

ABUSIVE CADRES IN A VORACIOUS PARTY-STATE:

ROMANIAN COLLECTIVIZATION IN THE 1950s

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Executive Summary

The first phase of Romania's communization—the ascent of the Communist Party to power—took place between 1944 (when it gained a toehold in government coalitions) and 1948, by which time it had fully consolidated its position over other political formations, thanks to the Soviet Army, and could begin implementing its agenda. Near the top of the list was collectivization of agriculture—a mammoth task, given that over 75% of the entire population was employed in that sector. To accomplish this, Party leaders developed a number of technologies, including propaganda, food requisitions, various methods of "persuasion," fomenting class warfare, and outright brutality. All of them were highly labor-intensive, requiring Party cadres to interact closely with individuals and households in Romania's many rural settlements. They required, in brief, a sizable and well-trained apparatus of cadres.

In this paper I discuss some of the characteristics of these cadres and the problem of their abuses of power as they sought to force peasants into the collectives. I discuss these abuses without offering extensive documentation, of which a great deal exists, but take them as given. I offer some reasons why I believe they were so common, suggesting how this relates to the nature of power in the communist Party-state, and I propose some of the social considerations that mitigated their occurrence. Overall, my aim is to open up the world of Party cadres, a world that has not been much explored.

Introduction

The first phase of Romania's communization—the ascent of the Communist Party to power—took place between 1944 (when it gained a toehold in government coalitions) and 1948, by which time it had fully consolidated its position over other political formations, thanks to the Soviet Army, and could begin implementing its agenda. Near the top of the list was collectivization of agriculture—a mammoth task, given that over 75% of the entire population was employed in that sector. To accomplish this, Party leaders developed a number of technologies, including propaganda, food requisitions, various methods of "persuasion," fomenting class warfare, and outright brutality. All of them were highly labor-intensive, requiring Party cadres to interact closely with individuals and households in Romania's many rural settlements. They required, in brief, a sizable and well-trained apparatus of cadres.

This, however, was precisely what the country lacked. In 1944 the Party had approximately 1,000 members. Prior to World War II, it had not been the most active grass-roots mobilizing force: that had been, rather, the Legion of the Archangel Michael, an indigenous fascist organization preaching a message antithetical to that of the Communists, which more successfully attracted both workers and peasants to a radical alternative. From 1944 on, however, the numbers in the Party rose swiftly. By October 1945 it had a quarter million members, and by February 1948 over one million (King 1980: 64).¹

This rapid increase indicates primarily that many of these people were "Communists" in name only. The influx caused Party leaders constant worry that some of the recruits might be "class enemies," who had infiltrated the Party and would subvert it from within. A campaign for "verification of Party members" (1948-1952) reduced the numbers from one million to 595,000, as of the 1955 Party Congress; 45% of the 1948 members had been eliminated (Tănase 1998: 115). The job of these cadres—most of them little schooled in the ideas and practices of Soviet-style communism—would be to turn life upside down for the country's 12 million villagers.

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¹ In much-larger Poland, by contrast, there were 4,000 members in 1942 and 500,000 in 1947 (Tănase 1998: 48).

offer some reasons why I believe they were so common, suggesting how this relates to the nature of power in the communist Party-state, and I propose some of the social considerations that mitigated their occurrence. Overall, my aim is to open up the world of Party cadres, a world that has not been much explored.

Who Were the Cadres?

The word "cadres" generally refers to anyone directly employed by the Party-state in an official capacity and excludes those in informal positions of village leadership (though sometimes ordinary usage may refer to the latter as cadres also). In this chapter I will use the term in a broad sense, to indicate anyone whose work (whether full- or part-time, and whether paid or not) entails serving the apparatuses of Party, state, or Securitate [Secret Police], at any level of the political hierarchy. There were many kinds of cadres, distinguished by the kind of work they did (agitation and propaganda, "persuasion" work to draw peasants into the collectives, education, collection of food quotas, running collective farms, administering the transfer of land from individual to collective ownership structures, etc.), as well as by their level in both the territorial and the political hierarchies—villages, communes, urban centers, districts, regions, and the national capital.

Party policy was for cadres to have, as much as possible, "healthy" social origins—that is, to come from proletarian or poor-to-middle peasant families. Indeed, it was common for villagers who entered into the Party's service to come from marginal groups: poor and landless peasants, or people who had moved into (rather than been born into) the community—and for cadres at the commune and district levels to have modest peasant backgrounds or be miners, railway workers, or other forms of skilled and unskilled labor. Certain ethnic groups were overrepresented (Jews, Hungarians), and despite the Party's goal of increasing gender equality, most cadres were men.

In the early period, many cadres were not ideologically committed; they joined the Party because it offered political opportunities to groups hitherto denied such chances, as well as to others with problematic pasts to be cleansed. Chief among the latter were considerable numbers of former fascists, known as legionaries. Immediately after the war, Party leaders invited them to join and placed them in responsible positions in factories, being eager to co-opt them, make use of their superior organizational skills, and thereby prevent their overthrowing the new regime

(Iordachi 2004). The Party urgently needed a core of disciplined cadres who would follow instructions and take initiative in consolidating its power position. As the Party gained strength, its leaders attempted to purge these erstwhile allies. That they had been numerous and significant, however, is essential to understanding the constant search for “hostile elements” in the Party and its apparatus throughout the collectivization period.

One widespread characteristic of Party cadres was their low level of preparation. Many simply lacked the necessary skills for the work they were required to do: they were illiterate or had little formal schooling, they could barely write, and they had little or no experience with managing an office or organization. Those in charge of collective farms required mathematical skills as well. Although the “revolution” required people who were educated and knew how to organize and manage, the Party’s ideology required using the poor and oppressed—the people least likely to have schooling or managerial experience—who enjoyed virtually no authority in their local communities because of their lowly origins. At the same time, the ideology also required persecuting the well-to-do and former state employees (who were educated and had local authority) and the fascists (who knew how to organize) as enemies of the people. Thus, ideological aims conflicted with the practical problems of consolidating a ruling apparatus.

