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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Rizescu, V. (2022). Labor Politics and Syndicalism in Interwar Romania: the Drives to the Right and to the Left. *Polis: revistă de științe politice*, 10(3), 81-104. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-81595-0>

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Labor Politics and Syndicalism in Interwar Romania: the Drives to the Right and to the Left

Victor RIZESCU

Abstract: *The article surveys the ideological drives to the Right and to the Left in the Romanian space, as they applied to the field of labor and social policies, over the period stretching from the first local reactions taken to the corporatist restructuring of syndical organization in fascist Italy up to the installation of communism. The developments involved are placed against their early XXth century historical background and the identity of the liberal approach to the issues concerned, enjoying a dominant position over the years coming in the aftermath of the First World War, is delineated in order to be invoked as a reference against which the tenets of the rival perspectives are evaluated. The full-blown fascist and communist relevant views are related to the other varieties of right-wing and respectively left-wing demands. The issue of syndicalism is taken as the central thread of the process of change under scrutiny, and the shaping of the legislative and institutional devices meant to address the problem of the representation of professional interests in an authoritarian guise is treated as the cornerstone of the same process.*

Keywords: *labor, syndicalism, corporatism, fascism, communism.*

From the first encounter with the corporatist reordering of labor politics exhibited by fascist Italy, in 1926, to the installation of the communist order in the field, in 1948, Romania was confronted with a wide range of models for the organization of social policies and of their syndical bases, themselves closely linked with larger ideological visions that pointed to the overall reorganizing of the political format of the country and to the reshaping of the underlying social-economic structure. One can only understand, however, the interplay between right-wing and left-wing designs of the sort, set on

the course of radicalization, by the means of a proper delineation of the liberal centrist view, as applied to the same area of social life. It is only the arrangements and practices arising from this view – whose elaboration was inaugurated in the national space before the First World War, in order to acquire recognizable contours over the years coming in its aftermath – that can be taken as a yardstick for assessing the character and measuring the scope of the drives subsequently taken in the context towards the opposite poles of the ideological spectrum and along the

relevant layers of social evolution and state activities.

The liberal view of labor and the drive to the Right

The two main pillars of the engagement with the area of labor predicated on broad liberal principles were the conception of syndical freedom meant to allow the genuine representation of the economic interests of professional groups, while preventing their politicization, and respectively that of the state mediating intervention on a permanent basis in the sphere of the relations between employers and employees. These sets of demands had evolved in deep correlation over the previous stages of European and world history, in so far as the vindication of the legitimate character of coalitions among laborers of any category, intended to work for the betterment of their economic condition, had to be advanced against the idea prevailing at the beginning of liberal capitalism and according to which any enterprise of the kind had to be opposed as disruptive of the market non-interventionist wisdom¹. Moreover, the philosophy of well-calibrated intervention taken against the background of generalized syndicalism could only make its way through a struggle on two fronts, fighting on the one hand the traditionalist yearning for the reinstatement of guild organization – consisting of the mandatory incorporation of the labor force in corporatist

professional structures subject to tight state regulations – and on the other hand the socialist revolutionary calls looking at the syndical bodies as instruments of full emancipation, enabling the working classes to move beyond the limitations of the market economy².

It was the same clash between resilient guild-based economic traditionalism and ascending socialist-dominated syndicalism which constituted the context for the emergence of the liberal perspective on the issue of labor in Romania, at the turn of the XIXth to the XXth century. Pleadings in favor of the uses and legitimacy of professional associationism³ went together at the time with others rejecting the conception of the night-watchman state and arguing the necessity of the open governmental involvement in economic life⁴, in a milieu where the vision of revolutionary class struggle harnessing the syndicates to its ambitious long-term political goals – consolidated at the moment 1905-1906 after a temporary eclipse – was taking roots alongside attempts at rejuvenating the traditional guilds in the frame of modern laws of the professions and of social insurances providing for the half-mandatory enlistment of the members of expanding occupational groups (adopted successively in 1902 and 1912).

