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Collectivization of agriculture

Inspired by Marxist-Leninist philosophy and especially by the Soviet experience of the 1930s, collectivisation was a fundamental component of consolidated Stalinist regimes from Eastern Europe after the beginning of the Cold War. Power takeovers by communist parties and the destruction of the capitalist class from urban areas were not sufficient as long as East-European societies were predominantly rural. The small peasant property, as Lenin had noticed, 'gives birth to capitalism and bourgeoisie permanently, day by day, hour after hour, spontaneously and in mass proportions.'

As a consequence, a socialist transformation of the rural world was necessary that followed three main directions: a politico-ideological one, aiming at introducing 'class struggle' into villages, by setting poor and middle peasantry against wealthy peasants considered to be the 'village bourgeoisie'; the second – economic – aimed at a mass nationalisation of peasant properties, by establishing collective households and encouraging large agricultural holdings with increased results; the third – social – aimed at abolishing the 'small owner individualist mentality,' turning peasants into workers active in collectivist structures such as agricultural factories.



In Romania, the official signal of the beginning of the socialist transformation of agriculture was given during the PMR Central Committee plenary between 3 and 5 March 1949. The whole process was to evolve in two directions: 1) the organisation of collectivist structures such as Collective Agricultural Holdings (GAC), Machines and Tractor Stations (SMT), State Agricultural Holdings (GAS) and 2) the intensification of class struggle within villages.

The essential element was the creation of Collective Agricultural Holdings, following the model of the kolkhoz in the USSR. Peasants went into these farms with all their land and agricultural inventory and work was shared. In order to avoid a fall in agricultural production and food supplies such as the ones that occurred during the early 1930s in the Soviet Union, it was decided to apply collectivisation gradually, on the basis of free consent and only where there were 'the best technical conditions' (meaning SMTs and state farms which would logistically support the new collective holdings). The coordination of the collectivisation process was offered to the key communist figure, Ana Pauker, taking into account the experience she had accumulated while training in the USSR.

Initial principles were abandoned, however, after less than a year. At the beginning of 1950 it was decided

to introduce a quicker rhythm of collectivisation and use force in order to make peasants join collective households. The transition from capitalist to socialist agriculture was sinuous, with accelerations and rhythm weaknesses, with alternations between repressive policy and concessions to the peasantry. Concerning collectivisation itself, three main phases can be discerned in Romania's case:

- 1.** 1949-53, creation of collectivist structures through violence or persuasion;
- 2.** 1953-56, relative détente in the collectivisation policy; the number of collective holdings remains constant and the fiscal burden over peasant households decreases;
- 3.** 1957-62, resumption of accelerated collectivisation, mainly through violent means.

This chronology is not uniform; during each phase different tendencies coexisted. During the first phase, for example, forced collectivisation generated numerous peasant revolts, especially during the summer and early autumn of 1950. These revolts came after others that took place in 1949 and which were determined by the imposition of mandatory agricultural quotas (fees in kind). Following the intervention of Gheorghiu-Dej, the establishment of new GACs was practically stopped. Until the beginning of 1952, a mixed formula was preferred – collective companionships (or *toz*), which were more attractive for peasants and preserved private ownership of their lands while it was only worked in common. After the application of the second monetary reform in January 1952, forced collectivisation resumed before again being stopped towards the end of the year.

After the calm period from 1953 to 1956, starting from the second half of 1957 the total collectivisation upsurge was resumed. Authorities again used pressure, blackmail and physical violence in order to force peasants to join collective holdings. Peasants reacted through individual and collective acts of revolt, which were harshly repressed by the Militia and the Securitate.

The collectivisation process was considered complete in the spring of 1962. At that moment, state socialist agricultural units held 94 per cent of the agricultural land, 96.5 per cent of the arable surface area, 97.6 per cent of the vine lands and 86,2 per cent of the orchards.

After 1965, GACs were renamed Agricultural Production Cooperatives (CAP). In order to become more efficient, their number was gradually reduced through mergers, decreasing from 5,398 units in 1962, to 3,776 in 1989. Also, the number of people capable of labour in GAC/CAP decreased from 4.5 million in 1962 to 1.9 million in 1989; a large part of the agricultural population was absorbed by industry. Instead, the number of agricultural experts attached to cooperatives increased, from 7,725 in 1962, to 31,014 in 1989 (of which 15,668 had a university education).

According to official data, agricultural crop production increased from 1962 to 1989 by 172 per cent, and animal farming production by 163 per cent. However, reports originating from CAPs were often fictitious, while the plan was fixed by the central administration, without any relation to reality. The state imposed the nature of production, the quantity and quality of production, working and activity plans and the development strategy. The desired returns could not be obtained because the selling prices of products, imposed by the state, were too low, well below production prices. As a consequence, the peasants' material situation did not progress and CAPs proved to be an unprofitable form of association.

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