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TACTICS AND PRINCIPLES: A CONTRIBUTION TO DOBROGEANU-GHEREA'S INTERPRETATION OF ANARCHISM WITH REFERENCE TO 'LEGAL SOCIALISM'¹ <https://doi.org/10.2478/ppsr-2023-0002>

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Early socialism from the second half of 19th century Romania is experiencing a systematic comeback among historians and social scientists. The works of Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea, the founding father of Romanian Marxism, occupy a central place in this newfound attention towards the origins and struggles of socialism in Romania. This paper addresses Gherea's interpretation of anarchism on par with his doctrine of 'legal socialism'. Its purpose is to prove how anarchism acts as a more than tactical catalyzer for legal socialism, placing the latter not necessarily on a new ideological perspective, but further on the terrain of Romanian political status-quo of late 19th and early 20th century Romania. Although more principled than tactical, Gherea's repudiation of anarchism in progressively unsubstantial Marxist terms has also led to tactical shortcomings. This was the case of the first Romanian socialist party, which was dissolved and absorbed after only six years of existence within the ascending liberal party.

Keywords

socialism, capitalism, oligarchy, anarchism, Marxism

Introduction: Historical context

Early Eastern European socialism of the late 19th century was a completely different affair than its Western counterpart. Intellectually mimetic and organizationally underdeveloped due to high levels of popular illiteracy and political repression, Eastern Europe-

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an socialism managed to gradually develop and to be locally considered as the influence of Marxism steadily grew in Western Europe (Eley 2002, 17–62). Austro-Marxism and its reverberations in the eastern provinces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire aside, names like Dimităr Blagoev in Bulgaria, Ludwik Waryński in Poland or Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea in Romania were starting to make a difference in this regard (Pundeff 1971, 523–550; Blit 1971).

The early Romanian socialist movement is experiencing a comeback among historians and social scientists and has already been analyzed in depth (Dohotaru 2019; Cotoi 2020). It was also recuperated in the form of publicistic literature (Cernat, Mocanu 2019). Within it, the departure between what was to become Marxist social-democracy, on one hand, and anarchism, on the other hand, was also scholarly addressed (Tătăran 2018; Tătăran 2019). Dobrogeanu-Gherea, considered the founding father of Romanian Marxism, was, through his works and administrative capacities, one of the main driving forces of local socialism. Although his intellectual contributions are acknowledged and he continues to be relevant among local historians, cultural theorists and sociologists (Ornea 1983; Ornea 2006; Dohotaru 2019) – except during the late 1940s and 1950s, when his writings were condemned by the Stalinist regime as revisionist – a study of Gherea's interpretation of anarchism was not yet undertaken. Gherea's staunch dissociation from anarchism is important since it contributes to a better understanding of his 'legal socialism' doctrine and his political tactics, beside to the consolidation of this new above-mentioned literature regarding early Romanian socialism.

A Jewish émigré from Tsarist Russia in the 1870s due to his Narodnik convictions, Gherea quickly understood and openly embraced the main social problems of the young Romanian kingdom (Wallachia and Moldavia were united only in 1859). Along with other local socialists like Ioan Nădejde, Sofia Nădejde, Ion Frimul or Constantin Mille, Gherea denounced the painstaking injustices Romanian peasants were subjected to by the small but very powerful ruling oligarchic class (Ornea 2006). Although the mainstream press attempted to portray him as a foreign agitator, Gherea's patriotism as a socially conscious Romanian citizen was beyond doubt (Preda 2002, 77).

As for the Romanian anarchist movement, although it never reached the amplitude of the French or of the Spanish one, it was nevertheless an important nexus of illegal political literature circulating between Western European countries and Tsarist Russia. Names like Nicolae Codreanu, Zamfir Arbure-Ralli or Nicolae Russel make up one of the first anarchist intellectual and political nexus in the 1880s, which underwent both a Narodnik and a 'Bakuninistic phase'. The city of Jassy was especially important in this regard, since it was the home of an anarchist journal entitled *Contemporanul* (*The Contemporary*). Even now, in its earliest phase, the Romanian anarchist movement had strong connections with similar movements in France and Switzerland. Later on, anarchists like Panait Mușoiu founded the journal *Revista Ideei* (*Idea Review*), active until 1916 and, in 1923, Iuliu Neagu-Negulescu published, in the form of a small book, the first Romanian anarchist utopian project, entitled *Arimania sau țara buneii înțelegeri. Orânda întocmirilor omenești, după potrive faptelor firești* (*Arimania or the country of harmony. The organization of human practices according to natural deeds*) (Tătăran 2022, 93–96; Cotoi 2020; Neagu-Negulescu [1923] 2018).

