

SMALL AND WRETCHED MEN. LETTERS TO POWER. 1948-1964

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Abstract: The communist party's particular interest in the letters it received from ordinary people can be explained from at least two perspectives: on the one hand, the communist power orchestrated a presumed dialogue with society, and on the other hand it revealed the capacity of the people to adapt to the new norms and codes imposed by the regime. Aside from mentions in the official paper, „Scântea“, or the resolutions written by officials on the letters, as well as the annual reports relating to the number and the topics of those letters, the real perspective of the authorities on all these documents is difficult to recreate. Official documents keep details about the general effort to respond to the complaints which are coming from ordinary people. The letters to power are direct proof of the interactions between leaders and led. They are especially valuable sources for understanding how the society functioned and adapted the rigours of political power. They allow us, on the one hand, to identify the reactions of society (revolt, approval, dissimulation), and, on the other hand, indicate the way in which the power reconfigured the political agenda according to the signals it received from below.

Keywords: Romanian Communism, Denunciations, Repression, Letters, Society

The letters to power – a *sui-generis* channel of communication between commoners and the upper circles – have produced lately a rich bibliography. The attitude of the Soviet citizens towards the authorities, the representation of power, collective mentalities, and the means of communication between the governed and the governing are among the topics approached by Russian and Western historians based on the new sources¹.

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¹ In Russian research, one should mention one of the first collections of letters by Soviet citizens to the party and state organizations, and to “Krestianskaia gazeta” – the Peasants’ Newspaper, on topics such as civil war, “war communism,” new economic policy – NEP, and forced collectivization. *Golos naroda* – the people’s voice which is heard in these letters paints an image completely different from that of the official propaganda. The letters contain essential information on less formal aspects of the “greater politics.” They enable a closer look at the relation between power and society, and a better understanding of the interaction between the upper circles and the ordinary people. *Golos naroda: pisima i otkliki riadovih sovetskikh grajdan o sobitiiakh 1918-1932*, ed. A.K. Sokolov, Moscova, ROSSPEN, 1998,