

THE WORKING CONDITIONS AT THE DANUBE-BLACK SEA CANAL. BUILDING EFFECTIVES: PRISONERS, WORKINGS AND SOLDIERS

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Strongly related to the way in which the Communist Government's objectives could be achieved there are also great problems regarding the workforces of the Canal, even if, as it was already seen, the empowered bodies of the Romanian State have created and perfected the appropriate legal framework for the pursued goals. There is a relatively clear delimitation of the human effectives involved during the Canal's construction. In this context, we can talk about a variable presence, on the Canal's sites being identified three fundamental-productive sectors, also considering the nature of executed work:

1. The sector of „free work” – which gathered a working mass from the entire country with people having different professions, a numerical and a rather relative qualitative stability, fact often admitted in the technical archive's documents of the Canal or in those of the Canal's Party Committee;

2. The sector of “special weapon constructions” – more specifically, of the responsibility of the Ministry of Armed Forces (the new name of the former Ministry of National Defense, under the Decree no. 74 of March 23, 1953 of the Presidium of the Great National Assembly of the People's Republic of Romania)¹ – for achieving the works assigned by the Canal's management;

3. The sector of „forced work” – having as central element the (political, administrative or ordinary) prisoner, representing in the same time the department of workforce on which the physical work load down the most. Regarding this sector, it may be also considered the necessity of working of other categories of people brought in Dobrudja following the deportations made by the Communist regime in those years. For those who were „working in special conditions on the Canal's sites”², the work itself represented the only insuring mean of the rather poor existence following the uprooting at which they have been forced by the political regime of the time;

The work without theoretical constraints on the sites of the Canal, that is the work in the free sector, was provided by different socio-human and professional categories arrived in Dobrudja. All kind of people worked then

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¹ Gh. Buzatu, M. Chirițoiu, *Agresiunea comunismului în România (The aggression of communism in Romania)*, vol. I – *Documente din arhivele secrete: 1944-1989 (Documents from the secret archives: 1944-1989)*, Bucharest, Paideia, 1998, p. 99.

² Arhivele Naționale Constanta (ANC), fund PCC, file 30/1951-1952, p. 256.

between Danube and Black Sea, more or less motivated by the future benefits of „the great economic objective”. „The construction of the Canal will not only transform this part of Dobrudja in a flourishing region of our country – said very optimistic in January 1950, the Regional Committee’s prime-secretary of the Romanian Workers’ Party from Constanta, Al. Reznicenco – but it will also attract tens of thousands of workers, technicians and clerks who will learn a high qualification, forming a powerful mass of qualified personnel, necessary for the development of constructions in our country”³.

The Communist leaders of the Canal’s construction were convinced (at least declaratively), that here, on the Canal’s sites, „will be created a new man, with a high cultural level, with an extensive experience in the construction field, with a new attitude towards the work”⁴. But the discrepancy between the propagandistic ideal and realities could be often seen from the very beginning of the construction.

The first months of the Canal’s construction led the decisional factors, responsible with the work at the Canal, at the situation of openly admitting that it was necessary „an intense work of explaining policy (of people – *our note*) in the region of the Canal but also in the rest of country”⁵, for making them aware of the work’s importance, and in the same time that „in this period the people’s distrust in such work must be defeated”⁶. The same decisional forums, especially the Canal’s Party Committee, were also admitting, in January 1950, that „there must be defeated the difficulties regarding the living conditions of the first pioneers who lived most of them in makeshift huts or directly on field”⁷, observing „the deficiencies in the organization of production, in the defective way of applying the rules, the timekeeping and the salary (...), that finally there must be solved the fluctuation question (50-60%) regarding the free workforce”⁸. Still from „the second half of December 1949 – the Party Committee admitted – that “it was created a general mood of going home, explainable by the coincidence with the holidays (Christmas and New Year)”⁹. This situation attracted, in the view of the mentioned forum, „the disruption of work by the anarchic leaving of almost 8000 people, they being absent two weeks from work, which has further strengthened the spirit of indiscipline and the lack of responsibility regarding the State Plan”¹⁰.

The human composition of the free work sector was defined as „a motley mass of people in which the peasant element dominated (poor and

³ *Ibidem*, file 75/1950, p. 1.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

middle peasant), and in which there could be found proletarians, semi-proletarians (sic!) and kulaks”¹¹. Only „a very small part from the total of employees were workers”¹².

