



State Labour Control and Women's Resistance in Austro-Hungarian Transylvania Tobacco Manufacturing (1897–1918)

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In late March 1897, after a week-long strike, the more than 1,000 women workers in the state-owned, and until 1911 fully non-mechanised, tobacco factory in the Transylvanian, eastern Austro-Hungarian city of Kolozsvár/Cluj Napoca/Klausenburg (Kolozsvár for short) succeeded in having an unpopular manager dismissed.¹ In the aftermath of the strike, in order to secure the women's loyalty and prevent another publicly visible labour conflict, the factory management introduced a range of site-specific paternalistic practices and institutions, including a library, cafeteria and crèche. Over a decade later, between late April and late

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¹ Anonymous (1897b).

May 1911, the women tobacco workers from Kolozsvár made the pages of the Budapest press, when a strike over wages and increased social insurance contributions met with a management-ordered factory lockout. According to a June 1911 issue of the social-democratic daily *Népszava*, the representatives of the Tobacco Directorate in the Ministry of Finance of the Hungarian Kingdom were unwilling to negotiate with the several hundred protesting workers for fear their demands would spread to other tobacco factories.²

Homing in on the Austro-Hungarian, Kingdom of Hungary, region of Transylvania between the 1890s and the end of World War I, this chapter examines how the increasing use of women workers in tobacco product manufacturing during the second globalisation of tobacco was accompanied by gendered labour policies and control measures on the part of the Hungarian state tobacco administration. The measures challenged and undercut an increasingly organised female workforce affiliated with broader social and political movements, through strikes and other practices. State-building and industrialisation in the Kingdom of Hungary after the Austro-Hungarian Dualist Compromise of 1867 was shaped by responses to workers' activism including that of an increasingly female tobacco-processing labour force across Hungary, including in peripheral Transylvania. The 1867 Dualist Compromise transformed the Habsburg Monarchy into an alliance of two states—Austria and Hungary—which had very similar institutions but a high degree of policy autonomy in most areas, including in most fiscal matters. By the 1890s, the rapid integration of a low-paid female workforce enabled the Hungarian state tobacco monopoly, which had been created in 1867 and legally strengthened in 1887, to retain its profitability in an increasingly liberalised tobacco world.

My case study of women tobacco workers' history of labour activism in Kolozsvár takes into account a very old historiography of labour in Transylvania and builds on a new wave of gender-sensitive scholarship on activism and imperial rule in Austria-Hungary and beyond. Eszter Varsa's reconstruction of late nineteenth-century peasant women's labour activism in Eastern Hungary's "stormy corner" (Viharsarok) reveals that 1897 was a peak year for women's organising in rural areas, within the Independent Socialist movement, led by István Várkonyi and benefitted

² Anonymous (1911f).

from the organising and editorial skills of his daughter Mariska Várkonyi.³ My findings here strengthen Varsa's argument that the year represented a high-point of women's labour activism in Hungary—especially in light of 1950s research documenting harvest strikes in Transylvania at the same time as in Viharsarok, with a peak in 1897.⁴ Rachel Trode focuses on bureaucratic conflicts surrounding a 1906 strike wave that began in a tobacco factory in Habsburg-ruled Sarajevo and considers the events as enabling interactions between local people and Austrian administrators in Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁵ She argues that tobacco factories were sites where imperial rule on the Austrian side of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was negotiated. I pay similar attention to gendered workers' networks, legal frameworks and economic priorities linked to constructing and maintaining imperial rule. However, I investigate more closely the limits to workers negotiating imperial and state power, especially in highly profitable industrial sectors, such as tobacco manufacturing.

In explaining the changes that took place in the Hungarian tobacco industry, I accord more power to women's labour activism than is found in the labour history of Transylvania in the 1950s and 1960s in Romania.⁶ I provide new perspectives on the lifeworld of women workers, evidencing their complaints, discourses and organising practices. Extrapolating from contemporary attention to factory-specific benefits and welfare institutions present in several studies on Austrian and Hungarian tobacco factories, I also aim for a more critical understanding of how social conflict was managed by means of factory-specific welfare infrastructure and practices as well as of discipline and control linked to state-building.⁷

I argue that women tobacco workers in Kolozsvár were more willing to become engaged in labour conflicts and had stronger links with the regional and national labour movement than presumed in the historiography of Transylvanian workers' movements, links which strengthened their position vis-à-vis management. I show how their demands—rooted in their specific experiences as women and as workers—could also be countered and neutralised through site-specific techniques of control

³ Varsa (2024, pp. 119–126) .

⁴ Egyed (1959, p. 227).

⁵ Trode (2022).

⁶ Fodor and Vajda (1957). Egyed (1957, pp. 33–56) and Deac (1962).

⁷ Csóka (1958). Bauer (2015) and Wernitznig (2022).

by Hungarian tobacco monopoly civil servants. This closer look at the state's control measures, which were increasingly refined in retaliation for worker resistance, contributes to a better understanding of women's labour organising practices and of how their capacity to organise and resist was eventually undermined. It also contributes to developing our understanding of labour unrest in Austria-Hungary.

The first part of the chapter documents the backdrop of how tobacco factories became key pillars of a state-driven Hungarian industrialisation policy, whose profitability partly stemmed from gender inequality. The second part traces the formation of a female tobacco workforce in Hungary, analysing the agendas and forms of action during a March 1897 strike initiated and led by women in the Kolozsvár factory. Workers' demands for lower social contributions, an end to harsh treatment by the director and workshop foremen, and access to medical care were appeased through an array of factory-based welfare institutions, such that a certain level of peace was secured in the factory for the better part of the 1910s. The focus of the third part is on the 1911 strike that met with a lockdown, and on strengthening ties with the Social Democratic Party and local trade unions. I conclude by suggesting points of continuity in post-1918 developments, when Kolozsvár became part of the Kingdom of Romania and the factory the property of the Romanian state. I also offer more general reflections as to how the specific case of Austria-Hungary provides insights into the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century interplay of a majority-women workforce, organisation of tobacco workers and state tobacco monopolies still found today in many parts of the world.

