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Reconstructing the Role of the Working Class in Communist and Postcommunist Romania

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Abstract This article examines the position of the industrial working class in Romania before 1989, its role in the overthrow of the communist regime during the December 1989 revolution, and its status during the postcommunist transition to democracy after 1989. The subordination of labor interests by both communist and postcommunist regimes to ideologies that underestimated the issue of class differentiation is emphasized throughout the paper. This analysis is undertaken at two levels, namely, the rewriting of the history of communism after 1989 and the obstacles encountered during the process of democratic transition. The later aspect refers to the problematic relationship between the intellectuals and the working class and labor's lack of involvement in shaping the post-1989 economic and political reforms. The argument that I pursue is that many of the setbacks experienced during the democratization process are partly rooted in the status of labor as an important absentee from the discourse and agenda of both incumbent governments and intellectual elites. It has been a significant factor in pushing the working class towards an illiberal right-wing politics and ideologies of a populist, xenophobic, and anti-intellectual nature.

Keywords Romanian working class · Brasov 1987 · December 1989 revolution · Romanian intellectuals · Romanian truth commission

Introduction

> “It is interesting that after being called a hooligan (huligan) in 1987 (and deported) I became mayor for five minutes in 1989, and then I became a factory worker again” (Iosif Farcas, 2004)

This testimony of Iosif Farcas, age 29 and one of the 61 individuals who were tried for their instrumental role in the November 1987 anticommunist revolt in the city of Brasov, summarizes well not only the individual experiences that most participants in this revolt

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shared, but also illustrates the general perception of the industrial working class regarding its status and agency during the recent history of the last 15–20 years.[1] The period that preceded the collapse of the communist regime in Romania in the late 1980s for the industrial working class meant a life of material deprivation, fear, and a sense of total disconnection from the official proletarian ideology propagated by the Romanian Communist Party (RCP). Even more, the period dramatized labor's inability to engage in any open dialog with those same authorities that claimed to rule in its name and represent its interests. But then, for a few brief but exhilarating moments during the December 1989 popular revolt, thousands working in industrial plants and factories left the workplace and joined the anticommunist and anti-Ceausescu demonstrations on the streets of Bucharest, Timisoara, Cluj, Sibiu, Brasov, and other industrial cities. This experience created a wave of euphoria and empowerment, temporary though it was.

In the first few weeks following the revolution, in many factories throughout the country, spontaneous grassroots manifestations of workplace democracy began to take shape in the form of National Salvation Front "enterprise" councils that attempted to elect their own managers and dismiss former nomenklatura elements. These councils, however, were short-lived and ultimately became an instrument of manipulation by the National Salvation Front (NSF), the new provisional body that took power in December 1989 (Siani-Davies 2005: 219–224). Enthusiasm among industrial workers was almost immediately replaced by anxiety resulting directly from economic and social dislocations endemic to the transition to a capitalist economy. These changes led to a continuous threat of massive unemployment, the collapse of the socialist welfare system, and ultimately a similar sense of political alienation felt before 1989 that relegated industrial workers to marginal status. In addition, during the difficult early period of the democratization process in the 1990s, marked by the persistence of authoritarian antidemocratic practices by former communists elites that continued to dominate political life, the working class was regarded with suspicion and sometimes hostility by the more progressive, liberal, and intellectual sectors of society. These sectors later came to see industrial workers as conservative, an easy target for manipulation by former communist, nationalist, or populist politicians and political parties, and therefore, unprepared to exercise newly acquired democratic rights and freedoms (Mungiu 1996; Patapievici 1997; Tanasoiu 2008).

As for Iosif Farcas, after facing the refusal of the Red Flag factory management in November 1987 to discuss specific economic and work-related demands of employees, joined by coworkers he took these demands to the local authorities. Supported by workers from other factories and hundreds of city residents, the protest escalated into a mass demonstration of discontent against the regime and Nicolae Ceausescu, the secretary of the RCP. Farcas was arrested, interrogated, and beaten by the police in both Brasov and Bucharest. During the interrogation, he was forced to declare that he and others had engaged in acts of "vandalism." Ultimately, Farcas was indicted as one of the principal instigators of the protest and sentenced in December to 2 years imprisonment for hooliganism and disturbing the social order (Oprea and Olaru 2002: 67–69, 123). Instead of incarceration, however, he was deported to a small town in a nearby county, assigned a lower occupational status in a factory, and kept under surveillance by local secret police. The same fate was shared by the other 60 accused. In December 1989, while still

[1] The city of Brasov is located in the southeastern part of Transylvania and, prior to 1989, was one of Romania's most industrialized cities. On November 15, 1987, an anticommunist protest occurred. It began at the truck manufacturing industrial plant Red Flag (Steagul Rosu) in consequence of a reduction in wages and a proposed elimination of 15,000 jobs in the city.

completing his sentence, the local community declared Farcas a hero and installed him as mayor. After a brief tenure as mayor, however, he decided to return to Brasov and, in 1990, became one of the founding members of the *Association November 15 1987*. Since 1990, the association has fought for material and legal compensation for those who were physically and psychologically persecuted by the secret police in Brasov and Bucharest for their involvement in the protest. It also lobbied—with other individuals and groups representing the anticommunist wing of civil society—for the prosecution of police officials and for establishing the truth concerning the crackdown. These efforts were unsuccessful despite years of determined struggle and a concerted attempt to persuade the judiciary and various postcommunist authorities of the justice of their cause. As late as November 2008, neither Farcas nor the other members of *November 15 1987* had succeeded in receiving any official recognition from the state or any extension of privileges or compensation as were typically awarded to other former political prisoners or dissidents. As a result of the extreme violence of the treatment received in 1987, 12 of the 61 died after deportation. At the time of their deaths, they lacked adequate medical care and were living in precarious financial circumstances.

Still, the 20th anniversary of the Brasov protest was marked by President Traian Basescu's official apology on behalf of the Romanian state for the victims of Brasov and for all victims of the communist regime. In his speech, Basescu acknowledged the events of 1987 as a prelude to the December 1989 revolution. He praised the courage of those who participated in the protest and situated it among the series of East European anticommunist movements including Budapest 1956, Prague 1968, Jiu Valley 1977, and Gdansk and Polish Solidarity in the 1980s. Basescu also admitted that the official condemnation of the communist regime in the report issued by the *Commission for the Analysis of Communist Dictatorship*, which he had officially endorsed in January 2007, was not sufficient. To become more than a symbolic gesture, it needed to be followed by some commitment of the justice system towards awarding compensation to the victims and by identifying and punishing the perpetrators.[2]

The special significance attributed to the Brasov 1987 events in the history of Romanian communism in particular (and the history of Soviet communism in general) acknowledged by Basescu and invited guests at a ceremony commemorating its 20th anniversary, a ceremony that included representatives of civic organizations, former political detainees, academic institutes, journalists, and the ambassadors of Poland and the Czech Republic, represents a sharp contrast with the existing historical interpretation. Instead of considering it as essentially anticommunist in nature and as ideologically inspired by previous workers' movements in other countries in the Eastern bloc, the first draft of the report issued by the *Commission for the Analysis of Communist Dictatorship* in December 2006 suggested that the Brasov protest was primarily rooted in local social and economic demands of the working class and restricted to its local boundaries. The final draft of the report substantially altered this interpretation and recognized both its anticommunist character and its crucial role in the collapse of the regime in December 1989. Moreover, the report claims that, after 1987, various tentative forms of a more

[2] The full text of Basescu's speech can be located on http://www.presidency.ro, Comunicat de presa, 15 noiembrie 1987 [Press release, November 15, 1987], accessed August 4, 2008. The first draft of the report, also known as the *Tismaneanu Report*, named for Vladimir Tismaneanu, the president of the commission and a political scientist, was endorsed by Basescu before the legislature in January 2007 when Romania was officially accepted into the European Union. At the time, it provoked negative reactions among the opposition parties represented by the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the nationalist Party of Great Romania (PRM).

structured opposition to the regime organized by intellectuals in cooperation with the working class began to take shape (Tismaneanu et al. 2007: 694–711).[3] And not just the Brasov movement: the much broader question of the relation between dissidence and workers' movements in communist Romania initiated intellectual debate and conflicting political argument among historians, social scientists, political actors, civic groups, and representatives of the old regime.