The intellectual stake of the paper is to approach Gherea's repudiation of anarchism in the context of his overall Marxist ideology and to show how his reformist 'legal socialism'

may have brought its intellectual contribution, albeit thinly veiled, to the dissolution of the Social-Democratic Party of Romanian Workers (SDPRW) through the migration of the majority of its members towards the National Liberal Party (NLP). While this paper addresses the anarchist gap within the Gherea literature, it will not offer a thorough presentation of the early anarchist movement from Romania and how it ended up by separating itself from the socialist movement whose informal leader was, by then, Gherea. It will neither systematically explore Gherea's critique of anarchism in the context of the broader Marxist critique of anarchism produced in Western Europe, Eastern Europe or the Tsarist Empire. Even if Gherea never stopped lamenting this political outcome (Dobrogeanu-Gherea 1977a, 250–251), in time, his critique of what came to be known in 1899 as the 'betrayal of the generous ones' became rather ambivalent and even sympathetic, to a certain extent (Dobrogeanu-Gherea 1977b, 338–342; Dobrogeanu-Gherea 1983, 238–240).

Therefore, Gherea's progressive dissociation from anarchism is used here as a means of evaluating his legal socialism and its gradual flirtation with progressive liberalism in the historical and political context of the late 19th century and of the early 20th century. It is a tool that allows us to analyze the interplay between the reformist and the radical tendencies from his work and to observe how the former slowly encroached the latter. It is also an indicator of his bourgeois sensibilities and of his adherence, once more, to legal socialism (Dobrogeanu-Gherea 1977b, 183–185; Dobrogeanu-Gherea 1983, 241–242), which he defended both bottom-up against anarchism and top-down against 'oligarchic anarchy' (Dobrogeanu-Gherea 1978, 215–217; State in Cistelean, State 2015, 25).

It is well known that Karl Marx himself was a fierce opponent of anarchism, which he contested both intellectually (Marx 1993) and politically (Marx 1942, 619–621; Marx, Engels, Lenin 1972, 27–180). Engels was also inclined to perceive anarchists as terrorists, "sipping beer, and later blood, like water!" (Tătăran 2022, 87). Newer generation of Marxists, like historian Eric Hobsbawm, for example, share this anti-anarchist trait, which represents a commonplace of Marxist critique against anarchism. Marx loathed anarchism for what appeared to be its lack of skillful organization, its petite-bourgeois theoretical principles that objectively abandoned socialism and turned up straight into the arms of individualism, demotivating proletarians and intellectuals alike by accomplishing exactly nothing (Marx 1993). Hobsbawm considered anarchism a rudimentary and even 'primitive' form of political rebellion, animated by a sort of mystic assertiveness resembling that of ancient Christian sects; anarchism's major aim of a fully liberated world is thus understood by Hobsbawm as pre-modern, naïve and disconnected from the emancipatory political stakes of the modern world (Hobsbawm 1959). Gherea, as we are about to see, also reproached anarchism for its violent, chaotic and ultimately uncivilized characteristics.

Although Gherea argued that 'legal socialism' worked foremost in favor of precarious social categories like peasants and workers in an agrarian and non-industrialized like Romania and against the political oligarchy running it, his argument is flawed for a number of reasons that this paper intends to expose.

'Legal socialism' and anarchism: what kind of reciprocity?

Gherea is definitely the most seminal Marxist intellectual from late 19th to early 20th century Romania. He emigrated from Tsarist Russia in 1875 due to the political retaliation

against Narodniks and other types of revolutionary populists. As a young Narodnik, he was closer to the anarchist movement than in his mature years (Tătăran 2019, 12–14). Moreover, his political ideas were also more radical (State in Cistelean, State 2015, 11–12).

