



**Rus, Alin. (2007) *The mineriads: between political manipulation and workers' solidarity* – foreword by Ruxandra Cesereanu, introduction by John Glendhill, Bucharest, Curtea Veche**

*Book review*

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Jiu Valley and the miners have represented for the Romanian society a continuous point of returning and this time the author suggests that an ingression in the recent history of Romania should be made through the instruments of the social sciences. Aware of the strong negative image which the miners have created in the eyes of Romanians, the author unfolds a courageous step to analyze the mineriads from the point of view of the main actors from Jiu Valley involved in these events.

The work opens with a short comparative analysis of the beginning of transition in Romania, Albania and Czechoslovakia, an analysis written by John Gledhill. Starting from the analysis of the main characteristics of the fights for the political power in the post socialist societies, Gledhill gives great importance to the intercession of Alin Rus to answer the following question: “*why were the miners ( more as any social group) so implicated in the political violence of the post decembrist period?*” (p. 13)

The book, “*The mineriads: between political manipulation and workers' solidarity*” is structured in two distinctive parts amounting seven chapters. The first part of the book contains three chapters: “*Mineriads - analyses and interpretation*”, “*Mineriads - chronological reconstruction*” and “*Mineriads and other post Decembrist strikes of miners; the strikes from August 1993 and August 1994.*”

The second part of the book is shared in four chapters: “*The mineriad's image in the local press of Jiu Valley*”, “*Miron Cozma and the mineriads*”, “*The mineriads as social movements*” and “*From Karl Marx to the mineriads*”.

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Published eight years after the last two mineriads (January and February 1999), the book manages to gather, in a well-informed and organized manner, different points of view of the actors involved, constantly following to render accurately the events which corresponded to each mineriad and the outlining of modalities in which these were presented and disputed in the local press of the Jiu Valley. In this way, the book of Alin Rus brings a pertinent outlook upon the social realities of Jiu Valley<sup>2</sup>.

One of the main goals assumed by the author is presenting the way in which the miners and the inhabitants of the Jiu Valley have lived and understood the mineriads. Other goals outlined by the author are related to presenting the “mechanism, the causes and the implications of the mineriads” (p. 23) and judging harshly “the myths that can be fitted in the pattern of the unquestionable unity and solidarity between the miners”(p. 24).

A strong point of the book is represented by the comparative modality in which he relates to the number of miners and to the social-economical realities<sup>3</sup>. The information was gathered through the fieldwork carried out in the period between December 2000 and December 2005. Hence, in this period Alin Rus effectuated more than one hundred interviews with active and dismissed miners, directors of the coal mines, journalists. Parallel to this process, the author analyzed the local press from Jiu Valley during the mineriads in a similar manner with the one that Ruxandra Cesereanu did.<sup>4</sup>

I particularly want to emphasize from the beginning that the author speaks in this work about a „zero mineriad” in February 1945. Building his topic on descriptions of the historians and on interviews with actors and witnesses of the siege of the prefecture of Craiova in February 1945, Alin Rus believes in the privileged relationship between the miners and the communists. In this way, one of the people that the author interviewed claims that in order to have success in the fight with the forces that defended the prefecture of Craiova, the communist militants resorted to a brigade of “300 miners armed with shanks of shovel, bats and axes” (p. 539). In these circumstances, we must underline that since the strike from August 1929, which took place at the central power station from Lupeni, the newspapers from that period signaled the presence of the communist activists.

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<sup>2</sup> A complete presentation of the social realities from Jiu Valley can be found at:

<http://sites.google.com/site/dumitrusandu/cercet%C4%83ri>, Sandu, Dumitru, Livability in Jiu Valley region.

