Chapter IV

4 People's Capital (1948 – 1956)

4.1 The Plot of Property

"'If a writer would carefully observe the life of our factories' comrade Ion Marin tells us 'I am sure a whole book could be published that would benefit the entire working-class of our country'"[1]. Voiced through the voice of an employee of Malaxa Works, this call for committed research and writing was printed by the communist party's daily *Scânteia* in the summer of 1948, shortly after the state's seizure of industrial property, an event the article dubbed "the revolutionary act of nationalization". Indeed, comrade Marin was reporting from within the new epoch inaugurated by nationalization, and looked back at the recent past with contempt for a vanquished world that deserved no other reaction. This was a world of privilege, war and dictatorship, but also one of bitter struggle against the plant's owner, against right-wing social-democrats ("wolves dressed in sheep's clothing") and likeminded saboteurs who

> still...seek to compromise the leadership ability (*capacitatea de conducere*) of the best among the workers and the newly appointed managers, trying to show that only an exploiter, only somebody coming out of the bourgeoisie knows how to rule such an industrial establishment as our own.[2]

There was no shortage of writers willing to take up this theme, explore industrial life and write plays, short stories and novels, all with the desire to experiment with the genre of socialist realism. Yet few writers were able to accomplish the task with a reasonable degree of political consciousness and a keen eye for the details of the workers' everyday social universe. Take, for instance, the case of Lucia Demetrius (1910 – 1992), the author of *Cumpăna* – arguably the most successful play about nationalization. A marginal, impoverished actress and occasional writer during the 1930s, Demetrius took up a job with Malaxa Works in 1937 where she was tasked with reading, summarizing and investigating the petitions various workers sent to the owner of the plant asking for money and help. Demetrius would often visit the working-class neighborhoods of Bucharest and briefed her boss on the living conditions of the many, underlining

1 "Din lupta muncitorilor de la Uzina '23 August' (fost Malaxa)", *Scânteia*, XVII, No. 1180, p. 4.
2 IBIDEM.

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the need for a local medical office and perhaps even a canteen. This experience might have helped sharpen the political sensibilities of the young actress, but it did not prepare her, ten years later, for the daunting undertaking of narrating "the revolutionary act of nationalization". On the contrary, the first version of *Cumpăna* contained "a most serious political mistake", as one censor reproached her, because a scene was found to depict a "Japanese strike", an unthinkable event after nationalization.[3] Demetrius grudgingly rewrote the scene in accordance with party doctrine, but went on to note:

> We, writers, we went into the field (*pe teren*) with all our faith; we wanted to see the true changes, the true conflicts. It often happened for our plays to be read and criticized by office people, people who knew the doctrine, knew the intentions of the rulers, but were alien to reality.[4]

Going "into the field", jotting down notes, talking to and even living among people of various social backgrounds were all characteristic features of the new socialist realist literature that emerged in postwar Romania to capture the unfolding of the socialist revolution. Some plays and novels aimed to depict how the coming of socialism transmogrified industrial life; others followed the trajectory of senior communist party activists, portraying their struggle against the forces of old and their contribution to the liberation of the country; yet others took on the revolution as it affected the countryside, detailing the advent of socialist agriculture, the collapse of traditional village structures and the building of collective farms. These were all topics easily amenable to narrative representation, whereby, in line with the requirements of the genre of socialist realism, heroes could be made to epitomize the fighting splendor of the new socialist universe in the making and pitted against the resilient backwardness of the old régime.

Nationalization, however, was a narrative puzzle for it was far from obvious how the alleged revolutionary nature of this event could be written into a plot. Demetrius's mistake of inserting a "Japanese strike" into her play spoke volumes about the sheer difficulty of grasping what nationalization was supposed to mean and what exactly it was supposed to change at the level of the factory. How was nationalization "revolutionary" and what made it an "act" were questions that troubled the souls of these writers just as much as they lingered on the minds of workers, engineers, and perhaps man-

3 Lucia Demetrius, *Memorii* (Bucharest: Albatros, 2005), 348. Demetrius, unaware of the notion of a Japanese strike, recalls it as a "Portuguese strike".

4 IBIDEM.

agers who witnessed the state's appropriation of private property firsthand on June 11, 1948.

This chapter asks, what was so inimical to the literary imagination about nationalization? What exactly happened on June 11, 1948 in the factories and what was the impact of the transition to state ownership of capital on labor relations? Firstly, I explore how June 11, 1948 became the day of the revolutionary act of nationalization and how this "revolutionary act" transformed ownership structures across Romanian industry and initiated a crisis of managerial authority, both in industries administered by Soviet-Romanian joint companies, the so-called Sovroms, and in the ones left to the Romanian state. I then move on to examine the manifold struggles of the new general managers to win, secure and reinforce their authority before the workers under conditions of state ownership. Managerial authority had been constantly tested and significantly weakened, not merely as a consequence of purges, strikes and revolts, but also due to the expansion of party and trade-union organizations at the factory level, where party and union bosses would often find themselves competing with, and hence challenging the decisions of the top managers, engineers and workshop supervisors. While a certain ambiguity around the issue of leadership within factories was encouraged by the communist party up until June 11, 1948, after it, murky lines of command and fractured, overlapping hierarchies were denounced for hindering the smooth run of production. The effort to reestablish managerial authority, however, produced a complex ritual of suspicion between party, trade-union and management, replete with mutual accusations of embezzlement and libelous campaigns.

Finally, in the last part of the chapter, I explore the tense relationship between investment policies and the social function of the industrial plant following nationalization. Should the "factories of the people" use their scarce resources to finance daycare facilities or should they instead invest in expanding their productive capacities? Was there a specific variety of socialist (or Soviet) paternalism available to guide the development of newly nationalized factories? These questions, I argue, are best answered by taking the nationalized factory as a gendered social space doubly circumscribed: first by the evolution of the collective labor contracts following June 11, 1948, and second by everyday struggles over issues of social reproduction.

4.2 The Making of an Event

The juridical transfer of ownership rights from shareholders and owners of capital to the state took place on Monday, June 11, 1948. This operation involved not

only the passing of a law by the Great National Assembly – the parliamentary body of the newly founded Popular Republic of Romania – but it also required direct state action and the mobilization of legions of party activists across the country. On that day it fell to the factory committees to gather the workers, stage a meeting after the lunch-break and break the news. The metalworkers of Laromet Works in Bucharest, for instance, were summoned at 2 p.m. and informed by one comrade Tegzeş – the secretary of the factory committee – about the "occupation of core industries", a news which had just came through a radio announcement.[5] Tegzeş immediately added, allegedly accompanied by waves of applause from the audience, that in these nationalized industries, the distinction between exploited and exploiters ceased to exist and that managers of working-class stock have replaced the old directors. Furthermore, he went on to draw attention to the fact that all employees must now be on the watch in order to safeguard the property of the people; that there must be tighter collaboration between manual workers and the technical staff and finally that the communist party is to be thanked for this unparalleled achievement.

The new general manager of the factory – a former worker by the name of Meşala – took the floor and asked the audience for support in his new mission as head of Laromet. Shortly thereafter another party activist told those present that the Soviet Union had decided to reduce by half the war reparations owed by Romania thereby opening the door for socialism. The gathering ended at five minutes past 3 o'clock in the afternoon with the collective singing of the Internationale. The last words of this report, however, cannot but catch the eye: "The meeting was all the time accompanied by applause and catchwords; the audience was enthusiastic over the unexpected event."[6] Jotted down in pencil on the notebook used to record the minutiae of the factory committee's weekly meetings, this account reads like any other run-of-the-mill article on the unfolding and significance of June 11 published by the newspapers of the day. The emphasis on the emotional effervescence of the audience, the timing of the speeches and the details of the meeting, the reference to the end of exploitation, the thanks due to the Soviet Union and the party – these were all tropes associated with nationalization.

Take, for instance, the front-page article featured by the monthly magazine *Femeia* (The Woman) entitled "How I Received the Great News". It contains mock interviews with women workers of Bucharest's cotton spinning and textile industries and recounts the schedule of the day: the afternoon meeting, the speeches,

5 AMB, Fond Laromet, 10/1945–1949, p. 69.
6 IBIDEM, p. 70.

and the appointment of new managers: "Even today I tremble at the thought of it. I will never forget the moment when I entered the manager's office, I put the seal on the money box and on all the documents and I checked his briefcase."[7] The near identical wording and encomiastic tone of these stories, appearing at the same time in the printed press and in handwritten factory archives, is no coincidence. Rather, this narrative pattern suggests their authors were probably writing in accordance with certain formulaic guidelines, part of which must have been to exaggerate workers' enthusiasm, record the speeches made and underline the unforeseen nature of the event. Why, then, was nationalization an "unexpected event"?

Image 7: *Nationalization meeting in Reșița, June 11, 1948*; Source: Fototeca online a comunismului românesc, 174/1948

It certainly could not have come out of the blue for Laromet's workers themselves, at least not for those who participated in the general meeting of June 9, 1948. It was during that particular gathering that the 50 % reduction offered by the Soviet Union was first advertised and comrade Tegzeș asked in return for more labor discipline on the shopfloor because "it won't be long until, through our own work, we will advance toward socialism, ending the exploitation of man by man."[8] On the other side of the city, metalworkers at Malaxa Works might

7 "Cum am primit vestea cea mare", *Femeia*, No. 5, July 1948.
8 AMB, Fond Laromet, 10/1945 – 1949, p. 69.

have been slightly surprised by the meeting of June 11, but they were certainly not shocked to discover the plant did no longer *de facto* belong to Nicolae Malaxa. Following an investigation conducted in early 1948, representatives of the Ministry of Industry allegedly discovered that the board of administration of the company spent much of the loan borrowed from the National Bank on investments not connected to production such as the maintenance of a farm just outside Bucharest that provisioned the canteen and the acquisition of shares in other companies. Since such actions violated the law, the Ministry of Industry was entitled to directly appoint its own general manager to overrule the board and supervise the owner. Consequently, in April 1948, Malaxa Works welcomed its new general manager, engineer Bobârnac, a man who would retain this position until the end of 1948, thus making irrelevant the appointment of another general manager on June 11.[9] In Reşiţa, the rain must have made the meeting rather unpleasant, but it surely did not make much of an impression on the metalworkers worth mentioning in the main newspaper of the region *Luptătorul Bănăţean*.[10] The new general manager – a young man by the name of Carol Loncear – was indeed a former worker of the steel mill, but he had already been serving as deputy manager since April 1948.[11]

The "eventfulness" of nationalization must be evaluated against this background. Party and factory archives that closely document nationalization reveal an unquenchable tension between the epochal meaning attributed to it and the mundane, bland aspect the whole operation had to preserve; between the "revolutionary" nature of a day supposedly filled with popular enthusiasm and the widespread feeling that, with the exception of a hastily organized meeting, nothing spectacular had happened on that given Monday. This tension may be described as the interplay between two very different temporalities: the temporality of

9 Law no. 249, passed in July 1947, authorized the Ministry of Industry to perform checks on companies that took out loans from the National Bank and appoint a general manager (*administratori delegaţi*) where the law was not observed; for the details of the Malaxa case see ANR, Ministerul Economiei Naţionale, 1/1947, pp. 6 – 9. Characteristically, the story was widely popularized as a corruption case throughout the summer of 1948, see, for example, "N. Malaxa şi complicii săi au pompat fondurile necesare producţiei uzinelor trimiţând sume mari peste granite", *Viaţa Sindicală*, June 26 1948.

