



Prison Conditions in **RUMANIA**



A FACTUAL REPORT
compiled by
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

SEPTEMBER 1965

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Political Prisoners
1955 - 64

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THIS REPORT was written and intended to be read as a part of a series. It was in 1964 that AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL resolved at its Annual Assembly to embark on the publication of reports on the conditions in the prisons of all countries holding 'Prisoners of Conscience'. As there are over seventy such countries and all of them by definition conceal what goes on in their prisons, the undertaking is considerable. As the available resources are limited, it was decided to proceed at the rate of three reports each year. This is one of the first batch.

A significant feature of the 1960's is the general development of interest in penology. Country after country is turning attention to the most intractable of its social problems — the reform of the habitual criminal. Great advances have been made. It has been demonstrated that imprisonment is neither necessary nor beneficial for the great majority of offenders, and that, where custodial care is essential, conditions should approximate to those in a mental institution. Unfortunately, there has been little sign of any improvement of the conditions of 'Prisoners of Conscience'. A hundred years ago political prisoners were regarded and treated more favourably as a class apart. Where this distinction remains, its purpose now is to single out opponents of the government for worse conditions and exclusion from any benefits of penal reform.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL is itself partly a product of the penological reform movement. It is not composed of philosophical anarchists who advance the view that society is obliged to tolerate any form of dissenting behaviour. It was established by, and is composed of, practical reformers. Its principal contention is simply this: it is short-sighted to penalise people for their ideas, for there can be no progress in civilisation unless new ideas are allowed to spread. Of course, some ideas are bad, socially harmful. But nothing is gained by taking physical action against their proponents. To execute, torture or incarcerate those who commit no other offence than to propound opinions is to ensure their views a currency and respect they would not otherwise obtain. In short, political imprisonment is not only wrong; it is stupid.

The purpose of AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL is two-fold; first, to secure the release of 'Prisoners of Conscience', that is to say those locked up because their government does not like their ideas; second, to convince mankind in general that this type of imprisonment is degrading and unnecessary. Consequently this series of reports is directed to two publics. It is on the one hand designed to give the citizens of the countries concerned some reliable information about what has been done in their name, by their government. Would that such a report had been published about

iv Germany after the Nazis took power in 1933. On the other hand, these reports are addressed to readers all over the world, inviting them to think not just about the suffering disclosed, but also about the principles involved.

To those who may object that most of the evidence comes from former prisoners and therefore cannot be trusted, one answer is that conditions in Hitler's Auschwitz and Stalin's Vorkuta were found to be worse than any description previously given by those who had escaped. The other that a government can disprove false allegations of bad prison conditions by inviting inspection by the International Committee of the Red Cross and publicising annual Red Cross reports; the fact that none of these three governments have yet done so speaks for itself.

One such principle is that the power of a government in the 1960's to control the media of communication is so complete that it is merely oppressive to spend public money locking up those already banned from the radio and press. In practical terms what can a few duplicated sheets distributed furtively at a street corner achieve in an age when newspapers are printed by the million? Does it really matter that a handful of people should gather to listen to a speaker in a hall, when the government can command the attention of the entire population over television?

When work on this series of reports was launched in 1964 all the first three countries selected quite needlessly harassed the political opponents of the government. The three countries selected were Portugal, Rumania and South Africa, and their selection was designed to reflect the operation of three differing ideologies. It may be said that there are certain similarities between the regimes of Portugal and South Africa; true, the two countries are allied, but there are most important differences: South Africa is frankly racialist, Portugal was the first country to assimilate large numbers of a different-skinned people without any legal distinctions. Portugal is the last country to retain its colonial empire, while South Africa was one of the first to fight a war against colonial masters to assert its right to self-government.

Since work on this series began the Rumanian Government accepted the proposition that political imprisonment was broadly speaking no longer necessary. Why then publish the report on Rumania? First, because the sensible attitude of the Rumanian Government is not shared by all other Communist countries; in some of them conditions such as those described in Rumania a few years back still continue. Second, because it is important to emphasise that, if the Rumanian Government can afford to take the risk of releasing their political opponents, they should not stop short once the prison gates are unlocked. They should bind up the wounds which they themselves have inflicted, restore the released

prisoners to their homes, their social benefits and their jobs. v

It may be objected that mere publication of reports such as these will not achieve a great deal. AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL relies upon the power of the word. The influence of these reports depends upon the degree of concern of the readers. The men responsible for imprisonment of this character are few in number. Some may read this report themselves and realise that they are inflicting as much needless, out-moded suffering as the surgeon operating without anaesthetic. Others may have their attention drawn to the contents by readers who have been moved to write to them. If the consensus of the decent opinions of mankind has no effect on them, let them reflect soberly that copies of these reports will be on library shelves long after they are dead... and that the supporting evidence by which history will judge them is stored away safely.

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RUMANIA

CONTENTS

General Introduction	1
Conditions for Political Prisoners 1955 - 64	
Amnesty Decrees	4
Regulations and Administration	6
Interrogation	8
Transit Prison — Jilava	12
Prisons	13
Fetters	13
Clothing, Accommodation, Washing and Food	14
Medical Facilities	18
Punishment	20
Procurator's Visit	21
Communication with the outside World	22
Work	22
Prolongation of Sentence and Release Procedure	23
Position of Prisoner's Family	24
Situation of Prisoners Released under Amnesty	25
Forced Labour	26

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

BETWEEN the Communist assumption of complete political power in 1947 and the final amnesties in 1964, the people imprisoned for security reasons in Rumania came from a wide range of social, political and religious backgrounds with no common denominator other than a refusal to support the official regime to the extent demanded by the Party. Although many prisoners were formerly members of a social and cultural intelligensia, the widespread arrests made by the Government of those opposed to collectivisation of the land in 1950 resulted in large numbers of peasants receiving prison sentences for offences against the State.¹ After the political parties had been dissolved by decree in 1947 and 1948, their leaders — of the National Peasant Party, the National Liberal Party and the Social Democratic Party — were tried and sentenced. At the same time, large numbers of the Iron Guard, a near-fascist group which had supported Marshall Antinescu's Government in the early years of the Second World War, were also imprisoned. The Government took stringent action against the Churches; by selecting the Patriarch, Justinian Marina, the majority of members of the Holy Synod, the National Church Council and the administration of the Patriarchate from Communist Party members, and by taking power over its finances, the State assumed wide control of the Orthodox Church. Orthodox Priests who refused to accept the new direction were imprisoned or sent to prolonged periods of forced labour at the Danube Delta. They were joined by large numbers of Latin Rite priests (of the Roman Catholic Church) who had resisted the Catholic Church's forcible amalgamation with the Orthodox Church. In the same years, widespread arrests were made of Rumanians who were employed either by western embassies or western business concerns, and many of them were tried on charges of espionage. One of these prisoners, Leonard Kirschen, who worked as a journalist for Associated Press in Bucharest, wrote a detailed and accurate account of his imprisonment after he was released in 1960.²

The Government also took action to limit the freedom of national minorities. In 1951, between 10,000 and 15,000 Serbs from the

1. In 1961, the President of the Rumanian People's Republic, Gheorghe Dej, admitted this when he said that in 1949 and 1950 mass arrests of peasants 'accused of failure to discharge their obligations towards the State' were carried out all over the country. 'In the name of the struggle against the Kulaks, more than 80,000 peasants, most of them working peasants, were sent for trial; more than 30,000 of these peasants were tried in public which provoked great concern among the peasant masses brought to attend these infamous frame ups.' (Scanteia, 7 December 1961; Agerpress Information Bulletin, 10 December 1961)

2. Leonard Kirschen, Prisoner of Red Justice (Arthur Barker) 1963.

2 Banat who lived on the shores of the Danube were deported to the Baragan plains. The Turkish minority in Dobruja were evacuated at the same time. By appointing a Government supporting body — the Supreme Rabbinical Council of Twelve — to control Jewish affairs and by allowing only one Jewish community to exist in each town which had to be under this Council, the Government took direction of Rumanian Jewish activity. In 1947 and 1948, Zionist leaders were tried and imprisoned. Activity against individual Jews appears to have continued and in 1962 after a trial of Jewish members of the Foreign Ministry alleged to have committed currency offences by lodging money in western banks, all Jews were removed from the Ministry.