With the notion of state mediation included in the constitution of 1923 and the arrangements of syndical freedom entrenched by the law of professional syndicates introduced in

1921 – together with that of legal persons adopted in 1924 – , the liberal view of labor then emerged as the dominant one against the challenges of the Right and the Left, moreover acquiring foreign aid as a result of the Romanian allegiance to the International Labor Organization, in 1919, and being endowed with internal institutional support by virtue of the creation of a specialized governmental agency devoted to the matters concerned, in the form of the Ministry of Labor and Social Care inaugurated in 1920. The manifestations occasioned by the celebration of this last body ten years afterwards, in 1930⁵, have to be seen as the most emphatic and penetrating assertions of the same vision in the context. By the time, its social impact had been broadened on the basis of a series of legal regulations, of which the most significant were the law for the regulation of labor conflicts precipitately adopted in 1920 – at a moment marked by the escalation of left-wing revolutionary activity – and the one for the administration of labor contracts, belatedly laid down in 1929. Split in 1921 with the separation from its body of the Komintern-controlled communist branch and further weakened with the outlawing of this last one in 1924, the Left was not a major pressure upon the defenders of the mainstream in the domain of social policies at the beginning of the fourth XXth century decade. The exponents of the Right, instead, had gained considerable strength, in possession of the cast of

mind whose tenets were to be tested against the exigencies of practical politics over the period 1938-1944. Although scoring significant and much-advertised accomplishments up to 1932-1933 – when the laws for the creation of the Chambers of Labor and for the unification of the systems of social insurances across the country were successively adopted – the liberal approach to the problems of labor and syndicalism was to be placed on the defensive shortly after its outspoken self-celebrations.

The wide popularization in the Romanian space of the modern corporatist perspective articulated in Italy in 1926 and set on stronger theoretical foundations with the 1927 Charter of Labor was accompanied by the steady conversion to this new discourse of large parts of specific professional milieus – mainly pertaining to the lower middle class social stratum and to the white-collar occupational segment – , partly connected with the welter of guild structures of the 1902-1912 variety, themselves pronounced dead in 1921 but stubbornly surviving after that moment, primarily by virtue of the functions they continued to perform in the field of social insurance up to 1933. Advocacies of the first kind were thus put forward in the prominent right-wing periodicals *Cuvântul* – from 1926 and directed at the time by Titus Enacovici⁶ – , *Curentul* – from 1928 and under the directorship of Pamfil Șeicaru⁷ – , *Calendarul* – in 1932-1933, all throughout led by Nichifor Crainic⁸ – and *Lumea nouă*

– starting with April 1932 and propagating the well-rounded corporatist doctrine of Mihail Manoilescu⁹. To the same extent, pleadings arising from the grass-roots movement of the professions were vacillatingly advanced in the pages of less prominent journals like *Glăsuț micii industriei* – inaugurated in 1922¹⁰ – and *Tribuna muncii* – launched in 1926¹¹ – , in order to get better crystallized in *Gazeta meseriilor* – founded in 1929¹² – and to finally emerge full-blown in *Drum nou* – over the years 1930-1934, staying in strong intercourse with *Calendarul*, treating *Lumea nouă* as a rival voice and featuring the figure of its leader, the architect I. D. Enescu, as an ideologist able to contest to Manoilescu the paternity of the corporatist doctrine in the Romanian tradition¹³.

Social-economic demands centered upon the design of the organization of labor on the basis of vertically-delineated guilds able to contain class strife, by opposition to the horizontally-branded syndicates – associated with socialist subversion and liberal obsolescence and perceived to foster the conflicts between groups in society –, were conjoined, in the corporatist thinking of Romania as elsewhere, with calls for the replacement of the inherently parasitic and corrupt party-based parliamentarianism by a new kind of politics, resting on the parliamentary representation of the professional bodies and conducive to the strengthening of national solidarity. While appropriating to various degrees

specific right-wing ethnic exclusionary and authoritarian programs, the promoters of the core doctrine originally shaped around the concerns of labor and syndical activity also established a dialogue, for that matter, with the exponents of ideas regarding the moderate supplementation of the regular electoral patterns leading to the structuring the legislative assemblies and state structures through the mechanisms of nationwide and individualistically-based voting processes by the creation of specific electoral channels meant to allow the representation of segmental interests circumscribed by criteria of professional allegiance¹⁴. In Romania, the searches of the last type were focused on the provisions of the 1923 constitution and of the 1926 electoral law regarding the special representation in the Senate of the universities and of the state-sponsored professional chambers (with the Chambers of Commerce and Industry dating from the XIXth century and those of Agriculture and Labor created – and thus made available for such responsibilities – in 1925, respectively, as said, in 1932).

