

THE LIBERTARIANS OF ROMANIA (from 1951)

Readers of the libertarian, anarchist or pacifist press often come upon articles signed by Bulgarian comrades and – since the Second World War – lots of documents, appeals and reports regarding the ferocious crackdown mounted by the new totalitarian regime against the various libertarian movements in Bulgaria. In that country, every anti-authoritarian notion, ranging from anarchism through to Tolstoyism, from undiluted pacifism to vegetarianism, have found thousands of loyal supporters and today, in spite of their suffering, they are faced by a State purportedly standing for a “proletarian and peasant dictatorship”. Their cries of revolt, their refusal to submit to the role of a militaristic party, their stubborn underground activity, have won the sympathy of free consciences elsewhere and active solidarity from Europa and the Americas. Bulgaria is already being spoken of as a second Spain. [A reference to the pamphlet *Bulgaria - A New Spain* published by the Alexander Berkman Aid Fund, 1948. KSL]

The same cannot be said of Romania which is separated from Bulgaria by the “Blue Danube”. The political and social circumstances may be the same, just as they are in other “satellite countries” represented as “people’s democracies”. The same cack-handed regime, the same *dirigiste* “revolutions”, the same police repression. Any opposition to be found inside Romania is more likely to emanate from “reactionaries”. Frankly it needs saying that inside Romania there is no internal resistance coming from libertarians like there is in Bulgaria, as their associations were never as well-developed as in Bulgaria: for one thing, Romania is regarded as a Latin nation currently swamped by waves of “liberating” Slavs. In Romania, any such movements were in pretty much an embryonic stage. Libertarian individuals of every persuasion there are, all of them eager readers of reviews and books that come mainly from France. A lot of them, libertarians from their youth, later became “cautious” and “pragmatic” as they grew older, going on to serve in the ranks of some right- or left-wing party, one that might guarantee them, if not some status in “society”, then at least a livelihood.

I do not want to exaggerate anything here. In this article I am not laying out the particulars of social or political life inside Romania; all I can offer are a few mentions of the men who have been deemed in that country to be libertarians or anarchists. In the 29 January 1949 edition of *L'Adunata dei Refrattari* there are statements made by a young Romanian anarchist to *Umanità Nova*. This “voice from Romania” is the only one that I have heard in many a long year. This young man escaped bolshevik tyranny and is now sampling a measure of freedom – in a concentration camp in Italy. He has something to say to us about the situation in Romania, but all too little about that country’s libertarians. Allow me to flesh out his report from memory, since I too left my library and archives behind me there.

The fact of the matter is that anarchist ideas were in circulation in Romania, even during the latter half of the 19th century, thanks to the Russian or Bulgarian refugees who found a haven there or used the country as a staging-post before moving further west. Followers of Bakunin crossed the border into Romania, as did other Russian revolutionaries persecuted by tsarism. One of the latter – C. Dobrogeanu-Gherea – became the chief theorist of Romanian socialism. But the followers of Bakunin or Kropotkin left no enduring mark behind them. It was more the case that Bulgarian refugees – one being the great revolutionary poet Christo Botev (1847-1876) – carried on in Bucharest, Braila and other cities on the Danube with their efforts to free Bulgaria from the Turkish

yoke. The hospitality that such outlaws received in Romania has been acknowledged. Their influence in the country was exercised by example: it was indirect and individual, as was the influence wielded by Italians prompted by Malatesta's thinking who arrived in the country to work as bricklayers or marble-workers. As I have stated, for more appreciative readers of anarchist writings we need to look to the intelligentsia and above all to the students.

But, for some sign of at least one action, no matter how sporadic, indicative of what we are looking for, we need to look further back, to the young Romanian revolutionaries of 1848, who, after returning from Paris, strove to make some sort of a difference. Just one of them, Diamant, managed to implement the ideas of Fourier, by building on the estate of a 'boyar', an agricultural commune known as the 'Scaieni Phalanstery'. It was successful but short-lived as it set an overly contagious example and this 'free commune' was destroyed by ever-watchful estate owners. In Bukovina, the Romanian province annexed up until 1919 by the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and which had been exposed to the influence of German culture, the writings of Mühsam, Landauer, Pierre Ramus, Rudolf Rocker and Max Nettlau were a stronger influence upon anarchists. Young people in particular travelled abroad and some of them visited Spain during the 1936-1939 civil war. But Romanian 'legionaries' (fascists) fought in Spain as Franco's mercenaries.

