

## Wooden language and the Communist Youth Movement in Romania. The case of Interior Minister Teohari Georgescu

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**Abstract:** *Romania has first experienced the communist wooden language during the Second World War, after the act of August 23rd, 1944. The target group, called shunting mass, was composed of workers, farmers, young and old, people generally with low education and low living, willing to compromise their judgment in the face of better promises.*

*In this case, we propose to analyze the wooden language of the first Interior Minister, Teohari Georgescu, on the communist youth movement. The context of the speeches consists of the late unification process of the movement, more specifically the setting of the Young Communist League in 1949. We analyzed two speeches, both in terms of content and the meaning of the text, since this is generally a mixture of political, ideology and exhortations addressed to young people in Romania, aiming their enrolling in the communist movement. Content analysis is related to the political realities of the time, and the grammatical take account of clichés and style for this type of language.*

**Keywords:** the young communist movement, Teohari Georgescu's speeches, wooden language.

In the years when the communist regime expanded upon all of Romanian society, the Romanian youth was also influenced, even transformed by the system change. The communist youth organisations were known from now on as *mass organisations*, representing extensions of The Romanian Communist Party (RCP) and also propaganda instruments for the national youth. Like in other cases, for instance the syndicates, the youth organisations functioned on *the transmission belt* principle, presented by Lenin and adopted by Stalin. It referred to the idea of indoctrinating the population, from the youngest ages, to create the *new human*. In Lenin vision, the main duty of soviet children was to *learn communism*. For Stalin, the communist youth organization “is not a Party organization, but one that stands to the Party”<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Presidential Commission for the Analysis of Communist Dictatorship in Romania, *Final Report*, Bucharest, Humanitas, 2006, pp. 138-139.

Communist youth organizations appeared in Romania shortly after the RCP was founded, but their history is unclear and fluctuant. In 1922, the bases of the Union of Communist Youth (UCY) were put by reorganizing a former organization, linked to the Romanian Social Democratic Party<sup>2</sup>. The tumultuous history of the Romanian communist movement in the interwar period<sup>3</sup> is reflected also in its youth. After the banning of communist political parties in Romania (1924) its youth organization had encountered the same situation. Its revitalization came after August 23<sup>rd</sup> 1944, but reorganization was difficult because of the non-existing compact mass of youngsters willing to propagate this Soviet imported ideology. Even more than that, the majority of young Romanians were, at that time, liberals and few of them legionaries. So, for the RCP plan to become reality, some external support, obviously, from the USSR, was necessary.

The creation of a mass youth organization that can propagate RCP's politics had the National Democratic Front (NDF – a block of political parties led by the RCP) as a model. So, the componse of this, we can call it, political youth alliance, corresponded likely to the componse of the NDF. That is why The Romanian Progressivist Youth Movement, founded on the 21st of January 1945, included, first of all, the communist youth and then the social-democratic one, respectively those of the other political parties in the block<sup>4</sup>. The general idea that such an alliance was guiding on was attracting young citizens, from all domains, to the communist movement. Even so, its heterogeneity insured its inefficiency, till 1946 not being capable of achieving its goals. There were just some cases when teenagers were sent on post-war construction sites<sup>5</sup>.

After the 1946 elections and the RCP National Conference (14<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> of March 1947), the creation of the Union of Worker Youth (UWY) was decided. The *coagulation* process of the new youth movement finished in 1949, on the recommendation of the Soviet Comsomol (Union of Communist Youth), and by

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<sup>2</sup> Oana Ilie, *Political propaganda. Typologies and manifestation areas (1945-1958)*, Târgoviște, Cetatea de Scaun Publisher, 2014, p. 123.