Thus getting deeply intertwined with the various compartments of the political Right on the one side, while also interfering with the camp of technocratic moderation on the other side, the corporatist right-wing philosophy of labor was unavoidably cast into a series of different embodiments. Adopted prematurely, uncritically and inconsistently at an early stage by nationalist politicians of a

traditionalist orientation like Nicolae Iorga¹⁵ and Simion Mehedinți¹⁶, it was brought by Enescu and Crainic into the headquarters of National-Christian politics, without ever being taken as a watchword by the hard-liner leaders of this last ideological group¹⁷. It also made inroads into Alexandru Vaida-Voevod's Romanian Front party¹⁸. The fascist Iron Guard displayed a welter of different attitudes towards it, stretching from the wholesale and enthusiastic support of Mihail Polihroniade¹⁹ and the academic account of Vasile Marin²⁰ to the occasional half-hearted approval of Ion Moța²¹ and Corneliu Zelea Codreanu²² and the quasi-rejection from the part of Traian Brăileanu and of other figures²³. Its vocation of navigating the whole road of right-wing radicalization up to a complete identification with revolutionary fascism is nevertheless proven by Manoilescu's attempt to elaborate a platform for the fusion between his National-Corporatist League and Legionarism at the juncture of the 1937 elections²⁴, and again by his strivings to get his doctrine ingratiated with the officialdom of the National-Legionary State, late in 1940²⁵.

The two legal documents with corporatist provisions adopted by the Carolist dictatorship were the February 1938 constitution and the law for the organization of the guilds introduced in October of the same year. Both of them were beware of a radical break with the past, therefore continuing to pay lip-service to the

principle of the freedom of association. The constitution looked forward to the creation of a profession-based parliament, laying down the demand for the organization of the electoral body in three categories comprising, in turn, the representatives of "agriculture and manual labor", of "commerce and industry" and of "intellectual occupations". The subsequent law inaugurated the creation of corporatist structures somewhat differently defined, for the time being addressing only the segments of the manual workers outside the sphere of agriculture, of the craftsmen and petty industrialists and of the professionals in the field of commerce. Proclaiming that "nobody can be obliged to be a member, not to be a member or to cease being a member of a guild", it also asserted that only one guild giving representation to a professional group could function within each and every administrative unit of the country. Thus reminiscent of the legislative regulations for professional associations of both the 1902-1912 and the 1921-1924 instalments, it was nevertheless issued together with a statement according to which "the old law of the syndicates exhibited the natural humanitarian hopes [...] of the prevailing optimism following the war", that had to be abandoned in line with the inescapable "collectivization of life" and "the robust assertion of the national principle"²⁶. The efforts to make clearer the implications of these basic imperatives would then focus upon a

legislative project introduced in the parliament in July 1939 and never transformed into a law.

Corporatist restructuring in debate

Meant to broaden the provisions of the 1938 law by the means of extending the guild-type organization to the spheres of the business owners and employers, of the big and small agriculturalists and of the whole range of intellectual professionals, the project of 1939 also comments in the preamble upon the 1921 law of the syndicates, in order to acknowledge to it the genuine intention of transforming the professional association into something different from the (socialist-driven) “instrument of struggle between social classes, of moral discord and of social-economic anarchy”. Showing that such an expectation could not be unfortunately fulfilled due to “the political biases displayed by the great majority of syndicates” under the pre-1938 regime and saying – by reference to not only the mild corporatist theorists E. Durkheim and L. Duguit, but also to R. Waldeck-Rousseau, perhaps the most celebrated founder of liberal syndicalism – that the principle of “liberty is not currently being applied any more to the isolated individual”, in so far as the spirit of the new times has “entrusted the professional group with the mission of defending individual freedoms”, the argumentation then goes on to vindicate syndicalism as “a movement tending to give a

precise juridical structure to the groups of individuals brought together by similar needs created in the process of the social division of labor”, thus pointing to it as “the force which [...] would impart to society a juridical structure more appropriate to its economic evolution”²⁷.