For my analysis I draw on a broad range of print sources, including a selection of recently digitised newspaper collections available in a comprehensive database of Hungarian language publications.⁸ While series of newspaper articles on strikes may help construct a fairly clear timeline of key events, or may capture unusual details of events, they may misconstrue or misrepresent the complex motivations and even the actions of participants, especially when many of the decisive occurrences do not happen in front of the eyes of the journalists reporting them. To mitigate for biases and omissions inherent in press reporting, I sought to integrate sources produced across the diverse political spectrum of the

⁸ The main database for digitalised Hungarian language press and government publication used in this chapter is Arcanum Digiteca (<https://adt.arcanum.com/en/>).

Hungarian press,⁹ assembling and comparing the different angles in reports from distinct ideological standpoints. Information from the post-1918 Romanian-language archives of the tobacco factory was invaluable, especially a detailed, unpublished factory monograph covering the period 1851–1930.¹⁰

STATE INDUSTRIALISATION OF THE TOBACCO SECTOR

The Kolozsvár tobacco factory was founded in 1851, a year after the state tobacco monopoly was established in the Habsburg Empire. A state monopoly framework was adopted by Vienna to combat smuggling, to collect revenues via indirect taxation and to favour the development of industry.¹¹ The monopoly framework was maintained in Hungary after the Compromise. According to György Képes, considered a remnant of the Austrian neo-absolutist period and meant to be abolished by the late 1860s, the tobacco monopoly was consecrated as a “*necessarium malum*” by the mid-1870s, on account of the indispensable revenues that the full monopoly on tobacco cultivation, production and sale brought to the coffers of the Kingdom of Hungary.¹² A dedicated, “praiseworthy (nagytekintetű)”, Royal Hungarian Tobacco Excise Central Directorate (Magyar Királyi Dohányjövédéki Központi Igazgatóság, the Tobacco Directorate hereafter), subordinate to the Hungarian Ministry of Finance, was created in 1882. The head of the Directorate had a function equal to that of state secretary. In 1887, the tobacco monopoly framework was reformed, to further increase tobacco revenues.¹³ The Kolozsvár tobacco factory was one of the four earliest tobacco factories in what would be the Hungarian part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy after 1867. In the 1860s, the factory produced fine and lesser-quality tobacco, for pipes and chewing, as well as cigars (*szivar* in Hungarian, *țigări de foi* in Romanian sources), before specialising in the former and, after 1883, also

⁹ Ternay (1957) and Horváth (1999).

¹⁰ Monografia fabricii 1851–1930 [Factory monograph 1851–1930], 1930, DJAN Covasna, Sfântu Gheorghe, Romania, File 40/1966, Fond 179 - Întreprinderea de Țigarete Cluj.

¹¹ Wickett (1897, p. 210).

¹² Képes (2019).

¹³ Képes (2019, pp. 71–74).

producing cigarettes (*szivarka*). By 1906, it was one of twenty-one factories of the state tobacco monopoly in the Kingdom of Hungary,¹⁴ and by the outbreak of World War I had an annual output of 2,000,000 kg cut (pipe) tobacco, 175,000,000 cigarettes and 30,000,000 cigars.¹⁵ It was one of the five largest in Hungary, and from the 1890s to the 1910s employed between 1,000 and 1,200 workers. As in all the tobacco factories, most of the workers were women: in 1911, for example, there were 1,112 women and 132 men, with most of the women working in cigars (526), followed by cigarettes (309).¹⁶ Although there was an attempt at mechanisation in 1883, and machinery was successfully introduced in 1911, production remained primarily manual until the 1920s.¹⁷

By the late nineteenth century, tobacco was an increasingly important source of revenue for a Hungarian state that pursued, with some success, a costly policy of jumpstarting internal capital accumulation via tax breaks and investment in infrastructure. Scholarship on (semi)peripheralisation in the nineteenth century, especially Berend and Ránki's research from the late 1970s, argued—drawing on Myrdal—that in the late nineteenth century, the Kingdom of Hungary could avoid becoming strictly a supplier of raw materials for “core” industrialised countries in Europe. Hungarian government policy favoured internal capital accumulation.¹⁸ Yet the development of modern infrastructure in the kingdom turned out to be more costly than expected. From the 1867 Dualist Compromise until the late 1890s, the state budget ran a deficit,¹⁹ a situation of course complicated by the 1873 financial crisis generated by the crash of the Viennese Credit-Anstalt. The end of the nineteenth century represented a turning point. Tobacco was meant to become increasingly profitable for the Tobacco Directorate and its ownership of tobacco factories became a priority. By 1898, revenues from the sale of tobacco products (cut tobacco, cigars, cigarettes) had increased by 167% compared to 1870. In the Statistical Yearbook for 1898, the government reported that “[t]he excise sale of manufactured tobacco yielded over 100 million crowns; after

¹⁴ Bányász (1906b, p. 808).

¹⁵ Monografia fabricii 1851–1930 [Factory monograph 1851–1930]: 4.

¹⁶ A M. Kir. Kormány (1906, p. 193).

¹⁷ Monografia fabricii 1851–1930 [Factory monograph 1851–1930]: 5–8.

¹⁸ Berend and Ránki (1980, p. 25). Myrdal (1957) and Szávai (2012, p. 43).

