

PORTRAITS OF YOUNG SOCIALISTS: MORAL STANDING AND SOCIALIZING PLACES

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Abstract: *The legend of the dissident intellectual surrounds the Romanian socialists of the last quarter of the 19th century. Young men called “nihilists” would break all social taboos, would protest against the legitimacy of the era’s corrupt political institutions, and would dispute religious ethics, the monarchy’s hierarchical authority, social inequality and the claimed reputation of the university. In various socialists’ or former socialists’ memoirs, they are deemed new social apostles, with the coming of the Hereafter replaced by the imminent occurrence of the revolution, which, by the collective approach of resources, will set in motion a more harmonious and equalitarian society. Unlike the restrictive bourgeois ethics, their (self) description is romantic and legendary. The attempt in this study is to create a generic portrait of the socialist intellectual toward the end of the 19th century, focusing on his/her exterior and moral standing, but also on the specifically socializing places of the socialists.*

Keywords: Socialism, Romania, intellectual, 19th century, popular education, cafe, club, clothing.

Several tens of testimonials on the Romanian socialists’ education at the end of the 19th century signal a new type of attitude toward the world, different both from the traditional Christian values and from the bourgeois and utilitarian liberalism growing in the Romanian sphere: “The trend favoured the radical socializing left wing from a political perspective and positivist materialism, including atheism, in the perspective of the world. Decidedly, a new *Weltanschauung* had been created”¹. In this sense, I will describe in a prosopographical manner the portrait of the socialist fighter as a young man.

Writer Jean Bart (1874-1933) reports the perception of the “nihilists” in the suburbs, particularly Ioan Nădejde’s, main writer at *Contemporanul*, the most important cultural Romanian journal during the last part of the century. The less educated part of Romanian society of the era reads the atheist in a mystical language, likening him/her to a demon, antichrist or dark alchemist. Bart notes that the slum did not differentiate among socialists, anarchists, democrat revolutionaries, atheists or freemasons; their common line was more important, specifically the position against religious and superstitious tradition in which suburbanites were raised: “At home, there had been frequent discussions about the nihilists as if they were an odd cult. They didn’t pray, didn’t wash and didn’t cut their nails. Men wore their hair long, women cut it short. They did not follow

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¹ Zigu Ornea, *Viața lui C. Dobrogeanu-Gherea [C. Dobrogeanu-Gherea’s Life]*, Bucharest, Edit. Compania, 2006, p. 171.

[bourgeois] tradition, nor fashion. They didn't believe in God, didn't baptize their children and walked while reading on the streets of Iasi"². The encyclopaedist Nădejde, self-educated on matters that ranged from the socialist doctrine and evolutionist theories to medieval Romanian law, is described as a blackish, bulky man, his gait heavy and his head always bent on reading, even when walking.

Journalist and socialist Const. Mille, the manager of *Adevărul*, the most important Romanian newspaper at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, depicts Ioan Nădejde in the same legendary-romantic approach, in his noticeably autobiographical novel, *Dinu Millian*. Nădejde alias Cara is described as a savage-looking, unkempt man, his overcoat loose; he ate while walking on the street, ignoring the era's preconceptions. His wife was taking the exam for her diploma to the "huge wonder of the borough, which hadn't ever seen such a thing". He was a "monster of science", who had graduated only high school and hadn't registered for university because, unabashed, he did not want autochthonous diplomas to confirm his encyclopaedic knowledge. It was only in his forties that he took his Law diploma; he was already a personality of the epoch, as leader of the socialist-democrat party. The high school teacher is a proclaimed atheist, a rebellious character³. Nicolae Leon, future chancellor of the Iasi University, high school student in 1881, recalls the intolerance of the teachers Nădejde who deemed stupid those who did not share their progressive beliefs, but spread out a sort of pioneer-specific fascination, which overpowered young men unaccustomed to criticizing the era's religious ethics, the teachers' plagiarism and the authoritarian nature of state institutions. Former socialist C. D. Anghel describes the founder of *Contemporanul* as the "oracle Nădejde, his Indian, hirsute Buddha features", who, when talking and smiling to Sărărie visitors (Sărărie was his home and the editorial office), radiated a certain contrast with his grimy and somewhat sullen face, while his white teeth brightened the room "like sunshine among clouds"⁴.