10 June 11 1948 was a rainy day in Reşiţa according to the memory of Augustin Virag, a local communist party boss quoted by Karl Ludwig Lupşiasca, *Höhepunkt ihrer Geschichte: eine Geschichte des Banater Berglands in der Zeitspanne 1920 – 1948* (Reschitz: Banatul Montan, 2006), 345.

11 "Spor la muncă tovarăşe Lonciar!", *Luptătorul Bănăţean*, No. 1065, April 11 1948.

law-making and the corresponding temporality of social labor.[12] The first temporality, more amenable to historical narrative, showed state institutions and party organizations working together to create an element of surprise, planning weeks in advance under rules of secrecy so as to catch the factory owners off-guard and preempt any hostile reaction on their part. June 11, 1948 was thus conceived as a genuine bushwhack operation that would allow for peaceful dispossession, negligible disorder and the swift transfer of ownership rights from private persons (corporate and individual) to the state. The second temporality, one better suited to statistical representation, saw the same actors fretting over the need to reproduce the rhythms and routines of industrial production: hurrying workers back to their workbenches, enforcing the eight-hour workday, making sure wages were paid on time, facilitating transactions between companies, helping new managers get the hang of ruling over workers, accounting books and paychecks etc. It was the interaction of these two temporalities that combined to mark June 11, 1948 as an event.

The proceedings started early, possibly around 4 o'clock, with a meeting of the members of the nationalization commissions. This institution – created during the previous weeks and sharing its headquarters with the communist party – grouped party bosses, trade-union activists and state officials at the county level; all of them charged with supervising nationalization in their home cities and villages. Roughly after 9 a.m., nationalization brigades left for their assigned locations, careful not to enter factories before half past noon. Once inside, they grabbed and sealed cash registries, factory papers and the available correspondence. The meeting with the employees was convened between 2 and 3 o'clock in the afternoon, shortly after the Great National Assembly unanimously voted for the nationalization law. The full text of the law was broadcast in the evening, probably after 6 p.m. In many factories, reliable party members, police officers and gendarmes were asked to put in overtime, setting up night patrols to guard the factories and their surroundings; trusted party activists were instructed to visit working-class neighborhoods in order to explain to housewives what had just happened during the day. Few details were left to chance. A national census

12 Social labor should be understood here in the Marxian sense as a form of abstract, objectivized domination that presents itself as "fate" to those whom it subjects; as Marx himself put it in *Grundrisse:* "Individuals are subsumed under social production, which exists, like a fate, outside of them; but social production is not subsumed under the individuals and is not managed by them as their common power and wealth.", quoted and explained in Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination. A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 125. The implications of this understanding of social labor as the deep structure of modern social life will become clear below.

conducted in late 1947 by the country's leading statisticians provided the activists with a reliable roadmap for the location and profile of the factories, mills, and larger workshops that were to be nationalized.[13]

Unlike in large-scale factories where, as we have seen, the event might have come with an element of surprise, though not of utter shock, in smaller factories June 11 was indeed perceived as a revolutionary event, not least because the owners of almost every such business were triumphantly replaced by new managers. Reports sent from the provinces to the Central Committee in Bucharest describe a number of tragic scenes: in the western city of Timişoara, no less than 70 women workers employed by a small workshop started to cry when they saw their owner thrown out the factory gates – they were denounced for their "compromising attitude" (*atitudine împăciuitoristă*); in the seaside city of Constanţa, one woman refused to take over the head manager position out of lack of self-confidence and respect for the former owner – she was described as suffering from "mental issues"; in the town of Sibiu, the Romanian owner of a formerly German factory refused to be replaced claiming he was appointed directly by the Soviet Army in late 1944; in the oilfields that were north of Bucharest, party activists detected anti-Semitic sentiment on the part of some workers who found out their new manager was of Jewish origin. Meanwhile, in the city of Iaşi, a newly appointed factory manager found the job daunting, got depressed and ran away. Such cases were characteristic of the small scale, artisanal Romanian industry made up of family businesses hiring no more than a few dozens employees in both urban and rural environments. In many cases, since home and factory (or mill) were physically tied to each other, nationalization often spelled homelessness and dislocation, with owners being deprived of their residence as well as their capital.[14] In these circumstances, it is perfectly plausible for women workers to have cried over their *patron* and for men to have gone berserk; for these workers and their employers, June 11, 1948 was emotional, violent and life changing, to wit revolutionary.

June 11, 1948 was surely, then, a revolutionary event for communist party bosses and perhaps even for the legions of activists that descended upon the factories that Monday. Yet while the activists were disappointed that workers do not quite understand basic slogans such as "factories belong to the people", the

13 The results of the census were published as Mircea Biji, *Inventarierea întreprinderilor de stat, industriale, comerciale şi de transport: rezultate provizorii* (Bucharest: Institutul Central de Statistică, 1948).

14 For the relationship between home and factory in the small scale, artisanal economy, see David Brody, "Time and Work during Early American Industrialism", *Labor History*, Vol. 30, No. 1, 1989, 16 – 17.

party bosses worried some workers took the slogans to heart and misrepresented their message. Indeed, a cursory reading of the debates engaged within the Central Committee in the wake of nationalization reveals an ambiguous discourse about the event. Some workers, it was claimed, had come to entertain the "totally wrong opinion" that "nationalized factories became their personal goods".[15] Other workers got the equally wrong idea that "nationalization means the complete defeat of the enemies of the working class and the end of the exploitation of man by man. In fact, capitalist exploitation goes on both in nationalized factories and in the countryside where leftover boyars and kulaks exploit the labor power of the rural proletariat."[16] Moreover, some workers were seized by "reformist ideas" and began to write petitions in order to save their former managers and owners by keeping them employed in the same factories. Finally, perhaps the most misleading opinion of all was shared by workers arguing that "factory hierarchy should disappear. Some workers distort their friendship with the new managers picked from the working-class, mock the engineers and the supervisory personnel while speaking about an unjust form of egalitarianism."[17] For party bosses, nationalization ought to have been about something else:

> Nationalized factories become more and more profitable (*rentabile*) due to the enthusiastic work of the workers, due to their love for the factory which manifests itself in the care with which tools are being handled in order to increase production and productivity. Funds resulting from increased profitability are accumulated within the factory and taken over by the state, which uses them to build new factories, develop social assistance, culture houses, and for boosting the material and cultural wellbeing of the working people.[18]

This language of profit, accumulation and redistribution spoke not merely of the fear that some unnamed workers might have gone too far in their interpretation of nationalization; it equally spoke of the need to reproduce, and even enhance the reproduction of the practices that constitute social labor. Whereas the temporality of law-making promised the revolutionary break with forms of ownership associated with capitalism, the temporality of social labor made clear the continuity (hence implicit neutrality) of a set of practices proper to both capitalism and socialism: the structure of the workday, the rhythms of the shop floor, the

15 ANR, CC/PCR, Secţia Cancelarie, 92/1948, p. 17.
16 IBIDEM.
17 IBIDEM, p. 12.
18 IBIDEM, p. 15.

wage relation, factory hierarchy and the flows of industrial production.[19] The interplay of the two temporalities, therefore, was bound to create some confusion with the workers and even with party bosses monitoring the event from Bucharest. Thus, for instance, in an early draft of instructions for activists on how June 11 should unfold, it was envisaged that workers must necessarily make up for the lost time between 2 and 3 o'clock in the afternoon – the full hour during which they were summoned to the meeting that announced nationalization.[20] Neither the workday, nor the payment of wages could be altered by June 11. On the contrary: as nationalization took place four days before the first wage installment (*chenzină*), the new managers were instructed to do everything in their power to pay the wages on time. For those factories lacking money to cover salaries, managers had to immediately notify the National Bank, which would duly provide the required amount of cash. Moreover, on June 15, the Ministry of Industry sent out an alarmed telegram to all nationalized factories noting how the rate of commercial transactions plummeted and the nexus between firms, markets and clients was likely to break apart causing the money flow to freeze. It urged managers to restart production, take care of their orders and observe the rules of offer and demand.

In the aftermath of June 11, the two temporalities intertwined to create a vantage point for assessing the transformative consequences of the new state ownership on workers' consciousness. Indeed, according to the communist party's daily *Scânteia*, the event of nationalization could not have but energized workers' everyday: absenteeism, foot dragging, disobeying factory hierarchy were all deemed bad habits inherited from the capitalist past to be overcome. One article specific to Laromet Works went on to note that although the situation of wasted productive hours got significantly better after June 11, there were still many workers who "did not learn to cherish every minute and love each moment in production."[21] In the following weeks, the proper use of the workday (*între-*

19 The notion of "structure" should be understood here in opposition to that of "event" along the following lines: "While events are caused or suffered by specific subjects, structures as such are supra-individual and intersubjective. They cannot be reduced to individual persons and seldom to exactly determinable groups. Methodologically, therefore, they demand functional determinants. Structures do not in this way become entities outside of time, but rather gain a processual character, which can then enter into everyday experience.", Reinhart Koselleck, *Future Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time*, translated by Keith Tribe (New York: Colombia University Press, 2004), 108. It is in this sense that social labor can be said to be a "structure": at the same time the object and the ground of domination in modern societies.

20 ANR, CC/PCR, Secţia Organizatorică, 57/1948, p. 11. The paragraph was crossed out in red pencil marks.

21 "Să combatem cu hotărâre indisciplina în muncă", Scânteia, No. 1155, June 27 1948.

buinţarea riguroasă a zilei de muncă) became something of an obsession for the new manager, comrade Maşala.[22] There was a crackdown against the customary ten minutes of tardiness that was usually tolerated, with employees made aware that any punching card not validated at 7 a.m. sharp would duly bring a fine to its owner.[23] Moreover, nobody was any longer allowed to linger on the factory premises after the official end of the workday was signaled by siren, less out of fear of sabotage and more as a way of enforcing a certain degree of control over the use of extra-hours. Small wonder then that already by June 24, during a general meeting of the employees, one party activist gleefully explained nationalization was in his view the last step in the long struggle undertaken by the communist party to "normalize the 8-hour workday".[24]

Maşala's enforcement of a stricter workday was preceded by the enforcement of Maşala as a stricter general manager of Laromet. On June 17, 1948, during the first meeting of the technical personnel of the factory after nationalization, the body of engineers gathered to salute the "new leader", a former employee of the national railway company (CFR) for over 20 years, and somebody "who knows what we need, knows our worries"[25]. Both Maşala and the engineers admitted his task was not easy as the factory was running high debts and had no money for investments. Yet they also agreed that June 11 ought to make workers more diligent, ready to care for their tools, more concerned with higher output, less prone to wasting time and materials, now that factories belonged to them. These words were not in vain. By the end of 1948, comrade Maşala could show an outstanding increase in the production of core nonferrous semifabricates: brass, zinc, aluminum, and copper. With the same industrial machines, a small bank loan and the same number of employees, Laromet managed to almost double its output between June 11 and December 31 due to the "class consciousness of the employees and the political education instilled by the party."[26] Financially, the factory cut back on its debt, registered a modicum of profit (*beneficiu*) and even allowed itself to pay for the maintenance of a daycare and build a hall for indoor sports and meetings. This success story, certainly exaggerated

22 Labor inspectors shared the same obsession with the proper use of the workday. One such labor inspector, for instance, visiting Laromet Works in November 1948 recommended among others for comrade Meşala to set up privies in each and every workshop. In this way workers would be prevented to leave their posts and run around in search of toilets thus wasting time. ANR, MM, 2545/1947, p. 1–6.