<sup>3</sup> Official Romanian propaganda attributed the communist youth with a 'hero' like status, with all the known names of people who have fought for the eradication of bourgeoisie and 'class fight'. See: 'Resolution of the plenary session of the CC of RWP [Central Committee of the Romanian Workers Party] of 22<sup>nd</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> of December 1948 on the activity of the Party concerning youth', in *Resolutions and decisions of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers Party 1948-1950*, Romanian Workers Party Publisher, 1951, p. 71.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 124.

absorbing the Romanian social-democratic youth organization and integrating the local Hungarian and Jewish other organizations<sup>6</sup>.

The last steps of the unification process drew the attention and implication of the Romanian Interior Ministry. In his rare occasions, the Interior Minister, Teohari Georgescu<sup>7</sup>, held political speeches about the meaning and functions of the youth organization coordinated by the RWP, always pointing out the correlation between its activities and the communist ideology. We identify such references mostly in the late 40's, occasioned by different meetings. For the communist leaders, a unified youth movement was important by its human factor, useful in the so called process of 'building socialism'<sup>8</sup>.

Even if in the Romanian historiography the national communist youth movement looks constant<sup>9</sup>, for the period we have now under study (1945-1952), the most important moment is the centralization of the activity, respectively the creation of the UWY, in 1949. The same historiography offers us a sum of details on the organizations' creation project. So, the initiative would have started from the 'Grivița Roșie' factory in Bucharest, where, in February 1947, an initiative committee would have launched a call for the 'whole youth'. The call, general and impersonal in its structure, wasn't clearly assumed by anybody, but it established the immediate time and space of the founding of the UWY. Thus, we encounter our first example of wooden language: 'We need *now* (underline by C.C.), in these moments of great historical changes, *a single organization* (underline by C.C.), a powerful one, for us and every young worker'<sup>10</sup>. Even if the addressee of the call isn't exactly defined, the text excludes from the beginning all youngsters that don't accept the communist ideology, because the 'worker' becomes synonym with the 'communist'. A process linked to that of the 'coagulation' of the movement is,

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 125.

<sup>7</sup> Old time communist, typographer originated from a grocer family, T. Georgescu was Romania's interior minister between 1945 and 1952. He was the chief of a ministry responsible for many purges, arrests and physical liquidation of the administrative and political opponents of the Communists. Through him, the *red power* had easily been consolidated in Romania.

<sup>8</sup> Resolution of the plenary session of the CC of RWP..., p. 69.

<sup>9</sup> See: C. Bărbulescu, Fl. Dragne, C. Mocanu, C. Petculescu, Al. Șiperco, N. Tue, *Pieces of UCY history*, Bucharest, Politic Publisher, 1971; Florea Dragne, Constantin Petculescu, Nicolae Tue, *Questions and answers on the revolutionary and democratic youth movement in Romania*, Bucharest, Politic Publisher, 1977.

<sup>10</sup> *Pieces of UCY history*, p. 267.

according to the same source, the participation on the youth construction sites<sup>11</sup>. In the communist period, the work of the members of a youth organization could have been a success only after eliminating all political opposition<sup>12</sup>. During the first Congress of the RWP (21<sup>st</sup> till 23<sup>rd</sup> of February 1948) it was decided that the general imperative of the Union was ‘to reeducate the youth in the spirit of Marxist-leninism’<sup>13</sup>.

The UWY unification congress took place from the 19<sup>th</sup> till the 21<sup>st</sup> of March 1949. It began by presenting the report of the Central Commission for unification, with the adopting of the new Statute and electing the new Central Committee<sup>14</sup>.

In his speech, held at the end of the congress<sup>15</sup>, the Interior Minister, Teohari Georgescu, assigned the Union with the imperative of participation in the political and social achievement of the communist program: ‘Young workers must stay in the first lines of the battle for fulfilling the state plan, for the socialist reorganization of rural areas’<sup>16</sup>. Like a significant mass of people in the country, youngsters were also ‘workers’, so they were being identified with adults, also ‘communist workers’, that in the perspective of class struggle and their role as descendants: worker descendants *equals* communist movement descendants. The word ‘must’ (an imperative) is also clearly formulated, and it precedes an enumeration with some activity directions for youngsters. Their positioning, ‘in the first lines of the battle’, takes our mind to some military organization on the battlefield. Georgescu identifies these directions in a few domains, such as economic, politic and patriotic, the last two being also connected to the ideological principles promoted. Surely, ‘RWP politics’ being centered on these domains, the speech could not be constructed otherwise than on the non-humanistic, impersonal areas, that recall the existence and action of the group (‘collective’), and not of the individual (a single person). That is why cultural activity, very shallow anyway, could not be a product of an individual, but just a product of a group.