Turning to Transylvania, we might invoke the name of Victor Arady, a Hungarian journalist with libertarian leanings; he studies the peasant revolts that occurred under Habsburg rule. But, drawn by the communist mirage, he went missing somewhere in the Soviet Union.

Broadly speaking, Romania's genuine libertarians had to look elsewhere for more favourable settings. They moved to the West, especially North America. Marcus Graham, editor of the periodical *Man!* based in San Francisco, was born in Romania. In his *Anthology of Revolutionary Poetry*, he published George Cosbue's poem "We Want Land", the cry of the Romanian peasants insisting that the huge estates of the 'boyars' be broken up. And then there was Joseph Ishill, a printing worker from Botosani, which he left forty years ago, before embarking in New Jersey on that splendid collection of libertarian publications, books so flawless in terms of their illustrations and artistic content, their translations, annotation and printing standards that they are prized, not just by all anarchist circles, but also by the most pernickety of booklovers. (I have an article about Ishill's 'Oriole Press' in a book of mine, *Essays* in 1936).

Likewise there was Panait Muşoiu, Romania's most outstanding libertarian figure: he served his apprenticeship abroad. He lived in Brussels for a time towards the end of the 19th century and on returning to Bucharest he oversaw, together with Doctor P. Zosin one of the best Romanian reviews, *Miscarea Sociala* (second only to Ion Nadejde's *Contimporanul*) dedicated to emerging social issues. Dr Zosin, moving to Jassy, turned into a promoter of Auguste Comte's "Positivism" whereas Muşoiu went on, pretty much single-handedly, to spread libertarian ideas through his *Revista Ideei*, the 1900 to 1916 collection of which amounted to a veritable encyclopaedia. With his rather eclectic turn of mind, Muşoiu started out as a socialist and had links to surviving members of the First International. In two pamphlets *Guidelines* and *Other Horizons*, he collected his articles of social criticism. He then turned his attention to various other anarchist sources, translating the more characteristic writers, ranging from Bakunin and Kropotkin, to Malatesta and Sébastien Faure, whilst not overlooking works of History, Sociology and Literature that might help spread libertarian ideas and mentality. He published about a hundred books in popular editions and he doggedly circulated these everywhere.

Ahead of systematic socialist and communist propaganda in Romania, his translations helped shape the basic sociological grounding that younger generations could find in his 'Revista Ideei Library' series. But very few of those youngsters remained loyal to Panait Muşoiu. They were later recruited by political parties. But the dogged translator carried on distributing his pamphlets open-handedly, adding to the libertarian "classics" other classic writings of world Literature and Philosophy. Sometimes he published strange writings such as *Memoirs of Judas Iscariot* and guides to Plato and Leonardo da Vinci. But he did not overlook Thoreau's *Walden*, M. Desumbert's *Morality Based upon the Laws of Nature*, Han Ryner's *Little Individualist Handbook* and essays by Antioco Zucca, Jean Marechal, Auguste Boyer, Bertrand Russell and stirring pages from Most, Lafargue, Reclus, Coeurderoy, Grave, Paraf-Javal and books on rationalist education, anarchist ethics, popular science and humanistic philosophy (Paul Gille), as well as novels and short stories that nurtured critical thinking, such as *What Is To Be Done?* by G N Chernishevsky, *Bad Shepherds* by Octave Mirbeau, the *Memoirs of Silvio Pellico* and so on.

We would have to pick out further names and titles to show how Muşoiu was able to delve into every sort of literature to pick out anything that might be of use in the activation of intellectual and social liberation and the spreading of a profoundly humane culture among the so-called "popular" strata of society.

Panait Muşoiu was not a publisher in the commercial sense, but a disinterested servant of culture, handling all of the work of translator, commentator and propagandist. He lived like an anarchist: poor in a commerce-minded society, but rich in terms of his hopes and selflessness and he stood firmly by comrades from other countries. I offered a sketch of him in my own *European Pilgrimages* when Max Nettlau – whom I visited in Vienna in 1930 – asked me about him. Nettlau's tiny room, packed with papers, reminded me of Muşoiu's. But Muşoiu was then living in a little house planted in a muddy courtyard on the outskirts of Bucharest. Pamphlets were stacked in two rows as high as the ceiling: this was the *Ideei Library's* storehouse. In the centre of the room there was an iron bedframe and a small table. The door was always ajar. If the comrade was out, a stub of pencil attached to a blank page invited the caller to leave a message. There were a hundred manuscripts waiting their turn to go to press. Muşoiu managed to cram as much into his 48-page pamphlets as one would ordinarily find in a complete book. He had sellers who worked for nothing and loyal subscribers. He lived the life of a hermit, but a free one. From a friend in New York he received a flannel shirt, from Italy, some shoes and a jacket from who knows where. Two days he dined at a friend's house then would vanish into the countryside for a month or two, into the vineyard of some 'prosperous' friend or at the writers' retreat in Ardeal ... He was always full of vim, calm, level-headed, with pockets crammed with manuscripts or printed matter. He was forever printing translations because, no longer having his review, he had stopped writing original texts. His generosity was "bookish". Tendering a pamphlet was his way of saying "hello". He hated money but the printers had to be paid. And he was able to find linotype-operators who would work a few hours for him out of sheer friendship.