23 AMB, Fond Laromet, 15/1945, p. 138 and 150.

24 AMB, Fond Laromet, 10/1945 – 1949, p. 74.

25 AMB, Fond Laromet, 14/1947, p. 38.

26 AMB, Fond Laromet, 5/1948, p. 3.

and perhaps even doctored, reveals how the event of nationalization was "normalized" in the course of the second half of 1948.

The fear that workers and the new managers could read too much into the "revolutionary act" of nationalization was real. That it was a misplaced fear, more a figment of the party bosses' imagination than a fact of industrial life, changes nothing: the newspapers were full of warnings of the following kind: "Some believe that now after we have removed the owner, profit will be split among the workers. This is a mistaken way of 'understanding' nationalization. Now profits will be used first and foremost for investments."[27] Or, further down the page in the same issue of *Scânteia:* "In some places, workers of the nationalized factories tend to waste the capital and income of their factories on various things which are indeed important, but which are not necessary at the moment: some want to begin the 'reconstruction' of an open air swimming pool, others want a chalet in the mountains, yet others crave for a modern sport hall etc. Some of the new managers even move in this direction – either because they want to win over workers and enjoy cheap popularity or because they don't treat the problem with the seriousness it deserves."[28] It is hard to say whether such hopes and desires were actually held by workers and their new managers or whether they were simply publicized by the printed press in anticipation of what might happen if the nationalization process was misunderstood. It is therefore more reasonable to argue that such discourses of anxiety over the various meanings of June 11 were not overt reactions to popular demand but rather the product of an effort to dissolve the rupture occasioned by nationalization, including the revolutionary horizon of expectation allegedly opened up on that day, into the normal flow of industrial production. This is precisely why the day was never intended as a popular fête nor would it ever be celebrated on par with November 7, May 1 or August 23 – all dates of central importance for the socialist calendar and popular culture. June 11 would rarely be associated with street names, or those of stadiums, parades or holidays.

For communist party bosses, the temporality of social labor with its time sheets, punching cards, paychecks, output figures, list of prices, guidelines for capital investment, bank loans, factory debt, and profit margins was the only testing ground for judging the nature of June 11 as a major revolutionary event. For William Sewell Jr., the practicing historian should be able to distinguish between genuine events and mere ruptures in the texture of social forma-

27 "Fabricile sunt ale poporului muncitor. Să le gospodărim chibzuit", *Scânteia*, No. 1149, June 19 1948.

28 IBIDEM.

tions: the first "significantly transform structures", the latter, while momentarily explosive for social order "are neutralized and reabsorbed into the pre-existing structures in one way or another."[29] Chains of ruptures, according to Sewell, might indeed give birth to events to the extent they resist neutralization, and as a consequence end up revolutionizing social relations and practices.[30] Was nationalization, then, an event in Sewell's sense, or was it instead a rupture stitched back on to the fabric of social practices that constituted social labor in mid-twentieth century East Central Europe? Or to put it more bluntly: is the success of Laromet Works during the second half of 1948, no matter how suspicious, evidence of a revolution in social structure initiated by June 11, or is it rather the expression of an accelerated reproduction of social practice brought about by nationalization?

Stated in this way the question is meaningless since it can be answered both ways.[31] Writing from his Parisian exile, social-democrat Şerban Voinea was led to believe that June 11 did indeed launch a revolution in social structure, albeit one pursued through dictatorial means that deeply compromised the meaning of nationalization before the Romanian working-class.[32] Experiencing the aftermath of June 11 on the shopfloor, metalworkers at Malaxa Works might be forgiven for navel-gazing before the sermons about nationalization delivered by party activists; workers looked forward to signing new collective labor contracts at the end of the year, argued over piece-rate norms, demanded proper working clothes and complained about the lack of consumer items at the local cooperative.[33] For

29 William H. Sewell Jr. *Logics of History: Social Theory and Transformation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 227.

30 IBIDEM, 226. Note that for Sewell social relations and practices are "profoundly governed by underlining social and cultural structures." It is this insistence on the constraining effects of "structure(s)" that makes Sewell's complex understanding of the role of contingency in social transformation (i.e. events) stand out from the crowd of more traditional approaches to the topic that privilege a voluntarist and conspiratorial, nay intuitive grasp of social life; see Pierre Nora, "Le retour de l'événement", in Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora (eds.) *Faire de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 2011 [1974]), 283 – 307.

31 The question ceases to be meaningless on a more charitable understanding of events, such as the one proposed by Koselleck: "A trial involving labor law, for instance, can be both a dramatic history in the sense of 'event' and simultaneously an index of a long-term social, economic, and legal elements.", Reinhart Koselleck, *Future Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time*, translated by Keith Tribe (New York: Colombia University Press, 2004), 108. My interpretation of nationalization is heavily influenced by Koselleck's great essay "Representation, Event, and Structure".

32 Şerban Voinea, *La socialization* (Paris: P.U.F., 1950), 176 – 180.

33 AMB, Comitetul Municipal PCR Bucureşti, Comitetul Sectorului 23 August (Malaxa) al PCR, 17/1948, pp. 62 – 69.

them, as for many other workers and their families, the more shocking news must have been the governmental decision issued in November 1948 according to which the customary Christmas bonus was abolished on the grounds it represented "a technique of the bourgeoisie to deceive wage earners".[34] In Reşiţa, metalworkers might have also succumbed to self-absorption, but they were also made to contemplate the production diagram – drawings on small blackboards, sometimes in colored chalk that allegedly helped workers of the bridge construction section of the plant achieve the highest productivity ever.[35] For them and their peers across UDR's sections, the introduction of the production diagram signaled a period of labor intensification, as did the constant pressure of the new managerial team brought about by June 11 to cut down piece-rate norms and make workers push harder for achieving their base salary.

June 11, 1948 was both an event, albeit one less revolutionary than *Scânteia* claimed and more traumatic than the briefings describing the experience of the dispossessed owners suggested. It was also an index of the heightened reproduction of practices embedded in the structure of social labor. Grasped from within the temporality of law-making, the transfer of ownership rights to the state is the stuff of dramatic history and can be rendered in narrative form, much like the socialist realist writers did in their plays and novels dedicated to the event. This temporality, however, could not frame the meaning of nationalization, above vignettes about the downfall of the propertied bourgeoisie and beyond plots about lurking class enemies committing sabotage, both of which constituted the political *faits divers* that filled newspaper pages. The full meaning of nationalization had to be inferred from within the temporality of social labor, a maneuver that required statistical description rather than plain narrative. The epochal significance of June 11, 1948 as a foundational moment in the history of state socialism in Romania was to be confirmed by the type of output report assembled by Laromet's manager or by the chalked charts figured on the shop floors of UDR Reşiţa. It was these kinds of documents, alongside paychecks, punching cards and production plans that verified both the reproduction of social labor and the transformative consequences that nationalization had on the social structure of Romanian society. There was no contradiction between the two as long as socialism was synonymous with the emergence and development

34 AMB, Comitetul Municipal PCR Bucureşti, Comitetul Sectorului 23 August (Malaxa) al PCR, 18/1948, p. 59.

35 "Muncitorii şi tehnicienii de la Fabrica de poduri au atins cea mai mare productivitate a muncii avută până în present", *Luptătorul Bănăţean*, No. 1245, November 14 1948 and "Să fie îmbunătăţite diagramele de producţie la oţelărie şi furnale înalte", *Luptătorul Bănăţean*, No. 1235, November 3 1948.

of the large-scale company because "it is not hard to understand that a large and profitable state factory has more opportunities to better the 'social wage' and to contribute to the bettering of its employees' standard of living."[36]

That socialism was about large, state owned factories making a profit for the sake of redistribution was not intuitive; that this process would entail an intensified pace of work, tighter piece-rate norms, a stricter factory hierarchy, and a deferral of investments in social welfare all for the purpose of capital accumulation was rather hard to understand. Foremen, for instance, might have found it hard to comprehend why all of a sudden some of them were accused of being secretive about their job, not sharing crucial details about the functioning of machines and the use of tools. In Reşiţa, one party activist noted with some concern that "there is a kind of tradition that foremen don't give away their secrets. This is why when one of them falls ill somebody has to visit him at home and ask him how to work in order for production not to come to a still on that day."[37] The intensification of work could not be hindered by such anachronistic habits of the craft. Party activists and union delegates must have been surprised that after June 11, 1948 they were forbidden to hold meetings during working hours or storm into the office of the general manager with all kinds of petty requests. Both the production plan and the authority of the manager could have been sapped by such recently acquired routines. Finally, workers must have been puzzled to find out the new collective labor contracts signed in early 1949 continued the obligation of factories to invest in livestock, farms and vegetable gardens only to condition these investments on overall profit. After June 11, 1948, socialism equaled sacrifice.

4.3 The Crisis of Managerial Authority

Engineer Bobârnac's career as head manager of Malaxa Works was cut short several months after nationalization. Praised in the party press for his outstanding abilities as leader of Bucharest's largest metal plant, Bobârnac swiftly and rather unexpectedly came under the combined attack of trade-union and party bosses at the factory level. By late June 1948, he came to be accused of seldom being present in his office, of widespread unpopularity and of displaying a kind of "forced respect" (*respect forţat*). This was harsh, though understandable criti-

36 "Regruparea întreprinderilor industriale", *Scânteia*, No. 1189, August 15 1948.

37 ANR, CC/PCR, Secţia Organizatorică, 28/1948, p. 9. The most entertaining literary rendering of this attack on metalworkers' craft tradition by the young and unskilled is Mihail Davidoglu's *Cetatea de foc*, a socialist realist play set in Reşiţa in 1949.

cism as Bobârnac must have been extremely stressed, with limited time at his disposal for weaving ties of respect with his peers and getting to know the plant's party and trade-union consecrated leaders. Yet he was guilty of something much more serious: "he showed mistrust toward his subordinates, hindering them from taking any kind of decision without his consent".[38] Moreover, he appointed a number of "old men", known to have been close associates of the of the former owner; engineers and office clerks who, paradoxically, seemed intent to work "as if for the state", without any commitment whatsoever. Bobârnac pleaded his cause, arguing that he was a busy man, admitting that he did not trust his subordinates and by pointing out that union and party bosses at the factory level were plotting to discredit him. Ministerial authorities took the side of the manager and dismissed the allegations, showing that Bobârnac was "able and hardworking, committed from seven in the morning to half past ten at night to solving problems small and large."[39] Solving problems "small and large" singlehandedly was the very stake of this scandal, as would become clear a couple of week later when Bobârnac was again accused of having "monopolized all the work for himself".[40] It was this last round of criticism that forced Bobârnac to resign. In advancing their different interpretations of what factory hierarchy should look like after June 11, 1948, neither union and party leaders at the factory level nor the head manager of Malaxa Works were acting against the general principle of managerial authority laid out by the communist party in the wake of nationalization.

This principle, colloquially referred to as *troica*, prescribed that authority in the newly nationalized factories is shared among the trade-union, the party organization and the head manager, with the first two obliged to help the latter in administering the factory. This meant that the general director could not rule alone, but rather had to consult union and party delegates on a whole array of matters pertaining to everyday politics such as provisioning, promotions, hiring and lay-offs. The *troica* principle notably made sense in small and medium-sized factories where the newly appointed managers were selected from among the more faithful and trustworthy workers, and could thus be legitimately suspected of lacking experience in running an industrial establishment. This was how a widely circulated pedagogical brochure articulated the relationship between the manager, the party organization and the union delegates:

38 AMB, Comitetul Municipal PCR Bucureşti, Comitetul Sectorului 23 August (Malaxa) al PCR, 19/1948, p. 113.
39 IBIDEM, p. 115.
40 IBIDEM.

