

Social Policy and the Corporatist Design: A Romanian Experience of Reluctant Intermingling

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Abstract

The article approaches the competing corporatist discourses in pre-communist Romania from the standpoint of their relation with the process of the development of professional associations and professional chambers, itself closely connected with the elaboration of labor legislation and social policies. There emerges from this a focus on a flirtation with the corporatist design exposed by a (broadly defined) Left-liberal trend of thought, shown to grow more reluctant towards a genuine engagement with the issue precisely as it gets channeled on a path of evolution marked by a (largely complacent) accommodation with the reigning right-wing discourse of the late 1930's.

Keywords

corporatism; social policy;
professional associations;
professional chambers;
Left-liberalism

It has been long since the theory proposed by Mihail Manoilescu in *The Century of Corporatism* of 1934 was established as central to a dynamic understanding of the corporatist design of „interest representation” bearing significance beyond the historical horizon of the interwar European Right.¹ Despite the continuing relevance of such a search for delineating the broader implications of the design in question² – and the repeated reinterpretations of the relations between corporatism, fascism and general right-wing authoritarianism between the wars, always confirming the special significance of the Romanian theorist³ –, the discursive context from which the internationally influential vision emerged has not been scrutinized in a manner resembling the contextual clarification of the national roots of Manoilescu’s (equally internation-

1 Philippe C. Schmitter, „Still the Century of Corporatism?”, *The Review of Politics* 36: 1, 1974, 85-131.

2 Peter J. Williamson, *Corporatism in Perspective: an Introductory Guide to Corporatist Theory* (London: Sage Publications, 1989).

3 Antonio Costa Pinto, „Fascism, Corporatism and the Crafting of Authoritarian Institutions in Interwar European Dictatorships”, in Antonio Costa Pinto, Aristotle Kallis, eds., *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 87-117.

al) theory of economic protectionism.⁴ Vindicating the two contexts as overlapping but not coincident, the present article is part of an enterprise of the sort.

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Alongside its deep entanglements with the traditional and the radical Right segments of the pre-communist ideological spectrum, the corporatist conception also got intertwined with the liberal and the left-wing streams of political, social and economic thought. The attitudes of rejection and of qualified acceptance from the part of the representatives of these various trends are all of importance for placing meaningfully the idea which has come to be associated with the name of Manoilescu in its Romanian discursive setting.⁵ However, there is a particular compartment of the setting invoked that displays both peculiarly strong links with the phenomenon surveyed and a spectacular condition of ideological syncretism. The field of discourse targeted here is that of the debate about the representation of professional interests, staying in plain conjunction with the searches for elaborating a local system of social protection, itself based on an appropriate framework of labor legislation. Starting to emerge alongside the gradual disappearance of traditional guilds – stretching from the Organic Statutes of 1831 to the final disbandment of these bodies by a law of 1873 – the modern professional associations (as institutions of private law) and the state-sponsored professional chambers (as institutions of public law) came to be deeply intermingled with the process of the emergence and continuous redefinition of local social policies (inaugurated in the 1880's).

Corporatism and syndicalism – the latter one most often understood, in Romania, as a synonym for trade unionism – stood as the main intellectual organizing devices of the relation between the expanding welter of professional organizations and the system of labor policies. The trade union movement was shaped at the turn of the XIXth to the XXth century in strong intercourse with the emerging socialist trend, benefiting from a very low degree of autonomy towards the latter and coming to act, over the interwar decades, as a virtual battleground for the contest between social democracy and communism. The tradition of historical interpretation in the field established under the communist regime and pointing to syndicalism as the only genuine expression of structured professional interests has basically been maintained by the works devoted to the subject in post-communist times (a tendency nurtured, otherwise, by the general confusion surrounding for long all topics of inquiry bearing a recognizable Leftist stamp). Partly as a result of this, the corporatist view has continued to be retrospectively located firmly within the area of right-wing politics, being moreover seen as confined to the pleading of Manoilescu and to the scattered Iron Guard relevant pronouncements.