¹⁹ Szávai (2012, p. 43).

deducting 40,906,000 crowns for the cost of manufacture and handling, the treasury surplus in money was 59,134,000 crowns.”²⁰ The numbers indicate a profit margin (not taxed, of course) of more than 60%.²¹

The factories were profitable because the Tobacco Directorate kept production costs low by employing primarily women. After 1891, the number of women employed in tobacco manufacturing in the Kingdom of Hungary increased by about 1,000 women a year, from 12,201 in 1891 to 16,082 in 1895 and 17,876 in 1898.²² In 1911, 18,497 women were working in tobacco factories,²³ with the number decreasing only slightly by 1914. The overall increase of women workers was not specific to the tobacco industry—in 1897, of the 170,267 workers employed in Hungarian factories (defined as enterprises with more than 10 workers) 41,868 (25.5%) were women—but 17,000 (40%) of female workers did work in tobacco manufacturing²⁴; and the Tobacco Directorate was the leading employer for women employed in industry.

Recent economic history emphasises that Hungarian industrialisation vis-à-vis the Austrian side of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy had limited redistributive effect and may have contributed to inequalities between various regions in Austria-Hungary. Living standards for waged workers improved in the northern and western Cisleithanian, Austrian, part of the monarchy, between 1850 and 1915. However, the growth in Gross Domestic Product did not lead to improvements in workers' wages and living standards in Transleithania, the Monarchy's Hungarian part.²⁵ Other similarly predominantly agricultural regions, such as Austrian-ruled Bukovina and Galicia, registered a clear improvement from the 1890s until the 1910s.²⁶ In the 1890s, however, peasants in various parts of Transylvania, as in other parts of Hungary, experienced an accelerated process of immiseration, as smallholding rural households lost land and many were forced to seek agricultural work as wage labourers on estates.²⁷

²⁰ A M. Kir. Kormány (1914, p. 254).

²¹ Compare with Allen (2009).

²² A M. Kir. Kormány (1914, p. 432).

²³ A M. Kir. Kormány (1914, p. 278).

²⁴ A M. Kir. Kormány (1914, p. 254).

²⁵ Cvrcek (2013, pp. 25–26).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

²⁷ Deac (1962, p. 51) and Varsa (2024, 105–107).

The Hungarian government (and implicitly, the Tobacco Directorate) also saw tobacco factories such as the one in Kolozsvár as the core of a development strategy for the economically troubled areas in their peripheries where labour was cheap and plentiful. Politicians and the administration presented tobacco factories as pioneering industrial and charitable institutions that could develop “backward” regions and rescue their inhabitants from dire poverty.²⁸ This mirrored a process documented by Ingrid Bauer for the Austrian parts of the Monarchy.²⁹ Contemporary observers noted that the tobacco factories were supported by agricultural pressure groups, and press articles suggested that cities were particularly keen to have factories built in certain areas where major landowners had a vested interest in supplying the tobacco grown on their own estates.³⁰

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, according to some sources, Hungary was the fourth-largest leaf tobacco producer in the world, ahead of Cuba and Brazil and surpassed only by production in the US, British India and Russia.³¹ At the time, the central Hungarian Tolna and Heves counties produced “distinctive, superior varieties of tobacco” while less subtle tobacco varieties were grown in over two-thirds of the other Hungarian counties.³² By the end of the nineteenth century, Hungary was still a leading producer of tobacco in Europe (second after Russia), but had long been surpassed by other countries globally, especially the US.³³ Tobacco was increasingly cultivated in different areas of the country, where less fine sorts grew better. For some Hungarian observers, including Vilmos Daróczi, the publisher of the *Magyar Dohány Ujság* (*Hungarian Tobacco News*), this shift of cultivation areas meant a decline in quality. Daróczi used familiar stereotypes about the “innovation-incompetent” farmer by arguing that although the soil in Eastern Hungarian counties was fully suited for more flavourful tobacco, underdeveloped methods meant that growers (many of them

²⁸ Járó (1883).

²⁹ Bauer (2015, p. 74).

³⁰ Anonymous (1897c).

³¹ Nemes (2016, p. 180).

³² Ibid., p. 193.

³³ Magyar Tudományos Akadémia (1896, p. 213).

still poor land holders) preferred sturdy, long-leaved, high-yield varieties.³⁴ Hungary's already modest tobacco product exports declined. As Austria, the traditional client for Hungarian tobacco leaf, began expanding production in Galicia, and countries in the Americas increased their production, the Hungarian tobacco industry focused on selling its tobacco products to consumers in Hungary even more than before. Varieties of cigars, and from the mid-1900s, as elsewhere, cigarettes became increasingly important.

With the construction of new factories, the Hungarian government tried to keep at bay the unrest that was sweeping the Hungarian countryside, especially in the first half of the 1890s, when an agrarian socialist movement rapidly gained support, intensifying and coordinating the riots and harvest strikes of peasants. A central reason for agrarian socialist activism was the concentration of land in the hands of landowners, increasing the number of landless peasants.³⁵ The Hungarian Social Democratic Party was founded in 1890 and organised May Day celebrations in various Transylvanian cities, including Kolozsvár.³⁶

Fear of disorder and attempts to curb the growing power of the labour movement led to an overhaul of welfare policies in the Kingdom of Hungary. In 1891, Act XIV introduced compulsory social insurance for all industrial workers, after half a decade of more comprehensive but unsuccessful drafts. Hungary became the third country in Europe, after the German Empire and the Austrian side of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, to introduce such insurance. In regard to the amounts available for sick pay or cover for family members, the system was more generous than in Austria and Germany.³⁷ Yet the new insurance system, as in Austria and Germany, was set up with the clear intention of weakening workers' mutualist associations. The influential General Workers' Insurance Office, a workers' mutual aid association that insured workers and provided healthcare, also "financed strikes and printed workers' leaflets and papers."³⁸ In this context, the government was intent on preventing

³⁴ Nemes (2016, p. 193).

³⁵ Drosick (1976). Csóka (1958) and Varsa (2022).

³⁶ Deac (1962, pp. 79–96).

³⁷ Szikra (2004, p. 263).

³⁸ Szikra (2004, p. 261). see Zimmermann (2011, pp. 97–106).

some of the large Budapest-based mutualist associations from expanding to other cities, preventing them from opening new local offices.