And when Nettlau asked me how many genuine anarchists there were in Romania, I was forced to admit that "in our country the anarchist is looked upon as a bogeyman. To the bourgeois and children, he is a wild man, hard-faced, with long dishevelled hair and often wears a cravat knotted like a noose. And in his pocket one can always find a bomb, or, at the very least, a dagger."

Nettlau got it: aside from Muşoiu, there was not another “real anarchist” that I could name for him. But Muşoiu was the sweetest, most peaceable of men. With him “the explosive effect” was to be found in the pamphlets he distributed tireless and impervious to changes of regime ... Later he quit his place in the outskirts and filled up another three right in the city centre. He had survived, unscathed, shelling during the war, the upheavals of dictatorship, the Nazi occupation and the “revolution”. And following Romania’s “liberation”, he was still lucid and busy when he passed away on 14 November 1945, on his 80th birthday. Of course, the new regime, by then in thrall to the bolsheviks, sang the praises of this “pioneer” in Romania. The controlled press knew nothing more about the tremendous libertarian effort that Muşoiu had mounted for more than half a century, without a party, without a subsidy, without the comforts of the political and police bureaucrats that rule the roost in the country as they do in other countries where statist absolutism – which is neither “revolutionary” nor “popular”, let alone “democratic” – has ensconced itself.

As regards other libertarians in Romania, if there are any left, they are unable to show themselves in public, much like their comrades in Bulgaria. Opposition has essentially been forced underground. And should articles turn up in the Romanian press signed by some former comrade of Muşoiu’s, we know that he will have made his “mea culpa” or that it is a case of “making peace between the goat and the cabbage”.

Before the war, Neagu Negulescu published a number of works of social literature, C. Brudariu two pamphlets dealing with the progress of peoples, peace and human culture. A. Gălăţeanu [Galatzeanu in Spanish text] also contributed a small collection of pamphlets “Free Pages” [*Pagini Libere*], along the same lines as the *Revista Ideei*. Later, there were two fitfully published reviews – *Cultura Omului* and *Free Pages*, rather eclectic publications and, in spite of their preference for the libertarian classics, they let themselves be caught up in “circumstantial” political compromises.

One young self-educated person, Ion Ionescu-Capatzana, has been an enthusiastic propagandist for Esperanto, vegetarianism, pacifism and a variety of libertarian outlooks in his review *Vegetarismul* (Bucharest, 1932-1933) and in a series of pamphlets. He left Romania sometime around 1935. In Paris, he headed the Esperanto press agency during the Spanish Civil War. In 1938 he settled in Soutraine-par-Rantigny (Oise department) on the edge of some woods, living in a wooden hut and there he set up a decent library and a small press. He tended his garden and self-published his pamphlets and the review *Artistocratie* (1939-1940) in four languages – Esperanto (Capatzana), French (G. de Lacaza-Duthier), Spanish (B. Cano Ruiz) and Romanian (E. Relgis). He planned to operate an international liaison centre there and libertarian gatherings held there were quite animated. Then along came the war. The Nazis never had the time to trouble him as he died in April 1942 after eating (he that was an out-and-out vegetarian) some mushrooms that he had picked in nearby woodland. The doctor was too far away to make it to the “Bois de la Solitude” in time. He was a grave loss to us, as Capatzana was brimful of energy and initiatives. The last pamphlet he translated, annotated and published contained some testimony from Panait Istrati “the man who joined nothing”.