The discontent of the Party bodies was also manifested regarding „the existence of some expropriated and unlocked elements, foreign from the interests of those who are working”¹³, but also for „the lack of experience of the technical-administrative mechanism”¹⁴.

Indeed, in the first report of the Canal’s Party Committee „regarding the organizational work”, with special reference at the analysis of working effectives in „the works’ starting stage – from May 25, 1949 to January 1, 1950”¹⁵, was made the assessment that „during this it was a great fluctuation of workers on our sites. Some of them were coming, they worked only for a short time, leaving without turning back, and others, who were the most conscious elements, remained, despite all the difficulties, and today are forming the most conscious mass of advanced workers on our sites ...”¹⁶. Those who have signed the report, Al. Reznenco and I. Beldean, that is the prime-secretary of the Regional Party Committee and the secretary of the Workers Party Committee at the Danube-Black Sea Canal, considered that „if in the first period it could not be mentioned a stable number of workers, this year (1950 – *our note*), the number of stable employees was of 19700, from who 55% are workers and technicians and the rest other categories”¹⁷.

At the end of 1950, the number of employees on the Canal’s sites raised to 33000 from who 13200 were workers, 2500 engineers and technicians, 440 accountants, 5630 administrative department, the rest being formed by „other categories”¹⁸. This formula „other categories” was disguisedly designating, the 11500 prisoners and working soldiers belonging to the other two working sectors mentioned above¹⁹.

The balance report for the first two years of works at the Canal admitted in same trenchant way the difficulties encountered regarding the workforce from the free sector, mentioning that „one of the most difficult problems for us was the recruitment and the mobilization of the working effectives from a numeric and qualitative point of view”²⁰.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 2.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, fund GDC, file 934/1951, p. 90.

In 1952, the shortages of free work was widening on sites, so the Prime-Vice-President of the Council of Ministers himself, Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej, had to alert the ministers that „the General Directorate of the Danube-Black Sea Canal can not find in the region (Dobrudja) sufficient workers in order to achieve their plan targets”²¹. Thus, the ministries involved together with the General Directorate of the Canal in its construction, were pressed to act by „the working sectors or annex enterprises to employ workers from the other regions of the country”²². Only that, the difficulties from the end of 1949 regarding the personnel were repeating now at more than three years since the beginning of works, the prime-vice-president of the Council of Ministers having to admit the fact that „their recruitment (of workers – *our note*) is made with great difficulty also because the delegates of the General Directorate of the Canal have not the right to provide cash advances to the families of new employees, in order to cover the expenses until they will receive the first salary”²³.

The work problems under all its aspects (organization, work plans, rules, effectives, equipment, the ensuring of social conditions of life) have marked the activity at the Canal since the beginning until the end of works in July 1953²⁴. Not even the Party’s authority seemed to be sufficient for solving this. Besides, the report of the Party Committee of the Canal from January 23, 1950 admitted that „much of the shortcomings from the Canal’s sites have their origin in the lack of organization by the Party Organization of the site, which in the period of work organizing (June-July 1949), having the headquarters in Bucharest, isolated from the practical problems, from the troubles on the construction sites, delayed the organization of party and of mass organizations. Since August, following the relocation in Constanta, the party organization, identifying the shortcomings on sites, began to take some administrative measures, replacing the General Directorate of the Canal, whose headquarters continues being in Bucharest, until October 1949²⁵. Consequently, also „after the relocation of the General Directorate of the Canal to Eforie the interference in the prerogatives of the administrative machinery had continued for a time, being gradually liquidated”²⁶. The report admitted the negative role of the Party Committee’s „interference” in the prerogatives of administration, considering that by its direct involvement in the current problems of some sectors of the General Directorate of the Canal it had contributed to „the isolation of the General Directorate of the Canal in solving of the problems regarding the works at the

²¹ *Ibidem*, file 1113/1952, p.188.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ M. Nedelea, *Istoria României în date, 1940-1995 (Romania’s History cronology, 1940-1995)*, Bucharest, Niculescu, p. 100.

²⁵ ANC, fund PCC, file 75/1950, p. 24.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

Canal”²⁷. But admitting the Party’s mistakes does not change the realities because the problems registered at the beginning of works remained most of them a constant, during the entire construction of the Danube-Black Sea Canal.