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 270-276.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 277.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 279.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 286; *Final report*, p. 143-144.

<sup>15</sup> ‘UWY is the beloved offspring of our Party’, *Scântea*, year XVIII, no. 1381, 23 March 1949, p. 1/3.

<sup>16</sup> Teohari Georgescu, *Speech held at the working youth unification Congress on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March 1949*, Tineretului Publisher, 1949, p. 8.

The political and ideological reorientation of Romania's youth, besides becoming a target for the communist leaders, was also a way for ensuring stability. But the opposition against the process of communizing the society found its many adepts among students. During the year 1946 (a year with parliamentary elections), protests were organized in all universities. The most violent actions took place in Cluj, where tens of Dermata workers were mobilized to abolish the students' actions<sup>17</sup>. As a consequence, Teohari Georgescu made a few calls in the national press, begging university teachers to have a 'patriotic spirit' and to keep things calm<sup>18</sup>. This is why the RWP needed to transform our youth into a maneuverable mass, loyal to its politic principles.

For the communist youth, the main watchword is 'work', so Georgescu exemplifies by 'work in agriculture'. He 'observes' that "on the chests of many youngsters in this room shine the *Work Order* and the *Peoples' Republic of Romania Star*". The word (imperative) 'must', ostentatiously repeated, precedes other enumerations: "socialist emulation *must* include masses of youth", "in all factories (...) youth brigades *must* be founded", "[UWY] *must* educate the rural and worker youth in the spirit of class combativity"<sup>19</sup>, "[UWY] *has to* attract hundreds of thousands of girls in the battle for socialism"<sup>20</sup> etc. These quotes refer to labor and ideological education and are designed to incite. Between the phrases 'must' and 'has to' there is no difference, the second one being just a little bit *soft* in its expression. The inclusion of the youth in the political program of RWP appears in the same way from all discursive interventions from the time and between all examples offered, T. Georgescu insists on the role of Romania's youth in the agricultural cooperativization process and in *fighting* against bourgeoisie. Communist propaganda from that time implied that bourgeoisie was responsible for the poor conditions of living and education of the Romanian youth<sup>21</sup>.

Referring to Stahanov's well known example on exceeding the production plan, our youth's mission was being defined by the new economic plan, namely the

<sup>17</sup> Dumitru Șandru, *The communization of Romanian society in 1944-1947*, Bucharest, Encyclopedic Publisher, 2007, p. 112.

<sup>18</sup> 'The government's attitude towards the challenges in universities', *Scântea*, year XV, no. 555, 25 June 1946, p. 1-2.

<sup>19</sup> *Speech held at the working youth unification Congress on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March 1949...*, p. 8-9.

<sup>20</sup> Idem, *The Party and the unique and revolutionary organization of worker youth*, Romanian Workers Party Publisher, 1949, p. 10; 'The Party and the unique and revolutionary organization of worker youth', *Scanteia*, year XVIII, no. 1321, 12 January 1949, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> Resolution of the plenary session of the CC of RWP..., p. 70.