After the Hungarian rising in 1956, considerable repression was exercised against the Hungarians in Transylvania. In November, up to 1,200 were reported to have been arrested in the towns alone on charges of pro-Hungarian activity; this included many students who had 'indulged in constant manifestations of nationalism'. Although in parts of Rumania, Hungarians have felt themselves the objects of discrimination, this does not seem to have been Government policy except during the period immediately after 1956.

Inside the prisons, the general policy determining their administration appears to have been influenced by two main factors: the number of political prisoners at any one time which, as little new accommodation was built, determined the accommodation, food and medical treatment of the individual, and certain external political events which had repercussions upon the lives of prisoners by shaping the Government's policy towards them. After interrogation, which varied according to the gravity of the suspected crime, the length of a prisoner's sentence does not seem to have affected the general conditions in which he lived, but long-term prisoners — 10 to 25 years — during some periods received harsher punishments and prisoners with short sentences were allowed to work.

In the early 1950s the prison population was probably greater than at any other post-war period; but, then, as at other times, there is no means of estimating an exact figure. The sentences passed on former political leaders, Iron Guard, priests and other suspected of western sympathies, had been followed after 1950 by the peasant trials and by the arrest of certain former Party members purged after the fall from power of Anna Pauker and other leaders. In Rumania, as in the rest of Eastern Europe, penal policy during the years immediately preceding the death of Stalin was one of extreme repression.

After 1954 considerable changes took place. Before the Geneva Summit Conference of 1955, Administrative Detention

was ended by law. This had been a form of detention without trial, under which thousands of people were sentenced by the Security Service to terms in labour camps throughout Rumania; large numbers of those in administrative detention worked on the Danube Canal. Their conditions were theoretically better than those of convicted prisoners in that they could work and receive payment, they had the right in principle to receive clothes, food and visits from their families, and for many the food was of better quality than that in the prisons. In practice, however, many prisoners received neither visits nor parcels, while working conditions for many — particularly at the Canal — resulted in a considerable mortality rate.¹

The limited amnesty granted to certain political offenders in 1955 reduced the numbers in the prisons and a general relaxation, coinciding with the Geneva Conference, led to better living conditions throughout the prisons. But this improvement appears to have come to an abrupt end in late 1956 when the Hungarian Rising and the simultaneous removal of the Russian Army which had been stationed in Rumania since the war were immediately followed by a universal deterioration in all aspects of prison life. Virtually no political prisoner worked between 1956 and 1962, the arrests of Hungarians and others thought to have Hungarian sympathies increased the numbers of political prisoners and food and drugs were reduced to a minimum. These conditions lasted until about 1960, and were worsened in some places by incidents like the Gherla revolt by prisoners against their conditions, and outbreaks of dysentery and typhoid in Pitesti and Galati in 1958. After 1960, however, with the gradual release of prisoners, and the increased liberalisation shown in the general attitude of the Rumanian Government, prison conditions underwent a definite and progressive improvement which culminated in the 1964 Amnesty.

1. For a full account of the Canal project, see Leonard Kirshen, Prisoner of Red Justice (Arthur Barker) 1963, appendix 2.

AMNESTY DECREES

In August 1964, the last of more than 10,000 prisoners serving sentences for 'infringements of state security' were released by the Rumanian Government. This was the final stage in a process whereby the vast majority, if not all, of political prisoners have been freed since 1960. Announcing the widest measure of amnesty, in June 1964, the Deputy Prime Minister, Alexandru Birlanleanu, said the Government felt that progress in economic and other fields had been so extensive that the Rumanian people were 'united in building socialism' and those imprisoned for political offences in the past, or whom 7,674 had been freed since 1960, should now be given a chance to work and live normal lives. In another statement, the Government said that by 23 August, the 20th anniversary of Liberation Day, there would be 'practically no more prisoners sentenced for political charges'.¹

The text of the official decree is not available. It appears that it was not published in the Official Gazette, nor were any further announcements made on its implementation. No lists giving the names of those released were published, but the total number of prisoners released since 1960 must now be about 12,000. Absolute confirmation that no political prisoners remained in prison after August 1964 has been impossible, but some of those released have said that they themselves were among the last groups to leave their places of detention and no names are known of prisoners who did not benefit under the amnesty. Some arrests have certainly taken place since the end of 1964, but although these are cases in which it seems probable that the arrest was a political one, no actual charges are known. It is also probable that some prisoners now serving sentences for so-called economic crimes could accurately be described as political prisoners.

The legal provisions of the 1964 amnesty and the manner of its implementation have not been publicised, nor is it known whether termination of sentences in this way meant the definite remission of the remaining part of it, or merely its suspension and thereby a conditional release. Usually a prison sentence removes all civil rights from a person, his personal possessions both in prison and outside are confiscated. This includes his house, any money he has and all material goods. But if a prisoner is pardoned, he re-assumes full civil rights and has his former possessions returned. Prisoners released under the amnesty have said that nothing removed from them on their arrest was returned; this included wedding rings, watches and other personal

1. Scanteia, 17 June 1964.

articles. It therefore seems probable that the amnesty was a suspension of the sentence and not a pardon.

Earlier decrees of amnesty were announced in 1955 and 1963. In 1955 political offenders with sentences of under five years and many war criminals were pardoned. Many of these were former members of the police and security services convicted of crimes against humanity, would-be defectors from the country, and currency offenders. But during 1956, a large number of those originally convicted of crimes against humanity were re-tried on the same grounds and charged — under Article 193 of the Penal Code — for 'intense activity against the working classes' and re-sentenced. In 1963, a decree of amnesty was announced on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the Rumanian People's Republic, benefitting certain categories of offenders. In spite of a clause expressly excluding political prisoners, the last paragraph of the text provided for the total or partial remission of sentences for people convicted of crimes against the security of the state, on the condition that they had 're-educated' themselves. But neither of these decrees applied to prisoners sentenced for the more serious political offences — members of banned political parties, the Iron Guard, former ministers and deputies and people convicted of espionage. It is also thought probable that most prisoners released before 1964 were those with favourable reports from the prison authorities, and thus were released more as a form of remission than as a general amnesty measure. Moreover, prison reports were made by the Political Officer attached to the prison, who was a member of the Security Service, and whose function was to keep detailed files on all prisoners containing evidence of their political attitudes.

