

## **WORKERS FACING EMPLOYERS - SHORT INSIGHT IN TIME AND SPACE**

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### **Abstract**

*Worker's movements (initially peasant) - riots or strikes or revolutions - have always represented and represent an exciting theme. In time, and space, these movements have evolved.*

*In a post-industrial society, of knowledge, of sustainable development, which is more integrated and globalized, these movements have acquired new forms than they did not exist a few decades ago.*

*Moreover, nowadays the category of workers present new economic connotation. There are many more intellectuals today in this category etc.*

*As this process was unfolded and runs, what structures are dynamic, above all, what is the perspective?*

*Here are some questions that seek to be responded briefly in my communication.*

**Key words:** revolts, revolutions, peasants, workers, employers, unions, evolutions.

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... It is difficult to ignore the book "Răscoala" (The Riot) of the great Romanian writer Liviu Rebreanu. Such a dramatic epic about Romanian peasants while, at the onset of the twentieth century, the whole country celebrated with pomp the 40 years celebration of King Carol I reign. The peasantry, "the sole of the country", as stated at the time, the greater part of the population, however, was forgotten. It moaned of heavy hunger and miserable

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living under the weight of a double exploitation: a) the nobles, the lawful lords of estates, who had the largest agricultural and arable area in Romania, and who needed high revenues to raise up to a so desired and envied luxurious living similar to that of Western Europe; b) even tougher, operation leaseholders who flayed the peasants heavily in their desire to accumulate money, capital, to buy land and become themselves masters of estates: they would have terribly liked to become "noble"\*<sup>2</sup>. All this against the venal background of "farm bargain", a system which got, in its bad substance, to paroxysm. The brilliant Nicolae Iorga published in "*The Romanian Nation*" (No. 87) the article "God Forgive Them" but not those that encountered peasants revolted in 1907 with killing bullets, but peasants - about 10 thousand - killed by those bullets. Further, although years passed, things had changed too little, PhD Ioan Claudiu, professor in medicine in Cluj - who later died in communist prisons - in his work "*Food of Romanian People*", published around 1930s, described the situation of peasantry in that time as tragic, their malnutrition calling into serious damage the vital fiber of the Romanian people ... (Claudian, 1939) The world would revel, and, as the poet Alexander Vlahuță entitled one of his sad poems, "*Minciuna stă cu regele la masă - Lie sits at the table with the king*". Not coincidentally, a little earlier, the great George Coșbuc wrote "*Noi vrem pământ - We want land*", a true fresco of the situation of landless peasant grievances and so oppressed. Brilliant Eminescu also approached in prose and in verse, such a sad picture. And, later, socialist C. Dobrogeanu-Gherea, would publish the analytical "*Neoioabăgia- Non-Serfdom*" (Dobrogeanu-Gherea, 1911) while the noble scholar Radu Rosetti

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<sup>2</sup> A sister of my grandmother, great landlady, married Rusănescu, suffered a lot, in 1907, from the peasant uprisings that attacked and then burned her mansion - here, in Rusanesti village - angry at the lord Titi Rusănescu sitting most of the time in France on the Cote d'Azur, and losing in casinos the usufruct of estates, estates that tenants squeezed even more. She and her daughter, my mother's cousin, were okay, they were allowed by peasants to leave by carriage, but the mansion with everything it had inside - quality furniture, priceful paintings, expensive carpets, a lot of jewels etc. - was completely destroyed. The episode is remembered also in the collection of documents of historian academician Andrei Oțetea from Săliște ... In fact, in an industrial time, in an agricultural industrial time, there appeared the "primitive" image of peasant "hordes" primitive-looking (only in appearance), raging, brutal, due to the harsh regime of servitude they were subjected to. Nevertheless, claiming not dreams, not "gifts" but righteousness. A justice that, well drawn, others would not harm the others, but would have done well anyway to the country, to all. But who should understand ...

would print the truthful "*Pentru ce s-au răsculat țărani - Why peasants revolted*" (1907, Rosetti). The conservatory large landowner Constantin (Tache) Garoflid will, in turn, make the Romanian agriculture and ownership structure history here, noting in his "*Chestia agrară - Agrarian Question*" (Garoflid, 1920) insidious, intractable problems, thus receiving praise and criticism. Praise from some socialists and criticism from some members of his party. We could continue...

