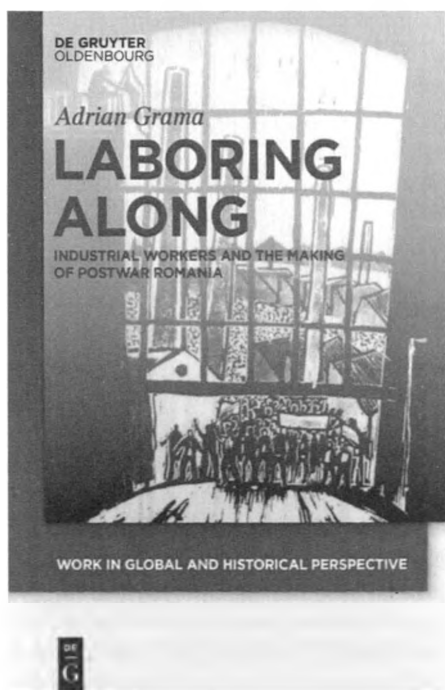


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## EDITORIAL EVENTS

# Industrial Policy, Labor Relations, and Ideology in Early Communist Romania

ALEX  
CISTELECAN



ADRIAN GRAMA, *Laboring Along: Industrial Workers and the Making of Postwar Romania* (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2019)

**N**OT LONG ago, scholars were deplo-  
ring the lack of solid research in the so-  
ciology of labor in Romania.<sup>1</sup> This absence  
was even more striking given the fact that,  
in the social realm, thus far away from  
scholarly interest, the transformations in  
the sphere of relations of production have  
shaken these last decades and have virtu-  
ally defined the major axes of the socio-po-  
litical reconfiguration of post-communist  
Romania.

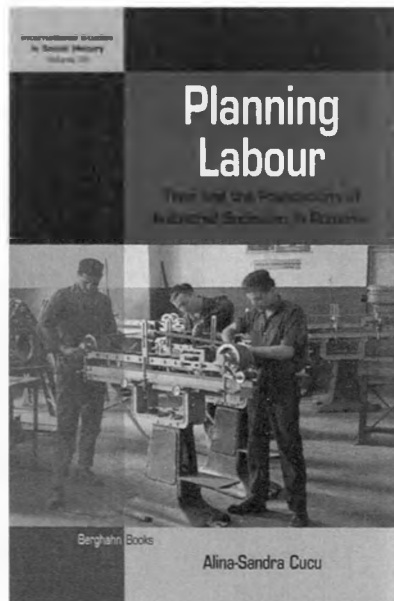
In the meantime, the situation seems  
to have changed considerably—at least  
in what concerns the historical sociology  
of past labor. In the last years, a number  
of outstanding works by young local so-  
ciologists and anthropologists—though  
most of them produced in English—have  
come to fill this gap. Thus, following the  
substantial investigations signed by Mara  
Mărginean<sup>2</sup> and Ștefan Guga (with his still  
unpublished doctoral dissertation on labor  
relations at the Dacia factories in Mio-  
veni), the last pre-pandemic year brought

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with it two other remarkable works bearing on the issue of the reconfiguration of industrial relations in Romania in the first decade after the war: Adrian Grama, *Laboring Along: Industrial Workers and the Making of Postwar Romania* and Alina-Sandra Cucu, *Planning Labour: Time and the Foundations of Industrial Socialism in Romania*.

It is no coincidence that so many works on the sociology of labor (three of the four above) revolve around the same topic, or, more precisely, the same phenomenon in the same historical period, i.e., the evolution of industrial relations (as dynamics of relations and forces of production) during the first communist decade. The topic itself is a perfect combination of empirical and structural, detail and overarching plan: it is not just a particular, concrete slice of the social reality of Romanian communism, but on the contrary promises—and has all the potential—to provide the cipher for the historical-political understanding of this whole social formation. In short, in the drama of industrial relations at the dawn of Romanian communism we can read, paradoxically, the historical staging of a seemingly predestined destiny of Soviet communism, the most concrete and intense figuration of its fatal non-synchronicity with history and its own conditions of possibility.