This only comes, however, at the cost of clarifying that “in order to properly fulfil such a task, the syndical movement has to evolve within the frame of liberty and must refrain from transforming the guilds and professional associations – in line with a certain quite widespread view of today – from voluntary and free organizations into mandatory and official ones, subordinated to the executive power”. It is further made clear that “a tendency of this kind could only have the result of bringing us centuries backwards and of resurrecting the guilds and corporations of other times”²⁸. The Romanian corporatist structure in the course of being elaborated is here clearly demarcated by comparison with the system of fascist corporatism prevailing at the time in Italy, which stood as the most prominent reference for the experiments of the kind attempted throughout the world.

The determination of the Romanian legislators under the Carolist regime to conceive of the corporatist bodies as mere institutions of private law, by opposition to the Italian doctrine and practice that was shaping them as public institutions, has repeatedly been underscored in

the bibliography of the subject²⁹. A survey of the debates on the topic taking place in the country over the period shows, nevertheless, a variety of conceptions regarding the course that the reforms relying on the corporatist conception were bound or advised to take in the future. One such category of relevant interventions thus offered the Mussolinian model for local imitation without demanding any significant adjustments³⁰, moreover pleading for a wholesale adoption of the plain “totalitarian” vision, something that could imply, for example, the creation of “a totalitarian ministry, custodian of all the interests of the nation, and not only of some sections of it”³¹ and entrusted with the supervision of “the future Romanian corporatist order”³². This stance was also supported with the help of translations from Italian authors³³. There were also works striving to find a way out of the design of the slavish imitation of foreign totalitarian fashions³⁴. Some of them addressed in a consistent manner the main issue at stake, namely that of deciding over the character of the corporations as branches of the state or as private associations.

A case in point is that of Petre Alexandrescu-Roman, a National Liberal Party specialist in social policies. Approaching the challenge of corporatism as part of an involvement with the prospects of the “petty Romanian bourgeoisie”, in a conference delivered in February 1937, he discloses the stark disconti-

nunity between the traditional guilds – “born of the actual needs of social and economic life” and “developed entirely on the basis of the sustained efforts deployed by their members” – and the modern corporations of the fascist variety – “created by the state and kept under a close political control” – , with the conclusion that “fascist professional associations cannot be described as either corporations or syndicates, but as mere organs of state administration”³⁵. The same author surveys then in 1939 the law of the guilds adopted in the previous year, in order to show how this one envisions bodies “reminiscent of the 1921 syndicates”, by the same token “avoiding any measures that could have transformed [them] into state institutions”, the result being a mere “concentration of the forces of labour, certainly stronger than could have been obtained on the basis of the Chambers of Labor alone”. Taking account of the declarations accompanying the publication of the law and pointing to the planned “integration” of the Romanian state into the purported drive to corporatist structures developing worldwide, he is keen to argue that such a thing “could only become possible on the basis of renewed efforts”, of “long years dedicated to the revision of social legislation” and of the “wholesale refashioning of the actual syndical system, together with the elaboration of new professional bodies and a sustained education of the masses”³⁶. Finally, in a conference of November 1941 hosted by

the General Union of Small Entrepreneurs, he covers the topic of the “regime of the professions in Romania and abroad”, presenting in a neutral fashion the totalitarian evolutions underway in Germany and Italy while depicting those of Vichy France as “set on a quasi-totalitarian course”³⁷, only in order to argue in the end that “on all accounts, the guild created upon the orders of the legislator fits very hard into the Romanian realities”, moreover adding the general statement that “the professional association can only be a very superficial entity when brought into being by virtue of public, instead of private initiatives” and mildly praising the organization addressed for “having opposed” the design of mandatory corporations of totalitarian inspiration³⁸.

One can also find a readiness to admit eventual non-totalitarian outgrowths of the 1938 constitution in the statements given at the same juncture by the law professor I. V. Gruia, a veteran of the search for the parliamentary representation of professional interests from the 1920’s³⁹, later converted into a stern defender of corporatism at the beginning of the next decade⁴⁰. Defining the state emerging from the constitutional document as “authoritarian, corporative and national”⁴¹, he also clarifies that “the Romanian constitution does not elaborate a totalitarian corporatist state”, or “in other terms it does not set forth to apply the corporatist conception in a totalitarian way”. To the same extent, as he argues, the

arrangement in question “does not prevent the creation of totalitarian corporatism, allowing full freedom to the ordinary legislator” with respect to any such possible developments. Rehearsing the fact that “one of the critiques most often adduced against the representation of professional interests is that within such a political system each and every citizen is obliged to be a part of a professional group”, Gruia argues that the Romanian constitution in place “provides for the representation of the professionals, and not of the professions organized in corporations”, thus “without ruling out the possibility of organized professional groups, it neither makes it a necessary development”⁴².