As a result of the releases, it is now possible to obtain information about the living conditions of political prisoners in Rumania during the last decade. Because no official material on prisons is published and because letters to the Rumanian Government and the London Embassy received no replies, all our accounts have come from former prisoners. Any discussion of prison conditions inside the country is expressly forbidden; on release every prisoner signs a statement in which he undertakes not to speak of any aspect of his prison life on penalty of a further sentence. As the authorities have taken action against relations of individuals thought to be opposed to the regime or to criticise any of its departments, many former prisoners felt extreme reluctance to speak about their experiences, although they were themselves in Western Europe. Nor has it been possible to write to individuals in Rumania, as postal censorship is still widespread. The few who were willing to describe their conditions did so on the explicit understanding that neither their names nor any details by which

6 they felt they could be identified should be mentioned. It is thus impossible for any sources to be given or, indeed, for individual cases to be described in any but the most general terms. It should be stressed that the trust shown by those who were willing to make statements was considerable, and for many it was extremely painful and distressing to recall their experiences in prisons or labour camps; indeed, the impact of the physical and psychological conditions has been so lasting and damaging to some prisoners that they find it almost impossible to give a coherent and accurate account. It has proved impossible to obtain a comprehensive picture of conditions in all the prisons and camps for forced labour and 're-education' in Rumania since 1955, and some gaps exist. Nothing accurate is known, for example, about conditions in the prison to which the few most important political prisoners were sent, Ramnicu Sarat, although it has been widely reported that all prisoners however long their sentences, were kept in solitary confinement without exercise. The lack of information about this particular prison appears to be due largely to the very high death rate among its prisoners which has meant that a proportion of those sent there were never released. This particular prison has now been closed.

REGULATIONS AND ADMINISTRATION

There were apparently no fixed prison regulations; none were ever given to prisoners and no published rules exist. In the cells of prisoners awaiting trial, lists of the prisoner's obligations to the authorities were posted on the door; these forbade him to shout or sing and stated the correct manner of addressing a warder. But, apart from this, prisoners learnt of the regulations from their enforcement. This meant that on occasion a prisoner was punished for an action which he had not known to be illegal. After 1955 when the local Procurator¹ began to visit prisoners, they were able to discover some regulations from him; prisoners in Aiud found that they were officially allowed to have 3 cms of hair; until then they had been completely shaved. Some changes in the practical running of prisons took place from time to time; in the mid-1950s, wooden shutters were fitted to all cell windows, thus preventing prisoners from seeing out as their slats slanted upwards; prisoners were in any case forbidden to go nearer than one yard to a window. In general, it seems that although there were some features common to most prisons — clothing, food, exercise, work and accommodation — prison authorities would receive instructions from the Ministry of the Interior from time to time about the treatment of specific

1. An official combining the functions of a Magistrate and Prosecutor.

groups of prisoners, and, as a result, different treatment would be given to a particular group in a particular period. 7

Before trial prisoners spent the period of their interrogation in prisons run by the Security Service; the People's Security — Directoratul General al Sigurantei Poporului — was the most powerful organ of the State, and controlled the activities of all departments as well as those of the Party. The prisons for convicted prisoners were run by a prison service directed by the Ministry of the Interior, but in each prison the Political Officer, as a member of the Security, had influence over the treatment of individual prisoners and could direct the attitudes of warders towards particular groups. The prison service was made up in part of members of the army seconded to the prisons; all were Communist Party members and therefore both as a result of their own political beliefs and on the instructions of the authorities, saw people sentenced for opposition to the Government, as traitors, and enemies of the State, the Party and so of the people. Good relations on an individual basis between a warder and a prisoner were therefore extremely rare in Rumania and every effort was made by the authorities to prevent this. Warders were moved from one part of a prison to another at fairly frequent intervals and no warder was allowed to be in charge of a cell in which there was known to be a prisoner from his home village. In interrogation prisons, the officers were forbidden to speak to a prisoner other than when giving orders and were not allowed to know even the names of the individuals in their charge but only their cell numbers. All prison officers wore felt slippers, so they could not be heard walking along a corridor, and they were instructed to keep a constant close watch over prisoners. The use of verbal and physical violence in day to day relationships is reported to have been constant, especially for prisoners with long sentences. When prisoners left their cells to wash or exercise, they were, reportedly, harangued and beaten; this was a particular hardship for prisoners who because of age, ill health or long periods with inadequate food or exercise, were unable to move quickly. Warders are also reported to have encouraged any dissension between prisoners in a cell, particularly between prisoners from different social backgrounds. In Mercurea Ciuc, peasant women who offered to take on the heavy cleaning work — scrubbing the cell floor — for older prisoners from the intelligentsia were forbidden to do so on the grounds that this was class exploitation. It is not known what salaries are received by warders at the present time, but in 1958 a prison officer earned 1,000 lei a month in comparison with 700 lei for a qualified engineer.

Political Officers, or 'operative officers' appointed to each prison, conducted the internal security system by collecting

8 information from warders and informers, which was then placed on a prisoner's file and sent to the Ministry of the Interior. Released prisoners all describe the constant use and encouragement of informers in prisons; prisoners willing to report conversations or other prisoners with illicit possessions like needles or string, were rewarded with extra food and might be nominated to a position of responsibility as cell chief. As possessions or pass-times of any kind were forbidden and prisoners, although spending all day in their cells, were allowed to talk only on certain subjects, the power of the informer was very great, and in a system where almost all prisoners were undernourished, the inducement of extra food was considerable. As the Political Officer had wide powers to determine whether a prisoner could work, receive medical treatment or perhaps the next prison to which he should be sent, and as his knowledge of particular prisoners was often based on reports from fellow prisoners, the informer had considerable influence.

Prisons appear to have been inspected by the Ministry of the Interior once or twice a year. It is not known exactly what form these inspections took, but although prisoners were asked by the officials if they had complaints, they say that representations were not treated seriously, but were met with mockery.

INTERROGATION

Between the time when an individual was arrested and his appearance in court, he had no legal rights in the western sense of the term, nor was he allowed any contact with his lawyer, relations or employers. Arrests often took place during the day, in the street or in an office; in most cases, arrested people were not allowed to collect clothing or other necessities nor were their relations informed either by them or by the police. In Bucharest, interrogation took place either in Malmaison where unsentenced prisoners were held while they were questioned by the Security, or in cells in the basement of the Ministry of the Interior or in a third Security headquarters. Other prisons outside Bucharest were also used for questioning and prisoners thought to have specialised or particularly important information were taken to security centres known as 'conspiracy houses', which were scattered throughout the country. Police making the arrest sometimes travelled in vans apparently belonging to non-political bodies like the national bakeries. When the arrested person got into the car, he was usually made to put on dark glasses so that he could not know to which prison he was being taken.

On reception, all possessions were taken from the prisoner; and throughout his time in prison, before and after trial, he was

allowed no personal possessions. The authorities' insistence that a prisoner should not keep a watch even before trial was apparently motivated by their fear of prisoners attempting to injure or kill themselves during interrogation.

Before trial, prisoners wore their own clothes and none were supplied by the authorities. A woman who was arrested in a Bucharest street in August wearing only light underclothes, a cotton dress and sandals, was kept in Malmaison throughout the autumn and early winter until after she had become ill through extreme cold, the prison then allowed her sister to send her in a parcel of clothing in December. This does not seem to have been an exceptional case. This particular woman did not have a towel until she received the parcel and at no time during her interrogation, which lasted intermittently for eighteen months, did she have a comb. Women's hair was often pulled about during interrogation.

Conditions for people during their interrogation seem to have been similar to those in Malmaison, which was the largest interrogation prison. Originally a cavalry stable, it was first used as a prison for the opponents of King Carol II in 1938 and was converted into a prison building by the German SS in 1944. A new block of cells was added in the early 1950s. Cells were small, perhaps 6' square, and although usually holding only one person, they had two-tiered beds, in the old block made of iron, and in the new block of concrete. There was no water in the older cells, and prisoners had to ask the warder when they wanted to go to the lavatory as no sanitary buckets were provided. They also had to ask for drinking water, which is reported to have been refused when extra pressure was being placed upon a prisoner. In the newer block there was a tap in each cell and a Turkish latrine. Prisoners were constantly watched and forbidden to have any material object or any sort; some have said that they were punished for having threads from a towel, chips of wood or a nail. Prisoners were usually allowed to lie down only during the sleeping hours — from 10.0 p.m. until 5.0 a.m.; at all other times they had to sit upright on their beds without sleeping or leaning. In the new cells, beds were about four feet from the floor, which meant that a prisoner could not rest his feet on anything as he sat and his legs often became badly swollen. A summary penalty given by guards for small infringements of the regulations, like sleeping during the day, was to make the prisoner stand for several hours.