Romania’s Party leaders expressed repeated concern about the quality of their cadres. At a meeting of the Secretariat of the Central Committee (C.C.), for example, leaders were discussing their problems in getting the comrades to take collectivization seriously instead of trying to “pass everything over to the Agrarian Section [of the Central Committee]. . . . [But] cadres of this section are not strong cadres and are numerically few. A good part of them are not up to snuff and so you can’t use them for inspections.”² From lower down: a 1950 note from a district in Maramureș complained,

We have problems with the minutes of the village Party cell because we have a few secretaries who can barely write their names and don’t know how to write out the missions of comrades who are in the Bureau, but they do as best they can; only we can understand very little from their minutes.³

From the archives of Odorhei district (Harghita) we find that “the first sign of the installation of new cadres in the local state and Party structures was an abrupt decline in the qualitative level of practices of preparing papers and documents. This is apparent in both the spelling and the style

² ANIC, Fond CC al PCR, Cancelarie, d.59/1950: 16. Document courtesy of O. Roske.

of expression” (Oláh 2003: 52).

In brief, most Party cadres were completely unequipped to do what they were expected to do, yet it was they who had to implement the gigantic project of collectivizing. For want of better raw material, the Party had to supplement its forces with the "wrong" kind of people, thus raising the specter of class struggle and ideological contamination within the apparatus itself. That, in turn, required internal surveillance over cadres, which sharpened the fierce competition among them.

Surveillance, Morality, and Abuse of Power

The Party had good reason to monitor its cadres closely, given the early pact with the legionaries as well as the desperate need to recruit at least a few cadres who could maintain the administration and therefore probably had bourgeois pasts. From these strategic compromises emerged the unrelenting search for “unreliable” cadres that we see in both local archives and the struggles at the top. For example, in the secret files of the People’s Council of Dobrosloveni commune is a 1954 document from the district Securitate headquarters, asking for data on who has or has not given their food requisition quotas. It specifically requests numbers “by category, such as Party members, members of the Communist Youth, district and communal deputies, the women’s delegates, union members, including functionaries by branch or by district.” From this we see that the majority of those holding power locally were closely watched by the next higher level (Lățeș 2003: 28-29).

Likewise, documents in the files for the State Commission on Food Requisitions regularly listed—separately from other people—how many Party members had turned over their required amounts. Alongside these lists, some of them swelled by denunciations from private citizens, were the famed "criticism and self-criticism" sessions so common in all Communist countries, at which cadres could offer each other guidance or unmask class enemies among them. This sort of surveillance served to create an environment in which everyone felt constantly watched and was ready to denounce and unmask other comrades.

Myriad potential problems appear in Party documents as the objects of monitoring. These include the attitudes and personality traits of cadres, their work habits, their adherence to Communist norms of morality (e.g., they were to avoid drink, sexual liaisons, or socializing with

³ DJAN Maramureș, Fond C.j. PMR Sighet 89/1950: 68.

"class enemies"), and their proper execution of the tasks given them. For my purposes here, however, I will concentrate on the problem of lower-level cadres' abuse of power and perversions of the Party line, a problem that appears frequently in documents of the period as well as in retrospective accounts. Such behavior constituted a particularly serious problem throughout the collectivization drive, as many cadres went well beyond what they were asked to do, exploiting their positions for both personal gain and political maneuvering room.

Of the many forms of abuse of power, the most serious was using force against peasants to make them join the collectives. Such actions contravened the Party's Leninist stricture that villagers must be lured into collectives not through violence but of their own free consent—an instruction sent repeatedly from Bucharest to the regions and districts.⁴ Collectives were to come from people's voluntarily donating their land, not from confiscations or nationalizations. Many activists ignored these directives, especially in the periods when the collectivization drive was in full swing (summer-fall 1950, 1952-53, spring-summer 1956, 1957-62).

Documentary and oral history evidence of the use of force is ample: beatings, torture, public humiliation, exemplary deportations and killing, etc., all in hopes of frightening the peasants into signing up. As Interior Minister Teohari Georgescu observed at a 1950 meeting with regional Party leaders,

Tens and tens of letters of complaint come to the Central Committee Chancery every day, from citizens all over the country, publicizing abuses. These letters prove that people have faith in our Party, but they also show that our comrades who had the job of [Party] secretary and responsible positions in the state apparatus are not doing their duty, because abuses were going on right in front of them. . . . When hundreds of thousands of people were drawn into responsible positions in the state apparatus and the Party, it might have happened that some are elements whose past inclines them to commit such illegalities. But the problem is even more serious when comrades with responsibility in the Party organization directly or indirectly support these illegalities.⁵

The first round of such abuses began when collectivization "czar" Ana Pauker left for several months in Moscow in 1950 and her temporary replacement decided to press hard for the

⁴ For instance: "Any kind of method of constraint or of economic or administrative pressure to induce working peasants to enter the GAC will be decisively combated. Those who consciously or unconsciously practice such methods, without respect to the function they occupy, will be severely sanctioned; if they are Party members, up to expulsion from the Party, and whether Party members or not, [să se nu clea dupa cay??], to organs of the state to be brought to justice." Ck ref DJAN Maramureș, Fond Sfătuț Raional Vișeu, Secția Agricolă, d.13/1953: 117.

⁵ ANIC, fond CC al PCR, Cancelarie, d.56/1950: 9. Document courtesy of O. Roske.

formation of many more GACs [collective farms]. The abuses continued in waves right through 1962, when the campaign was declared complete—and even after it. Top Party leaders repeatedly raised in their meetings the matter of abuses by cadres, some protesting that the Party “does not teach us to form GACs with a club” and that if the directives of the government are distorted, honest people will not want leadership positions in villages because they will be attacked. “The People’s Council is being transformed into a police force,” objected one member of the Secretariat.⁶

Although we know that sometimes their discussions had as much to do with factional infighting as with actual issues, it is scarcely likely that there was no real content to an instruction given to newly trained cadres being sent out to do their work:

Let us be clear, that the state apparatus is not intended to be used as it has often been used by us, even drawing up lists with them, writing minutes with the chief of police in which the chief prosecutor obligates himself that the wealth of 15 chiaburi, whether guilty or not, will be confiscated. As you leave now for your new jobs, with greater responsibility, you will take measures, and we are confident that . . . you will liquidate these failings.”⁷

Discussions at the highest level blamed the problems with collectivization in 1950 on a lack of adequate planning at the top and persistent violations of orders by lower-level cadres. Their careerism was seen as the primary problem. If the center ordered the counties to work according to a plan, cadres soon acted as if fulfilling the plan were more important than keeping to the Party line or using correct methods. “In chasing after fulfilling the plan all manner of grave aberrations were committed” (ibid.).