This paper examines the position of the working class in Romania before and after 1989. I argue that labor interests were subordinated to the prevailing interests and ideologies embraced by both communist and postcommunist regimes. While the communist regime silenced the working class in the name of social and economic equality, the post-1989 democratic regime denied class interests by unconditionally and uncritically subscribing to the ideology of laissez-faire capitalism. In the first case, a totalitarian regime represented by a patrimonial state controlled by a corrupt bureaucratic elite utilized a Marxist rhetoric of a classless society and of a communist party ruling in the interests of the working class. The latter regime, whether represented by left-wing or right-wing governments, chose to ignore or exclude labor-specific policies and, instead, promoted the interests of an emerging oligarchic elite represented by former communist nomenklatura and a new political class. This analysis is undertaken at both conceptual and empirical levels in respect to the rewriting of the history of communism after 1989 and the obstacles encountered in the process of democratic transition. The ambiguities and difficulties of rewriting the history of communism relate to the role and place of distinctive groups (intellectuals, dissidents, and workers) and their relationships with the communist regime and each other. My intention is to deconstruct the competing narratives of the significance and importance of workers' movements for the demise of the communist regime in December 1989. The Brasov case here has relevance for the broader topic of the tension between the critical rewriting of history through truth commissions and nostalgia for an idealized past felt by many poor and unemployed workers. It also illustrates the failure of intellectuals and workers to establish a strong and viable political alliance against communist dictatorship before 1989. This gap, which widened under the specific circumstances of the post-1989 transition to democracy and a market economy, originated in the failure to include workers and their interests in the political agenda of successive governments. This failure led to a rapid decline in the position of industrial labor, its economic and social marginalization, and eventually led to its adoption of populist, xenophobic, and anti-intellectualist ideologies. At the same time, an elitist apolitical discourse propagated by a significant element of the intelligentsia was a factor in pushing the working class into right-wing illiberal electoral choices and protest actions. These developments, inhibiting the process of democratization, are taken up in the second part of the article.

After preliminary consideration of the policies of industrialization, state ideology, and the working class in Ceausescu's Romania, a detailed account of the Brasov protest in the context of other actions and protest movements is provided. This is followed by a discussion of the December 1989 revolution and its implications for the working class. The second part of the paper also examines the relationship between intellectual elites and the working class during the post-1989 democratization process. We can then draw some conclusions about the lessons to be learned from this case study.

[3] Several analyses of the context, content, political reactions, and controversial disputes of the Tismaneanu Report have been published: Tanasoiu (2007); King (2007); Cesareanu (2008); Ciobanu (2009).

The Working Class, Ideology, Coercion, and Resistance in Communist Romania

In 1947, when the RCP took power, its main source of legitimacy was Marxist–Leninist ideology supported by the coercive military presence of the Soviet Union. Given that, after World War II, Romania was still predominantly an agrarian society and the urban population was only one third the size of the rural population, the creation of an urban working class became a priority for the new regime. A significant industrial and urban working class would give the communist party, it was thought, real authority as ruling in the name of a genuine proletariat whose interests it claimed to represent. At the same time, the RCP pursued the forced collectivization of agriculture in an attempt to transform the peasantry into a rural working class. By 1953, villages were in turmoil across the country, while the old commercial bourgeoisie and professional classes were virtually destroyed. The Department of State Security (Departamentul Securitatii de Stat) seldom hesitated to use its repressive apparatus against any individuals or groups who opposed this new order: whether they were peasants (approximately 80,000 peasants who opposed the new collectivization reforms of 1949 were jailed), former members and leaders of the pre-World War II political parties, or priests and congregants in the Greek Catholic faith who opposed assimilation to the Romanian Orthodox Church and also members of the RCP who refused to follow the all-pervasive Soviet line. Efforts at forced industrialization and urbanization at the same time had no impact on living standards although it did construct the appearance of an urban working class. What primarily lay behind this was simply new urban housing. Factory wages of this residential industrial class were not capable of ensuring even a minimal standard of living. Finally, in 1956, Romania was the last country in the Soviet bloc to renounce the fixed ratio system of consumer to capital goods further eroding living standards.[4] By 1960, the rural population was still the predominant sector of society while the urban population comprised only 32.1% of the total.

When Nicolae Ceausescu came to power in 1967 following Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej's death, he introduced populist measures intended to improve the standard of living. For example, price reductions on some consumer goods (radios, refrigerators), the improvement of housing facilities, even granting permission to operate boarding houses and artisans' shops (Fischer 1982). This paternalist approach was short-lived and limited. Ceausescu's two speeches from 1971—the so-called July theses—announced his intention to develop a "new man" whose life and activity would be motivated by a socialist consciousness rather than by material incentives that were seen as simply in servile imitation of Western habits. This new ideological theme formed the basis for radically increased industrialization. Misconceived or misguided industrial sectors were developed, investments made in megalomaniac and unnecessary projects, agriculture centralized, and in 1983, compulsory deliveries to the state were reintroduced. By the 1980s, the steel and metallurgical industry along with petrochemicals became the main pillars of the national economy. The processes of industrialization and urbanization were pursued at breakneck speed. While the population residing in urban areas had increased to 45.8% by 1980, in 1990, it had also surpassed the rural population and reached 54.3% of the total (The National Institute of Statistics 2008). This policy of forced urbanization and industrialization plunged the country into heavy debt. In 1981, foreign debt reached $10.2 billion, a sum that Ceausescu

[4] For a historical account of the social and economic transformations in early communist Romania, see Giurescu and Fisher-Galati (1988).

planned to repay by 1990; a goal he pursued through measures of severe austerity. Food imports were reduced but the country was again pulled back into the orbit of the Soviet economy to which basic supplies like meat were exported. Consequently, significant shortages of food and also electricity dramatically decreased the standard of living. In 1983, rationing of basic food supplies including bread, sugar, milk, flour, and eggs were introduced throughout the country except in the capital Bucharest. Similar restrictions were applied to the consumption of gas and electricity. Together with severe food shortages, ordinary citizens found that they had to cope with unheated apartments in winter and only intermittently available hot water or gas for cooking.

