

## TRIBULATIONS OF THE HISTORICAL FRONT AT THE END OF THE 1950s IN ROMANIA

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One of the most important standoffs between the various camps within the historical field took place in 1958. It concerned the editorial board and policies of the periodical of the Academy's Institute of History – “*Studii. Revistă de istorie*” (from 1955). The Central Committee (CC) of the Romanian Workers' Party's Propaganda and Agitation Department (PAD) harshly criticized the journal as early as 1954. The PAD recommended a massive re-organization of both the board and its publishing priorities. It considered that “*Studii*” did not have enough theoretical articles or materials popularizing Marxism-Leninism and that it was republishing articles from either party organs, such as “*Lupta de clasă*,” or from the issues of “*Voprosy Istorii*” already translated into Romanian. Furthermore, “*Studii*” did not provide, ahead of time, publication plans for each of its issues. Its editors were delivering the final content in the last moment. Even when the materials were submitted they did not all arrive at the same time.<sup>1</sup>

The main problem with implementing the intended changes was, to quote Valter Roman (director of the Political Publishing House), that “‘*Studii*’ is comrade Roller's dearest child.” Both political and editorial issues depended on his final say.<sup>2</sup> The periodical's activity was ‘professionalized’ through the nomination of an editor-in-chief, a deputy editor, secretary of the board, and a technical editor. The publication plan was decided and supervised by an editorial board comprising all relevant actors of the historical field. In November 1955, when the first nominations for the new leadership of the Academy's History Institute were made, the PAD also listed the editors of “*Studii și articole de istorie*”: Ion Gheorghiu, Nicolae Fotino, Vasile Liveanu, Lia Lehr, Pagu Aghir (listed in the order of the positions enumerated above).<sup>3</sup>

The new editorial board was only a narrow improvement on Roller's hegemony. However, it prepared the ground for further changes. Around the same

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<sup>1</sup> Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale, București (hereafter: ANIC), fund CC al PCR – Secția de Propagandă și Agitație, file no. 64/1955, f. 117, “Referat cu privire la activitatea Editurii Academiei RPR,” November 23.

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem, file no. 61/1954, ff. 38-41, “Stenogramă luată în ziua de 17 noiembrie 1954 ...”

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, file no. 64/1955, f. 70, “Referat cu privire la unele aspect ale muncii Institutului de Istorie al Academiei RPR din București,” September 23.

period, 1953-1957, in the USSR, Anna Pankratova and Eduard Burdzhlov initiated a reform of “Voprosy Istorii” (“Studii” was its Romanian equivalent). Their fundamental argument was that history-production should adjust to the changes in the ideological stand of the party, that is, it needed to be in tune with de-Stalinization.<sup>4</sup> It would not be too far-fetched to say that most likely all parties involved in this conflict in Romania followed a similar logic. I take the crisis at “Studii” as exemplary of the political and academic currents affecting the historical field in the second half of the 1950s.

But first we have to return to Roller’s situation. The most powerful blow against Roller came from within the party quarters. At the July 9-13, 1958 CC Plenum, Leonte Răutu (chief of the Department of Propaganda and Culture, the new name of the PAD) strongly criticized Roller for what was labeled as his anti-party activities. What happened was that Roller became associated with a group led by Constantin Doncea and Ovidiu Șandru who challenged Dej’s supremacy in the party. They also claimed to be the true leaders of the 1933 Grivița railway-workers’ strike, the defining revolutionary event of Gheorghiu-Dej’s underground years.

Within the larger project of writing a history of the RWP (the second fundamental task of history-production in Romania set by the party’s II<sup>nd</sup> Congress),<sup>5</sup> Roller began to record on tape these individuals’ accounts about the Grivița strikes. According to Răutu, his crucial error was that he allowed Doncea, Șandru, and the others to present their own version of the events: “direct blame falls on comrade Roller. He gave there [at the RWP CC Institute of History] a legitimate location for the rants of Doncea, Șandru, and others. [...] The Institute of History proceeded in a fashion similar to that of a bourgeois institute: everybody came to spew their venom, to satisfy their ambitions.”<sup>6</sup>

As Constantiniu argued, with Roller reeling from this formidable criticism, the editorial board of the journal was bound to undergo changes. The first issue of “Studii,” in 1958, showed that A. Oțetea was now editor-in-chief. His deputy was Gheorghe Haupt, while Mihai Ionescu was secretary of the board. However, the

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<sup>4</sup> Pankratova became candidate member of the RPR Academy in 1957. For a full account of the Pankratova-Burdzhlov affair in Soviet historical studies see Roger D. Markwick, *Rewriting History in Soviet Russia. The Politics of Revisionist Historiography 1956-1974*, London, 2001 and Nancy Heer, *Politics and History in the Soviet Union*, Cambridge, 1971.