The attitude of caution with regard to the degree and complexion of the authoritarianism expected to get entrenched throughout the Romanian social body by virtue of the Carolist constitution was certainly characteristic to prominent previous defenders of social reforms with a liberal cast from the 1920’s and the early 1930’s, now converted to the new wisdom apparently taking hold of the entire world, like D. R. Ioanițescu or Marco I. Barasch⁴³. It might be argued, however, that the contributor to the debate which went farthest in denying any implications of a totalitarian corporatist nature to the Carolist constitution was the young jurist Tudor Drăganu. Developing his reflections on the corporatist credentials of the regime in conjunction with a more general

characterization of its foundational document as inconsistently authoritarian⁴⁴, he claims that the same arrangement only created the preconditions for the elaboration of “moderate professional representation”, alongside the traditional parliamentary representation of the electorate. This comes from the fact that “there is no intention proven by the constitution to give political suffrage to professional groups enjoying continuous existence, but only to temporarily distribute the electors between the three professional categories, for the time of the elections”⁴⁵, while also restating the principle of the freedom of association⁴⁶.

The opposite attitude expressed in the discussion is best represented by a 1939 unsigned article in the journal *Parlamentul românesc*, itself displaying a sustained concern for the matter⁴⁷. An international survey allows the author to state that “from the point of view of the juridical form taken by the professional bodies, there can be identified two systems”, namely “the one which imparts to [them] the character of moral persons pertaining to the sphere of public law”, respectively the one which “maintains these bodies as organs with a particular character”. It is then underscored that “according to our constitution, [...] the professions are given decisive attributions with respect to the election of the deputies”, in so far as “their role is not confined to the mere nomination of the candidates, being instead extended to the actual election of the

latter”. When taking in view that “Italy has maintained the institution of universal suffrage, while our new constitution has abolished it, replacing it with professional suffrage”, it can only be concluded that the Romanian parliament “has a character of professional representation more clearly displayed than the parliaments of the most corporatist of all countries”, and accordingly the professions here “cannot be allowed to get organized freely”. On the contrary, it is said, “the only form that our professional organizations can be allowed to take is that of organs with a public character, issuing from the mandatory association of all the professionals”. It is to be decried that the 1939 legislative project “does not take into account all these conclusions which derive in a logical manner from the letter and the spirit of the constitution”⁴⁸.

It is this reading of the corporatist constitution that was retained by I. D. Enescu, the most laborious of the people working throughout the years of the right-wing dictatorships for fulfilling the promises of 1938. In a project for the organization of the professions that he delivers shortly after the installation of the Carolist regime, he treats “social activities” as divided among three “categories of functions”: those of “production” (comprising the spheres of agriculture, industry and trades), respectively those of “repartition” (commerce, communication, exchange and circulation) and of “discipline” (intellectual activities and public

administration). He then offers “a plan for the organization of social functions”, meant to “make constitutional provisions operative” and providing for the structuring of professional bodies with a “mandatory character” able to incorporate appropriately the functions of the social body⁴⁹. The vision is then restated by the same ideologist in projects delivered successively in 1942 and 1944, under the aegis of the Ministry of Labor, the first time as a member of the technocratic team entrusted with the task and the second time as the head of the specialized commission, in his capacity as undersecretary of state within the ministerial department. Besides incorporating the tenets of the anti-Semitic legislation adopted meanwhile – and resting on the law for the Romanianization of labor of November 1940 (with exclusionary provisions regarding the Jews), together with the one for the organization of national labor of May 1941 (connecting citizenship benefits with the duty to work) –, the new instalments of the corporatist vision advanced under Antonescu dropped out all attempts at striking a middle ground between the full-blown fascist organization of labor set within the Italian paradigm and the lingering liberal view. The system of professional chambers maintained by the law of 1938 and by the project of 1939 alongside the one of corporative bodies is abolished, with the chambers reconfigured as the highest ranking structures at the county level within each of the five professional

branches of agriculture, industry, commerce, trades and intellectual occupations, themselves integrated into the nation-wide corporations of the respective branches. Both the regional chambers and the corporations are defined as “legal persons pertaining to the sphere of public law”⁵⁰. The commissions were operating, otherwise, in a space cleared for experimentations, due to the closure of the Carolist guilds by a decree of December 1940.