...Of course, there are Romanian sequences, prefaced, in essence, by the uprising of Bobilna (1437), that of Gheorghe Doja (1514) and then that of Horia, Cloșca and Crișan (1784-1785). Then, "Tudor Vladimirescu" in 1821, a veritable revolution... (Popescu, 2001). There were deep wounds, "wails", "screams", there were cries of pain "We want land!" We will synthesize only in four words the essence of some very serious problems that were pressing, that burdened heavily not only peasants but the whole Romanian society: "The agrarian problem" (in this case, the social problem of agriculture, the problem of overwhelming land estates, made often by "loathing" and "intercession") and "The agricultural problem" (in this case, problems with under-developed technique, consistently exceeded for national agriculture which could not keep up with European times, a lot more advanced than the Romanian ones) (Popescu, 2002).

I had not yet quite got to experience in Romania the social "regularization" of the European West. Here, social, economic upheavals of the poor, of the "doomed" to poverty by unfair laws and provisions did not wait to gain scope, a large social one, as written in a recent and interesting study (see "Dignité ouvrière, l'Histoire, octobre 2014) (Vigna Xavier et al, 2014) "the emergence of the steam engine, the effects of industrial revolutions which will concentrate large masses of workers". But such violent riots, had broken out with great force especially since Antiquity and the Middle Ages. For example, rebellions of employees in the textile (in manufacturing) in Flanders or Italy, which culminated in the famous uprising in Florence in 1378, when "ciompi" workers in the manual processing of wool, were strongly and "so structured" outraged - we would say today - that they managed to conquer governance for several weeks, the very strong republic governance.

Shall we refer, in England, to the "Wat Tyler Revolt", a well-known English craftsman that in May-June 1381 brought together around him disgruntled peasants and raised them to fight the nobles and the privileged? "The Ideologue of revolt" priest John Ball demanded, among others, monastery fortune confiscation, its division to peasants, abolition of serfdom, community wealth and "full equality". Or should we refer to what happened in Germany with "the peasant war" led by Thomas Münzer? Should we remember the Hussite movement in Prague, Czech Republic, led by Jan Hus, at the beginning master and Rector of the University in Prague (J. Hus would be excommunicated and burned in 1410 as he required community-based organization of economic and social life)? Should we remember - and we can do this without making a mistake, even if it was not Western Europe - the bogomils or Stenca Razin, the Cossack, the leader of the great peasant war in Russia, executed after being defeated in 1671? Should we reiterate trajectories of Romanian uprisings, of those mentioned, and others? (Popescu, 2002) However, we hardly succeed in this framework parting interests of the peasant from those of craftsmen, usually small craftsmen, important decanting happening once with the industrial development... (Popescu, 2002)

They were but the beginning - so to speak - of some harsh economic "protests". As highlighted in the popular publication mentioned - for example, Professor Xavier Vigna in his study "*Pourquoi les ouvrières se révoltent*" -, the nineteenth century will bring upheaval in Western Europe - especially - a dash of industrialism scaring companies and the powers sought to pacify them, these being actually terrified, actually all being terrified by the violence of class struggles with, most often allure of civil wars. "We live by working, we die fighting" ("Vivre en travaillant, mourir en combattant" motto of silk workers in Lyon, 1830-1833). More than in other times, population violence was indicative of industrialization in its beginnings before which, prior to adapt to it, they acted as such. What was and is all about?

What happened in this framework to give "a path", an orderly, controlled move, to some requests and claims that revealed anyway as natural and which had, should have been solved, completed peacefully, not in blood, not by death, not by destruction? There will come, then, "another age of workers' revolts and strikes", to these we refer particularly now, to social raising of peasantry itself amid major reforms, the emergence and

development of many farms, weakening the West in intensity and still so, remaining eastern representative.

So this second age will be, as I said, in the West that of some "adjustments" by law, of workers' revolts and strikes. The process has its own logic, it has its own dynamics. As written by researcher Michelle Perrot, the strike is what gave rise to the labor movements. It is not unions that triggered strikes, the way things happen nowadays, but even strikes most often spontaneous, triggered by the intelligence, the will and action of some more daring, enterprising workers, strikes, therefore, such strikes are those that have driven the creation of unions (Perrot Michelle, 2014). In the UK and then in France, strikes have been recognized as such by law in 1864, but in France, for example, unions were recognized, also by law, only twenty years later, in 1884, respectively.

Of course the market in general and the labor market in particular are those which, by their laws, determine the cost of labor, namely its lowering for a good period, given the modern economy, the increasing productivity. Of course, involving new technologies, today diminishes everything required by the market, the number of jobs. But the cost of a job is much higher than even 50 years ago, creating a job demanding costly, exquisite, quality investments... (Popescu, 2014). But back. Of course, the market has imposed its laws, but workers, employees were - and are - those who "support them". And their dream of long ago was often to "get rid" of patrons, to become masters of machines, of production or of wages.

