sunday?!" "You shouldn't just sit around doing nothing, you should always be busy with something or you'll lose your mind!"*

The possibility of skipping a working Sunday was denied to E. C., an engineer and a member of the Design department. In her position, missing a Sunday at work was out of the question, unlike for other workers:

*The hell you could refuse! Excuse me! The production departments, the workers maybe, but here we always came to work on Sundays. You couldn't afford to say no...*

P. I., an engineer, describes in a similar manner the factory work schedule on a Sunday:

*I'm telling you, on Sundays we actually worked with a diminished workforce. And we, the management, came to work at least two Sundays a month.*

Some positive connotations of time are determined by its association with the youth of the persons interviewed. It was an archetypal time, whose value, albeit within certain limitations, produces the consciousness of a positive and unrepeatable condition of existence. M. Ș., an engineer, explains:

*The good thing was that we were younger, sort of carefree, we had our group of friends who had no children or family obligations yet; some*

*of them were still single, and we used to go to the mountains.*

Holidays at the seaside and in the mountains constitute a pleasant memory for all socio-professional categories represented in the 23rd August Works. Every year, through its Youth and Trade Union organizations, the factory offered travel and recuperation packages for approximately 10,000 employees at holiday resorts throughout the country. Besides packages for the seaside or the mountains, the factory also scheduled short trips at the weekend. M. B., an engineer, remembers the vacations at the seaside and how the reality of the economic crisis affected people even within the supposedly protected space of the holiday. For example, the restaurants at the seaside stayed open until only 6 pm because of systemic food shortages:

*What we did have and enjoyed were the student camps, which were affordable; then there were the annual vacations on the seaside, which we would always look forward to. We could afford them, we could afford to save money since there was no food; and so you could save money for a whole year to go to the seaside. But once you got there...the restaurants would close at 6 pm. But we still enjoyed the sea, the sand, the water... and that was about it. So, in the end, so much for having fun at the seaside!*

C. A., an engineer, describes the atmosphere during days off, accompanied by the disregarding of certain rules by restaurant managers and the necessity of procuring products on one's own:

*We used to go to the seaside and it was cool, there were so many people and so much fun that some restaurants would disobey the rules and close later in the evening, at 10 pm, when they had students there. Generally, once the exam session was over, the students would be everywhere: at the seaside, in the mountains, Sinaia or Predeal. You would go for a walk in Sinaia and bump into your fellow students. Students would also go to the seaside on 1st May. They took everything with them – soda, cigarettes...*

R. B., a laboratory technician, is one of the

employees for whom time spent at the seaside represented a positive chapter. In his capacity as head of the Sports-Tourism factory department, he organized trips for 1st May:

*1st May was the best occasion to have fun, everybody had a few days off and went to the seaside. You're too young...[...] For those who were irritated by the "Workers 1st May", where they had to clap their hands... [...] this was a unique chance to go to Vox Maris in Costinești, where it was full of students and you had the chance to do lots of things for those times and strike up brief friendships. It was interesting how the railway company wouldn't schedule any extra trains, so we travelled on slow trains, one of top of the other, literally.*

The structured distribution of time was in some instances the responsibility of the Party-affiliated bodies, like the Workers' Trade Union. For performances that took place at the factory club the tickets were handed out for free, while for those that took place in the city the tickets were sold for a fee. Tickets for football matches were a great success. As O. R., a locksmith, recalls:

*We would also get tickets to see the football team Metalul; so that's where we went. We would meet on Sundays and go there in an organized way. At 11 am, we'd have a wash, get dressed and off we went, accompanied by our foreman.*

Football matches provided a way of eliminating occupational hierarchies, these being the moments that brought together distinct professional groups, as, for example, workers and engineers. R. I., a worker, explains:

*Take the interdepartmental football championship, for instance. The finals were played with an audience. There was also the Spring Festival, there were shows that culminated with the Final. Of course, it was interesting to see the foreman, the locksmith, the engineer all playing together... People would go; the stadium was full, here at 23rd August.*