What role higher Party officials may have played in encouraging this violence, or at least turning a blind eye to it, is uncertain. From stenograms of a 1950 meeting of the Party Secretariat we learn that Party First Secretary Gheorghiu-Dej expressed indignation at the extreme use of force—the deportations, shootings, and torture—seeing it as a deviation from the Party line and accusing the Agriculture Minister of having ordered these methods, for they were used all over the country and must therefore have started at the center.⁸ Levy, however, in discussing these excesses, argues that in all likelihood Gheorghiu-Dej himself had ordered them, for he took no measures against those who had perpetrated the abuses and even promoted them

⁶ Ibid., p 14.

⁷ Ibid., p. 22.

to better jobs. As soon as he ousted Pauker in 1952, the same methods reappeared. Again, during the final push, he lambasted local officials for coercing the peasants in 1961, but he then did nothing to temper their actions (Levy 2001: 111).

On the basis of our research team's documents and interviews, I find this argument incomplete. Although very possibly the Party center (perhaps under Soviet pressure) did order the application of force, there is good evidence that the response exceeded central intention and that the center had difficulty reining it in. Across the entire period, policy oscillated between centralization and decentralization: when Party leaders wanted to control the process, they tried to centralize it, inevitably slowing the pace; when they wanted to increase the pace, they had to decentralize. This, in turn, led to their losing control of their cadres and to local abuses of power, as cadres competed with one another to sign up more villagers.

Following the first major decentralization in 1950, an opponent of the policy expressed his fear that the local Party secretaries, "in their desire to fulfill the plan, [would] start coercing people," for which reason the center should maintain control over the process (Levy 2001: 125). Levy himself writes that after the leadership informed county secretaries in 1950 that they could confiscate the property of one or two wealthy peasants [chiaburs] in each village, so as to encourage others to join the GACs, confiscations of chiabur property "soon commenced throughout the country, but they quickly surpassed the central authorities' established parameters" (ibid., 121-22). Similarly, in that year the First Secretary of Constanța County described his own experience with cadres exceeding their mandate when he was working as a Central Committee instructor:

I myself, inadequately prepared, went into the village and took measures for the expulsion of chiaburs. After this, anarchic actions were begun all over the county, and it was not easy to stop them. . . . In five or six cases chiaburs were expelled beyond the letter of the law. It was necessary for us to call in the Party secretaries just to deal with this.⁹

In a report to the Central Committee's Organizational Bureau in 1950, Pauker noted,

At the beginning of summer, many county committees were working directly at the local level to establish collectives, going around the district committees. When it was underscored that district committees must be instructed to do this, some county committees relaxed their control over the work below, and after that we

⁸ ANIC, fond CC al PCR, Cancelarie, d.59/1950: 7-8. Document courtesy of O. Roske.

⁹ ANIC, fond CC al PCR, Cancelarie, d.56/1950: 4-5.

had the majority of the aberrations.¹⁰

From these and other examples, it seems appropriate to conclude, as does Márton in his discussion of events in the Mureş region in 1950-51, "Power is not in control" (2005: 66).

In all likelihood, there was a process of reciprocal learning going on at all levels of the hierarchy. The center would give an order, lower-level cadres would try to figure out how to implement it in ways that might also build their own careers over those of other cadres, sometimes outstripping central intent in the process; peasants would resist and cadres would have to accommodate, creating solutions the Party leadership would have to take into account. MacLean (2007) suggests precisely this dynamic in his analysis of lower-level cadres in Vietnam during the 1950s. More moderate policies at the center produced increased abusiveness in the countryside, leading the center to attempt to curb the violence that ensued. Then, responding to central directives that were impossible for local conditions, lower-level cadres devised solutions that effectively convinced higher authorities to change their policies. I see this analysis as appropriate for Romania as well.

Aside from inadequate control by the center, what might contribute to the level of violence activists displayed? Although it certainly did not reach the extremes seen in Soviet collectivization, there is ample evidence of force—and of corresponding resistance.¹¹ One reason may be the relative dearth of well-prepared cadres: because there were few committed activists convinced of communist ideas and capable of effective verbal persuasion, many cadres would have trouble persuading and might therefore turn to force, especially if they had career ambitions. This then aroused peasant resistance, which in turn required more force, in an escalating spiral (see also Viola 1996). Another reason was the wholly uncertain environment in which cadres worked, characterized by purges and constant reversals of policy from week to week as Party leaders argued over the best options.

For ambitious cadres this environment would create a tension between a wait-and-see attitude and short-term calculations of advantage. Perhaps those choosing the latter were those having black marks in their files that they hoped to overcome by demonstrations of revolutionary fervor—people from social categories unlikely to be accepted into the Party, cadres who had

¹⁰ ANIC, fond CC al PCR, Cancelarie, d.59/1950: 80.

already been criticized for poor performance, or former legionaries. In one case, a school principal from the Mureș region was over-zealous in expelling the children of chiaburi because he wanted to join the Party (difficult for intellectuals as compared with workers) (Kristó 1999: 32). In another, one of the two activists most savage in beating up peasants in Pechea village (Galați) had been criticized in a report of the local Party organization for not taking an active enough role in collectivizing the commune (Șandru 2003: 16).

Careerism was a frequent motive for exceeding Party guidelines in hopes of making an impression. Whenever the pace of collectivizing picked up, Party leaders made it clear that they wanted results and that the ends justified the means. They fostered competitions among settlements, communes, districts, and regions to see which could produce the most new GACs; they promoted those with the best results, regardless of the methods used. In this climate, when policy emphasized speed yet peasants refused to join, force was inevitable even without orders from above.

Beyond this, however, I suspect that behind some of the excesses were rituals of male competition and male bonding—an underappreciated aspect of Party-building. Just as anthropologists have found that male violence against women is a product not of the male-female relationship but of competition among males (Collier and Rosaldo 1981, Smuts 1992), so the exercise of violence against the peasantry may have served as a vehicle for cadres to outdo one another in making their careers—or to form bonds with one another by participating in violence together.¹²

Given the undeniable relationship between excessive force and peasant resistance to collectivization, why were these excesses not more effectively curbed?—a question I posed above as well. Did the center permit cadres' abuse of power, or was it simply unable to keep them under control? The fact that many abuses went unsanctioned (a source of constant complaint in the documents) can be explained in several ways: the leadership liked the results so it did not punish the perpetrators; it could not control the abuses or apply effective sanctions (perhaps because those who would do that were themselves regional and district cadres in the

¹¹ Some of it assuredly came not from the Party cadres charged with collectivizing but from the police and Securitate troops. That is, we may be seeing here a conflict between the Romanian Party leaders and the repressive apparatus, directly controlled by the Soviet Union.