Like all Soviet regimes of the last century,<sup>3</sup> Romanian communism was, as is well known, a regime which, from a Marxist point of view and, therefore, from the perspective of its own ideological legitimation and justification, anticipated its own conditions of possibility: it did not emerge in highly industrialized societies, as an almost natural transition beyond a fully mature and already self-overcoming capitalism; on the contrary, it emerged in pre-industrialized societies, in which the proletariat, far from reaching its full development and threatening to break the proverbial fetters of existing relations of production, barely moved through their interstices. This reversal of the classical Marxist order of priorities—first the development (up to the objective limits) of the capitalist mode of production and, implicitly, of the forces of production, only then the natural transcendence into socialism—which the Soviet regimes had to accomplish in order to establish themselves led, as is well known, to a whole new list of strategic aggiornamenti of the classical theory of Marxism: in all these societies, the political party—even when it becomes a state, or especially then—is not the expression and vanguard of a huge economic and social base that is already, in and of itself, quasi-socialist and only needs a little mobilization and political guidance from above; on the contrary, here too, what should



ALINA-SANDRA CUCU, *Planning Labour: Time and the Foundations of Industrial Socialism in Romania*, foreword by DON KALB (New York—Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2019).

have been the effect of the social base—the party—must assume the role of the original cause of its own genesis: the party must retroactively produce its social and economic conditions of possibility. Which is not so easy. The party must, on the one hand, carry on the process of industrialization, which had only just begun before the war, and must therefore develop to the fullest the industrial relations of production, in order to be truly anything other than the usual socialization of misery in which utopian socialisms usually end up; on the other hand, and at the same time as it pushes production relations to their maximum “capitalist” intensification—in the sense of maximum extraction of surplus value, and therefore overexploitation, necessary for massive reinvestment in industrialization and continuous development of the means of production—it must create, as soon as possible and largely from scratch, precisely those forces of proletarian production which should have sustained and empowered it from the very beginning, namely, a working class that tends to become the whole of society and that already understands itself as a universal class, socialist and loyal to the regime that not only represents it, but practically unleashes it by conjuring it up into existence—even if the latter has only the bitter taste of overexploitation.

Perhaps this attempt—not necessarily unique in history—of a political regime to retroactively create its own material conditions of possibility would not be so exposed to failure if the two main strategies by which the regime could (theoretically at least) succeed in such an endeavor would not come to a head from the very beginning: for, concretely, this attempt to develop to the maximum both the relations of production (and the productivity of labor) and the forces of production presupposes the creation of an ever-increasing proletariat, virtually covering the majority of the population, which is faithful, dedicated and attached to its historical mission and its ruling party, all the while it is subjected to a maximum exploitation of labor, necessary to maximize surplus value, itself necessary for the accelerated development of the means of production and modernization, according to the well-known conundrum of the “primitive socialist accumulation.” This historical challenge, almost insoluble, like a genuine squaring of the circle—how to consolidate in power a party and a state of the proletariat in which the proletariat is structurally the most exploited class, the part that must not only sustain on its shoulders the weight of social whole, but also push it over the historical backwardness that fundamentally compromises the potential, maturity and strength of that proletariat from the very beginning—explains why these investigations in the sociology of postwar labor perfectly capture the drama and the specific dialectic, of historical anticipation and delay, of Romanian communism and of Soviet communism in general.

Given that Grama’s and Cucu’s books are so close in their interests and ethnographic approach and are both quite brilliant from a scholarly point of view, what is striking about them is rather how rarely they overlap. As a matter of fact, on certain aspects they not only differ, but are quite opposite. Thus, while both of them rely mostly on an ethnographic reconstruction of industrial relations in postwar Romania, their uses of ethnography are at odds with one another. Inspired by an avowed Postonian perspective, Cucu proceeds from the issue of the plan and the effort of planning labor, whose incidence on industrial relations is then followed in its various configurations and ef-