Istrati has belatedly tasted some literary acclaim thanks to the early appreciation of him shown by Romain Rolland, but only after his desperate suicide attempt in Nice. He can be classified among the libertarians because of his independence of outlook, his quest for human brotherhood, his refusal to countenance political lies and his thirst for justice, which prompted him to write the three volume

Russia Exposed following lengthy travels through the Soviet Union. The narrator, known worldwide due to his moving confessions, was born near Braila of a Greek father and a Romanian mother and, in his youth, he was active in socialist circles before travelling through the countries of the Levant and the whole of Europe before ultimately discovering the whole horror of statist tyranny and murderous bureaucracy lurking behind the communist mirage. By then, joining anything was already beyond him, but, for all his contradictions he stayed a champion of Man and human freedom. He was isolated behind a wall of silence, but in his later years, in Bucharest, consumed by TB, he spat his truths into the faces of his slanderers and asked Romain Rolland (by that time a champion of the USSR) in vain for an answer to his pointed questioning. I outlined this process of awakening in my foreword to the Spanish-language edition of *My Crusade*, a posthumous anthology of Panait Istrati's last articles (translated by Tito-Livio Bancesco: Edit. Armonia, Buenos Aires, 1937). It is long past time for the man and his oeuvre to receive proper recognition, given that his very name may not be spoken back in Romania. But, here in South America, no matter where I have gone, I have seen all his books in Spanish on the shelves of the bookstores and – even in libertarian circles – lots of people have pressed me for an explanation of the “Istrati Affair”.

Among the statements made by that young Romanian refugee in Italy that were published in *Umanità Nova* (as mentioned in the opening of this article), we find the following:

“Our comrade also used to talk to us about the ‘Humanitarianist’ movement that has a great kinship with anarchism and which takes its lead from Eugen Relgis, currently an immigrant in Uruguay and close to a lot of comrades there. But the ‘Humanitarianist’ movement too has been scattered by Anna Pauker’s dictatorship, by single party rule and tight Bolshevik ‘control’ over the country’s cultural life.”

It behoves me, therefore, to say a little about myself. This is not the time to lay out cultural and social activities deployed in Romania over a thirty-five period (1912-1947) as well as in a number of international locations. I have written elsewhere about the circumstances surrounding my move to South America (as well as in my short book on Professor Georg Nicolai, published by Edit. ‘Reconstruir’, Buenos Aires, 1949). I merely carried on with my endeavours in this little corner of freedom – relatively speaking, of course – and it is doubly demanding as I have to make up for the years lost during the war and dictatorship in Romania.

What I ought to explain here is that ‘Humanitarianism’, the principles of which I spelled out in 1921, is a positive notion free of all dogma and constantly evolving and that it enshrines everything that favours the individual and the human person, without neglecting the ongoing interests of Humankind as a whole and of “the species as a whole”. The “First Humanitarian Group” which I founded in Bucharest in 1923 was, primarily, a study group. But out of the idea came action: twenty-three such centres opened up in Romania between 1924 and 1932 and a lot of publications have drawn inspiration from that ‘Humanitarianism’. There is no bureaucratic organization but there is free competition. People are free to come and go as they please! Over those years I was assisted by my loyal secretary Ion Mehedinteanu [Mehedintzeanu in Spanish text] (who was prompted to commit suicide in 1929 after he contracted an incurable illness).

In my reviews *Umanitatea* (Jassy, 1920), *Cugetul Liber* [Free Thought] (1927-1928 and *Umanitarismul* (Bucharest, 1929-1930), I also published articles signed by libertarians of every persuasion, either Romanian or from elsewhere. My ‘Humanitarianism’ is also anti-authoritarian, anti-statist, a-political

and anti-political: it subscribes to undiluted pacifism, the importance of the individual and is alive to anything that might be described as economic revolution and social revolution. In Sébastien Faure's *Encyclopédie Anarchiste* I laid out the meaning of 'Humanitarianism' in full. My '*Humanitarian Principles*', translated into fourteen languages (and repeatedly in some of those languages), have also been published in pamphlets and papers published by a wide range of libertarian groups. It would take a lengthy bibliography to show the warm welcome that I have received from anarchist, individualist, libertarian-socialist and anarcho-communist quarters, not to mention pacifist and humanitarian movements.

It therefore comes as no surprise to me to find that I have been blessed with the description of libertarian-anarchist-individualist humanitarianist and such like. It just goes to show the affinity that binds together this big 'human family', the members of which, scattered throughout the wide world where intolerance and violence prevail, share the same purposes: the freedom and development of the person: justice, which can never be based on oppression and enslavement; brotherhood, meaning the social and spiritual fellowship of humanity, which is itself a worldwide organism, the component cells of which – individuals – can and should live on the basis of mutual aid and creative harmony.