No without interest is also, we believe, the start itself of the selection work and recruitment of free workers for the Canal. Thus, since the adoption of the Ministers Council’s Decision of May 25, 1949, it had to pass over a month until June 30, 1949, for the personnel chief of the Canal, M. Mihai, to present „the Plan regarding the work planning” to the Temporary Committee of Constanta County and to the Office for Workforce Distribution. The document required, among others, „the identification and verification of technicians, engineers and workers from the entire Constanta country for the development in good conditions of the building operations at the Danube-Black Sea Canal”²⁸. The document was also requiring “the organization of personnel for the employment office for the Canal’s works, which must include the section chief, the accountant, the typewriter and two reviewers”²⁹, and „the organization of the commission for the identification of the personnel which will be employed at the Danube-Black Sea Canal”³⁰. The commission included „a member in the county office of the Romanian Workers’ Party, as responsible of the county at the Canal, the Party secretary, the syndicate president, the enterprise director”³¹. The paragraph five of the plan mentioned that, „since July 1, 1949, we will start the operations of identification, verification and filling of files for those who will be employed for the Canal’s works, according to the instructions of the General Directorate of the Canal (with the headquarters in Bucharest, C. Răureanu Street, no. 3). After finishing this phase (unmentioned period within the plan – *our note*), we will move to the second one, that is the administrative one, which must be executed on site. When finishing this, we will move to the third phase, the one of employing people according to the received instructions”³². The same M. Mihai, the personnel’s chief, presented to his superiors, on July 6, 1949, the report regarding „the personnel’s activity for identifying and verifying the clerks from all the enterprises in the city and the county of Constanta, announcing the Temporary Committee of Constanta County”³³ about the identification of a small number of personnel for the sites’ administration: „we managed to identify and verify a number of 54 (bureaucrats – *our note*) for the site’s administration of the Danube-Black Sea Canal and, since July 7, we will move to the recruitment of workers of all categories for the works which will begin

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, file 21/1949, p. 69.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 70.

(obviously, by that time the works did not started) on the site of the Danube-Black Sea Canal”³⁴.

The recruitment activity of workers was not limited to Constanta county. In that days of July 1949, there were created in the capital and in other cities of the country, as Tulcea, Ploiești, Brașov, Timișoara, Cluj, Iași, Târgu-Mureș, „recruitment offices” which will act in the mentioned direction³⁵. By great efforts of investigation, selection and employment of working personnel, the General Directorate of the Canal succeeded, at the end of July 1949, to have a number of 7400 employees „working effectives”, in which there were included all the mentioned categories of constructors³⁶.

The phenomenon of free labor fluctuation at the Canal may be registered and analyzed using the information from the Work Dispatch during the entire period of works. If in August 1949 the number of „civilian workers” reached 8960, on September 1, 1949, it raised to 13309; in the next months the number had rapidly declined from 12203 on October 1, 1949, to 11770 on October 30, 1949. On June 30, 1950, the number of workers registered on site was of 13048, on July 30 of 12782, on August 30 of 13309 and on September 30 of 12203. During 1951, the civil effectives had an average of 10 and 15000 workers. In 1952, the number of civilian workers was situated between 7033 in February and 12552 in September. Finally, in the last year of the works (1953), the distribution of workers was the following: 1st quarter – 11650; 2nd quarter – 13750; 3rd quarter – 14150; 4th quarter – 11150.

Regarding the immediate causes which have been at the base of the effectives’ fluctuation, some telephonic notes of the sector chiefs from Cernavodă and Medgidia, addressed to the management of the General Directorate of the Canal, have an edifying purpose. Thus, on September 1, 1949, the chief of Medgidia sector indicated the fact that there were registered „when payments, discontents with the carpenters because of the salary”³⁷ (sic!), who, actually, did not wanted to work in the afternoons”³⁸.

On October 4, 1949, the management of the construction site from Poarta Albă registered the leaving of 520 workers, who are promised salaries over 5000 lei and had received only 2572 lei. The authorized representative of the Canal’s Party Committee, taking note of what happened, without waiting the explanations of the site’s management (which identified two causes of the workers’ leaving: the first one, the fact that the majority of them, being peasants, went for the agricultural campaign, and the second one being the small salaries),

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁵ D. Jela, *Cazul Nichita Dumitru. Încercare de reconstituire a unui proces comunist, 29 august-1 septembrie 1952 (The case of Nichita Dumitru. Attempt of reconstituting a Communist trial, August 29-September 1, 1952)*, Bucharest, Humanitas, 1995, p. 29.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 30.