<sup>5</sup> ANIC, fund CC al PCR – Secția de Propagandă și Agitație, file no. 17/1956, ff. 81-88, “Plan de elaborare a manualului de istorie a PMR,” May 24. The project of a history of the RWP/RCP was never completed under communism in Romania.

<sup>6</sup> *Amurgul ilegaliștilor. Plenara CC al PMR din 9-13 iunie 1958*, ed. by Alina Tudor, Dan Cătănuș, București, 2001, p. 173.

times were changing: the failure and subsequent purge of the Chişinevschi-Constantinescu tandem combined with the house-cleaning party offensive targeting the intelligentsia and the student body (1958-1960) revitalized the importance of “revolutionary vigilance” and of “ideological purity.”

Andrei Oţetea along with two of his collaborators, Eliza Campus and Nicolae Fotino (member of the editorial board of “Studii”), were publicly criticized by Leonte Răutu in May 1958. He accused them of inability, after fourteen years of building socialism, to adjust to the requirements of the new social order. Oţetea was guilty of nourishing reactionary thinking on the historical front, therefore hindering the development of socialist consciousness both among his peers and within the general public: “We understand the difficulties experienced by old historians in the process of moving away from the old way of seeing things to the new one. We consider that it is necessary to be patient with them in order to make sure that this transition takes place under normal circumstances. [...] Nevertheless, I am convinced that comrade Oţetea’s assessments [of the current problems of history-production] are his own and that they are not merely suggestions he took on from the Party Institute [...] Have the past fourteen years been in vain? Haven’t they created the necessary political and ideological scaffold for a founded analysis of the works of the old historians and for the critical evaluation of what is erroneous in their work? There are few ideological fields where the struggle over ideas is as strong as in history. From this point of view, we cannot say that our historians have reached a satisfactory level.”<sup>7</sup>

Even if we are to leave aside the general ideological revivalism<sup>8</sup> in the country, it seems that Răutu was not too fond of Oţetea’s prominence on the historical front. In his autobiographical account, Ţugui claims that Răutu was very angry when he realized that he was not consulted regarding Oţetea’s appointment as director of the Academy’s History Institute and editor-in-chief at “Studii.” Ţugui, the head of the Culture and Science Section at the time, maintains that

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<sup>7</sup> ANIC, fund CC al PCR – Secţia de Propagandă şi Agitaţie, file no. 6/1958, “Stenograma consfăturii din zilele de 30-31 mai 1958” *apud* Vladimir Tismăneanu, Cristian Vasile, *Perfectul acrobat. Leonte Răutu, măştile răului*, Bucureşti, 2008, pp. 364-366.

<sup>8</sup> David Priestland distinguished within Bolshevism between “a voluntaristic, or ‘charismatic’ approach to politics and economics” – ‘revivalist,’ and “a more scientific, Weberian ‘rational’ attitude” – ‘technicist.’ He then took his argument further and branched his typology into subspecies of each of these two categories. However, for our purposes, what is important is that these two tendencies, despite being in tension, are not mutually exclusive. See David Priestland, *Stalinism and the Politics of Mobilization. Ideas, Power, and Terror in Inter-War Russia*, Oxford/New York, 2007.

Răutu's bypassing was possible because the nomination came from the Academy's Presidium and Secretariat after the vote of the members of the Historical Section.<sup>9</sup> This scenario is plausible only to a limited extent. What is more likely to have happened was that Răutu grudgingly accepted the change, but when the time was right he made sure to have things under control.