A focus on the journal *Politica socială* – issued under this title from 1934 to 1942, in continuation to a first series entitled *Munca*, of 1933 – is highly appropriate for clarifying the above-mentioned compounded nature of the ideological devices acting as driving forces behind the development of social policies in Romania. For the same reasons, it can help us to delineate the role played by the corporatist idea – with its intrinsic right-wing leanings – as part of the interwar debate on social reform predicated on the notion of professional representation. The two periodicals were published under the directorship of D. R. Ioanițescu (sometimes indicated as

4 Joseph L. Love, *Crafting the Third World. Theorizing Underdevelopment in Rumania and Brasil* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 71-98.

5 Victor Rizescu, „Developmental Ideology or Regenerative Nationalism? Competing Strands of the Romanian Right before World War II”, part I: „Corporatism between Liberalism and the Right”, *Revista istorică* 25: 5-6, 2014, 557-592.

the most significant representative of the field in the interwar period⁶) and meant to develop the legacy of his tenures as minister of Labor held in National-Peasant cabinets between June 1932 and November 1933 (having as their main accomplishment the unification of the systems of labor legislation from the Old Kingdom – already extended to Bessarabia in 1919 –, Transylvania and Bukovina, in 1933). They also bear the mark of his longer engagement with the domain, which included – alongside the parliamentary activity inaugurated in 1919 – his participation to the very creation of the same Ministry of Labor in 1920 (himself functioning then as a secretary general of the institution, with Grigore Trancu-Iași as a minister),⁷ his contribution to the celebrations marking the consummation of the first decade of social policies with solid institutional foundations in Romania, in 1930,⁸ as well as his later conversion to supporting the nationalist discourse of the Romanian Front (led by Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, initiated by him as a splinter of the National-Peasant Party in 1935 and joined by Ionițescu from the beginning, after having People's Party, National Party and National-Peasant Party affiliations over the previous period).

When cast into this last ideological embodiment, the dedication of Ionițescu to promoting social reform was absorbed into the echelons of what an inspired historian called the „bourgeois fascism” of interwar Romania,⁹ being turned into a sustained concern for the „Romanianization” of the economy on the basis of *numerus valachicus* principles, nevertheless staunchly reluctant to embrace the revolutionary temper of full blown fascist theory and politics. A collection of articles from *Politica socială* published in 1938 clearly documents this type of discourse adopted by the former minister of Labor,¹⁰ in conjunction with a work with the same character and orientation coming at the same juncture from his son and close collaborator D. Ionițescu-Dere.¹¹ This general evolution of the periodical has to taken as a framework for examining, in the following, the way it related to the corporatist idea.

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The topic makes its first appearance in the pages of the journal in February 1934 with an article by V. M. Ioachim, an author with a firm background in the field of professional representation, that had previously engaged, in the immediate post-war period, with the problem of re-tailoring the institution of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry (functioning since 1864) to the requirements of Greater Romania¹² and then, over the 1920's, with the one of fashioning, alongside them, the envisioned Chambers of Labor¹³ (eventually introduced in 1932, after a failed attempt in 1927). Targeted at dissociating between the „economic” and the „social” meanings of the notion of corporatism – as part of a brief general perspective

6 Ilie Marinescu, *Politica socială interbelică în România. Relațiile dintre muncă și capital* (București: Ed. Tehnică), 1995, 226-239.

7 D. R. Ionițescu, *Charta muncii*, vol. 1: *Contractul colectiv. Organizarea internațională a muncii. Fazele contractului de muncă* (București: Tipografia „Cultura”), 1920.

8 Idem, *Charta muncii*, vol. 2: *Renașterea meseriilor. Istoric-legislație-corporații-revendicări* (București: Tipografia „Reforma Socială”, n. d. [1930]); Idem, „Partidele politice și politica socială”, in G. Tașcă et al., *Un deceniu de politică socială românească* (București: n. p., 1930), 49-75.

9 Nicholas M. Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and the Others. A History of Fascism in Hungary and Romania* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1970), 345-376.

10 D. R. Ionițescu, *În slujba socialului*, (București: Tipografia A-B-C, 1938).

11 D. Ionițescu-Dere, *Preocupări sociale* (București: Tipografia A-B-C, 1938).

12 V. M. Ioachim, *Reorganizarea camerelor de comerț și industrie din Vechiul Regat și din noile teritorii* (București: Tipografia „Hașdeu”, 1920).

