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Mining Labor Agreements in the Jiu Valley during the Interbellum Period

MIRCEA BARON
OANA DOBRE-BARON

THROUGHOUT THE history of humanity, mining is an economic activity which provides society the mineral resources absolutely necessary for its existence and development.

In Romanian mining there would be developed socio-economic and professional relations between employers, which could be private capital, but also the State, and its employees, workers and/or clerks. We can accept that between the two entities there should be a climate of cooperation beneficial to labor in general and to the purpose for which they allied in the productive activity, but it is not less true that each entity would permanently have a motive to be discontent. Employers, because the work carried out by employees is not as efficient as they would like it to be especially in relation to the material demands and claims of other kinds; and employees, convinced that their work is not remunerated well, they feel exploited and consider that, in fact, they contribute to the wealth of those for whom they work..

On the other hand, the difficulty of the work and the inherent dangers implied by such activities, create, in time, the feeling of power given by the cohesion, and this, along with the awareness of the importance for the society of the work carried out in the mining sector, will permanently lead the miner to believe that he is indispensable. At the same time, he is able to obtain, through negotiation, and when this is not possible, through pressure, some rights related to both job security and resources to ensure an acceptable standard of living for him and his family, especially by a remuneration corresponding to the effort.

When frustrations of employees, understood as an entity and not necessarily as separate individuals, could be stopped by positive measures and through compromise, the balance would be kept and we would witness long periods of stability. If this was not achieved for various reasons, sometimes due to external economic factors, primarily the political factor, the balance would be broken and we would witness various forms of protest, including strikes. Moreover, in industrial regions with

specific mining activity such as the Jiu Valley¹, Banat Montan², Apuseni Mountains gold field³, Baia Mare, and Maramureş regions⁴, such movements mark, to some extent, the evolution of productive activity, especially in modern times.

From this theoretical perspective, we intend to analyze the evolution and the work regulations in the Jiu Valley mining industry during the interbellum period.

The unification of Transylvania with Romania, due to the decision of the Assembly of Alba Iulia on December 1, 1918, made the Jiu Valley coal basin become part of the new Romania.

Changes occurred within the organizational structure of the mining activity in the Jiu Valley through the involvement of a group of banks and credit institutions in the “nationalization” of assets belonging to foreign capital and the “trading” of the State’s enterprises.

Thus, the assets of the “Salgótarján” Company from the Jiu Valley - including the mines: West Petroşani, East Petroşani, Dâlja, Petrila, Aninoasa, and Vulcan mining complex - became “nationalized” on January 1, 1921 and a new mining Company “Petroşani”⁵ was set up and the assets of the “Uricani-Valea Jiului” (“Uricani-Jiu Valley”) Company - including Lupeni mining complex-were passed to the ownership of the recently created “Lupeni” Company⁶ on January 1, 1925. The two mining Companies would merge in May 1931, and would bear the name “Petroşani” Company⁷.

On January 1, 1926, under the effect of the law related to the commercialization of the enterprises of the State from June 7, 1924⁸, Lonea State Mines was sold and “Lonea” Company was created, with the help of the State and private capital⁹. The work of the “Valea Jiului de Sus” (“Upper Jiu Valley”) Company in the mine of Vulcan continued until May 1931; and, from 1926 to 1940 the “Sălătruc” Company would operate the Sălătruc mine, located in the southern part of Petroşani.¹⁰

It must be said that because of the economic crisis in the years 1929-1933 and because of the rationalization measures, some mines had to be closed down so that by the end of the interbellum period, the following mines were operating: Petrila, Aninoasa, Lupeni, Lonea, and Sălătruc.

In order to ensure a smooth deployment of the productive activity, including in the mining sector, labor legislation had been perfected, and a legal institution had been set up to regulate relations between employers and employees, and this would be the collective labor contract.

The collective labor contract is considered to have two important features:

1. *a conventional character*, because it is based on an agreement between the parties concerned. It is the final act of negotiations between workers and employers, either in the conciliation phase or during arbitration and results in signing a contract. The terms of the collective contract shall include the rights and obligations of the group of workers and of an employer concerning working conditions and payment. There are two types of clauses: *a.* the mandatory, which come from the law; and *b.* clauses that the parties shall include in the contract without any interference from the law: payroll, in-kind benefits, safety measures, etc.;

2. *a normative character*, because it acts as a “law,” requiring all employees to obey by it, including those who were present at the signing of the contract and those who adhere later on or who simply become employees of a company working under the collective agreement; the provisions of the collective bargaining agreement may not be derogated by individual contracts¹¹.