A dream difficult to achieve in an economic world in which the three classical factors of production which include neo-factors - in this case, labor, land, capital - have imposed each an appropriate reward, namely salary, a rent, profit. However, the more or less spontaneous stopping of labor meant, first, essentially, rebellion against misery, obnoxiousness of wages crackdown, the fight against "labor without bread" for survival. With the organization as such, with or without unions, current words may be others as well: the social revolution, the prospect of a new company, which meant something else. It was sought, in economy, the breaking of borders between those who give orders and those who obey. Mutation, practically unfeasible (Popescu, 2001), until modern society times, in the modern state, democracy, respect for the individual, acquiring several dimensions. But let us come back.

There are elements which, in one way or another, culminated in significant expressions in the twentieth century, which, by the Bolshevik Revolution in October (November) 1917 in Russia, were given an important signal. A signal, however, proved in time, unsustainable... However, more and more requests, express economic actions - directed directly against misery, expensive life against an exterminating working regime - dressed the broader garments of the social, and, almost simultaneously, the, more complicated ones, of politics...

Let us say that during industrial times, the working-class revolt played an increasingly more important role in the economic and social development. At national level, of course, but also in general. This working-class revolt became ever more pronounced, the main component, the main expression of political and social rebellions fit "to shake" those "who had things in possession". It was a revolt of the poor workers, the overwhelming working class, by a revolt of despair but, equally, a genuine political revolt increasingly asserted.

Their violence begins to be a key feature. Publicist Saint-Marc Girardin, quoted by Professor Xavier Vigna in l'Histoire magazine, issued October 2014 (Vigna, 2014), wrote thus in December 1831 in the "Journal des débats" after the first revolt of silk workers of Lyon (about which I wrote some time ago): "barbarians who threaten our society are neither in the Caucasus nor in the steppes of Tartaria. They are in the manufacturing outskirts of our cities". These "new barbarians", the more threatening showed themselves, the more intimately needed, living and working near their patrons. The expressions palette of these uprisings, however, will produce changes in ratio with the tempo of ongoing modernization of activities, in relation to the pace of political developments, of changing employers' strategies to assure labour hands to the companies, in relation to the pace of development of social legislation. However, changes will be compared with the pace of change in working conditions and living standards of workers - rebels, the respective subjects – with evolution awareness towards their mission, to their significant role in society, in production, but also social, cultural, etc. In relation to all these, however, their forms of organization and rebellion will evolve.

As mentioned already, Professor Xavier Vigna, distinctly referring to working-class uprisings, distinguishes three stages in this framework. A "first

age” refers to workers in small less mechanized industries. It envisages small industrial and urban occupations at the "edge of craftsmanship". It envisages disseminated workers in rural areas close to large centers, workers that often had their means of production, and some plots of land, having contracts, commitments, arrangements with merchants and manufacturers. Finally, Xavier Vigna envisages to an even greater extent, workers in manufacturing, later become textile and steel factories etc., concentrating a large number of people in a certain space, characterized by division of labor and discipline of production increasingly assumed and firm, all these amplifying as numbers and companies in most dynamic industrial regions (Vigna, 2014).

However, there are workers in France who would not have the right to vote until 1848 and after a few months of that year, until 1870-1871. Let us add that many employers were mayors of the communes where workers lived or where companies they worked were located. Let us add a paradox: namely, the French Revolution of 1789, suppressing corporations and forbidding coalitions (even strikes, therefore) established the regime of available contracts between employer and employee, banning any form of protection or collective organization and leaving therefore the workers somehow "disarmed" in relation to the requirements of employers, virtually at their hand. And workers would revolt – when they would - by first destroying machinery that "occupied" jobs more and more – a problem that had already remarkably developed in England, found on its industrial revolution path (see the very interesting book by Costin Murgescu "*David Ricardo in the England of Industrial Revolution*"). (Murgescu, 1972) And they would spontaneously rebel against an overflowing income tax, against some extraordinary gestures contrasting them, such as establishing a very low and legal manufacturing price based on employment regulations, valid for the same type of companies etc. They would find other forms of defense in this case, especially self-help and mutual aid companies.

In such circumstances, towards 1840 and beyond, in France as well - but not just in France - a rising proximity between mobilizations, worker oppositions, more or less legal and republican societies had been created, looking towards the future and inclined more towards action and social concessions. This will make rebellions often combine economic dimensions, social dimensions and behold, political contestation against the Bourbon

monarchy, against royalty generally, still lagging behind socially. These joins would culminate with the revolution of February and June 1848 and, especially, but in other circumstances, in 1871, with the Paris Commune, but also with the municipalities of Saint-Etienne, Lyon, Le Creusot, Marseille, Narbonne etc. One way or another, such problems, dynamics, developments began to be exposed more pronounced throughout the whole Western Europe, but also in the United States, of course, here in specific forms.