¹² We thank Carol Worthman for suggesting this idea. An alternative interpretation is that violence may also have increased solidarity among cadres who perpetrated it against others.

same networks as the abusers); or everyone was simply too busy, as in one report concerning the lapses of the agricultural agent, comrade R., in Turdaş, “who is in relations with chiaburs and sharecroppers their land [For] all these manifestations stipulated above, until now not a single measure has been taken on the part of the Bureau of the Party Committee because too much work has piled up. . . .”¹³

An additional set of reasons, I argue now, comes from important features of the Party-state's operation: persistent shortages of cadre labor. In the early 1950s the single most labor-intensive activity in this heavily rural economy was the work of cadres involved in collectivization. Later, it would be factory workers and (later still) collective farmers who were in short supply, but initially it was cadres. Two things contributed to this result. First were the problems already discussed concerning the inadequate levels of preparation, the Party's small numbers, and the strategic compromises and consequent fears of "enemy infiltration" that led to purges. These produced absolute shortages of cadres. The second was the Party's voracious conception of its tasks, which produced relative shortages. Both gave lower cadres a structural advantage and may have disinclined the top leadership to exercise sanctions against those who exceeded their authority—even though the excesses were to compromise the Party's legitimacy with the population. I turn now to the Party's voracious self-conception to illustrate this possibility.

The Voracious Apparatus

The effort to understand politics in Soviet-type systems exercised many scholars in the period before 1989. Much of this work conceptualized power as the capacity to make and enforce policy, localized at the political center and flowing down from the top; thus, lower levels in the political hierarchy were primarily the executors of policies from above. Even after the totalitarian model of politics lost its hegemony, that conception remained. As Hungarian sociologists Horváth and Szakolczai contend in their fascinating study of mid-level cadres in Hungary, however, this view neglects the specificity of the actions of the communist apparatus: its attempt to penetrate daily life more fully than any modern regime hitherto, its essentially mobilizational character, and its reliance on cadres' personal networks at all levels (1992: 10).

We obscure these features, the authors suggest, if we see power in these societies as

¹³ DJAN HD F16/93/1951: 116.

emanating from the top.

[T]he type of power exercised under communism . . . resurrect[ed] the Greek concept of power as *arkhé*, as initiative, as opposed to the idea that power is simply rule or position. The consequence was that bolshevism tried to influence and supervise all decisions, all movements, all initiatives. . . . It tried at once to destroy and then to replace, stimulate and instigate all activities, 'activity' itself (1992: 216; emphasis added).

The Party must be everywhere for things to work as they should: "The carrying out of these all-encompassing tasks . . . required the constant presence of a regular apparatus, the formation of a 'standing army' whose basic task was to help and teach the population in matters of daily life in times of peace" (*ibid.*, p. 80). Because this "helping" attitude gradually usurped initiative and discouraged many people from being able to lead their own lives, express their views, or discuss public interests, activists would need to intervene even more and do more work to mobilize the population they had infantilized (pp. 50-55). Eventually cadres would find themselves enmeshed in a plethora of activities they should not have to do, but the need to intervene in everything had become completely embedded in their outlook (p. 58). In short, Communist Party rule created a huge bureaucratic edifice that micromanaged daily life, with no sense of the limits to its intrusions. This is what I mean by a "voracious apparatus."

Although the authors developed this description for the 1980s, their analysis sets me to thinking about the work of earlier cadres as well. Already in the 1950s, documents reveal the Party's comprehensive intentions, which produced what Horváth and Szokolczai regard as one of its quintessential traits: its ubiquity. Seeing themselves as agents of the Party's historical mission, cadres justified maximizing the power they could appropriate on behalf of the apparatus. That mission—to fulfill human happiness by satisfying all social needs—so broadened the sphere of politics as to make it omnipresent, permeating more and more of everyday life (see also Rév 1987). Given cadres' all-embracing interests, there was constant supervision, intervention, and control aimed at maintaining battle-readiness and internalizing constant attention and vigilance (Horváth and Szokolczai 1992: 60, 73-77; Oláh 2003: 52).

But here we run up against a major difficulty in the East European context: How was this boundless ambition to be realized with a Party membership that was, especially at the outset, unreliable and mostly untrained, an inevitable result of the Party's having had little support in most of these countries before the Red Army imposed it? The problem was particularly acute in

Romania, with its tiny Party, its insignificant urban proletariat, and its huge peasantry—a combination wholly unpropitious for building a Communist apparatus. The influx from fascist organizations and others with compromised pasts created new problems, and the subsequent verification that nearly halved the numbers of Party members further magnified the crisis in the number and quality of cadres.

From early stenograms of Central Committee, Secretariat, and Politburo meetings we see clearly the center's preoccupation with this issue. For example, a May 24, 1950 meeting of the Central Committee's Organizational Bureau contained the following exchange. Ana Pauker began by observing that to create socialist agricultural forms would require great effort, owing to the lack of cadres. She asked another participant whether they could get 350 people, and he replied, "We do indeed have a lack of cadres," stating his plan to send some workers to school for this purpose. In her report for the meeting, Pauker underscored the necessity of cleansing local organs of the enemies of socialist agriculture and intensifying the training of personnel.¹⁴ Five years later, at the 1955 Party Congress, Gheorghiu-Dej observed that the Party had 595,363 members and only 100,000 "activi," or full-time cadres (Tănase 1998: 116).

The theme of a crisis of cadres appeared in many of our documents and interviews. In a discussion of cadres from Orăștie district (Hunedoara), a former Party activist from Geoagiu commune commented, "There was a crisis of cadres then. It was after the war. Few people were going to school, others had dropped out. It was quite a situation! That's why there weren't any teachers either—the Party sucked them up. Most of the teachers were substitutes. There was a lack of cadres."¹⁵ Similarly, an agronomist from Ieud (Maramureș) who had worked on collectivization for the State Planning Commission in the early 1950s observed, concerning technical agricultural specialists, "There were few. . . . They had four primary grades and then four grades of middle-school in agriculture. And the regime made use of these imperfect cadres to begin collectivization."¹⁶ An activity report from the Orăștie district to its regional Party committee in June 1955 wrote of good and bad cadres, commenting, "One is a drunkard but we can't change him because we have no alternative."¹⁷ In a 1959 document listing all the top

¹⁴ ANIC, fond CC al PCR, Cancelarie, d.38/1950: 16-17, 32-33. Document courtesy of O. Roske.

¹⁵ I.H., female, of poor-peasant origin, born ca. 1930. Interviewed by Verdery, Geoagiu.