IN ROMANIA, the Law on the settlement of collective disputes from September 5, 1920¹²; the Law on occupational trade unions from May 26, 1921¹³; the Law establishing non-working days and public holidays from June 18, 1925¹⁴; the Law on labor protection of minors and women and on the duration of their work from April 13, 1928¹⁵; Decree No. XII of the Directing Council of Transylvania on May 21, 1919, about the duration of work within industry and commerce¹⁶; Peace Treaty of Versailles and the ratification of the Washington Convention in 1919, through which Romania made a commitment to establish by law the maximum duration of a working day to eight hours;¹⁷ etc., all formed the elements which, indirectly governed the aspects of the contents of collective agreements until the adoption of the Law on employment contracts on April 5, 1929¹⁸.

The law on employment contracts from April 5, 1929, dealt with the contract of apprenticeship; individual labor contracts; and, team contracts. However, in the Jiu Valley, employment agreements between employees and employers would be exclusively based on the provisions of art. 101-118 of title IV of the law: Collective Bargaining agreement, which presented the nature and the formation of the collective labor contracts, the effects of the collective bargaining agreement, and the termination or denunciation of the collective contract.

In the opinion of the legislator, “collective bargaining agreement is the written consent regarding working conditions and payment, concluded, on the one hand, by one or more entrepreneurs, by groups or associations thereof, and on the other hand, by professional associations or groups of employees. Collective agreements are also the stipulations contained in the minutes of conciliations, as well as the arbitration decisions solving collective conflicts” (article 101)¹⁹.

The gradual implementation of collective agreements in practice at first and then through the provisions of the law would establish, at the mines in the Jiu Valley, the relationship between employers and employees: a maximum of 18,197 in 1924 and a minimum of 7,247 in 1932.

The implementation of the collective bargaining agreement would be important in the economy of mining companies. Not all the workers would be included in the content of collective agreements - only 88.13% of workers in 1930²⁰ - nor would any of the high-ranking officials, technicians and administrative staff; however, in one form or another, they would benefit from the provisions or the application of the agreement.

We believe that there are three factors that contribute to the practical completion of the settlement of labor contracts: the State, through the legislative work carried

out on the basis of the law of April 30, 1920, by setting up the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection²¹, which in the first phase would have an arbitration right in labor conflicts²²; the employer, by understanding the importance of internal stability, which could not be achieved simply by satisfying some of the workers' claims by means of a social policy that combined material interests with the need to have a workforce able to meet the requirements of hard work; and, the workers who, through a more consistent organization and through pressure exercised upon political and economic decision makers, would be able to obtain some of the claims and, especially, integrating them into a legal, institutionalized framework.

Miners would be organized immediately after the unification of Transylvania with Romania; the Congress held in Sibiu on December 7–9, 1919 established “The Trade Union of Miners and Furnace Men from Transylvania and Banat” including the 27 unions, especially those from the Jiu Valley. The Union, based in Cluj, would have its own newspaper, “Minerul” (“The Miner”), which was issued since July 15, 1919, in Romanian, Hungarian, and German²³. The Union would aim to improve the living conditions of its members and the means by which this purpose could be achieved were: the collective agreements and their supervision, and in extreme cases, strikes²⁴. The Union and its leaders in the Jiu Valley, where a cabinet had been set up, would be the most important partners of dialogue, as representatives of workers, in relation to the management.

One may recall, in this context, the institution of “men of trust” decided at the Trade Union Congress in Sibiu on December 7–9, 1919, and whom the mining companies recognized and accepted as dialogue partners in issues regarding the agreement between employers and employees²⁵.

The Romanian National Trade Union Center from the regions of Transylvania, Banat, and Hungarian Parts also had headquarters in Petroșani—the “yellow” Trade Unions—was set up in July 1921²⁶; this Trade Union was considered a product of employers and of Political Police²⁷; furthermore, the Union would not get along with the Communists active in the Jiu Valley.

In the process of elaborating some regulations governing the relations between employers and employees, there is a first period that takes us to the general strike in October 1920, when many of the workers' claims had been able to lead, finally, to the adoption of the first collective bargaining agreement in the Jiu Valley.

The first settlement occurred on July 5, 1919, when a collective agreement between the Mining Companies: “Salgótárján,” “Uricani-Jiu Valley,” “Upper Jiu Valley,” and Lonea State Mines; and their workers, was arbitrated by the Directing Council of Transylvania (Consiliul Dirigent al Transilvaniei), workers obtained a salary increase of 15-16% and the right to get food at a lower cost = reduced prices²⁸.