fects in rich ethnographic detail, and concludes with some reflections on the socialist state—thus describing a movement from abstract, to concrete, and back to abstract. Grama, instead, follows a more strictly chronological order of exposition and, faithful to his ethnographic method, derives the theories and superstructures from the minute observation of the factory universe. Thus, he wonderfully connects literary renditions of factory life (Nicolae Breban, Serge Moscovici, Paul Cornea, Radu Cosășu) with the factory archives, thus locating in their socio-historical context the former, and often extracting pure literature from the latter. Employing a method devised in Italian historiography and called “*ricerca micronominativa*,”<sup>74</sup> he fascinatingly tracks down some fleeting and forgotten characters through various sets of archives and reconstructs their story and interconnected contexts—thus articulating an approach in which it is not the pre-existing abstract concept or theory that guides the research and is confronted to the empirical material, but on the contrary, the theory emerges out of the latter at the end of the ethnographic reconstruction. Besides these opposite uses of the ethnographic instrument—as the mediator or proving ground between various abstract concepts and overarching structures, or as the very generator of the latter—there are several other points of contention that these books articulate between themselves, which we will address below, while examining their contributions.

However diverse, their ethnographic accounts share a common strategic purpose: they are meant to shift the usual emphasis from the high policies of Sovietization to the minute details of the social concrete. Instead of placing the burden of the explanation on the external agency of the Communist Party, or the Soviet liberator, as is de rigueur in official anticommunist historiography, the story unfolds here at the concrete level of industrial process and relations, and involves a various set of conflicting and dynamic characters, from workers and foremen to trade-unionists, managers and party officials. Instead of dividing the postwar scene between an active political agent (the party) and a passive society, this approach has the merit of showing how “workers had their own politics, which sometimes aligned them with the communist party, yet most times went beyond the moderate approach encouraged by party bosses and trade-union leaders.”<sup>75</sup> This rich fresco of social life draws its material from *Uzinele și Domeniile Reșița* (UDR), the Anina mines and two metal plants in Bucharest (Malaxa and Laromet), for Adrian Grama, and factories in Cluj—which thus involve also a strong inter-ethnic component—for Alina-Sandra Cucu. This is a quite welcome division of scholarly labor, since it combines a perspective on the most industrialized regions of wartime Romania (Grama’s Bucharest and Reșița and its surroundings) with a survey of a less industrialized city like Cluj (which only became an industrial center in the ’60s).

In what concerns the beginning of their story, both accounts agree on the deep continuities underlining the communist takeover and the industrial policies pursued during the war. Instead of instituting a radical break with the most recent past, the communist labor and industrial policies—themselves expressions of a gradual, successive establishment of the new regime (August ’44, March ’45, January ’48, June ’48)—conveniently reproduced numerous features of the policies pursued previously. “The dismemberment of organized labor during the war enhanced the role of the state bureaucracy in mediating labor disputes and reinforced paternalistic forms of workers’ representation.”<sup>76</sup>

Besides the growing role of the central bureaucracy in establishing the parameters of production, another feature developed during the war and faithfully reproduced after it was the development of provisioning facilities by industrial plants, such as vegetable gardens, cattle, canteens etc.—an inherent social contract or component supplementing the monetary wage, around which most of the labor unrest of the first communist years will revolve—before taking a turn, after the wage reform, as Grama shows, towards issues pertaining to the labor process itself and rhythm of production during the 1950s. Another, more surprising, element of continuity and resemblance is the shared perspective that both postwar communist officials and wartime political police had on industrial unrest, both explaining the latter in terms of manipulation of apolitical workers at the hands of dangerous agitators, thus “conferring the role of ideological tutor to the agitator” and postulating a “naïve ordinary worker that was liable to manipulation”<sup>77</sup>—a line of interpretation very much found also in the current official communist historiography of the Tismăneanu Report on Romanian Communism. Against this simplifying view, Grama shows how workers’ unrest often resulted in “indeterminate action situations.” The inherent ambiguity of workers’ grievances explains why their radicalization “happened with but also against unionization, and was carried out in the vernacular of everyday struggle rather than in the more abstract vocabulary of class identity and anti-fascism.”<sup>78</sup>