> It is the duty of each and every party member and worker to help the managers so that they can accomplish their tasks. Let us note that most of them lack the experience to lead (*experienţa de a conduce*), to administer the factory: let us then help them to acquire the necessary experience and ability as quick as possible, and use it in the service of the working people. They should enjoy the complete respect of the workers, engineers and functionaries. We should be aware that friendship relations between former working mates and the new manager-worker (*directorul-muncitor*) might harm work discipline and the smooth running of industrial production.[41]

This type of discourse addressed to party and union bosses was complemented by myriad speeches meant to instruct the new managers on how to get a grip of their status as leaders of industry. Such was the case, for instance, with a lecture delivered by Minister of Industry and party notable Chivu Stoica before an audience composed of Bucharest's newly appointed managers. Stoica attempted to explain the duties of management now that "capital belongs to the people"[42], particularly in view of the concerns expressed by some of the new managers themselves in the weeks following June 11, 1948. Firstly, Stoica pointed out that the expertise of former owners in matters of financial, administrative and technical organization was highly valuable and managers should be able to "steal their secrets". Moreover, even though nationalization abolished the institution of the Board of Administrators, it often happened that highly skilled engineers were part of these boards. They too should be milked for their knowledge, and retained within factories under the close supervision of the party because "the capital of their expertise does not belong to them."[43] Secondly, any change in the wage scale was strictly forbidden, even in those cases in which technical personnel were judged to be earning too much. Characteristically, in early July 1948 the Central Committee approved a ministerial recommendation according to which, after nationalization, the new managers, as long as they were appointed from among the working-class, would necessarily receive a lower salary than the chief engineer of the factory.[44] The wage scale rewarded skill over function. Finally, Stoica ended the lecture by urging the new managers to become "more severe than a capitalist manager." Stoica gave the example of Vulcan Works, a medium-sized metal factory in the capital city, where workers had

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41 *Despre naţionalizarea întreprinderilor industrial, bancare, de asigurări, miniere şi de transporturi* (Bucharest: Editura PMR, 1948), 39.

42 ANR, CC/PCR, Secţia Economică, 57/1948, p. 4.

43 IBIDEM, p. 3. The argument Stoica was making here run as follows: since these engineers were trained in public schools financed by the taxpayers' money either in Romania or abroad, their acquired knowledge was eminently public in nature.

44 ANR, CC/PCR, Secţia Economică, 17/1948, p. 5.

recently built a canteen with the owner's money and were now requesting all sorts of investments in similar amenities: "[T]his is neither possible nor right. The surplus must be directed to the state's treasury. [...] There might indeed be pressure to build swimming pools or sports fields. We should not give in."[45] Giving in to popular demands for investments in such amenities, Stoica concluded, would bring about the "death of our regime."[46]

Bobârnac hardly conformed to the new category of "manager-worker": he could neither be suspected of lacking managerial experience nor could he be denounced for retaining friendships with his former workmates. As we have seen, the opposite was the case, as Bobârnac allegedly turned out to have a distant personality, bent on taking his job seriously and in doing so, was willing to risk antagonizing Malaxa Works' party and union bosses. His downfall came as a consequence of a struggle over the nature of managerial authority within the factory in the wake of nationalization. This struggle, which pitted managers against party and union bosses, was common in both small and medium-sized factories headed by "manager-workers" such as Laromet, as well as in large-scale plants under the leadership of engineers, as was the case with Malaxa Works. By late September 1948, an upsurge in conflicts around managerial authority caused the Central Committee to declare the *troica* principle a failure. Noting that in many nationalized factories, it was either the manager controlling party and union bosses, or union delegates and party representatives controlling the manager, Secretary General Gheorghiu-Dej concluded the *troica* diffused authority, causing strife where industrial order and responsibility should have reigned. Consequently, nobody could be made accountable for failing production plans as long as the manager's prerogative to give orders continued to be challenged and undermined.[47]

What replaced the *troica* would come to be known as the "sole leadership" (*conducere unică*) principle. The "sole leadership" principle – i.e. the idea that the manager was the only source of command within the factory, endowed with power to overrule both the ruling body of the factory committee and the ubiquitous party organizations planted in each and every section of the plant – had a venerable Stalinist pedigree. Indeed, it was in the Soviet Union of the late 1920s that the principle was first formulated as an answer to a question which might have seemed familiar to Bobârnac himself: "Is it possible to exercise com-

45 ANR, CC/PCR, Secţia Economică, 57/1948, p. 8.
46 IBIDEM.
47 ANR, CC/PCR, Secţia Cancelarie, 35/1948, pp. 5–6.

mand against the party if its politics hinders industrial efficiency?"[48] The general manager of Malaxa Works – engineer Bobârnac – seemed to have answered this question in the positive, as did the new "manager-worker" of UDR, thirty-one-year-old former welder Carol Loncear. Following June 11, 1948, Loncear proceeded to tone down the acquired habits of the party and union bosses in the plant by setting office hours and by declaring he cannot be disturbed, not even by CGM representatives traveling from Bucharest, unless an appointment was made in advance. Predictably, this administrative move was met with slander by local party and union leaders. While the setting up of office hours in and of itself was not found to violate the *troica* principle, Loncear's attempt to seal himself off from the everyday politics of the plant was found utterly offensive, a token of the entrenched industrial tradition of the place ("*spiritul Reşiţei*").[49] Reproaches poured: "He works a lot, and he looks to rise up to the occasion, but more often than not he is anarchic in his work methods and rather superficial. Even when he aims to explain a problem he does not manage to nail down the subject; in the past he had many faults, being a drunkard, and a bit of a fly-away (*uşuratic*), though he has recently matured. He tackles many problems too quickly, he often agrees with us but then he lets himself be influenced by the technical personnel and does the opposite. He displays some unjust attitudes of defiance."[50] Born in 1917, he was further accused of being too young to wield any authority over workers, and too inexperienced to head the country's leading industrial plant.[51]

None of these accusations stuck. Unlike engineer Bobârnac, the young welder from Reşiţa retained and consolidated his position for a number of years, only to then make a career as Deputy Minister and Minister of Heavy Industry throughout the 1950s. Part of the reason why Loncear could not be easily replaced might be attributed to the timing of the struggle, which unfolded at the moment when the Central Committee agreed to introduce the "sole leadership" principle. Matters of chance aside, the fact that Loncear was a native poster child of the steel mill must have also contributed a great deal to furthering local expectations. That he was also something of a communist hero, having spent time in jail during the war following the arrest and death of his own brother –

48 This is how historian Yves Cohen sums up in question form the manifold debates around managerial authority that took place in the Soviet Union in the late 1920s; Yves Cohen, *Le siècle des chefs. Une histoire transnationale du commandement et d'autorité (1890 – 1940)*, (Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2013), 640.

49 ANR, CC/PCR, Secţia Organizatorică, 28/1948, p. 13.

50 IBIDEM, p. 8.

51 ANR, CC/PCR, Secţia Organizatorică, 33/1948, pp. 5 – 6.

a communist militant – must have counted for something in the eyes of party bosses in Bucharest.[52] That Loncear surrounded himself with an aura of modesty, refusing to take residence in the villa of the former general manager in order to transform it into a daycare, might have suggested the new director continued to be a man of the people.[53] Even those who got to know Loncear personally during the early 1950s recall his down-to-earth approach to factory life. Take, for instance, the following description provided by Dorin Pavel, the engineer in charge of building a dam and a hydro-electrical power plant to run the steel mill in Reşiţa:

> From the outset, and as long as Loncear was general manager, we were left to work independently. We did not need to request official approvals for our solutions or projects. When we encountered difficulties, it was enough to give a call to comrade Loncear and everything was put in order. The following event is telling for this able former welder. We arrive in Reşiţa in the morning to visit the locomotive workshop where they would weld the 700 mm Semenic pipes, designed to resist the extraordinary pressure of 75 atmospheres. They had already tested the first pipes and noted that under the water pressure, many had leaked. They welded them only on the outside. I immediately asked comrade Loncear to come and see. 'Well, well, my brothers, my welders, have you no shame ... you say you cannot go inside the 700 mm pipes to weld, bring me a ventilator'. As tall as he was, though lean, he welded the whole ten meters on the inside. Put to the test the pipe was waterproofed. 'See now, does it work or not? Weld me the entire stack of pipes and I'll give you 40000 lei as bonus.' There were seven welders and they all got the promised money that day.[54]

No doubt, Loncear's ability to secure a degree of independence for the engineers supervising the construction site, as well as his capacity to put things in order with a phone call presupposed a certain political savviness in coordinating the distribution of resources and containing the occasional inquiries of zealous party activists. It is no surprise, then, that it is precisely this skillset of the general manager that made it into the pages of a socialist realist novel devoted to the

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52 These biographical details are provided by long time social-democrat trade-union boss Eftimie Gherman in an article written in exile, see *România Muncitoare*, No. 10, October 1952, p. 35. Gherman mocks Loncear, whom he might have known personally, because he became a communist not by conviction but by chance, due to the family tragedy he endured during the war. The tone of the portrait, however, remains respectful: "Of all the communists in Reşiţa, Loncear is the only one who knows what he wants."

53 "La Uzinele Reşiţa s-a înfăptuit of frumoasă creşă pentru copii", *Luptătorul Bănăţean*, No. 1176, August 25 1948.

54 *Caietele de amintiri ale profesorului Dorin Pavel. A patra conferinţă a hidroenergeticienilor din România, 26 – 27 mai 2006, Bucureşti* (unpaged manuscript).

erection of the dam, Nicolae Jianu's award winning *Cumpăna luminilor* (1952). For Jianu – who had spent several weeks incognito among construction workers around Reşiţa – comrade Chirtoş, the character modeled after Loncear, was capable of subtle maneuvering among rival engineers, competing foremen, and dispassionate office clerks, always aiming to conduct the conduct of his subordinates. And it was this pastoral power that allegedly impressed workers and engineers alike because, as another character of the novel says about the general manager "snappish at times, his words sting, but he's always helpful when needed and good at it too."[55]

Yet no matter how many more such examples we might retrieve in support of Loncear's power position vis-à-vis local party and trade-union bosses, none of them will fully explain why the young welder was able to shake off party criticism. This explanation should be sought, not merely in the symbolic practices that construed Loncear's managerial authority, but also in the ownership structure that was imposed on the steel mill following June 11, 1948. In this respect, the difference between Malaxa Works and UDR Reşiţa could not be greater. While both companies were integrated into the German war economy via the Nazi conglomerate Reichswerke Hermann Göring (H.G.W.) in early 1941, the manner in which this inclusion took place was different. For the case of Malaxa Works in Bucharest, the Romanian state acquired 50% of the shares in January 1941 and the other half during the following month thus effectively nationalizing the plant before renting it out to a German joint-stock company (ROGIFER) later that same year.