Dissatisfied with the results achieved, the workers would address a *Memorandum with the demands of all miners from the mines in the Jiu Valley*, drawn up in Petroșani on September 30, 1919; this Memorandum would be the basis of discussions that would lead to the Arbitration Agreement on July 10, 1920. This new memorandum required: the transition from the piece wages to the new system of pegged wages per

hour; a substantial increase in salaries; multiplying the rights of the sick or of those who are incapable of working; and, maintaining paid vacation²⁹. Mining companies would respond by a note on November 6, 1919, sent to the Directing Council of Transylvania, which stated that the introduction of pegged wages according to the hours worked, instead of the piece wages, was not a productive measure, because the worker tended to have a minimum benefit; mining companies did not agree with wage increases because salaries were the highest in Central Europe as well, the increase of wages and the demands of lower officials and supervisors could have effects on the price of coal, in conditions in which efficiency does not grow. Employers agreed to multiply the rights of the sick or those who are incapable of working, considering that the role of Social Security Houses should also develop; moreover, they were entitled to paid leave³⁰.

In January 1920, The Central Trade Union of Miners and Furnace Men from Transylvania and Banat submitted a new petition according to which the administrative and technical management of the Mining Companies would be held responsible for the decrease in production and for the poor condition of tools, equipment, horses, etc.; there were more demands for food, the rights of workers to decide on the agreements, and increases in the salaries of various categories of workers. Employers - this time with the help of the General Inspectorate of Coal Mines from the Jiu Valley - would respond to the Directing Council of Transylvania by showing the causes that led to the severe state of the mines. Immediate response was provided in the case of the social demands of the miners. Thus, in response to the miners' request regarding reduced price food the Mining Companies said that they were never obligated nor bound by any Commission to ensure the food requested by workers; the Directing Council of Transylvania, through the General Directorate of Mines had decided on July 5, 1919, on the products which were to be given to workers at reduced prices: bacon, flour, sugar, cheese, potatoes, and boots; no other products were to be provided at reduced prices, in compensation they were offered a salary increase. Mining companies believed that, at that time, it was hard to obtain these new products, let alone offer them at reduced prices, and if one met this claim, the price of coal would go up by 10-12 cor./to. When thinking of increasing the salaries of those who were paid by shifts, there was the idea that the miners, especially those married with children were barely making ends meet and therefore they were offered, instead of the addition of smoke of 6-7,5 cor.; each working man, woman or child, that takes care of another person in the household would receive an additional 20 cor., regardless of the total number of people in the household; if this proposal were not accepted, it would seem reasonable to increase the percentage and add it to the salary. As far as the right of miners to decide on the agreement was concerned, they said it was unacceptable because so far the agreement has been, in fact the result of negotiations between engineers and the group of miners³¹.

The solutions proposed were not accepted by the workers, and it was emphasized by the lack of money in cash for the payment of salaries, the lack of food, including flour, which all led to a new strike which broke out on March 21, 1920. The strike

would be suppressed by the army and leave behind two dead and several injured, however all this led to the conclusion that new rules were a must³². In April 1920, Grigore Trancu-Iași, Minister of Labor and Social Protection Ministry, a new minister which was created on March 29, 1920 within the Alexandru Averescu cabinet (March 13, 1920 - December 17, 1921)³³, led investigations to determine the causes of the strike, provided a temporary solution and measures to ensure the fall-back pay for workers³⁴ and set up a Commission that came into contact in May 20, 1920, with representatives of workers and employers to establish the collective bargaining agreement³⁵.

On this occasion, workers would present new requirements to which mining companies responded on June 6, 1920, pointing out that they did not agree with the system of wages per working hour, the request to be able to take on only workers within the organization, and the fact that the workers' organizations decided on hiring and distributing workers to different jobs. Mining companies agreed with the demands of the workers with a long service time to go on paid leave and it was proposed that workers with uninterrupted service of not less than three years would receive a number of days of vacation each year equivalent to the number of years of service between at least five days and a maximum of ten days. As far as an increase in salary was concerned there were two variants: ceasing the distribution of products at reduced prices, a benefit obtained during World War I period or an increase in salary, which was made up of: cash payments, the difference in the purchasing price of food and the family allowance.