The question of syndical autonomy and the drive to the Left

One can most appropriately discern the contours of the evolving Romanian socialist and communist theory with regard to the politics of labor by focusing again upon the two problems whose treatment from a liberal standpoint was taken above as accounting in the main for the way this last view on the matter got adopted and entrenched in the national space: that of the mediating intervention of the state in the relations between employers and employees and that of the legal status and social function of the syndical organizations. A vacillating attitude of the Left on both questions can be easily disclosed, and we can identify the twists and turns of the approach to the issue of syndicalism as constituting the central thread of the development of socialism in the context. It emerges, moreover, that the predicament of deciding on the

choice of syndical autonomy versus politicization performed, within the left-wing camp, much the same role as the debate over the private versus public legal character of the corporatist structures within the area of the Right. For sure, the baseline of the analysis must be an emphasis upon the Marxist principled denial of the capacity and vocation of the state to act consistently as a neutral arbiter of the relations between classes and of the government-run policies to constitute a possible instrument of income redistribution across the social body, as this view was spelled out at the turn of the XIXth to the XXth century by opposition to the growing liberal welfarist movement set on the path of evolution leading to Keynesian economics. Inescapably captive to the interests of the dominant classes and unable to get disentangled from the web of power relations shaped within society, the state could not be relied upon by the socialist parties and movements as a mediator, except in very special circumstances⁵¹.

Instances of this wisdom can be discovered in the Romanian record. A telling case in point is the short-term engagement of the journal *Socialismul* with the new challenge raised by the articulation underway of the Geneva-based system of social protection run by the International Labor Organization. Operating as such during the interlude of radicalization induced by the Russian revolution, on the way to the aborted Romanian general strike of October

1920 that was to produce a temporary disarray of local socialism and before being taken over by the communist branch issuing from the same processes, in May 1921, the periodical meditated over the problem of the international labor legislation by asserting that “once this kind of legislation will be disseminated internationally, it will become impossible to bring changes to it as a result of any success scored by a national worker movement”, to the extent that the eventual “victorious French proletariat, able to obtain better conditions for itself from the part of the French capitalists, would be faced with the power of the British or American capitalists” coming to the help of their French counterparts⁵². In the same fashion, the notion of “social care” – recently inscribed in the very title of the newly founded Romanian ministry entrusted with the administration of labor issues – is characterized here as “unfortunately anachronistic and self-contradictory, no matter the beauty of the words employed”, due to the fact that “the acts of care have never been able to satisfy a working class eager to struggle for its emancipation”⁵³. One can compare such statements, however, with the one advanced by Cristian Racovski in 1906, when bestowing a positive evaluation upon the fact that “we witness the emergence of a new type of right from within the bourgeois right, namely the labor right”⁵⁴, or with the thesis put forward later by the same socialist politician as part of a general

assessment of the 1912 law of professions and of social insurance, and consisting in the demand for the working class to accept as a positive development the system of insurances established by the legal document, while at the same time rejecting the corporatist solution given by the law to the question of the professions⁵⁵. When set on the course of the 1927 reunification on a social-democratic and anti-communist basis, the socialist movement would indulge in self-criticism, decrying its refusal to send its own delegates – alongside those of the government and of the employers – to the sessions of the International Labor Conference which had taken place over the first years after the dismemberment of 1921⁵⁶. Still later, following the establishment of the Carolist dictatorship and the inauguration of its policies with a corporatist cast, the same movement would adopt the stance of making a virtue out of necessity, accepting to collaborate with the authoritarian government and to use the channels of the new guilds as venues of syndical activity supposedly able to differ very little in these conditions from the previous activities of the sort⁵⁷.