According to historian Florian Banu, this type of wartime nationalization was undertaken out of Ion Antonescu's fear that the loss of control over economic life at the hands of the Germans would bring about the loss of control over domestic politics.[56] This allegedly "protectionist" reaction to the expansion of German capital could not be replicated in the case of UDR where H.G.W. inherited a large number of shares from a Czechoslovak shareholder swallowed by Germany in 1938. With the collapse of the war economy, Malaxa Works underwent privatization and was returned *in toto* to its original majority shareholder, Nicolae Malaxa. Declared "enemy assesses" by the Armistice Convention of September 1944, UDR's H.G.W. shares were taken over by the Soviets as war reparations. It was these "enemy" shares, amounting to over 30% by November 1947, that constituted the Soviet contribution to the joint-stock company – Sovromme-

55 Nicolae Jianu, *Cumpăna luminilor* (Bucharest: Editura Tineretului a C.C. al U.T.M., 1952), 466.
56 Florian Banu, *Asalt asupra economiei României, de la Solagra la Sovrom (1936 – 1956)*, (Bucharest: Nemira, 2004), 54.

tal Reşiţa – that emerged after nationalization to manage the steel mill, the metal factories and the mines that had belonged to UDR.[57] In contrast, Malaxa Works was simply re-nationalized in 1948 and placed under the control of the Romanian state.

Sovrommetal Reşiţa was a latecomer to the string of Soviet-Romanian joint-stock companies (Sovroms) that came into existence after the end of the war in naval and maritime transport, petroleum, wood processing, banking, manufacturing, mining, movie and other industries as well.[58] Yet in spite of their importance for the postwar economy, both domestic and international, little is known about how these joint-stock companies operated. From the standpoint of ownership, these were bi-national corporations governed by the laws of profit. One agreement between the two countries signed in 1949 specified that dividends were exempt from taxes, with the two shareholders splitting 80% of the annual profits, the remaining 20% being retained by management for investments and similar spending within the company.[59] It is reasonable to suppose that apart from facilitating an outflow of cheap goods, notably raw materials such as oil and timber, these companies also contributed to a transfer of industrial technology from the Soviet Union to Romania. The evidence to support this, however, is scarce. For instance, Soviet experts did build an assembly line for the caterpillar KD-35 tractor in the city of Braşov and did provide expertise for the enlargement of the steel mill in Reşiţa. More important for the argument developed in this chapter was the way in which managerial authority was upheld within the Sovroms.

Unlike the companies owned completely by the Romanian state such as Malaxa Works or Laromet in Bucharest, the joint-stock Soviet-Romanian companies were infinitely more eager to enforce factory hierarchy. Take, for example, the case of the Soviet specialist supervising the production of tractors in the city of Braşov. By July 1949, comrade Supikaşvilli was driven crazy by the manner in which the general manager – one comrade Trandafirescu – understood his role as "sole leader" of the plant: "He does not have the ability to comprehend the major problems of the factory, and even though he works very much, he always gets lost in details."[60] According to Supikaşvilli, comrade Trandafirescu was unable to lower production costs because he lacked authority: he refused

57 ANR, UDR, 1039/1947, p. 5 *et passim* for the full list of UDR's shareholders.

58 Still the most reliable guide to the spread of Soviet joint-stock companies across Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania and Yugoslavia is Nicolas Spulber, *The Economics of Communist Eastern Europe* (Cambridge, M.A., MIT Press, 1957), 166–223.

59 ANR, PCM, Comisia de Colaborare Tehnico-Ştiinţifică, 7/1949, pp. 1–6.

60 ANR, CC/PCR, Secţia Cancelarie, 169/1949, p. 66.

to fire at least 40 office clerks from the allegedly overstaffed accounting unit of the plant; he was always granting audiences during the workday arguing that were he to stop doing so workers would call him a dictator; and finally Trandafirescu could not grasp the proper relationship between the general manager and the party and union bosses. Not only was he always asking for their input in matters of administration, but he also turned a blind eye to the fact that these activists were forcing many good technicians to quit their jobs. Supikaşvili, therefore, demanded a new general manager.

The young Loncear, we now begin to understand, no matter how much authority he was personally commanding, diligently observed the requirements needed to run a joint-stock Soviet-Romanian company. The Soviet advisor in Reşiţa, comrade engineer Simonenco, acting as a deputy general manager of the steel mill was an adamant supporter of the "sole leadership" principle. During a national conference that assembled the country's leading experts of the metal industries in October 1949, Simonenco expressed his disappointment that more than one year after nationalization, many directors were still sharing their authority with party and union bosses at the factory level: "The sole leadership is of utmost importance. From the general manager down to the team leaders and workshop supervisors, all of them should feel responsible for the duties entrusted to them by the state. This cannot be done unless every leader (*conducător*) knows his obligations perfectly. Decisions over production depend on it."[61]

Naturally, it was much easier for lower management – workshop supervisors, team leaders, engineers, foremen and others – to secure their authority before workers and party organizations within a joint-stock company. Working under the Soviets allowed them to justify their commands by simply invoking the will of the Soviet advisors rather than of native managers. Thus, for instance, engineers of the Jiu Valley mining company Sovromcărbune were able to dismiss or ignore workers' demands (*revendicări*) by arguing they were instructed by the Soviets to do so. Moreover, using the same justification made it possible for them to apply fines and distribute punishments down the chain of command without fearing reprisals form the party or union organizations.

It is understandable that anti-Soviet sentiment was soon detected among the miners, who complained of having their requests silenced. The appeal of anti-Soviet sentiment, however, should not be exaggerated. For instance, Simonenco was held in high regard for his willingness to undertake reevaluations without

61 ANR, CC/PCR, Secţia Cancelarie, 91/1949, p. 101.

the consent of the trade-union in order to reward newly qualified workers.[62] Be that as it may, by the end of 1948 it had become increasingly clear that even within the Sovrom companies, trade-union activists were pushing for workers' demands by way of fighting against the new general managers: "Many bosses of the factory committees show the tendency to substitute themselves for the general manager. Even when they don't do so completely, they still force the new managers to adopt a passive attitude which is very bad for the production process and for the collaboration between workers and engineers."[63] These so-called "anarchists", one report alarmingly noted, "still did not understand that their role in defending the real interests of the salaried cannot take the form of making all sorts of demands on management, often inspired by reactionaries. The leadership of the Sovrom companies is not a capitalist leadership."[64]

The new leadership that followed comrade Bobârnac at Malaxa Works might have not been capitalist. Yet between late 1948 and early 1953, the plant changed four general managers, all of whom were deeply concerned with containing challenges to factory hierarchy coming from party and union bosses. Unlike in the case of Reşiţa where party, union and management found common ground immediately after the end of the war in 1945, Malaxa Works remained a factory divided between strong party and union organizations, with a managerial team controlled up until late 1947 by the plant's owner. The absence of Soviet advisors in Bucharest only deepened this rift, encouraging party and union bosses at the factory level to openly dispute managerial prerogatives, especially those pertaining to the firing and hiring of personnel. The removal of Bobârnac was a direct consequence of the influence party bosses enjoyed at the factory level, an influence which was thought to seriously hinder production. The failure to meet plan targets for that year triggered an investigation into the tense relationship be-

62 ANCS, PMR, Comisia Judeţeană Reşiţa, 9/1950, p. 37. Simonenco was a firm believer that workers should acquire their skills at the point of production, see ANR, CC/PCR, Secţia Cancelarie, 91/1949, p. 102. Even the exiled social-democrat Gherman, for whom the Sovroms were "Russian" imperialist devices for plundering his native Romania of all her resources, had this to say about Reşiţa's Soviet managers: "Nevertheless, we have to admit the two directors Serghienco and Simonenco, appointed by the Soviets, proved themselves capable, bringing real gains to Reşiţa. The first was a wonderful technician, the second a skilled organizer. The other Soviet directors that came after did nothing but ruin what these two created.", *România Muncitoare*, No. 10, October 1952, p. 22. Not much is known about Serghienco apart from the fact that in August 1947 he introduced a special bonus system for metalworkers working in dangerous conditions (heat, toxicity), thus lifting their wages above the average, ANR, UDR, 306/1947, pp. 3–5.

63 ANR, CC/PCR, Secţia Organizatorică, 72/1948, p. 39.

64 IBIDEM, p. 30.

tween the managerial staff and the so-called "mass organizations." Let us try to decipher the report's conclusions.

Investigators attributed the underperformance of the plant to a runaway conflict amplified after June 11, 1948 between party and union bosses and the technical personnel, particularly engineers who were in a state of "passivity". This state was induced by the plethora of accusations thrown at them by party and union leaders who "waste no chance to insult them."[65] Some of these insults were personal, others derived from a so-called "leftist" or "anarchist" attitude as party bosses failed to understand why engineers earned more than they did and why they should not be mocked for "living at the expense of the workers."[66] The new general manager, Oniga, was caught in the line of fire. On the one hand, he could not exercise even basic managerial control over the labor process without the consent of the party and the factory committee. Moving people from one section of the factory to another according to the needs of production was impossible; and so too were minor attempts at rationalizing the labor process. For instance, the introduction of the production diagram was rejected on the grounds it was a "fascist method". On the other hand, the plant's financial resources as stipulated by the collective labor contract were vociferously claimed by union delegates. Oniga, although he set regular office hours, could not prevent visits during worktime: "they went so far that workers' delegates came to me to push for social demands (*revendicări sociale*) in the name of the trade-union."[67]

Malaxa Works remained a conflict zone even after Oniga left the plant in late 1950.[68] The next two general managers – Teodorescu and Dumitraşcu – were equally unsuccessful in asserting managerial authority and organizing an uninterrupted chain of command that could reduce the pressure from the party and union bosses. In this context, the plant's newspaper *Viaţa Uzinei* – launched in May 1949 – was the main vehicle of the struggles. Workers' relocation from one section to another, for example, appeared in its pages as an attempt of a malevolent engineer to break up well-trodden work collectives.[69] In face-to-face en-

65 ANR, CC/PCR, Secţia Economică, 71/1949, p. 12.

66 IBIDEM.

67 IBIDEM, p. 55. Some of these demands included the use of the plant's cars for trade-union affairs and the curious suggestion that the general manager guarantee that workers buy home appliances on credit from Bucharest's Ferometal shop.

68 In one of his last meetings summoned as general manager, Oniga noted rather euphemistically that, in spite of his personal efforts, party and union bosses still do not collaborate with the technical personnel, ANR, CC/PCR, Secţia Economică, 37/1950, p. 22.

69 Radu Ioan, "Lipsuri în colaborarea dintre muncitori şi tehnicienii la Edile şi Construcţii", *Viaţa Uzinei*, No. 1. May 1, 1949.

counters, during meetings or episodes of contention, engineers and functionaries could be accused of sabotage, arguably the most powerful discursive resource available at the hands of trade-union and party bosses. The break-down of a machine, a work accident or a fire were occasions for "class enemies" to be ferreted out and bullied from among the managerial staff. The head of the forging workshop – engineer Drogeanu – a rough character known to have boosted armament production during the war became completely "inactive" and suggested the plant be shut down because "workers indulge in politics (*muncitorii fac politică*)".[70] The engineer had been a victim of workers' libels. In another section of the plant, a party leader was reportedly bossing around foremen, taking upon himself the task of distributing workloads.[71]

The protracted process of instituting managerial authority at Malaxa Works following June 11, 1948 was arguably detrimental to fulfilling production targets. Ministerial authorities, top communist party bosses and Soviet advisors were certainly of the conviction that higher output comes with a strict factory hierarchy, the "sole leadership" principle emanating downwards from the director's office to the shopfloors. Hierarchy was not inimical to party politics, if the latter touched on issues not immediately relevant to the labor process. Hierarchy, however, was not simply about allocating workloads, assigning norms and obeying the commands of foremen, workshop supervisors or engineers. It was equally about controlling the factory's financial resources, particularly as money reached out into the realm of social reproduction. Determining the priority of investments within the plant's paternalistic institutions was an issue in which most everyone had an interest: male and female workers, engineers, party leaders, the general manager, the employees of the medical cabinet or of the daycare.