After the war, the main challenge in rebuilding industrial production was the severe scarcity of labor, on which both Cucu and Grama dwell at length, highlighting the various methods used by the communists to mitigate this shortcoming. Besides the objective labor shortage, “government employment regulations and managerial coping strategies defined a historically specific labor market in which workers were ‘more precious than gold.’”<sup>79</sup> The communists tried to cope with this situation by means of a whole spectrum of stick and carrot strategies, from paternalist practices (enlarging the provisioning stock of the factories, more lenient and understanding managerial relations, largesse of the “director’s fund,” the “economate”) to disciplining approaches. While the latter clearly put an emphasis on misbehavior that hindered productivity and tried to prevent or sanction it as hard as it could, it couldn’t afford to be too strict and mete out harsh punishments, up to firing the recalcitrant workers—because of the same scarcity of labor, but also because of the party’s demand that workers should be kept happy by the management. Another obstacle for keeping the workers quiet, if not happy, was, at least in the first years, the contest for authority over them and for control over the process of production between the union delegates, the party cell, and the management itself. With such conflicting networks of authority—at least until management was re-granted ruling authority in the factory—confronting an unruly and precious labor force, the first communist years resulted in a “permanent failure to stabilize and discipline labor.”<sup>10</sup>

These initial tatonnements and sharp frictions between the workers and the other inter-conflicting instances of (new or re-established) authority in the factory were, as shown by Grama, also a battle on the meaning of the very term “communism” or “communist.” A practical-ideological battle in which, apparently, both sides that presumably should have used this period to forge or recharge their mutual bond, the workers and their party, surprised one another with a behavior clearly at odds with their understand-

ing of the communist nature of their alleged bond. For the party, the workers' unrest, after March 1945 and the formation of Petru Groza's government, could not be explained but as a form of dangerous leftism, an "anarcho-syndicalist tendency . . . deeply entrenched in the masses, and currently reinforced by the fact they have a communist government."<sup>11</sup> As for the workers, they soon realized that, in this uphill battle, "they stood alone against a common front . . . which included the management, the local trade-union, the Soviet supervisors, the CGM [The General Confederacy of Labor], the communist party and the government,"<sup>12</sup> an unequal confrontation in which the term "communist" "came to stand for the state's authoritarian pursuit of industrial peace"<sup>13</sup> which for the workers spelled only mandatory "sacrifice."

The major milestones in this process of neutralizing working class unrest and getting production going were not so much nationalization as such—rather a non-event on the field, as Grama shows—but rather the new collective contracts of 1946, the monetary reform of 1947, and the new wage system of 1949. The first one aimed specifically at curbing the "harmful egalitarianism" of the old collective contracts of November 1945, giving more power to management (and thus putting an end to the rivalry between trade union, party cell and management) and, more crucially, moving away from the idea of "social wage"—with the entire provisioning system it entailed (economate, canteens, etc.), which was becoming more and more burdensome for the factories themselves and limited their available funds for investments—to a wage indexed on productivity, in which privileges and high retribution would be granted only for heroic acts in production. In a second political act, the monetary reform of 1947 imposed "financial discipline on management, the dismantlement of the economate to the extension of piece-rate, the abolition of workers' debts and the remaking of the wage relation."<sup>14</sup> Finally, the new wage system implemented in 1949 aimed to push further the "transition from a 'politics of social assistance' to one of 'economics' and to finalize the 'disappearance of egalitarianism.'"<sup>15</sup> This set of policies, argues Grama, should not be seen as the expression of an all-powerful state, as in the 'totalitarian' theoretical framework, but precisely as radical state building in action: "The cluster of interlocking financial and social policies that prepared, accompanied and followed up the stabilization [constituted] the first concerted attempt by the party at radical state-building." By the end of this sequence, and as an index of its temporary success, "the epoch of collective bargaining over provisioning, with its strikes, sequestrations and outbursts of violence, was over," and industrial conflict relocated to "the maddening and shadowy shopfloor struggles over work norms, productivity bonuses or piece-rate schemes."<sup>16</sup> Looking back on these first five postwar years, and given their highly problematic context, the performance of the Communist Party and its Soviet backers in imposing industrial peace and raising production seems remarkable to say the least. At the end of this fight, the industrial peace