These conditions could hardly be said to resemble the workers' paradise envisioned by party ideology. How the working class voiced its concerns in this context of declining living standards obviously became crucial. A potential channel for addressing social and economic concerns was the unions representing the industrial working class. But since unions were subordinated to the party-state and their role prescribed by the higher echelon of the RCP workers had no real opportunity to express grievances within so obviously a restrictive legal framework. The attempt in 1971 at introducing a mechanism of worker participation in workplace governance known as "self-management" (*autoconducerea*) was never translated into real democracy and worker autonomy in the workplace. To the contrary, the workers councils that were meant to promote self-management were far from representative of the workforce in industrial enterprises. As Daniel Nelson noted, "they (i.e. the workers councils) have between ninety and ninety-five members, of whom three to eleven are 'representative of workers.' The remainder of the council is 'nominated' (by party or trade-union leadership) or is required by law to participate" (Nelson 1982: 194). The same author emphasized the overlap between union leadership and communist party membership (p. 193). The evident political distance between the RCP and the working class was further underscored by the extent of privilege and access to goods and services that members of the communist nomenklatura enjoyed under the existing conditions of "the economy of shortages," none of which were available to average citizens. This gulf between the upper echelon of the party and its general membership reflected the fundamental contradiction between reality and the progressive principle of the socialist system centered on the idea of the "classless society."[5] In this respect especially, the status of "a worker in a worker's state" was not at all unique. Students of the working class under socialism have argued that worker alienation in the capitalist system as originally described by Karl Marx was similarly and equally experienced in the factories and enterprises of communist societies (Haraszti 1978). What is solely different in this context is that industrial enterprise is no longer represented by the bourgeoisie as owners of the means of production, but by party managerial elites whose status and privileges establishes them as a ruling class (Nelson 1982; Djilas 1957).

The absence of any normative or other identification between the party and the working class was compensated by the regime through propaganda. It is important to note here that Ceausescu always felt the need to create an appearance of expressed consent by staging meetings in which officials (and Ceausescu himself) met with worker groups to celebrate worker participation and exhort ever-higher levels of socialist motivation and production (Petrescu 1988a: 229–238). The national festival *Cintarea Romaniei*, launched in 1976 and intended to bring together workers from the best performing factories along with the best students and scientists, was transformed

[5] According to Vlad Georgescu, in the 1980s, the communist elite represented only 5.6% of party members and 0.88% of the total population of Romania (Georgescu 1987: 69–93).

1 year later into a pageant in obeisant homage to the leader (Petrescu 1988b: 239–251). Ceausescu's emerging cult of personality reached its peak in the 1980s and was inextricably intertwined with an extreme nationalist and xenophobic rhetoric that led to a distinctive brand of Romanian nationalist-communism. This was expressed as complete identification between the nation, the communist party, and the leader.[6] Given that these manifestations of adherence to the regime and its leaders were orchestrated from above and not in any way a reflection of genuine popular support, the regime had to employ force in order to ensure compliance. Coercion, in contrast to rhetoric, was developed through the brutal apparatus of the secret police (Securitate). Securitate customarily used both physical and psychological terror. Most effective among its weapons was the intimidating tactic of spreading rumors of its omnipresence through the use of spies, collaborators, and ubiquitous phone tapping.[7]

Under these circumstances, any protests against the regime were labeled as unpatriotic and its initiators silenced by Securitate. The RCP consistently refused to engage in real dialog when faced with working class demands and unrest. Instead, the communist leadership claimed that protesting workers were not fully educated as socialist citizens or described them as hooligans and/or traitors. Typically, scapegoats were found among local party officials and enterprise managers. Those considered most dangerous were imprisoned, deported, tortured, thrown into psychiatric hospitals, or sometimes killed. This systematic approach—minimizing, dismissing, and repressing workers' oppositional activities—was employed in all instances, whether against individuals like Vasile Paraschiv whose struggle with Securitate lasted for more than two decades, the miners of Jiu Valley in 1977, the Worker's Free Union from Romania (SLOMR) founded in 1979 by physician Ionel Cana, or the workers from Brasov in 1987. Examining the first three cases can provide some understanding both of the Brasov uprising and its significance for the 1989 revolution, and in a more general sense, of the predicament of the industrial working class in postcommunist Romania and its relationship to the intellectual class.

The story of Vasile Paraschiv represents an individual story of courage and heroism, but it is also significantly illustrative of the process of estrangement and alienation between the communist party and the working class. Born into a family from the poorest segment of the peasantry and experiencing a deprived childhood and youth, Paraschiv was among many who gravitated to the communist party in 1946 out of genuine conviction that the new party stood for justice and equality for all members of society. Over the years, he became disenchanted with the regime and particularly with local party corruption. In 1971, when Ceausescu introduced the concept of "self-management" of industrial enterprises, Paraschiv wrote to the General Association of Romanian Trade Unions (UGSR) and made 11 concrete proposals for democratizing workers' unions. These proposals—including workers' rights to choose factory management, to have their own newspapers free of censorship, and the all-important right to strike—reflect Paraschiv's mature understanding of the realities of the socialist state in which the voice of the working class was fundamentally under the control of communist officials.[8] His letter was ignored by the authorities and he was arrested, diagnosed, and forced to undergo treatment for paranoia and psychosis in psychiatric facilities. Eventually, under international pressure initiated by Radio Free Europe and Paul Goma (a Romanian novelist who organized a solidarity movement with Charter 77 of

[6] For the nationalist–communist doctrine practiced by Ceausescu's regime see Shafir (1983); Verdery (1991).
[7] For an analysis of Securitate, see Deletant (1998) and also Oprea (2003).
[8] See interview with Paraschiv (2008).

Czechoslovakia and to which Paraschiv subscribed), Paraschiv was released and allowed to move abroad. He went briefly to Paris in 1978 where he established contact with French trade unions and began raising international awareness of the political and economic conditions experienced by the Romanian working class. On returning to Romania and after evading attempts to block his entry, Paraschiv continued to lobby for free unions and engaged in open protest against many of the policies of the RCP into the 1980s. He was kidnapped and tortured by the secret police on several occasions and, he claims, even irradiated. Miraculously, Paraschiv was still alive in 1989.[9] Subsequently in 2008, a legal grievance was filed against former Securitate officials and others on Paraschiv's behalf, but his important role in the workers movement has not, to this date, been fully understood and accepted.

Turmoil among the miners of Jiu Valley beginning in July 1977 threatened Ceausescu and the communist regime more than any other act of dissidence and protest in the 1970s. Dissatisfied with the provisions of a law passed in July 1997 that restricted certain rights and benefits of retirement, approximately 35,000 miners went on strike after developing a list of economic and social demands. Given the history of radicalism of this occupational group (on which ironically the RCP had capitalized in an attempt at manufacturing a mythical narrative of the socialist revolution that praised the great strike of the Lupeni miners in 1929 as a crucial moment in the development of class consciousness), the strike triggered deep alarm among the nomenklatura. Ceausescu's solution to the crisis—sending a government committee to negotiate—was angrily rejected. He had no choice but to go to Jiu Valley himself. Ceausescu imprudently scolded the miners for acts of insubordination as contrary to the socialist discipline of the working class, but found himself confronted with outrage and contempt. Frightened for his safety, Ceausescu backed off and promised to meet the miners' demands and not punish the strikers. These apparent concessions persuaded the miners to return to work. Yet immediately, they learned that Ceausescu had deceived them: Jiu Valley was shut down and the armed forces sent in. Several thousand miners were deported to other mining centers and some sent to labor camps (Deletant 1998: 235–236). When the online version of the report was released by the *Presidential Commission for the Analysis of Communist Dictatorship* in January 2007, Constantin Dobre, one of the principal leaders of the Jiu Valley protest expressed anger that the report described the strike as simply a movement that sought bread and butter social and economic reforms, that is, as simply a movement from within the system and one which in no way opposed the regime and its policies (Dobre 2007; April 20, 2007). This was manifestly not the case. The failure of the draft report to fully understand the historical implications of the Jiu Valley strike suggests again that, in post-communism, the role of workers' protest has been underestimated.