Cells were heated and ventilated through grids on to the corridor, and had no windows. They were therefore extremely

10 cold in winter, particularly for prisoners who were wearing inadequate clothing when they were arrested. In summer they became hot and airless; one prisoner says that during his interrogation in Malmaison, the Security gave orders for the ventilation grids on to the corridor to be closed for long parts of the day, and this gave him a feeling of suffocation. He also says that, as part of the general secrecy observed throughout the prisons, when the cell door was opened periodically to allow fresher air into the cell, he was made to lie on his bed facing the wall so that he could not see other prisoners passing by in the corridor.

All Malmaison warders were male, and this was disliked by women prisoners whose showers and washing was supervised by them; it also seems to have been a fairly common feature for warders to speak and behave extremely coarsely and brutally towards their female prisoners, although cases of prisoners being made to have sexual intercourse with warders as part of the pressure of interrogation seem to date mainly from the years immediately after 1947.

During the period of their interrogation, although unconvicted, prisoners were allowed no contact of any sort with the outside world. Although in some cases relatives were allowed to send in clothes, it was more common for them never to be told of the arrest or where the prisoner was held and no letters, messages or visits were allowed. Prisoners remained alone, unoccupied and unable to sleep for seventeen hours of each day, except while they were actually being questioned. On the occasions when a prisoner shared his cell with another person, there was a constant and frequently justified fear that this might be an informer.

Direct methods of interrogation were all turned towards obtaining from the prisoner a written statement admitting his implication in activities thought to be hostile to the State, and naming as many others as possible who had been involved in any way.

There appears to have been a discernible pattern in the majority of interrogations during the 1950s. After arrest, the prisoner was left in his cell for two or three days; he was then taken out of his cell, wearing the same dark glasses in which he was arrested, and taken to a room in which there might be one or more members of the Security. He took off the spectacles, but was usually unable to see his interrogators as they sat behind very bright lights which shone on his face throughout the sessions which frequently took place at night. Some prisoners did not see the faces of their interrogators for the whole of the months during which they were questioned. The prisoner was then

asked about his actions and acquaintances; when he refused to reply he was sent back to his cell and told to write a complete autobiography of his life mentioning all the people with whom he had ever had any contact. This, when done, was invariably rejected as inadequate by the interrogators and pressure was put upon the prisoner to make a confession admitting political guilt; again, priority was placed upon the implication in this of other people. Initially, this pressure took the form of refusing to allow a prisoner to sleep for up to a week or ten days; during this time he might be allowed to sleep for an hour and then woken up. Former prisoners, both men and women, have described having their hands and feet tied together and being strung from the ceiling, like carcasses, and beaten. One woman was stripped and beaten with wet ropes. Rubber truncheons and wire ropes were also used. Sometimes recordings of the screams of other interrogated prisoners were played on a tape recorder while a prisoner was being questioned. In the cases where nervous tension increased a prisoner's appetite, food was reduced. On some occasions prisoners who had refused all other pressures were given drugs to make them talk in their sleep and a tape recorder was placed in the cell; this was usually after a prolonged and unsuccessful period of interrogation when the facts a prisoner refused to disclose were near the surface of his mind. This method is said to have had a very long-lasting effect on the minds of those on whom it was used. The discovery and exploitation of an individual achilles heel was a part of the breaking-down method. A young peasant nun, whose religious order demanded chastity as its only prerequisite for novitiate, was given drugs to make her sleep and then told that she had been raped by the guards. Although this did happen to some young women prisoners, it had not been so with her, but the shock to her was so great that she was willing to make any confession. Often relatives of prisoners were arrested and the prisoner was told. One commonly used method throughout Rumania to break down all physical resistance was the 'maneg'; a prisoner was placed in a completely empty cell, without even a bed, made to remove all his clothes except his underpants, and then told to walk round the cell, barefoot, for six hours at a time. After each six hours he was allowed to sleep for two hours. Guards ensured that a certain minimum speed was maintained by beating the prisoner when he slackened. In some cases gravel was thrown on to the floor which increased the pain. After a week or more of this few prisoners had any resistance left in them. The 'maneg' was enforced on a prisoner for several days and then he was allowed 48 hours rest, after which he was threatened with a continuation of it unless he made a statement which would satisfy the Security. Other less common forms of compulsion

12 were the provision of an entirely salt diet for several days without any fresh water, and the cruder forms of duress such as removal of teeth. It was rare for an individual to maintain a successful resistance. Cardinal Mindzensky acknowledged this when in a letter before his arrest, he warned that no belief should be placed in any statement he might make after his arrest as the flesh was weak and he might have to admit things which were untrue.

After the interrogation was over, prisoners were usually taken to a transit prison to await their trial, although in most political cases the legal proceedings were felt to be little more than a matter of form. Leonard Kirschen was told by his interrogator: 'Don't think this court is going to try you and decide on your fate. The dossier goes to them with our decision. We are the ones who decide on your punishment. The trial is just a formality. If you retract in court what you've told us here, we'll bring you back and take the hide off you. We've been very lenient and understanding in your case. We feel that you've been led astray by bourgeois influence and by the surroundings in which you moved. An intellectual has no business to be against the working class.'

TRANSIT PRISON — JILAVA

Jilava was the main transit prison for prisoners awaiting trial after interrogation and for sentenced prisoners either en route for another prison or who had been brought back to Bucharest for further interrogation in connection with new trials of other people. Jilava was an underground fortress, built in the nineteenth century, eight miles outside Bucharest. The cells were 20 feet underground and for this reason were perpetually damp. The proper capacity is reported to have been about 600, but whenever mass arrests were made, the prison, and therefore the cells, held two or three times their intended number. Some large communal cells held 150 prisoners, and on occasion this number went up to over 200; they were long and vaulted, perhaps 90' x 20', the windows were small, ventilation was therefore bad and the heat even in the winter was so great that prisoners often wore very little clothing in order to keep cool. In many cells there were no separate beds, and prisoners slept on long tiered shelves, but even so, at very crowded times — the early 1950s — prisoners have reported that there was such a space shortage that they had to lie down in shifts. Lavatory barrels, emptied at most twice a day, were not always adequate for such large numbers, many of whom were ill, and at times over-flowed. Smaller cells than these existed, and the places built as ammunition dumps for a fortress were used as punishment cells.