Resting on the idea of the necessary adjustments of Marxist sociology and political theory in accordance with the conditions of backwardness – most memorably articulated here by Constantin Dobrogeanu - Gherea – , the overall vision of Romanian socialism involved a sustained pleading for the genuine propagation of

the patterns of liberal capitalism in the context against the survivals of feudalism and traditionalism and as a precondition for any future meaningful strategy preparing the transition to the socialist stage of social evolution. This philosophy also constituted the foundation of the first elaborated stance taken by the same ideological and political group to the problem of syndicalism, by confrontation with the corporatist arrangements of 1902-1912. Commenting upon the two regulations in 1913, Racovski reminded his audience that “when proclaiming individual freedom, the French Revolution of 1789 ruled out the corporations, taken to contradict individual freedom”, further arguing that “if the authorities cannot prevent someone to take part in an association functioning according to the laws, they also cannot oblige someone to take part in an association against his convictions and interests” and concluding that the laws of the professions must be considered “unconstitutional, due to the fact that they oblige the laborers to become parts of corporations, whether they intend to do so or not”⁵⁸. The contradictory nature of the two attempts at making bygone institutions acceptable within the horizon of the modern world is to be partly blamed on the character of local liberalism, unable to stay true to its credentials, something that makes Racovski to say that “Romanian liberalism has nothing to do with its western counterpart and especially with its classical English embodiment”⁵⁹. Hence the distorting

laws are traceable to the prevalence of a “bureaucratic, centralist and Byzantine” spirit that pervades all spheres of society⁶⁰.

The above-mentioned resilience of the old-style and half-refashioned structures of the corporatist variety into the interwar period was accompanied by the survival of this kind of socialist advocacy, that we can discover restated in 1931, in the frame of a syndical congress and by reference to the fact that “the guilds and corporations ruled out on paper by the law of professional syndicates” had proven able to circumvent the new policies of the liberal stripe, under the benevolent eye of the Ministry of Labor itself. As such, it is said, “we are faced with a process of consolidation of these medieval institutions, which have recently got united [...] in a general confederation”. The confederative body here indicated is the one issuing the periodical *Gazeta meseriilor*, encountered above when covering the grassroots articulation of the new kind of corporatist ideas and politics, and the blame coming from the socialist corner against the inability of Romanian liberalism to pursue consistently a path of policies in accordance with its avowed principles stays in continuity to the older complaints of Racovski, when it is further noticed that “the Ministry of Labor, obliged by the law of professional syndicates to take measures meant to uproot the guilds and corporations, has done nothing of the kind for 10 years, but on the contrary

has tried to consolidate their position”⁶².

When navigating together with liberalism in the same anti-corporatist boat and claiming to serve better the tenets of generic liberalism than the local embodiment of the latter, Romanian socialism did not identify entirely, however, with the liberal theory of syndicalism. Its support of syndical freedom against the guild limitations of the right of free association is meant only as a temporary solution in the conditions defined by strong traditionalist survivals. Over the long run, this thesis has to be subordinated to that of the closest possible collaboration between socialist politics and syndical economic demands, ultimately having to yield into the abolition of capitalism. It is the question of the exact terms of this collaboration that stood as the major source of disagreements within the socialist camp. Reverting to the discourse of Racovski before the First World War, we can notice how he departs from the liberal view by conceiving of syndicalism as a vehicle for the emancipation of the employee category alone, instead of a device applicable to all occupational groups, thus asserting, in 1907, that “the syndicate is the free association of the workers”, for that matter comprising only members of the worker constituencies⁶³. His opinion on the relation between the syndicates and the socialist trend is clearly stated one year beforehand, when he says that “the socialist movement is the most accomplished form of

syndical movement”, that “political struggle is a continuation of the syndical struggle” and that “the existence of the syndicate is justified only in conjunction with socialism”⁶⁴.