elimination of the landlords in the countryside. “The socialist reorganization of the rural area”, an ambiguous concept, was becoming one of the UWY’s means of existence, defined by “the fight for a rich harvest, for the eradication of illiteracy and enlightenment of all peasants (...) for eliminating superstition and mysticism, (...) for developing agricultural cooperatives”<sup>22</sup>. In this case, the speech enounces actions that will take place in an undefined future; present time, once canceled, can’t be a base for the future any more, the processes of ‘eradication’, ‘enlightenment’ and ‘eliminating’ don’t need elements of the present that will be, anyway, destroyed. UWY members will have to do the so called *clarification and agitation* work in the villages (on communist policy and the process of agricultural cooperativization). The Romanian youth was considered a veritable propagandistic instrument, but those who spoke about such a thing didn’t have in mind the instruments needed to convince locals about the communist beliefs. Even if, in another public intervention, Georgescu suggested that the Communist Party will manage the ideological education of these youngsters (“the Party introduces its political rule upon our youth, educating it (...) according to the spirit of the struggle for socialism”<sup>23</sup>), he didn’t have in view that those teenagers and young adults were more orientated towards liberal-type political ideologies. Some of them, regarding the new political conditions in Romania, preferred to remain apolitical.

On the other hand, as I said, the UWY was a sort of *stock* for new members of the Communist Party<sup>24</sup>: “The future of the Party will grow from its core”<sup>25</sup>. Here, we can identify the suggestion of the RWP as a *living organism*. But the actual way in which youngsters could have become *reserve staff* for the Party is also presented by T. Georgescu in another speech: “By diverting capable youth from villages to tractor driver schools, technical schools, by promoting them towards managing rural cooperatives, (...) in state farms and SMT-s (Machines and Tractors Stations)”<sup>26</sup>. The gerund, often used in this passage, refers to actions that are not so easy detectable in time; we know that they will take place *sometime*, but we don’t know exactly when.

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<sup>22</sup> *Speech held at the working youth unification Congress on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March 1949...*, p. 9; ‘UWY is the beloved offspring of our Party’, *Scântea*, year XVIII, no. 1381, 23 March 1949, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> *The Party and the unique and revolutionary organization of worker youth...*, p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> Resolution of the plenary session of the CC of RWP..., p. 77.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> *Speech held at the working youth unification Congress on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March 1949...*, p. 10.

Even if future urban activity does not occur in T. Georgescu's speeches<sup>27</sup>, this is compensated by the consistent references on ideological education. Texts often evolve from frequently repeating the imperative 'must' to others charged with international political battles, often caused by occidental states. The fund of words used in these discusses rapidly depletes and is split in half by the two *camp*s of the ideological battle.

In this sense we cannot talk about a national addiction (or social need) for the Workers Party without announcing its *role* and *beliefs*. In the official discourse, for instance that presented by the Interior Ministry, everything linked to the communist thinkers, to the Bolshevik Party and the USSR was first of all offered as an example of wise and activity. In his (formal) *argumentation*, the speaker only simulates a demonstration. Many phrases make Stalin a debating subject, because "he teaches us that the Party, being the best leader school for the working class, is the only organization capable of centralizing the head of the proletarian struggle". Further on, referring to the differences between generations, T. Georgescu continues to paraphrase the leader from Moscow: "the old [staff] had what the new one doesn't have: a high experience in leadership, a Marxist-Leninist main preparation"<sup>28</sup>. So, the main difference between the young members and the elder ones is the lack of *revolutionary experience*, or we can call it *professional experience*. In this text we can find an exception from the 'rule' of placing positive events only in the future. The speaker suggests interwar class struggle (that was scares in Romania) or the Bolshevik revolution.

Invariably, from this posture, Georgescu finds another formula for attacking the *enemies of working youth* – the bourgeoisie. In just a few phrases, he throws an avalanche of negative words towards them, using techniques like enumerations, epithets and metaphors: "the bourgeoisie infiltrates among the working youth, its poisonous ideology, nationalism and fascism. In places where vigilance is low, hostile elements both to working class and working youth, penetrate and snuggle"<sup>29</sup>. We can observe the opposition between the 'hostile elements' and the 'working class'. Commonly, the word 'elements' has a negative

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<sup>27</sup> The urban activity proposed for the Union appears only in Party documents. Some of them were: organizing technical and scientific trainings and conferences, stimulating individual study and professional qualification or preparing *intellectuals and technicians*, political education and so on. See: Resolution of the plenary session of the CC of RWP..., p. 79.