Throughout his works, Gherea insisted on the neo-feudal economic, social and political regime of Romania. Peasants, which constituted about 80 percent of the population, were systematically spoiled through juridical means and customs by an oligarchy that extracted surplus-value from their work and commercialized it on the Western European market. Pressured between the advancing capitalist system externally and by the need of this oligarchy to remain competitive on foreign markets without investing too much in technology in order to raise productivity, the peasant class became part of a mode of production Gherea has named 'neo-serfdom'. Although serfdom was officially abolished in 1864 (at a later date than in all other European countries; even Tsarist Russia abolished serfdom three years earlier, in 1861) pressures upon peasantry were mounting, as the oligarchy consisting mainly in powerful landowners and rising industrialists were keen on obtaining profits and financing their leisure activities with costs as low as possible (Dobrogeanu-Gherea 1977a; Gherea 1976a, 101–103; Ornea 1983, 400–402).

Within an agrarian and underdeveloped country like Romania, Gherea argued, Marxism could not and should not maintain the same political tactics as it did in Western, developed countries; they simply could not function. The political objectives of Marxism were to be maintained, but the strategies of achieving them would vary from country to country (Dobrogeanu-Gherea 1977b; Dobrogeanu-Gherea, 1983). After all, Marx himself promoted the diversity and adaptability of his ideas (Marx 1942, 446–474). Consequently, before struggling with capitalism, Romania should, first of all, develop and become a capitalist country. Capitalism would be progressive in the sense that it would replace neo-serfdom and create the social wealth socialist would later appropriate in the name of public good (Gherea 1977a; State in Cistelean, State 2015, 21–22).

In a context like this, social tensions were on the rise and would explode in 1907, when a huge peasant revolt, the last event of its kind and magnitude in Europe, raged across the country. Even then, as he did starting with the 1880s, Gherea insisted on legal socialism as the best political tactic of Romanian socialists. In a country like Romania, he explained, socialism has no real political chance but to obey the legal system. By doing so, it forces the ruling classes to act accordingly, since they are the most frequent and the most obstinate law breakers since neo-serfdom made its appearance in late 19th century. This is just a political tactic, Gherea continued. Given the harsh reactionary context, it is the most useful tactic Romanian socialists can deploy in order to constrain the ruling oligarchy to implement social reforms (Gherea 1977b, 183–185, 523; Gherea 1983, 241–242; Gherea 1977a, 497–498, 502–503, 517).

Furthermore, Gherea continues, given the Romanian social-political context, parliamentarism itself is truly revolutionary and should be maintained whatever the costs. Moreover, state regulations are harmful for the economy and for the peasant class, since they can only work in favor of the ruling class. Protectionism was therefore to be abolished or limited as much as possible since it favors big landowners and especially capitalists by raising the prices of certain products they sell (like oil or petroleum derivatives) at the expense of peasants, small craftsmen and tradesmen, whose merchandise become more expensive (Gherea 1977a, 251–254; Gherea 1977b, 216–218, 331–332; Gherea 1976b, 357–359).

As previously mentioned, this strategy was to help the country get rid of neo-serfdom and embrace capitalism as a superior form of development.

Legal socialism can flourish only in the absence of political violence and revolutionary militantism (Gherea 1983, 20–241). Violence and militancy disturb the legal order in which socialism is supposed to become stronger and eventually replace neo-serfdom, with the help of surging capitalism. Furthermore, violence and militancy are remnants of an inferior type of socialism that is to be found on the far left, namely anarchism. According to Tătăran (2018, 18), Gherea's interpretation of anarchism is 'political' and 'polemical', not having much to do with his socialist convictions. It is, in other words, tactical, not principled. On the contrary, Gherea's understanding of anarchism is a very ideological one and in strong continuity with legal socialism, despite tactical elements articulating it are not to be excluded.