Tickets for the Opera or the Athenaeum suffered an unpredictable fate, given that the person in charge of handing them out found few willing recipients. I. B., a locksmith, illus-

trates this case:

*What need was there for me to go to the Opera? I didn't go because I lacked the rich culture needed to go and listen to an opera or a symphony. Why should I go?*

Hence, the factory offered tickets for the theatre, pop music, and folk music. This system was supervised by the Trade Union and by the Communist Youth Union (U.T.C.). N. B., a psychologist, was a beneficiary of such tickets from the share reserved for the factory by the institutions organizing the events:

*There were Trade Unions representatives who kept in touch with the theatres and concert venues, and they assigned a number of tickets for the workers from the factory. I often went to the shows with tickets I got from the factory. This lasted until 1990.*

Holidays spent at the seaside and in the mountains were usually more accessible to those living in Bucharest. Commuter workers were tied to the rural environment, many choosing to use their holidays to work in the field. Still, in some exceptional cases, they also enjoyed short holidays:

*I used to spend my spare time at the C.A.P. [agricultural cooperative]. I didn't go to work on Sunday much. But I used to work the night shift, so I would sleep for four hours and work the other four. I had my vineyard and everything I needed here, but I would take leave in autumn, on 15th September. And where to spend it? Harvesting the beet... [...] The hell I went [on holidays]?! But I did go on a holiday in '81, because I fell sick. I suffered from facial paralysis three times in thirty years and when I got sick in '81, they sent me to Mangalia to recuperate. That's when I saw the sea for the first time in my life...*

The Stalinist ideological context determined the attempt to apply supposedly voluntaristic principles. The real purpose was, in fact, the quantitative reduction of paid labor. Voluntary or patriotic work organized at the level of the state enterprise by the Party apparatus, the Trade Union, and the U.T.C. was, likewise, a practice in which employees were obliged to invest a part of their free time. Performed on a Saturday and Sunday, this type of



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work presupposed that people be placed on a list for activities like sweeping, digging, planting trees, cleaning the streets of leaves and removing snow. Each department of the 23rd August Works was assigned a cleaning area. The area in the immediate proximity of the factory, including Titan Park, represented a priority area. These activities were supplemented by the patriotic work performed in the village of Cățelu, where the factory owned livestock farms, vegetable gardens and greenhouses. Another area where the workers of the factory were assigned cleaning activities was the pier on the river Dâmbovița, where, after the working day came to an end, the workers were sent to sweep.

R. I., a worker, and M. P., a foreman, describes the moment they performed “voluntary” work at the inescapable request of the state:

*...There were 4, 10, or 15 of us from each department, sweeping every day after work; then we'd go out for a beer, a movie, or play football.*

*...During the work schedule, they would create groups of 30, 40, or 50 men and say: “18 Decembrie Boulevard, as it's called now, you have to clean away the snow between post X and Y!”*

*...They used to send us to 30 Decembrie Boulevard to plant roses, sweep the pavements. [...] This kind of patriotic work needed to be done twice a month. But it was done in stages;*



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*it was impossible to send out an entire section. There'd be 10-20 this Saturday, other 10-20 the next Saturday...*

M. P., a foreman, describes the general state of the patriotic work performed towards the end of the 1980s. Voluntarism, as a work practice, lost its meaning in a paradoxical way, becoming imposed by the state itself, and not resulting from personal choice. This type of labor came to be a means of achieving an increasingly stringent control over personal time:

*...The plant was in sector 3, and coordinated by the Party secretary over there. Each of them used to work with their people. We would work during working hours or on overtime, but mostly during working hours, because afterwards there was hardly anybody willing to stay on, they would throw away their shovels and leave.*

