

Land Reform in Romania, 1945 - Motives and Consequences

Artur LAKATOS
Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj

Keywords: Year 1945, postwar Romania, land reform, agriculture, Romanian Communist Party, Hungarian Popular Union, social violence.

Abstract. This paper is dealing with the issue of the land reform adopted in 1945 in Romania under certain specific circumstances, generated by the post-war turmoil, the need of rural population for land property, and the political ambitions of the coalition government. In the mirror of press sources and unpublished archival documents, we analyze the political background of the land reform process, its social environment and through relevant case-studies, its consequences on a local level. The role of this current article is to present through a large variety of representative case-studies a general, yet comprehensive image of the reform, and its immediate consequences on local, regional and national level. Most of the sources are unpublished materials from the Archives, which were consulted for the first time by the author of this article. The paper proves that the most important winner of the whole reform process, adopted in a moment of turmoil, based on social considerations rather than economic ones, was the Romanian Communist Party, which through the work of its allies obtained a certain level of popularity. Even so, this conjuncture gain was not enough to assure majority in elections for the parties of the political left, which led to electoral fraud in 1946.

E-mail: lakatos_artur_lorand@yahoo.com

*

The year 1945 brought the end of a long, bloody and cruel war for Romania, as well as for the rest of Europe. Normally, post-war circumstances favour social transformations. These changes are not always beneficial, even if they initially seem to be. In the countryside all over Europe, after both World War I and World War II, agrarian reforms were intended to give land to the peasants, especially to those who fought in the wars. In Romania, these reforms took place in very chaotic circumstances, and major political forces of the country often had very different point of views.

This paper is designed to examine the political background of the land reform from 1945, its circumstances and immediate political and social consequences. While editing it, I had a double goal: a general and a specific one. The general goal was to present a comprehensive, synthetic image of the Land Reform, of its circumstances and immediate consequences on a national level. The second goal was to examine case studies on a local level, which can offer a realistic image of the impact of the Reform on daily life.

As a consequence, the paper can be divided into two parts, which are nevertheless strictly related to each other. The first part presents the general political background of the Reform, through analyzing the representative press of the main

political forces from Romania, and in the mirror of certain manifestations of the politicians involved. The second part illustrates the concrete application of the measures related to the reform, in the mirror of a series of illustrating case-studies. A small amount of the case-studies cited is coming from the press of that time, the majority being illustrated through documents from the Archives. A considerable amount of these documents – according to the official Research Sheets – were consulted for the first time by the author of this article. The high variety of the case-studies offers a mosaic-like, but in the same time comprehensive image to the reader.

The most popular party at the time, the National Peasant Party, adopted a position which can be considered both radical and moderate. On the one hand, party leaders thought that a new agrarian reform was necessary to provide for landless peasants, even at the price of expropriating big landholders. On the other, they sought to implement it in a controlled gradual manner that would avoid major disruptions.¹ Some authors even say that the NPP's project was much more radical in some aspects than that of its opposition, the National Democratic Front. This opinion was based on certain declarations of the party's President, Iuliu Maniu, who expressed the idea of complete expropriation of all the big farms over 50 hectares from lowlands and of those over 30 hectares in hilly and mountainous regions.² In an article called *The New Government of the NDF* (Noul program de guvernare al FND-ului), Victor Ianuc expressed the NPP view that agrarian reform could not be done during wartime without generating incalculable social conflicts and the immediate decline of agricultural production, criticizing the policy of NDF and the coalition at the same time, calling it *extreme left*.³

Dissenters of the party, led by Anton Alexandrescu, left Maniu and allied with the NDF. These adopted a radical, completely populist position, which rivalled the Communists. Many times their attacks turned aggressively against "Historical" parties and their leaders. They concentrated most of their arguments against liberal critics of the reform. For example, the leadership of the NPP, Alexandrescu, formulated counter-arguments for the following positions of the Liberals:

1. expropriation is against the principle of individual property
2. expropriation ruins social harmony
3. expropriation diminishes agricultural production
4. expropriation leaves a great number of agricultural workers without work

They tended to express their opposition not with logical, rational arguments, but with emotional rhetoric.⁴

There was one major political force against expropriation, the National Liberal Party. Major figures of this party considered expropriation of huge private farms to have

¹ Dumitru Șandru, *Reforma agrară din 1945 în România* (The 1945 Agrarian Reform in Romania) (Bucharest: Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2000), 65.

² *România Nouă*, February 23, 1945, 1–2.

³ *Ibid.*, February 7, 1945, 1.

⁴ National Archives from Bucharest (DANIC). Central Committee of Romanian Communist Party. Agrarian Section. Dosar Nr. 5/1945. ("Dosar" means file in Romanian; and "filă" in Romanian means page of an Archive File. For avoiding confusion of the two similar words (file and filă), having different meanings, we will use the Romanian "Dosar" term in our footnotes).

negative effects, and believed that peasants should obtain new lands only from state properties. They used their Party's official newspaper, the *Viitorul* (The Future) to publish supporting views of economic and agricultural experts. For example, an article called "To Parcel out or to Organize?" claimed that parcelling, if it exceeded a certain limit, damaged production, and did not deal with the root causes of social issues. The author illustrated with tables and figures that in the European countries with an advanced agriculture (France, Denmark, and the Netherlands) parcelling of agricultural fields was minimal and called any kind of attempt for land distribution at the expense of existing great property, a "pseudo-solution of demagogic nature that has to be treated as such".¹ Other articles with similar content were written by university professor Constantin A. Stoianovici² and party leader Constantin I. C. Brătianu.³ Probably the best and most well-documented study was authored by university professor and governmental expert G. Cipăianu, who proposed expanding production by continuous, planned improvement on what he considered ideal farms of between 10 and 100 hectares, training of agricultural workers on both theoretical and practical levels, and creation of a special state fund to finance private farms' activities.⁴

Tătărescu's dissenting liberals allied themselves with the forces of the left. Tătărescu's personal position can be considered moderate, compared both to the liberals of Brătianu and to the Communists. His critics, however, saw it as opportunistic. On the one hand, he promised land to the peasants, even by expropriation,⁵ but on the other hand, he did not want at all costs to liquidate big properties. When the final text of the Law was adopted by the leading coalition,⁶ Tătărescu stated that he is going to vote for the final text even if he did not agree with that, because the law had to reflect the entire coalition. Later, during the summer of 1945, Tătărescu firmly opposed nationalizations in industry and expropriation in agriculture,⁷ but it was already too late. Generally, Tătărescu and his followers were much less radical than Alexandrescu and his faction, and secret Archive documents also show that in these months Communist leaders even considered excluding Tătărescu so he would be marginalized.⁸

¹ *Viitorul*, January 18, 1945, 1.

² *Ibid.*, January 31, 1945, 1.

³ *Ibid.*, February 2, 1945, 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, February 2–3, 1945, 3 (on both days).

⁵ Keith Hitchins, *România 1866-1947* (Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 1996), 502.

⁶ Gheorghe Onișoru, *Alianțe și confruntări între partidele politice din România (1944-1947)* (Alliances and confrontations between political parties in Romania) (Fundăția Academia Civică, 1996), 216.

⁷ Vlad Georgescu, *Istoria românilor de la origini până în zilele noastre* (The history of Romanians from the origins to the present) (Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 1997), 244.