4.4 The Logic of Investment

Socialist realist playwright Lucia Demetrius might have needed the watchful eye of censorship to properly emplot nationalization in her widely successful play *Cumpăna* (1949) simply because it was far from clear what nationalization was really about and how its transformative impact on ordinary workers should be depicted in narrative form. Demetrius's experience as an office clerk with Malaxa Works's social assistance department during the late 1930s might not have helped the author to tell the story of nationalization as an event, but it certainly came

70 ANR, CC/PCR, Secţia Economică, 60/1950, p. 19.
71 IBIDEM, p. 33.

in handy for another play she wrote about the social function that industrial plants acquired after June 11, 1948. Published in the mid-1950s, *Cei de mâine* (The Ones to Come) is the author's lesser-known and arguably least successful play. Unlike nationalization, the topics broached in this play were not narrative puzzles but rather hotly debated, public issues of the time: managerial authority, factory welfare, women's double burden and the all-pervasive question of investments in industry. Equally public and publicized was what brought these themes together, namely, the future of children as socialist citizens. Demetrius might have known something about these topics given her personal trajectory and it is not hard to imagine what she might have seen upon visiting Bucharest's mid-century working-class districts.

She might have seen, as sociologist Natalia Popovici revealed in a short study published during the war, that it was only the young and unmarried women, the widows and those abandoned that took up day jobs, seldom regular employment. She might have also seen that the vast majority of these women could not but leave their children unattended "on the streets in the company of the other kids."[72] It is plausible to suppose Demetrius wrote the character of Catrina, a recently abandoned mother of three living on the outskirts of the capital city, with this social landscape in mind.

Catrina was a typical figure of the early 1950s: a former washerwoman and a single mother who took up a job in industry partly because this was now openly encouraged by the communist authorities, partly because her husband left her for another woman.[73] Catrina would constantly ask the general manger to invest in the extension of the factory's overcrowded daycare so that it could take in her kids as well. The manager, and old-time communist named Petru, was equally characteristic: he took offence in criticism coming "from below", was overworked, dreaming of building a model metal factory, complained of not having sufficient funds for investments and gave priority to buying new machines over the enlargement of the daycare. The play's plot is rather predictable: the manager

72 Natalia Popovici, "Influence du travail de la femme sur la vie de famille", *Archives pour la science et la reforme sociales*, XVI, No.1 – 4, 1943, 132.

73 In one way or another, the "typical figure" embodied by Catrina was at the center of socialist industrial development. See, for example, the opening story of Krystyna W. – a young mother of two who entered Poland's Silesian coal mines in 1952 – in Małgorzata Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1 – 3. In the same vein Natalia Jarska, "Rural Women, Gender Ideologies, and Industrialization in State Socialism. The Case of a Polish Factory in the 1950s", *Aspasia*, Vol. 9, 2015, 65 – 86. See also Shana Penn and Jill Massino (eds.) *Gender Politics and Everyday Life in State Socialist Eastern and Central Europe* (London: Palgrave, 2009).

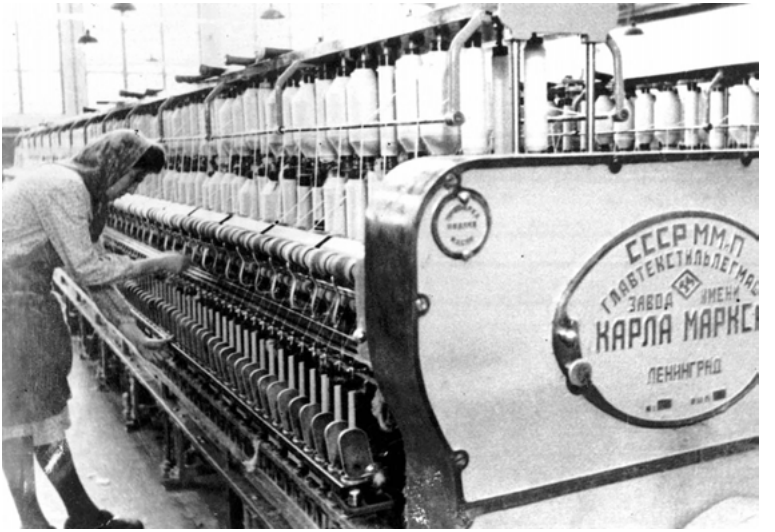

Image 8: *Textile factory worker, Botoşani*, 1952; Source: Fototeca online a comunismului românesc, 184/1952

would learn through criticism and self-criticism to value the social function of factories in liberating women and breeding the next generation of socialist workers.

The type of conflict portrayed by *Cei de mâine* is a good starting point to think about the structural limits and inherent dynamic of struggles over the allocation of resources at the point of production. These struggles were indeed very often about issues of social reproduction yet they rarely, if ever, took the form of women workers asking for their rights to welfare facilities. Before examining in some detail why this was the case, we need to know more about the type of industrial paternalism inaugurated by June 11, 1948.

Post-nationalization paternalism not only retained but also built on many of the features that historically defined UDR's and Malaxa Works' varieties of paternalism. The goal of producing stable, skilled and loyal workers remained unchanged, even amplified, and thus there were conspicuous lines of continuity between paternalist practices enacted before and after the June 11 divide. However, it is important to note the ways in which post-nationalization paternalism marked a break with company tradition to the extent that it grounded (and implicitly justified) the provisioning of factory welfare on a general notion of "social wage" (*salariu social*). In principle the social wage included all the benefits that wage earners enjoyed at the point of production, as both wage earners *and* socialist citizens: access to free medical care, cheap meals at the canteen, low

rents on the factory's housing estate, subsidized transportation for commuters, the possibility of using the daycare, paid holidays etc.

More importantly, the social wage also encompassed social insurance, which was now relocated at the factory level and placed under the combined administration of trade-union delegates and lower management. Yet none of these components of the social wage could be adequately quantified and although they were included in the collective labor contracts, few had the status of social rights. On the contrary, this type of welfare depended on both the ability of the factory to fulfil the plan, and on the struggles over the distribution of resources that unfolded along the chain of command. Both aspects derived from the radical transformation in the nature of collective labor contracts after 1948.

Two aspects of this transformation were paramount for the redefinition of industrial paternalism. The first concerned what communist party bosses called the contracts' "confused and clumsy" character, namely the fact that historically, collective labor contracts in Romania lumped together issues of wage policy, social insurance and social assistance, work safety, transportation subsidies and various other obligations companies agreed to observe for the benefit of their employees such as daycares, housing, marriage bonuses etc. Also, the postwar contracts imposed by CGM added the responsibility of providing employees with subsidized basic consumer items via factory stores to the already existing duties of the management. The collective contracts, beginning in 1949, did away with this alleged confusion by splitting up and reallocating most of these obligations: wage policy would be set by the state via its ministries, workers' rights would be protected by a new labor code, social insurance would be regulated by law and administered by trade-unions, while rules of discipline would be spelled out in codes of conduct authored by management alone.[74]

The second transformation targeted the very object of the contract, which was no longer just "living labor" collectively represented by union delegates but also the production plan.[75] This was indeed an absolute legal novelty of dis-

74 Liuba Chişinevschi, *Noul contract colectiv* (Bucharest: Editura Confederaţiei Generale a Muncii, 1949), 10.

75 Non-Soviet inspired collective labor contracts, including the two enacted by CGM in 1946 and 1947, were built, as all labor law is, around the impossibility of separating labor as a commodity from the body of its seller (or "living labor" in its Marxian original). The rights of the worker inscribed in the collective labor contracts derived exclusively from its subjection to the employer rather than, as in the Soviet case, from fulfilling production targets in addition to subjection. On the *aporia* of traditional "European" labor law see Alain Supiot, *Critique du droit du travail* (Paris: P.U.F., 2011), 60 – 63.

tinctively Soviet provenance.[76] The production plan was inserted into the contracts as blank spaces to be filled up with numbers: "here you will write down the plan requirements for 1952 in absolute values or percentages as compared to the one for 1951; the global production expressed in lei, the labor productivity, production costs [...]".[77] Blank spaces, however, were not only reserved for the production targets to be reached but also for investments in welfare at the factory level: "the factory is obliged to use the investment funds, the director's funds and the social insurance budget administered by the trade-union to build houses for workers amounting to ... lei; locker rooms, showers, barracks worth ... lei."[78] The blank spaces, then, were apparently invitations to negotiate between the two legal corporate fictions engaged in the contract: management and the factory committee. Yet these were always constrained negotiations since the amount allocated for issues of welfare was conditioned on the fulfillment of the plan: on paper, the money available for investments, for the social insurance budget or for the director's fund were distributed in accordance with the performance of the respective industrial unit. This did not make the blank spaces any less negotiable, as both CGM and the workers themselves took them seriously out of necessity.

An investigation pursued by CGM in late 1951 revealed that many factories ignored their obligations on the ground that, since they were unable to fulfil the production plan, they lacked investment funds. After two years of experimenting with the new collective labor contracts, the mood was grim indeed: "Unless we take urgent measures, we will find ourselves at the end of 1951 just like one year ago with factory management not observing the obligations deriving from the collective labor contracts, which would only make workers lose faith in them."[79] For the workers, particularly for those toiling in hazardous conditions without proper working equipment, appealing to the collective labor contract was a desperate matter of last resort. For instance, disgruntled employees of a wood processing facility lacking working clothes wrote a protest memo and sent it together with a copy of the collective contract to management and ministerial authorities.[80] CGM representatives were therefore wrong to fear that workers might begin to regard the new contracts as a mere legal sham with no bind-

76 For a brief genealogy of the relation between numbers and Soviet labor law see Alain Supiot, *La gouvernance par les nombres. Cours au Collège de France (2012 – 2014)*, (Paris: Fayard, 2015), Chapter 6.

77 ANR, PCM, 29/1952, p. 3.

78 IBIDEM.

79 ANR, PCM, 200/1951, p. 2.

80 They never received an answer, ANR, PCR, 146/1951, p. 46.

ing power over management. Out of the 3,758 collective labor contracts signed across industry in 1951, the vast majority were found to have been violated by management, notably in the realm of "social investment" (*investiţii sociale*). This was simply because many small and medium-sized factories were unable to fulfil the production plan.

