

VISEGRAD SCHOLARSHIP AT THE OPEN SOCIETY ARCHIVES

FINAL REPORT

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Research project: Social movements as transnational constructs: Hungarian environmental and Romanian workers' mobilizations in the Records of RFE/RL Research Institute 1973-1990

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The project proposed to look at the materials of RFE/RL Research Institute on two types of social mobilizations in socialist Hungary and Romania during the period after 1973. It worked with the assumption that in different settings and through different mechanisms, both types of mobilization connected to the transformation of the world economy after the 1973 oil crisis, and subsequent changes in the modes of world economic integration in the two countries. Issues raised by movements, such as pollution in Hungary's chemical plants under export pressure and lack of hard currency, the construction of the Bős-Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros dams, as well as the brutal raise of austerity and working hours in Romania's heavy industry and energy sector, were linked to the pressures and constraints on countries' industrialization projects after 1973, and their elites' strategies in reaction to that. In movements' claims, and their political repercussions, the connection between problems of economic integration and concrete grievances are addressed in various ideological forms, uttered on the political-ideological level of national politics, and international politics across the Cold War divide. The project looked at how the materials of the RFE/RL Research Institute frame that connection, with special attention to moments where it is specifically some element of that connection (e.g. the lack of hard currency for anti-pollution technology imports) that is named and framed as politics.

1. Research question and method

The project was designed to deal with the two types of social movements as constructs in a double sense.

On the one hand, social movements themselves were considered as constructs, not only of their actors, but also of commentators with varying levels of power to define them as political facts. The scholarly study of social movements itself is permeated by the political stakes of constructing movements as social phenomena with political intentionality. Within that interplay between knowledge and power struggles, generally reflected throughout the social movements literature, the project was prepared to focus especially on a problem that could be described as that of the "locus of enunciation" within global epistemic hierarchies or the "geopolitics of knowledge" (Mignolo 2002). While within Western social movement studies, scholarly debates on the status of social movement phenomena can work as debates within a more or less set and generally accepted framework of what social order and politics are, the interpretation of non-core movements traditionally raises the deepest questions over the social and political organization of the societies involved. Social movements, instead of elements of a 'normal' society, are interpreted as signs or symptoms of presumed processes of non-core societies' historical development on the controversial path of becoming a 'normal' society. That characteristic in the understanding of non-core social movements is linked to the dynamics of broader geopolitical struggles

and hierarchies, and the hierarchies of knowledge production implied by them. In the understanding of East Central European movements, the problem of identifying “movements” as similar to, or, in the contrary, deeply specific and different from, Western examples, has been part of the long-term historical drama of semi-peripheral catch-up efforts and internal struggles about the modes of local development (Janos 2000). In the period under study, knowledge production on mobilizations in Socialist countries was part of politically loaded diagnoses and projections within the transnational relations of the Cold War and postsocialist transformation. The stakes of constructing Eastern European movements as meaningful political facts was not only a definition of what certain movements were, but also what those movements signified in terms of the general status and direction of their societies in history.

The other type of “construct” the project prepared to deal with was the RFE/RL Research Institute’s archival material itself. While preparing to investigate how the Institute, as a significant institution of Cold War knowledge production and communication, constructed the facts of mobilization as political facts, I was aware that the RFE/RL materials do not constitute a traditional archive. I expected that the status and significance of documents will be less easy to track down, and the dialogical layers within the documents will need a technique of reading different from a simple take on historical data as proof of facts.

The method I proposed to cut through the complexity of both types of “constructs” was to narrow my focus on several macroeconomic links. I took as a starting point the reorganization of both country’s world economic integration after 1973, and focused on elements of that reorganization that connect to grievances named by the two types of movements respectively. My plan was to trace direct references to such elements throughout RFE/RL subject files on topics connected to the movements, and see how these elements came to be portrayed as political facts.