⁸ Romanian National Archives, Serviciul Județean Cluj. (SJAN-Cluj) Romanian Workers' Party's Regional Committee. Fonds no 1. Collection 1/1945. Instructions, circulars, activity reports. Record of Regional Committee.



Teodora Cosman, *The Summer Without Stalin*
50cm x 50 cm, acrylic, gouache on tissue, 2014

The political forces from the left, united in the NDF and led by the Communist Party, saw things differently. Communist officials from the outset favoured radical land reform, which they thought would lead to the abolition of private land ownership. Both the party's official newspaper, the *Scântea*, and *agents provocateurs* promoted this view during the months before the takeover of the government. These agents encouraged peasants to create "peasant committees" on their own, without any legal base for doing so. These "committees" were meant to organize expropriations and repartition of land.¹ From 24 September 1944, Party leaders openly expressed their intention to expropriate all properties larger than fifty hectares, and distribute these to landless peasants, with priority going to those who fought against the Axis.

¹ Natalia Tampa, "Starea de spirit din România la începutul anului 1945" (Mindset of Romanian in the beginning of 1945), in *6 martie 1945. Începuturile comunizării României* (6 March 1945. Beginnings of the communization of Romania) (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1995), 315.

Scânteia propaganda during 1944–1945 was aggressive and supported with data and arguments. Especially in January 1945, the fourth page of every single number was entitled *The peasants and the Land*, and contained both reports of recent developments and propaganda-articles with titles like: “What the Peasants need?”, “The Land has to be owned by the Peasants”¹ “How exploited Peasants are?”², “Agrarian Reform till Spring!”³ “The Tool of Justice: Agrarian Reform”⁴, etc. The reports spoke about mass agitation in the countryside, and praised those villages in which peasants took the initiative and confiscated huge land properties by force. In some cases landowners divided their land by themselves, and they too received praise. The majority of these reports came from counties of the Old Kingdom – Ialomița, Teleorman, Buzău, Dolj, Constanța, Dâmbovița, Ilfov, Vlașca, Tutova,⁵ etc. from territories which had no complication under Romanian rule (Northern Transylvania making an exception). In Transylvania, the Communists depended mostly on the influence of their regional allies: the Ploughmen Front and the Hungarian People’s Alliance.

The attitude of the Communist Party was clear: they sought an expropriation of large properties as soon as possible, without taking into account potential negative consequences. But major party leaders did not see the Agrarian reform project as a complete and final solution for agrarian issues. Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu wrote: “One single law like the Agrarian Reform cannot solve all the problems.” and “We cannot have illusions that all the peasants will receive land. Many will remain with small property, or even without land”⁶. In the Transylvanian Hungarian Communist newspaper, the *Erdélyi Szikra* (Transylvanian sparkle), a journalist wrote: “We should not let the poor peasantry, gathered around Land Claim Committees, to disperse and to try to succeed by themselves. Those two iugărs⁷ are not enough for this, and they can register only losses”⁸. The prefect of the county of Cluj, Vasile Pogăceanu, publicly stated: “Complete solution to this problem can only be given in Socialism. In this moment we could only achieve liquidation of Feudalism (sic!) and destruction of the great landowner’s class”⁹. The real intention of Communist leaders is probably best revealed by one of the speeches of the influential Ana Pauker, at the Bucharest’s Regional Conference of the RCP, on August 15, 1945: “The ploughmen have to be instructed regarding the great possibility represented by Cooperatives for all. Those peasants who obtained land by the Reform have to be the first partisans of the Cooperatives. It is important for us, the workers and functionaries from cities, to have Cooperatives, and it

¹ *Scânteia*, September 28, 1944, 4.

² *Ibid.*, September 26, 1944, p 4.

³ *Ibid.*, January 6 1945, p 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, January 10, 1945, p 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, January-March 1945, *Passim*.

⁶ Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, “Democratizarea armatei. Îndrumări pentru munca aparatului de cultură, educație și propagandă” (The democratization of the army. Guidelines for the work of the cultural, educational and propaganda apparatus) (Bucharest: 1945, 71–78), in : Pătrășcanu, Lucrețiu, *Scrisori, articole, cuvântări, 1944-1947*. (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1983).

⁷ 1 Romanian iugăr = 0,57 hectares or 1,42 English acres

⁸ *Erdélyi Szikra*, April 5, 1945, 3.

⁹ SJAN-Cluj. CC of RCP. Party Archives. Mai 3-4. Regional Conference of the RCP in Cluj. The speech of Vasile Pogăceanu. F1. Collection no 1/1945

is important for peasantry, too, to not lose their goods, to not get exploited by speculations.”¹

Clearly for the Communists, the Agrarian Reform represented only a temporary measure, and their main purpose was not the creation of lots of small properties, but the realization of cooperative production.

The Ploughmen Front, a Transylvanian regional peasant party, constituted in the interwar period around the lawyer and landowner Petru Groza, Prime Minister of the NDF coalition, shared the same ideas regarding expropriation and land division, but they did not desire a future socialization as their Communist allies did. Just as other activists of the NDF, Ploughmen Front's members agitated among peasants during the Rădescu government. On 12 Februar 1945, at Cluj the party's main expert in Agriculture, Iulian Chitta presented in a conference his Reform project, which should have had as final result a cooperatives movement, with volunteer participation.²

A special case is that of the Hungarian People's Union, which represented the Hungarian minority of Romania. The HPU was one of the most important promoters of the Agricultural Reform in Transylvania, but most of its specialists were not adepts of Communist-type final solutions. On 12 February 1945, the HPU organized the regional congress of the NDF at Cluj. In the Agrarian Commission, besides the six HPU members, three persons from the PF, one representative from the Syndicates, one from the Patriot's Alliance, two Communists and four "apolitical" experts were present. On this occasion the project of Venczel József, economic expert of the Roman-Catholic Church was presented.

Venczel's project was well documented and with solid arguments, in some parts even more radical than the Communists: Venczel's main goal was not the expropriation and destruction of big properties, but the creation of a series of small, viable properties, for whose achievement expropriation was just a necessity. Regarding Venczel's statistics, at that moment 420,000 families in Transylvania lived from agriculture, but to be able to assure a certain level, each family would have needed at least 15 iugărs of arable land, 3 iugărs of grassland, and 2 ½ iugărs of pastures. In case there was improvement of agricultural production (fertilization of soil, mechanized production, etc.) the necessary amount could be 7 iugărs of arable land, 3 iugărs of grassland and 2 ½ iugărs of pastures. In Venczel's vision, there was not enough land for all the 420,000 families. Only 363,000 of them were able to make a decent living from agriculture. The others in his opinion had to be oriented towards industry. He calculated expropriation of properties over 50 ha, and proposed expropriation of ethnic Germans and repartition of state-fund lands too.³

Hungarian press was dominated by leftist ideas, favourable to the Agrarian Reform. On the other hand, not all Hungarian intellectuals and politicians were partisans of Communist-type solutions and debates were common concerning the future of

¹ DANIC. CC of RPC. Agrarian section. Doc nr. 3/1945

² Gábor Vincze, *Illúziók és csalódások. Fejezetek a romániai magyarság második világháború utáni történetéből* (Illusions and disappointments. Chapters from the post-WWII history of Hungarians from Transylvania) (Miercurea Ciuc/CsíkSZereda: Státus Könyvkiadó, 1999), 155.