For Gherea, anarchist movements are 'violent', with no intellectual background whatsoever, and therefore prone to police and intelligence infiltration. Its terroristic practices do not foster social progress, but social regress. Under the guise of socialist organizations, anarchists create turmoil and confuse workers by showing similar traits between the anarchist simulated socialism and rebarbative anti-Semitic movements, the forerunners of fascist parties of the 20th century. While socialists embrace the wellbeing of society understood as a collective ensemble where forces and relations of production will one day be balanced, anarchists conspire for the demise of society and are stark individualists. Socialists are moralists, even if they reject bourgeois morality, while anarchists are in general anti-moralists and nihilists, some of them even Nietzschean in their anti-social militancy. Anarchists consider morality as an artificial product of an artificial society and they consider both to be expendable, forgetting that society creates historically determined forms of (individual) morality and not the other way around. By using violence against political order, anarchists contribute to the increase of the punitive and repressive dimension of the state. Within the anarchist imaginary, the state is not the result of the development of social-economic factors in a given historical framework, but some sort of 'mystical' domination of a minority, foreign or not, that uses the legal order against the majority of its citizens. Anarchists loathe private property, do not understand it in its dialectical complexity and would destroy it by any means available, especially illegal ones. Lastly, anarchists pose a 'childish' understanding and a criminal attitude towards the complexities and intricacies of modern societies and their violent political tactics play right into the hands of reactionaries everywhere, who use the threat of anarchism to suppress peaceful and democratic socialist movements and initiatives. Anarchists are therefore either naïve and manipulable persons or 'agents provocateurs' (Gherea 1977b, 35–37, 48–49, 101–103, 254, 325, 343–369, 518–523; Gherea 1983, 172–173, 238).

Before dwelling on Gherea's diverse and occasionally contradictory understanding of anarchism, it is worth mentioning that, for the socialist theoretician, anarchism is considered a far-left ideological movement, not a libertarian one (Gherea 1978, 297, 300), exactly like Bolshevism. The Bolshevik Revolution is approached by Gherea as an adventurous and risky political deed of aggressive, unmannered and poorly educated activists (anarchists are also accused of lacking education, proper manners, and favoring political violence). In its current form, Gherea, who passed in 1921, argues, the Bolshevik Revolution was forced upon an extremely poor and backward society that was not at all prepared for socialism, and the result would likely be a form of rigid, 'primitive communism'. More-

over, the example of the Hungarian Soviet Republic from 1919 proves that communism does not work, not even in more advanced societies and, on the contrary, it entails a fierce reactionary response. Finally, communism, anarchism, Spartakism and Bolshevism are all products of 'semi-intellectual revolutionaries' that are harmful to the cause of socialism, leading it astray. It would be 'regrettable', Gherea concludes, if this sort of 'puzzlement' would ever become influential in Romania (Gherea 1978, 307, 309, 324–326, 328–329, 332–333).

If Gherea would have incriminated anarchism only for the sole purpose of domestic political conflicts, as Tătăran (2018, 18) states, why then go through all these efforts to isolate Bolshevism as a menace to Romanian socialism and to associate it to anarchism, Spartakist communism and, in general, with maximalist socialist projects almost everywhere in Europe? It seems Gherea's view on anarchism is more than tactical. It is ideological. Also, it is better understood on par with his legal socialism. On a further note, it appears that Gherea was more interested in anarchism than in Bolshevism, which he tended to interpret as a subspecies of anarchism. His knowledge of Bolshevism was thus rather limited and mainly connected to the events of the Russian revolution as it was reflected in the European social-democratic and progressive liberal press. Although we cannot know for sure, it is likely that Gherea did not read Lenin's systematic works like *Materialism and empirio-criticism*, *State and the revolution* or *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism* – resuming himself to the latter's polemic press articles. Also, Gherea's overall view of Bolshevism is basically imbued with the same intellectual prejudices he manifested towards anarchism.