Industrial giants such as UDR or Malaxa Works were too big to fail. Their importance to the national economy and the transnational Soviet joint-stock commercial empire secured them some investments funds for them even when production plans were not reached. This allowed UDR's management to continue its local paternalist tradition of subsidizing workers' and functionaries' accommodation in town and investing in the development of new housing for its employees. Faced with a mounting housing crisis by the late 1940s, Reşiţa retained its status as a company town, with housing and rent subsidizes remaining the two main managerial devices for controlling local labor supply.[81]

During the immediate postwar period construction efforts were few and far between, with a first major investment project scheduled for 1947. UDR promised to build 110 houses for married workers: one big room, a small kitchen, a surrounding garden, running water and electricity would allow over 220 families to settle in the town.[82] Nevertheless, company housing was scarce and mostly geared towards servicing white rather than blue-collar workers. Out of the 1,216 technical personnel residing in the town in 1948, only 297 owned private houses, over 400 were accommodated on UDR's housing estate while the rest were given rent subsidies. By contrast, out of the 8,015 resident blue-collar workers only 1,665 owned their own houses, leaving over 6000 in need of monthly rent money.[83] In postwar Reşiţa – a local journalist noted – one "did not rent a room, only a bed."[84] It was in this context that housing projects dating back to the war period were revived after nationalization, most notably in the so-

81 On the link between work, residence and labor control as the defining trait of company towns see Marcelo J. Borges and Susana B. Torres, "Company Towns: Concepts, Historiography, and Approaches", in Marcelo J. Borges and Susana B. Torres (eds.) *Company Towns. Labor, Space, and Power Relations across Time and Continents* (London: Palgrave, 2012), 9 – 10.

82 "La Reşiţa se construiesc 110 case familiale muncitoreşti", *Luptătorul Bănăţean*, No. 763, April 4 1947. It is not clear how many of these houses were finished, if any.

83 ANR, UDR, 208/1948.

84 Toma George Maiorescu, *Geneze la borna stelară* (Reşiţa: Editura TIM, 2013), 220. Maiorescu (b. 1928) was one of the first local journalists employed by the postwar regional communist daily *Luptătorul Bănăţean* to write about his native town.

called Lunca Pomostului – an area UDR expropriated from villagers as early as 1942 in order to build individual houses for workers.[85]

Image 9: *"Universal" – General store, Reșița, early 1960s*; Source: Postcard

Lines of continuity can be seen between the underlining stress on domesticity and the expansion of the apartment stock. Characteristically, inaugurated in 1952, Reşiţa's remarkable symbolic building of the first postwar construction boom was a large general store selling a wide variety of goods. The ideology of domesticity linked shop floor and public space in an overarching celebration of the duties of family life. In August 1949, the town's cooperative decided to reward the most productive workers by offering to freely transport goods to their place of residence so that "their wives won't waste time strolling around shops, picking up rationed goods, and would use their time for the good of the family, therefore contributing to bettering the lives of those who build socialism in our country."[86] The good of the family was the duty of the husband as

85 Dan Gh. Perianu, *Istoria uzinelor din Reşiţa, 1771–1996* (Reşiţa: Editura Timpul, 1996), 103. See also ANR, UDR, 189/1946, p. 24 according to which the plan of building houses in Lunca Pomostului dated from 1945. In any case, the Lunca Pomostului housing project was the second largest investment project financed by the Ministry of Industry in 1948 after Hunedoara, ANR, Ministerul Economiei Naţionale, 3/1948. For the latter see Mara Mărginean, *Ferestre spre furnalul roşu. Urbanism şi cotidian în Hunedoara şi Călan* (Iaşi: Polirom, 2015).
86 ANCS, Sindicatul muncitorilor metalurgişti din Reşiţa, 25/1949, p. 284.

well, whose spare time could not be wasted on young women, parties or booze. Both the local newspaper and trade-union bosses carried occasional moralizing campaigns to push workers out of their loss of "interest in the education of the children and household chores."[87] Discipline was also required for the children of the families who moved into the new apartments of Lunca Pomostului, many of whom "slam the doors disturbing the peace of the other residents."[88] Under the post-nationalization paternalism, Reşiţa was to become a town of rooted families rather than one of loose, male tenants. Children could aspire to a career in the plant via the network of vocational schools jointly sponsored by local authorities and UDR's management, with the end result of the company securing a stable flow of reliable workers. The beginning was modest, yet hopeful:

> Thus, for example, this year [1949] we had planned to build 300 working-class flats, out of which only 120 will be finished with great delay. The same applies for the apprentices' school and canteen, as well as their dorm. We also planned to build another dorm with a capacity of 600 places but up until this moment construction work did not take off. The same goes for the daycare of the Romanilor Street which should cater to those families where both mother and father work.[89]

Turning Reşiţa into a company town of nuclear families was a long process. For most of the 1950s, it was merely a paternalist dream amidst a quicksand urban landscape crisscrossed by commuting male metalworkers (*navetişti*).[90] UDR's investment plan for 1949 is telling in this respect: out of the total budget only 15% went for so-called "social investments" (housing, vocational training buildings, crèches etc.), 22% for maintenance operations of industrial equipment and over 62% for the expansion of production capacity.[91] Though I was unable to find any data for the following years, I suspect this basic distribution was maintained at least up until Sovrom was disbanded in 1954 and perhaps well into the late 1950s. The town's urban growth only took off in the 1960s with the construction

87 "O femeie îşi caută soţul", *Flamura roşie*, No. 30, July 17 1949.

88 ANCS, Sindicatul muncitorilor metalurgişti din Reşiţa, 27/1950, p. 293.

89 "Să asigurăm uzinelor braţele de muncă şi să intensificăm grija faţa de ele", *Flamura roşie*, No. 49, November 27 1949. For the full list of "social investments" scheduled for 1949 see ANR, UDR, 347/1948, pp. 8 – 9.

90 For a typology of the commuter see Z. Bejenaru, "Deplasări pentru lucru la Uzinele Reşiţa", in N.A. Rădulescu (ed.) *Lucrările seminarului de geografie economică, 1941 – 1946* (Bucharest: Academia de Înalte Studii Comerciale şi Industriale, 1946), 105 – 107. In 1948, over 25% of the total workforce employed by UDR in Reşiţa was commuting from nearby villages on foot, by bus and by train.

91 ANR, UDR, 77/1948, p. 117.

of Lunca Bârzavei, a district that would come to accommodate over 60% of the local population.[92]

Structural investments (*investiţii capitale*) of this sort, however, were not the only source of money for financing the institutions of managerial paternalism. Two additional mechanisms complemented it: the first was bank loans; the second was known as "the director's fund".[93] The latter was another legal innovation introduced by the collective labor contracts, enacted in 1949, of explicit Soviet lineage: a special amount of money was retained from the company's annual profit to be used for investments in the factory's social function as well as for giving out bonuses to norm breakers, Stakhanovists, and other productive workers.[94] How the director's fund was spent was a contentious matter that came to shape everyday politics at the factory level throughout the 1950s. It was also a public matter, as workers were formally required to debate the investment priorities and make suggestions. Although initially, like other prescriptions set out in the new labor contracts, this fund was dependent on the fulfillment of the production plan, in late 1955, a governmental decree made the director's fund easier to access i.e. less dependent on fulfilling the plan, and thus implicitly acknowledging it had become the main source for supporting factory welfare.[95] Given Loncear's authority and Simonenco's expertise in Soviet management, the decision as to how to spend the director's fund in Reşiţa was taken between the two. Union delegates, while aware that such a fund existed, were nevertheless rather uninformed about its use, arguably because they knew they could exert little control over investments.[96] It was in fact Simonenco who designed the first spending plan for 1950, allocating a monthly budget of one million lei for the director's fund: 200,000 lei for building or repairing daycares, hostels, and canteens; 300,000 lei for money prizes awarded to norm

92 Dan Gh. Perianu, *Istoria uzinelor din Reşiţa, 1771–1996* (Reşiţa: Editura Timpul, 1996), 133 *et passim*.

93 Loans, even when they were granted by banks, required massive paperwork and a bureaucracy to support it, ANR, CC/PCR, Secţia Organizatorică, 75/1951, p. 25 for the effort to build a park with a loan in Reşiţa.

94 For the *Direktorfonds* in GDR see Sandrine Kott, *Le communisme au quotidian. Les entreprises d'État dans la société est-allemande* (Paris: Belin, 2001), 77, 86–87. Kott argues the social policy financed through the director's fund constituted a form of paternalism the goal of which was to instill company loyalty.

95 ANR, PCM, 53/1956. The same decree reduced the percentage of the director's fund to be spent on bonuses for productive workers from 25% to 10% with the hope of forcing managers to invest more in welfare facilities at the factory level.

96 ANCS, Sindicatul muncitorilor metalurgişti din Reşiţa, 27/1950, p. 89 asked about whether the director's fund would be used for housing, one union boss replied in the negative.

breakers; 200,000 lei for the acquisition of musical instruments for the plant's choir and sporting equipment, mountain trips, books and magazines; and finally 300,000 lei for so-called individual aid given to needy employees following a work accident, a death of a family member, sudden illness and other unpredictable events. For the second half of 1950, the monthly budget was raised by 50 % which almost doubled investments in housing, canteens, kindergartens and daycares.[97]

Malaxa Works in Bucharest craved such clarity in the way the fund was spent. Here, as the person in charge of the plant's medical office – doctor Weintraub – noted, the general manager always claimed funds were lacking, funds which then often "popped up as if by miracle following an investigation."[98] Published in the plant's newspaper, Weintraub's article was a form of lobbying on behalf of the 14 medical doctors employed by the plant to take care of its workforce, including the employees' children.[99] In making it clear that the medical office needed at least a car for transporting patients, the doctor was staking out a claim on the director's fund and throwing in a jab at the director's moral composure. Naturally, Weintraub was not alone in launching a struggle over investments in the pages of *Viaţa Uzinei*. The plant's newspaper was the ideal medium for similar claims to be voiced. For example, workers of the metal repair section allegedly told the reporter: "We ask comrade director Oniga whether he knows the location of our workshop? We never saw him take any interest in the harsh conditions under which we work."[100] They were asking for some money in order to consolidate the walls of the workshop while complaining that the new bosses of the factory "forgot they come from among us and by turning a deaf ear to the masses they cut themselves off from us."[101] Money was also required for the plant's daycare as comrade Maria Ionescu made it clear in a virulent article in which she argued that "our daycare is part and parcel of the social wage".[102]

This argument was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it was used by authorities to justify low wages. The official womens' magazine *Femeia* regularly

97 IBIDEM, pp. 7 – 9. To get a sense of these figures, it is worth mentioning here that the average wage of a skilled metalworker in late 1949 was well under 9,000 lei.

98 Şura Weintraub, "Dispensarul nostru", *Viaţa Uzinei*, No. 13, November 7 1949.

99 For more on what authorities considered a "model" medical office see *Viaţa Capitalei*, No. 326, May 20 1950.

100 *Viaţa Uzinei*, No. 18, January 15 1950.