In Hungarian tobacco factories, workers had already had insurance through factory-based schemes but with the 1891 Act XIV tobacco workers could be admitted to a broader “Tobacco Sickness Insurance Fund.” Tobacco workers had access to sickness benefits and a funeral allowance. After at least ten years of employment, workers were entitled to a small monthly retirement pension.³⁹ Employment in the tobacco factories also appears to have been a coveted position particularly because of the small pension available to workers in old age.⁴⁰ Under the 1891 social insurance act, the contribution rate of workers was 2% of the daily pay. Two-thirds of that contribution was deducted from a worker’s salary, while the employer paid the remaining third, and workers were to have a two-third majority in administering the new insurance offices.⁴¹ The Tobacco Sickness Insurance Fund was maintained even after the 1907 reform of health (and introduction of accident) insurance, which aimed to centralise and unify the previously large variety of funds.⁴² Significantly, benefits provided to workers in tobacco manufactories were higher for men than for women, and amounts varied depending on the location of the factory.

From the late 1890s, practices to foster worker loyalty were enhanced in many Hungarian tobacco factories. Besides health insurance and retirement benefits, tobacco factories were to offer workers access to facilities such as on-site libraries, cafeterias and crèches. Remarkably, however, by 1906 the Kolozsvár factory was the only one in Hungary which had set up the entire gamut of on-site welfare facilities that the Tobacco Directorate considered desirable. The Kolozsvár library—one of only two such tobacco factory libraries in Hungary—was opened to “ennoble the morals and thinking of the workers.”⁴³ “*Bildung*” through reading seemed to be a means of taming the workers, who were perceived as out of control, familiarising them with the behaviour of bourgeois society, without in turn erasing the actual class distinction. At the same time, a factory library

³⁹ Bányász (1906a, p. 580).

⁴⁰ Mérey (1997, p. 241).

⁴¹ Szikra (2004, p. 263).

⁴² Bányász (1906b, p. 807).

⁴³ Bányász (1906b, p. 823).

was a way to counter socialist publications and the libraries socialist organisations set up. The Kolozsvár factory cafeteria was among only five that were left by 1906, and a free crèche existed only in one other Hungarian factory, its cost being shared with the rail company.

By the end of the nineteenth century, tobacco factories had become highly profitable establishments and important tools in the Hungarian state's fiscal and industrial policies for the peripheries. As the next section reveals, press articles discussing these policies show how the factories were closely linked to public reflection on the peripheral regions and increasing internal inequalities within Hungary, and how the peripheries became increasingly sites of policy innovation in Hungary, in response to workers' demands, aimed at fostering loyalty and discipline among a female workforce that kept production costs low.

WOMEN'S LABOUR ACTIVISM AND PATERNALISTIC STATE CONTROL

The Romanian-language labour historiography of Transylvania has portrayed tobacco workers as reluctant to engage in labour conflict. Historians have argued that workers feared losing their employment in workplaces better regulated and more stable than in other industries, and that their reluctance was further due to the 'barracks-like' discipline state manufacturing imposed on and demanded of workers.⁴⁴ The regulations for tobacco factory workers in the Kingdom of Hungary were particularly explicit about the expectation of discipline in such factories.⁴⁵

There was, however, already conflict in the tobacco factories dating back to before state investment intensified in the sector, deepening social tensions in the 1890s. In August 1882, women tobacco workers in Budapest clashed with the local management and urban police next to the Soroksár street factory after the director had read a decree by the Ministry of Finance according to which all women were to learn how to make cigars according to a new, faster, rolling method, without their pay being increased.⁴⁶ In 1886, female workers in the Transylvanian Temesvár/

⁴⁴ Fodor and Vajda (1957, p. 75).

⁴⁵ Bányász (1906a, p. 583).

⁴⁶ Anonymous (1882).

Temesvár/Timișoara tobacco factory went on strike over pay,⁴⁷ and in 1887 women workers in Pozsony/Pressburg/Prešporok/Bratislava went on strike and rioted, demanding the dismissal of a manager, better work materials and better pay.⁴⁸ Rather than displaying disciplined attachment to the factory-specific benefits, workers also frequently highlighted changes and malfunctions in the dedicated insurance system. This was the case in Temesvár where women not only demanded higher pay but also a part of the money they paid weekly towards their health insurance.⁴⁹ It was also the case that same year, when 800 women workers from one of the three Budapest tobacco factories attended a gathering in an inn close to the factory. There, one of the women speakers argued that if the Minister would not rescind a new, five-forint, tax on wages, she herself would be the first to declare a strike. She also proposed to found a trade union and inform the “socialist party” in Budapest of its founding.⁵⁰

An increase in taxes that was not accompanied by an increase in wages was at the core of the 1897 strike in the Kolozsvár tobacco factory and was well reported in the national and local press. The strike came on the heels of an uptick in social-democratic organising and trade unionisation in Transylvania in the 1890s, and also of increased surveillance of the labour movement, especially during the 1895–1899 premiership of Dezső Bánffy.⁵¹ The statutes for new trade unions and worker associations were approved by the Ministry of the Interior with great difficulty, and on the condition that any organisation refrain from aiding striking workers.⁵² Because of the significance of the General Workers’ Insurance Office for the labour movement, issues related to social insurance played a frequent part in labour conflict, at least in Transylvania.⁵³

Although press reporting on the 1897 strike of the women tobacco workers did not reveal any direct ties with the Social Democratic Party or workers’ associations in Kolozsvár, the demands made, the organised ways in which workers proceeded and surveillance by the local police suggest

⁴⁷ Anonymous (1886).

⁴⁸ Anonymous (1887).

⁴⁹ Dohánygyári munkásnők strájkja [Tobacco factory workers’ strike].

⁵⁰ Anonymous (1896).

⁵¹ Fodor and Vajda (1957, pp. 36–46).