One cannot deny the Marxist elements present in Gherea's view upon anarchism, namely the critique of individualism and tactical hastiness working in favor of state repressive apparatuses everywhere. There are also non-Marxist and even anti-Marxist components in his concise presentation of anarchism, that is denying the interpretation of state as a form of class domination condoned by an elite relentlessly oppressing the dispossessed classes and attributing it solely to anarchists. Moreover, his insistence on the moralism of socialists and anti-moralism of anarchists leans considerable towards a semi-critical, yet firm acceptance of the present bourgeois status-quo, both in Western and Eastern Europe. Marx's repudiation of liberal-bourgeois morality is definitely stauncher than Gherea's (Marx, Engels 1998). Other philosophical and psychological traits of anarchism identified by the Romanian socialist, such as nihilism and 'childishness', are not relevant for the aim of the paper, but they do contribute to complete the picture of Gherea's more bourgeois-than-Marxist condescendence toward this intellectual and political current.

Gherea's legal socialism insists on reproducing the political status-quo in favor of the dispossessed and against the elites. His theorizing of revolutions as structural processes that advance through reformist quantitative accumulations, not through political upheavals, also adds to the consolidation of legal socialism (Gherea 1983, 120; Gherea 1976a, 125–126). It works against 'oligarchic anarchy' by compelling it – more morally than politically – to respect the juridical system in place and to accept, whenever the time would come, a less asymmetric distribution of economic resources (Gherea 1978, 215–217).

As legal socialism's dialectical other, anarchism represents the main challenge of this polite and almost harmless type of socialism in its quest of gratuitously convincing the powerful landlords and the ascending capitalists of the humanistic need of renouncing some of their advantages to the benefit of peasants, workers, small tradesmen and intel-

lectuals. Nevertheless, Gherea's argumentation was embellished in moral considerations, with a twist of incisive ironies, also because the SDPRW was electorally and politically irrelevant on the Romanian political scene (Jurca 1994).

For the purpose of this paper, it does not matter that Gherea reduces the diversity of anarchism to almost ridiculous dimensions, nor that he advances some interesting and thoughtful insights about anarchism that do not necessarily fit, however, the Romanian domestic political context, since anarchist-led terrorist events/attempts were rather scarce in late 19th and early 20th century Romania in comparison with Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia or Montenegro, for example (Brogan 1990). His non-endorsement, as already argued, of anti-Marxist arguments when condemning the anarchist interpretation of state as the domination of a determined minority against a passive majority is not necessarily important here. Lastly, the expedient association of anarchism with Bolshevism as 'semi-intellectual' movements is not to be taken into account for the sake of the present paper, even if Joseph Proudhon, Peter Kropotkin, Michael Bakunin, Leon Trotsky, Vladimir Lenin or Nikolai Bukharin were anything but 'semi-intellectuals'. What matters here is how the reciprocity between legal socialism and anarchism is constructed as part of enforcing, not undermining, a certain type of political status-quo.²

How could the dispossessed classes use the law into their own advantage since the 'oligarchic anarchy' endorsed the law precisely as a tool of its material and symbolic dominance? The juridical system of late 19th and early 20th century Romania was not neutral – no juridical system ever is – but pervaded by power relations underlined by a certain social stratification that worked in favor of local elites. The juridical system may have been progressive up to a point, but that happened because Romania, a young state protected and even created by France in 1859, needed to secure a respectable position within the Western capitalist world as a reliable source of agricultural commodities and raw materials (Pătrășcanu 1969, Pătrășcanu 1946).

There was simply no political and no tactical guarantee either that obeying the law when the ones meant to enforce it broke it permanently and arbitrarily would have ended up by bringing the SDPRW within a new government that would proceed thereafter in changing the social order of neo-serfdom with a new one, that of a progressive bourgeoisie. The political system of late 19th and early 20th century Romania was enforced by an authoritarian monarchy that simulated democratic elections by alternatively offering either the conservative or the liberal party the mandate to form a new government and to organize (rigged) elections in order to comply with the king's task. Neo-serfdom was substantially abolished only after the First World War, through a deep agricultural reform that solved many of the peasant-soldiers' immediate grievances while leaving enough room for other types of appropriations to be put in place by a new, liberal elite that deceived by far Gherea's optimistic expectations. The NLP government, 1922–1926, which Gherea did not live long enough to witness, implemented economic monopolies and organized the administrative spoliation of new Romanian provinces like Transylvania and Bessarabia on a tremendous scale, even for a non-socialist observer (Pătrășcanu 1946; Manner 1997).