<sup>3</sup> Taking an interest in the main transformations in the life of the workers from the post Decembrist Romania, David Kideckel outlines the fact that „the signification of the mineriads exceeds the region of Jiu Valley; these marches indicate the transition of the Romanian workers from action to the inability of action, from unity to rupture, from optimism and prospects of a better future to query and incertitude (...) The mineriads have represented a death blow for the miners power in post socialist Romania and they have put an end to the public interest in listening their requests and resonate with their needs. Kideckel, David, 2010, *Getting By In Postsocialist Romania: Labor, The Body, & Working-Class Culture*, Iasi, Polirom.(p134)

<sup>4</sup> Ruxandra Cesereanu renders the way in which the mineriads were presented in the national press starting from the articles published in the newspapers that supported FSN (*Adevarul*, *Azi*, *Dimineata*) and also in the newspapers that were against FSN (*Romania Libera*, 22). Cesereanu, Ruxandra, 2003, *Imaginarul violent al romanilor*, Bucuresti, Editura Humanitas

Enunciating the distinctive characteristics for each mineriad, Alin Rus manages to mark out a number of similarities between the six post Decembrist mineriads. The temporal delimitation used by the author for these is: 29-30 January 1990, 19 February 1990, 14-15 June 1990, 24-28 September 1991, 18-22 January 1999 and 16-17 February 1999. From these six mineriads, those from June 1990, September 1991 and January 1999 occupy a main role in this analysis, corresponding to the impact which the mineariades had upon the Romanian society.

The comparative perspective is assured by the detailed presentation of two important post-Decembrist miners' strike (August 1993 and August 1994) which did not transform themselves into mineriads. Through these delimitations, the author shows that the miners' strikes transformed themselves into mineriads only when a series of favorable conditions were fulfilled. A main role in these explanations is occupied by the political factor. Another dimension of the comparative perspective is represented by the introduction of some events into the analysis which are specific to the mines of brown coal from Oltenia..

The author named the chapter "The mineriad's image in the local press of Jiu Valley" is presented even by the author as a necessary addition for the case study made by Ruxandra Cesareanu. The desideratum of which this chapter is built starts from the following idea: "Additionally, we find in the local press many undiscovered information regarding the origins of the mineriads, information at which only the reporters from here have the use of, elements regarding the line of thought, the ideas, the feelings of the people from the Jiu Valley during the mineriads, but also about the mechanism which made these events possible" (p. 306). Below, I will render shortly some of the main conclusions of the author, which resulted from analyzing the local newspapers published around the dates for each mineriad.

For the mineriads from January and February 1990 the following main aspects have distinguished:

1. the reinvigoration and the consolidation of the myth of the "heroes miners" (based on the important role which the leaves of the miners to Bucharest had for defending "the Revolution" and "the Democracy")<sup>5</sup>;
2. the cultivation of the miners' attachment towards FSN -the National Salvation Front (towards Ion Iliescu and Petre Roman) and their strong opposition of the miners towards historical parties;
3. Maintaining the communist myth according to which the coal from the Jiu Valley was vital for the country.

For the modality in which the local newspapers presented to the mineriad from 14-15 June 1990, Alin Rus finds as being definitive the following characteristics: 1. The miners leave to Bucharest had a spontaneous nature (this thesis was identical with the one that FSN spreaded); 2. The consolidation of the myth of the "heroes miners" of the fight for defending "Democracy"; 3. Avoiding any kind of commentaries regarding the violent acts made by the miners: "In this way, it was tried the perpetuation of the same idyllic

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<sup>5</sup> The propaganda newspapers belonging to the NSF promoted the idea of the new democracy built on the foundation of the revolution from 1989 was endangered. Also they were saying that it is the duty of the workers to defend the new democracy.

image about the miners, as an elite social-professional category, in the same time honest, dignified and courageous“(p. 326).

Once with the mineriads from September 1991, the author records also the first gradations of the perspective in which the mineriads are reminded and analyzed in the local press. The author sees a delimitation between the miners' acts and the local newspapers. In this way, the mineriad is presented in a way with critical points, caused by the purposes associated with the leave of miners to Bucharest, but also to the violent acts made by the miners in the space covered by the local press (Vulcan, Petrosani, Craiova).

Dominant, The last two mineriads (January and February 1999) are presented in a negative perspective in the Jiu Valley local press. The newspapers redactions highlight the monopolization of the syndical activities by Miron Cozma. More than that, the approach between Cozma and a series of extremist political leaders represents a sufficient argument for demonstrating the miners' unjust leave of the miners to Bucharest. The local press brings into discussion the way in which Miron Cozma and the people that surrounded him exploit the dark socio-economical situation<sup>6</sup> from Jiu Valley.