The macroeconomic processes of reorganization after 1973 were conceptualized in an analytical framework inspired by world systems analysis, a tradition of social analysis which takes as its basic unit the whole scope of interdependences formed by the development of an interconnected economy. In our case, that unit is defined as the capitalist world economy, which the socialist bloc’s development efforts were internal to. In that understanding, socialism did not constitute a separate world system, but was politically and economically integrated into that bigger scope of interaction (Frank 1977). From that perspective, rather than characteristics of an autonomous system, traits of socialist economies seem to be connected to more general conditions of postwar centralized industrial development projects across the global semi-periphery: an industrialization effort based on a relative lack of capital and technology vis-à-vis the centers of the global economy; coercive resource centralization in compensation for that lack; the problem of agrarian-industrial balance; and the insurmountable problem of need for technological imports, breeding a lack of hard currency, consequent export pressure, and finally, international loans (Comisso and Tyson 1986).

In Hungary, the local constellation that gave the immediate context of the reorganization after 1973 was a bridge position between Comecon and Western countries (Vigvári 1990, Lóránt 2001, Geröcs and Pinkasz 2015). Expenses of Western technology imports were compensated by selling Soviet raw materials and oil for hard currency. With the 1973 crisis, the terms of that trade were shaken. In the grip of a growing current account deficit, Hungary resulted to a policy of inviting joint ventures and later FDI, international loans, and a decentralization of economic policy.

Romania’s breach with the Soviet Union in 1968 opened an exceptionally good access to Western technological transfers, which Romania directed to exports to Western and Southern hard currency markets, as well as to the domestic market. The 1973 oil crisis did not shake that model, as Romania could cover up for its energy needs through domestic production and technology-to-oil barter with Iraq, Iran and Libya. The second oil crisis in 1979, together with the Volcker shock on the financial markets, and the revolution in Iran put an end to the model (Ban 2014). Romania resulted to Western loans, in a

moment when the days of cheap petrodollar credits were over. By 1981, Ceaușescu needed to choose between following the Polish example, and obey lender's requests to reorganize his economy in exchange for a bailout, or push for an extremely severe plan for early payment. In an effort to retain independence, that is, power, he chose austerity and continued industrial investment.

In the case of both movements, I looked at how elements of these reorganizations which have become issues named by movements are referred to in RFE/RL materials. Table 1. illustrates some elements of the post-1973 reorganization connected to issues named by the two types of movements in the two countries.

Table 1.

	Hungary	Romania
Energy projects to compensate growing import prices	Paks, Bős-Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros dams	Domestic production – petrol, Southern barbers, coal
Loans	Accumulated from 1973 on – grows into unsustainable through the 1980's	Expensive, taken in 1981 – extreme effort to pay back
Austerity	Tamed	Extreme
Labor	Second economy Pressure tamed	Continued centralized industrial effort Extreme pressure
Lenders influence on internal politics	+	-
Dissidents' voice and influence on local movements	+	-
Export sectors for hard currency, linked to movement issues	Chemical (pollution)	Agrarian (food shortage)

2. Results and reorientation

Going through the subject files dealing with the two types of mobilizations, I found that references to elements of the economic background do fit the framework presumed in the research plan. Effects of the macroeconomic reorganizations are widely referred to, and references do indeed connect them to various ideological, moral and political stakes. However, in asking how the RFL/RL materials frame those effects as political facts, I ran into questions more dense than I presumed.

Reading through movement-related subject files, I understood that it was extremely hard to arrive to any conclusion on the significance of various portrayals of economic facts as political facts in the various pieces of documents. I also found it problematic to define any well-defined body of RFE/RL documents as a totality representative to any coherent pattern for "how" the RFE/RL would treat Hungarian or Romanian movement cases in the period. Even with the narrowed-down research focus in mind, I felt that attributing any sort of political or historical significance to frames I identified in documents would have required an extremely broad contextual knowledge on the circumstances of the production of documents, and the informational and causal loops through which documents connected to their broader historical context.