The second issue of "Studii" in 1958 introduced a new editorial board: P. Constantinescu-Iași was editor-in-chief; E. Stănescu was deputy editor; and Boris Bălțeanu was secretary of the board. Oțetea's replacement with Constantinescu-Iași along with the elimination from the board of Gh. Haupt (an 'objective change' considering his immigration), Matei Ionescu (who was fired from the Institute and excluded from the party), and Nicolae Fotino (who maintained his job at the Institute, but was suspended from the party) brought "Studii" closer to the party line. Most importantly, it was controlled by a historian-censor (Constantinescu-Iași) along with one of Daicoviciu's henchmen, V. Cheresteșiu, and by a historian affiliated with the Party History Institute (Gheorghe Matei).

The renewed revivalism of the journal was proven by the editorial of the third issue (1958): "it ['Studii'] had to strengthen and deepen the combative-ideological character of the published material. It did not suffice to publish scientific work [...] it must also publish as many ideological texts as possible."<sup>10</sup> The resolution reached at "Studii" is strikingly similar to the ruling given at "Voprosy Istorii." In the Soviet case, the junior editor-in-chief, Burdzhhalov, was fired (and temporarily demoted from all offices he held). Pankratova was reprimanded by the party (the whole affair led to her untimely death). The new editorial board published an assessment of its predecessors' errors. It stated that: "the editorial board will pay particular attention to resolutely restoring the principles of the Party allegiance in the evaluation of historical phenomena [...] It will wage an adamant struggle against distortions of the historical process, against relapses into bourgeois ideology in historiography, and for the purity of Marxist-Leninist theory."<sup>11</sup> It seems indeed that Răutu did have a template to follow.

<sup>9</sup> Pavel Țugui, *Istoria și limba română în vremea lui Gheorghiu-Dej. Memoriile unui fost șef de secție al C.C. al PMR*, București, 1999, p. 60.

<sup>10</sup> "Studii. Revistă de istorie," 1958, no. 3, p. 125. See also Florin Constantiniu, *De la Răutu și Roller la Mușat și Ardeleanu*, București, 2007, pp. 189-195; Andi Mihalache, *Istorie și practici discursive în România "democrat-populară"*, București, 2003, p. 137.

<sup>11</sup> *Statement of "Voprosy istorii,"* in vol. *History in the USSR: Selected Readings*, ed. by Marin Pundeff, San Francisco, [1967], p. 244.

“Studii,” however, was only a small stage on which the tumult of 1958-1960 surfaced. The University was the arena where the impact of the socialist offensive was most strongly felt. The Council of Ministers issued in 1957 a decree that imposed a 70-75% quota of students with peasant or working-class origins for the admissions to higher education. By January 30, 1961, the PAD’s Section of education declared that it reached the level of 70%.<sup>12</sup> Those who were deemed to spread “reactionary, antiscientific views” among the students were fired or expelled. Sons of “former exploiters, kulaks, priests, lawyers” were also expelled along with individuals that did not have the necessary professional and scientific training. For example, during the 1957/1958 academic year, out of a total of 8,227 cadres in higher education, 562 were fired (6.8%); of these 179 were transferred to other institutions, while 21 lost their jobs because their departments and sections were disbanded. The composition of this group was the following: 28 professors, 85 assistant professors, 120 lecturers, 307 assistants.<sup>13</sup>

These purges had two fundamental functions: the revolutionary purification of the higher education by means of proletarianization; and the strengthening of the position and leverage of the party organizations affiliated to either University departments or the Academy. By 1959, the committees for the admission exams, for the employment in research job openings, or for the elections of sections’ or sectors’ chiefs had to include representatives of the local party organization and of the respective trade-union section.<sup>14</sup>

One of the dominant and recurring complaints of the PAD reports concerning the Academy’s institutes was the weakness and inactivity of the party organization combined with the informal isolation of party members in research collectives.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> ANIC, fund CC al PCR – Secția de Propagandă și Agitație, file no. 5/1961, f. 11, “Informare privind desfășurarea adunărilor generale de alegeri ale organizațiilor de partid din instituțiile de învățământ superior,” January 30.