In the same vein, Ionel Cana's attempt at organizing an independent workers' union in 1979—the Worker's Free Unions (SLOMR)—was quickly stifled. It was thus short-lived and never escalated to a large-scale movement involving a significant representation of the industrial working class and other segments of society. Immediately after Radio Free

[9] For a detailed biographical account of Paraschiv's life and his struggles with the communist regime, see Paraschiv (2005).

Europe announced the formation of SLOMR, its three leaders—physician Ionel Cana, Father Gheorge Calciu-Dumitreasa, and a former member of the Social Democratic Party (PSD) Gheorghe Brasoveanu—were arrested on March 10, 1979. Cana was well known among the shipyard workers from Turnu-Severin where he worked as a general physician and helped file grievances concerning work conditions (Deletant 1998: 234). Although there is clear evidence that those who joined SLOMR were primarily workers from industrial centers such as Ploesti, Constanta, Bucharest, and Tirgu-Mures, there is less certainty regarding the number of followers.[10] What seems to be the case, however, is that SLOMR never gained the organizational strength that would allow it to survive the arrest and sentencing of its three leaders. Twenty-eight years later, after the release of the *Tismaneanu Report*, Cana himself protested how SLOMR was analyzed. He argued that SLOMR was the first independent union in the communist bloc, predating Polish Solidarity, and that in fact it represented a real rapprochement between the intellectuals and the working class (Cana 2007; April 16, 2007). Yet, in reality, after the union protested the incarceration of its leaders, Nicolae Dascalu (Cana's successor) was himself imprisoned and SLOMR ceased activity. The most notable initiative in popularizing SLOMR among the factory workers of Ploesti actually came from Vasile Paraschiv. It was unfortunately unsuccessful and resulted in Paraschiv's arrest. For the following 3 years, he was confined to Ploesti.

Although these three cases involved substantially different actors—an individual, Paraschiv, who tried to connect with other movements and dissidents but remained isolated in his political protest; an occupational group whose actions were confined to geographical boundaries (the miners of the Jiu Valley); and SLOMR, an independent union that never went beyond its formative stage—all failed to attract wider support and establish alliances with intellectual dissidents of the time. It is true that some ties between Goma (the novelist) and Paraschiv were formed, but it is also an acknowledged fact that, among Goma's supporters, workers were numerically far better represented than intellectuals. But Goma's movement was so closely identified with him and a few key players (who in fact were largely motivated to leave the country) that his own forced exile in Paris in November 1977 meant the end of any possibility of developing a more significant and socially broader movement (Goma 2005).

The specific tactics used by Ceausescu to bring the RCP under his full control and the widespread terror of the Securitate that supported them is one thing. The specific nature of intellectual dissidence is quite another. It can be interpreted as accounting for the inability to develop a strong opposition movement that could have potentially posed a serious challenge to the authority of the regime. As noted before, Ceausescu's regime used nationalism as a tool of propaganda and also for promoting a cult of personality. This obsessive cult was supported by an important coterie of humanist intellectuals, among them novelists, poets, painters, and dramatists, who were predisposed in their individual work to exalt both the cult of the nation and glorify the communist leader at

[10] While Deletant estimates the number of those who subscribed to SLOMR at 2,400, Oana Ionel and Dragos Marcu question it. They show that, during the trial of the founding members, many of the addresses and names claimed by SLOMR could not be verified (Ionel & Marcu, "Vasile Paraschiv and his Securitate" [Vasile Paraschiv si "Securitatea lui"], pp. 367–379, in Paraschiv, op. cit.).

the same time. This group inaugurated a distinctive literary fashion whose guiding ideology—protochronism—promoted a nationalist vision of Romanian history that denied any foreign influence on national culture.[11] In opposition to this influential coterie, a philosopher, Constantin Noica, began mentoring a group of younger intellectuals from the humanities and philosophy in an act of resistance to this protochronist ideological indoctrination.[12] This group, which retreated to the village of Paltinis located in the Transylvanian mountains, remained apolitical and essentially isolated from the rest of society. As Alina Mungiu shows, the only political work on their reading list was Plato's Republic (1996: 346–347). Plato's philosophy, that of a philosopher-king, has little conception of liberal democratic politics and political competition between diverse groups and classes, but takes an elitist intellectual approach to governance. Mungiu makes the pertinent observation that the very absence of social scientists and economists, who might have injected a sense of realism in Noica's own coterie, accounted for its failure to develop a social project founded in the experiences and needs of different social and occupational groups (p. 348). Like the protochronists, Noica and his friends suffered from romanticist illusions.

Thus, Cana's claim of a real alliance between the intellectuals and the working class does not seem to be supported by evidence. As discussed, SLOMR never benefited from the support of either a significant segment of the working class or any organized group of intellectuals. Moreover, his comparison between SLOMR and the Polish opposition movement forged by an alliance between the two groups is not accurate either. Unlike the 1977 miners' Jiu Valley strike, the strikes carried out in the shipbuilding cities of the Baltic Coast in 1970 in Gdansk, Gdynia, and Szczecin played a major role in the emerging democratization of the Polish working class and contributed to its political development. Although brutally repressed by the Polish communist party, workers gained a major sense of empowerment and autonomy by rediscovering the sit-in strike and organizing interfactory strike committees in which local decision making was a significant factor (Laba 1991). When the Workers Defense Committee (KOR) was formed in 1976 by a group of Polish intellectuals, a new era in the development of a strong and coherent opposition movement was inaugurated. After an initial stage in which KOR provided legal, financial, and medical assistance to the victims of repression and their families, collaboration between workers and intellectuals began to move from a practical towards a theoretical level. This involved an evolutionist or developmental conception based on a strategy of inducing change by organizing social movements from below (Bernhard 1993; Lipski et al. 1985). While both during and after the Brasov uprising some Romanian intellectual dissidents had formally expressed their solidarity with workers, a similar pragmatic alliance between the two groups was never achieved in Romania at any point in the 1970s and 1980s.

[11] The etymological origin of the word "protochronism" comes from the ancient Greek and means "before in time." Initially, protochronism referred to the major role played by the original Dacian population that inhabited what constitutes the current territory of today's Romania in its contribution to world civilization before colonization by the Roman Empire. Some authors have claimed Dacians' priority and ascendance over other cultures.

[12] Philosopher, essayist, and poet, Constantin Noica became one of the most prominent intellectuals before WWII. His previous political sympathies for the fascist movement of the Iron Guard and his antimaterialistic convictions led to his imprisonment for 10 years by the communist authorities. Detained yet again for propagating the forbidden work of Mircea Eliade, his sentence was renewed for a further 6 years until released and pardoned in August 1964. After 1965, he moved to Bucharest and re-entered official intellectual life as a member of the Romanian Academy.

