Resume

The thesis deconstructs the contemporary prejudice of presenting completely separate currents of the left, one reformist, another revolutionary-Marxist and an anarchist insurrectional extreme. All the socialists in the studied period were revolutionaries: social-democrats, anarchists, Bolsheviks, just their methods and accents of the revolutionary change were different. The general preference for a revolutionary change of society is not difficult to understand as long as the situation in 19th century Europe contained a drastic polarization between a political-economical bourgeois oligarchy that ruled society and a social mass deprived of political and economic rights. Although the divisions in Romanian society were quite larger than other European countries, socialists believed that in Romania there is no historic agent of social change because of the lack of an industrial proletariat. This is why Romanian socialists accentuate in a cultural language the role of democratic reforms on the short and medium terms and a legalist way to change society, though on the long, indefinite term they maintain the revolution. In the absence of the wanted subject of historical change, socialists living in Romania considered their role in a pedagogic and intellectual manner, as prognostics of change and channels of modernization.

Key words: socialism, modernization, utopia, left, reform, revolution, emancipation, class struggle, Marxism, anarchism, poporanism, equality, civil rights, syndicalism, Marxism, polemics

The projections of the left concerning Romanian modernization derive from diverse socialist currents from Western and Eastern Europe in the 19th century but mainly is influenced by Marxism. Socialism is based on two major characteristics, with secondary particularities depending on the specific area of manifestations. The first characteristic concerns its universalism as a possibility of implementation and the second the idea of progress in which the future is necessarily better than the past, both ideas being an inheritance of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution.
Marxism, which was adopted by Romanian socialists at the end of 19th century after a short stage of a decade of Russian Narodnik influence continued by Constantin Stere in an attenuated format by the Poporanists, had as a fundamental characteristic class struggle as law of historical development. The second pillar of Marxism is the law of accumulation of capital, in the sense that capitalism that leads to the creation of a rich bourgeoisie and of a growing dispossessed proletariat which further leads to inequality, exploitation and finally economic monopole. For this reason the fall of capitalism is considered inevitable because proletarian revolutions will proclaim the socialization of property and of the means of productions in the benefit of the working class formerly disadvantaged by the rules of private appropriation of the surplus.

Autochthonous socialists were inexisten in the political sphere in the interval studied because they based their ideology of urban proletariat which was under 5% of the population, and which had a restricted access to vote because of the census. As long as they did not change their political discourse for the peasantry the merits of socialist discourse moves in a syndical a civic plan that militates for the democratization of the public life in Romania. The program of Social-Democrat Party of Workers from Romania, born in 1893, inherited the demands of What Do Romanian Socialist Want written by Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea that was the main guide for socialists until the end of the First World War. In the same time many programmatic directions are borrowed from the Erfurt Program of 1891, adopted by German socialists under the theoretical leadership of Karl Kautsky, the main doctrinal influence in Romania after Marx and Engels. The Erfurt Program, thought in strict reformist terms and in which the revolutionary ideal is completely minimized, develops an evolutionary German parliamentary socialism that spreads across Europe, but which still clings to revolutionary hope in a distant future. The socialist program presupposed the modernization of Romania in the trail of western societies supposing in contrast to the conservative junimist theory of Romanian modernization as forms without that modern forms and institutions will be filled afterword with content, either mimetic or local. In Gherea’s Marxist terms in peripheral countries like Romania the superstructure will determine the base, which implies a relatively fruitful lecture of Marx maintaining still an orthodox approach as long as the German theorist thought that developed states show the way of modernization and synchronization for those less developed. The name of a “social-democrat” party comes from the insistences of the party’s leader, Ioan Nadejde, in the detriment of a
socialist party with the aim of anchoring the legalist side of socialism. The political, economical and agricultural parts of the new Social-Democrat Party, reinstituted in 1910, shows a clear continuity of ideas with the prospects of emancipation 25 years ago. The political program demands the universal right to vote (including women and Jews, a prospect not emphasized by liberals or radicals), proportional representation, organizing the elections on a day of rest, direct democracy through the right of referendum, administrative decentralization and communal / municipal autonomy, abolishment of the law that permits expulsion of foreigners, political and civic equality for all citizens no matter their ethnicity, the annulment of Orleanu Law that forbade the right to strike of state employees, progressive taxation, the separation of state from church, the transformation of permanent army in national militias, the abridgement of military service from three years to one year, the abolition of military justice etc. The economical program proposes the eight our day of work, Sunday rest, to forbid work for minors under the age of 14 and protective legislation for minors between 14 and 18, the founding of a central house for people with health issues, unemployed and retired persons (a Labor Ministry), the creation of a national labor inspectorate, passing a law concerning the minimum wage etc. The agrarian program contains the abolition of in kind payment, enforced recuperation of parts of large properties owned by boyars, creation of rural commons, and institution of a public land fund which rents lands to associations of farmers on terms that are not less than 50 years, a measure that would be better than selling land to individual owners that would lead afterword to fragmentation and subsistence agriculture, as it happened in Romania between the wars etc. The democratic and reformist spirit of these programmatic documents and of other publicist interventions are presented in part I: Revolutionary Horizon, Reformist Practice.