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, file no. 10/1960, f. 23, “Informație cu privire la compoziția social-politică a cadrelor didactice din învățământul superior.” In 1959, those who, after August 23, 1944 were sentenced on political grounds or those who were labeled “enemies of the people” or “agents of reaction” were banned either from taking the admittance exam to university or from applying for a job at research institutes. See ibidem, file no. 29/1959, f. 69 and 181-182, “Referat privind recrutarea, selecționarea, promovarea și asigurarea stabilității cadrelor de specialiști din unitățile de cercetare științifice ale Academiei RPR, ministerele și instituțiile centrale de stat,” October 24, and “Informare cu privire la admiterea și menținerea în instituțiile de învățământ superior a fiilor de exploatare, condamnați politic, transfugi, etc.”

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, file no. 29/1959, f. 163, “Referat cu privire la unele măsuri de îmbunătățire a activității Academiei RPR.”

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem, file no. 64/1955, f. 14, “Notă informativă privind unele aspecte ale activității Academiei RPR,” April 28.

Besides strengthening the ideological criteria in the process of cadres' selection, two other major solutions were found to this situation. The first was the creation of two commissions (in 1960 and 1959), made up of the most important party-academics. They were given the task to evaluate both the institutional and research activity of the Academy and to provide recommendations for its improvement. The two commissions decided to create the Council for the Orientation, Guidance, and Coordination of Research in the RPR (COGCR). It was supposed to coordinate smaller committees (which included ministerial representatives) that supervised the work in the corresponding research branches.<sup>16</sup> The creation of the COGCR also brought about the reorganization of some institutes and sections of the Academy.

Ilie Murgulescu, Athanase Joja, and Iorgu Iordan expressed their reticence in accepting this transformation. But, as Joja noticed: "whether we like it or not the situation is the following: there is a document that forces the Academy and the Ministers into a new reorganization. The Academy's reorganization is just a matter of time and it ultimately goes beyond us. A final decision will most likely be taken by a higher authority."<sup>17</sup> The Academy lost the limited autonomy it had in setting its sections' yearly research plans. They were most of the time decided by each section individually under the supervision of its president, who was also a vice-president of the Academy.

This transformation was doubled by the redefinition of the status of the Academy's party organization. Until 1961, the latter was subordinated to the "I.V. Stalin" district party committee. The problem was that the district committee did not have enough specialized personnel to control the content of the research undergone at the Academy. In order to fix this problem, it was decided that the Academy's party organization will be unified with the University's and both will be subordinated to the Bucharest municipal party committee.

The new organization was named the Party Committee of Institutes of Higher Education and of Scientific Research. One of the main tasks of the municipal committee was to instruct the members of the newly created organization in focusing upon the political and ideological education of scientists.<sup>18</sup> In a sense, however, this was merely an officialization of the status quo reached after the waves of purges that

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<sup>16</sup> Ibidem, "Referat cu privire la unele măsuri de îmbunătățire a activității Academiei RPR."

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, file no. 2/1960, f. 95, "Informare privind unele aspecte din activitatea Academiei RPR," May 16.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, file no. 5/1961, ff. 97-99, "Referat cu privire la îmbunătățirea activității comitetului de partid al Academiei RPR și a organizațiilor de partid din instituțiile de cercetări științifice departamentale," October 23.

the Bucharest municipal committee, under Florian Dănălache, coordinated at both the University and the Academy between 1957 and 1959.<sup>19</sup>

The 1957-1959 campaign of changing the profile of higher education through revolutionary vigilance and 'democratization' of admissions and employment did impact upon the historical front. Some of the most high-profile Romanian contemporary historians have strong memories of those years. Dan Berindei and Florin Constantiniu were reprimanded on party line, but they continued their work at the Academy's Institute and in the collectives of the national history treatise. Al. Zub, however, was arrested in 1957 (accused of nationalist attitude because of his commemorative speech at the 500-year anniversary of Stephen the Great's enthronement). He was released and reintegrated in research in 1963.<sup>20</sup> Another famous case was Răzvan Theodorescu, who was expelled in 1959 from the University. He returned to the Institute of Art History in 1963.

What needs to be emphasized though is that most of the attacks against the young researchers affiliated to the Academy's institutes of history (in Bucharest,

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<sup>19</sup> Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Între servilism și fanatism. Reflecții pe marginea carierei politice a lui Florin Dănălache*, in vol. *Arheologia terorii*, București, 2008<sup>3</sup>, pp. 334-339; Pavel Țugui, *Dosarul studentului Manolescu: povestea unei exmatriculări*, in "Revista 22," year XIV, September 30 – October 6, 2004, no. 760.