<sup>28</sup> *The Party and the unique and revolutionary organization of worker youth...*, p. 6-7.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 7.

sense, but its value is given by the adjective, so ‘hostile’ can be only the other one, namely the political enemy. Their manifestation, during moments of inattention, suggests a *profiteering, greed and destruction-oriented bourgeoisie*. The way the two phrases are thought leaves place for a possible sequel, meaning the effects of the infiltration of the bourgeoisie influence. Interesting is that the speaker prefers to place his verbs at present time. He wants to suggest that the youth, considered untouched neither by *class fight* or bourgeoisie, would have to perish. The unique solution is given by the same speaker, namely socialism, ahead with its *savior-the Party*.

That is why – continues Georgescu his speech, quoting Stalin – it was recommendable that youngsters should have learned communist policy. Between all the *positive things* that could have been learned from *experienced* Party members were resistance and counterattack techniques: “[Youngsters need to] hate exploitation, slavery, injustice; [they should] not be frightened by difficulties and not come across invincible obstacles”<sup>30</sup>. The speaker turns then to quoting Lenin, using another known technique, specific to wooden language: the rhetorical question: “Isn’t it natural that here, in the revolutionary Party, youth prevails?” An affirmative response is not also satisfactory, so the quote is continued with a double syllogism: “We are the Party of the future and the future belongs to the youth; we are the Party of innovators and innovators are always wholeheartedly followed by youngsters”<sup>31</sup>. Thus we deduce: 1. that youth is the future of the party; 2. youth is innovative.

In this speech, the Soviet example could have *inspired* the UCY from its founding. There are two connections that are presented: political leaders (Lenin, Stalin) – youth, respectively the one between the Bolshevik Party and Comsomol. The two cases could work properly just together, in Georgescu’s opinion, for *the construction of socialism* in the Soviet Union. Also, these young working hands could have also contributed to Romania’s progress, by constructing agricultural and industrial centers, by exceeding the Five Year plans, and also by promoting specific artistic and intellectual creation; all these were known as *socialist accumulations*. The speaker uses the moment to identify himself with the other Party members, using an impersonal formula, with sentimental accents, reminding

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 8.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*.



of the interwar activity: “many of us fought in the lines of our beloved communist youth”<sup>32</sup>. T. Georgescu sees the completion of the unifying process as an important result, but he also considers that the key condition for the success of the Union is permanent coordination from the Workers Party: “Day by day and hour by hour the unique workers’ youth organization must feel the Party’s strong and leading arm support”<sup>33</sup>. As the speaker suggests, this should be a constant fact, a *sine-qua-non* condition for maintaining *the enemy* far away; also, Georgescu tries to humanize the Party, to make it look like a living organism. From its body should detach a *descendant*, namely the UWY.

In this sense, the texts we analyze here offer both positive and negative examples for the support offered for the Union by local RWP organizations. If the speaker is short and to the point when describing good cases like Bucharest, Jiu Valley or Bacău organizations, he talks a little bit longer about the not so good cases, like Botoșani, Timișoara and Dâmbovița local organizations. His mode of expression is biting, the examples offered have an accusing real reason: “not only did they not help the youth movement, but they caused them hardships”<sup>34</sup>. In order to counteract any possible negative consequences of such a situation, we identify an interesting comparison between the Party and a caring parent, at the same time with the already stated awareness of the role of the communist youth. Common youth spirit is explained through an enumeration, every element of it being then *decorated* with an epithet: “...our youth’s ardor and energy, its enthusiasm, its will for great constructive achievements, its innovative spirit and thirst for knowledge”<sup>35</sup>.