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 30–45.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

that their protest was part of a broader trend of labour organising in the city. Thus, in March 1897, the Kolozsvár factory management announced that women workers would pay 4.7–7.98 forint, while the men were to be taxed 7.98–9.98 forint.⁵⁴ The higher taxes covered an increase in workers' insurance contributions, as well as municipal and road taxes specific to Kolozsvár. As of 1896, tobacco workers were already paying an increased yearly tax—of 4.74 forint for women, whose salaries were lower than men's, as against 7.98 forint for men—an increase that likely triggered the women workers' meeting in Budapest.

After the announced increase, as allowed under the 1895 regulations on tobacco factories,⁵⁵ women workers' representatives (a delegation of no more than six persons) had an unsuccessful meeting with the Kolozsvár factory director, Sándor Hadházy, to present their complaints, which triggered dramatic events on Saturday 20 March 1897.⁵⁶ Hadházy ordered the women workers be locked in their workshops for the rest of the day, presumably so as not to be able to stage a walk out. The press reported that after the locked-in women workers began screaming male colleagues broke down the door, and 1,000 women left the factory building, assembled on the adjacent street and declared a strike.⁵⁷ One of the women workers assembled outside the factory's gates, Mrs. György Zachariás, was reported as "shouting over the heads of others" that work in the Kolozsvár factory would be resumed on Monday only if the level of taxation from three years before, of 3.24 forint per person, was reinstated. When police arrived, protestors quickly dispersed so that no one would be taken to the police section.

The day after, some 50 male workers in the factory also joined the women to protest calmly outside the factory gates. Small groups of strikers were seen in the streets that day, all reported to have been behaving calmly. Speaking to the correspondent of one of the newspapers, the argument of the workers was that although they paid 0.08 forint a week for sickness insurance, the designated factory doctor also worked for the railway company and as a private practitioner and was unable to

⁵⁴ Anonymous (1897d).

⁵⁵ Bányász (1906a, p. 587).

⁵⁶ Anonymous (1897d).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

genuinely attend the needs of 1,040 factory workers.⁵⁸ Hadházy emerged as a deeply unpopular figure in the factory and the strikers wanted him dismissed. He was considered a disciplinarian who was unwilling to demand that his foremen stop their verbal abuse of women workers.⁵⁹ A newspaper sympathetic to the management reported that in the initial meeting with women workers Hadházy claimed to not have any power to influence taxation but that he promised he would seek to remedy the problems. While male workers could be convinced to stand in solidarity with female workers during certain strikes and conflicts, in the tobacco industry in general these solidarities could be complicated by the sometimes distinct interest of workers considered skilled (men) and by the social advantages men as a group enjoyed in and outside the factory.⁶⁰

As had happened during the Pozsony labour conflict a decade before,⁶¹ the Kolozsvár strike soon involved the local city authorities, and a conciliation committee was organised. A senior official of the Tobacco Directorate arrived in Kolozsvár from Budapest and held meetings with the factory manager and other local representatives in one of the city's main hotels. The workers—who had not appointed a ten-person delegation, as proposed by the Budapest envoy—gathered in front of the building. Rózsa Dézsi, a woman appointed by her co-workers, “read the agreement and conditions of the strikers to the crowd.”⁶² Eventually, Dézsi and several other workers were taken by the police for interrogation but were soon released.

The strike ended on March 26, with a victory for the strikers. A newly dispatched representative of the Tobacco Directorate promised that all would be done to lower workers' taxes, while Hadházy was put “on leave” and temporarily replaced by his deputy, György Hirth.⁶³ Rezső Kazay, seemingly an official who was well liked among workers, was soon appointed director,⁶⁴ and under Kazay carefully choreographed fatherly benevolence towards women tobacco workers was devised and displayed

⁵⁸ Anonymous (1897a).

⁵⁹ Anonymous (1897d).

⁶⁰ Ghiț (2023) on constructions of skill in the same factory, after World War I.

⁶¹ Anonymous (1896).

⁶² Anonymous (1897a).

⁶³ Anonymous (1897b).

⁶⁴ Anonymous (1898).

to the public. The following year, Kazay organised a lavish “May Festival” (*majális*) in the local, beautifully decorated park, where more than 2,000 people connected to the factory gathered to listen to the playing of a brass band. When Kazay, Hirth and their families arrived in the park, a delegation of women workers presented each of them with a bouquet of flowers. Oranges were distributed to the women workers’ children, and Kazay personally invited the children to accompany him to enjoy cakes in a nearby confectionery.

When in 1901 the factory celebrated 50 years of existence, the symbolic markers and rhetoric of paternalism were further evidenced. The celebrations took place in the presence of representatives of the Hungarian Tobacco Directorate and other government officials from Budapest. Newspaper articles mentioned the “spirit of peaceful agreement,” love, respect and trust for the factory managers.⁶⁵ Repeatedly, speakers at the event presented the factory as not only an industrial enterprise but also as a charitable and humane institution in which “the poor, the widow and the orphan” had always found refuge. Various speeches referenced the “paternal kindness” of representatives of the Tobacco Directorate and especially Kazay, who, in turn, praised the charitable hearts of the women workers, noticeable—he declared—in the donations workers had made to the local school for blind children. An enthusiastic speech delivered by a young woman worker encouraged colleagues to cheer for the factory’s “benevolent bosses.”⁶⁶

The 1901 celebration also proved to be an occasion to review the activities of several factory-based welfare institutions created since Hadházy had been ousted. As part of the classical repertoire of paternalist institutions, such facilities helped justify the levying of high taxes on wages, increased the authority of the managers and were designed to enhance workers’ loyalty to the company.⁶⁷ The most important among these institutions was a credit cooperative. Started in September 1900 it had helped workers with small loans,⁶⁸ to help build homes and pay for food.⁶⁹ In September 1900, Kazay had asked the city of Kolozsvár to

⁶⁵ Anonymous (1901).