The ideas in question are then laid down again with the occasion provided by the 5th congress of the syndicates revolving within the orbit of socialism, held in 1914. Racovski says here that “there can only be one single movement” to speak of, namely “the worker socialist movement”. Hence “it is unacceptable to attempt the creation of two different kinds of socialism, on account of the notion that some people are socialists and others are mere syndicalists”. This is because “there is only one idea which can guide the worker movement, namely the socialist idea”, and “accordingly within the syndicate there is only one kind of politics which can be practiced, namely socialist politics”⁶⁵. The thesis of de-politicization and of the autonomy of syndicalism in relation to socialist politics was also voiced within the premises of the same manifestation. This one said that “when considered from an economic point of view, syndical organizations are purely professional”. As such, “they have to be concerned with purely material issues, having therefore to be neutral in all respects. Within them, one does not have to be concerned with the nationality of the members, with their religious or political views”. The attitude of taking politicization for granted is denounced as a major shortcoming of

the movement, with the statement that “up until now, either unconsciously, or from other reasons, syndical organizations have functioned as venues for socialist propaganda”, while at the same time “failing to stay as venues of proper syndicalist education”, and “it is due to this that we are lacking of both powerful syndicates and a [genuine] political party”. A conclusion is then drawn to the extent that “any member is free to make socialist propaganda, but not within the syndicate”⁶⁶.

Coming back now to the period of the drive to radicalization predating the communist split of 1921, we can pick up a characteristic reassertion of the thesis of necessary and unavoidable politicization from the periodical *Calendarul muncii*, where the explosive situation is taken to be characterized by the fact that “the link between the syndicalist movement and the socialist party has recently been strengthened, with these organizations coming to be seen as a constituting a whole, pertaining to the overall struggle of the working class”. The “autonomist” currents are pronounced dead, together with the anarchic ones of “revolutionary syndicalism”⁶⁷. This was not to last for long, however. In 1922, a syndical congress of Sibiu issues a penetrating pleading for de-politicization, in the conditions defined by the political fragmentation of the Left and hence of the impossibility to have a solid connection forged between syndicalism and socialism broadly understood. As

recorded in the journal *Viața sindicală*, the declaration adopted by the congress states that “having an eminently economic character, the syndical movement has to comprise all the laboring and exploited people of the country, [...] irrespective of the political conceptions”⁶⁸. In the past, it is acknowledged, “the subordination of the syndical movement to socialist politics has kept the largest part of the proletariat out of the syndicates”, the same situation having to be blamed for the fact that “any action meant to obtain purely economic reforms was depicted by our enemies as hiding political goals”⁶⁹. While it is reminded that “both the law of professional associations and the law for the regulation of labor conflicts prevent the syndicates from getting involved in party politics”, a stricture is added to the extent that “not this is the reason for which we adopt the stance of autonomy”. Instead, it is underscored again that the very “interests of the working class, together with the lessons deriving from the mistakes of the past stay behind our decision”⁷⁰.

The long-term dilemma would be precipitately solved over the brief period of the communist takeover, when it is stated that “in a capitalist state the syndicates cannot abstain from an open involvement in politics”⁷¹. Otherwise, the clarification goes on, “under the regime of the apolitical syndicate”, the organizations of the sort “would be easily pervaded by [...] supporters of the bourgeois parties”, with the result of

“being turned into mere instruments of the employers”⁷². A more elaborated assertion of the same vision makes clear that the notion of syndical autonomy is necessarily superseded by that of the inescapable identity between the higher meanings of syndical activity and the historical mission of the worker political parties. By virtue of this, in spite of the fact that “the syndicates enjoy autonomy when considered from both the organizational and the political standpoints”, they can only be “sustained by the class ideology of the proletariat”. It follows that “the efforts deployed by the reactionary forces of all ages to prevent the political struggle of the syndicates [...] have always had the objective of isolating [them] from the worker party and to keep them under the influence of reaction”. Accordingly, “the syndicates cannot have an ideology of their own, they can only adopt the ideology of the working class”⁷³. Another contributor to the same advocacy says that “one cannot separate the economic objectives of the syndicates from their political objectives, in so far as they can only have the same content and are connected by unbreakable links”⁷⁴. The function of the syndicate under the communist regimes is in its turn delineated by opposition to the predicament that the same institution must face under the capitalist order. Here, “the state gives representation to the interests of the masses”, and hence “the syndicates give support to all the measures of the respective

governments and fight, together with the entire people, for the strict application of the laws which are voted". In a nutshell, "they unconditionally support state organs, collaborating with them and playing an active role within them"⁷⁵. It is in line with this

doctrine that the constitution of 1948 and the labor code of 1950 would transform the syndicates into virtual state organs by way of their near-absorption into the politics of the party.

Notes

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