Mining companies believed that, in order to conclude the collective labor contract one might adopt the solution that the amount of money that the workers would be losing with the cessation of reduced prices should be replaced by a bonus to the normal salary. The cash value of benefits lost by not providing food at reduced prices from the shops of the mining companies was to be established on a monthly basis by calculating the difference between the purchasing price and the reduced price. The monthly amount would be divided by working days and it would result in the bonus calculated for each shift. The demand of miners regarding the family allowance was considered to be reasonable, the amount would not have a fixed monthly value but it would be calculated for each shift. In the case that the proposals of mining companies were accepted, a miner would earn 30,192 cor. annually, a sum resulting from the base pay, bonuses, the value of coal and free housing, and the family allowance. The explanatory report pointed out that it was important for each party to understand the limits of the possible compromise and it was believed that the government had the right and duty to regulate the wages, but they have to see if those who pay the wages were able to do so³⁶.

This report, as well as the agreements reached earlier and the demands of the workers threatening a new strike represented the basis and the reason for new negotiations.

Negotiations were carried out between delegations of mining companies and delegations of workers' organizations in the region in Bucharest, on the premises of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection during the period of June 21 to July 6,

1920 the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection delegated an arbitrator responsible for the conciliation arrangements. At the meeting on June 25, 1920, the parties with the exception of the representatives of Lonea State Mines, signed a declaration of adherence to such arbitration which would be decided by the Minister of Labor and Social Protection for the issues that would not be agreed upon. Then, discussions continued with issues from the report which included the claims of workers; the meetings took place on June 28, 29, 30, 1920 and on July 2, 3, 4 and 5, 1920.

Debates ended on July 6, 1920, and based on the agreements reached on July 19, 1920, the arbitrator appointed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, “taking into account the requests contained in the memorandum submitted to the Ministry of Labour, listening to the proposals of *Salgótárján*, *Uricani-Jiu Valley* and *Upper Jiu Valley* mining companies as well to the counter-proposals of the delegations of workers’ organizations during the meetings of June 24 - July 6, 1920, and considering the following: *A. Working conditions; B. Wages of workers and lower officials; C. Supply; D. Housing, electricity, etc.; E. Trade Unions; F. Transient provisions . . .* decides” therefore the first collective bargaining agreement was concluded between workers and mining companies from the Jiu Valley³⁷.

From now on, for the entire analyzed period, work and social relations in the Jiu Valley, in the case of the largest part of the miners, would be based on collective bargaining agreements. There are some categories such as: day laborers, telephone operators, guards, security, gardeners, cleaning staff, coachmen, drivers, seasonal workers, supervisors of pumps and fans, unskilled workers and, woodsmen, who have not been included in the provisions of the collective agreement, but mining companies would use these provisions of collective contracts to regularize the relations with them. At the same time, the issues of pay and other rights, as well as the obligations of technical and administrative officials of mining companies, would be governed by the decisions of the Board of Directors and decisions of the General Directorate, some of them subject to the approval of the General Shareholders ‘ Meetings³⁸.

The arbitration decision of July 10, 1920, which took the legal characteristics of the collective labor contract, and which was valid through October 1922, would defend the interests of more than 10,000 miners from the Jiu Valley. It was made up of six chapters³⁹, and established the following:

A. Working Conditions

Labor day length was set at eight hours and in dangerous working places, with fire or gas emissions, the length was set at six hours;

Mining companies were obliged to comply with a minimum working age, below which they couldn’t take on people to work in workshops and in mines;

Work was carried out according to an agreement, but it was subject to a minimum subsistence for mining workers; workers used for day labor were given the minimum wage;

Bonuses of 10% were granted when a 20% increase in production occurred, compared to the moment the convention was signed;

Mining companies were forced to improve the technical equipment of mines, and to provide employees a sufficient number of tools in good condition;

Mining companies were obliged to annually give workers working with fire and in water, a suit of clothes and undergarments at half price, and a pair of boots at a reduced price, all these in addition to the rights of all employees; workers used for the extraction of ammonia were annually given two suits of clothes and boots, free of charge;

Mining companies could perform certain works with entrepreneurs, thus workers were paid directly by mining companies and benefitted from the same advantages as the employees of the mining company.

B. Remuneration

The piece wages system was kept, mining companies being obliged to pay an increase of 30%, over the 15% obtained in 1919; a base pay was set on a monthly basis and it was paid if a worker did not reach this level with his salary and bonuses; miners working with fire, in caving zones, and coal pits were paid a fixed salary, which equalled the average salary of a miner, including all the extra allowances granted, and an additional 40%;

Day laborers working underground and on the surface were divided into three categories and they received a salary per hour equal to the initial salary in 1918, plus extra allowances granted by the mining companies;

Women and children could work only on the surface, and the salary was equal to the salary in 1918, plus an allowance of 200% which included the pay increase granted by the mining companies.