*was a hard won peace brought about by the containment of localized, short-lived and often violent labor unrest; a phenomenon produced by the combined effort of the RCP [The Romanian Communist Party] to run the state, build a mass political party and manage an industry geared toward repayments to the Soviet Union, all against a general background of inflation.*<sup>17</sup>

But the industrial peace brought about by the new discourse and politics of productivity had its own specific shortcomings. Thus, on the shop floor, it revolved around the crucial category, emphasized by both Cucu and Grama, of the “hidden” or “inner reserves of production.” The idea was to increase production not through technological upgrade and capital investments, which were difficult to come by, but by “endlessly expanding and improving workers’ *current* practices.”<sup>18</sup> The burden of the mission to discover and exploit these hidden reserves of production fell on the management, which was supposed to rise to its task by means of the new techniques of scientific management.

*Together with its main competitor, the science of labor, scientific management promised to offer a purely technical solution to industrial conflict . . . [it] was designed as an anti-politics machine that was going to translate the language of class into the sanitized vocabulary of “efficiency.”*<sup>19</sup>

However, the discourse on “inner reserves” and the rationalization of production involved not only the scientific art of management, but also a campaign of unrelenting critique and moralization of the underperforming worker and “slacker” at factory level itself. As Grama shows, the factory newspaper—not the political brochure or the scholarly journal—was the principal medium of expression of the productivity discourse, and its “weapon of choice was the caricature and the moralizing column.”<sup>20</sup> In this context, the “slacker,” against whom the factory newspapers were railing, “was the natural by-product of speed-ups, piece-work and all the other methods geared towards labor intensification against the background of broken chains of supply, ‘storming’ and ‘bottlenecks.’”<sup>21</sup>

Besides the rationalization of production through the activation of its inner reserves, and the new tool of scientific management, the third pillar of the communist initial effort was, according to Alina-Sandra Cucu, the wage system based on piece-rate and quantifiable work/time units. Thus, the plan was to be the overarching structure of knowledge encompassing and rendering possible these three components.

By carefully reconstructing this constellation of the first communist decade, both Grama and Cucu, albeit in different directions, are able to challenge some of the hegemonic categories and interpretations in this field of studies—proof that theirs are not mere ethnographic incursions into communist industrial policies, but also formulate important conceptual and theoretical contributions. Thus, for example, against Hayek’s classic contention (still widely popular) that socialist planning involved a leveling, statistical knowledge from above, Cucu shows instead that “planning [was] a bottom-up process that was subjected to struggles and negotiations on the shop floor,” which “required the emergence of a complex knowledge production apparatus,” which was articulated in three ways: “by constructing legibility structures; by making labor into an object of scientific and managerial knowledge; and by transforming the state’s agents into skillful ethnographers.”<sup>22</sup>

In a similar vein, Grama argues that the economic policies that guided the first communist decade should not be placed—as they usually are—under the heading “forced industrialization.” There are, after all, different ways in which such a thing can be carried

out, and what defined the Romanian way were rather the twin strategies of “rationalization and austerity,” which “structured both the options available to policy makers and the experience of industrial work” and thus predetermined what kind of forced industrialization there was going to be.

*For the better half of the 1950s, the politics of productivity took the form of the dialectic between rationalization and austerity, between policies designed to squeeze the value of labor through intensified work rhythms . . . and policies bent on maintaining low labor costs through meager wages.<sup>23</sup>*

Both export strategies and growth policies pursued by the communists in this period were predicated on “the sacrifice of the consumer” and austerity: the first, up to late 1953, consisted in massive exports of raw materials used to acquire industrial equipment; the second, until 1958/9, saw a shift towards “exporting semifabricates and importing raw materials needed for the domestic manufacturing capacity to run at full capacity.”<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, the transition from the first to the second strategy is also proof of the industrial development attained by the communists thus far and of the country’s ensuing better positioning in international trade—proof that rationalization and austerity managed to sustain a successful forced industrialization *and* keep the workers quiet.

