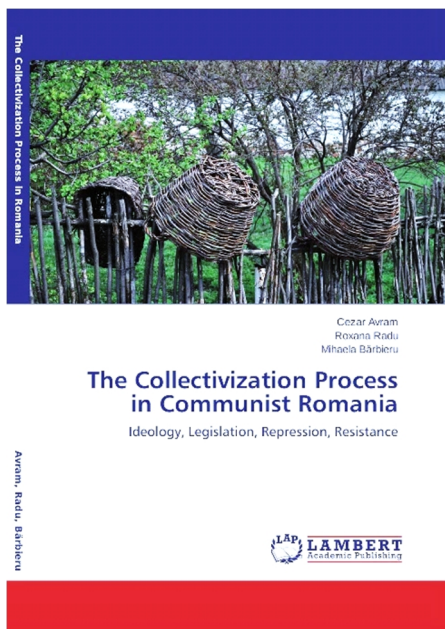




BOOK REVIEW

Cezar Avram, Roxana Radu, Mihaela Bărbieru, *The Collectivization Process in Communist Romania. Ideology, Legislation, Repression, Resistance*, Saarbrücken: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2014, 125 pages.

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The book “*The Collectivization Process in Communist Romania. Ideology, Legislation, Repression, Resistance*” is of real concern for all those passionate about history and elucidation of events that will forever mark the destiny of the Romanian people and his thirst for humanity.

On the basis of a vast documentation – published and unpublished documents – the authors present the process of collectivization in the context of the era, revealing the levers, legal means and repressive instruments used by Communist authorities in the preparation and conduct of this sad episode in the history of contemporary Romanian.

This is the challenge that faced the three researchers and whose solution is of great complexity in the face of the multitude of sources analysed, combined with a reflection of the internal mechanisms of

operation of the Communist regime.

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The volume includes five distinct texts, each analysing a hypostasis of the collectivization of agriculture in the period 1949-1962.

He can, however, be viewed as a unified whole, which tries to compose a global picture based on an overview of the historical, social and political context, to which different dimensions are gradually added, as the events are running, and the Communist Party's program of collectivization of agriculture is spiked with new tactics and tools. Each chapter of this work has in view a distinct aspect of this program: ideology and communist propaganda, agrarian law, criminal law, the means of repression and defeating the resistance of the population.

The first chapter of this paper depicts an overview of agrarian policy in the wider context of communist policies aimed at reforming society through the abolition of individual property, the introduction of super-centralized and planned economy, the construction of an ideal type of new man, which must correspond in all points of view with the new ideology – the living conditions, diet, social and family relationships, beliefs, even the manner in which man was born and died had to align to the rules dictated by the new system.

The authors show how the collectivization of agriculture was a major concern for the Romanian political class since the early days of the Communist regime, aimed on long term at the liquidation of social inequalities and injustice that were doomed to disappearance in a society in which private property was gone.

The second chapter completes the first one, addressing the process of collectivization in terms of ideology and propaganda it was founded on, by deciphering and interpreting philosophical construction of Marxism as a whole (the works of Marx and Engels, Lenin and Stalin), as well as by analysing, in the general context in which they were launched by Communist leaders, of a vast set of documents including the writings and speeches of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, Vasile Luca, Ana Pauker, Teohari Georgescu, the plenary reports, conferences and congresses of the party, the programmes concerning the agrarian policy of the Romanian Workers Party, archival information, studies and Articles published in periodicals of the era.

By placing propaganda elements of the campaign of collectivization released yet from the plenary session of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers Party from 3-5 March 1949 facing the realities of the Romanian society, the authors demonstrate how the agricultural policy has been used as a tool in the ascent towards the conquest of political power by the Communists and how, gradually, the regime has built not only an ideal type of new man, as well as an ideal type of enemy – the kulak, the criteria for inclusion in this social category depending on the political imperatives of the moment or on the particular interests of the local authorities responsible for the implementation of the rules and directives coming from the policy makers.

This chapter is a suggestive illustration of how ideology has been transposed in the writings, programmes and propaganda declarations of the Communist leaders, whereby they have transposed the Stalinist model of “kolhoz”, have implemented the concept of “the property without owners or the property of everybody”, have masked the conflict between the owner and the Communist regime through false statements meant to reassure the peasants, and have justified the means by the necessity and usefulness of the aims pursued.

The third text deals with land law and the extent to which it has been instrumentalized to serve the interests of political actors of the moment.

From the avalanche of legal acts which have put into practice Stalinist policy of collectivization of agriculture are analysed separately the laws on the establishment, organization and functioning of the collectivist structures – Collective Agricultural Farms (GAC), State Agricultural Farms (GAS), State Agricultural Enterprises (IAS), Machines and Tractors Stations (SMT), Associations for the cultivation of lands in common (TOZ), Agricultural cooperatives of production with income (CAP), governmental and ministerial acts which aimed at ensuring the technical-material basis of these structures, laws and decrees on labour organization and work remuneration, decrees and decisions of the Council of Ministers on land consolidation, regulation of land donations to the State, the law on agricultural taxes, legal regime of collection of cereals and other agricultural products and livestock, as well as other related laws which supported collectivization process during 1954-1962.

The authors present not only the evolution of agrarian legislation, but also the methods of monitoring and control of the manner in which it was implemented.

Another aspect of legislative policy is presented in Chapter IV entitled «The Role of Criminal Law in the Realization of the “Socialist Transformation of Agriculture”». The text presents, on the one hand, legal regulations and official justification used for their introduction and, on the other hand, the actual effects that the criminal laws has produced in the population and the shocking testimonies of eyewitnesses to the confiscation of goods and agricultural products from the so-called “kulaks”, exposing them to the danger of starvation.

Another episode shown in this chapter is that of judging and condemnation of “saboteurs and enemies of the people”, the whole section devoted to “show processes” being based on the reports of those convicted and sent to prison or forced labour camps, on the stories told by children, nephews or other members of their families.

The report adds more colour and seems all the more real since many of the short stories included in this chapter are collected even by two of the authors of this book, Cezar Avram and Roxana Radu.

The last part of this volume is devoted to manifestations of resistance against collectivisation. The authors describe how simple peasants or people with little education, treated as mere tools or accessories in the grand project of building a Communist society, have turned into opponents of the regime, the fiercest since the means and instruments of repression evolved.

Multiple incidents between peasants and party activists, “Militia” and “Securitate” workers, their conduct and their suppression by police are reflected both on the basis of archive documents, information notes prepared by the “Securitate” offices or by the presidents of the popular councils, and on direct reports of participants in uprisings and rebellions through which rural population has expressed opposition to radical, unjust and inhuman measures taken by the communists for the collectivization of agriculture.

Without ignoring other historians’ studies focused on the same period analysed (Robert Conquest, Jean François Soulet, Katherine Verdery, Reuben H. Markham, Stephane Courtois, Nicolas Werth, Serge Bernstein, Pierre Milza, Mikhail Geller, Robert Levy, Dumitru Şandru, Vladimir Tismăneanu, Ruxandra Ivan, Octavian Roske, Florin Abraham, Dan Cătănuş, Nicoleta Ionescu-Gură etc.) that the authors have correlated to describe as realistic as possible the national and international context, the book “The Collectivization Process in Communist Romania. Ideology, Legislation, Repression, Resistance” has the merit of having brought to light a number of unpublished documents

and touching stories of eyewitnesses of the events of that period on which time and the natural course of life would have gathered dust and oblivion.

Book review Info

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