¹⁶ D.H., male, agronomist who worked for the State Planning Commission for 3 ½ years in the early 1950's as head of the Sector for Collectivization. Interviewed by Kligman, Ieud.

¹⁷ DJAN HD, Fond MIFASD, D7/1953 [sic]: 5. The document is dated 25 vi 55.

positions (nomenclatura) in the Hunedoara regional Party apparatus, the first items recorded were “Number of cadres needed” and “Actual number of cadres”—the former larger than the latter (378 vs. 349).¹⁸

From other documents we learn that the Party relied heavily on agitators who were not Party members—clear evidence of both a recruitment problem and ideologically uncommitted activists. For example, an April 1951 monthly report on the number of agitators for Orăștie district by kind of unit (state enterprise, state or collective farm, institution, village, commune, etc.) showed that in almost all categories there were more agitators who were not Party members than who were (see table 1).

**Table 1. Party and Non-Party Members among Agitators
Concerning the Situation of Agitators**

	Number of Agitators in the District			Number with Party/ Agitation Training
	Party Members	Non Party Members	Total	
In Enterprises	219	146	365	331
In Institutions	82	105	187	108
In Machinery Parks	5	20	25	25
In State Farms	2	16	18	18
In Collective Farms	17	51	68	60
In Villages	352	396	746	364
In Neighborhoods	35	10	45	35
TOTALS:	712	742	1454	941 (65%)

Source: DJAN HD F16/200/1951: 69.

Table 1 also shows that in the villages, not only were more than half of the agitators not Party members; more than half had had no training for their work. An earlier report indicated that the problem was one not just of numbers of agitators but of their diligence: two right-hand columns show "number of agitators who work" (79%) and "number who work less" (12%).¹⁹

¹⁸ DJAN Deva F16/39/1959: pp. 8-12. I suspect that the gap between the two figures would increase as one went down the hierarchy, for it is likely that the nomenclatura positions would be filled sooner than those below.

¹⁹ DJAN HD F16/200/1951: 60.

The crisis of cadres perdured. In a 1958 report on the numbers of cadres in villages of the Hunedoara region, one heading reads "How many of the total number of cadres are not Party members": 20,594, of which 11,182 (54%) were in agriculture.²⁰ Two years earlier a report for that same region showed how long it would take for each district to reach the Party leaders' goal of being 65% collectivized if the present rhythm were sustained. The figures ranged from Sebeș district—27 years—to Brad district—152 years. (This brings to mind the 1980s joke, "We will make the 5-year plan in 4 ½ years even if it takes us a decade.") The report gives the total number of the region's activists as 1,016.²¹ We gain an idea of the shortfall this represents from statistics reported by (smaller) Maramureș region in 1962, as collectivization was driven to the finish: over 26,000 cadres were used to complete the job there, and the region was even then instructing over 10,000 new cadres for the task.²²

One obvious effect of these shortages was that a significant amount of work might go undone or be performed inadequately, as we see from documents in the Hunedoara Party archives. In 1954, a peasant from Dâncu Mare village wrote to his district Agrarian Section to complain that cadres were manipulating the amount of land he was supposed to have, with the result that he could not keep up with the taxes assessed on him. To this complaint—and similar ones as well—the district replied, "As soon as we have time we will send a technician to measure your entire surface area. Until then we will keep your petition in our files."²³ (There was no indication that the case was revisited).

The reasons for "not having time" were amply evident: Orăștie district had 105 villages and 13,752 peasant households, many of which might be wanting a cadastral technician to come and measure their land, but the People's Council had only two such technicians. A similar sense of work overload comes from a file labeled "Reports and situations on the resolution of letters of working people."²⁴ There we find reports about the importance of answering citizens' letters, with statistics on the number of letters received, how many had been resolved within the required

²⁰ DJAN HD F16/83/1958:? p. 128.

²¹ DJAN HD F16/2106/1956: 29-30.

²² Sources: Dobeș et al. 2004: 55-56; DJAN Maramureș, Fond Comitetul Regional PCR Maramureș, d.42/1962/M: 16.

²³ DJAN HD, Fond Sfat Popular al Raionului Orăștie, d.134/1954: 405.

²⁴ DJAN HD, F16/16/1959. Informări și situații cu rezolvarea scrisorilor oamenilor muncii. 1 i - 8 vi 59, 34 pp. The file is dated 1959 but contains documents from 1952-53 as well.

time limits, and so on. One from 1953 shows that of a total of 1,404 letters received to date, only 596 (42%) had been resolved.²⁵ Overall, documents in the district or regional archives reveal a sense of great urgency alongside massive delays, as work is needed that is not being done.

The effects of a shortage of cadres could range from mere inconvenience and unanswered letters to substantial delays in collectivizing villages, as we see from reports of how the government coped with emergencies—such as mass withdrawals of peasants from GACs. One such report concerns an event in 1957 involving three villages in Hunedoara region, where nearly everyone withdrew from the collective farms and retrieved their inventory; the report concludes that these events “obstructed the rhythm of the socialist transformation of agriculture because so many Party and state activists had to be concentrated in these communes who could otherwise have worked effectively for society.”²⁶

László Márton (2005: 55-56) describes the response to a similar event of much wider amplitude, as people withdrew from GACs across the entire Mureș region in 1951. According to the severity of the situation, varying numbers of cadres of varying importance were sent for varying lengths of time into each settlement. The entire apparatus of the Party, the People’s Councils, and district and regional activists was mobilized, even including the Minister of Agriculture and members of the Central Committee. Márton concludes, “[T]he resistance in autumn 1950-1951, by requiring the concentration of a large number of activists, saved many localities from collectivization, even if only briefly” (p. 66).

Not only was there a relative (i.e., socially created) shortage of cadre labor: it was aggravated by infrastructural inadequacies that affected cadres' work. When Romania had become a single unified kingdom following World War I, the transportation network was improved primarily by linking all parts of the country with Bucharest; out in the countryside, however, it could be very difficult to get from peripheral communes or districts to the district or regional centers. The problems of traveling these distances may be one reason why cadres sent out into the field sometimes preferred not to go. In interviews, villagers in Reviga commune, for instance, claimed that because the settlement was 15 km. from the nearest railway, higher-level cadres were not eager to travel there (Chelcea 2003: 2).

Moreover, cadres had to write weekly reports on matters often so sensitive that it is

²⁵ Ibid., p. 20.