But this whole system based on raising productivity by means of the hidden, inner reserves of production, and indexing workers benefits on their output on the shop floor, had its limits and carried some risks that were quickly exposed. The strategy of rewarding the overfilling of quotas, and the whole practice of “working in assault” led to disruptions in the production process, as workers could manipulate the quotas by amassing better materials and relying on solidarity networks inside the factory, which again alienated the other workers, deprived of such social skills; plus, this system “chipped away at managerial authority and made supervision of the labor process difficult,” allowed workers “too much autonomy on the shop floor and made it hard to control the rhythm of production and work methods.”<sup>25</sup>

Among the panoply of characters that filled this productivist universe, the Stakhanovite is an extreme, but characteristic, one. Alina-Sandra Cucu spends some wonderful pages describing this figure of labor heroism, who, through his or her own dedication, could overfill the quota and thus “make up time”, i.e., literally work already for the future—as, for example, Axente Vasa at the leather factory in Cluj, who on 7 November 1951 was already working for the year 1953, or Ion Ciupea, who had been working for 1952 since 16 June 1951.<sup>26</sup> While this Stakhanovite discourse and practice, with its disruptions in the production process and corrosion of workers’ solidarity, started to lose momentum after the mid-1950s, as it was replaced by the new managerial ideologies imported from the West, the real question, argues Cucu, is why was it applied in the first place, considering that its experiment in the Soviet Union turned sour and had to be aborted long before the establishment of communism in Romania. The answer seems to lay in the ideological weight carried by this figure of labor heroism, which constituted “the last breath for the specific temporal conception entailed by the Bolshevik project:



the possibility of transcending historical time through an elevation of ordinary work practices.<sup>27</sup>

The wage reform of 1957 finally tried to reshape this labor constellation, with its hidden reserves, Stakhanovites, bottlenecks and stormings. Its main effects, as analyzed by Grama, consisted in raising the tariff wage—the mandatory component of the wage, not indexed on production—thus reducing the incentives for quota overfilling, and abolishing the system of piece-work payment. Interestingly, as Grama shows, the enchantment and then disenchantment with piece-work payment was a global and quite synchronic phenomenon—albeit for different reasons—between the end of WWI and the 1960s. In Romania, this system was abandoned from the late 50s not because of fear of labor unrest and opposition, but because it ultimately meant low productivity.

Having started the book from a Postonian critical perspective, Cucu ends it rather appositely with some melancholic remarks inspired by E. P. Thompson and Ernst Bloch on the “appropriation of people’s time” as precondition to industrialization and on the socialist socio-political construction as “non-synchronicity” and “struggle around time,” a desperate, quite Stakhanovist, attempt to make up historical time and convert backwardness into progress by mere willpower. This constitutive non-synchronicity seems to be, at the same time, heroic, defining, yet fatal for such socialist projects undertaken in backward societies. Grama ends instead on a more positive note, arguing that

*the politics of productivity was not just a bundle of policies that secured the reconstruction of postwar Romania and laid the foundation for long-term development . . . [It] is hard to imagine that the pacification of labor relations, the monetarization of everyday life, the recovery of managerial authority, rationalization and austerity would have even been remotely possible without the tacit, seldom uttered consent of the multitude. In other words, the politics of productivity was a call to collective sacrifice addressed in terms of citizenship, deferred affluence, and national sovereignty.<sup>28</sup>*

a call that, given the industrial peace conquered during the period analyzed here, seems to have been heard.