Not a specialist in the field, the scope of a further research to establish that context seemed out of reach for me. Consequently, I needed to reformulate my research expectations. Instead of coherent patterns in frames linking movements to macroeconomic facts, that could have identified as elements of the process of transnational construction of these movements, what I found were a series of dense examples, the context of which I can establish from external sources. In my own further research, such cases will be used as case studies (vignettes) in descriptions of several moments of movements linked to macroeconomic and political reorganizations. To give an insight on the types of cases that flicker through the documents, in the following I will present some observations and examples from the materials I worked with.

3. Observations and examples

a) Romania

Reading through Romanian files reflecting on labor mobilizations, the continuity of strikes registered by the subject files on Labor: Strikes, starting with 1952, was striking. That continuity, paralleled by the recurring pattern of portraying individual cases of labor unrest as a single and novel element, that stands in contradiction with the nature of Romanians as a docile peasant population, and therefore, might be the sign of a final civic awakening, is a characteristic of the construction of social movements in the country that continues after 1990.

Similarly, there is a steady pattern of major strikes settled by the arrival of a high official: after some austerity measure, workers in some key point of the import substitution industrialization effort (typically: heavy industry, mining, railway) go on strike. A high official with special connection to the plant arrives, makes promises, and blames the problems on middle levels of administration. After he leaves, the militia comes in, and repercussions begin. This pattern is noted in the literature, and its continuation is documented after 1990 (Rus 2007, Varga 2011, 2013).

With respect to Ceaușescu and the Jil Valley, I found documents referring to the same pattern from 1972, 1977, 1980, and 1981. Similar visits of Gheorghiu-Dej at CFR Grivita yard, where he started his career as a mechanic, are documented in 1952 and 1957. In 1957, workers at the Grivita yard rebelled because their basic wage was reduced for non-fulfillment of the plan. Gheorghiu-Dej appeared personally to calm the workers down,

*„ordering that they must be excused of things that are really the fault of bad organization (...) Source asked the official accompanying him why something is not done to avoid this discontentment, that is why the collective work contract is not changed. Smiling, the Rumanian official replied: 'Then Gheorghiu-Dej could not be the **'father of the railroads'** any longer, and would lose forever the popularity he enjoys now in the shops'". (Item no. 1025/57, Cases of rebellion at Grivita Rosie on payday, Labor: Strikes, 1951-1979, HU OSA 300-60-1, 424)*

A third observation on the Romanian files concerns changes in the qualifications of what counts as opposition, or a problem of the system worth mentioning. While I was not able to identify a coherent pattern in that matter, a chronological reading of the files gave a strong sense of variability – and later, chaos – growing with time, with June 1990 as a peak. On one pole of the continuum seemed to be what I termed as a 'peaceful coexistence' of 'proofs'. In such framings, strikes, peasant boycotts, student's protests, tourists' reluctance to return to the country, and various individual acts shifting between conscious dissidence and acts of despair, feature one along the other as mutually interchangeable 'proofs' of the same diagnosis on the inherently erratic nature of the system.

In relation to labor mobilizations, a typical way of reading such acts is as proofs that the socialist industrialization effort is a mistake :

„*Western diplomats believe that the **strike could be an initial symptom of the strains of forced industrialization**. Ceaușescu's stated goal is to transform Romania into a modern industrial country by the end of the century, whatever the sacrifice*” (WSH, 280211/77, 1924 Labor: Strikes, 1977, HU OSA 300-60-1)

„*În esență actuală criza se datorează nu conjuncturii ci structurii defectuase a economiei, ci faptului că agricultura, neglijată și epuizată decenii la rând, prezintă acum factura pentru lungul șir de erori savârșite în trecut.*” („*In its essence, the present crisis does not flow from the present conjunction and defect structure of the economy, but from the fact that **agriculture, unattended and exploited for decades, now presents the check for the series of mistakes committed in the past.***” FAZ, Mai 1981, Labor: Strikes, 1972-1987, HU OSA 300-60-1, 425)