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Reid (1985).

⁶⁸ Anonymous (1900a).

⁶⁹ Anonymous (1901).

assist with the expenses of setting up the crèche for the children of the factory workers,⁷⁰ and the factory cafeteria was established for workers to have a cheap daily meal with meat. Workers could also join a choir.

At the same time, the support of the local labour movement for tobacco factory workers, likely veiled for strategic reasons in previous years, became clearer. This was most evident in public contestations by social-democrats of the industrial paternalism practices pursued in the tobacco factory. In 1903, an article by Mór Rappaport in *Erdélyi Munkás*, a short-lived social-democratic newspaper that had begun publishing in Kolozsvár that year, claimed the tobacco factory management “robbed” the workers and sought to control their every move. He argued that “our mothers, our sisters” became sick working in the factory, while the management underpaid them, and complained that the workers were expected to work very fast and pay could vary because management set women’s wages at its discretion. Moreover, he declared: “it is not enough for them to exploit the workers who toil under their management, they also want to control the workers outside the factory, by ordering them where to go, what to read and what to wear.”⁷¹

The article in *Erdélyi Munkás* is significant not only for the passion of its language but also its mention of tobacco women workers’ contact with social-democratic organisers and socialist literature. In Rappaport’s view, it was in vain for the manager to ban women workers from attending social-democratic meetings, or from reading social-democratic pamphlets, since the cause of social democracy ended up triumphing wherever there was oppression. He ended his article demanding that factory women be treated decently, as the patience of the women’s family members was already running thin. Interestingly, the following day, a women’s delegation from the factory contested Rappaport’s account in a statement of their own, which suggested that loyalty-producing practices in the factory were not entirely unsuccessful.⁷²

In the period 1904–1907, Transylvania was swept by a wave of strikes, as was the rest of the Kingdom of Hungary. State socialist historians in Romania have suggested that these occurred despite a strong legalistic approach to labour struggle favoured by the Budapest-based Trade

⁷⁰ Anonymous (1900b).

⁷¹ Anonymous (1903b).

⁷² Anonymous (1903a).

Union Council, and as expressed in a 1904 Strike Regulation created by the Council.⁷³ The women tobacco factory workers in Kolozsvár did not declare another strike until 1909, during an attempted city-wide general strike, one that failed due to quick repression by the authorities.⁷⁴ Their labour activism subsequently developed in tandem with the broader social-democratic trade union movement in the region; shared some demands with the broader (male-dominated) union movement; and strategised how to organise within the specific framework of the new rules, regulations and paternalistic institutions which governed the tobacco industry.

COST CUTTING AND LABOUR ACTIVISM

In 1911, a late April week-long protest followed by a bitter May lockout once again drew the attention of the Hungarian press to the Kolozsvár factory, revealing key changes in managerial tactics and labour politics in the decade since Hadházy was replaced by Kazay, and Kazay himself replaced in 1909 by his long-time deputy Hirth. In terms of managerial strategies, 1911 represented a shift towards cost cutting, with faster work expected for the same pay, less willingness to appease via paternalist institutions and greater willingness to take hard-line stances.

In terms of labour politics, the years 1908–1910 were a period of reflux after the uptick in organising in the period 1905–1907. In 1911, the pace of unionisation in Transylvania picked up again, with the Trade Union Council recognising that too little attention had been granted up to that point to workers in larger factories, especially state-owned ones, as energies had concentrated on unionising skilled workers in small and medium-sized enterprises.⁷⁵ Protests and strikes across the region highlighted the intensification of the pace of work and the increase in the cost of living.⁷⁶ The Trade Union Council (a Szakszervezeti Tanács) was created in 1892, with its first congress held in 1899. It was associated with the Social Democratic Party.⁷⁷

⁷³ Fodor and Vajda (1957, pp. 60–61).

⁷⁴ Anonymous (1909).

⁷⁵ Fodor and Vajda (1957, pp. 101, 103).

⁷⁶ Ibid. (1957, p. 95).

⁷⁷ Fodor and Vajda (1957, p. 38).

Despite criticism by an early state socialist historiography highly critical of the social-democratic trade unions' approach towards unskilled workers in large industrial establishments during this period, the development of the 1911 labour conflict in the Kolozsvár factory shows that local trade unionists supported the demands of women piece-rate workers. The tactics of “slowdown” and “passive resistance” and the careful attempts at compliance with factory regulations and those governing local assemblies, point to how workers involved in labour conflict elaborated their own strategy to protect workers at risk of dismissal. Importantly, press reports made it clear that workers marshalled a history of failed management promises by, for example, comparing the situation in Hungary with the higher pensions in the tobacco industry in the Austrian side of the Monarchy. In addition, a mid-May appeal of the locked-out women to local public opinion revealed that the workers sought to turn to their advantage the paternalistic practices and the community's attachment to the smooth functioning of the factory, the very practices and attachments cultivated by factory management over the previous decade.

As revealed by a factory monograph drawn up in 1930, eight Semenoff tube-making machines were introduced in the Kolozsvár factory in 1911, to respond to growing domestic demand for various kinds of cigarettes.⁷⁸ That year the Tobacco Directorate had set out to increase tobacco revenues by increasing tobacco prices and efficiency in the factories.⁷⁹ The combination of mechanisation and drive for increased profits affected the piece rates of some 500 women workers employed in the factory's “most difficult piecework.”⁸⁰ At the end of April, the Tobacco Directorate announced that wages might be increased in May for workers in certain factory departments, but not for the workers doing piecework and hired on a daily or weekly basis.⁸¹ A delegation representing the 500 women pieceworkers in the factory sought unsuccessfully to meet with Hirth to discuss a wage increase that would also include them.

Seeing this, the signal was given for the 500 women pieceworkers to “slowdown” for the rest of the day, engaging in what was known

⁷⁸ Monografia fabricii 1851–1930 [Factory monograph 1851–1930 and Ghiț (2023, pp. 14–16) for production processes after World War I].