13 Idem, *Camerele de muncă și asigurările sociale*, (București: Institutul de Arte Grafice „Tiparul Românesc”, 1926).

over its long-term historical evolution – and acknowledging that „recently the importance of professional associations has grown considerably”, the intervention takes account that „corporations are now envisioned to be integrated into the very body of the state, as forces guiding the economic and political life of the nation”.¹⁴ Later articles in the same series make clear that „modern economic corporatism is predicated on the demand of deep involvement of the state in economy on a permanent basis”, something which is not a system to be accepted when „extending beyond certain limits”. In its turn, „political corporatism” – usually understood, in the fashion of Manoilescu, as belonging to the „integral” variety –, requires „the bodies giving representation to the nation to be exclusively the emanations of corporations”, a vision staying at odds with the stark reality that „the specific, and often opposed interests of all [social] categories cannot be harmonized by the means of professional representation alone”.¹⁵

After rejecting, thus, both the economic interventionist implications of the doctrine – as it currently featured in the rising right-wing discourse of the time – and the design of guild-based parliamentarianism exposed by the „hard” promoters of it, Ioachim then offers his pleading for a modest interpretation of the same view, advanced under the label of „social corporatism”. This is understood as an arrangement amounting to nothing more than „the effective collaboration between the state and the professional associations of a public and a private nature”, able to allow the „parliament and the governments to maintain a direct contact with the masses, by using the professional organizations as agents of mediation without succumbing to a domination from their part” and likely to be constructed by simply broadening upon the system of special representation of the professional chambers in the parliament, already in place by virtue of the article 70 of the 1923 constitution.¹⁶ The benefits of such a choice are described vaguely as resting on the fact of allowing Romania to join the general world stream of evolution leading the „democracy of the individualist sort towards a new form, with the character of a solidarist democracy”.¹⁷ Over the same period, Ioachim gives in the journal a strictly descriptive presentation of the Italian fascist type of corporatist theory and practice,¹⁸ in order to come then with a negative evaluation of that system when contrasting it to Manoilescu’s view of integral corporatism. The latter author is invoked as an authority for the sake of underscoring that „one cannot speak about a genuine corporatism functioning at present in Italy”, but this only comes as a preamble for arguing that, in fact, the doctrine „is more likely to develop in a state with a democratic structure”.¹⁹

The main book of Manoilescu on the subject is reviewed at length by the authorized voice of *Politica socială* in a series of four articles issued in March 1935. The reader is confronted here with a slight change of emphasis, by comparison to the interventions covered above. The analysis is drawn towards the conclusion that „the corporatist [...] idea must be supported”, which is advocated by pointing to the „brilliant work” under review as to an „important contribution to political and economic science on a world scale”.²⁰ Such an evaluation is not impaired by

14 Idem, „Corporatism economic și corporatism social. Evoluția corporatismului”, *Politica socială* 2: 6, February 24, 1934, 2.

15 Idem, „Corporatism economic și politic”, *Politica socială* 2: 7, March 3, 1934, 2.

16 Idem, „Corporatism social”, *Politica socială* 2: 8, March 10, 1934, 2.

17 Idem, „Foloasele corporatismului social”, *Politica socială* 2: 9, March 17, 1934, 2.

18 Idem, „Noua ideologie corporatistă italiană”, I, *Politica socială* 2: 22, June 9, 1934, 1; Idem, „Noua ideologie corporatistă italiană”, II, *Politica socială* 2: 23, June 16, 1934, 1.