³ Hungarian National Archives, Budapest (Magyar Országos Levéltár, henceforth: MOL). Küm.Tük xix-j-1-j Románia, boc no 18. 16/b II. Doc. 12/1945. 68. II. 1387–1391

Transylvanian peasantry and life in a rural environment. One of the articles of that kind was Viktor Román's, published in *Utunk* (Our way), in which the author proposed creation of agricultural schools in the countryside for agrarian workers, and arguments that those methods which are efficient in case of huge properties cannot be successful in case of smaller ones, so there is need for innovation.¹ Another study, that of Balázs Kós's, analyzed different possibilities for success of small properties and suggested the creation of cooperatives on volunteer-based associations around agro-industrial factories,² etc.

A special case is that of the Social-Democrat Party, with strong base among workers from urban areas. Social-Democratic politicians came with their own plans, much more moderate ones than those of the Communists.³ Generally speaking, the SDP wanted an Agrarian Reform meant to be better than just distributing land property like the current one did. But the party never had the same power and influence in the countryside like the Communists did. Several attempts were made to create a base among peasantry for Social-Democrats, proved by articles in the party's official newspaper *Făclia* (The Torch) like "Încadrarea țăranimii în Partidul Social-Democrat" (The place of peasantry in the Social-Democratic Party)⁴ or "Partidul Social-Democrat și reforma agrară" (The Social-Democratic Party and the Agrarian Reform)⁵. Since these had little success, it was a general tendency for Social-Democrats to accept the proposals of their allies.

The atmosphere was full of tension. On 14 December 1944, the Committee for Studying Agrarian Reform was created by the Rădescu government for debating the possibility of a just reform. Its members were: George Cipăianu, Ernest Grințescu, Valeriu Bulgaru and M. Berceanu from the National Liberal Party; Gheorghe Zane, Cezar Spineanu, Vasile Serdici and N. Rusu from the National Peasant Party; and from the National Democratic Front, representatives were sent from its main parties: Vasile Luca from the Communists, Theodor Iordăchescu from the Social-Democrats and Ion Moga-Fileru Romulus Zaroni from the PF. Besides these politicians, the following specialists were there: Nicolae Mureș from the Central Union of Agrarian Syndicates (replaced later by V. Iamandi, than by C. Garofild), Manuel Capri from the Agricultural Academy, Nicolae D. Cornățeanu from the Agronomical Research Institute, and Al. Odobeșteanu from the Forest's Administration. President of the Committee was Ion Hudiță. The Committee debated the aspects of a possible reform,⁶ which was adopted under Petru Groza's government.

It was adopted in an after-war period, with the complete expropriation of ethnic Germans, war criminals and those who fled away with the German and Hungarian armies. Their goods had been confiscated previously also by the CASBI law,⁷ which led

¹ Román Viktor, "Törpe mintagazdaságokat!", *Utunk*, September 14, 1946, 10.

² Anavi Ádám, "A túlnépesedett erdélyi mezőgazdaság", *Utunk*, November 9, 1946, 4.

³ Șandru, *Reforma...*, 64.

⁴ Ion Bordan, "Brazda nouă", *Făclia*, March 13, 1945, 3.

⁵ *Făclia*, November 16, 1945.

⁶ Șandru, *Reforma...*, 99–116.

⁷ CASBI = Casa Administrării Bunurilor Inamice, or the law of Administration of Enemies Properties

to many problems and conflicts. On the other side, too many were acquitted from expropriation. Those deported by force in *lagers* in Germany or Hungary were not considered “absentees”. Lands over 10 ha were not expropriated even if they were leased, or represented possession of Diplomats, major military commanders or those decorated with the Mihai Viteazul order.¹ The law also left untouched the properties of the Royal Family, the state institutions and the churches, without considering whether or not citizens felt the need for it. Law-makers did not want any conflict yet with major forces of the country like royalty, army or churches, since in 1945 the control of the NDF over society was not complete yet.

The text contained several contradictions, which had their consequences on its application. For example, the goods of war-criminals and Nazi collaborators were completely expropriated. After they received official conviction by the Court, their property went under the administration of the Ministry of Justice, and by this, became state-fund and could not become object of repartition. Only in 1948, law nr. 10 from June 27 passed these lands under jurisdiction of the Ministry of Agriculture and Public Domains.²

Another problem was related to the properties of the *absentees*, those people who left their residence after the passing of the front. The law said that all those people who left their residence after 23 August 1944 by refuge to German or Hungarian territories are losing all of their lands and properties. Its application gave birth to many confusions, especially in Transylvania, since many people chose to flee away from the way of the battle, and return home after things got normalized.³ The HPU lobby finally obtained, on 31 May 1946, Ministerial Decision no. 1015 which acquitted from the accusation of absenteeism those Hungarian and German ethnics who returned in the country till that moment.

Another issue was that of model-farms: the text of the law said that those agricultural properties which received this rank were acquitted from expropriation, even if they had over 50 ha. Since no clearly defined criteria existed of what a model-farm was, its interpretation was often abusive.⁴

Regarding the effective application of the Agrarian Reform, we can notice several periods with different characteristics. Before March 1944, when the text was adopted, expropriations and repartitions took place illegally, especially in those places in which turbulence created by the passing of the front was significant, or Communist propaganda was successful. In many cases abuses were encouraged by decrees emitted by local authorities, without the approval of central state or party institutions. Such a case appeared on 7 March 1945, when Dr. Virgil Câmpeanu, the prefect of Sălaj county emitted a decree which stipulated “confiscation of the lands of the Fascists, of the refugees with Horthy’s armies, of war criminals and of saboteurs of agricultural works, and of those properties which are bigger than 50 ha”.⁵ After the Reform was adopted,

¹DANIC. CC. of RCP. Dosar nr 7/1945

²Șandru, *Reforma...*, 164.

³Vincze, *Illúziók...*, 155.

⁴Șandru, *Reforma...*, 167–174.

⁵Gheorghe Onișoru, *Alianțe și confruntări*, 216.

the number and intensity of expropriations increased considerably,¹ with simultaneous attempts of organizing committees responsible with repartition. During the summer, expropriation and repartition stagnated, because they could bring serious problems to the continuity of agricultural works. It started again from September, with a “dead” period during winter, being almost completely finalized in the first months of 1946. Most of its major issues could be solved only after a few more years. Anyway, it was finalized relatively quickly, especially in comparison with its predecessor, the Agrarian Reform from 1921.²

From an administrative point of view, the process was organized in the following way:

For the actions, local and communal committees were responsible, named by the mayor of the settlement. These consisted of 7 to 15 people, landless peasants or peasants who had less than 5 ha. Their superior organs were the “plaşa” committees, which started to function from autumn 1945. The law stipulated clearly that the presidents of these plaşa-committees had to be jurists, but when there was a lack of jurists, this clause was not respected, even if the President, regarding the paragraphs of the law, had to be named by the Minister.³ In many cases, this had serious repercussions over the committee’s work, and there were attempts to remediate this, but in many cases, without success. For example, on 26 May 1945, the prefect of Târnava Mare county asked the Central Committee to name jurists in the six plaşa-committees of the county, while all the six presidents were simple peasants.⁴

Above local and plaşa-committees were the County Committees for Agrarian Reform, whose members were named by the Minister and composed of six people: the prefect of the county, a judge, the president of the Agricultural Chamber of the county, and three peasants proposed by political parties. From these peasants, at least one had to participate in the war against Nazi Germany.⁵ In their turn, these County Committees were subordinated only to central organs of state.