⁷⁹ A M. Kir. Kormány (1914, p. 34).

⁸⁰ Anonymous (1911i).

⁸¹ Anonymous (1911j).

as *amerikázni* (Americanising)—a term that began to circulate in the Hungarian labour press around 1906, meaning to “work less than before during the allotted time.”⁸² Whereas “go slows” or “slowdowns” were a part of labour activism repertoires elsewhere, the association with the US may have been due to the relatively strong ties between the Hungarian and the American labour movements at the turn of the century.⁸³ The workers knew that under factory regulations, absence from factory premises during work hours for more than three days constituted grounds for dismissal and could lead to the loss of accumulated benefits. After the failed meeting with Hirth, the women remained in the workshops, not leaving even for lunch for fear of being locked out of the factory. But otherwise “busy hands stood still,” so that at the end of the workday “less than a quarter of the usual quantity of cigarettes had been delivered.”⁸⁴

Slowdown, in American trade union practice sometimes described as “goldbricking,” had as its objective to reduce the anticipated volume of production to obtain concessions from management. Researchers investigating the practice during the 1950s argued that slowdowns were used as a tactic especially by workers doing piecework, often with the aim of lowering production quotas that were considered too high. Generally, the method required a high degree of solidarity on shop floors since a slowdown is of consequence only if a cumulative effect is achieved. The tactic could be quite discreet, in that in most factories it was still difficult to pinpoint who had started the slowdown, who was intentionally participating in it and who was simply suffering the consequences of others’ slowness.⁸⁵ This meant that workers at risk could protect themselves more from dismissal, the tactic was less disruptive than a full-blown strike and it could be used especially when the workers involved had little job security.

One day after the beginning of the slowdown, most of the workers in the factory joined this “passive resistance” initiated by women pieceworkers. Circumventing the regulation that they could be dismissed after three days of being absent, the women arrived at work on time but did not start work at their tables, milling about in their locker area instead.

⁸² Anonymous (1906a).

⁸³ Jemnitz (1963).

⁸⁴ Anonymous (1911j).

⁸⁵ Hammett, Seidman and London (1957, p. 126).

Other workers who depended on the work done by the women could also not do much, and increasingly would not.⁸⁶

Workers demanded a general increase in wages and an increase in the level of their pensions, pointing out that the pensions of the tobacco workers from the Austrian side of the monarchy had already been increased. They claimed that for years management had been making promises about an increase in wages.⁸⁷ Three days after the slowdown began, Minister Counsellor Haracsek travelled from Budapest to Kolozsvár to appease the workers. In meetings with workers from each workshop, he promised that a wage increase might be possible the following month.⁸⁸ As the workers felt they had been deluded with promises for several years, they continued their slowdown.

Haracsek ordered the workers on slowdown out of the factory and barred their return to the premises. The move meant the Directorate was willing to risk a strike, and thus a stoppage in production, in the hope that the threat of having everyone dismissed would make workers drop their demands. The now locked-out workers formed a strike committee and asked the authorities for permission to picket in front of the factory.

When strikers arrived in the afternoon for their picket, the police violently disbanded their protest. At the end of that day, the Tobacco Directorate issued an ultimatum: workers could either return to work by 4 May or be dismissed. Once the slowdown had become a strike and an ultimatum issued, the involvement of local social-democrats in helping to organise the workers became visible. On 3 May, Izsák Berkovics and Gyula Tatay, representing the Social Democratic Party leadership and both editors of the party's *Erdélyi Munkás*, encouraged workers to hold out on strike, offering financial support for the strikers while encouraging them to organise in a trade union.⁸⁹

The city authorities' investment in social peace at the local tobacco factory was also rendered more visible, as had been the case in 1897. The mayor of Kolozsvár asked the strikers to return to work for two weeks while waiting for a final decision of the Directorate on the matter of planned wage increases. At this point, most of the women workers

⁸⁶ Anonymous (1911g).

⁸⁷ Anonymous (1911h).

⁸⁸ Anonymous (1911g).

⁸⁹ Anonymous (1911d).

decided to continue with their strike, while knowing they were taking a great risk with their stable, albeit underpaid and deeply unhealthy work.⁹⁰ On 5 May, with only 133 workers reporting for work, a notice that the factory would be closed indefinitely was posted on the factory gate. The women on strike subsequently launched an appeal, distributing a leaflet on 18 May among the citizens of Kolozsvár, asking for support for themselves and their children and urging any member of the public who wanted to help to contact them via the Trade Union Council secretariat (“*Szakszervezeti Tanács titkársága*”), located in “Kolozsvár, Mátyás király street 4.”⁹¹

Hirth, they stated, had been interrogating various workers in his office in an attempt to learn who were the leaders of the protest. Asking “who is an agitator (...) Mr. Hirth?,” they urged he “just reach up to the shelves... where the payrolls are” to identify the actual source of the discontent. They denounced him for behaving not like the father figure he often claimed to be but with the arrogance of a medieval lord of the castle. By contrast, the women claimed to have been good paternalist subjects. Rather than making their demands in a spirit of human dignity, as they could have, they had appeared humbly at the door of his office, having believed management promises and waited patiently for their raise. They also referred to women workers’ participation in the (gendered) rituals of citizenship in Hungary, mentioning how on Children’s Day that year they had donated for the benefit of poor children. The women signatories argued that despite their donations to charity, they were now seeing their own children threatened by hunger. They concluded: “In the wretched hovels of our homes, our children weep with hunger, their anguished sobs blessing the fatherly kindness of the tobacco factory director.”⁹²

As the standoff between management and workers continued after mid-May 1911, several representatives of the city of Kolozsvár sought to have the ear of the Tobacco Directorate. Local members of a city council that was not known for being either too progressive or worker friendly travelled to Budapest to speak to the heads of the Directorate on behalf of the women who had been locked out. Repeatedly, Tobacco

⁹⁰ Anonymous (1911c).