²⁶ DJAN HD F16/2426/1957: 44.

doubtful they were sent through the mail; more likely, a lower-level unit sent these documents by courier, over miserable roads or with prolonged train rides. The archives contain numerous and often lengthy telegrams sent, for example, by the Securitate in the countryside to Bucharest, possibly indicating problems with mail service. As for the telephone infrastructure, it was totally inadequate for conducting much Party business. These kinds of problems involving the communication and transportation infrastructure worsened the labor shortage, for if it took one person the better part of a day to go to his assigned village and back, he could not do any other tasks.

In making these observations concerning the Party's "voracious" conception of its work, inadequately supported by infrastructure and by the numbers and preparation of its cadres, I aim to offer a structural argument that might contribute to explaining why local cadres could so regularly abuse their power. With its overweening ambition to penetrate and transform all aspects of daily life, the Party set up a relative shortage of labor in the apparatus. At the level of cadres doing most of the work of forming collectives (in the districts, communes, and villages), insufficient numbers and the poor quality of lower-level activists gave them a structural advantage. The center could not afford to get rid of every cadre who was criticized for abuses or there would be even fewer to carry out the work; it therefore had to put up with a fair amount of improper behavior by those at lower levels. This was the more so after the verification of Party members that reduced the Party's size in 1952 to half its 1948 numbers. With all these pressures, then, the Party's hunger for constant activity led lower-level cadres—especially those with questionable pasts—to operate within a zone of at least partial impunity. If all the petty misdemeanors they engaged in were to be punished by expulsion from the Party or removal from their posts, there would be even fewer cadres to implement the leadership's ambitious agenda.

If it is that the shortage of cadres forced Party leaders to accept certain levels of violence, then why were cadres competing with one another by displaying such excessive zeal? A labor shortage should reduce competition for positions, of which there would be more than enough to go around. Perhaps so, but a structural situation of labor shortage does not mean that actors perceive it as such. Instead, I believe cadres saw their situations as precarious. To become a Party activist was to cross a line from which there was no going back: especially in these early years, one could not spend time as an activist and then return quietly to one's former life, for Party activism had become stigmatized in the resistant wider society. The Party had divided the

social world into a variety of opposing camps—chiaburi and other peasants, exploiters and exploited, the pure (Party members) and the impure (those outside the Party), the priesthood and the wayward flock that must somehow be converted.

Becoming a Party member, and even more so becoming an activist, placed a person definitively in one group, within which he would have to make his career by competing with other cadres.²⁷ Crucial in this competition was constant surveillance of cadres and their anxiety about denunciations from both citizens and other Party members. In such conditions, anyone with good success in getting peasants into the GACs might be cushioned against negative reports or sanctions. And the dangers of one's job put a heavy premium on developing protective networks—by co-participating in the use of force, by stealing from collectives to give to other cadres, and by achieving results that might win patrons higher up whose success depended on one's own.

Inside and Outside Cadres

I have been describing the forces that encouraged lower-level cadres to abuse their positions of authority and exercise force against recalcitrant villagers. Were there any constraints on this behavior? Or, to put the question another way, on what sorts of cadres do we see constraints at work?

With this, I turn to the more human face of cadres' jobs, the kinds of things that might militate against their losing their heads and tormenting the villagers without mercy. To facilitate the discussion I distinguish two kinds of cadre: "inside" and "outside." "Inside" cadres were those who lived in the settlement in which they were working—thus, the officers of most collective farms and the village Party members who had become involved in agitation/persuasion or other Party work among their fellow villagers or townsmen. "Outside" cadres were those who came into settlements other than their own (usually from the district or regional levels), where they had few or no connections.

Successful collectivization required both kinds. The difference is not absolute, for an activist could come from outside yet have a social connection to one or more locals, but I will treat them as contrasting ideal types. A crucial difference between them was the degree of their social embeddedness and the likelihood that this might influence their work. On the one hand,

outside cadres were unable to work well because they knew too little about local social relations. On the other hand, local ones knew about social relations but could not work well because they were too deeply embedded in them. In addition, “inside” cadres had trouble gaining authority in their own communes and villages, whereas “outside” cadres had greater authority—and were more likely to abuse it.

The distinction between those working in the villages and those from outside was routine in our interviews. A number of our respondents believed that the harshest measures came from intermediate-level outside activists—particularly those from the regions and districts. In an interview, the mayor of one commune disavowed the methods of activists who came from outside, and the GAC president of a neighboring one observed, “The teams had no idea how to talk with people; they leapt on them and beat them, so people hid wherever they could, but the teams came after them with the police. The [outside] activists did great harm; they beat people with clubs. And I said in a district Party meeting: I’m going to collectivize, but without activists who will do harm!” (Stoica 2003: 22-23).

One reason that outside cadres were especially likely to commit abuses was that inside ones were entangled in social relationships with their co-villagers as well as in local identities. The most obvious entanglements were from kinship and friendship relations: no inside activist would beat or torment his neighbors and kin; more likely, he would help them. But one’s broader status as a community member also constrained one’s actions. An activist from Poiana Mare commune (Sibiu), when the local head of the police asked her to help identify exploiters and take away their property, described why she refused:

He wanted to take me to about 20 houses, but I didn’t want to go. I didn’t need to be beaten up by their sons. “What are you thinking, sir?” I said to him. “You’ll stay a year, or two, or five, and then you’ll leave.” Because that’s their job; they don’t leave them here. “But I stay here.” My mother [was blind] and I had to stay with her. So I said to him, “I’m not going to unlock the gate at anyone’s house.” (Stewart and Stan 2003: 28).

Although there were of course exceptions, in general these local relationships and roles tempered the amount of abusive behavior inside cadres could permit themselves.

Insiders drawn into persuasion work or other Party functions were also weighed down by their previous status positions. Here is one from Jurilovca commune (Dobrogea):

²⁷ I owe a debt to Carol Worthman for these points.

These pushy types would come in, and they'd take some of us local people—I was a state employee—to go with them and say who lived where and to represent the village in their presence. (Interviewer: Did you talk [with villagers] as well?) Nooooo!!! The others did it!!! How would I know what to say?! What did I know! Did I have the courage to talk with people? Why would they listen to me? What?! Didn't people know who I was? I should be persuading someone with land, when I, my parents, didn't have any, and no ancestor of ours had any connection with land? I should be the one to say, "Hey, join the collective," stuff like that?! How could I know if it would work or not? (Iordachi 2003: 57).²⁸

Because many cadres came from humble backgrounds, like this man, they lacked the authority to persuade their "betters." If for some reason they ceased to hold office and remained in the village, they were socially marginalized without exception (Bodó 2003: 63).