Participation in agricultural activities constitutes another chapter of patriotic labor. Given a shortage in the workforce in the rural areas because of the commuting of the population from the villages to the cities, the Party was obliged to resort to the unpaid labor of

high school pupils, university students, and factory employees. At a factory level, a contract was drawn up with a State Agricultural Enterprise (I.A.S.) through which younger employees in particular were obliged to work in the fields. During the autumn, the factory sent workers to harvest corn, potatoes, sugar beet, and grapes. These moments could constitute temporary spaces of socialization. For E. C., an engineer, this agricultural work represented a means of relating to a period of her own youth:

*Then there was the work in the field, but, as I told you, I didn't take it personally or as an affront, it's also part of my youth.*

Recreation outside of holidays was also an important factor in the process of analyzing the temporal structure of late Romanian communism. The means of recreation seemed insufficient and excessively politicized for the engineer, I. M.. What in the beginning were positive events were hijacked in the 1980s by Ceaușescu's propaganda. I. M. describes the state of the youth of the day, whose freedoms he saw as being limited:

*It was sad because young people, like we*

*were back then, couldn't express themselves. Apart from the national festival, "Cântarea României", which was mostly political, there was nothing else. Parties where young people would dance would only last one or two hours, the TV broadcast was only for two hours, as the people were supposed to get their rest, to be at work the next day, as they [Party leaders] hoped. Lots of politics...*

Again I.M. talks about a categorical separation between the different ways of spending free time in the case of educated people and that of workers. For a society that claimed to be heading towards the elimination of social class distinctions, these were still visible in the structuring of free time by occupational categories:

*In fact, there were two ways of living life in that period. There were those who had some kind of education, and there were the great masses of the workers. For them parties meant going to some bars on the outskirts of Bucharest or going for picnics. The others would struggle to get tickets. [...] They screened "The Reenactment" for one week only. It was a miracle I saw it. Then there were Dan Pița's and Veroiu's films...*

In terms of the religious calendar, the unofficial policy of the party was to replace it with the economic and ideological calendar. The continuous appropriation of time in 1980s Romania removed people from the usual rhythm of the religious holidays. The holy days in the religious calendar were hijacked by different types of activities. M. B., an engineer, relates how work was used as a means to create artificial calendar priorities:

*If you think about it, we didn't even have any spare time. We had no 1st or 2nd January, no Easter, no Christmas. It was all continuous work. They would deliver the materials right before the holidays on purpose. I can also tell you that the hijacking of religious holidays was extreme. We would crack Easter eggs under the table.*

The linearity of time was affected in 1980s Romania by hectic production processes, unrealistic targets, and bureaucratic control. The

incongruence of time in late Romanian communism led to a transformation of behavioral patterns. We can speak of a modified and atomized form of the human being, in the context of a focus on production, statization, and competition dressed up as solidarity. Behavior was reduced to a cyclical series of choices in the context of daily life, directed by the political-administrative bureaucratic apparatus for the purpose of ensuring production efficiency and eliminating political dissent. Ideological constraints and the abstract ideal of creating the "new man" manifested themselves through the appropriation of private time and the attempt to eliminate religious holidays. Similarly, tactics were devised in order to engender an arrhythmic typology in the case of socialization within the Party, through the organization of meetings at irregular intervals.

The transformation of time into a form of social capital paradoxically contributed to the strengthening of class based differences, a result that contradicted the plans and promises of the Party to gradually equalize socio-economic conditions. Illustrative of this are the conditions endured by commuters, who were obliged to modify their biological clocks, the plight of those deprived access to informal networks of food supply and, last but not least, the workers forced to participate in parades, unpaid labor, and various official events.

From this discussion about temporal modifications in late communist Romania, we can note that in capitalist societies time was also subjected to different phases of modification, beginning with the late 18th century, in the context of the gradual economic processes involved in profit targeted calculations of output and consumption. In communist Romania, this utilitarian component of industrialized societies disappeared in the 1980s due to flawed economic decisions, thus producing the phenomenon of a greater monopolization of time.



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