Because of the objective process of the future revolution, peasant revolts, the so called jaqueries, are not supported by socialists, although the violent acts are empathized and explained in the broader context of systemic violence of a regime that didn’t grant citizenship to the majority of its citizens. In general the socialist attitude towards peasants is contradictory for the simple reason that the peasant is not seen as a subject of emancipation in Marxist theory and so the peasant desire to get a larger property is seen as petit bourgeois but still modern in the sense of ending feudal relations and subject in this sense to future land fragmentation and proletarianization. Although in the early 20th century agriculture represented two thirds of the
economy and supplied two thirds of the country’s exports the state fails to make a coherent effort in investing in the rural labor force, to educate it or to grant more civil liberties.

Socialists repeatedly criticized the lack of an even distribution of welfare, the maintenance of small farmers in a state of subsistence and illiterateness and the incapacity to profit from the export of cereals and oil in order to develop local industries that would process raw materials. Their critique though had a small impact because of the lack of dialogue between socialists and other ideological forces. The first tended to overcome contingent political issues by postulating the final revolution and representatives of other ideologies in power had no interest until the First World War to negotiate or diminish their privileges.

The universal vote (for men) was accorded at the pressure of Russian revolutions of 1917 because until than the political circles in power discussed only of a census vote of one college for people who proved that they knew how to read. But the universal vote fastened the rhythm of literacy. Labor reforms are legislated and a Labor Ministry is born in 1920, these reformatory measures being put into practice in order to avoid the threat of a socialist revolution. Strike became the main instrument of manifestation of union power and they started shyly to become an accepted instrument of negotiation for the governments. “The chronic intoxication with work”, as socialists used to refer to hard and long labor, was diminished because of international pressures coming from the ratification of the Bureau of International Labor, a department of League of Nations, a creation of the First World War, who established the day of work for maximum 8 hours. Even though the international legislation is not respected everywhere it becomes a prerequisite of democratic thinking. The peasantry receives land, even though the reform is not planned in socialist associative terms which paradoxically were better linked with a market economy because cooperative associations were more able to compete on the market than individual subsistence farming. Antimilitarism and propaganda against a police state were legitimate in the context of a state whose taxes were used for the formation of a repressive state and not for access to public services. The emancipation of woman that was present only discursively in the socialist language of 19th century and in the progressive press starts to become an accepted reality after the First World War, although the inequality of participation in the public life is still maintained. If democracy is, in the terms of Barrington Moore, a never ending march to verify arbitrary rulers and to replace arbitrary rules with just and rational ones and to
obtain the citizens right to participate in the formulation of the rules, than socialists were the most democratic cultural force until the First World War and even after.

The polemics between anarchists and Marxists, between socialist and what later became the liberal left, and between legal socialists and illegal communists had as core issues the modalities to modernize Romania and the speed in which history should accelerate. From a cultural point of view the disputes are relevant because they presuppose an intellectual effort of understanding development in a semi-peripheral country, but at a political level the polemics fragmented the left, even though after the First World War socialism seemed to play a role in the democratization of the public sphere having elected parliamentarians and a relatively strong union movement. Socialist idealism camouflaged as dialectical determinism that was respected *ad literam* almost religiously, the faith that history will always be transgressed and sectorial issues will be resolved in the future by socialization of property, blocked them in contingent political actions. But the bottoming of socialist action does not come solely or even mainly from socialist themselves because the authorities repressed strongly the Romanian left as it happened with the shutdown of hundreds of socialist clubs in rural areas, after the peasant rebellion of 1907 during the First World War when socialists became active for a definitive neutrality that could have avoided the loss of 1 million lives, or after the war when the regime arrested during strikes thousands of workers and socialists.