"Inside" identities constrained in other ways, as we see in Lățea's discussion of the nuances of local social relations involving cadres. Activists who were primarily locals were susceptible to being drawn into village norms of polite behavior. Once, the mayor of Dobrosloveni commune (Craiova) came to persuade a certain I.B., who decided to use hospitality to constrain the mayor's zeal, reminding him that he was a local first and mayor only second:

One evening the mayor came, sometime in 1958-59.

"Hey, B., how about you, won't you join the collective?"

"Oh, come on! Damn it all, have you come here with this nonsense? No, you're coming so we can drink some wine!"

Together with the secretary, there were three of them. I killed a chicken, my wife began cooking it up, time passed, it was ready I put the wine on the table, we ate the roast, and then he says:

"So come on, what do you say? Join the collective, or these people will throw me out of the mayor's office!"

"Go ahead, let them throw you out! I'm not joining the collective! I'm not joining!" (Latea 2003: 39-40).

Especially interesting here is not just I.B.'s use of hospitality to postpone persuasion, seeking to redefine the encounter as a social one, but also the mayor's signaling both the constraints on his authority from higher up the chain and his attempt to gain compliance by enlisting I.B. in preserving his job; he too needed to maintain his family like everyone else. After 1957, as the drive to collectivize Dobrosloveni heated up, more activists came in from outside the locality, "about whom it was thought that they would be harder to co-opt into the local canons of

²⁸ V.Z., male, b. 1933, landless fisherman who became tractorist, later president of the collective farm (1970-1980). Interviewed by Iordachi, Jurilovca.

reciprocity” (ibid., 36).

For all these reasons, the Party had very explicit cadre policies that aimed to reduce their social embeddedness and enhance the likelihood that they would do their jobs. Not using insiders alone was general policy, especially for collections and for persuasion work (as opposed to running the GACs), in which insiders were suspected of holding with the villagers. District officials followed new cadres closely, expecting them not to become too familiar with locals (Oláh 2003: 48). They saw such personal relations as an obstacle to efficient Party work: activists would fail to do persuasion, would not be "combative," and might help fellow villagers; it was preferable to send in cadres from outside.

In a 1953 meeting of the executive committee in Lueta/Lövéte commune (Harghita), the district delegate criticized the president with these words:

We ask comrade president to change his behavior and to give his attention first of all to the Party's directives, to implement them rather than trying to gain the people's sympathy. . . . His task is to guide the commune politically, not to seek people's trust. He must do his duty in accordance with the interests of the working class (ibid., p. 49).²⁹

Thus, the aim of the political elite was to create an apparatus of cadres fairly immune to appeals from the surrounding society. A good cadre was expected to break his normal social ties in order to be effective and not try to be popular with those whose lives he was disrupting.

Besides sending cadres into locations other than their native places, the Party also moved them around. Respondents saw this policy, too, as designed to keep activists from becoming friendly with villagers. Another motive, however, may have been to prevent their colluding with other local officials so as to protect their families and friends: groups of inside cadres who worked well together and seemed reliable might actually be conspiring to send up false information, to shield their intimates, and falsely accusing others based on personal grudges. To prevent the emergence of such collusive networks required not leaving anyone in place for a long time.

The policy of rotating cadres had a number of negative effects, including diminished efficiency in some aspects of their work. One Maramureş activist observed, “Now, you know that when you go to a new place of work, you need a period of accommodation, to study the

²⁹ DJAN Harghita F164/5/1952: 115.

program of activity, what you have to do and how... it's not such an easy thing.”³⁰ His comment points up yet another way in which Party policies heightened the artificial scarcity of good cadres. Paradoxically, rotating cadres from place to place made them rely more heavily on local villagers for knowledge they lacked and inadvertently embroiled them in local conflicts they understood too little to avoid. Finally, moving cadres around led to weakened morale from the constant uprooting. I believe that cadres felt the costs of this policy, and that we find some evidence in one other object of the Party's surveillance over them: their drinking habits.

Drinking Together

In the interviews and documents produced by our project's team members, the moral lapse that appeared most often was excessive drinking. Concern with it is evident in reports from the Central Committee on down through regional, district, and commune Party committees, as well as GAC councils; villagers' predominant image of cadres, too, paints them as drunks and low-lives.

A report from Maramureș County in 1948, for instance, notes that the financial administration is very weak, "because all the agents and tax-collectors in our county are drunks."³¹ Multiple notes from Sânnicolau Mare district (Arad) describe cases of theft, fraud, and drunkenness by cadres in Tomnatic village (Timiș; see Vultur 2003: 47). Discussions in Central Committee meetings point to serious problems with drunken cadres, who should be removed.³² And in Beriu village (Hunedoara), according to a report, the GAC president was very good but had the vice of drink, leaving work to go look for alcohol; he could not be changed because there was no one else to do the job.³³

Villagers too recall excessive drinking as a characteristic of cadres. A respondent from Geoagiu commune (Hunedoara) recalled an activist who, in response to criticism of his drinking, replied, "Comrade boss, there is no bed in your house as soft as the one in my stomach for brandy."³⁴ After peasants in Reviga commune (near Bucharest) found that the new Party Secretary liked to drink, they gave him brandy so he would help them out (Chelcea 2003: 23). In Vadu Roșca (Galati), interviewees remembered the quota collector as “a pimp, a pauper, and a

³⁰ DH, data, Interviewed by Kligman, Ieud.

³¹ Com. jud PMR 43/1948: 68-69. Report by PMR jud Maramureș, 4 xii 48.

³² For example, ANIC Fond 1, d.55/1951: 31.

³³ DJAN HD Fond MISR Orăștie, dos.7: 53.

heavy drinker” (Stoica 2003: 24).

In assessing these bits of evidence, we must bear three things in mind. To begin with, drinking in Romania is a social activity: people drink with other people, rarely by themselves. Our sources show cadres who drink either with villagers (posing potential hazards to their work in collectivizing) or with other cadres. Second, for cadres competing with one another to move upward in the hierarchy, accusing other comrades of drunkenness could place a black mark in a competitor's file, even if the accusation were ill-founded. Third, many villagers interviewed after the collectives were dismantled tended to paint the entire communist period—and particularly the people who had taken their land—in very dark colors; thus, we cannot take literally their characterizations of specific people as drunkards (always a major flaw, in rural values). Nonetheless, the frequency of complaints about drinking, especially in the documents, makes me believe that it did indeed occur. Why was it so serious a problem as to preoccupy so many officials, and what may have caused it?