³⁷ ANC, fund PCC, file 19/1949, p. 23.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

asked himself „if there could be the disguised sabotage of the class enemy”³⁹. The chief of Personnel and of Labour Regulations, Kanner Ilie, was personally at the site from Poarta Albă on October 5, 1949, „in order to observe the spirit and the discontents of workers on this site, the cause and how many abandoned the construction site”⁴⁰. Among his observations, there were noticed the faulty system of clocking „detrimental to workers”, „the incorrect calculation of rights by the pay lists-salaries department”, and he admitted that „the workers were damaged with 1000 and even 2500 lei”, and not least, the problem of the canteen which was functioning „from the administrative point of view very bad”⁴¹.

Another extra causal argument, regarding the leavings of workers from the construction sites between September-October 1949, was given by another telephonic note on October 11, 1949, from the Medgidia sector, which indicated an essential fact and on a disarming tone for the Canal’s constructors, at least from this sector, that „there is no finished hut until now where the workers can be accommodated”⁴². Finally, on November 26, 1949, the informative notice signed by Stoica Ambrozie, regarding the same sector, emphasized even more strongly the malfunction of the canteens and the fact that the workers from so-called km 8 refused to work because of the lack of an appropriate protective equipment⁴³.

To all these, it appeared the symptomatic absence of specialists – a problem which had seriously affected the development of work at the Canal in the best conditions. It was a real event the coming on site of a specialist. The Minister of Metallurgy and Chemical Industry himself (Chivu Stoica, November 23, 1949 – May 31, 1952) was informing the chief engineer of the site about the „driller master” Revi Elmer, arrived in Medgidia on November 29, 1949 „for carrying out the drilling works”⁴⁴. This problem has been perpetuated in the next years, and thus, the chief of the Mechanical Sector (23 August Sector), admitted with the same honesty, in September 1952, „the acute and continuous lack of mechanic personnel from the troubleshooting and control teams on every construction site (...). I must remember, said Ivan Gheorghe, adjunct chief-sector at Poarta Albă, on September 28, 1952, that in 1950, when the equipments arrived at the Canal, there was an almost total lack of specialists...”⁴⁵.

In the Summer of 1953, Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej, being in Moscow for presenting an information about the economic situation from Romania, was

³⁹ *Ibidem*, file 14/1949, p. 1-2.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, fund GDC, file 914/49, p. 120.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² *Ibidem*, fund PCC, file 19/1949, p. 27.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 41.

⁴⁴ D. Jela, *op. cit.*, p.30.

⁴⁵ ANC, fund PCC, file 14/1949, p. 103.

made aware that the Soviet officials led by Malenkov knew about the massive import of equipments and about the fact that an important part of these was unused for lack of specialists (the Romanian State's imports of equipments from USSR and Czechoslovakia for the Canal's construction reached in that moment the value of 231 million rubles)⁴⁶.

The attitude towards work and rules represented one of the important problem of the time, being accentuated on the Canal's sites in the early '50s. The president of the Canal's Union Committee, Gh. Bratu, was informing the Party basic organisations about the fact that „the work discipline on sites, the education of workers for a new attitude towards work was and continues to be an issue of concern to the party, to the mass organizations and to the administrative department”⁴⁷. In the opinion of the syndicate's chief, „the factors that lead to indiscipline” were multiple. Among these, first of all he mentioned „the human element – a motley world (sic!), businessmen, kulaks, landlords, released officers etc., they all with trend of truancy and sabotage (...); the administrative deficiencies – the norms are not always well done, this attracting the workers' discontent and the registered fluctuations; the overtime services provided by clerks, which are not paid; poor working conditions – bad and insufficient food, dirty bedrooms, the lack of protective material”⁴⁸. Paradoxically, between 1949-1952, „for the workers' accommodation on the sites of the General Directorate of the Canal were registered works in an area of 338664 m² and until 1953 the projected area will increase to 383664 m²: 67.5% from the area represented the huts for living; the social huts – 17.05%, the site huts – 4.15%, and different huts – 10%”⁴⁹.