PRISONS

13

Most prisoners remained in Jilava only a matter of months, although a few remained there for years. But at some time almost every Rumanian prisoner passed through the prison. In general, prisoners were held with people who had committed similar offences; the Iron Guard were kept together and, so that they should not influence other prisoners, during some years they were kept isolated even during transit from one prison to another. People with long sentences for serious political crimes like espionage, endangering the safety of the State, and former deputies and senators, were sent to Aiud, Gherla, Pitesti or Dej; former police guilty of crimes against humanity went to Fargaras and the most eminent prisoners — leaders of the political parties — served their sentences at Ramnicu Sarat. The largest women's prison was Miercurea Ciuc, where women who were not allowed to work, either through age and ill health or because of the length of their sentences, were sent; it had been built by Maria-Thereasa of Austria and at its most crowded held about 500 prisoners divided into small cells of eight or ten, and larger dormitories of forty or fifty. Aiud, to the northwest of Bucharest, was reported to have one of the worst regimes. The original block of cells had been built in the eighteenth century, and contained a hundred small cells without windows or any form of heating; this was used as the punishment block, called Zarka by the prisoners in reference to the Hungarians who had built it; prisoners placed in these cells were often not given enough blankets or clothing and this form of punishment through total neglect — too little food and no exercise combined with the lack of fresh air and extreme cold — was widely seen by prisoners as part of a policy of indirect extermination employed by the Rumanian Government during the worst periods on prisoners who refused to co-operate with the Security or were particularly recalcitrant. The second section of the prison, built at the end of the nineteenth century, also held political prisoners; until 1954 these people were allowed to work in the furniture factory attached to the prison, but between 1955 and about 1962 no political prisoner sentenced for any but the least serious offences were allowed to perform any labour. In the third section were held common law prisoners, who worked outside the prison. Political prisoners were always held separately from criminals.

FETTERS

For travelling, all long-term prisoners, with sentences of over ten or fifteen years¹, both men and women, wore handcuffs and fetters. The fetters were thick steel bracelets soldered to the ankles, and

1. The length of sentence seems to have varied at different periods.

14 held together by a steel bar about ten inches in length; their weight was about $1\frac{1}{2}$ stones. Although they were usually removed when a prisoner arrived at the next prison, in some cases there was a delay of some days and one group of prisoners sentenced to death in 1957 in Timisoara, kept their fetters until the execution which took place some months after the trial. Prisoners wore fetters even when ill enough to be stretcher cases being sent to the hospital at Vacaresti.

CLOTHING, ACCOMMODATION, WASHING AND FOOD

The clothing allowance consisted of a striped suit made of wool re-spun from reclaimed rags, this was poor quality and unlined; an overcoat of the same material, although slightly thicker, and also a forage cap; one pair of boots which were army rejects; two pairs of 'Russian' socks (pieces of material measuring 2' x 1', which were wrapped round the feet); two shirts which were also army rejects, two pairs of underpants — one long and one short, two towels, and two handkerchiefs. If a prisoner had socks or a sweater on his reception he could keep them, but if he had two he could only keep one and could not give the other to another person but had to put it in the prison store. A prisoner sentenced in 1957 and sent to Galati was only in 1959 allowed to receive the sweater in which he had been arrested. The overcoat was given to prisoners between October and April and could only be worn outside. Some prisoners had pyjamas, but some prison commandants did not allow them to be worn. No fur was allowed. Women had similar clothing: a striped coat and skirt, 3 cotton shirts, 2 pairs of cotton pants, a pair of heavy boots, a sweater and overcoat and stockings. They did not have underwear. In normal periods, clothing was washed once a week, but prisoners washed their own socks, handkerchiefs and towels. As a result of the strict demand for the utmost secrecy in all prisons, prisoners were not allowed to put their names on their shirts when sending them to be laundered; this meant that they did not get back the clothes they sent and often had to wear clothes of the wrong size. Needles for mending were strictly forbidden except on the one or two occasions a month when a cell would be given three or four to mend their clothes; possession of a needle at other times, or even a nail sharpened into the semblance of one, was a punishable offence. Replacements of worn-out garments appear frequently to have been unavailable. In practice, warders had the power to refuse a prisoner his sweater in winter, or articles of clothing to which he was entitled. Leonard Kirschen described the clothes given to him when he went to court for his trial:

'The trousers I obtained were extremely short and the flies were fastened with twisted bits of wire. My knees showed through a pair of worn-out patches. The jacket, small and shrunken, was stained with huge patches of red paint and had twigs held with wire for buttons. My over large cap flopped right over my ears. We all looked grotesque in the flickering light, as our weird shadows jiggled on the walls. To keep warm we stamped around in huge boots without laces and with trodden-down heels. Lest our trousers slipped down, we clutched them round our stomachs with both hands.'¹

15
Until 1962, cells were universally over-crowded, although the degree depended on the period; in the early 1950s and after the Hungarian Rising in 1957, mass arrests had resulted in a prison population enormously in excess of available accommodation. After 1960, the authorities announced a policy of one bed for each prisoner, but only after numbers had been released could this become a reality; before 1960, it had been common practice for two or three prisoners to share each bed or mattress. Normal conditions were those of a cell in Pitesti in the late 1950s where thirteen prisoners occupied a cell of 6' x 12' with six beds and a window measuring 80 cms x 70 cms. Bedding, also, varied considerably according to the time; in 1956 most prisoners had beds, mattresses, a sheet and pillow and one or perhaps two blankets. But the following year, after the Hungarian Rising, the mattresses and pillows were removed, and the sheet — unless it too was taken away — was washed very rarely. In Miercurea Ciuc, women prisoners had one blanket each for the whole of the 1957-60 period, and no extra coverings were given even to TB cases. Throughout Rumania, all political prisoners slept facing the door of the cell, with their hands lying on top of their blankets; this rule was enforced by the warders to ensure that prisoners neither tapped on the wall to a person in the next cell, nor attempted to commit suicide. Lights were kept on all night, and — in winter — all day as well.

The night lasted from 10.0 p.m. until 5.0 a.m. the next morning when a bell rang and prisoners got up, made their beds, and left their cells to wash and empty the latrine buckets. For the rest of the day, a period of seventeen hours, unless prisoners had regular exercise, they were not allowed out of their cells. Food was eaten in cells and all sanitary functions took place there. No personal possessions of any kind were allowed and no pencil, paper or books. Prisoners found with improvised games — chess men were made from dried bread and coloured with brick dust or soot — or seen writing — the only means of doing this was to scratch letters on a bar of soap — were punished. Language

¹ I. Kirschen, page 57.

16 lessons, prayers and physical exercises were also forbidden. During the times when warders were enforcing a more austere regime on particular groups of prisoners, no one was allowed to sleep or doze during the day; they had to sit on the edge of their beds and could not lie down. The hardship of this particular restriction was increased by the authorities' practice of giving prisoners a mild sedative in their food to quieten the tensions natural to people living in such unvaried and over-crowded conditions.

Ventilation and heating appear to have been generally very inadequate. Windows in the prisons, some of which had been built in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, were small, and in communal cells holding a hundred or more people they were the only means of ventilating the room. After 1955 when slatted shutters were fitted on the outside of all windows, restricting the inflow of fresh air, the problem became worse. In 1961, in Dej, orders were given that windows should be opened for only ten minutes of each day, and in Gherla the next year, cell windows were kept closed constantly to prevent inter-cell communication. Prisoners in communal cells suffered less from the cold than those in small cells because of the crowded conditions. Heating in most prisons came either from the corridor through grids above the cell door, or from stoves in the cell which were usually lighted only for short periods at the beginning and end of each day, as in Dej and Pitesti in 1959.

Many prisoners have said that the greatest discomfort of their prison life was having to perform all washing and sanitary functions in the cell in front of the other occupants. Except for their short visit to the wash-room every morning, which usually took place at the run with a very short time allowed, prisoners often did not leave their cells. The two or three lavatory barrels allowed for a cell of 60 or 80 were barely adequate normally, but when there was dysentery in a cell, they were quite inadequate. Disinfectant was not always available for cleaning the barrels and lavatory paper was never provided. In Miercurea Ciuc prisoners were not allowed to place the barrel out of sight of the warders. In Gherla, some cells had flush sanitation, but this is reported to have often been out of order as the water pressure in all cells except those on the ground floor of the prison was very low.