101 IBIDEM, p. 3.

102 Maria Ionescu, "Lucruri ce trebuiesc remediate la creşă de copii", *Viaţa Uzinei*, No. 44, January 23 1951.

explained how women workers receive not merely cash money on payday but also the "social wage" such as, for instance, keeping their children in the factory's daycare.[103] On the other hand, women in charge of the daycare at the factory level found in the notion of "social wage" a ready-made rhetorical device that could be employed to articulate demands within the limits of the official discourse. This strategy allowed comrade Maria Ionescu to complain about the lack of adequate milk for the children, to ask for medicine and a larger building. One month later she complained again about the difficulties of buying a laundry dryer.[104]

The actual outcomes of these struggles over the distribution of the director's fund are hard to assess. The collective labor contract that marked the onset of the First Five Year Plan in 1951 mentioned none of these bones of contention. It spoke of housing for unmarried young male workers "who live outside of the city"; of an open swimming pool, a theater and cinema hall, reading rooms, a neighborhood park and of the need to build a so-called "palace of culture".[105] An investigation conducted at the plant revealed that the contract had been severely violated with the exception of the daycare, which received a new wood storeroom and 70 of its children were sent to a summer camp for free.[106] Moreover, unlike in Reşiţa, the plant's resources seldom spilled outside of its walls. It was the local municipality who singlehandedly financed housing in the neighborhood, although, for symbolic reasons, Malaxa Works did offer to help with construction material when needed. Things were not much better in 1952. With the exception of a barbershop that had opened on the premises of the plant to cater to the needs of the workers at lower prices, the contract was again apparently ignored. An angry article by one of the union bosses listed everything the management had failed to invest in: showers, tables for the canteen, dentistry equipment, the cinema hall and finally a soccer stadium in the nearby neighborhood of Balta Albă. It is no coincidence that the soccer stadium – more of a sport field in fact – was finally built under the management of comrade Constantin Putinică, the plant first general "manager-worker" appointed in 1953.[107]

The rise and fall of Putinică between 1953 and 1957 might help us to better understand how paternalism, managerial authority and the gendered struggles

103 Ada Bârseanu, "Pentru bunăstarea oamenilor muncii", *Femeia*, No. 2, March 1950.
104 "Unde duce birocratismul", *Viaţa Uzinei*, No. 48, February 28 1951.
105 "Cum vor creşte Uzinele '23 August' în cursul primului an al Cincinalului", *Viaţa Capitalei*, No. 326, July 11 1950.
106 ANR, PCM, 18/1951, p. 43.
107 Not to be confused with the "23 August" – Bucharest's largest sport arena – built in the mid-1950s and located two kilometers away from the plant.

over factory welfare deeply structured investment priorities. In many ways the appointment of Putinică as head of Malaxa Works marked a turning point in the trajectory of the plant as the new director successfully consolidated managerial authority while also muting much of the criticism published by *Viaţa Uzinei*. Indeed, a close reading of the factory newspaper under Putinică's leadership shows not only a dwindling number of articles claiming the financial resources of the director's fund, but also a complete disappearance of references to the person and personality of the general manager. How, then, did Putinică achieve such a remarkable feat, both securing authority for himself and silencing demands from below? Or to put it differently, how did he succeed in sheltering the director's fund from the claim-making propensity of medical doctors, ordinary metalworkers (women and men alike), employees of the daycare, of the canteen or of any other institution of the "social wage"?

Part of the answer lies in the first article published under Putinică's name shortly after his appointment, which was an ode to the authority of the foreman on the shop floor. Putinică's success rested on his ability to reinforce factory hierarchy, an effort that involved episodes of camaraderie, mixing masculinity with attention to manly concerns. The complex chain of command linking lower management to engineers, planners, accountants and top directors – a hierarchical decision-making process historian Yves Cohen called *l'entrechef* – was exclusively male.[108]

On paper, Constantin Putinică was the dream manager of the 1950s. Born in 1911 to a land-owning peasant family, his professional trajectory on the interwar labor market took him to Brăila, Cluj, Bucharest, Braşov and Râşnov. He was a mechanic with the national railway company until 1934; a salesman for a couple of months; a cleaning man and an office clerk in the capital city; again a mechanic with the aerospace manufacturer IAR between 1939 and 1941; and finally a norm checker and a functionary of a small factory in Southern Transylvania for much of the war up until 1949. Putinică was also a communist militant involved in the underground operations of the party. Sentenced to twenty years of political imprisonment during the war he was lucky to spend no more than eight days in jail. The end of the war found Putinică caught up in the struggles over workers' representation as the leader of a factory committee. A family man and faithful party member, Putinică worked for the Ministry of Industry after 1949. In 1952, he was appointed general manager of a factory in the town of Târ-

108 Yves Cohen, *Le siècle des chefs. Une histoire transnationale du commandement et d'autorité (1890 – 1940)*, (Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2013), 644. In the Soviet Union of the interwar epoch, Cohen argues, *l'entrechef* was based on the exclusion of women.

govişte, from where he left for a managerial position with Sovromtractor – the Soviet-Romanian joint-stock tractor manufacturing company located in the town of Braşov. Here, Putinică might have acquired the basics of the "sole leadership" principle first-hand from Soviet advisers like Supikaşvilli.

In early 1953, Constantin Putinică was called upon to take up the more challenging task of managing Malaxa Works, a factory known for its recalcitrant party and union bosses.[109] It took more than three years for the party and union bosses of the plant to orchestrate the downfall of Putinică. In an unsigned note that reached the Central Committee in late 1956, the general manager was denounced for having hired his own sons and for bringing over 500 of his close associates from Braşov to work in the factory. These people, the note explained, were used as spies; a fact that gained Putinică the derogatory nickname "the general": "doesn't he understand workers see all this and badmouth him?"[110] In addition to his allegedly rough manners, what really brought the director into ill repute among Malaxa Works's employees was Putinică's habit of throwing parties, particularly for his protégées and patrons. Among the latter, persons of influence were singled out at the municipal level who supposedly protected Putinică. The note was followed a couple of months later by an investigation by party and ministerial officials. Let us now try to make sense of what they discovered at Malaxa Works by attending to their report.

The team of investigators found Putinică was an excellent pupil of the "sole leadership" principle: "every time the party committee or the trade-union attempted to follow up workers' complaints, he accused them of wanting to attack him personally."[111] Moreover, "any attempt to single out the guilty was considered by him a personal affront, an attack to his prestige as leader (*conducător*)."[112] Neither party nor union bosses at the factory level could exert control over Putinică. It was not easier for state authorities such as the "economic police" (*miliţia economică*), a brigade of which was kicked out of the factory while attempting to investigate a case of theft. As for opportunities for the employees to voice their opinions, in print or otherwise, Putinică was accused of "strangling criticism from below".

There is hardly anything new in these remarks; the tone was reminiscent of the immediate post-nationalization struggles over the nature of managerial authority. What was new in the report was the following astute observation

109 This fragment builds on Putinică's party biography, ANR, CC/PCR, Secţia Economică, Dosare Anexe, 51/1956.

110 ANR, CC/PCR, Secţia Cancelarie, 99/1957, p. 4.

111 ANR, CC/PCR, Secţia Economică, 20/1958, p. 29.

112 IBIDEM.

about factory hierarchy: "between the sole leadership (the general manager of the plant) and his subordinates (*executanţi*) there is a compact layer of dubious people who have no interest in fulfilling workers' demands."[113] The most blatantly ignored demand of the workers was to have a say in matters pertaining to the spending of the director's fund. Putinică, however, retained absolute control of the fund and spent it together with the "dubious people". Who, then, made up this so-called group?

Firstly, there were the 189 foremen, 53 of whom were overqualified young engineers promoted by Putinică. Secondly, there were the workshop supervisors (*şefii de secţii*) whom the general manager used to call to his office on a daily basis to discuss issues related to production. Thirdly, there were men with experience, long time employees of the plant who survived all political regimes from the late 1930s onwards. Sure, the report painted grim portraits of these men in the vernacular of everyday struggle, accusing them of having beaten up workers in the past, of making shady business with state money and of being morally corrupt if not politically dangerous. Hardly surprising, Putinică's effort to restore managerial authority and establish factory hierarchy along the chain of command meant that he "not only tolerated but even supported them".[114] These were men whom Putinică trusted to run the factory, including the distribution of the director's fund. Money could therefore be spent on building a sport field for soccer games, for giving bonuses to football players and, more importantly, for "buying" football players from other factories of the capital city.[115] Equally, the director's fund was used for financing "parties".

Shortly after nationalization, Malaxa Works became the key industrial complex to be visited by foreign delegations. Engineers, poets, political figures, journalists and even ordinary workers were often taken on a tour of the plant. Putinică saw in these visits opportunities to organize collective meals, sometimes even in the company of paid women dancers.[116] For many on the factory's hierarchy these were also opportunities to bond, team-building moments that greased the flow of command as it trickled down from the main office to the shop floors. Small wonder that the amount of money spent on these parties was staggering: "no matter how much food there was and no matter what hotel they were put

113 IBIDEM, p. 22.

114 IBIDEM, p. 19.

115 Buying football players was a literal phrase in the report. What this could mean is that Putinică used the director's funds to transfer workers who played the game from other factories offering then better working conditions and bonuses.

116 For a Hungarian delegation, Putinică even hired the famed group of dancers "Paris on Ice" (*Parisul pe ghiaţă*).

into, a single human being cannot consume that much."[117] Of course, the passion for soccer, good food and women dancers could not deplete the director's fund in its entirety. The general manager also used it to more personal ends, such as the acquisition of a photo camera and the siphoning of construction material necessary for his own private house. It would be an exaggeration, however, to consider Putinică's manner of spending the director's fund a form of corruption. Anachronisms apart, for the investigators it was something much worse, namely a case-study of a director of working-class pedigree and communist faith "losing class feeling (*simţ de clasă*) and the sense of direction a proper leader should have."[118]

On the one hand, it was an infringement of the plant's variety of paternalism. Under Putinică's leadership, investments in housing plummeted, meals at the canteen got worse and the needs of women workers were arguably pushed back even in terms of entertainment, let alone social reproduction. Moreover, the reinforcement of the male dominated factory hierarchy could not but reinforce men's customary disdain for women working in metal industries.[119] On the other hand, Putinică's success in securing a degree of autonomy for the chain of command, above and beyond the reach of party bosses at the factory level was a risky affair that finally backfired. Granted, it gave the general manager absolute control over financial resources and a free hand in spending the director's fund, but it also exposed him (and those close to him) to a more devastating form of criticism than that which he might have received in the pages of *Viaţa Uzinei* (had he allowed it).

The downfall of Putinică, although couched in a rhetoric of conspicuous consumption and reckless spending, came as a consequences of the plant's chronic underperformance.[120] Indeed, the investigation that brought down the general manager was motivated less by what Putinică did and more by what he could not do, namely reach production targets. That the plan could not be

117 IBIDEM, p. 15.

118 IBIDEM, p. 31.

119 Before Putinică's stint, it was still possible for the party organization at the factory level to scold and shame those foremen unwilling to accept women workers. It was also possible for the party to punish workshop supervisors such as Carol Schwager for "performing abject gestures" before recently employed women wanting to learn the craft. The same went for men such as comrade Orbeşteanu who lied about being married in order to take advantage of fellow women workers on and off the shopfloor. AMB, Comitetul Municipal PCR Bucureşti, Comitetul Sectorului 23 August (Malaxa) al PCR, 37/1950, pp. 43–45.

120 The investigation was triggered by Malaxa Works failing again to meet production targets in 1956 and asking the Ministry of Industry to bail it out by providing it with money for the director's fund.

executed in an industrial plant where, as the report put it, the party was "weak" in relation to the technical and managerial staff suggests that not even unencumbered factory hierarchy and a chain of command unhindered by the nuisances of everyday politics could have produced a higher output. This example, then, suggests that the problem of securing managerial authority during the postwar period might have been less contingent than expected by the leaders of the communist party. To be sure, the scramble over social investment at the factory level, the overlapping claims to rule of party members, union representatives and managers as well as the influence of Soviet advisors were factors that mattered in the process of enforcing hierarchy and obtaining control over the chain of command. However, the real testing ground was the labor process: the ways in which the workers themselves, due to their skill and ability to forge solidarities on the shop floor, could hope to wrest a degree of mastery over the pace and rhythms of work and rest, over access to higher pay and better tools. Rationalizing the labor process against the background of repressed consumption, low wages and high wage dispersion was the great challenge that industrial managers faced throughout the 1950s.