In which regard I associate myself with the wishes expressed in the Buenos Aires anarchist publication *La Obra* when, reporting on the situation in Romania (April 1949), it concluded: "We have been assured that in the current circumstances anarchism is not going to be able to reorganize inside Romania, and nor will any other movement that does not dance to the tune of despotic bolshevik rule. However, one has only to look at the underground fight being put up by anarchists in resisting their oppressors in Bulgaria, Spain, Portugal and elsewhere, to query the validity of this claim. Regardless of all the despots, man always strives for freedom and the instinct to shun despots is forever stirring in the People's bosom. And upon that we base our opinion as we point out that we believe in the recovery of that People, regardless of the poisonous actions of Red dictatorship."

Eugen Relgis

POSTSCRIPT

In the Buenos Aires paper *Organización Obrera* (July 1949), I came upon something reprinted entirely from *Ruta* (France) and entitled "The Anarchist Voice from Romania", which I mentioned at the time of its publication. Its author – A.P. – refers to the great historian of anarchism, Max Nettlau:

"According to Max Nettlau (*Bibliography of Anarchy*, 1896) the roots of the socialist movement in Romania were anarchist. Its founding father was Nikolai Petrovitch Dragosch (Zubku Kodreanu) whose Russian-language biography by Z. Ralli was published in Geneva in 1879. His disciples, Doctor Russel and Ioan Nadejde mounted intense propaganda in Besarabia in 1879-1881, publishing a newspaper and several pamphlets in Jassy. Two years after that (in 1884-1885), C. A. Filitis and G. Munteanu relocated the focus of written propaganda to Bucharest which is where the former published a review. "All that literature was pretty much anarchist", Nettlau stated and he added: "Not until 1886 was C. Dobrogeanu able to introduce Marxism into Romania and it provided a disguise for socialists turned vulgar politicians."

Anarchism bounced back with gusto with Ch. A. Teodoru, Pescani and some émigré Italian comrades: Panait Zosin and Panait Muşoiu argued against Ioan Nadejde who had gone over to social democracy

and they launched the review *Munca*, translating and publishing Reclus, Most and Malatesta and turning the Romanian anarchist movement into the most vigorous in the entire Balkans.” (For further details, see *Der Socialist*, Berlin, 5 September 1896).

Given the care that Nettlau invested in the authentication of his sources, we can acknowledge the accuracy of this. And we can add that Z. Ralli, author of the pamphlet mentioned, was the alias of Zamfir Arbure who died at a great age in Bucharest following the First World War. In Romanian he published a book of memoirs about his activities and incarcerations in Russia. Extracts from those appeared in English translation in the volume devoted to Elisée and Elie Reclus, published and printed by Joseph Ishill’s Oriole Press, (Berkeley Heights, NY, 1927). Ioan Nadejde’s review was called *Contimporanul* and it was much consulted for its social studies. Together with a group of socialist intellectuals, Nadejde later defected to the ranks of the Romanian Liberal Party which was, in spite of its name, one of the most reactionary factions. The controversies between Nadejde and his “sponsors” and the anarchist Muşoiu and the socialist C. Dobrogeanu-Gherea proved useful when it came to shedding some light on the confusion that prevailed in certain “ideological” camps.

But when Nettlau says that “all this literature was pretty much anarchist”, we need to add that the influence of Russian refugees in Romania towards the end of the 19th century, varied greatly. There were followers of Bakunin and Kropotkin and we must not ignore the influence of the Russian social revolutionaries and their ideologue N. C. Mikhailovski [Nikolay Konstantinovich Mikhaylovsky]. One of the core ideas of his philosophical and social outlook was the “universal law of the struggle for individuality”. In my Jassy-based review *Umanitatea*, Alexis Nour laid out that teaching (Nos 1-6, 1920). I devoted a few pages to it myself in my book *Humanitarianism and the International of the Intellectuals* (Bucharest, 1920). An expanded version of that chapter was published in French as “Humanitarianism and Individualism” in a pamphlet published by *L’En Dehors* (Orleans 1932) and a Spanish version appeared in Madrid in 1933 as part of the *Cuadernos de Cultura* series.

But that is all in the past now! The last fifty years of authoritarian socialism have culminated in Romania too in a totalitarian communist regime that mercilessly stifles any voice for freedom. But in the neighbouring country of Bulgaria, libertarians – in spite all their suffering – are still numerous and the world echoes to their cries of revolt.

E. R.

From *Cenit*, Toulouse (1951)

[Translated by Paul Sharkey for the Kate Sharpley Library <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/>]