While Cucu and Grama’s books happily supplement one another—as seen even in the tonality of their endings—there are, as mentioned before, also some points of possible contention between their views.<sup>29</sup> The most important has to do precisely with the possible explanation of this communist success—how come that, with all the intense capital and labor shortages that they faced, with all the “permanent failure to stabilize and discipline labor” in the early years, they were nonetheless capable to pacify labor and increase industrial productivity? The burden of Cucu’s explanation seems to fall on the category of the peasant-worker and the phenomenon of under-urbanization: the mass of semi-proletarian workers, who could endure low wages because their reproduction was partially covered by keeping one foot in the rural world, thus providing a sort of “temporal fix” to the problem of under-urbanization and austeritarian industrialization. Grama, instead, while acknowledging the importance of the category of “worker-

peasant” and the not less important absence of proletarian traditions, tends to place the burden of the explanation on austerity as such:

*The relative social tranquility of Romanian workers during the better half of the 1950s . . . had structural rather than cultural origins. The politics of low wages and the dynamics of Romania’s exports made both rationalization and austerity more amenable to be suffered in silence. Paradoxically, then, low wages secured the regime’s legitimacy.<sup>30</sup>*

AS ALREADY (repeatedly) mentioned, both Cucu’s and Grama’s books are highly remarkable from a number of perspectives (from the clarity and elegance of their style and construction, to their ethnographic depth and theoretical or at least hermeneutical ambitions). If there is something that the reader might feel is still missing, or still wanting after going through them, this is certainly not something that these books might be taxed for having left out. For one, after all the drama of the various strategies—from labor and economic reforms, provisioning and productivism, up to reluctant discipline and patchy paternalism—employed by the Communist Party, as over-determined as they were by the unforgiving local and international context, it would have been interesting to know what other road could have been taken, what other alternatives were available in that specific context for that specific political actor? However, this human, all too human curiosity—how else could it have happened, what other real alternatives, not just mere possibilities, were there?—is, perhaps, not something the ethnographer, historian, or social scientist should bother herself or himself with.

The other “unfulfilled” expectation is also probably unfulfillable, and it might be just the regret of seeing these books end where they do. In other words, it would have been again very stimulating to follow through this investigation into the 1960s (if not further), since the changing context would raise interesting questions with regards to the diagnostics given here by Cucu and Grama. A quick glance at the evolution of economic topics in *Lupta de clasă* (Class Struggle)—the party’s journal of theory and politics—indicates clearly the changing of tone and direction in matters of economic policy during this period: from the proverbial articles on “the reduction of production costs, the main task in industry,” “economizing and economic rentability in the socialist economy,” or even straightforward pieces on “why labor’s productivity has to increase faster than the wages” during the 1950s, to a clear shift, in the 1960s, to a more technical, but also rather more redistributive direction, with strong emphasis on “the technical-material base of production,” “science and production,” “technical progress,” “the mechanization of agriculture and automatization of industry,” “increasing the products’ quality” and “increasing the economic efficiency of investments.”<sup>31</sup> From this perspective, and returning to the respective diagnostics of Cucu and Grama, could the 1960s possibly be seen as an unexpected “temporal fix” of state socialism’s fatal non-synchronicity, or the apparent luster of this period—industrial peace, growing productivity, raising living standards—was merely a passing illusion expecting its final, pre-established denouement (*pace* Bloch, Postone)? As for Grama’s account, if austerity was the key to early communism’s success, could the 1960s be seen then as a major change of strategy which briefly improved social conditions while settling the long term trajectory of this political proj-

ect, by exhausting its internal engine—in other words, communism’s own staging of the “creating one’s own diggers” script, whereby the successful economic policy of the state generated an increasing set of urban expectations and growing professional middle class whose allegiance to the regime could no longer be satisfied by the still semi-Spartan and growingly provincial social contract offered by the latter—a possibility more in line with Gabriel Chindea’s already classic essay on “Revolution and Middle Class.”<sup>32</sup> In any case, it is as if once the mystery of the socialist primitive accumulation has been elucidated, the ensuing period of growth and stabilization becomes somehow more mysterious. □