Brasov 1987

The chronology of the events that threw the city of Brasov in turmoil in November 1987 mirrors not just the absence of popular support for the regime at the time, but is also indicative of accumulated collective frustration that could at any time develop into a spontaneous manifestation of discontent. At the same time, the combination of inertia, ritualism, denial, and repression with which the communist nomenklatura and the secret police responded to the events seemed also to signal a potential collapse of the regime. In this respect, the succession of the events and the reactions to them anticipated on a smaller scale the revolutionary nature of the regime change 2 years later. The context in which the protest began in one section of the Red Flag factory, its escalation into an antigovernment uprising, the response from factory management and local authorities, the repression and persecution of the protesters in sharp contrast with the RCP's official version, and the reactions of dissidents and a few prominent anti-Ceausescu members of the RCP all tended in this direction. But the absence of a strong organized opposition movement and of existing ties of solidarity between workers, dissidents, and anti-Ceausescu communists, in fact the essential suspicion and mistrust between them, weakened the movement. This was later manifested in December 1989 in the inability of various actors to articulate a coherent political project.

By 1987, deteriorating living conditions created by food shortages worsened when electricity quotas were reduced by 30% and fines were imposed for families and enterprises that exceeded permitted kilowatt usage. Applied to enterprises, this meant wage reductions for employees. Brasov then was facing a harsh winter and working class families found it difficult to make ends meet, frequently traveling to nearby cities to shop for food. On November 14, workers from the metal section 440 of Red Flag were informed by management of a 30% reduction in wages to balance the electricity budget. Yet a week earlier, they had in fact been notified that the production plan had been exceeded by 20%. On receipt of this news, the 440 section night shift downed tools in protest. Next morning, local supervisors and officials (foremen, engineers, and the factory's party section) reacted to the strike with threats. Workers from other sections joined the protest and an estimated 3,000–4,000 began destroying communist symbols that were omnipresent in every state institution (communist flags, portraits of Ceausescu, propaganda posters, etc). Later, it became clear that foremen had already compiled lists of the main troublemakers. About 400 men took the protest to the local party council headquarters demanding economic reforms. However, as more of Brasov's citizens joined the protest, the movement began to radicalize and took on anticommunist and anti-Ceausescu overtones. Several thousand assaulted party headquarters including women, university and high school students, and members of different occupational groups.[13]

The demonstration was unplanned, without leadership, and emerged spontaneously. In the absence of microphones, those who did try to lead the crowds were often not heard. The need for leadership, however, generated a remarkable myth: the myth of "the man in the white helmet," always a symbol of the engineers. Such a man was believed to be a formal leader and many followed him. However, in 2004 at a roundtable anniversary of the Brasov uprising organized by the Civic Academy Foundation, one participant explained that, in reality, there were no groups besides the workers that day and that it was a worker who

[13] A notable presence among them was Werner Sommerauer a former adherent of SLOMR. While under interrogation because of his amateur radio license, Sommerauer was falsely accused of leaking information outside the country through Radio Free Europe.

snatched the helmet from an engineer and put it on, at which point others followed him (Rusan 2004: 29–30). The gap between ordinary working people and officialdom, the communist nomenklatura, became starkly evident during the demonstrations when dozens forced their way into party headquarters. Local elections had been scheduled for that day, November 15, and apparatchiks celebrated their inevitable re-election at a well-supplied dinner table. Anger, frustration, and cynicism greeted this discovery but, since party officials managed to escape, there was little violence beyond the destruction of a few doors, windows, and communist symbols. It was reported later that most strikers thought their actions constituted normal reactions requiring little courage on their part and were fully justified (Oprea and Olaru 2002; Rusan 2004; Hossu-Longin 2007). The response to this was the use of force.

Although these events were to some extent similar to the 1977 miners' protests as both were largely determined by specific social and economic conditions and were spontaneous and unorganized in nature, the significance of the Brasov riots is much more profound. They reflected strong popular discontent and a major loss of confidence in a corrupt communist party apparatus, its leadership, and perhaps above all in its ideological underpinning as the party of the working class. If in 1977 the miners of Jiu Valley were willing to give Ceausescu a chance to prove his personal and party commitment to the interests of the working class, this time neither side attempted to engage in any meaningful dialog or negotiation. By taking this uncompromising stand and employing force as a response, the regime essentially admitted its inability to exert authority without coercion. At the same time, the solidarity and support demonstrated by the local population with Red Flag workers suggests that social and economic unrest and ideological discontent overlapped. The December 1989 revolution similarly manifested elements of popular revolt against a corrupt and unaccountable regime as well as an ideological rejection of communism, though, as in Brasov, the connection was not clearly articulated.

Despite vague promises by Brasov's mayor to calm the situation, police and local Securitate officers repressed the demonstration and succeeded in dispersing the protesters and arresting several hundred. Efforts to identify the principal instigators resulted in the arrest and interrogation of a further 183 who had been caught on hidden camera. They were later transported to Bucharest and subjected to harsher treatment by the secret police. As Ruxandra Cesareanu points out, methods of treatment were quite similar to those used during the Stalinist repression of the 1950s and 1960s. Among interrogative techniques employed were nighttime and nonstop interrogations, subtle psychological techniques for inducing fear through the use of two interrogators, throwing protestors into cells occupied by common offenders, and redefining them as perpetrators not victims (Cesareanu 2003). Some recalled being beaten, physically and psychologically humiliated, and threatened with firearms.[14] The authorities obviously concealed the social and political character of the action and forced the accused to sign statements admitting criminal acts. Initially, they had been asked about potential ties with anticommunist and hostile fascist groups, but later, the main evidence collected was focused on acts of vandalism and violence committed during the protest (Oprea and Olaru 2002: 61). As Danut Iacob, one prominent member of the protest initiated by Red Flag's section 440, recalled: "If at the outset they beat us up to admit that we chanted against communism, later each of us was forced to write that we destroyed something" (Oprea and Olaru 2002: 90). This strategy allowed the state to issue indictments of hooliganism and thus claim that the accused had never represented the

[14] This, in fact, was Werner Sommerauer. See below for his role.

attitudes of the working class, attitudes which of course were defined as fully in conformity with the spirit of true socialism.

In refusing to admit that the Brasov events were caused by popular discontent with the economic policies promoted by Ceausescu, the state was able to deny the political dimension of the uprising and responded instead with coercion. The blame was also shifted to local officials and the management of Red Flag. The ensuing show trial was similarly grotesque. The first official account, broadcast on December 2 on Radio Bucharest, characterized the protesters as hooligans and announced the firing of Red Flag management for illegally reducing wages (Deletant 1998: 239–240). Meanwhile, meetings of workers were staged by political officials at Red Flag during which "angry citizens" criticized the acts of their coworkers as unpatriotic and subversive of socialist morality and demanded exemplary punishment. Public incrimination of this nature was sharply reminiscent of the show trials that terrorized the country during the Stalinist years. If the case proved anything, it showed the incapacity of the regime to undertake reforms and revealed its obvious paralysis. The trial took place on December 3 behind closed doors under the surveillance of local party officials and the police. It lasted an hour and a half. Contrary to existing law and without any semblance of due process, 61 of the accused—most of whom were from Red Flag—were ordered to relocate and work in cities far from Brasov. The deportation period varied between 6 months and 3 years. A number of others were required to change jobs within Brasov (Oprea and Olaru 2002: 120–147). For those forcibly relocated, life was difficult. They were separated from families (officials made strenuous efforts to persuade wives to divorce or relocate as well) and permanently kept track of by the Securitate.