In the same logical reasoning key, important changes of the kind shown above would occur, also in France and in Belgium, Italy, United States, once with 1880 of the second industrial revolution subsequent to that crossing from coal to wood and metal, with the onset and then the vast expression of the electricity revolution etc. It is thus especially about the emergence of new industries, such as the automobile, electrometallurgy, chemistry etc., which almost have "trivialized" the concentrations of workers in enterprises become, here, "large".

In France, worker opposition, exploiting the law legalizing the strikes of 1864 - we talked about - and the law on the organization of trade unions, adopted two decades later, in 1884, would be structured adequately, revealing views that opposed employers. There would be negotiations, most times, but the refuse that those, the many, to be taken into account meant a working-class revolt. We would refer, similarly to the European perspective. For example, England had authorized professional associations and the strike year between 1821 and 1824, reflecting a certain advance in this country's industrial revolution. Belgium legalized the strike in 1866 and Prussia in 1869. In fact, the labor movement increasingly articulated union centers - the General Confederation of Labor was established in 1895 - and the relevant political parties, socialist parties and later communist parties became more expressive. International structures would manifest themselves, with significant milestones in the International Workers' Association, established in 1864, and according to some opinions, in the Komintern, "born" in 1919.

All these dynamics would progressively frame labor movements, intensifying them, broadening their targets, widening the scope of objectives. Typically, the number of strikes would increase, and their average duration would increase. As written by Xavier Vigna, for example, in Fougères, France, a strike of workers in footwear, in 1932, would be extended from



February to September, for 215 days ... Similarly we may note such events in interwar Romania: the general strike in 1920, then "Lupeni '29" and Grivița, in February 1933, extended as well from days to weeks. During the last part of the above mentioned period "sacrifice curves" had a contribution, pursuing that the Romanian economy and industry got out of the crisis at the expense of the poor, by reducing wages, income, consumption. (Popescu, 2013) Not only to workers but also to teachers, professors, clerks etc. ...

Back in Europe, nearly every May 1, starting with 1890, workers, in all countries, would demonstrate in many ways, for the working day of 8 hours, generating sometimes armed, tough, violent reactions from the state. However, the increasing international trade union movement, which has become a crucial factor - along with parliaments, the executive and employers - that of participating in the social state management, the new perspectives of that time and of later of "social and solidary development" - development sustained among others by Leon Bourgeois, Charles Rist, by followers of the German cooperative movement etc. - that, under the law, "strikes do not stop employment contracts", the access, almost regularly, if not sometimes exclusively, of the left parties in power, the improvement - according to created superior resources - of working and life conditions for workers, in fact "the Welfare State" will weaken the "social question" in intensity, especially in Western Europe and the United States, Canada, Australia and some emerging economies in Southeast Asia etc. There resulted, as counterpart, arrangements and understandings with positive results, inter alia, labor productivity growth, labor productivity growth in social services, progress achievement as such. (Popescu, 2013)

We now also have to do with a "third age" of worker movements in conditions of changing labor content, consistently widening the scope of what we call workers - not a few intellectuals are the ones that integrates it, claims being others, employers' interests often becoming more solidary with those of workers, compared with a not too wise political, labor content becoming, often intangible, thus changing, in the essential points, what we have been calling economic life. Of course, throughout this framework there existed nuances and details. Here, in general, workers suffered more than other social groups from the rationalization and misery that characterized, to a large extent, the life of Europe during the immediate period of the Second World War.

Moreover, even in the coming years, but until today, in many cases, the results of economic growth were unevenly distributed, and employment conditions remained difficult. Combining plans a little, let us add "deindustrialization" especially particular for steel industry and mining that has yet often generated violent episodes. Let us add the nomenclature disappearance of traditional crafts and the invention of new ones. Let us add the efforts, not always cheap and generally difficult, of retraining, although often addressed to a relatively singular casuistry; they were not received, at least initially, with open arms. Let us add "de-location" shattering the joy of "localization". Let us add wages cuts, of one kind or another (see, for example, in Romania, even under communism, in 1987, the workers of enterprises in Brasov revolted, their protest becoming a particular political protest, but also the protests in 2012), the major difficulties to find a job, a labor market that is no longer national but international, resetting pressure on it, with everything that goes with that. (Popescu, 2014) In fact, globalization of production and the labor market have spoken. Another world where, often, wishes do not suit possibilities on realities. Another world with fewer certainties and many, too many uncertainties. Actually, more and more difficult to explain ... And there are still many aspects. All these have made "worker" riots, discontent generated, continue...

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