Prisoners were usually allowed one shower a week, although during 1957 and 1958 this was reduced to once a fortnight or once a month; several former prisoners say that they always had to use the showers five at a time. Other washing was done in the wash room each morning and at other times in the cells where

each prisoner was allowed about four pints of water a day for washing himself, those of his clothes which did not go to the prison laundry and his food canteen. If prisoners were too ill or weak to go to the wash house, they had to do all washing in the cell.

Toilet articles do not appear to have been automatically issued to all prisoners, and some prisoners say that they had no towel or toothbrush for long periods — one man had no towel for four years. Scissors were provided for cutting nails about once a month, but this varied from year to year; in the early 1950s one prisoner was not given scissors for a period of six months, but in 1964 the interval seems to have been only about a week. Prisoners were shaved once a week, although this, too, varied with the period, and their heads were shaved once a month. The prisoners in Aiud who discovered in 1955 that they were officially allowed 3 cms of hair, achieved this for some months, but with the general deterioration in conditions in 1956 and 1957 they were again completely shaved. Each prisoner was given one 100 gram cake of soap each week.

For prisoners who did not work, food appears to have varied widely in quantity. But in content the diet consisted of five main foods — bread, barley, maize, meat and beans; other sorts of food were rarely given. For their first meal, at 6.0 a.m., prisoners were given a mug of black ersatz coffee ($\frac{1}{4}$ pint), about 3 oz. of bread and a small spoon of fruit paste; at 11.30 a.m. they had about 1 lb of maize cake and about 1 pint of vegetable soup containing beans or barley and some bread; in the evening, at 5.0 p.m., they had about $\frac{1}{2}$ lb of a vegetable stew. Meat — usually about $\frac{1}{2}$ a pound — was given three times a week. The quality of food was universally low and quantities varied from year to year. In 1958 and 1959, prisoners in Botosani and Arad who claimed to have had a normal diet of about 1,500 calories, say that this was reduced to 700 calories. When quantities were reduced, the proper volume of soup would be given but it would have been watered down considerably. Meat is reported to have been offal and the vegetables were those left unsold in the markets at the end of the day. The sugar ration was one lump a day. Under nourishment and malnutrition appear to have been general, and some prisoners say that they dropped to half their normal weight during the worse periods. Food was weighed out in the cells, and prisoners usually had to share spoons and canteens. Meals were eaten in shifts.

For prisoners who worked, the food ration was considerably increased. Food also improved very markedly in 1963 and 1964. In Gherla in 1963, those prisoners who worked received 400 grams of powdered milk and an extra 400 grams of bread; they say that

18 they received over 2,500 calories a day.

For TB cases and for prisoners judged to be chronically under-nourished, there was a special medical diet containing cheese and milk, but this was only given to the most serious cases in each category as the number of available medical diets was usually less than the number of eligible prisoners. This extra food was eaten in the cell in front of the other prisoners.

Because of the lack of calcium, many prisoners were prone to dental decay; the majority of prisoners of over 50 appear to have lost most, if not all, their teeth in prison. The only form of dentistry available in any prison was the extraction of teeth by an untrained medical orderly; anaesthetics were scarce and rarely given for this.

MEDICAL FACILITIES

Medical facilities existed in prisons in the form of a prison doctor, several untrained medical orderlies and a small surgery or infirmary consisting of a room containing perhaps a dozen beds but often no special medical equipment. In some prisons, sometimes prisoners who were qualified doctors were allowed to treat patients, but this was far from general. There was an extreme shortage of drugs and medicine of any kind; both were in short supply in Rumania generally, and political prisoners were therefore the section of the population with the lowest claim on what there were. The treatment given to prisoners who reported sick appears to have depended on their political record and, often, upon their social background. The medical orderlies were Party members and had practical power to decide which prisoners the doctor should treat; a prisoner might be asked what had been his profession before arrest and if his answer was one of the professions or a former state official, his treatment would be worse than that given to a peasant. The decision to allow a prisoner to go to the main hospital at Vacaresti appears also to have been taken as much on this basis as on the patient's state of health. One prisoner, described by the prison doctor as 'on the point of death' from jaundice, under nourishment and an ulcer, was refused permission to go to Vacaresti when he appeared before the Commandant and two Political Officers, on the grounds that he was a person with a record of recalcitrance. The drugs available in prisons appear to have been rarely more than aspirin, medicine for stomach complaints and hyper-manganate powder for boils, and even these seem to have been in such genuinely short supply that only a part of the correct dose could be given. Prisoners could report sick at a medical inspection twice a week, but at many times only a certain number were allowed to do so from each cell and this was usually less

than those who wanted to do so. This also increased the rivalries among the prisoners in the cells. Between 1957 and 1960 medical attention decreased considerably. After the Hungarian Rising, the Rumanian Government sent supplies of drugs to the Hungarian Government, and, presumably as a direct result, all prisoners who have described their conditions have affirmed that medical treatment was either completely stopped or reduced. In one cell in Galati between December 1958 and December 1959, no prisoner was allowed to see a doctor at all. As very many prisoners were under-nourished, prisoners were susceptible to stomach disorders, skin diseases and liver complaints, all of which were encouraged by the general living conditions.

TB appears to have been prevalent in some prisons; in Pitesti in the early 1950s the authorities threatened students undergoing 're-education' with TB infection and by 1954 it appears that some 80% of the students concerned had contracted the disease. Mobile X-Ray units examined prisoners about once every eighteen months, and those in the more advanced stages were placed in special cells, but milder cases remained with the other prisoners. In 1958 when the prisoners in Gherla were examined, 15 out of one cell of 80 were found to have TB.

Prisoners say that in general the attitude of the authorities was that of a doctor at Fargaras who told a patient: 'We are not here to heal, we are here to keep you alive so that you can continue your sentence.' Prisoners seem to have been sent for operation when their lives were thought to be in danger. Hospital facilities were extremely limited, and in Vacaresti prisoners slept three to two beds immediately after their operations. The shortage of anaesthetics seems to have limited the extent of some operations, and dressings were also very scarce. Prisoners speak well of the doctors at Vacaresti, but one prisoner sent back to Jilava with an unhealed operation wound had to wait for a week before he was allowed to go to the infirmary for a clean dressing.

Possibly as a result of the length of some political sentences and the lack of adequate medical treatment, numbers of prisoners died in prison. From names and numbers given by released prisoners, it seems probable that the average annual death rate was between 5% and 7%, but this varied from year to year depending on the situation in the prisons, the climate and epidemics in particular prisons. Prisoners were usually, but not invariably, removed from the cells before they died.

Released prisoners also say that mental disorder of a mild or serious nature was also prevalent. Those prisoners thought to be violent or dangerous were removed from the cells and placed together in a separate cell, but they do not appear to have received any form of treatment. Other prisoners suffering from

20 disorder or breakdown remained in the cells.

Exercise for prisoners who did not work was usually half an hour a day. But as cells had to be exercised separately so that prisoners could not know who was in other parts of the prison, the proper time was often cut. Prisoners walked in single file, with hands behind their backs and faces to the ground; they were not allowed to speak or gesture to each other. In Botosani the authorities made prisoners leaving their cells to wash, cover their heads with a blanket so that they could not be recognised by others, and this secrecy extended into all parts of prison life.