Security measures were tightened in Brasov and all suspected dissidents kept under stricter surveillance. Two years later, Ceausescu himself visited Brasov and Red Flag. It was carefully staged. Presumably loyal workers from elsewhere were imported, section 440 shut down, and its workers put under wraps. An appearance of consent and enthusiasm was orchestrated and, with his usual arrogance, Ceausescu repeated the 1987 accusation that the protesters were "hooligans" and dismissed their actions as nothing more than "isolated incidents." Reactions immediately following the November 1987 events were isolated and fairly muted. While there was considerable criticism of the regime's punitive approach and its disastrous economic policies, there was no unified opposition among dissidents capable of mounting a challenge to the regime. It was not like Poland where Solidarity was able to forge a power-sharing agreement with the communist party. There was, obviously, no movement equivalent to Solidarity and dissidents were generally weak, isolated, and fragmented.

Dissidents who took a public stand through Radio Free Europe or other western outlets, known both in the country and outside for their critical opposition to the regime, were constantly harassed, threatened, and kept under surveillance by Securitate.[15] An interesting position was taken by six former veterans of the RCP who jointly signed an open letter of protest publicized by Radio Free Europe in December 1987. Among other accusations, Ceausescu was criticized for isolating the country from both East and West, for the economic situation, and for the regime's treatment of the working class. The most vocal of the signatories was Silviu Brucan, an old member of the RCP who held important diplomatic positions as former ambassador to the USA from 1956 to 1959 and then at the United Nations from 1959 to 1962. In an interview he secretly gave to the BBC, Brucan discussed a growing crisis in the relationship between the RCP and the working class and

[15] These included the poet Mircea Dinescu, Doina Cornea, a professor of foreign languages at the University of Cluj, the novelist Dan Petrescu from Iasi, and a young physicist Gabriel Andreescu.

warned that the working class was no longer willing to be treated as an "obedient servant" (Deletant 1998: 239–240). The foreign media was also quick to register the meaning of Brasov, noting that it was the first serious working class uprising in Romania since the 1977 events in Jiu Valley. Foreign journalists or Romanian exiles working as journalists for West European stations—such as Radu Portocala, Emil Hurezeanu, and N.C Munteanu particularly—immediately described what happened in Brasov as "the beginning of the end" of the Ceausescu regime (Oprea and Olaru 2002: 167–195; Hossu-Longin 2007: 356). Their negative assessment was sustained and enhanced by the processes of liberalization taking place at the same time in the Soviet Union under Gorbachev and by the ongoing demand for change in other parts of Eastern Europe.

While this prediction proved to be correct no more than 2 years later, no one could then foresee that an entirely similar scenario to Brasov would be played out on the national stage in such dramatic terms in December 1989 and later. As in November 1987 when Brasov residents joined Red Flag workers in a mass protest, a police action in Timisoara on December 15, 1989 to remove a Hungarian priest, Laszlo Tokes, for preaching both human and minority rights, turned Timisoara into a center of revolutionary fervor. In much the same way as in Brasov, where local authorities were unable to end the demonstrations forcing Ceausescu to rely on special Internal Affairs forces and top party leaders to suppress the protest, the Timisoara mass demonstrations could only be dispersed by force. And again, Ceausescu and the party leadership denied and distorted the reality of the events. Alarmed at developments, Ceausescu called a mass public meeting in Bucharest's Republic Square on December 21. It was intended to express indignation against "the hooligans," the "CIA spies," and indeed the whole plot against Romania defined as orchestrated by both East and West in concert. But this time, unlike Brasov, anger and the sheer force of numbers outweighed fear and intimidation. It was this meeting, ironically called by Ceausescu himself, that spelled the end of Ceausescu and the communist regime. Army violence in the beginning followed by repressive tactics by Securitate elements loyal to Ceausescu was more extreme than in 1987, but neither was sufficient to control the situation. It is estimated that in Timisoara, and then in Bucharest and other cities, more than 1,000 people lost their lives before the end of December.[16] But the result was clear. Not 2 years after Brasov, the regime was finished.

However, the Romanian revolution was not carried out in isolation but was part of a transnational shift in the late 1980s. Events unfolding at the time in other East European countries played an important though not determining role in precipitating the collapse of the communist regime. On the contrary, widespread popular discontent erupting during December 1989 indicated the ultimate inevitability of Romanian revolution while the geopolitical context in the Soviet bloc showed that revolution in the area as a whole was long overdue. The relative isolation and unresponsiveness of Ceausescu's regime, Gorbachev's permissive attitude towards revolutionary transformations earlier in Hungary and Poland, and peaceful regime changes in Bulgaria and the former Czechoslovakia, all contributed to the distinctive and violent end of the communist regime. But 1987, and Ceausescu's reaction to it, essentially prefigured 1989 to the extent that it signaled the potential for a violent and abrupt overthrow of the regime. A short-lived power vacuum was the obvious result. This outcome was in sharp contrast to the revolutionary changes in other countries that were based on legal continuity and negotiations between communist parties and opposition movements.

[16] For the December 1989 revolution, see Codrescu (1991); Ratesh (1991); Siani-Davies (2005).

The significance of 1987 as a prelude to December 1989, as ultimately described in the final revised version of the *Tismaneanu Report* and then by President Basescu, is grounded in the same kind of empirical analysis provided above. However, a principal disagreement in interpretation lies in the explicit parallelism drawn by Basescu and others between Brasov in 1987 and the 1981 events in Poland involving the Solidarity Union. Both Romanian intellectuals and representatives of the working class adopted the Polish Solidarity movement as the normative model for a successful anticommunist opposition movement. This model, adopted by the authors of the "Tismaneanu Report," which formed the basis for rewriting national history and reconstructing collective memory, ultimately shaped the conceptual framework. However, empirical analysis of the communist period in Poland shows that this claim is not valid.

The experience gained in the 1970s taught the working class in Poland in 1980 that social and economic grievances can only be addressed within an organized, cohesive, and national framework of solidarity between unions representing various industrial plants. In 1980, when workers from the Gdansk shipyard struck and only some of their demands were partially met after a temporary suspension of their protest, they joined forces with workers in other enterprises that were also engaged in work stoppages. This marked the beginning of Solidarity as a combination of different groups. For the next 16 months, Solidarity, as a free independent union, coexisted on equal if uneasy terms with the government (Lis 2003). Meanwhile, intellectuals who had previously supported strikers in the 1970s continued to sustain and counsel the Solidarity leadership in and after 1980. Although martial law was imposed in December 1981 by Jaruzelski's beleaguered regime, Solidarity re-emerged intact in 1989 during the roundtable negotiations and brokered a power-sharing agreement with the communist government. Largely through this important agreement, a peaceful transition to democracy was accomplished in Poland. In contrast, the Romanian transition was abrupt and violent.[17] There were no negotiations at all between the party and opposition groups (they were impossible) and political authority was assumed by the NSF led by Ion Iliescu, a provisional body that emerged spontaneously from the December 1989 events. In addition, the composition of the National Council of the NSF lacked any working class representation. In fact, after many dissidents disenchanted with Iliescu's leadership left the Front, the NSF came to be dominated by former second-rank party apparatchiks. As Vladimir Tismaneanu himself and later Ana Blandiana acknowledged, the lack of a formal alliance between intellectual dissidents and working class representatives in 1987 had unfortunate consequences for December 1989 and for what followed afterwards (Tismaneanu 2008; Blandiana 2004). It is to this aspect of the democratic transition that we now turn.