Industrial workers (i.e. manual workers) received a salary per hour which equalled the salary from 1918, plus 1 cor. and an allowance of 90% while the apprentices were granted a 100% increase.

This decision determined the salary of lower officials as well.

Bonuses between 50-100% were paid for additional work;

2 additional cor./shift were paid to workers and lower officials or maximum 50 cor./month, plus a family allowance of 2 cor./shift or a maximum of 60 cor./month for each family member under 14 years of age, or who was unfit for work, living in the same household as the worker;

Workers, depending on the length of uninterrupted service at the same mining company, were given a number of days of annual leave; leave days being paid in full, with an amount equal to the average salary received before the leave;

Both workers and lower officials could not be absent from work without a motive. The worker who had unexcused absences of three days within a month would lose the right to 50% of the family allowance, and the one who missed six days a month would lose the entire allowance. The worker who during the interval between the two vacation leaves, was penalized with the loss of or with a reduction of the family allowance because of unexcused absences would lose the right to vacation leave for that year.

C. Supplies

Employee provisions would be like in the past, mining companies being required to grant the necessary food commodities, and other necessary objects such as clothing and footwear. It was decided that: sugar, flour, potatoes, lard, cheese, and boots would be provided by mining companies in the quantities and at the prices established by previous agreements;

If the lack of the six commodities was because of the negligence of the mining companies, they were obliged to pay the workers and lower officials the difference between the market price in Petroșani and the reduced price for that certain quantity of food.

D. Housing, electricity etc.

Mining companies were obligated to build free hygienic housing for the workers and officers to use;

Those who were not offered accommodation by the company, were granted a monthly stipend in cash amounting to 40 cor. for workers with a family consisting of three members; 60 cor./month for workers with families consisting of more than three members and 100 cor./ month for lower officials;

Mining companies were obligated to furnish, as quickly as possible, the mining centers with toilets and showers, to be used by employees and their families;

Mining companies had to introduce electricity in the housing of workers; pending the completion of electrical installations, mining companies gave miners three litres of petrol per month, at the prime cost;

Mining companies had to provide and deliver the quantities of coal to the workers' houses; they had to purchase in a timely manner the necessary materials for making straw mattresses for workers, who paid for them at cost ;

Mining companies would gradually build schools for the education of the children of workers while the teaching staff would enjoy the same benefits as the miners, in terms of supplies and housing;

The doctors who had to take care of employees would benefit from free housing and food allowances just like the workers, as well as free transportation.

E. Trade Unions

The request of miners to not hire workers who were not members of labor organizations, was not accepted.

F. Transient provisions

The Decision took effect on July 1, 1920, and it was to be valid until the monetary unification. If the monetary unification exceeded the period of three months, a joint committee was to review the salaries established by the Arbitration Decision, taking into consideration the prices of commodities at that time as well as the general conditions of the country.

The most important and disputed problem of the Arbitration Decision of July 10, 1920, and indeed of all collective agreements within the interbellum period, was that of remuneration⁴⁰.

The Arbitration Decision was meant to ensure a minimum salary - subsistence wage—for the daily work of miners and a certain income for each family member who was unfit for work and who was cared for by the worker. The guaranteed minimum basic salary and the allowances for the worker and his family raised the question of whether he was tempted just to enter the mine and to not produce anything for this money; this provision would regulate the payment of the worker and not the payment of his work; Gheorghe Damaschin reached a conclusion, that seems fair to us, namely that the arbitration decision and the next collective labor contract in 1922, by its terms, stimulated the attendance and not the performance⁴¹. Mining companies should comply with this and, although the Arbitration decision became effective on July 1, 1920, salary increases and family allowances were in effect since January 1, 1920⁴². Hereupon, the monetary unification in September 1920 and the conversion of crowns into lei at the exchange rate of 2 cor. for 1 leu, would bring about a change in salaries.

Thus, by 1920 mine workers in the Jiu Valley would have achieved living material standards which can be compared with those in other European countries with developed mining activities.