PUNISHMENT

Punishment appears usually to have taken the form of solitary confinement without exercise for a week or ten days. The cell was dark or barely lighted, sometimes without a window, but more usually with the window covered except for a small area at the top. In most prisons, there was an iron bed which was locked against the wall during the day, and no other furniture. The prisoner was not allowed a mattress and had to sleep on the steel wires or metal slats stretched across the bed frame. A normal diet was given every third day, but for the rest of the time, the prisoner received 300 grams of bread and water each day. During the day, prisoners had to stand, in some instances water was poured on the floor, and an extension of the period of punishment was imposed on prisoners who sat on the floor. All punishment, except for summary beating, was imposed by the Political Officer on reports made by the warders; prisoners could not see him to make their own representations until after the punishment had taken place. In some cases no lavatory bucket was provided in the cell. For more serious offences prisoners wore chains — and even ball and chain — on their legs both during the day and at night. There was no heating, but blankets were provided in the winter. This type of punishment was imposed for infringements of the regulations — the possession of a needle, giving a language lesson, slowness in performing an order, insolence to the warder or holding communal prayers.

Although beating was constantly imposed to punish prisoners, it was only legally allowed in 1958 under the Penal Code. A 3" rubber hose pipe, attached to a wooden handle, was used; prisoners were treated roughly throughout and up to 25 blows were administered. One occasion has been described when a prisoner who fainted was given an injection by a doctor to enable him to undergo the rest of the beating. In 1958 also, the practice of collective punishment was introduced, whereby a whole cell was punished for the misdemeanour of one person. This took various

forms; cells were denied medical treatment for a month, all beds were removed so that prisoners had to sleep on the floor, prisoners were not allowed to sit down during the day, or short rations were given for several days.

In practice, the degree of punishment appears to have depended less on the offence than on the will of the Commandant or Political Officer or on the policy of the authorities towards a particular group of prisoners at a particular time. In periods when a special rigour was being applied to a cell or group, former prisoners report that warders might plant needles or a piece of string on a particular prisoner, or false reports would be made of conversations in which the regime had been criticised. One prisoner, who refused to give additional evidence at trials which took place after his own conviction and in which he was to be a main state witness, was placed in solitary confinement and kept in solitary confinement in varying conditions for a total of four years. Other punishments were imposed on prisoners; one person was made to stand in a 'sentry box' measuring 3 feet square for three days without being allowed to leave it at all; another was made to walk round the unheated wash house, naked, for four hours after he had gesticulated to another prisoner during exercise; a different type of 'sentry box' had spikes sticking out of the walls so that the prisoner could not lean — this was not imposed for more than 24 hours. In general, punishment concerned the removal of food, warmth or sleep.

PROCURATOR'S VISIT

After 1955, when conditions improved, regular visits from the local Procurator took place. He visited all cells and asked prisoners for complaints and allowed them to make petitions concerning their sentences. In 1955 this took place every month, but after the deterioration in prison conditions in 1957 following the Hungarian Rising, the visits dwindled to three or four times a year, prisoners had to make their representations in front of the whole cell, the Procurator was sometimes accompanied by the prison officials, and complaints were not written down; prisoners who spoke were very often mocked as 'criminal bandits' — the derisory name commonly given to all enemies of the State. In general, petitions made about the length of sentence or the position of an appeal do not appear to have had discernible results, but prisoners say it was important from their own point of view that they should be allowed paper and pencil to write a petition. In Gherla, in 1958, prisoners expressed their dissatisfaction at their living conditions by refusing to leave their cells, barring the doors and asking to see the Procurator. They wanted to complain that the authorities had shut off the water-

22 closets and made them use barrels, that the food was extremely bad, and that a lot of serious beatings had taken place. The authorities answered by breaking down the doors and machine-gunning the prisoners, with some loss of life.

COMMUNICATION WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD

For those prisoners who did not work, no letters, parcels, visits or other form of communication with the outside world or their families was allowed at any time during their sentence; even at their trials, prisoners could not speak to their relatives who might be in court. It has been possible to find isolated instances where prisoners did have letters or visits, but these appear to have been the result of a particular and rare sympathy on the part of a prison officer. The only means for a prisoner to discover events outside the immediate cell in which he was living, was either through indiscretions on the part of individual warders or from newly sentenced prisoners.

WORK

Between 1955 and 1962, it was very unusual for prisoners sentenced for official offences to be allowed to work. Before this, prisoners considered healthy enough had worked in factories in Aiud and Gherla, or in the lead mines near Aiud. After 1962, however, increasing numbers of political prisoners worked in the prison factories. In Gherla, there was a furniture factory. At Arad women prisoners did basket work, but as the plastic with which the baskets were made had to be kept wet and the work rooms were not properly heated, it appears that many of the women contracted cystitis. In Gherla, prisoners worked a six day week of ten hours a day until late 1963 when it was reduced to eight hours; in practice, however, prisoners say that they had to spend an hour at each end of the day preparing and tidying up. Forty minutes was allowed for lunch. On Sundays, prisoners could spend the day as they liked outside, after 1963, although they had to spend the morning of alternate Sundays doing 'voluntary' heavy labouring. Those prisoners who fulfilled their work quota in the factories after 1963, could receive one parcel a month of 5 kilos, containing food. They could send a printed post card asking for these parcels, but could neither send nor receive any personal message. The family of one prisoner, arrested in 1957, had their first news of him when they received the request for a parcel in 1963. After 15 May 1964, prisoners could receive 20 words from their families about health. Prisoners received some payment for work, and this appears to have been held over until their release, although those who worked

prior to 1955 report that they could then spend the money they earned on extra food and cigarettes. Prisoners released in 1964 appear to have had their earnings put towards their rail fare.

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In Gherla, prisoners who worked, after 1963, took part in a compulsory hour of political discussion and reading at the end of each working day. Prisoners were able to read newspapers and books during this time, but attendance was compulsory and the head of each cell — elected by the authorities — reported any prisoner whose attention appeared to be wandering, and this was regarded as a punishable offence. Once or twice a week, there were longer meetings, and every fortnight several hundred prisoners met for a period of self-analysis on an ideological basis, during which one or two individuals criticised their political attitudes in front of the others. This was a programme apparently designed to re-educate prisoners in communist political doctrine before their release and only took place during 1963 and 1964.

PROLONGATION OF SENTENCE AND RELEASE PROCEDURE

It is hard to know what proportion of prisoners prior to 1964 were released at the legal end of their sentences, and how many were either charged and convicted of additional crimes — usually currency offences — or left in prison for longer periods without further legal action being taken. It is reported that in some periods it was official policy to keep former members of the Iron Guard in prison without further trial after their sentences had expired. In some cases, a prisoner was tried and convicted of further offences without his knowledge or his presence; but this practice appears to have been much less common in the years after 1958, when discharges came at the proper time. For those prisoners convicted of crimes carrying the heaviest sentences — from 15 to 25 years — the end of their sentences was anticipated by the 1964 amnesty. But the practical prolongation of sentence by forced domicile was a common practice for many released prisoners up to 1964; on release they were compelled to live in certain areas of Rumania — usually in the eastern part of the country — where there were no towns and where the physical hardships were often only relatively less than those of prison; large numbers were sent in this way to the Baragan — a plain lying to the north-west of the Danube Delta. For most prisoners and their families there was no means, legal or other, of ensuring that release from prison took place at the proper time; in the cases of some few individuals, however, early

24 releases appear to have been obtained as a direct result of political and financial pressure applied by relations in western Europe.