The Working Class After 1989: Political Marginalization and Alienation

Political actors in the post-1989 transition—both reformist elements of the former communist parties and anticommunist opposition groups—shaped their agenda broadly within the framework of "laissez-faire" economic liberalism. Throughout East and Central

[17] The lack of a formal alliance between the working class and the intellectuals inhibited the course of reforms undertaken during the first decade of democratic transition in Romania. This does not imply that Poland, despite the workers' instrumental role in the fall of communism and the union's presence in postcommunist governments, did not follow a similar path towards liberalism shared by other East European countries.

Europe, representing either left-wing or more right-wing liberal constituencies, successive governments since 1990 have adhered to the Western principles of "liberal consensus." By pursuing reforms seeking the dismantling of state-planned socialist economies and the introduction of free markets, they discouraged industrial labor from defining itself along class lines and were reluctant to accept the idea of strong unions (Ost 2001, 2005). Industrial workers, frequently represented in public discourse as "anachronistic artifacts" and portrayed as potential liabilities for the success of the democratic reform, continued to perceive themselves as outsiders to politics as they had before 1989 (Kideckel 2008). Since labor interests were absent from the agenda of postcommunist reformers, a significant segment of the working class was attracted to illiberal politics and influenced by emerging right-wing, conservative, nationalist, xenophobic, or populist trends (Ost 2005). Romania was no exception to this pattern and, despite strong union militancy, labor lost ground in the postcommunist transition. At the same time, the existing pre-1989 gap between the working class and intellectual elites continued to widen.

The convergence of three important factors transformed labor into a socially and politically marginalized group and often made it a scapegoat for various weaknesses and failures of the democratization process. First were the initial populist measures taken by the National Salvation Front and later by its successor governing party the Party of Social Democracy (Partidul Democratiei Sociale [PDSR]) in order to ensure the electoral support of the working class; second, the general climate of corruption that characterized the privatization of socialist enterprises; and third, the militancy of unions that frequently resulted in acts of violence tending to undermine democratic progress.

Immediately after 1989, the industrial sector of the economy began to deteriorate. In 9 months, the net decline in industrial production was 27.7%. The initial revolutionary mood that contributed to weakening work discipline coupled with the NSF's creation of enterprise councils and early populist measures aimed at raising wages and shortening the workweek accounted for a major decline in worker productivity. It is estimated that wages rose by 26.1% while the workweek was shortened by 16.7% (Bacon 2004: 376). Yet almost immediately, industrial labor began to experience the uncertainties of the transition and to face the ongoing prospect of job losses and an insecure future. The monoindustrial cities, especially those represented by mining, chemicals, metallurgy, and petroleum, that previous to 1989 represented the major source of employment for the industrial workforce, experienced a rapid and massive decline. Between 1990 and 2001, the share of industrial employment was reduced by half (from 3,367,000 to 1,582,000; The Statistical Yearbook of Romania 2002). It essentially meant that this important occupational sector lost much of its source of income and welfare support given that, in the past, socialist enterprise had been the provider of a wide range of social services in education, health, housing, etc.

Under these circumstances, industrial workers felt a further weakening of what had already been a problematic collective agency before 1989. Many embraced individual exit strategies such as migration to other countries or to rural areas, work in the informal sector, or simply some subsistence type of life (Kideckel 2001, 2008). This last strategy became fairly common and was unintentionally sustained by the government's solution to unemployment by an early retirement program that resulted in much reduced pensions. Many of the beneficiaries of this law were artificially employed or those who had been unemployed for more than 9 months and were close to retirement age. In the late 1990s and 2000, a corrective policy in the form of the law of "unfavorable regions" had similar consequences for the status of the working class and especially for the miners. In 1997, the Ciorbea government introduced a policy of voluntary lay-offs that offered compensation of 12, 15, or 20 months of wages (emergency ordinance no. 22/1997). In consequence,

approximately half of the mining workforce left but without seeking any occupational retraining, attempts to open a small business, or efforts to find new employment. Two years later, a new corrective policy of "unfavorable regions" was introduced. This too failed to improve the circumstances of thousands of miners and their families who continued to languish in poverty (Kranz 2001; Kideckel 2008). The truck factory Red Flag experienced a similar fate. Already a problem for the communist government in 1987, after 1989 truck production at Red Flag failed to comply with international standards. With no demand for trucks production ceased. For a brief period, the NSF government continued to pay wages in order to avoid potential unrest. But being unable to sustain an unproductive factory, massive lay-offs were inevitable. These lay-offs were not, however, supported by compensatory social programs and, as with the mining industry and other monoindustrial regions, a middle-aged unemployed male population without any future prospects settled at the margins of postsocialist society. In 2007, when the factory was shut down and a foreign private investor purchased it, none of those workers arrested and deported in 1987 were any longer employed there.[18]

At the same time, the way in which privatization of state enterprises occurred contributed further to the marginalization of the industrial working class. Those benefiting from the policies of privatization were former nomenklatura, former secret services (Securitate), or the old managerial class in socialist enterprises. These groups, which had the ability to use the knowledge, experience, and connections acquired before 1989, succeeded in appropriating and draining state resources to their advantage by operating through complex political mechanisms. Former state managers appropriated choice sectors of state industry through purchasing vouchers during the privatization program. Similarly, they received preferential treatment in the form of capital and loans via well-established political connections. These companies are known as "tick companies" and have caused huge financial losses to the state (as the expression indicates they are parasitic on a state enterprise).

Industrial workers, convinced that they were betrayed and ignored by the various successors to the NSF (1990–1996) and for the next 4 years by the center-right governing coalition of the Democratic Convention (CDR), were easy targets for counterproductive aggressive union militancy and populist, nationalist, and xenophobic illiberal ideologies. These merely increased the suspicions and condescension of the intellectual elite. The rift between the working class and the intellectuals became noticeable from the beginning. In January 1990, disparate anticommunist opposition groups among the intelligentsia incensed by the government's populist policies protested the NSF's decision to compete in elections. Industrial workers at the same time expressed their support for the new political authority with equally intolerant rhetoric. Slogans such as "We work; we don't think" or "Death to intellectuals" were chanted on January 28, 1990 during a pro-NSF demonstration in Bucharest. During this formative period, intellectual elites failed abysmally in their expressed intention to become the civic voice of the new society focused on correcting pre-1989 divisions with the working class. Some adopted the Polish KOR as a model within the structure of a newly created Group of Social Dialogue (GDS). But GDS remained a closed and relatively small group of 50 members, among them members of the pre-1989 Paltinis group including Andrei Plesu and Gabriel Liiceanu, who as romanticists occupied

[18] For the developments involving *Red Flag* and the *Association November 15, 1987*, see the Association's press release website (http://www.15noiembrie1987/.ro/presa/, accessed May 20, 2008). I would also like to thank Florin Postolachi, president of the association, for a personal communication that further helped me clarify the facts of the case.

prominent positions. This group embraced the same pre-1989 rhetoric of superior intellectual detachment in relation to political competition under the slogan "Only those who do not love power should approach it." They essentially called for a thorough decommunization. The attack on communism had already been expressed in the eighth point of the Proclamation of Timisoara, a document released in March 1990 clarifying the objectives of the revolution. It stated particularly that anyone associated with the communist nomenklatura should be barred from holding office. This demand became the rallying point of the University Square demonstrations, a protest that continued for 3 months and brought together an anti-NSF opposition consisting of the old historical parties, the GDS, and other intellectual groups and students.