COMPARATIVE TABLE OF MATERIAL ELEMENTS⁴³

Region	The income of a miner including bonuses and food allowances				1 kg beef -1920	With a daily wage a miner can buy kg/ beef-1920	Free coal kg / month 1920	Coal at reduced price kg / month	House rent / month 1920	Allowance for overtime represented by % of the minimum minim-1920	No. of paid vacation days -1920
	Currency	Earnings per shift 1920	Earnings per shift 1914	Increase of earnings %							
Jiu Valley	Leu	63,50	4,88	1.301	10	6,3	800	-	Free	50	6-14
Westphalia	German mark	54	6,50	830	35	1,6	-	500	15	25	3-9
Mährisch Ostrau	Czech crown	65	5	1.300	30	2,2	500	-	20	50	5-12
France	Franc	26	5,80	448	8	3,2	-	400	15	25	-
Belgium	Franc	38	5,25	723	12	3,2	350	-	20	33	-
England	Sterling pound	15	6	250	3	5	-	-	-	-	-

The collective labor contract established by the arbitration decision would have this form until October 1922, although there were enough disgruntled workers among the miners who requested, for example, in a meeting on July 22, 1920, the reduction by 2 cor. in the price of meat or an increase by 5% in salary⁴⁴.

On July 2, 1922, the management of Mining Companies in the Jiu Valley received a new *Report* of workers, miners, ironmen, builders, and carpenters who called for a renegotiation of the collective labor agreement from 1920. The main requirements were: increasing salaries; providing housing and other benefits for descendants of the miners deceased in accidents at work; granting an annual amount of money for clothing; rent money; each employee is entitled to paid legal leave; the agreement should be revoked in the case of manual workers; etc⁴⁵.

At the request of workers, the mining companies would give examples from the “Petroșani” Company⁴⁶. They would insist on the purchasing power of the wages received by workers, a salary which was the highest in Transylvania; due to the fact that the company provided prime necessity commodities through the “Consumption stores”⁴⁷ - some of these products at reduced prices—and some for free, such as coal, housing, and electricity. A calculation made from the average income from the mines in the Jiu Valley from within the Petroșani Company showed an income of 113 lei per day, consisting of 56.30 lei cash = 50 lei medium income + 2.15 lei family allowance + 4.15 lei production bonus, to which the following sums were added: 28 lei the net value of food items per working day, 25 lei the value of coal, and 4 lei the value of the rent⁴⁸.

These different positions would require conducting negotiations between employers and workers’ representatives, meetings that were held in the Petroșani town hall during October 20—November 6, 1922. Not reaching an acceptable agreement, between December 16 and 30, 1922 further negotiations⁴⁹ would be conducted at the headquarters of the Ministry of Labor, under the arbitration of Minister Gheorghe Mărzescu, based on Section III [the arbitration (article 15-26)] of the Law on settling collective disputes⁵⁰. This would result in the adoption of the collective labor contract of miners from the Jiu Valley, which was valid throughout the period between October 20, 1922 and October 20, 1923; it was abridged and extended until 1926. The contents generally represented the basic collective agreement that regulated social and working relations between workers and employers for the rest of the interbellum period.

The collective contract, comprised of 102 articles, was structured into 11 parts:

A. Working conditions *B.* Payroll; *C.* Supplies; *D.* Housing, electricity and heating; *E.* Protection of children, apprentices and women; *F.* Prevention of accidents and saving; *G.* Measures for the workers’ hygiene and health; *H.* Benefits for the sick, casualties and disabled workers; *I.* Holidays; *J.* General provisions; and, *K.* Final provisions⁵¹.

Changes to the collective bargaining agreement were made, first in May-June and then in August 1923, when the “Petroșani,” “Uricani-Jiu Valley” Companies and Lonea State Mines increased the coal wagon bonus by 50% and they granted an attendance bonus⁵².

In February 1924, the arbitration of the Prime President from the Court of Deva did not produce substantial changes in the collective labor contract that expired on

October 20, 1923. It agreed upon the following: to increase the rent allowance, the family and the person allowance to be paid after 27 shifts and not after 25 shifts as it was stipulated in the old collective labor contract; the number of holidays to increase from six days to 12 days per year for all workers, regardless of their religion⁵³. In addition, salaries would be increased starting September 1, 1924 by an average of 10% for all categories of employees, the Mining Companies took over the income tax which had been paid by workers until then, and it increased the bonus from 25% to 35% based on price inflation, officers being granted the same rights⁵⁴.

In July 1926, workers submitted a *Report* to the mining companies in which they pointed out new claims, including: an increase in wages by 50%; increasing the allowance of coal from 8 tons to 9 tons annually; a better quality of products at the “Consumption stores”; further reduction of overtime hours; and an increase of 25% the quantity of food provided, which was already almost free⁵⁵.