2 Despite its deep fragmentation and protean intellectual character, anarchism was not, as Gherea interpreted it, a chaotic, incoherent and regressive and anti-civilizational movement, but a current of thought with roots firmly placed in the European tradition of Enlightenment, seeking foremost non-coercive means of social emancipation and slowly, but firmly, building up a canon of its own. Tătăran 2022, 88.

Conclusion: principles, tactics and the pitfalls of Gherea's legal socialism in perspective

Gherea's legal-socialism fits the reformist social-democratic picture of late 19th century Europe, where theorists like Karl Kautsky or Eduard Bernstein were becoming highly influential. Gherea is therefore a reformist socialist. As argued, he is in favor of free trade, even if he dismisses the anti-social liberal competitive society resembling the state of nature (Gherea 1976b, 266–269). As previously mentioned, he is not fond of political violence. All these considerations were adequate for the Romanian political context of the time and they show a mature understanding of what socialism *should* be and how it *should* work. In the same time, it is very likely that his reformism paved the way – political opportunism and other types of motivation aside – for a milder political position of the SDPRW towards the NLP, contributing to the dissolution of the former into the latter in 1899. As the previous section stated, Gherea officially bemoaned this political outcome, but, in private, he was rather empathic towards the former members of the SDPRW who chose to enroll in the NLP, hoping they would still serve the cause of socialism even better now, since the NLP's higher degree of acceptance by Romanian society in comparison to the SDPRW (Gherea 1983, 238–240).

Ideologically, Romanian liberalism with its oligarchic-capitalist elite absorbed Romanian social-democracy that was leaning increasingly towards liberalism, a grassroots socially oriented liberalism that would later find its most appropriate expression in the Peasant Party of the 1920s. Defending bourgeois democracy and bourgeois political rights was indeed revolutionary for late 19th and early 20th century Romania; however, it ultimately played more on the bourgeois than on the socialist political side. If Gherea's understanding of anarchism was more than tactical, the main result of his political tactic – in which anarchism definitely played its role – was ultimately a fiasco, one that strengthened local liberal ideology at the expense of socialism. Thus, a principled critique of anarchism led, among other factors, to the tactical failure of the SDPRW.

Still, through his careful analyses of local class-relations and of Romania's development in the broader context of the country's slow integration within the Western capitalist economy, Gherea certified his Marxist intellectual lineage (State in State, Cistelean 2015; Ornea 1983, 438; Shafrir 2007, 5–48), even if several elements of his legal socialism are, as already argued, strikingly non-Marxist: the rejection of state as institutional class domination, revolution as process that transforms, not changes altogether the capitalist mode of production, his firm 'legalism' and parliamentarism (see Marx 1942; Marx 1947). Overall, his partial and unsubstantial political seditiousness, regardless of context, political tactics and means, that is indispensable to any Marxist political project may have been more than a simple and circumstantial electoral camouflage after all.

It follows Gherea's theory of anarchism is a means of validating his legal socialism. Their reciprocity is asymmetrical, working, as already argued, in favor of 'legalism'. What is most important is this mutually constitutive political dialectic takes place on the phenomenological terrain of a given capitalist order that needs to be maintained and even enforced, not replaced, at least not in the near future. Holding on to this philosophical line of argumentation, Gherea's legal socialism is both phenomenologically and ontologically a function of the existing social order, not a subversive instrument put to use with the purpose of superseding it.

Therefore, Gherea's condemnation of anarchism is not just political, it is especially of doctrinaire nature. Understood on par with legal socialism, Gherea's aversion towards not only anarchism, but Bolshevism, Spartakism and all other communist and maximalist socialist projects played, politically, right into the hands of the rising Romanian bourgeoisie, although its cultural influence was nevertheless innovative, challenging and even refreshing. The NLP was, compared to the Conservative Party of the wealthy landowners, progressive. However, that type of progressiveness was liberal, not socialist, and would later on, as already mentioned, add to the consolidation of economic monopolies the liberal oligarchy thriving within the NLP would secure both against foreign capital and against the dispossessed classes.

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