Given the large membership of the communist party and the associated fear of the loss of security promised by Iliescu, this agenda was unpopular among ordinary former party members in rural areas, industrial cities, and among retirees. As Alina Mungiu shows, the intellectuals involved with University Square approached the rally as "a means in itself" but found no practical ways of using it to influence the outcome of the political process (1996: 352). The overwhelming electoral victory of the NSF in May 1990 was then vehemently contested by the opposition. It continued to protest it until June 13 when the police finally smashed the demonstration. This police action was further aggravated and confused by the involvement of several thousands of miners from Jiu Valley who came at President Iliescu's behest to defend the government from a fascist coup d'état. Students, journalists, and members of the opposition parties were brutally attacked by the miners. These particular incidents finalized the split between the intellectuals and the working class that was to continue for 10–15 years. Subsequent "raids" on Bucharest from Jiu Valley that threatened political stability and endangered the emerging institutions of the democratic regime occurred again in 1991 and 1999.[19] In both instances, the outcome was the resignation of prime ministers under pressure of street violence. In 1991, Petre Roman, seen as too liberal by conservative elements within the NSF loyal to Iliescu, resigned. The 1999 miners' demonstrations not only ousted the center-right government of Radu Vasile, but led to the declaration of a state of emergency.

Political militancy was not restricted to the mining sector of the industrial working class. Throughout the 1990s, numerous strikes, many of them illegal, expanded across various sectors of the economy including the transportation system, power plants, the medical profession, and the educational system (Kideckel 2001; Keil and Neil 2002). Red Flag did not escape its share of protest and unrest either. In December 1999, factory workers there engaged in violent riots similar to those of 1987 in protest of the government's failure to raise wages (Keil and Neil 2002: 25). While labor unions in postcommunist Romania did become a permanent presence, as well as a source of ongoing anxiety for all governments regardless of political orientation, they were not successful in promoting the interests of their members. Kideckel explains union weakness as resulting from several factors. Of particular importance has been the fragmentation of the union movement, a result of conflicting political loyalties and competition to control the patrimony of the former communist General Union of Romanian Syndicates (UGSR). Lack of experience and the general climate of corruption in the economy also undermined union effectiveness in pressing labor interests (2001: 98–106).

By 2000, labor, and especially the industrial workers from monoindustrial cities and the mining sector, had lost all respect for both the parties representing the anticommunist liberal opposition or the PSD, the successor to the NSF. The corruption scandals involving the PSD angered and disappointed its supporters. In addition, its new political direction no longer appealed to the same electoral groups. It moved closer to the adoption of a program

[19] See Vasi (2004).

of economic liberalism and reforms as mandated by the European Union. In these circumstances, a populist antisystem message of social justice became extremely attractive. It was directed against political parties, new capitalists, ethnic minorities (Hungarians, Roma, and Jews), the West as represented by international financial institutions (the World Bank and International Monetary Fund), and membership of the European Union and NATO. This message was forcefully propagated by the xenophobic and extreme nationalist Party of Great Romania (PRM) and its leader Corneliu Vadim Tudor. PRM was the only political party that had supported the miners' riots in 1999. Indicative of PRM's popularity, Miron Cosma, the leader of the miners' union from Jiu Valley, became a member. In the 2000 elections, the PRM gained 20% of total votes and became the principal opposition party. Tudor himself entered the presidential run-off election as a serious contender to Iliescu but ultimately lost. The main support for PRM and Tudor were the most impoverished rural areas, the mining sector, and middle-aged men with limited education in industrial cities (Mungiu-Pippidi 2001; Shafir 2001). Sociological surveys showed that, among these groups, a deep nostalgia for the past was common (Barometrul de Opinie Publica 2002). In 2003, workers from Red Flag again expressed their dissatisfaction. They protested the government's indifference towards the loss of 3,000 jobs and, perhaps extraordinarily, elevated Ceausescu to the position of "the creator of employment."[20] This electoral behavior and nostalgia for the past was not addressed as a serious issue by the intellectuals. But it was clearly an expression of accumulated frustration with successive governments and their neglect and lack of genuine interest in labor. Quite to the contrary, some intellectuals adopted an elitist view by emphasizing what they saw as irrational electoral behavior by less-educated voters and went so far as to advocate establishing a restrictive franchise (Tanasoiu 2008).

Some Conclusions

Two questions need to be addressed. First, how important is labor's lack of involvement in shaping the post-1989 reforms in the democratization process in contrast to that of other political actors (among them intellectuals). And second, what is the significance of the discussion of the meaning and impact of the 1987 workers' movement in Brasov for establishing a new interpretation that might encourage a more open dialog between the working class and the intelligentsia in general.

As this analysis shows, the circumstances of pre-1989 dissident movements in the context of Ceausescu's regime were not conducive either to the development of a grassroots opposition movement of the working class or to an alliance between workers and intellectuals. After 1989, labor's interests were absent from the agenda of successive incumbent governments and entirely underestimated in the rhetoric of the intellectual elite. This has been a significant factor in pushing the working class towards right-wing illiberal politics. This undoubtedly had the effect of inhibiting the democratization process and essentially left it in the hands of an elite liberal consensus that ultimately resulted in the alienation and marginalization of an important segment of Romanian society. In postcommunist Romania, worker dissatisfaction with governance and a widely shared resentment associated with perceived government indifference to social justice has, however, distorted the memory of a repressive past (viewing it nostalgically) with unfortunate and unnecessary consequences.

[20] http://www.15noiembrie.ro.presa/2003_118.html, accessed May 23, 2008.

From this standpoint, the *Tismaneanu Commission*'s recent attempt to address the past, the debates concerning the importance of the 1987 workers' protest for the overthrow of communist dictatorship in December 1989, and of other opposition movements by representatives of the working class or on its behalf, represent salutary gestures of reconciliation between intellectuals and the working class. Only an inclusive revisitation of the past and an admission of the mistakes made by both sides can promote an honest dialog and bridge the gap between the two groups. The work done by the intellectuals from the Civic Academy Foundation and President Basescu's official apology on behalf of the Romanian state for the repressive treatment of the Red Flag protesters represents an important step in this direction. But such gestures can only be meaningful if supported by equal measures of reparation for those persecuted and repressed by the former regime. As of this writing, the proposed restitution law regarding those who suffered as a result of the 1987 repression, which would grant them the same benefits given to the "revolutionaries" of 1989, still has to be approved by the Senate.

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