Researcher Zigu Ornea considers that Ioan Nădejde's encyclopaedic skills, intimidating in an era that had only just and difficultly left an archaic social pattern, lead to the creation of a mythical portrait: "Stout, tall, grimy and hirsute, dishevelled, the pockets of his clothes or of his brown overcoat crammed with books he read on the street, too, he promoted a *bohème* of the simplicity, which was set to emphasize the separation from the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois manners. His behaviour was rough; the hirsute taciturn did not shy away from saying the truth in the teachers' office, in the socialist club or in front of the

² Jean Bart, *Misterul casei din Sărărie* [*The Mystery of the House on Sararie*] (fragments), „Adevărul literar și artistic”, IX, no. 424, January 20th, 1929, in Tiberiu Avramescu (ed.), *Amintiri literare despre vechea mișcare socialist* [*Literary Memories on the Old Socialist Movement*] (infra: Tiberiu Avramescu, *Amintiri* ...), Bucharest, Edit. Minerva, 1975, p. 216.

³ Const. Mille, *Dinu Millian*, 4th edition, Bucharest, 1913, pp. 136-143, in Tiberiu Avramescu, *Amintiri* ..., pp. 86-87.

⁴ C. D. Anghel, *Cum am devenit socialist* (*How I Became a Socialist*), „Viața românească”, XXV, no. 6-9, June-September 1933, pp. 272-276, in Tiberiu Avramescu, *Amintiri* ..., p. 238.

authorities, determining both hostility and great admiration. He was also a declared free-thinker; he hadn't baptized his children, he did not receive the priest on holidays and the rumour was that a child who had died prematurely had been buried in the garden, obviously, without a priest's presence"⁵.

The learned socialists' apostolic portrait can be read in relation to a relatively sedentary and tame Romanian society, fascinated with the almost fantastic adventures of the socialists whose origins pertained to Tsarist Russia. While the socialist (later poporanist/narodnicist) Constantin Stere is deemed, at only just 30 years of age, a mythical character, holding an early beard, after nearly a decade of Siberian exile, Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea is attributed the same hagiographic, extremely plastic portrayal. Lucian Predescu describes the doctrinaire of Romanian socialism in an inter-war encyclopaedia in the same mythical approach, in an alert, action novel setting. Gherea flees from Russia on account of his socialist ideas: "Arrived with no means of living in Iasi, he took service as a worker at paving streets, sleeping at night on the sand piles in Unirii square. Following a period of lodging in a flophouse, he became a blacksmith's apprentice. From then on, it appears he was earning a living. During the Russo-Turkish war he was living in Brăila, married and with a child. As Robert Jinks, American subject, he dealt with the Russian Red Cross, having access on the sanitary ships. Perhaps he also contacted his former comrades, because he was always in touch with Russian refugees and with international socialist centres. The Russian Police got on to his trail in a sensational manner. They summoned him to the Galați Russian railway station, through a telegram that seemed to have been sent by a well-known charity nurse. There, they rushed him out through the Romanian territory and set him on the road to Russia, giving him a ride through Odessa, Kursk, Orel, Tula, Moscow to Petersburg, accommodating him in jails, obviously. In Petersburg, they even made a fool of him. They told him he was free to leave by train at a certain time; they put him in a carriage and took him to the Petropavlovsk fortress. However, about one year later he escaped and went back, passing through Arkhangelsk, Norway, London, Paris, Vienna, Bucharest and then Ploști"⁶.

The literary critic Eugen Lovinescu refers to Izabela Sadoveanu's bombastic expression, the same as communist historiographer Tiberiu Avramescu mentions the predominant literary nature, and less historical, of her memoirs concerning the socialist movement. It's a manner of writing unlike journalist I. Teodorescu's more accurate style, referring to the same period of emergence of the socialist trend in the Romanian area. The presentation of the facts (of course, subject to interpretation) is not as relevant as the abundance of religious representations of the left-wing

⁵ Z. Ornea, *Curentul cultural de la „Contemporanul”* [The Cultural Movement at „Contemporanul”], Bucharest, Edit. Minerva, 1977, p. 40.

⁶ Lucian Predescu, *Enciclopedia Cugetarea. Material românesc. Oameni și înfăptuiri* [„Cugetarea” Encyclopaedia. Romanian Material. Men and Results], Bucharest, Edit. Cugetarea – Georgescu Delafras, 1940, p. 450.