In another sequence, the interior ministry speaks about our youth’s *patriotic education*. Generalizing, he identifies the enemy groups once more, procedure that will help him detach a convenient reality: on one side there is the *people*, with its *well penetrated patriotic sentiment*, and on the other we can find the bourgeoisie and landlords, who mocked this feeling. The charges are redirected then towards the fascists and the Americans, both seen as hypocritical and mercenary: “The legionaries, who feigned patriotism, were in fact a miserable German imperialist

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 9.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 12.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 13.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 14.

agency; they were paid and leaded by the Gestapo”<sup>36</sup>. He contrasts this example with one of a former UCY member, Petre Gheorghe, murdered in 1943, the penultimate year of the Antonescu regime, or the example of a Romanian sergeant, dead in the battle for the liberation of Northern Transylvania.

Continuing the analysis of the wooden language technique, we mention that, through the examples given and the details of the information given, the speaker gives the appearance of fairness and accuracy, influencing the auditor to think he is told the truth and the information is indisputable. In this way, the speaker gains credibility. From the altered present, sprinkled with so many negative examples, we have the promise of a clean and bright future, but *only* if people will have learned from the mistakes made in the past.

Even if it has nothing to do with the subject of the speech, allusions to the Anglo-American imperialism and the opposition between west European states and socialist states, altogether with the founding of NATO become elements of persuasion, creating enmity in ordinary people’s minds. This enmity is maintained by the sum of enumerations, epithets, metaphors, hyperboles etc. According to the speaker, “The imperialist rage of fury” because *the masses*, under the specter of proletarian internationalism, “rise against The Atlantic Pact”<sup>37</sup>. The texts oppose ideologies, organizations and states, opposing also the West to the socialist states. The cult of the Soviet Union, endorsed by the Romanian youth, had, also in this case, military support: “The Socialist State (the USSR – C.C.) is the savior of mankind from the threat of the Nazi barbarity and the main abutment in the fight against Anglo-American imperialism”<sup>38</sup>. The negative example, from which all young communists had to learn, was the one of Tito’s Yugoslavia: as it was saying, Yugoslav youth where threatened to be educated “in a chauvinistic spirit and obedience to the Anglo-American imperialism”<sup>39</sup>. Nationalism was inconsistent with the internationalist idea of the time, of attracting minorities to the communist movement. Subjecting was also sentenced under the lock-independence militant spirit. But now we understand that this so called *independence* referred *just* to distancing from Western influence. In fact, by stimulating the youth, the use of the leitmotif of the ideological conflict between communism and capitalism remains

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<sup>36</sup> *Speech held at the working youth unification Congress on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March 1949...*, p. 12.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 15.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 16.

the best indoctrination method for unconditioned obedience for the communist leaders and also hatred (explicit and implicit) to those who do not share this political orientation.

Lastly, the Interior Ministry tries to give orders by formulating sentences lacking a precise recipient, again all of them impersonal and abstract. The *comrades* that he is calling to “fight and work” receive a unique chance and just one purpose: socialism – “our big and right cause”<sup>40</sup>. The speaker takes advantage of this last opportunity to glorify Stalin, this time pronouncing his entire name, all elements presented in his other discourses being gathered on “the road indicated by whole of working mankind’s genius, Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin”<sup>41</sup>. In another text, he again exemplifies RWP’s contribution to the political-ideological course of the Union of Worker Youth: “[We need] to actively help the working youth in achieving its unique organization and to successfully fulfill all tasks given to them by the Party”<sup>42</sup>. The subjunctive imperative, recognized here at the beginning of the phrase (*to help*) is also present, and the use of the word *actively* indicates the permanent battle between the two ideological sides. It is also very clear that the Workers Party was the entity who decided all of the Union’s actions. The Party’s expectations were, as a consequence, understood through our youth’s *victories* in this ongoing ideological battle.

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 18.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>42</sup> *The Party and the unique and revolutionary organization of worker youth...*, p. 15.

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