For enforcing the work discipline and for changing the general attitude towards work, the syndicate's president was proposing to the Canal's Party Committee and to the General Directorate of the Canal „the remedial of norms especially regarding the excavation and the intensification of care for people”⁵⁰. His audacity was punished for the moment with „written reprimand by the management of the Canal's Party Committee”⁵¹. The discussions, the reports and the informative notices regarding the work at the Canal until the Autumn of 1950, made Mihai Nicolae, one of the party secretaries, to conclude, on September 1, 1950, in the spirit and the mentality of the age, that „the analysis made (regarding the work at the Canal – *our note*) armed the office with a Bolshevik attitude, that we should not forgive one another when somebody is making a mistake (sic!), but on the contrary, to show one to another the

⁴⁶ M. Chirițoiu, *Lichidați Canalul, liniștit, fără țipete [Liquidate the Canal, quietly, without shouts]*, in „Magazin istoric”, year XXXIII, no. 7 (388)/July 1999, p. 26.

⁴⁷ ANC, fund PCC, file 77/1950, p. 165.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, fund GDC, file 266/1953, p. 186.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, fund PCC, file 77/1950, p. 168.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 173.

deficiencies, using the wonderful weapon for building the communism – the criticism and the self-criticism”⁵².

Regarding the workers’ mood and the problem of insufficient food, in a thematic notice from April 24, 1951, the secretary of the basic Party’s organization, I. Beldean, was declaring that „regarding the canteens’ supply we are in a very critical situation – of how are supplied (sic!); thus, in this moment, the majority of canteens, of annex enterprises and also of those on the Canal’s construction sites are in the situation of not having food for workers, because of poor distribution of rationed aliments such as: beans, meat, potatoes, canned food etc, precisely the main elements which are absolutely necessary”⁵³.

„The concern for people”, mentioned in the Party documents, can be easily remarked in the notice on January 27, 1951 „regarding the aspects from the hospitals and dispensaries on sites”⁵⁴. In this document was openly assessed that “the maintenance of hospitals is made with difficulty: at the hospital from Medgidia there have began the repair works which remained unfinished, in which case the hospital does not appear in very good conditions; the hospital from Cernavodă has unsatisfactory conditions because of the filth which persists after the repair works which are extended for too long; the hospitals from Năvodari and Poarta Albă are not functioning yet because of the sterilization facilities, the kitchens and the laundry”⁵⁵.

At least regarding these last hospitals, the Party committee, making a special reference to that from Poarta Albă, registered, on April 10, 1952, the fact that “the care for the patients is not respected and that is not because the personnel does not accomplish its duty, but on the contrary, because it has not all the necessary. In the entire hospital there are three syringes and two thermometers ...”⁵⁶.

Regarding the working norms at the Canal, the engineer Ioan Panteli, sent by the General Directorate of the Canal in control on sites, between September 19 –September 23, 1949, was remarking and reporting to superiors 3 important observations: „1. The working norms should be prepared in time and verified by the competent bodies in order to be applied on time and on all construction sites; 2. There were observed obvious differences for the same work from a site to another; 3. The norms for the masonry works and ironworks, being insufficient (sic!) make more difficult the employment of skilled craftsmen”⁵⁷. In conclusion, the engineer mentions that „I judiciously consider that until the norms’ revision there should be approved an increase in

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 238.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, file 62/1951, p. 61.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, file 65/1951, p. 5.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, file 30/1951-1952, p. 208.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, fund GDC, file 914/1949, p. 663.

order to ensure to the bricklayers of 6, 5, 4 categories a daily gain of 600-500-400, per day (sic!)”⁵⁸.

Although the norms’ problem was very acute, only in November 1951, according to the Council of Ministers’ Decision 174, they were reexamined. This action, according to the new prime-secretary of the region, Anton Nițescu, on March 25, 1952, „was completely ended by the Central Commission of works at the Danube-Black Sea Canal on March 20, 1952, and the norms have been discussed and improved in the Party Committee meeting; then they were sent to the State Planning Commission on March 24, 1952, and received the approval of being processed and displayed at the working points”⁵⁹. The reduction of norms was insufficient as volume, fact also admitted by the Party Committee in many informative notices.

On March 31, 1952, A. Nițescu informed the Party’s regional body about „the hostile action of the team leader of carpenters from the Enterprise 25 Medgidia, (Petre Ionescu) regarding the implementation of the new norms”⁶⁰. This one went „from team to team” on March 28, 1952, and he had declared that the new norms could not be exceeded, and for this, the only solution was for the workers to abandon the enterprise”⁶¹. Because of „the hostile position” towards the regime, P. Ionescu „was taken and led to Security for investigation”⁶². But A. Nițescu considered entirely wrong this method of solving the „class enemy” problem, the fact that the party organization „has replaced the political work by compulsion”, because „instead of being exposed in an unannounced meeting on site, the secretary of the basic organization, Constantin Gheorghe, and the enterprise’s director, Rădulescu, arrested him and brought him to Security”⁶³.