Two images of the reform existed: a public, “official” one, present in government politicians’ speeches and in left-wing newspapers, and a real one presented in secret party reports, which proved that things were not always the best.

The Communist Party’s organ, the *Scântea*, made serious propaganda before the adaptation of the law for expropriations by force, and described cases in which these things actually happened, praising those peasants who made it. Articles with titles like “What do the Peasants need?” , “The land has to be owned by its workers”⁶ , before the Reform was adopted, and other ones after the redistribution became legal, with titles like “The workers of the land, Romanians and Hungarians, are working now side by side”⁷ were completing the reports regarding evolution of events. The official newspaper of Alexandrescu’s Peasant Party, the *Dreptatea* characterizes the Reform as “A healthy

¹ Şandru, *Reforma...*, 85.

² *Ibid.*, 155.

³ Vincze, *Illúziók...*, 155.

⁴ Şandru, *Reforma*, 133.

⁵ Vincze, *Illúziók...*, 179.

⁶ *Scântea*, September 28, 1944, 4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, April 28, 1945, 4.

balance between city and village”, “correct redistribution in just parcels”, and “masters in Romanian agriculture are not its abusers anymore, but the poor or wealthy peasantry, which is directly interested in its best production”¹. In another article, “The road of Peasantry”, the prefect of Ilfov county, Eugen Gibescu, compared the results of the Reform with other similar reforms from the past and concluded with satisfaction that “our peasantry is having a new life”². Hungarian newspapers from Transylvania, *Igazság* (Truth), *Erdélyi Szikra*, and the Social-Democrat *Erdély* (Transylvania) also published propaganda-articles with similar content.

A different image of the Reform and its consequences is reflected in secret reports towards central organs and leaders of the Communist Party and speeches held in front of a relatively small, trusted audience by major Party officials admit that in many cases, things are not going as they should.

The Agrarian Reform brought not only new properties for poor people from rural area, but in most parts caused injustice, violence and havoc. One of the key issues was that Communist Party and its allies strongly encouraged the peasantry before to take measures themselves by taking away properties of great landowners. And once this got general, could not be brought back under control. Another cause is that in the first post-war year, Romania lacked the administrative infrastructure, the number of qualified functionaries was too small compared to existing needs and in confusing times, internal security forces lacked the necessary stable political “back-up” for actions against those who broke the law. And even if there were serious attempts of NDF forces for remediating the situation, they were not all the time successful. This is reflected very well in one of the most important regional Communist leaders, Miklós Goldberger’s speech at a regional Party congress, held in summer 1945:

It was correct and a really successful thing from our Party that it started to implement the Agrarian Reform long before the text of the Agrarian Reform Law was adopted against all forces of the Reaction. This was truly a success. We cannot say that it remained just after the coming to power of the Groza government, when we adopted the Law of Agrarian Reform. At the beginning it was hard to convince the peasants for they took the land without legal disposition. But they started at least to redistribute the land and even after the disposition was adopted, they continued to pass across that. They expropriated peasants who had over 20 hectares. What happened there? Why couldn’t we adopt the Law immediately in the first day of the Groza government? We have to know those circumstances too. What could happen if some of our allies would have left the government, for example the group of Tătărescu? We could help a lot the Reaction. Another political force could join the Reaction, and the entire Agrarian Reform project could have been doomed to failure. Our comrades had to work a lot till they convinced these liberal elements of the government e by the necessity of the Agrarian Reform.

Concessions were granted too, but not major ones. They came with proposals regarding who should pay for expropriated fields. They said that it should be

¹ *Dreptatea*, June 24, 1945, 1.

² *Ibid.*, June 25, 1945, 1 and 4.

paid by that part of the bourgeoisie which is not affected by expropriations. Our Party said no, we considered that land should be confiscated without any compensation. We left much more land to their original owners than in Poland. We kept evidence of local reality, of major problems. From the text of the Law till its implementation a certain time had passed. And in Oltenia they had even started to expropriate the Kulaks too.

What did we do when we broke our own Law? This Law was elaborated by our Party, by our Central Committee. By breaking our own law we broke the prestige of our own Government. We had to respect this Law, because it is OUR Law. Everything that happened in the countryside had repercussions in the Government. Instead of obtaining the support of wealthy peasantry against big landowners, to destroy the most dangerous social class, we obtained that wealthy peasants got closer to the landowners. We isolated, only by our forces, can't keep the order in the whole country. The Party have not had enough discipline; in many places they couldn't see the general interests of the Party, only their tiny local interests...¹

Tens of thousands of abuses were documented in the whole country, on central and local level too. A synthetic report addressed to leadership of RCP describes the situation as follows:

Changes are made often on the Plăşa's President level, and the lack of Authority of the Minister of Agriculture results that at least a part of local level decisions regarding expropriations are done by breaking the law. There are cases in which the same commission gave 2-3 different decisions regarding same cause. Because of this many local commissions lost their trust and respect for plăşa committees, and in the majority of cases they don't listen anymore to authorities.

Local expropriation committees are usually considering themselves to be immune of any control, and they are breaking the law many times. There were expropriated properties spared by the law, which were either under the expropriable level, or they belong to institutions whose land is absolved from expropriation (The Romanian Academy, The Alliance of Civil Hospitals, Foundations, etc.) or they are already under CASBI dispositions. In the county of Odorhei there were completely expropriated properties less than 10 hectares, in Dolj County there are properties less than 50 hectares expropriated in great number, etc...These were expropriated without written documents, only by simple will of the peasants, to which the local committees supposed themselves... (...)

In many cases the right of previous, legal owner over his property was admitted and documented, but he could not get his property effectively back. (...)

It is known in a very discontinuous way, situation from over 34 counties and a surface of 500000 hectares. (...)

¹ SJAN-Cluj. Regional Committee of RCP Cluj, Fonds 1. May 3-4, 1945. The speech of Miklós Goldberger. (=Goldberger)

There are many cases in which local committees and presidents of plăsa committees decided expropriations in abusive and illegal manner, and not even the prefects dared to intervene for the law to be respected.

Regarding the same document, there were many local, specific transgressions of the law. In the case of Carmen Silva village from Constanța, communal lands were expropriated, just as in Bucharest.

In mountainous counties properties which were exempted from expropriation were still expropriated in illegal and abusive ways. Huge surfaces of forests were expropriated in this way. Such cases happened in counties of Neamț, Putna, Dâmbovița, Trei Scaune, Turda, etc. In the majority of causes damages were final, in the sense that forests were immediately devastated by the “new owners”.