Typical problems of the socialist industrial development effort, while sometimes described as analytical results of Western experts, other times are pictured as stakes of a moral stance taken by a leader:

„*Two days ago, Romanian ambassador in Ankara, Vasile Patilinet, **denying** Western reports of dissension in Romania, **admitted** the existence of some local disenchantment': recent hikes in crude oil prices by petroleum exporting countries had an adverse effect on Romanian economy, resulting in shortages of other consumer goods*” (201358/80 Vienna, aug 20., Labor: Strikes, 1972-1987, HU OSA 300-60-1, 425)

“*NARRATOR: (...) 'promisiunile făcute de Nicolae Ceaușescu s-au dovedit a fi doar vorbe fără acoperire, ca de altfel toate discursurile și promisiunile făcute în comunism. **Nici nu putea să fie altfel, de vreme ce însuși comunismul nu este decât o simplă și eternă promisiune.***” („*The promises made by Nicolae Ceaușescu proved to be empty, just like all discourses and promises made in communism. **It could not be any other way, since communism itself is but an eternal promise.***” RFE Romanian broadcasting dept, Program Domestic Bloc nr 914. July 17, 1986. Interviu cu minerul Istvan Hosszu, participat la greva min din 1977, Labor: Strikes, 1972-1987, HU OSA 300-60-1, 425)

By the time of the 1990 mineriads, the certainty in interpreting macroeconomic and mobilization facts gives way to an inflation of overlapping interpretations. Data on mobilization events, far from stable proofs of some diagnosis on the state of the local system, and its place in a political and moral universe, appear as a swarm of uncanny phenomena raising more doubt than certainty. Instead of carriers of the truth of the communist system's decay, workers, dissidents, politicians, even the Romanian people itself, become potential carriers of a decay now much harder to locate.

„*Dumitru Dinca, „a small man with a deft populist touch, **describes himself** as chairman of the League of Hu Rights and for Regaining Lib, a little-known organisation wich **claims to have 30.000 members**” (F-528 Bucharest, April 28 1990. Anti-communist protests in Romania spawn two leaders. Demonstrations anti-FSN Jul/Apr 1990, HU OSA 300-60-3, 2)*

“*Iliescu [spoke of] remnants of a dictatorial regime that prejudiced social, political and spiritual life and left a unique **disease in society, leaving suspicion and hatred in the people's hearts.** (...) [A Western diplomat explained:] There is a lot of **suspicion** always looking behind, behind. This is part of a tradition going back hundreds of years. **You are not going to overcome the Balkan elements, what these people are**” (FF029 20 feb 90. John Kifner in New York Times. Demonstrations anti-FSN Jul/Apr 1990, HU OSA 300-60-3 Box 2)*

„*[Mircea Dinescu said] **while we have beheaded the communist dragon (...) the body is still pumping – not just the remnants of the party but in the mentality of the people at every level. We have not yet had a***

revolution in people's minds" Jul 9, 1990. Draft notes on Buch. 4-5p, Ro: Buch events of June 13-15, 91-91, HU OSA 318-0-5, 104)

„Romania's revolutionaries have driven a television antenna through the heart of the modern Dracula, the dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu" But: „record of these events establishes how much a product of the Ceaușescu system the men who still run Romania are" (Jim Hoagland: Ceaușescu is dead, all right, but his system isn't. April 26, 90, Romania: Buch events of June 13-15, 1990, HU OSA 318-0-5 ,104)

b) Hungary

In documents on green and environmental issues in Hungary, too, references to economic conditions were coupled with various political and moral interpretations. A connection between interpretations and interest positions could also be traced. The treatment of the environmental and energy topic in the Hungarian state press, quoted in RFE/RL materials, is palpably defined by the macroeconomic grip between energy prices and export pressure – e.g. "modern fuel" is defined as the type of fuel that ensures production to export markets with the lowest energy input (FRE Hungarian press survey no 2139., 30 July 1971, Energetika, Erőművek, Vízierőmű, B-G-N 1951-1974, HU OSA 300-40-1, Box 275). Several articles discuss the inacceptability of the Club of Rome proposal of limiting growth, as a proposal that favors developed capitalist countries, and contradicts the socialist development project. In Western actors' discussion of environment and energy problems in the East, the interest in technological investment is detectable. The question of how introducing lead free combustible impacts the automotive market, or how possible loans could finance the import of environmental protection technology persists throughout the 1980's. In 1986, the head of the US Environmental Protection Agency takes a tour in Eastern European countries, discussing environmental problems together with the possibilities of selling environmental control technology as a solution:

„control technology is an interest that both sides are very keen on" (FF003 14, Nov 86, US rates Poland, Hungary as most environmentally conscious , Economy/Pollution 1985-87, HU OSA 300-40-2, 18).

By the years leading up to the regime change, economic contradictions implied in environmental protection measures surface everywhere. The Lehel refrigerator plant declares its incapacity for further operation in reaction to freon prohibition. Workers and managers of chemical plants issue statements declaring the incompatibility of their interests with claims of environment protectionists. Local receivers of toxic waste struggle between the economic gains and pollution costs of dumping.

The contradictions inherent in catching-up industrialization, especially the lack of advanced technology, and the investment pressure in export sectors, which puts a limit on investment in environmental protection, are continuously framed as political and moral facts, 'proofs' of the fallibility of socialism as such. The certainty in dealing with such 'proofs' and their meaning, however, decreases as we draw close to 1990. Contradictions of catching up are expressed in increasingly contradictory moral and political narratives.

„We are not hoping to return to preindustrial levels but to reach the technological and emissions level of the Ruhr Valley or Pittsburgh" (Children are the ultimate victims of Eeu's environmental nightmare, Newsweek, 1991 apr 8, Környezetvédelem 1991, HU OSA 300-40-1 , 641)

„A gondolkodó magyarok feladata e tekintetben ma kétszeresen nehéz (...) azt kell megértetnünk honfitársainkkal, akiknek jobbára csak a paleotechnika e guruló paródiája, a Trabant jutott ki, sőt esetleg még az sem – hogy a Ford sem igazán jó autó, sőt a Citroen vagy a Volvo sem, hogy jó autót egyáltalán nem gyártanak. Egy országban, ahol szükölködés és robot megannyi ember osztályrésze, ismét egyszerre kell elvégezni három nemzedék feladatát" "Hungarians who think more deeply are faced with a double

*task today (...) we need to make our fellow citizens, who barely managed to get hold of this parody of paleo-technology, Trabant, that even Ford, Citroen or Volvo are not good enough, that no car is good for the environment. In a country where people struggle with material needs and overwork, **we need to do the job of three subsequent generations at one time.*** (Hitel 1988 1. Kodolányi Gyula. A kör helyreállítása Energetika, Erőművek, Vízierőmű, B-G-N 5 of 7, HU OSA 300-40-1, 278)

„Clean environment is our human right. How long will we be obliged to bear the smell of Trabants?” (1989 márc 28 Magyar Nemzet, Környezetvédelem 1989 (2 of 5) HU OSA 300-40-1, 639)

As Zsuzsa Gille notes, by the end of the 1980's, the question of chemical waste in Hungary grows into a major moral metaphor for the troubles of social transformation (Gille 2007). In the documents, the variation in political-moral expressions of macroeconomic effects peaks by 1989-1990. While in earlier years, the reform economist idea of monetarist regulation as a tool to locate and create socialist responsibility for the environment appears as a solvable technological question, a base for future optimism, the same technique of searching for immediate causes and responsibilities for pollution turns into a mechanism of proof-searching frenzy, unable to locate its targets, yet projecting targets everywhere. Whose fault is pollution? In the fast changing environment of decentralization and privatization, personally targeted legal procedures only impinge on testimonies breeding further testimonies that shift responsibilities from one place to the other in space and time, targeting moving functionaries of companies that already multiplied into subsidiaries and parent companies at law with each other. Documents' various sources speak of an overwhelming suspicion and mistrust, where suspicion itself is described as pollution:

„a bizalmatlanság (...) a népet semmibe vevő évtizedes politika 'veszélyes hulladéka'” („suspicion (...) is the 'toxic waste' of the decades when politics disregarded the people” 89 június 7 Népszabadság Kőváry E. Péter: A bizalmatlanság kútjai. Környezetvédelem 89 (4 of 5) HU OSA 300-40-1, 640)

Hungarian and Western press citations abound in metaphors of socialist legacy as pollution – from titles like “The Dirty Men of Europe” (F-556, The Guardian January 19 1990, Környezetvédelem 1990 1 of 4, HU OSA 300-40-1, Box 640) to fears of a possible resuscitation of the Bős-Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros dams expressed in the form of “Stalin still lives underwater” (Képes 7, 21-04-1990, Környezetünk 90., Környezetvédelem 1990 1 of 4, HU OSA 300-40-1, Box 640).

The individual cases of mutual suspicion and pollution accusations presented in the documents provide dense excerpts of situations created by the transformation, where economic and social change disbands coherent moral and institutional answers to emerging problems, yet the moral and political expectation for solutions is bigger than ever. In an article complaining of the inefficiency of efforts to identify and solve environmental problems, a Hungarian journalist presents the following situation, illustrative of multiple levels of privatization and social precarization:

*„[Kiskőrösön] a talaj felszíni rétegét, amelyen évekkkel ezelőtt vegyi hulladékokat égettek, most összekaparták, és Dunaiújvárosból ideszállított elemes betongarázsokba rakták. Azokat a hordókat viszont, amelyekből annak idején égetés előtt köntötték a mérget, olcsó áron eladták a környékbelieknek, akik azóta **pálinkafőzésre** való cefrét és törkölyt tartanak benne. ... Egy Szekszárdról Kiskőrösre került alkohológus főorvosnő csodálkozva fedezte föl, hogy a kiskőrösi alkoholisták mennyivel hamarabb leépülnek, mint a szekszárdiak. ... Vizsgálni sem könnyű a mérgező pálinkákat, hiszen akadályba ütközik a mintavétel, Ezt az italt ugyanis főként a szőlősgazdák által foglalkoztatott **új napszámosréteg** szükségleteire állítják elő.” („[in Kiskőrös], the surface of the soil on which chemical waste had been burnt in the previous years, was now collected and put in concrete containers brought from Dunaiújváros. However, the barrels in which the poison had been stored before it was burnt, was sold to locals, who use them **to make brandy.** (...) An alcoholologist chief physician who recently moved from Szekszárd to Kiskőrös was surprised to see that in Kiskőrös, the state of alcoholists deteriorates much faster than in*

Szekszárd. (...) It is also hard to take monitor the polluted brandy, as sampling is not easy to do. This type of brandy is made specifically for the new strata of day laborers employed by vine-growers". Népszabadság 89 márc 24. Tanács István: Zöldhullám, Környezetvédelem 1989 (2 of 5), HU OSA 300-40-1, 639)

4. Materials consulted during the research

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HU OSA 300-60-1, 425: From 1924 **Labor: Strikes, 1972-1973** To: **Labor: Forced labor, 1951-1952**
HU OSA 300-60-1, 431: 2300 **Police and security/Opposition in Ro 1981-1989**
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HU OSA 300-60-1, 533: 2807 **Resistance and criticism of the regime: Underground. 1954-1977**
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HU OSA 3018-0-5, 105: **Bucharest events of September 91**
HU OSA 300-60-3, 2: **Demonstrations anti-FSN Jul/Apr 1990**
HU OSA 205-2-20 **Files of Dan Ionescu. Strikes, 90-91**
HU OSA 300-5-190, 44: **190 Records of Vlad Socor**

b) Hungary

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HU OSA 300-40-1, 275-278: **Energetika/Erőművek, vízierőmű, Bős-Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros .**
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