<sup>20</sup> On the case of Al. Zub and the content of his actual speech at the anniversary organized at the Putna Monastery see Gheorghe Firca, *Historia, magistra vitae 1957: o altă aniversare*, in "Revista 22," year XIV, September 7, 2005. Zub's case is rather strange, because the manifestation he participated in and spoke to was considered a success even by the PAD, for example ANIC, fund CC al PCR – Secția de Propagandă și Agitație, file no. 18/1957, ff. 59-60, "Informare cu privire la manifestările ce au avut loc cu ocazia aniversării a 500 de ani de la urcarea pe tron a lui Ștefan cel Mare," May 8.

This document also contains the information that the lecture, which Barbu Cămpina was supposed to present at the Academy special session, did not fit into the program anymore (allegedly for reasons of time, but Cămpina was by no means a historian that had many good things to say about Stephen the Great's reign). The sole historian to pay homage to the Moldavian voivode was I. Nestor. At the same time, the Academy published the anniversary volume *Ștefan cel Mare – 500 de ani de la înscăunarea sa ca domn al Moldovei*, București, 1957. Its bibliography listed all the works on the topic by 'bourgeois' historians such as Gh.I. Brătianu, Th. Capidan, C. Giurescu, C.C. Giurescu, Vasile Grecu, Ioan Lupaș, Alex. Lapedatu, etc. (P. Țugui, *Istoria și limba română*, p. 79). So, Zub's arrest for nationalist propaganda at the voivode's anniversary stands out because the times were quite favorable for a national interpretation of Stephen the Great's rule. Most likely he got such a raw deal also because he didn't have an influential historian/academician to back him up.

Cluj, or Iași) or to the University's history departments were also intended as warnings to their mentors. Dan Berindei, Răzvan Theodorescu, and Nicolae Tanașoca were reprimanded in the context of a vicious attack against Dionisie M. Pippidi, Mihai Berza, and Ion Nestor (candidate member of the Academy). The three professors initially refused to sign a letter of support for Manolis Glezos, a Greek communist. They soon changed their attitude; the letter of support was published in "Contemporanul" signed by them along with Andrei Oțetea, and Emil Condurachi.<sup>21</sup>



The evaluation of the institutional and personnel dynamics of the historical front from 1955 until 1962 reveals significant transformations. The fall of M. Roller meant the end of an academic regime based on the "the reign of a great dictator scientist."<sup>22</sup> The historical front was divided in a plurality of power-holders who both collaborated in the production of a national historical narrative and in the establishment of professional norms, and competed against one other for resources and for "obtaining the ear of the party bosses" (Krementsov).

By the end of this timeframe, the sector of Marxist historiography was much weakened in comparison with the strengthening of the fiefdoms of 'bourgeois' (leaning) historians, such Oțetea's or Daicoviciu's. The causes were multiple: first, through the writing of the treatise and the production of monographs, national history was gradually settling upon the fundamental elements that would later make up a new paradigm. In contrast, because of the successive purges within the party ranks, party and working class history remained unsettled. Only after 1962 some of its basic features would crystallize and even those would go through additional modifications because of Ceaușescu's accession to power.

Second, there was a dearth of qualified personnel in this sector of the historical front. On the one hand, some of its luminaries such as Barbu Cămpina and Gheorghe Haupt disappeared prematurely, while Miron Constantinescu was forced to start from scratch after being purged in 1957. On the other hand, in order

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<sup>21</sup> For a detailed account of the affair see Ioan Opriș, *Istoricii și Securitatea*, vol. I, București, 2004, esp. pp. 520 and 538; vol. II, București, 2006, esp. p. 485.