Almost everywhere there were personal dissatisfactions regarding the redistribution process, and the solution of these unrests in the majority of cases was impossible, because of the lack of land. Almost everywhere there were contesters of the way how local distribution committees were constituted and in many cases the use of force was necessary to survive. In many places, among the receivers of new agricultural properties there were people who were not entitled for it (priests, teachers, jurists, etc.). In many cases, war veterans or their widows did not receive land. Lakes and vegetable gardens, but even industrial enterprises and installations were expropriated in illegal ways.¹ In these cases there is no wonder that in many places there were violent conflicts between villagers, or even small local wars between neighbouring villages. The suspicion generated violence often without the *motive* to be real. For example, inhabitants of the city of Cluj, the *Hóstátis*, were chased away by the inhabitants of the villages Gilău and Florești when they wanted to gather timber from their forests.²

Even if it was very strictly defined who could be a member in the redistribution committees and who cannot, it was not respected in the majority of cases. Only in Dolj county 309 people entered these committees who should not have had functions like this.³ In such a case, regarding a report addressed to Communist Party officials, a former member of the fascist Iron Guard Movement, Ana Lazu, became president in the plăsa Lazu-Dolj, and openly acted in a very corrupt way, favouring those who gave bribes to her.⁴ The chaos and social unrest in some places compromised even basic agricultural matters, for example in Caraș county the harvest had to be gathered in many places with volunteer paramilitary forces.⁵

Referring to a report of the Gendarmerie of Cluj, in Sălaj county the population committed serious abuses, “while there were not enough lands to expropriate, and local committees of Agrarian Reform could not satisfy all the just needs”. It seems it was a general phenomenon that these people set fire to private or state-property forests (many of these being already under CASBI rule) for creating new arable lands, which could be expropriated. In this way, the burning of the following forests was documented: the

¹ DANIC. CC of RCP. Agrarian Section Dos. nr. 266/1946

² *Erdély*, July 17, 1946, 3.

³ Șandru, *Reforma*, 129–133.

⁴ DANIC, CC of RCP. Agrarian Section. dos 14/1946.

⁵ DANIC. CC of RCP. Agrarian section. Dos 42/1946

forests from Moigrad were burnt down twice (5 iugărs), the forests of Săcășeni (1 iugăr), Jibou (5 iugărs), the Meseș from Zalău (60 iugărs), and Aghireș (4 iugărs) once.¹

In a speech of his, Communist leader Goldberger reflects on another aspect of the agrarian Reform from Sălaj: peasants were confiscating the land of churches by force. In this paradox situation, the strongly Atheist and anti-clerical Communists became the defenders of church property:

“In Sălaj, the lands of the churches got expropriated. If the land is on “dead hand”, no one works it, it can be expropriated. In Sălaj, the peasants said so: if they want to take back the land, we will chase the priest away. And then we don’t need neither priests, nor Church”.²

Another county from which we know many concrete examples is Hunedoara. Here, expropriation was done in a similar way. The redistribution process was not documented by records, so we can only say that around 20,000 people got impropriated. In many cases, peasants got in violent conflicts with the authorities.

For example, in Branișca, the peasants divided among themselves 85 iugărs expropriated from Baron Jósika, a field reserved for founding an Agricultural School. In Bobâlna (village from Geoagiu plașa) they occupied 75 ha of reserved land, exempted from expropriation by being a model-farm (the farm of Aurel Vlad) and did not want to give up on it. In Ghimendie, the villagers expropriated the whole property of Filimon, a lawyer (important member, otherwise, of the PF), because it was exploited in rents, in proportion of 3/2. In Călan, the workers of the local factory occupied and redistributed the land of the factory. In Simeria, 44 iugărs of the Ocskay farm were distributed to railway workers.³

Demonstrating the whole reform process’ character, we have chosen to analyze its situation in an important Transylvanian county, the county of Cluj, both in details and in its general perspectives.

Regarding scientific studies as statistics, the county of Cluj as administrative unit⁴ could be characterized in the following way: Transylvanian county, with mixed geographical character (comprising mountain-hill and lowland area), having 4,813 square kilometres, 225 communes (villages) distributed in 10 plășas, and two cities: Cluj (in Hungarian : Kolozsvár) and Huedin (in Hungarian: Bánffyhuntyad).⁵ The county had a quite important agriculture, but its main character was not agricultural, like in counties from southern Romania, and large property was not dominant, mostly because of two reasons. The first one is that the Agrarian Reform from 1921 was more radical in Transylvania than in the rest of the country, the second one is a completely geographical

¹ SJAN-Cluj. Fond 208. jandarmeria Crime, delictes, contravenții, dos 414 (19 mai 1946) . Raport înaintat de jandarmi către Ministerul Afacerilor Interne, Direcția Administrației de Stat (Fonds 208. Gendarmerie. Crimes, delicts, contraventions. dos 414. (May 19, 1946). Report forwarded by the Gendarmes toward Ministry of Internals, State Administration Direction).

² SJAN-Cluj. Regional Committee of RCP Cluj, Party Archive. Fonds 1. May 3-4, Goldberger

³ DANIC. CC of RCP. Agrarian section. dos 1/1946. 1532 (March 1-2).

⁴ In 1945–1948, having a much smaller surface than the present county of Cluj.

⁵ “Principalele probleme economice ale județului Cluj,” (The main economic problems in the county of Cluj), *Probleme Economice* (Economic Problems), Institutul de Politică Economică și Socială al Universității “Bolyai “ din Cluj (The Political and Social Economics Institution of “Bolyai” University from Cluj), September-October 1948, 81–102.

one, because most of the county's land resource was not the most favourable for agriculture.

Regarding statistics, the agrarian reform took place in the county as follows:

At the beginning, in the RCP Region of Cluj¹ there were 637,718 ha of arable land, 14,766 of vineyards, and 617,178 ha of forests. 457 of private properties were expropriated, from which 310 were under 50 ha, which meant a surface of 58,258 ha. 29,788 peasants were impropriated (persons, not families - A. n.). Agricultural work resources: 8 centres of agricultural machines, 537 tractors (second place after Bucharest in the country), 17,481 ploughs, 30 sowing machines, 5 mowing-machines, 26,594 other different agricultural tools. The number of working animals was: 45,137 cattle, 15,626 horses.

The process of expropriation and redistribution went in the following way:

In March 1945, there were 21, 888 peasants impropriated from 61,722 ha expropriated at the time. In April, 36,268 peasants were impropriated and there were no new expropriations. In this moment, the number of expropriated properties was 545, from which 438 were under 50 ha.

In May, the number of expropriations and redistributions grew: 587 properties were expropriated, from which 387 under 50 ha, on a total surface of 67,756 ha, 40,681 peasants receiving new properties. In June, the number of expropriated properties and hectares grew considerably: 1,726 of properties have been expropriated, from which 387 were under 50 ha, in a complete number of 73,432 ha. 44,496 peasants received land. During July, the situation remained unchanged. Minor changes were produced in August: 1,945 properties were expropriated, the number of properties under 50 ha remaining unchanged: 387. 44,496 peasants received land from 73,432 expropriated ha. Situation remained unchanged during September too.

During October, major changes were produced: the number of expropriated properties falls under 1887, from which 304 being under 50 ha. 72,404 ha remained expropriated, and 42,604 peasants impropriated. In November the number of expropriated properties fell even more, but the number of properties under 50 ha, expropriated completely, grew: 1,847 properties remained expropriated, from which 373 were under 50 ha. The absolute number of expropriated hectares remained unchanged: 72,404, but the number of the beneficiaries grew, reaching 44,154 of impropriated peasants. The situation remained unchanged during December, this month being considered to be a "dead period" from the perspective of agricultural works.²

The regional situation, under the form of statistic tables, can be reproduced as follows:

¹ The Communist Party's documents are based on party regions consisting of several counties each.

² DANIC. CC of RCP. Agrarian section. Dosar 231/1946

Fig. no. 1.