For one thing, drinking might indicate a flaw of character and thus a potentially unreliable Party worker, so such habits had to be followed closely. For another, as I just indicated, a man with a weakness for drink was more likely to be open to bribes with alcohol that might affect his duties: collectors might take less than the full requisitions quotas, activists might abandon persuasion and recruit fewer collectivists, functionaries might help chiaburs escape into the middle peasantry, secretaries might give a worker extra work-points, and so on.

A report from Romos commune (Hunedoara) in 1953 complained:

The secretary of the People's Council in Romos does not measure up to the politics and tasks of Popular Democracy in our country, he has close relatives who are chiaburi and supports the indignities they perpetrate and purposely tries to attract the new president into them. On 17 iii 1953 the president and secretary of the Romos People's Council drank all night with the chiabur T.A. from Romoșel, being provided with drink by the chiabur M.N. Between 12-14 iii 1953 [they] went to Vaidei village and drank and ate at a chiabur's place, promising him they will get his milk quota forgiven if he petitions for it.³⁵

In short, drunks were corruptible, and the Party was right to worry about that.

As for the cadres themselves, there are several possible reasons why they might have been inclined to drink. To begin with, the lives of Party activists were extremely stressful: every day

³⁴ G.Z., middle peasant and petty functionary in the GAC. Interviewed by Verdery, Geoagiu.

³⁵ DJAN HD, F16/888/1953: 67.

they faced angry peasants who hated what they were doing, might gang up on them, and might even try to kill them. After a harrowing day's work they may well have needed a stiff drink. Then, some drank because they liked to, others (particularly those with local ties) drank because they disliked what they were being asked to do to their neighbors, kin, and friends: for many, having to exercise force went against their character.

Some drank because it was free—villagers always offered it, presumably to soften them up—and because norms of hospitality compelled anyone subject to those norms (again, especially the "insiders") to accept. That villagers offered them drink is utterly in keeping with peasant norms and strategies, and it puts a slightly different spin on their recollections of cadres as drunks.³⁶ An additional reason for drinking might be that by going to the pub and demanding that people there buy them drinks, as many respondents recalled, cadres were seeking to shore up their authority—minuscule in the eyes of most villagers—by performing it. There were few occasions when a Communist could publicly subject someone to his will in a fairly innocuous way—by demanding a drink (in breach of local norms of hospitality)—thus habituating villagers to the idea that cadres gave orders and others had to follow them. Such performances might also be for the benefit of other activists, in masculine competitive displays of prepotency.

In view of my discussion of the Party's cadre policies, I suggest one more reason for drinking. Those sent in from outside, or rotated frequently from one place to another, drank because this was a way of creating social ties with other activists and thereby reducing the strains and isolation of the work. When they first joined the Party they had few connections with other cadres; any given village would have few Party members, and those in the larger towns did not necessarily know one another, for the Party's small size meant that solidarity among cadres had not developed through years of struggle together. These were people whose primary connections were kin and neighbors, from whom their Party work might now estrange them. For companionship and relaxation, they would have to rely on other cadres. Moreover, they were rapidly discovering how important networks could be to keeping and advancing in their jobs, and drinking helped to build up those networks.

Cadres drank together, then—and documents make it clear that they did drink together, not

³⁶ In research for my book on decollectivization (Verdery 2003), I encountered the same practice of officials being plied with alcohol by anyone who had a problem case.

just with ordinary villagers—because Party work demanded social ties, yet was so organized as to make these difficult. Like other people, cadres were social persons, not just persuasion machines; for Romanians, an essential ingredient of personhood is socializing together with drink. When a few cadres finished their day's work, drinking together gave them the experience of bonding that makes life bearable for Romanians (as well as for most other people in the world). If their jobs placed their old networks for socializing under threat, they would have to create new ones by drinking together. These networks among cadres were to become the central feature of Romanian socialism and would preserve links among them even after the system collapsed in 1989. Drinking, then, did not simply indicate a flaw of character: it was vital to a cadre's career.

Conclusions

This essay has presented something of the complexity of the world of the cadres upon whose shoulders collectivization rested. Their situation was rife with contradictions. Surveillance exercised over them was at least as pervasive as that over the rest of society. The relative shortage of trained cadres enabled them to abuse their power over peasants with impunity, yet they perceived themselves as being in a position not of advantage but of precariousness; this demanded constant preemptive action, such as by overexecuting their orders.

Against the much-touted solidarity of the Party were policies isolating cadres from each other and from those they were to collectivize. Expected to give their all to the Party, they too were human and needed sociality. More significant, in a very uncertain environment, they needed to watch their backs at all times and to develop powerful networks of others who would help them do so. Thus were formed the careerism, insubordination, network-embeddedness, and clientelism that were the hallmarks of Romanian communist society.

At the root of this outcome were the Party's small initial size and the magnitude of the task of collectivizing a primarily agrarian country. As a result, Party leaders drew in as many people as they could find, including people whose pasts made them totally unsuitable for the work. Concerns over what these people might in fact be doing—concerns, that is, that early membership policy had empowered "the enemy," who would have to be purged—generated verifications of members and cadres, as well as permanent surveillance, especially by the Securitate. This contributed to difficulties in finding and keeping good cadres.

Aggravating the problem was the Party's voracious self-conception that made every aspect

of life fair game for interference, and the structural advantage cadres thereby gained because there were never enough good ones to do all the work. At the same time, surveillance and inconsistent policy created an environment in which cadres never knew what to expect, and this fostered competition and rivalry for career success. Therefore, the Party leadership repeatedly lost control of what was going on in the countryside and was unable to curb the abuses of cadres lower down—which, in turn, increased peasant resistance and necessitated ever more force. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that Romania's collectivization was accomplished only through exercising considerable violence.

In 1991, Romania passed a law returning the land in collective farms to the former owners. Over the next fifteen years, “local cadres” executed that law in much the same way as had their predecessors in the 1950s: abusing their positions of power with impunity, because the magnitude of the task made it too great to be effectively controlled from the center. This time, the abuses did not consist of physical violence, but that did not make them any less consequential: the stakes this time were the repossession of the means of livelihood, which somehow ended up disproportionately in the hands of local politicians rather than of the people who were supposed to receive them. Although many commentators saw in this a hidden directive from the country’s crypto-communist leaders, our research on collectivization makes us think otherwise. As with collectivization before, the central authority was compromised by the necessity of decentralizing the enormous task of decollectivizing, creating a power balance that favored local officials, giving the new commune elites the edge and enabling them to execute central directives in furtherance of their own careers.

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