19 Idem, „Corporatismul italian față cu corporatismul integral”, *Politica socială* 2: 24, June 23, 1934, 1.

20 Idem, „Secolul corporatismului. Pe marginea unei cărți”, IV, *Politica socială* 3: 64, March 30, 1935, 1.

the fact that, otherwise, Manoilescu „gives expression to his long-standing conviction that the state has the obligation to take a deep involvement in the organization of national economy”.²¹ As to the comparison with the Italian case, it is now acknowledged that, „in light of how he understands the way the representatives of the corporations are to be elected, [Manoilescu’s ideas] do not differ very much [...] from the system actually functioning in Italy” (characterized by the fact that the leaders of the corporations are nominated by the head of the government).²² Even after taking such a turn of the argumentation, Ioachim is still able to delineate cautiously the „limits of corporatism” in an article of December 1935, maintaining now that the design is faced with „considerable obstacles of both a psychological and a material nature, which induce us into thinking that this is not the shape that state institutions will take in the near future”, and stating moreover that „there are limitations which have to be observed if we are to disentangle from the corporatist doctrine the valuable components with real chances of being put into practice”. In spite of his earlier half-way approval of Manoilescu and Italian fascism, covered above, the author is thus keen to underline that a Romanian corporatist enterprise must be conducted such as to protect „the idea of private property and the spirit of individual initiative”, while also allowing „the highest public authority to rest in the state, as a political organ over and above the corporations” and refraining from placing interdictions on the circulation of different „philosophical, economic and social creeds”.²³

This appears to be the last attempt of *Politica socială* to take a meaningful critical engagement with the corporatist idea. The subject would reappear in the pages of the periodical only at the beginning of 1938, in the guise of a contextual accommodation with the political regime of Carolism and with its corresponding official discourse. The issue of the professional associations is now rehearsed here in light of the corporatist trappings of the February constitution,²⁴ together with the larger prospects of an economy patterned on the same ideas.²⁵ As part of the complacent advocacy, there are given enthusiastic descriptions of the fascist or semi-fascist corporatist experiments underway in Italy²⁶ and Portugal,²⁷ and even a fresh look at the promising turn taken by the organization of professional bodies and by the policies of labor in France.²⁸ In line with this accommodating discourse of the journal, D. R. Ioanițescu himself would then set forth to tailor his view of professional representation shaped in the 1920’s to the principles governing the Carolist projected „law of the guilds” of 1939.²⁹ Still later, he would proceed to take account in the same fashion of the legal vision in the field of the

21 Idem, „Secolul corporatismului. Pe marginea unei cărți”, II, *Politica socială* 3: 62, March 17, 1935, 4.

22 Idem, „Secolul corporatismului. Pe marginea unei cărți”, III, *Politica socială* 3: 63, March 23, 1935, 1.

23 Idem, „Limitele corporatismului”, *Politica socială* 3: 92, December 7, 1935, 1.

24 Stere I. Ionescu, „Noua constituție și asociațiunile profesionale”, *Politica socială* 5: 146, March 1, 1938, 1; G. N. Dulcu, „Noua constituție și asociațiile profesionale”, *Politica socială* 5: 151, April 24, 1938, 1.

25 Mircea Nuțescu, „Economia corporativă. Principii și realizări”, *Politica socială* 5: 154, May 22, 1938, 1-2.

26 Idem, „Sistemul corporatist în Italia”, *Politica socială* 5: 144, February 1, 1938, 1-2.

27 Idem, „Dictatura corporativă. Aspecte din viața corporativă portugheză”, *Politica socială* 5: 151, April 24, 1938, 1.

28 Petre Corcoveanu-Balș, „Organizarea corporațiilor de meseriași în Franța”, *Politica socială* 5: 156, June 5, 1938, 1, 3.

29 D. R. Ioanițescu (*Regimul breslelor*, București, Tipografia A-B-C, 1940).

National Legionary State,³⁰ before attempting to cope, in 1945, with the communist conception of syndicalism.³¹