The thesis details four disputes. The polemic between anarchists and Marxists has tactical stakes, not necessarily epistemic, concerning the modalities to spread a socialist movement in Romania. Anarchists preferred an anti-parliamentarian stance, focused on union movement and intellectual radical propaganda, but legal Marxists who were the majority in the movement tried to emulate without success the electoral and parliamentarian tactics of the German SPD. As a consequence of the electoral failure the intellectuals negotiated their entrance in the National Liberal Party were they obtained governmental functions but their hopes of democratic reforms were not fulfilled, as the palliative reforms after the 1907 rebellion proved. Union socialists and just a few intellectuals remained faithful to socialism and organized unions and socialist propaganda in newspapers and magazines, but their results remained modest as long as their public was the industrial worker in a country that mainly lacked native industrial workers. The dispute between poporanists and socialists has at its core the most suitable way for the country’s
evolution. If poporanists believed that a semi-peripheral state in the world economy can detour capitalist development through a peasant cooperative economy, socialists proposed the industrialization of the country that would lead in a teleological scheme to further proletarization and revolution. The dispute after the war has as its stake the possibility to revolutionize Romania on the Soviet’s model. The communists proclaim the revolution but they do not have a proletarian subject to activate that is powerful and self-conscious enough and socialists propose the democratization of the public sphere and a long term revolution. In this violent quarrel the ordinary worker, a new citizen with voting rights, interested mainly on short economic objectives for improving his standard of living, remains unrepresented. Because of this disputes concerning Romanian development that ended without compromises, though relevant on a cultural level further fragmented the political left, as we can see from a long series of scissions inside the left, some of them discussed in part II Polemics: revolutions or reforms?

Socialist equality might be translated in esthetic terms as harmony. Harmony that might be found in literary utopian (short)novels and in the glimpse of a generous socialist future. Equality involves social equilibrium, a promise of fulfillment of peoples own potential through socialization and an equitable distribution of profits, and this perspective attracted great numbers of workers toward socialism. The position towards equality defines human relations toward the state, human nature, future and might constitute even the fundaments of a philosophy of history. If inequality is inevitable than the present foresees the future in a linear manner, but if inequality is not inevitable than the future determines the vision of the present. History’s roots for socialists are in the future. For socialists the image of the future suscitates the immediate in a voluntaristic vision of society’s transformation of historic agents with a highly revolutionary potential. The present is modified through the belief that in the future inequality, alienation and disharmony will be eradicated or substantially decreased. This is the major difference between the revolutionary state of mind and the reformist one that maintains a controlled gradual improvement specific to liberalism and conservatorism. The socialist perspective ends in a state of stasis after a long class struggle and is presented in part III: After reforms, after revolution.

Concluding, socialists had an indubitable progressive role in the Romanian environment, especially at a cultural level because their political revolutionary idealism brought minimum
participation in a peasant culture and determined also governmental persecution. The democratic reforms pleaded by socialists, as preparation for revolution, became common sense in the 20th century. Although it might sound counterintuitive the best term for Romanian socialism in the period studied is “revolutionary reformism” used by Ralph Miliband for British labor party after the Second World War who lost, as other social-democratic parties in Europe, a revolutionary ideal. “Revolutionary reformism” presupposes socialist economic transformation through class struggle, but one that needs mass participation not vanguards, gradual parliamentarian focus and resistance in the field work in order to have workers rights not only for higher salaries but for entrepreneurial decision making. It is exactly what the socialists of the Second International tried to apply until the First World War which divided socialism in two groups, a revolutionary intransigent line for which democratization of public life was of little relevance and a social-democratic trend satisfied to adjust capitalism with the possibility of a higher redistribution of capitalist profits. Eventually, both currents succumbed in the last quarter of 20th century to a neoliberal capitalism that started to privatize public services of the social state.