

Women's Reflections on Work and Gender Relations under Socialism

R. born 1924, deported by the Romanian government to Ukraine 1945-50 due to German descent, currently retired, widowed, two children, interviewed in Braşov, Romania, summer, 2003

From the first day I began to work like a man, because the men [on my team] said "if a woman has the same rights as we do, they should do the same work." We worked as switchmen for the direct trains where I was a signaler for the local trains where you had to climb in between the cars, which had to be assembled in each station, and the wagons which remained had to be taken out of the station... And these local trains were very difficult for women... but we didn't make a fuss, we had to work alongside men.... One day I was at the station at Buzau... the two male switchmen stood at the station while I, a woman, had to climb from one car into another. And the ladder was crooked and I wanted to climb it while it [the train] was moving.... I managed to grasp the ladder and climb up so the locomotive didn't run over me. This situation lasted about a year. Finally they [her employers] noticed that regardless of what happens a woman remains a woman and a man a man. And then they withdrew the team of women from circulation.

I. born 1954, seamstress under communism, currently an independent vendor, married, three children, interviewed in Braşov, Romania, summer, 2003.

For me, I have the impression that the period was good... it was very good... I was taught to work at a young age... I believe that, regardless of the regime, if you are diligent and you work, you will live well. I liked it because I worked eight hours... I came home... I put a meal on the stove... and I had time to read... I read a lot then... I led an ordered life. Yes... we worked on Saturday and sometimes Sunday, but to be honest that didn't disrupt anything. It was more of a pretension than anything else on those days.

M. born 1955, worked as an electrician under communism, currently unemployed, married, two children, interviewed in Braşov, Romania, summer, 2003.

You know it was a personality conflict; it was a continual battle working with men. In the first place it was very difficult to demonstrate to them what I knew and that I knew to do it very well... that nobody else needed to follow me, a man for example, to put the work right again once I had finished. After they got used to me then they treated me with dignity. They never talked in an ugly or vulgar way with me because I would not permit it... and there was equilibrium. I had two choices: either to act like I didn't know anything or to be unusual. I preferred to be unusual. And I did very well.

E. born 1954, factory worker under communism, currently unemployed, married, one child, interviewed in Braşov, Romania, summer, 2003.

Almost all of us were in the same boat regardless if you were a man or woman. Sex didn't matter, that is

being a man did not mean you were privileged. Women could also achieve what they wanted, if they wanted, if they had ambitions, attended the party school, not a problem, they could make it anywhere. But from a humanitarian point of view, we were in the same boat.

N. born 1953, geologist, married, one child, interviewed in Braşov, Romania, summer, 2003.

It was like today, there was comrade, there was no mister... you needed to use the word comrade. [But] Equal... never have women been equal to men. My opinion is that women work much more than men. You have to work, you have quotas... you could be an intellectual in an office, a worker at a machine in a factory, it's all work. You come home and then you have to take care of the family... It is true that men were better paid because they could handle more heavy/difficult work. Equality was only formal.

Source: Anonymous Interviewees, interview by Jill Massino, oral histories, Brasov, Romania (Summer, 2003), tape, Indiana University Institute for the Study of History and Memory.