



ARCHIVAL RESEARCH PAPER

**Workers and Intellectuals
in Communist and
early post-Communist Romania**

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OSA Archival Research Paper

Workers and Intellectuals in Communist and early post-Communist Romania

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Abstract

Much of the discourse that has emerged on the topic of this research paper has consisted of the intellectuals' attempts to explain and justify what they perceive as the absence of any kind of solidarity between themselves and the workers. In this respect, the records available at the Open Society Archives provide a certain amount of evidence, hitherto overlooked, which contradicts this notion and indicates a not inconsiderable degree of solidarity between workers and intellectuals, especially engineers, but also humanist intellectuals. However, there is strong evidence that the very concept of dissident behavior, which existed in Romania, was oriented around dissidence as a principally individual activity in the country.

Introduction

As matters currently stand in the Romanian field, the attention of both the intellectuals who were critical of the communist regime prior to the 1989 revolution, and the democratic intellectuals who emerged in the public arena following the revolution – perceived as being primarily of humanistic character – has focused on the interaction between workers and the humanist intellectuals themselves, with an overwhelming emphasis on writers.

OSA's holdings provide a necessary and rich basis for the examination of the actual history of these relations, i.e. between workers and intellectuals, as well as of the reasons why the intellectuals' discourse on this issue has taken the form and substance that it has. More than this, the records available provide substantial knowledge from which such research can easily be extended to cover the relationship which developed between workers and the other professional strata of the intellectuals; that between workers and engineers is particularly fascinating.

The archival materials include press clippings, news agency releases, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty research papers and background analyses, Radio Free Europe Reports on Eastern Europe information items, transcripts of radio broadcasts, émigré publications, and letters.

Intellectuals and “anti-intellectual” miners’ marches, Romania – 1990

In the early post-Communist, Romanian context of social antipathy, three major, relatively violent, urban clashes occurred. The reason why they are called *mineriade* is the fact that on all three occasions, after the initial outbreak of disorder, the next morning miners descended upon Bucharest as an extra-legal force charged with reinstating order in the capital.

In 1990, all three marches of miners to Bucharest were preceded by large, public demonstrations against the neo-Communist character of the provisional government (the Front) and President Iliescu. The response to the protests was the mobilization of large masses of workers from several factories in Bucharest, and from cities and towns in its vicinity, which were firm in their support for the interim leadership, and for the then-President. Of the six miners’ marches on Bucharest (three more were to follow in 1991 and 1999), the June 1990 march is considered to have been symptomatic of the contentious relationship which developed in the communist period between Romanian workers and intellectuals, and of the anti-intellectual character of the newly instated authorities, which were neo-communist in orientation.

The most disputed implications of the June unrest were the isolation of the country in the international arena, the discontinuation of western non-humanitarian financial aid to Romania, and the reactions of the historical parties etc. Given the variety of documents recorded, OSA’s holdings document the multiple implications of the *mineriada*, and the effects discernible within the field of Romanian, democratic intellectuals on the one hand, and the relationships between this field and that of the political powers-that-be and that of the labor movement in Romania on the other. The available material ranges from opposing perceptions on the events present in the newspapers’ ‘morning after’ reactions to the *mineriada*, to their institutionalized homologues in the reports on the June 1990 unrest which were published a couple of months later. Among these, highly suggestive of the attitudes of the field of democratic intellectuals and that of the political powers-that-be are the report issued by the parliamentary commission (1991), that of the Group for Social Dialogue (GSD) and of the Helsinki Committee from Romania (1990), and that issued by the Helsinki Watch (1990).

Briefly, the dominant perspective in the intellectual field regards the June events (when miners descended on Bucharest) as inspired and supervised by the government which was voted into office in May 1990, after the provisional term had expired, and which mobilized workers and miners to suppress the opposition’s demonstrations against neo-communists. Subsequently, in the literature review on the *mineriade* issued by democratic intellectuals, there is a strong association between the President and the workers’ stratum on the one hand, and the opposition, which is seen merely as counting on students’ and intellectuals’ backing, on the other. The three *mineriade* are addressed as the logical culmination of the putatively problematic relations between the intellectuals and the workers. It is in this context that OSA’s references account for the less emphasized aspects of the relationship between workers and intellectuals in early post-Communism, i.e. those ranging from meetings between

important, Romanian intellectual figures and different ‘independent’ trade unions to tentative efforts to build a ‘cross-class’ opposition to the neo-communist regime. More than this, there is strong evidence that the workers’ support for the post-communist powers-that-be was not unanimous. The archival material reflects the attempts to promote a common Front between workers and democratic intellectuals, which proceeded with increased amplitude after the June 1990 unrest. The records examined show that the democratic intellectuals replaced the initial critical distance toward the powers-that-be with a more sustained, politically active participation, leading eventually to the organization of a so-called “party of intellectuals”. What is more striking is that in the declarations of the democratic intellectuals, the major steps taken towards this sustained political activity were directly correlated with the three miners’ marches on Bucharest in 1990.

To conclude, OSA’s holdings provide a critical basis for re-contextualizing the early post-Communist relationship between democratic intellectuals and workers, and thus for the rectification of different theoretical assertions regarding the environment of social antipathy which allegedly developed between the two groups in Romania.

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