Usually prisoners due to be released were removed from their normal cells about a month beforehand, and placed apart from the other prisoners; the apparent purpose of this was to prevent messages being carried to the families of those still in prison. In the document signed by all prisoners on their release undertaking not to speak of their prison experience, they also promised not to communicate with the families of other prisoners still serving sentences. On the day of release, a prisoner was given a suit of civilian clothes, a railway ticket to whatever area the Security, on the authority of the Ministry of the Interior, had decided he should go, and food for one day. Any payment owing to him from his work was then given to him, but, in practice, when this was due, it seems to have been put towards his travel expenses. He was also given a 'liberation card' on which were stated the grounds for his release and his destination; this card had to be given to the Militia within 24 hours of his arrival and they issued him in return with a temporary identity card which enabled him to apply for work. No duplicates were issued in cases where a 'liberation card' was lost. Under the 1964 amnesty, only those former prisoners who had lived in Bucharest for longer than 20 years prior to their arrest were allowed to return there to live; others had to return to their place of birth. Former priests were not allowed to return to traditionally Roman Catholic areas.

POSITION OF PRISONER'S FAMILY

For the prisoner's family, throughout his detention in prisons, there was no means of getting news of his health or whereabouts. In some cases where prisoners died in prison, their families were told of this only on the date when his sentence would have ended, while there are instances where a prisoner was sentenced to death for a political offence, but the sentence was later commuted to one of life imprisonment, and families were not told that the execution had not taken place. The only communications concerning a prisoner's relations which appear to have been regularly transmitted were applications for divorce from wives. One former prisoner has estimated that between 1958 and 1962, half the prisoners in one section of Gherla received such applications. This should be seen as a result of the general pressures placed upon the family of a convicted 'enemy of the people'. After the arrest the family often seems to have been avoided by neighbours who feared any form of implication with a 'traitor's' relatives. The child's school was informed, and this had a direct and bad

effect on his academic progress; children of political prisoners 25 rarely obtained high marks or chances of further education. The brothers and parents and wives were often down-graded in their employment, and for the wife, especially, it was often difficult to find an employer willing to take her on. If she divorced her husband, however, her chances of employment were greatly increased and thus her means of earning a living; on conviction all political prisoners forfeited all their material possessions.

SITUATION OF PRISONERS RELEASED UNDER AMNESTY

Since August 1964, the Rumanian Government has made positive attempts to encourage the rehabilitation of former political prisoners and their absorption into normal society. An official decree stated (Decree No. 1051 of 1964) that prisoners should be reabsorbed into society, that state concerns should re-employ them as far as was possible in their former professions and that every former prisoner had the right to at least one room in which to live. This attitude has been reiterated in other pronouncements. The President of the Supreme Court said:

'The persons benefitting from the amnesty committed grave offences in the past against the laws of the country, for which they were given appropriate sentences. Now the People's democratic state gives them the possibility to redeem their debt to the people by honest work.'

In practice, however, released prisoners have not found work easily. Employers have been afraid that the official attitude might alter overnight and a former prisoner on their staff would be a liability; those prisoners with professional qualifications find that even if their mental and physical health is good enough to enable them to do their old work, their knowledge is out of date and employers would prefer younger men; for former priests, untrained for secular work, only manual labour is available. At the present time, it appears that released prisoners have usually been able to obtain only low grade manual work with a salary of about 500-600 lei a month (about £10). The rooms they can find are almost invariably those which no-one else wanted and these, in a country with a considerable shortage of accommodation, are extremely small or uncomfortable.

A small social pension is given by the Government to some former prisoners who have no other means of getting an income, but this is not universally available and it is not known on what basis it is allocated. Some former prisoners have been refused any old-age pension at all on the grounds that while in prison they

26 did not contribute towards it. Where it is given it appears to vary between 200 and 600 lei a month (£8 - 18), and may be given to those over 65. Medical facilities have been made available to former prisoners, and some individuals with TB have been sent for free treatment.

As most prisoners came out of prison with some immediate or chronic disability — mental or physical — the start made by the Government in effecting their re-habilitation could valuably be followed by further measures to assist these people.

FORCED LABOUR

Both during and after their sentences, numbers of political prisoners were sent to labour camps throughout Rumania. As well as convicted prisoners, the camps contained people charged with sabotage, deliberately non-fulfilling their production norms in their normal employment, and with absenteeism, who were sent to work on the enormous communal labour projects ordered by the Government, for their 're-education'. Most of the camps to which political offenders were sent were situated round the Danube Delta; until 1954 the workers constructed the Danube - Black Sea Canal and after 1956 the largest project was that of cutting reeds in the Delta, as part of the Second Five Year Plan. The reeds were cut for use in the cellulose industry and the annual target was set at 50,000 tons. It is not known how many people worked on this and similar projects at any one time, but it has been estimated that the Danube Canal project at its peak in the early 1950s used about 40,000 prisoners. It has been extremely difficult to obtain any detailed account of conditions in these camps; before 1955 some prisoners were sent to work at the Delta during their sentence, and this type of forced labour has also been imposed on released prisoners as a de facto prolongation of sentence. After 1956, the majority of prisoners sent to forced labour for political reasons worked at cutting the reeds in the Delta; this was done by hand, little or no protective clothing was issued and prisoners' hands and bodies were cut by the very sharp and tough edges of the reeds. Work had to be done after the seeds had been shed in the autumn and cutters often stood waist-deep in water, which in some areas contained leeches. Temperatures in the Danube Delta rose to 120°F in summer and dropped to -4°F in winter. Prisoners were housed in metal barges or huts on the land which flooded in the spring when the snow and ice thawed. Although there was a theoretical age limit — usually 60 — for prisoners sent to do this work, some prisoners were old and many were ill; the mortality rate is reported to have been high, and little medical assistance was

available for the prevalent diseases of dysentery, pneumonia, TB 27 and rheumatism.

At Salcia, one of the larger camps, prisoners were housed in large 'hangers' with walls made of a composition building material covered with tar, which had cracks and holes in it. They also lived in barges. Windows were covered over during the winter to try to keep in the heat generated by the bodies of the occupants. Clothing issued to prisoners was similar to that in prisons, but ankle-boots were also provided; at Periprava, another large camp, prisoners were given knee-boots of imitation leather, but no replacements were given and prisoners reported that they were such poor quality that after about a week they let in the water. Clothes were washed once a month in summer, but only very occasionally in winter. At Salcia, there was a shortage of water and in any case washing facilities were extremely limited: one bathroom with five showers was provided for over 1,000 workers. Sanitary arrangements were equally inadequate and quite insufficient for the number of detainees who were ill at any one time. Although three meals were theoretically provided, when detainees were working they only received food in the morning and evening, when they returned from work; when the weather was bad and floods or snow prevented the delivery of food, prisoners received half rations, but had to do the same amount of work. When weather or illness prevented detainees going to work, their food was cut to that given to prisoners who did not work.

At Salcia, detainees built trenches and dykes. Each detainee had to achieve a certain 'norm' each day; this was fixed at three cubic metres of earth to be dug and transported each day. The norm was not reduced in winter when the earth was wet or frozen and therefore heavier and harder to dig. At Periprava, detainees worked only in the late autumn and winter when the reeds were ready to be cut. The norm here was for each man to cut, carry and deposit 15 bundles of reed each day. The bundles had to be 1 metre in circumference (weighing about 40 kilogrammes), the reeds were about 4 metres in length and they had to be carried for 2 kilometres on the shoulders without either end of the bundle touching the ground. On the return journey, prisoners had to run; the guards used wolf hounds to chase prisoners who flagged. The length of day was not strictly laid down, but usually prisoners arrived at the place of work — some kilometres from the camp — before sunrise and left after sunset.

Medical facilities were very limited. The drug allocation was worked out three months in advance and was not increased or varied according to the needs of the detainees. At Salcia, there was one surgery with 12 beds; two detainees worked as medical

28 orderlies. These facilities served between 1,000 and 12,000 prisoners.

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