A few days later (April 10, 1952), the same high official from the management of the Party’s Regional basic organisation from Constanta admitted that „the reexamination of norms and their implementation in production have not reached their goal; they have been forcedly introduced as pattern, in the mechanical department and foundry but also in constructions, which led to the creation of an unhealthy atmosphere within the mass”⁶⁴.

To the great problems regarding the workforce it can also be added the delay with which it was elaborated the Canal’s Rules of Procedure, applied since October 15, 1951. By these, there were established „the right and the obligations of administration, workers, technicians and clerks of the General Directorate of the Canal, for the enforcement of work discipline, the norms regarding the

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, fund PCC, file 30/1951-1952, p. 90.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 92.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*.

⁶² *Ibidem*.

⁶³ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*.

organization and the working time, and also the sanctions which will be applied for the deviations from the rules of discipline”⁶⁵. According to the Rules’ signers (General Manager M. Grumberg and syndicate’s chief C. Juga), „the discipline in work is based on the socialist attitude, the consciousness in work, and it is manifested by respecting all the legal and regulatory provisions which lead the socialist work and economy”⁶⁶.

Finally, not without importance for the working conditions in the free sector, it is also appearing the problem of work accidents registered at the Canal, some of them „serious and fatal”. Thus, in 1950, the Office of Labour Protection had registered in this sector 30 cases of serious and fatal accidents from which 27 had affected the workers and three the soldiers. In 1951, the same office mentioned 37 accidents affecting a number of 9 soldiers and 28 civilian workers⁶⁷. These work accidents had gradually increased along with the working effectives between 1952-1953. In the Report regarding the analysis of work accidents and their causes (only in sector 9 Peak) at the Canal, „in the 2nd quarter of 1953, the Office of Labour Protection mentioned that it happened a series of accidents from which it can be observed that their number had worryingly increased over the same period of 1952. While the production and the park equipments had increased, not the same action was taken regarding the control, the prevention and the elimination by technical-organizational measures within the production.

From the analysis on this period, the coefficient of frequency on the 2nd quarter shows that it increased with 2.68% over the coefficient on the 1st quarter, which was of 2.1%; the coefficient of gravity on the 2nd quarter increased over the 1st quarter with 7.87%, totalizing a number of 199 incapacity days on the 2nd quarter, over number on the 1st quarter, which was 85; that means that the increasingly number of accidents on the 2nd quarter over the 1st quarter represents a serious matter to think about, for the management, engineers and technicians, and also for the companions who have production tasks within the construction sites”⁶⁸.

Regarding the involvement of military effectives in the Canal’s construction, their presence must be noticed in double aspect: that of soldiers of the „special weapon constructions” and for the guard of objectives and prisoners within the Canal’s area.

The General Staff disposed for the General Directorate of the Canal, as soon as the works have started, important military effectives. In the balance-report for the first two years of workings at the Canal, it was admitted that „by the speed with which we had to employ the personnel and especially because of too hasty verifications which have been especially made in the free sector, (...)

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, file 21/1949, p. 44.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 48.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, fund GDC, file 824/1950-1952, p. 35-38.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, file 872/1950-1953, p. 13.

there was necessary the completion with effectives from the Enterprise of External Work of the Internal Affairs Ministry, from the Command of Work Forces of the Internal Affairs Ministry, and from the Command of Workforces of the Ministry of Armed Forces”⁶⁹.

On May 1, 1951, the Command of the Ministry of Armed Forces contributed at the works with 19.8% from the effectives of the Canal⁷⁰. The fluctuation regarding the number of working soldiers was infinitesimal compared with that of the civilian workers or of the prisoners. Thus, if in August 1949 the number of soldiers was of 4250, in September it reached to 5058, decreasing in October to 4735. In 1951, the average of building workers will be of 4500. the most significant leap regarding the number of working soldiers will be mentioned in 1952, when the reports of the General Staff and of the Workforce Dispatch have registered 16000 and even 18000 of soldiers (July 1952 – *our note*)⁷¹.