movement that sustained the dissemination of new ideas in the Romanian society (economic equity, woman and man equality within the society, a materialistic approach to history, the promise of a better future in this world, and so on and so forth). Izabela Sadoveanu considers the powerful intent to “reform the universe” as in a new act of creation, the desire to descry the “deity” of an upcoming, socialist world. She visits Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea as if he were a prophet. The memoirist records the flamboyance of youth, with gentle self-irony and kindness while referring to Gherea’s famous restaurant in Ploiesti: “The train station restaurant radiated cleanness and it appeared to me as the real altar of economic materialism...” The young socialist Izabela dreamt of a new Thebaid, a solitary desert spot chosen by eremites for refuge; this meant a place in which one could contemplate the capitalist society and foresee the new world. Gherea’s library is called a sanctuary and Bucharest socialists, more revolutionary in rhetoric, are deemed heretics, unlike the “gods” from Sărărie, a neighbourhood in Iași where the family Nădejde’s home and the office of *Contemporanul* were situated. Gherea’s portrait is painted in literary key, and the Jewish thinker from Russia is naturalised as Romanian, through the Romanian plane region Dobrogea, nearby the Black Sea. Dobrogeanu-Gherea becomes a contemplator of distances, of heights seen in large spaces, such as the sea and the plane: “Who from among those who’ve known him can forget his smile? He smiled like no one else. There was kindness, benevolence, simplicity, poise and slight self-irony aimed, at the same time, at himself, at the one to whom he was talking and at the entire world’s vainness. His brown, rather oblique eyes looked in the distance, the look of a man who has contemplated since birth the heath or the sea, beneath a harmonious and tall forehead”⁷.

While the socialists’ accounts reveal that many of the petit-bourgeois, poorer Romanian students promoted a certain bohemia, the class and social standing differences in relation to the socialists sprung from the grand boyar and merchant families remain the same. Al. Radovici is one of the wealthy members of PSDMR (Romanian Social Democratic Workers’ Party). He was born in Ploiești, in 1860. He attends classes in the Matei Basarab high school in Bucharest and law courses in Paris and Brussels. He becomes the socialist mayor of Ploiești at the end of the 19th century, supported by the liberals and, in fact, becomes a liberal parliamentary in several legislatures at the beginning of the 20th century, once the “generous” socialists transfer to the liberals. He dies in Iași, in 1918. I. Teodorescu portrays Al. Radovici as an elegant, distinguished, generous young man, extremely wealthy owing to his family. Radovici chooses socialism under the influence of the humanitarian ideas of the era, but the bourgeois milieu absorbs him gradually. He remains a gentleman, annoying the young intellectual socialists who wore shabby clothes not only because of their poverty, but also as an image, in order to

⁷ Izabela Sadoveanu, *Adeverul literar și artistic*, Bucharest, IX, series II, no. 494, May 25th, 1930, p. 1, in Tiberiu Avramescu, *Amintiri...*, Bucharest, Edit. Minerva, 1975, p. 566.

challenge the epoch's bourgeois practices: "Once he could see us, even on the street, Alexandru Radovici would offensively look us up and down, with a stare deliberately harsh, then he would show us our unpolished shoes, criticize the swell in the trouser knees and, finally, have something to say about the tie, which he would wind six ways to Sunday until adjusted..."⁸.

Constantin Mille (1862-1927) is one of the first socialist students in Romania. In 1881, he is expelled from the Iasi university because he disseminated ideas against the social order. In fact, the students in Iasi had started a strike because of the chancellor's abusive behaviour during classes. Although the chancellor is relieved of his function, the heads of the revolt are also expelled. He is one of the founders of *Contemporanul*, responsible of the literary section. He attends law classes in Brussels; he is a member in the Paris Romanian students' socialist revolutionary committee. He takes part to the publishing of the magazine *Dacia viitoare*, issued by the Romanian students in European universities. In 1884, he returns to Romania and takes part to the reinforcement of the Bucharest socialist movement, together with Anton Bacalbaşa and pressman Al. Ionescu. He publishes the first socialist daily paper, *Drepturile omului*; he is one of the leaders of PSDMR and takes part in the congresses of the Socialist International in Brussels and Geneva in the beginning of the 1890s. Because of disagreements with some of the socialist Romanian leaders, particularly with I. Nădejde, he leaves the party in 1895 and manages *Adevărul* for 25 years. From 1921 to the year of his death he is the political manager of the newspaper *Lupta*. His attraction to socialism dates back to his adolescence. In the novel *Dinu Millian*, uncle Mihalache indignantly explains to the 17-year old Dinu what socialist nihilism is: "sharing together lands and women", which stimulates the teenager's imagination. In the beginning, the young man's socialism is sentimental rather than cerebral, a declamatory socialism, a bohemia substitute. The beard is left messy, "for it is in the name of freedom". Hair is kept long. Clothes are dishevelled; buttons are missing or are unstrapped. Boots are larger than his foot size, "so large that, in a quarrel, I could hit the opponent with them, by fanning them away from my feet". As advised by Nădejde, he gives up dancing and bourgeois costume elegance in order to woo girls, and the latter deem him mad: "I crossed the town streets as if I were in a beautiful dream, my forehead straight up, my stare defiant; I walked by in my black riding coat, wearing my dark high hat, my red necktie; I walked by, stirring the town echo with the cane left by my father, resembling a bishop's rod – I walked by like a soul conqueror, boasting the believer's mysticism and the neophyte's audacity"⁹. According to Mille, Iasi's intellectual students were socialists sooner than

⁸ I. Teodorescu, *Din lumea umbrelor [From Beyond the Shadows]*. Alexandru Radovici, *Adeverul*, 40, no. 13.226, January 30th, 1927, pp. 1-2, in Tiberiu Avramescu, *Amintiri...*, p. 657.