⁹¹ Anonymous (1911e).

⁹² Ibid.

Directorate representatives argued that they had no intention of negotiating with either the workers, who had sent also their own representative, or their intermediaries. According to *Népszava*, Tobacco Directorate officials made it explicit that they were adopting a hard line because if wages were increased for the women workers of the Kolozsvár tobacco factory, women workers in Budapest factories would immediately make similar demands.⁹³

When the factory reopened, at the end of May, strikers faced retaliation. After holding out for several weeks, 800 women who reapplied for work were asked to line up in the factory yard. The women who were identified as agitators were rudely chased away. Then every third woman lined up in the yard was told she was dismissed and would no longer have access to the pension into which some of them had been paying via the Tobacco Insurance Fund for decades. “Now you can strike forever,” they were told.⁹⁴ New workers were recruited to make up for most of the dismissals.

It is unclear if up to the eve of World War I labour organising in the Kolozsvár tobacco factory further intensified or whether labour conditions and pay improved. Between 1914 and 1918 the Kolozsvár factory functioned at reduced capacity, producing only lower-quality cigarettes to supply the front.⁹⁵ After 1918, women workers’ labour activism in the factory was periodically noticeable, as for instance in the late 1920s. However, such moments of contestation took place in quite different circumstances, as the city became part of the Kingdom of Romania and the factory was incorporated into the Romanian Régie of State Monopolies. In this new Romanian context, the key factory-based workers’ welfare facilities were kept but became part of a broader attempt to transform the city through rapid nationalisation.⁹⁶

The tobacco factory became a preoccupation for an emerging network of Romanian-speaking social reform actors, who, in the early 1920s, were encouraged by the Régie to become involved in factory-based welfare institutions and practices.⁹⁷ Thus, in 1920, the “Prince Mircea” women’s

⁹³ Anonymous (1911f).

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Monografia fabricii 1851–1930 [Factory monograph 1851–1930]: 5.

⁹⁶ Livezeanu (2000). Ghiț (2023, p. 15).

⁹⁷ Stanca (1927, pp. 18, 30).

society, focused on children's welfare, was appointed to manage the on-site crèche that had been functioning in the factory since the 1890s.⁹⁸ The "Prince Mircea" Society for the Protection of Children was one of a plethora of women's societies founded after World War I. It focused on healthcare for children, was generously subsidised by the Direction of Social Assistance in the Ministry of Labour and enjoyed the patronage of Queen Marie of Romania.⁹⁹ The social reformers included middle-class women's organisations and physicians; the latter were interested in social medicine, industrial hygiene and the "social hygiene" strand of eugenics which focused on welfare policies to improve the health of ethnic Romanians in Transylvania.¹⁰⁰ The social reformers sought to delink the factory from some of the Austria-Hungary-specific networks that had shaped its existence in the previous 60 years, and instead link it to networks that were beginning to define a post-imperial world, including those forged between European scientists and American institutions such as the Rockefeller Foundation.¹⁰¹ In this context, the factory was left with a heavily constrained labour movement, which built on the history of trade unionism as it had developed in the factory since the 1890s, with only limited success.¹⁰²

CONCLUSION

As I document here, the increase of women workers in the successful consolidation of the Hungarian state tobacco monopoly, aimed at keeping production costs down, was accompanied by a back-and-forth between state policies of labour restriction and appeasement and the protests of an increasingly organised female labour force. The history of the Transylvanian Kolozsvár factory in the late Austro-Hungarian Empire evidences how women developed a new dynamic of labour organisation, adapted to their own ends. Their protests, strikes and slowdowns helped ensure social improvements for those working in the factories and a strengthening and expansion of the workers' movement.

⁹⁸ Stanca (1927, p. 18).

⁹⁹ Asociația Științifică pentru Enciclopedia României (1938, p. 529).

¹⁰⁰ Bucur (2002, p. 48).

¹⁰¹ Weindling (1993).

¹⁰² Ghiț (2020). Ghiț (2023, p. 16).

The 1897 strike reveals how the women tobacco workers' demands ushered in a period of factory-based, partly locally funded, welfare institutions and paternalistic practices. The limited success of the labour movement in the later period, however, can be seen as the flip side of this, leading to a consolidation of the state tobacco monopoly and a strengthening of its labour policies. The strikes and the alliance of the tobacco workers with socialist and social-democratic initiatives after the 1890s heralded a change in state labour policy from a paternalistic and benevolent approach to one of cost cutting. After 1911, the intensification of the pace of work accelerated and was accompanied by lower piece rate pay, so that workers opted for a failed slowdown that resulted in mass dismissal and an undercutting of women's labour organising.

After World War I, the newly expanded Romanian state was able to draw on structures and experience in the control of female factory workers that state officials had successfully assembled and applied to consolidate and expand the administrations of the state tobacco organisation in Transylvania within the Hungarian Kingdom. This is suggestive of how state monopoly longevity in tobacco, during a time of increasing global liberalisation of the tobacco economy, at least in regard to a trend of dissolution of state monopoly organisations, was to a significant extent grounded on the monopoly's ability to manage protest. The emergence of a better organised female labour force had represented a challenge, one which the monopoly was able to contain to its advantage.

Women's work in tobacco manufacturing was clearly instrumental to capital accumulation, with the state in the Hungarian case becoming the main employer of women workers in industry and engaging in the development of social policies specific to this sector. This was not unique to Transylvania, a region on the supposed periphery of Europe, but was also to be observed in the apparent centres, such as the state-owned factories of the French tobacco monopoly in Paris or the privately operated factories in the Southern German states. The extent to which the successes and failures of the Hungarian tobacco monopoly's back-and-forth between control measures and worker protest and the containment of the women's organisation were replicated in other states, however, remains to be seen.

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