Month	No. of expropriated properties	No. of properties expropriated under 50 ha.	Total no. of expropriated ha.	No. of inappropriate peasants
March	457	310	61722	29888
April	545	438	61722	36268
May	587	360	67756	40681
June	1726	387	73432	44496
July	1726	387	73432	44496
August	1945	387	73432	44496
September	1887	304	72404	42602
October	1887	304	72404	42602
November	1887	373	72404	44154

The numbers shown in the table can be contested, and analysed in many ways. There are many reasons for them not being considered as being 100% precise and correct data: information and data were collected in a non-uniform manner, in different periods, some numbers could not have been reproduced precisely, superior organs having no reliable ways to control them, etc. But at this moment these are the only existing statistics and, before the contrary is proved, we must accept them even with doubts to be correct and real.

Regarding another table, which presents the Agrarian Reform on Transylvanian level, in the mirror of ethnic proportions (Hungarian/Romanian report) the situation is presented in the following way:¹

Fig. No. 2

County	Total expropriated surface	Total expropriated surface of expropriated land of Hungarians in absolute numbers and in percents	Total number of expropriated people	Total number of expropriated Hungarians, in absolute	Total number of people with right for impropriation	Total number of Hungarian people with right for impropriation, in absolute numbers and percents
Odorhei	4063	3840 94,0 %	456	445 97,8%	9535	9003 94%
Cluj	12278	16828 87%	214	159 74,3%	23000	8000 35%
Sibiu	34845	341	9710	22	14252	34

¹ DANIC. CC of RCP. Agrarian Section Dosar nr 339/1946

		1,1%		0,23%		0,24%
Braşov	43624	418 0,9%	7309	35 0,48%	9510	1319 13,1%
Mureş	12610	9110 72,24%	172	99 58%	10151	3700 36,4%
Făgăraş	37364	74 0,2%	2685	5 0,19%	3010	25 0,83%
Total	155784	30655 19,7%	20446	763 3,79%	69458	22081 31,8%

Regarding this table, in the county of Cluj 12,278 ha were expropriated from 214 persons and were distributed among 23,000 persons.¹ On the other hand, in a document found in the Hungarian National Archives, the situation is presented differently, especially regarding its ethnic connotations. A report addressed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from Budapest shows that there were 246 cases disputed by the agrarian committees, and from these, 200 cases regarded Hungarian property, 42 Romanian and 4 other cases. Regarding this data, we calculate the following: confiscated Hungarian property 81,3%, Romanian 17,1%, other 1,6%. The number of properties over 50 ha were 58, from which 44 were Hungarian, 14 Romanian. 140 landowners were expropriated, from which 121 were Hungarians, 17 Romanians and 2 others. The proportion of expropriated land size was the following: 89, 1 % from Hungarians, 10,7% from Romanians, 0,2% from others. In the case of expropriated properties over 50 ha from the 58 examined cases from 44 Hungarian owners only 17 remained with properties of 50 hectares, and from the 14 Romanians only one lost his land completely.² Regarding Vincze Gábor's calculus, in the county of Cluj 90% belonged before to Hungarians, and only 15,3% of the beneficiaries were Hungarians, on this turn.

Reform in Cluj county took place as follows:

The County Committee consisted of the following members: Fărcaşu Vasile (president) Tătaru Aurel (secretary), Vasile Pogăceanu, Abruday Ion, Pârău Vasile, Kelemen Francisc, Câmpăneanu Traian, members. Responsible on Plaşa level were the following ones: Călăţele plaşa: Matei Vasile; Borşa plaşa: Mălai Gheorghe; Cluj plaşa: Olteanu Marcel; Nădăşel plaşa: Simion Ştefan replaced with Mişin Vasile, who got replaced with Pop Alexandru; Hida plaşa: Seliceanu Vasile; Huedin plaşa (I) : Dr. Toduţiu Iulius; Huedin plaşa (II) Cotea Ion; Mociu plaşa: Ciuarta Vasile, replaced by Suteu Teodor, who also got replaced with Suseveanu Vasile; Sărmaş plaşa: Groza Mircea; Cluj city: Fodor Balázs; Gilău plaşa: Sfârlea Vasile.³ The central coordinator had little role in confiscating and redistribution of lands, which was made by local

¹ It would be a big mistake to draw general conclusions regarding Romanian/Hungarians percentages only based on the data of this table, while population in these counties did not have the same numbers and proportions, neither the same social and geographical realities. They only have an illustrative role.

² MOL. Papers of Foreign Affairs. Küm. Tük.-XIX-J-1-j. Románia, box 18. 16/b pachet. Földreform (Agrarian Reform), 1271.

³ DANIC. CC of RCP. Nr 339/1946.

committees, elected by the population of the village or territory in case, fact which proved to generate scandals and turbulence in many places.

Local redistribution committees appeared quickly after the text of the Reform Law was adopted. Actually, in many places people were already morally prepared. In Cojocna, on 1 April took place the gathering in which the committee was elected, which immediately started its activity by redistributing Palló Sándor's property, which had 252 iugărs.¹ At Cara, the property of Baron Atzél was redistributed, 133 iugărs. Over here, at first there were some interethnic discussions, members of the Romanian population refusing at first to receive any Hungarian villagers in the committee, because of the war against the Hungarians not so long before. On 2 April they reached an agreement,² and the local committee was constituted on 4 April, having the following people in composition: Muntean Demian, Călăcion Ioan, Nuț Simion, Cent Ioan, Székely Gergely, Laczi Márton, Bota Ioan, Bici Vasile, Fodor Gergely, Mureșan Ioan, Orosz Ioan, Nemes Pantelimon, Crișan Ioan, Lucigaș Vasile.³

Problems were not only here. Most of the disputes were apparently interethnic ones, at least on surface. I tend, on the other hand, to believe that basically interethnic aspects were secondary, the real conflict-generating issues being economical ones, related to property. As a proof, the conflicts inside ethnically homogenous communities; disputes between neighbouring localities; conflicts between former owners and new ones can be reproduced, impropriated from the goods of the previous ones; the complaints of poor peasants, remained often without land because of some "crocks" and wealthier peasants who used their influence to take advantage of opportunities and obtained new properties.

Romanian-Hungarian disputes existed in several communities, even if at the level of official propaganda image and *Scânteia* articles everything was just perfect. In a short news from the *Scânteia*, referring to the county of Cluj, is the statement that "workers of the land, Romanians and Hungarians, are working now together"⁴, and in another text, found in the Archive of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, "in their fight against big landowners the whole peasantry is united, without consideration to ethnic background".⁵ Reports from the field often proved the opposite.

So there were complaints in Cojocna on the side of Hungarian inhabitants, regarding the correctness of redistribution, because those lands which were confiscated from Hungarian landowners became Romanian property.⁶ A similar case happened in Bodu, where the Romanian majority terrorized the Hungarian minority on ethnic basis.⁷ At Suatu, Hungarians were displeased because even though Hungarian represented 70%

¹ SJAN-Cluj. Fonds of Regional Committee of RCP Cluj, Party Archive. Fonds 1. Inv 1. F. 26. 1/1945.

² SJAN-Cluj. Fonds of Regional Committee of RCP Cluj, Party Archive. Fonds 1. Inv 1. F. 26. 3/1945

³ SJAN-Cluj. Fonds of Regional Committee of RCP Cluj, Party Archive. Fonds 1. Inv 1. F. 26 4. IV.1945.

⁴ *Scânteia*, April 28, 1945, 4.