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A 1934 article in *Politica socială* tries – inconclusively and without managing to inaugurate a sustained line of the sort – to clarify the ideological orientation of the publishing enterprise as resting on a synthesis between the liberal and the socialist traditions.³² The pleading has overtones meaningfully resembling those of the „liberal socialist” experiment taken in 1923 by the journal *Dreptatea socială* under the directorship of Dumitru Drăghicescu, that has been recovered as the most significant local manifestation of the early XXth century socially minded liberalism pertaining to the world-wide pedigree of Keynesianism and of the welfare state vision.³³ In February 1935, Ioachim can still foster his anti-interventionist (and anti-Manoilescu) creed under the heading of a meditation on a „new social order”, rejecting Italian fascism and German national-socialism in the same package with American New Deal policies and stating that all of these political families „are keen [...] to enslave the individual to the collective interests of society”. Instead, he maintains that the collaborators of the journal, „grouped around its founder and leader, D. R. Ioanițescu, a former minister of Labor, are sustained by the belief that the social order of the future has to emerge by virtue of a synthesis between the spirit of initiative and responsibility and the spirit of social solidarity”, without destroying, thus, „the ideas of profit and private property which are the two driving forces of progress”.³⁴ This statement of a vague variety of the liberal-socialist vision seems to glimmer also in an earlier article by Ioachim on „Christianity and the social order”,³⁵ that can easily recall to us Drăghicescu’s strivings to integrate Christian thinking into his theoretical construction dedicated to the ideal of well-pondered social justice.³⁶

The works of Ioanițescu elaborated before adopting the Romanian Front position do not exactly open themselves to such an interpretation. Still, one can occasionally encounter characterizations of his political stance that resonate with this vision of ideological harmonization, as for example in a (however encomiastic and bombastic) article dedicated to his activity and published in *Munca* in 1933.³⁷ Some contemporary ideological utterances defining themselves – unlike the contributions of *Munca* and *Politica socială* – as firmly belonging to the National-Peasant fold seem to support the supposition that a discourse of the kind featured within the party over the period (the articles of the short-lived journal *Progresul social*

30 Idem, *Protecția muncii naționale. Istoric. Legiuirile regimului legionar* (București: Tipografia A-B-C, 1941).

31 Idem, *Istoricul organizării sindicale din România. Codul sindicalismului român, 1921. Noul cod al sindicalismului român, 1945* (București: Tipografia Remus Cioflec, 1945).

32 C. Dumitrescu, „Între liberalism și socialism”, *Politica socială* 2: 12, April 7, 1934, 1.

33 Victor Rizescu, *Ideology, Nation and Modernization: Romanian Developments in Theoretical Frameworks* (București: Ed. Universității din București, 2013), 243-250; Idem, „The Nation of the Westernizers: Mainstream and Minority Varieties of Romanian Liberalism”, *Revista istorică* 24: 5-6, 2013, 405-426.

34 V. M. Ioachim, „În slujba unei noi ordini sociale”, *Politica socială* 3: 59, February 23, 1935, 13.

35 Idem, „Creștinismul și ordinea socială”, *Politica socială* 2: 51, December 29, 1934, 3.

36 Dumitru Drăghicescu, *Creștinism și democrație* (București: Tipografia Ziarului „Voința Națională”, 1909); Idem, *La nouvelle cite de Dieu* (Paris: Marcelle Lesage, 1929).

37 (unsigned) „Armonia claselor sociale. Capitalul, munca și partidele politice unite au stabilit pacea sufletească a muncitorimii. Opera prodigioasă a domnului D. R. Ioanițescu”, *Munca* 1: 9, April 23, 1933, 1, 3.

of 1932 are good cases in point³⁸). Otherwise, Ioachim's modest interpretation of corporatism, summarized above,³⁹ emerges as closely resembling other proposals for wisely calibrating the demand of professional representation to the universal requirements of party-based parliamentarianism, in continuation to the existing constitutional provisions. A view of the kind is advanced in the works of the influential specialist in labor legislation Marco I. Barasch.⁴⁰ Participating alongside Ioanițescu to the 1930 celebration of the Ministry of Labor already mentioned,⁴¹ this one entrenched his conception in a legal philosophy already clarified in his 1923 Paris doctoral dissertation⁴² and betraying the inspiration of a liberal-socialist synthesis that can itself be related to the vision of Drăghicescu.⁴³ There are good reasons to argue, therefore, that the (undeniably unaccomplished) corporatist conception advanced in *Politica socială* in 1934-1935 can be traced back to the local version of the Left-liberal discourse, enjoying thus the same status as the branches of corporatist advocacy previously chartered as part of the approach developed here and discovered as connected, in turn, to the dominant liberalism with an oligarchic cast of the Zeletinian type and to the Romanian stream of classical free-trade liberal theory.⁴⁴