Negotiations conducted in order to complete a new collective labor contract proposed a radical change in terms of remuneration and other benefits offered to workers. Engineer Ilie Popa writes in a study entitled *On the remuneration of miners*⁵⁶, that workers should receive a proper salary, in relation to: *a.* the cost of living; *b.* the quality and quantity of work carried out; *c.* experience and professional qualities; and, *d.* the income obtained by other workers for similar jobs.

In 1926, mining companies in the Jiu Valley had the same point of view, which revealed that payments were made according to agreements with little connection to the work carried out, the base salary representing less than 40% of the total of bonuses and allowances received by the worker: food at reduced prices for the miner and any member of his family; personal bonus; family allowance in proportion to the number of the members of the family; production bonus and attendance bonus, and all this for each eight-hour shift. Moreover, they were offered free accommodation or rent money, a garden, free electricity, 8 tons of coal and 4 tons of wood annually and taxes paid by the mining company. Statistics show that these benefits added to a base salary of 100 lei would produce an increase of up to 236 lei/8 hours. Hence the idea that the efficiency was negatively influenced; no work was rewarded since it represented only 30-40% of the income, but the attendance which produced bonuses of 60-70% of the income. This would discourage the young ones, who would not benefit from the same rights as the older workers, and they would want to leave; these were added to the tasks that Mining Companies had to deal with that could influence the production cost⁵⁷.

The new collective labor contract was concluded on November 20, 1926, by the arbitration of the Prime President of the Court of Deva following negotiations between employers and workers' representatives which were conducted in Deva between September and November, 1926. The contract was considered valid for the period from July 1, 1926 to December 31, 1927 and both parties had the right to review it every six months, but no sooner than March 1, 1927. The new collective labor contract had 63 articles and it was structured into 8 chapters: *I.* Working

hours; *II*. Categories of workers; *III*. Work system; *IV*. Remuneration; *V*. In-kind payment; *VI*. Legal leave, disciplinary measures; *VII*. Legal provisions, protection of women, children and apprentices; and, *VIII*. Final provisions, the structure and content of the articles remained the same for the rest of the interbellum period⁵⁸.

Accepting some of the articles, one could notice a fundamental change in the point of view regarding the relation between work (performance) and salary. The workers' delegation, led by Eftimie Gherman, a Trade Union representative from Cluj agreed on establishing an equal wage for all workers of the same category, regardless of the number of family members, a wage according to performance, while workers with very large families, employed at the time of denouncing the collective labor contract—October 31, 1926—would receive the old benefits in the form of personal exceptional bonuses. At the same time, the personal bonus, the attendance bonus, the production bonus, as well as food allowance would be included in the base salary, which would be calculated on the basis of agreements and, as such, would be paid according to the work carried out. They estimated a salary increase of 15-19%⁵⁹.

The solution adopted deeply dissatisfied the workers, who demanded a return to the previous situation, but the precedent had been created and nothing notable can occur from this point of view.

During the rest of the interbellum period we hear of: reports of workers; increases or reductions of salary made by Mining Companies, with the proper changes in the collective bargaining agreements; arbitrations of the Prime President of the Court of Deva who did not always go in favor of the accused party, or settled only part of the claims; 13 collective labor contracts were extended or elaborated automatically, in which there were no changes of substance, most often the only article that would change was the one regarding the salary. They are as follows

- Collective Employment Agreement for the period of July 1, 1926 - December 31, 1927⁶⁰;
- Collective Employment Agreement for the period of January 1 - December 31, 1928⁶¹;
- Extension of the Collective Employment Agreement for 1928 with some changes for the year 1929;
- Collective Employment Agreement for the period of January 1, 1930 - June 30, 1931⁶²;
- Collective Employment Agreement for the period of July 1, 1931- July 1, 1932⁶³;
- Collective Employment Agreement for the period of July 1, 1932 - July 1, 1933;
- The Collective Employment Agreement would be automatically extended for the period July 1, 1933—July 1, 1934, and then for the period from July 1, 1934 –July 1, 1935 with insignificant changes regarding remuneration before July 1, 1936, and then before July 1, 1937 and under the same conditions, before July 1, 1938⁶⁴;

- Collective Employment Agreement for the period of July 1, 1938—July 1, 1939⁶⁵;
- Collective Employment Agreement for the period July 1, 1939—December 31, 1940, modified however, on July 1, 1940⁶⁶.

When, for some reason, negotiation and compromise did not work, there were strikes, some with bad consequences.