The soldiers’ participation in the Canal’s construction is marked of their double mission (that of constructors and that of guardians), that did not exempt the sector, which was under responsibility of the Ministry of Armed Forces, of having certain problems.

It may be said that the working soldiers together with the prisoners have carried the burden of the works. Among their current activities, there can be mentioned the construction of railway embankments, roads and highways; the construction of buildings, hutments; the unloading and the loading of wagons with soil and stone (brought from the granite quarries of Turcoaia) many times frozen, and which require a new burst to be removed; the installation of rail lines; the diggings of banks and even the work with the equipments. But from an official point of view, the Canal’s authorities did not always manifested their content towards the soldiers’ work. As proof, the engineer I. Panteli was noting in his report from September 23, 1949, that „the efficiency of the soldiers sent on site is very low. I think that the improvement of the soldiers’ work could be achieved by defining the obligations and the rights and by applying the norms having a personal interest”⁷². Still, the engineer admitted the fact that „the soldiers do not have the necessary equipment for the bad weather which is close, they have few clothes, usually that brought from home. This question was also resumed by the commanders of detachments”⁷³. The consequences of this difficult situation in which the soldiers were, appeared very soon. Immediately after the information of engineer Pantali, on October 1, 1949, a thematic notice from Cernavodă registered an unusual fact for a military unit: „Today, October 1, 1949, about 200 soldiers did not want to work because of the lack of clothing

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, file 934/1951, p. 90.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 91.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, file 147/1952, p. 122.

⁷² *Ibidem*, file 914/1949, p. 663.

⁷³ *Ibidem*.

and footwear. The political second was sent to Bucharest to receive orders”⁷⁴. „Following the meeting with Captain Banu, the detachment’s commander from Cernavodă – it was mentioned in that notice – we have concluded that there are indeed reasons of discontent regarding the lack of equipment. The soldiers are untrained, without discipline and the rules are not applied”⁷⁵. The one blamed for this incident, the Lieutenant Batatorescu, „was sanctioned with three days of arrest for (...) immorality regarding the security...”⁷⁶.

The situation of working soldiers, their general mood continued to be oppressive a month later, when in a telephonic notice, this time regarding the site from Mircea Vodă, the sector of Medgidia, it was mentioned the fact that „the soldiers are complaining that they have no warm clothes or shirts and that they are sick”⁷⁷.

At the hard working conditions and at all kind of shortcomings (from shelter, food and equipment) were also added the acts by which the vigilance of soldiers who were guarding the storehouse was put to test. It happened in the night of 11 to April 12, 1950, when, at the Fuels Storehouse from Cernavodă, „a band of five-six persons attacked the regiment’s sentinels with gunshots. From the regiment they shouted with the weapons and with light missiles, but the bandits could not be captured” (sic!)⁷⁸. In the same night „the same kind of individuals attacked three guard posts of the bridgehead over the Danube from Cernavodă”⁷⁹.

Far from positively appreciating the way in which the soldiers participated at the missions on the Canal’s sites, the party’s bodies were closely monitoring their activity from soldier to commander. The height is that the site itself as work unit and all the working points of the Canal were assimilated to the military objectives with a special importance. The reason of militarization could be explained, at least from the party bodies’ point of view, for the mitigation of the effects regarding many irregularities in the work and activity of this important sector in the context of the Canal’s construction.

The pursuit by the party of the soldiers’ activity was materialized on May 9, 1952, in the record made by the Newsletter no. 40 of the Party’s Committee: „Within the military detachment for constructions – wrote the Prime-Secretary A. Nițescu – were discovered some irregularities such as the theft of materials, of money, unhealthy attitudes towards work, drinking bouts etc., where are involved more companions.

Following the information made by the basic organizations within the work detachment, the Party’s Committee, on the basis of the material, guided

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, fund PCC, file 19/1949, p. 42.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 43.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, file 17/1949-1953, p. 162.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, file 18/1949-1950, p. 13.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*.

the Political Service of the Regional Military Directorate to proceed to the investigation”⁸⁰. Starting with the standardized soldier Popa Gheorghe and up to the commander of the group (detachment) from Medgidia, Lieutenant-Colonel Radu Constantin, there were investigate many persons from the personnel of the military units on the Canal’s sites. Among the accusations was mentioned: „large quantities of stolen materials such as cement, lime etc., have been removed by the soldiers within the site from the order of the lieutenant-Colonel R. Constantin and brought them at the functionary of Sector 24, Chirițescu Angela, with who the Lieutenant-Colonel R. Constantin has intimate relationships”⁸¹.