## Notes

1. Mihai Varga, “An Anatomy of ‘Collective Anti-Collectivism’: Labor Sociology in Ukraine and Romania,” *Global Labour Journal* 2, 1 (2011): 43–63.
2. Mara Mărginean, *Ferestre spre furnalul roșu: Urbanism și cotidian în Hunedoara și Călan (1945–1968)* (Iași: Polirom, 2015).
3. For a subtle and in-depth analysis of this defining dialectic of anticipation and delay in Soviet communism, see the first volume of Pavel Campeanu’s trilogy on Stalinism, *The Origins of Stalinism: From Leninist Revolution to Stalinist Society*, translated by Michael Vale (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1986).
4. “This method starts out with a proper name that pops up randomly in a document and proceeds to build up fragmented biographies around it, crosschecking other archival sources, adding visual and literary material for thickening particular social contexts, all in order to grasp how seemingly disparate social processes converge even in the lives of the most anonymous of historical actors.” (Grama, 40)
5. Grama, 10.
6. Grama, 29.
7. Grama, 51.
8. Grama, 59.
9. Cucu, 85.
10. Cucu, 98.
11. Vasile Luca, quoted in Grama, 107.
12. Grama, 116.
13. Grama, 81.
14. Grama, 162.
15. Gheorghiu-Dej, quoted in Grama, 167.
16. Grama, 162, 167.
17. Grama, 120.
18. Cucu, 150.
19. Cucu, 164.
20. Grama, 229.
21. Grama, 230.
22. Cucu, 147.
23. Grama, 261.

24. Grama, 219.
25. Grama, 241.
26. Cucu, 220.
27. Cucu, 208.
28. Grama, 275.
29. A less important point would regard the legitimate use of such a category as “aristocracy of labor,” which Alina-Sandra Cucu employs in order to explain the position occupied by the foremen in the period of the politics of production, when, given their precious skills and their scarcity, they were able to amass considerable privileges, while Grama rather dismisses it—when discussing the privileges and sense of entitlement of the UDR workers—as a rather “culturalist” explanation, and moreover one used by the communist ideologues themselves in order to trample protests.
30. Grama, 250.
31. Among numerous similar articles, see: I. Rachmuth, “Gospodărirea socialistă și rentabilitatea în economia socialistă,” *Lupta de clasă* (Bucharest) 35, 7 (1955); M. Vasiliu, “De ce productivitatea muncii trebuie să crească mai repede decât salariul mediu?” *Lupta de clasă* 35, 10 (1955); D. Mosora, “Progresul tehnic în industria construcțiilor,” *Lupta de clasă* 43, 3 (1963); Octavian Groza, “Progresul tehnic și activitatea de studii și proiectări,” *Lupta de clasă* 44, 6 (1964); Florian Dănălache, “Tehnica nouă și calitatea produselor,” *Lupta de clasă* 44, 11 (1964).
32. Gabriel Chindea, “Revoluție și clasă de mijloc. Partea I—Este clasa de mijloc capabilă de o revoluție?” and especially “Revoluție și clasă de mijloc. Partea a II-a—Anii ’60 sau revoluția ratată,” *CriticAtac*, <https://www.criticatac.ro/revolutie-si-clasa-de-mijloc-partea-a-ii-a-%e2%80%93anii-%e2%80%9960-sau-revolutia-ratata/>, <https://www.criticatac.ro/revolutie-si-clasa-de-mijloc/>.

### Abstract

#### Industrial Policy, Labor Relations, and Ideology in Early Communist Romania

The article discusses two highly significant recent contributions to the Romanian sociology of labor and historiography of communism—Alina-Sandra Cucu’s *Planning Labour: Time and the Foundations of Industrial Socialism in Romania* (2019) and Adrian Grama’s *Laboring Along: Industrial Workers and the Making of Postwar Romania* (2019). After laying down the conceptual and historical framework of the “socialist primitive accumulation” imposed by the premature nature of the socialist experiments in the East, the paper reconstructs the successive phases, difficulties and strategies that the communist authorities encountered or deployed, in the field of industrial labor relations and economic policies, during the first postwar decade. It ends by formulating some comments and interrogations on the wider political and historical meanings and consequences of these remarkable historical reconstructions.

### Keywords

Romanian communism, state socialism, sociology of labor, industrial policy, ethnography