There are three moments to remember from this point of view: the strikes between the years 1919-1920, the strikes in August 1929 and, again in April-May 1941, movements that took place in difficult socio-economic and political historical periods, and were strongly influenced by the interference of the political factor.

a. The Lupeni Strike of August 1929, the most important conflict in the Jiu Valley during the interbellum period, had intrinsic and extrinsic causes: the coal crisis that began in 1927⁶⁷; tensions arising from complaints of people towards the harsh working conditions, the deterioration of the standard of living, abuse of technical and administrative officers, etc.; and, the involvement of the political factor, the Communists, and especially the representatives of the National Peasant Party, who sought to exploit the grievances, for political purposes.

About the Lupeni strike of August 5-6, 1929, and especially about its unfortunate consequence, which meant the death of 22 miners—9 Romanian and 13 belonging to other ethnic groups⁶⁸—articles were written by partisans in the press of that time⁶⁹; the writer Panait Istrati, came to the Jiu Valley on September 7-8, 1929, and published his impressions entitled, *What I saw in Lupeni*, in the newspaper *Lupta*⁷⁰; it brought about debates in the Parliament of Romania.⁷¹

The National Peasant Party leaders tried to use the miners as a mass of pressure, convincing the miners from Lupeni to participate in the Assembly of Alba Iulia on May 6, 1928, and after having taken the power in November, 1928 they continued to harden the spirits, leaving the mining companies, with their interests and problems, alone, face to face with the disgruntled workers whose claims were not accepted⁷². All these led to the events of August 5-6, 1929 in Lupeni, and the best title that describes the situation was the article *He that mischief hatches, mischief catches* in the newspaper *Avântul* from Petroșani⁷³, which presented and analyzed the events in Lupeni.

b. The general strike of April 15 - May 5, 1941, with the participation of the majority of the 7,600 workers from the four mines of “Petroșani” and “Lonea” Companies, which were then operating in the Jiu Valley; security sources spoke of the involvement of some communist elements in triggering and maintaining the conflict⁷⁴. The strike was determined by the workers’ dissatisfaction towards the conclusion of a new collective employment agreement, the old one expired on December 31, 1940, by the inability of mining companies to provide proper supplies

by the fact that the militarization of mines allowed authorities to impose forced attendance at work,⁷⁵ etc. The strike would be primed by accepting conciliation talks between employers and representatives of the Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Protection and workers' elected representatives. Negotiations, but also the pressure of authorities, would lead to the conclusion, on July 15, 1941 of a new collective employment agreement, which included some of the claims: the rise of salaries; ensuring the supply of food and clothing and continuing the activity of "Consumption stores"; sickness benefits; labor protection measures; stopping the beatings of miners and the tyranny of leaders; etc⁷⁶.

Beyond these social movements, the acceptance by the parties involved in the productive activity in the Jiu Valley, of the need that employment relationships were regulated mainly by collective agreements, would foster a good climate of work in which labor force could be used effectively. The efficiency of this type of economic policy would be reflected through the socio-economic and technical development of the Jiu Valley, which ranked this coal basin as the most important Romanian coal producer, accounting for 60.74% of the country's total production in 1939 and 67.15% of the consumption of Romanian Railways⁷⁷.



Notes

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Abstract

Mining Labor Agreements in the Jiu Valley during the Interbellum Period

During the interbellum period, the Jiu Valley was the most important coal basin in Romania, which in 1939, accounted for 60.74% of the national production and 67.15% of the consumption of the Romanian National Railways. In order to achieve this production, the mining companies were using a qualified work force with a maximum of 18,197 employees in 1924 and minimum of 7,247 employees in 1932.

Our study deals with one of the institutional ways of regulating the work relations between the coal companies and their employees in the Jiu Valley, namely the collective work contract. The first collective work contract was signed on July 10, 1920, and in principal was meant to regulate the following: work conditions; the employees’ payment and supplies; the provision of housing, heating and electricity; the protection of children, apprentices, and women; the prevention of accidents and rescuing; measurements for the employees’ health and hygiene; the treatment of convalescents, victims of accidents, and invalids; holidays; etc.. These issues were to be found in all subsequent collective work contracts from the interbellum period.

We can appreciate that, during most of the interbellum period, the sustained dialogue and the application of the stipulations of collective work contracts ensured a climate that supported productive activity, as well as the social, economic, and cultural development of the Jiu Valley.

Keywords

Romania, the Jiu Valley, the interbellum period, coal companies, miners, work relations, collective work contract.