Regarding what happened, the Prime-Secretary proposed to the superior forums the following measures: the sanction of the Second Lieutenant Stoica Ene as Party’s member (sic!), the removal from the secretary position, and his sanction on the military line ...; the replacement of the Lieutenant-Colonel R. Constantin, as soon as possible, from the commander position of the unit in Medgidia and his sanction (sic!); the prosecution of the standardized soldier Popa Gheorghe for the fraud he committed (among these: the clocking of the working soldiers „without working”, the elaboration of pay lists „and the money was taken by him, the introduction of commitment sheets made together with the civilians who did not work and the money was divided with those”); at the monetary reform the above-mentioned had over five hundred thousand lei and after the reform, he permanently had hundreds and even thousands of lei (sic!)”⁸².

In connection with the sized facts, within the units of the Regional Military Directorate, the regional Prime-Secretary A. Nițescu proposed to be made an investigation by a commission of the Party Committee from the Regional Military Directorate, of the competent control bodies „in order to be exactly established the fraud and the links (sic!), taking into account that there is no larger complex”⁸³. It must be said that under a truly causal complex, in August 1950 were already made in the civil sector of the free work 112 prosecutions for embezzlements, thefts from the barracks, amounts of money unjustified appropriated⁸⁴. One year later, the personnel sector of the General Directorate of the Canal reported not less than 101 investigations regarding fact of the same nature with those registered in 1950⁸⁵.

„The larger complex” at which was making reference the mentioned party secretary was also in contact with the famous process of „the Danube-Black Sea Canal’s saboteurs”, developed on August 29-September 1, 1952, in

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, file 30/1951-1952, p. 139.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, p. 140.

⁸² *Ibidem*.

⁸³ *Ibidem*, p. 141.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, fund GDC, file 1041/1951, p. 203.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, file 1053/1951, p. 171.

Poarta Albă. Few days after the mentioned process (at the end of the year will be convicted the second important batch of the „Canal’s saboteurs”), it was issued the Order of the day no. 770 of the Internal Affairs Ministry, by the Council of Ministers’ Decision no. 801/September 8, 1952, through which the General Directorate of the Canal passed under the control of the Internal Affairs Ministry. „For ensuring the successful fulfillment of the Council of Ministers’ Decision, the enforcement of discipline within the works for the construction of the Danube-Black Sea Canal”⁸⁶, the Minister of Internal Affairs, the General Al. Drăghici, ordered some important measures regarding the effective militarization of the objective. Among they: „1. The personnel which works at the Canal’s construction and has military ranks or is effectuating the military service should obey the Armed Forces’ Disciplinary Rules of the People’s Republic of Romania. 2. The management personnel which has military ranks is assimilated in disciplinary rights in the following way: the chief of the Canal’s construction with the Commander of Army Corps; the substitute of the chief for the Danube-Black Sea Canal’s construction with the divisional commander; the sector chiefs with the regiments’ commanders; the working points chiefs with the commanders of battalions”⁸⁷.

The measure was late, inefficient, because despite the militarization of the entire activity from the Canal and of explicit threats (many of them applied by the state repression bodies) which floated on all the free constructors, workers or soldiers, the negligence and the lack of motivation became even more visible⁸⁸.

The last page signed by the army on the Canal’s sites was its gearing in the authorities’ effort of masking the great failure of the construction itself. In this sense, in October 1953, the Ministry of Armed Forces, through the General Staff, ordered the destruction by burning the plan works (94/115) by which it was approved the mobilization for work of the army reserve personnel. „The burning of works – was specified in the Order nr. 002582/October 9, 1953, will be made by a commission appointed by you (the detachment’s commander) which will mandatory include the chief of the special service”⁸⁹. The burning operation will be mentioned in a record of proceeding dated October 16, 1953. There were involved in the destructive action the Deputy General Manager Carol Cogut, Vera Lipan – Responsible Special Office, Crăciun Ion – Sector Chief, Secretary of the General Directorate of the Canal, responsible with the „M” (mobilization) works, Kalitka Iosif – Chief of Personnel within the General Directorate of the Canal⁹⁰.

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, file 1186/1952, p. 199-200.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, file 1082/1952, p. 206.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, file 1071/1951-1952, p. 75; see more detailed in D. Jela, *op. cit.*, p. 53-55.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*.