In January 1935, an intervention in *Politica socială* centered upon the notion of syndicalism can still greet friendly the first issue of a journal with a related focus entitled *Munca. Revistă de doctrină și orientare sindicală*, having a social-democratic orientation, headed by Ioan I. Mirescu and meant to offer guidance to trade union activism in the country⁴⁵ (while also taking a harsh critical stance on corporatist ideas⁴⁶). In June of the same year, Ioanițescu-Dere takes a new departure in terms of the discourse on social reform advanced by the periodical by invoking as a model the patterns of the „organization of national labor” in Nazi Germany.⁴⁷ Shortly thereafter, the obsolescence of democracy is contrasted by an author to the promises of fascism and dictatorship,⁴⁸ in a manner slightly contradictory to a later article by D. R. Ioanițescu meant to vindicate the genuine democratic character of right-wing nationalist parties, by opposition to the falsification of democratic creeds within the stream of the Left.⁴⁹ All throughout this very abrupt process of ideological refashioning, the all-pervading topic of the „protection of national labor” acts as the privileged engine of discursive transformation. Making its appearance during the spring of 1935,⁵⁰ it is rapidly embraced by the notorious anti-Semitic publicist

38 Ștefan Mihăiescu, „Rostul nostru”, *Progresul social* 1: 1, March 20, 1932, 1-3.

39 Ioachim, „Corporatismul social”.

40 Marco I. Barasch, *Camerete profesionale în organizarea statului modern* (București: „Cartea Românească”, 1935).

41 Idem, „Legislația muncii în cadrul politicii sociale”, in G. Tașcă et al., *Un deceniu de politică socială românească* (București: n. p., 1930), 208-227.

42 Idem, *Le socialisme juridique et son influence sur l'évolution du droit civil en France à la fin du XIXe siècle et au XXe siècle* (Paris: Les Presses Universitaires de France, 1923).

43 Dumitru Drăghicescu, *L'Idéal créateur: essai psycho-sociologique sur l'évolution sociale* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1914).

44 Rizescu, „The Nation of the Westernizers”; Idem, „Developmental Ideology or Regenerative Nationalism?”.

45 H. Pas, „Politica socială și sindicalismul”, *Politica socială* 3: 55, January 26, 1935, 1.

46 Alexandru Frangopol, *Contra corporatismului (răspuns d-lui profesor M. Manoilescu)* (București: n. p., 1935), issued from within the circle of Mirescu's journal.

47 D. Ioanițescu-Dere, „Organizarea muncii naționale în Germania. Conducătorul (Führer-ul) și bărbații de încredere”, *Politica socială* 3: 75, June 22, 1935, 1, 3.

48 G. Dulca, „Democrație, fascism, dictatură”, *Politica socială* 3: 88, November 7, 1935, 3.

49 D. R. Ioanițescu, „Dreapta' și 'stânga'”, *Politica socială* 4: 104, May 1, 1936, 1.

50 G. Dulca, „Protecția muncii naționale”, *Politica socială* 3: 67, April 20, 1935, 3.

N. Porsena with utmost dedication.⁵¹ The reluctant flirtation of *Politica socială* with the corporatist idea gets silenced hand in hand with its gradual adjustment to the nationalist predicament. This can be invoked as a proof for the incongruence between the defining vision of social reform assumed by the periodical and the quintessentially right-wing corporatist notion of structuring economy, society and politics on the basis on vertical lines of solidarity. It can also suggest, nevertheless, that, as much as it existed, the concern of Ioanițescu's journal for the virtues of corporatism was driven by ideological motives different from those of the nationalist Right.

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51 N. Porsena, „Români și străini”, *Politica socială* 3: 78, July 20, 1935, 1; Idem, „Aplicarea proporției”, *Politica socială* 3: 81, August 1, 1935, 1; Idem, „Norma etnică”, *Politica socială* 3: 82, September 14, 1935, 2; Idem, „Cota minoritarilor”, *Politica socială* 3: 83, October 3, 1935, 1; Idem, „Românizarea profesior libere”, *Politica socială* 3: 84, October 10, 1935, 1; Idem, „Asimilarea etnică”, *Politica socială* 3: 92, December 7, 1935, 1.

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