⁵ DANIC. CC. of RCP. Agrarian Section. Dos. 5/1946

⁶ SJAN-Cluj. Regional Committee of RCP Cluj, Party Archive. Fonds 1. 21. XI. 945

⁷ SJAN-Cluj. Regional Committee of RCP Cluj, Party Archive. Fonds 1. 20. XII. 945

of the inhabitants, only two Hungarians became members in the redistribution committee and there was a very annoying case in which a wealthy peasant, the owner of 17 iugărs, also received land, and he was Romanian. The peasants from the villages of Pata and Luna had a violent ethnic conflict because of land redistribution.¹ At Ciumăfaia there was not any violence of this kind, but disputes were there, too: the redistribution committee, led by Rus Ironin confiscated and redistributed Hungarian properties completely, and left the Romanian ones all untouched, declaring them to be model-farms. As a result interethnic relations suffered a serious degradation.² In other cases there were no violent conflicts because of the asymmetrical proportion of the two nationalities. Regarding a Hungarian diplomatic report, in Frata 400 of iugărs were confiscated, all of these Hungarian property before, and as the result of the reform, only 4 Hungarians received land, among them a really poor peasant who had 5 children and only ½ iugăr of land also received only 1 iugăr.³

We should not reach to the conclusion that interethnic conflicts based on redistribution existed where the population was mixed, and that these completely dominated interethnic relations. In many places with mixed population were no ethnic conflicts during the redistribution process. Actually, the parties of the NDF had no interests in creating and maintaining conflicts. Where they could, they intervened in solving the issue in an acceptable way for all. In Transylvania in general the Ploughmen Front and the Hungarian Popular Union decided to send mixed Commissions in ethnically mixed villages.⁴ In a mixed community, where the distribution process of 133 iugărs caused ethnic conflicts, a mixed committee, made up by 8 Romanians and 3 Hungarians, managed to solve the issue.⁵ In another village, Jebuc, or in Hungarian Zsobok, all the peasants were pleased from the start, since the existing expropriated land – 70% from the farm of the Szentiványi family – was divided in parcels of equal size.⁶ At Coruș, or in Hungarian: Kardos, expropriation was made before its legal base appeared, but in a very efficient and civilized manner.⁷ From the local villagers, 52 Romanians and 21 Hungarians requested land, and the disputes regarding the correctitude of the process was prevented by the offer of Fodor Balázs – local representative of the HPU – who suggested that every single rightful person will receive 1 iugăr, and the remaining land will be distributed among the Hóstátis, Hungarian gardeners from the city of Cluj, who had the right for land, but had nowhere to take it from. The offer was accepted without problem by the Romanian villagers, and so the Hóstátis received 15 iugărs in Coruș. In another village, in Gilău, the process was supervised from the start by representatives of HPU and the PF, and tensions were prevented.⁸ In the same spirit the Bánffy-property from Bonțida,

¹ SJAN-Cluj. Regional Committee of RCP Cluj, Party Archive. Fonds 1. 17. VI. 945.

² SJAN-Cluj. Regional Committee of RCP Cluj, Party Archive. Fonds 1. 20. XII. 945.

³ Nékám Sándor diplomatic attaché's report to Gyöngyösi János (Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs) regarding the 1945 Romanian Agrarian Reform In: Vincze Gábor, *Illúziók...*, 167–170.

⁴ SJAN-Cluj. Regional Committee of RCP Cluj, Party Archive. Fonds 1 I. 388/1945

⁵ SJAN-Cluj. Regional Committee of RCP Cluj, Party Archive. Fonds 1 I. 2. IV. 945

⁶ SJAN-Cluj. Regional Committee of RCP Cluj, Party Archive. Fonds 1 I 24. VI. 945

⁷ SJAN-Cluj. Regional Committee of RCP Cluj, Party Archive. Fonds 1 I 8.3. 945

⁸ SJAN-Cluj. Regional Committee of RCP Cluj, Party Archive. Fonds 1 I Proces verbal 308. 3. III. 945

having 500 iugărs, and the property of another land-owner from Bacu, Gidófalvy István, having 222 iugărs, were distributed as well.¹

In many cases violent conflicts appeared between land-owners and people faithful to them and those who wanted to obtain new properties by the Reform. In some cases clashes were pretty violent. For example, in Mureş county the Baroness Bálinttit, who returned home from the West, where she fled to escape the horrors of the war, found her properties distributed: she gathered her loyal men and tried to take it back by force, without success.² In other cases, former land-owners renounced to their right by their free will, such cases being described in details by the left-wing press of those days. In other cases, a part of peasants were those who did not want to expropriate the former land-owners, resisting even to political pressures. Such a case is narrated by the Hungarian-language Communist newspaper *Erdélyi Szikra*, when in an ethnically mixed community – the exact name is not told – the Hungarian peasants did not take part at first in the works of the local Committee, letting the PF do all the job, and then:

Some Hungarian gentlemen, being friends of the renegade Count, went to the meeting where expropriation was discussed, and tried to save the integrity of his Possessions by all means, for the sake of his relatives. They invoked the incapacity of the sick, the old Countess to being able to survive alone, and her good heart. Etc. They said that the Count is not a Renegade, he just left with Business, and because of travelling difficulties he didn't arrive home yet, but he is going to come soon. The result was that the villagers accepted to postpone the expropriation of the almost 200 iugars. This was the result of the fact that the poor Hungarian peasants didn't dare to oppose their former Ruling Elite, National Solidarity was more important to them than Class-Solidarity with Romanian masses, with whom they share common Economic and Social interests.³

In other cases, even small land-owners, who temporarily left their communities, found their properties taken away, when they returned home. In a complaint from 1946, the following is written:

In Autumn 1944, my father, Alexandru Mikes, former land-owner from Floreşti, was sent by Doctors from Cluj to Szombathely, Hungary for a surgery, away from the dangers of the Front. After the war, my parents and I came home to Cluj, where my father, being very sick was taken to the Hospital again, where he died in November 1945.

When the Agrarian reform became official, in his absence all of our properties were taken away, including our houses, the collection of Art Works and the garden too. My father proved in front of the Justice Court that he cannot be considered to be a Renegade, since he left only because of his illness, but all of his efforts were in vain⁴.

¹ *Scânteia*, April 28, 1945, 4.

² *Igazság*, December 22, 1945, 3.

³ *Erdélyi Szikra*, April 20, 1945, 5.

⁴ SJAN-Cluj. F 3. Prefectura judeţului Cluj. Biroul de Armistiţiu. Dosar nr. 31. Vol. I. 1946. Bunuri părăsite de moşieri CASBI. Doc. nr. 97. (Prefecture of the county of Cluj. Properties left by the CASBI land-owners. File 31, Volume I/1946, Document nr. 97).