<sup>22</sup> The first president of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, V.I. Vernadsky, used this formula in his diary in 1931. See Michael David-Fox and György Péteri, *On the Origins and Demise of the Communist Academic Regime*, in vol. *Academia in Upheaval – Origins, Transfers, and Transformations of the Communist Academic Regime in Russia and East Central Europe*, ed. by Michael David-Fox, György Péteri, Westport, Connecticut/London, 2000, p. 18.



to shield himself from possible Khrushchevite influences, Gheorghiu-Dej also turned his wrath against party members who were graduates from Soviet universities. Consequently, a group which could have shaped up as a counterpart to more traditionally minded historians never fulfilled its promise. Moreover, the institutional structures of the party controlled education were themselves experiencing turbulent times.<sup>23</sup>

In this context, it is not surprising that, by the early 1960s, despite the assault on higher education, the ‘traditional’ historians successfully managed to impose their personalities and values on the historical field. Furthermore, people like Oțetea or Daicoviciu had the possibility of *direct* negotiations with the highest ranked party officials and they could bypass mid-level apparatchiks.

The historians who rose against Roller successfully used the Academy and its institutes for the transformation of the field while brokering deals with various

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<sup>23</sup> In 1954, the “Ștefan Gheorghiu” Party School merged with the Higher School of Social Sciences “A.A. Zhdanov.” Party higher education lasted only 3 years. Until 1963, however, the graduates had to pass a set of supplementary exams in order to have their diplomas recognized. At the same time, the Institute of History of the RWP’s Central Committee was experiencing its own growth pains: in the 1950s, its researchers had very limited access to the CC Archives; the Institute strived to integrate the Museum of the People’s Revolutionary Struggle (from 1954 the Museum of RWP History) headed by Clara Cușnir-Mihailovici; it also failed to establish a research-based relationship with the “Ștefan Gheorghiu” Party School. Moreover, in 1958, the director of the Institute, Constantin Pârvulescu, was purged because of his association with the Constantinescu-Chișinevschi faction.

As we have seen earlier, with Roller’s demise (vice-president of the Institute), the Institute itself was the target of an anti-factionalism campaign. Only in the second half of the 1960s, does the Party Institute begin to assert itself on the historical field. Within the field of party and working-class movement history, there are two examples of resounding failure to produce definitive scholarship: the stillborn project of the Treatise of the RWP’s history and the inability to finalize the fifth volume of the *Tratat de istoria României*, which dealt with contemporary history. Even the fourth volume was barely finished and published in 1964, only to be heavily criticized in the first years of Ceaușescu’s reign.

See Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Școlile de partid ca formă de indoctrinare comunistă* and *Academia Ștefan Gheorghiu și formele corupției ideologice*, in vol. *Arheologia terorii*, pp. 150-166; Nicoleta Ionescu-Gură, *Studiu introductiv*, in vol. *Membrii CC al PCR, 1945-1989. Dicționar*, coord. by Florica Dobre, București, 2004, pp. 39-40 and 48-52; Nicoleta Ionescu-Gură, *Nomenclatura Comitetului Central al Partidului Muncitoresc Român*, București, 2006; Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu, *Intelectualii în câmpul puterii. Morfologii și traiectorii sociale*, București, 2007, pp. 92-97; Mihăiță Lupu, *Funcționarea Academiei “Ștefan Gheorghiu” sau ce putem recupera în folosul mobilității elitelor actuale din România*, in “Anuarul Institutului de Investigare a Crimelor Comunismului din România,” vol. II, 2007, pp. 265-279.

party authorities. They also established trans-institutional coalitions, benefiting from the support of three successive Ministers of Education: Ilie Murgulescu, Miron Constantinescu, and Athanase Joja. At the same time, despite their personal idiosyncrasies, they managed to collaborate when the time called for it. Additionally, the various chiefs of the Propaganda and Agitation Department adopted a “weatherwave” like behavior, adapting their pronouncement in accordance to an ever changing doctrinal climate.<sup>24</sup>

The ‘de-Rollerization’ of the historical front was a form of academic collective action under the umbrella of a monumental party-engineered, collective scientific effort.

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<sup>24</sup> I am using Roumen Daskalov’s model of change in the field of history. See Roumen Daskalov, *The Making of a Nation in the Balkans. Historiography of the Bulgarian Revival*, Budapest/New York, 2004, pp. 119-120. David Joransky (*The Stalinist Mentality and Higher Learning*, in “Slavic Review,” vol. 42, 1983, no. 4, pp. 575-600) coined the minds of Soviet ideologues as “weatherwaves.”