The analysis of the mineriads in the conceptual sociological register is created by the use of the social movements theories. Alin Rus considers the first four mineriads as being framed in the social counter-movements, and while the last two mineriads are idiosyncratic as social movements. Hence for rendering the way in which the author framed the mineriads from 1990 and 1991 are vital: “(...) the mineriads from 1990, having the attribute of counter-reaction to a certain phenomenon didn't have a clear ideology and also no aims”(p. 436) and “the mineriad from 1991 (...) was a politically controlled to a series of national and international events, which could create problems to a certain part of the power, the same of the power after the fourth leave of the miners to Bucharest”(p. 437-438).

Analysing the mineriads from January and February 1999, the author considers that these fulfilled the necessary conditions to be labeled as social movements: “(...) they didn't come off explosively, like the previous mineriads, they had a period of gestation caused by a series of dissatisfactions which had worsened in the climate already tensed of Jiu Valley in the last part of the year 1998”(p. 441).

Starting from the major differences which came into prominence between the six mineriads, the author comes to the conclusion that a single theory can not offer a sociological explanation for all these. In this way, Alin Rus identifies and analyzes a large series of theories: The mineriads- spontaneous reactions of the working class; The theory of relative deprivation - The theory of the relative frustration; The mineriads –

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<sup>6</sup> Starting with the reform of the mining, Maria Larionescu, Cosima Rughinis and Sorin Radulescu describe the socio-economical situation from Jiu Valley as following: „Above the growth of the unemployment rate which worsed the phenomens of divortiosness, suicide and crime have grown very much after the process of discharging. The prone decrease of the life quality, the harsh conditions of habitation, the pollution, the alcoholism, the precarious state of health of a great part of the population...” Larionescu, Maria, Rughinis, Cosima, Radulescu, Sorin, 1999, *Cu ochii minerului. Reforma mineritului in Romania (Evaluari sociologice si studii de caz)*, Bucuresti, Editura Gnosis, pag. 233.

manipulations of the laborer masses; The theory of coming to command of the labor army; The theory of political violence in period of crises; The theory of the emergent work load; The theory of occupational community; The theory of the split society. Every theory manages to offer explanations corresponding to the causes, mechanisms and consequences of the six *mineriads*, and the author considers that a significant relevance for the sociological analysis as social movements can be associated to „the climate of *mineriads*: “The post Decembrist Romania, the success of *mineriads* against the reforming movements, promoted especially by students and intellectuals developed by so-called “*mineriad*’s climate”, a state of being in which the Romanian democracy and economy have suffered a severe decline curve” (p.490).

The last chapter of the work is structured in a very short presentation of the privileged connection between miners and communists. This relation is not a creation of the totalitarian regime installed by Moscow after the Second World War. Even from the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup>s century, the communists have used brigades of miners in Siberia-1919, in the Ruhr area-1920 and the north of Spain, Asturias-1934 (p.504-509). In Romania, the communist propaganda has brought and has maintained the miners’ myth as an elitist laborer group. The author strengths that this process began strongly in the period before the installation of communism (the theatre play *The Miners* written by Mihai Davidoglu in 1949, the movie *The reverberating Valley* in 1950, Geo Bogza’s book *People and coal in Jiu Valley*) and continued in the entire communist period (even after the strike from the mine of Lupeni from 1977). The description of these realities is a necessary condition in explaining the way in which the masses of miners acted in the post Decembrist period<sup>7</sup>.

Alin Rus manages in the first part of the work to order the social realities corresponding to each *mineriad* based on interviews and mass media analysis, and in the second part to give answers to the main questions related to the *mineriades*. The harsh conclusion of the author is the following: “Them (the *mineriads*) encompass in their structure all that can be more ignominious and more shocking in the history of a nation: civil war, concentration camp, race hatred, laborer movements and coup d’etat, all these under the shadow of violence” (p. 586). The ample documentation and the author’s care to keep himself away from the political interests and political positions related to the *mineriads* assures the necessary requisite for a sustained scientific inquiry.

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<sup>7</sup> Septimiu Krausz distinguished a series of objective and subjective elements which have driven to the line of thought and to the miner’s behaviour. Krausz, Septimiu, 2000, *Valea Jiului dupa ’89: un deceniu de probleme si convulsii*, in Zamfir, Elena, Zamfir, Catalin, Badescu, Ilie (coordonatori), *Starea societatii romanesti dupa 10 ani de tranzitie*, Bucuresti, Editura Expert, pag. 331-343.