In other cases abuses were committed by members of the Committee, clearly for their own good. A report of an independent Communist observer contains the following case study: in Panteceu, a community from Cluj county, a Committee formed by three “strong men” of the community, Kozma Vasilie, Rus Simion and Haragos Sándor, using many various pretences, expropriated completely Sádin Gerő’s previously large property, of 170 ha, not leaving him even the minimal property guaranteed by the Law. The person harmed in his interests naturally brought the case to the Court of Justice.¹

In other cases favours were made by Committees towards certain rich or influential people. In the locality of Leghea, for example, there were serious complaints that the brother-in-law of the Mayor, a former activist of the Horthy regime, was favoured in an abusive manner, receiving 35 iugărs of land from the property of deported Jews, and he was named to be responsible for fulfilling the conditions of Romania’s truce with the Allies in the settlement.² In Vișoara the Romanian Orthodox priest, former member of the Fascist Iron Guard organization, was named to investigate War Crimes and Criminals in the region; and there were several hundreds of cases like these all over the country.³ In other localities mass-abuses prevailed and illegal measures were taken throughout the whole process: a seemingly very serious complaint was registered in Dârja, where the committee formed by Babán Gábor and Babán János distributed land to rich peasants, who were their friends, like Cubánkán István, owner of 15 ha and Tripon György, owner of 8 iugărs, since the really poor, landless peasants received nothing.⁴ In Viștea, the accusations targeted the mayor himself;⁵ etc.

All these misunderstandings, problems and abuses were caused primarily by the text of the Law itself, which was unclear in many places, especially regarding its Application Process: and these errors were often used, especially on local level, for gaining advantage in unfair manners. In many cases, Committees were giving the expropriated land not to peasants, but to Institutions which had nothing to do with Agriculture: we have to mention that this phase of expropriation-redistribution took place not so much in 1945, but in 1946–1948, probably because in many cases the weakening of great land-owners were perceived by Committees to be of a personal or common interest. For example in the locality of Cara, Cluj county, the property of Countess Beáta Jósika-Bethlen, in a total size of 10,13 ha, was given to the Ministry of Internal Order, buildings and arable land being transformed into the Mayor’s Hall, Culture House, and residence for Cooperative and Communal Stables. In 1947 at Nădășel an important amount of expropriated land from Nagyselymesi Gyula was given

¹ SJAN-Cluj. Fondul Comitetului Regional PMP. (Fonds of Romanian Worker’s Party, Regional Committee). Doc. 20. XII. 945

² SJAN-Cluj. Fondul Comitetului Regional PMP. (Fonds of Romanian Worker’s Party, Regional Committee).Doc. 19. XII. 1945

³ SJAN-Cluj. Fondul Comitetului Regional PMP. (Fonds of Romanian Worker’s Party, Regional Committee).Doc. 24. VIII. 945

⁴ SJAN-Cluj. Fondul Comitetului Regional PMP. (Fonds of Romanian Worker’s Party, Regional Committee).Doc. 20. XII. 945

⁵ *Igazság*, September 15, 1945, 2.

to the Ministry of Cults for building a Greek-Catholic Church.¹ On the other hand, it often happened that the land of Institutions was occupied by peasants by force. For example in Bonțida, peasants took the land of the local School, distributing even the Park in front of the entrance to the building.²

In his well-documented work Dumitru Șandru concludes: “Expropriation and redistribution were part of a long series of measures initiated by Communists for obtaining Power in the State”.³ One thing is certain: following the Agrarian Reform, the popularity of the Communist Party significantly increased in rural areas, even if it did not become – yet – the most popular political force. As illustration by a case-study, we will present the situation of the county of Cluj, based on reports and statistics discovered in Party Archives.

Before the Agrarian Reform was applied, we cannot talk about significant presence of Communists in rural area, neither in percentage, nor in absolute numbers, nor in comparison with other counties. Regarding an Organization Report dated 31 March 1945, in the Cluj Region⁴ there were 2618 registered Party members, from which 1860 (72%) were workers, 510 (19%) peasants, 248 (9%) public officers and intellectuals. The gender distribution was the following: 2445 men (94%) and 173 (6%) women. Ethnically, members were divided in the following way: 684 (27 %) Romanians, 1776 (67%) Hungarians, 158 (6%) Jews. Counties composing the Region had the following number of members: Cluj 1460, Someș 238, Turda 720, Bistrița 92, Sălaj 108 members. The Report remarked the weak percentage in Cluj county of Peasantry and on Ethnic plan, of Romanians: “Regarding Party Structures in Rural Area, we have a very small membership of Peasants in this county. Another important weakness of the Party in Cluj is that its Romanian members are only 84, which means 5%,” he writes. A few examples of local village organizations are: Răscruci: 10 members; Mera: 14 members; Nădășel: 6 members; Bonțida: 8 members; Luna de Jos: 9 members; Huedin town: 10 members; Aghireș: 26 members. As we can notice, these numbers are especially small being compared to strength of Party organizations in the factories of the city of Cluj: the organization from Dermata factories had 452 members at that moment, and the organization structure of railway workers, 720 members.⁵

The situation changed radically during the next months. A report from February 1946 tells about 6681 peasants, members of the Party, having 397 organizational cells throughout the whole rural area. But even so, the number of Communist Party members is incomparably smaller than the members of its ally, the Ploughmen’s Front, which, based on the same Report, has 118263 registered members throughout the Region.⁶

This growth is probably caused in part by the chance of the Communist Party to

¹ Șandru, *Reforma...*, 183–184.

² *Ibid.*, 144.

³ *Ibid.*, 309.

⁴ Romanian Communist Party, after Soviet model, organized its structures, at national, regional (Regiune in Romanian), county and local levels. A Region consisted was formed by several Counties and was named after the name of the county in which it had its Center – Author’s Note.

⁵ SJAN-Cluj. Fonds of Romanian Worker’s Party, Regional Committee. File nr. 1/1945

⁶ DANIC. C C al PCR. Secția agrară. (Central Committee of the RCP, Agrarian Section). File nr 23/1946

free propaganda,¹ with practical measures like the Agrarian Reform bringing a serious contribution to this conjuncture. If we check the Statistics, we observe a serious growth following the intense Communist Party agitation in April 1945, when activities were directed in two major directions: politicization of the Agrarian Reform and subventions given to peasants during an intense insemination campaign. Due to successes in these, after 1 May the number of registered party members in villages increased.²

Generally speaking, in the county of Cluj the Agrarian Reform went relatively in a similar manner as in other counties in Romania. We have to mention that this county is one of those examples in which less than 100 documented illegalities were registered related to the execution of the Reform process.³ On the other hand, we cannot catalogue the Reform Process itself or its consequences to be normal or beneficial to society. It is true that for a short time, many people were satisfied because getting chance to own land property. But this lasted only for a few years, and proved to be a populist measure, meant to bring popularity for its applicants, for the crucial elections from 1946, in a sector in which these forces previously lacked major support. With the destruction of compact great properties, productivity on national level was greatly diminished, and contributed even more to the climate of insecurity and poverty, since the agrarian production – due partially also to natural causes, like the great draught from summer 1946, affected also by previous war events, was incapable to fulfil even the needs of the country's population. The Reform aggravated existing social, ethnic and inter-community tensions, and the social unrest and crisis in economic and social life of the urban area was extended and worsened in the rural area too.

On the level of politics, we consider that the main winner of the whole process was the Communist Party, the prime ideological force of the National Democratic Front. Even if most of the propaganda and effective measures were carried out by its allies, like the PF and HPU, their prestige raised the most, and one of its "bourgeois" adversaries was diminished. But even so, this conjuncture gain was not enough to assure even a slight majority of forces of the political left. In the following years, other similar measures had to be taken.

¹ Previously to Soviet Eliberation/Occupation, Communist Party was banned both in Romania and Hungary, and its members suffered serious persecutions.

² SJAN-Cluj. Fonds of Romanian Worker's Party, Regional Committee. 1945/345

³ Șandru, *Reforma..*, 152.