⁹ Const. Mille, *Letopisiți. Caragiale [Chronicles. Caragiale]*, „Adeverul”, XXIV, no. 8039, January 30th, 1912, p. 1, in Tiberiu Avramescu, *Constantin Mille. Tinerețea unui socialist*, Bucharest, Edit. Politică, 1973, p. 104.

nationalists. Several of them will later become important lawyers, mayors, famous journalists and physicians.

Socialist virtue and the challenging of the norms are put against a petty bourgeois conventionalism. Young high school girls who glued stamps on envelopes in order to send *Contemporanul* (approximately 6,000 papers were printed at the journal's peak era!) were ashamed to come at the editorial office if, during week, they had taken part in dancing, flirting or in Iasi's high-life events. Socialist principles implied the dismissal of certain useless, leisure and bourgeois indulgence activities. Warned about their bourgeois behaviour, young men rebel against the bourgeoisie from Iasi. Thus, Izabela Sadoveanu recalls that, at a charity event, they had worn "horrible yellowish calico dresses and hats that had been sold for the ridiculous amount of... three lei! One of our friends, close relative of V. G. Morțun, wore opanaks, so that the outrage should be complete!"

Charisma was one of the essential traits of the socialists. While only Gherea was a powerful thinker and remarkable promoter of Marxism, the other socialists stood out by their elocutionary skills, by their ability to persuade an audience to follow an ideal little known in Romania. Thus, C. D. Anghel speaks about socialist V. Gh. Morțun, later a liberal minister of internal affairs but also of public works: "Owing to his pleasant Bedouin face, his melodramatic voice and meaningful gestures, to his impressive elocutionary talent, V. Gh. Morțun had all the prerequisites of a people's tribune. He was a phrase-monger, enthusiastic, quick to answer and a great histrionic. Moreover, he played kissy face and was so easy money that he spent on politics not one, but several large inherited fortunes"¹⁰.

Dr. Russel is the main organizer of the socialist movement during the 1870s and the most emblematic personality from among the decade's socialists; he was described by Z. Ornea: "In Moldova's capital, the socialist circle was, undoubtedly, the most powerful in the whole country. The merit is largely ascribed to doctor Russel. Picturesque and fascinating character, wholly dedicated to serving the socialist ideal, never weary, naturally shifting from professional duties to political ones, skilled in charming both the crowds and the intellectuals, keeping his home permanently accessible to anybody (patients who benefited from free care or socialist neophytes), ready at any time to convert and prompt actions..."¹¹. The Russian-born revolutionary, dr. Russel, arrived in the country in 1875 and banished in 1881 on request from the Russian consulate, is described as an extremely enthusiastic young man, fanatic idealist, optimistic, charming, active, tremendously stimulating orator. It appears Russel had told to the Iasi socialists in his chamber, in front of the always present samovar: "— The path is long through precepts, but short through examples, he said. Nothing will influence people more than the examples

¹⁰ C. D. Anghel, *Cum am devenit socialist [How I Became a Socialist]*, „Viața românească”, XXV, no. 6-9, June-September 1933, pp. 272-276, in Tiberiu Avramescu, *Amintiri...*, p. 240).

¹¹ Z. Ornea, *Curentul cultural de la „Contemporanul”*, Bucharest, Edit. Minerva, 1977, p. 31.

you give. They stir in them the desire to do the same: it is an unconscious suggestion that awakens them and makes them active. The industrious one promotes industry, the lazy one – laziness”. His energy allowed him to share his time among patients, writing, organising the workers’ organization in crafts and editing a newspaper (Basarabia) and socialist propaganda amid pupils and students. Because of the atheist propaganda, the pupils in the Vasile Lupu school, future rural schoolmasters, throw the icons in the yard and trample on them. One of dr. Russel’s posters said “Poor men are always examined free of charge”¹².

Testimonials on the socialists’ socializing places

Similar to other young men who studied in the Romanian universities patched at that time, Const. Mille retrieves his intellectual sources from outside the faculty, as shown in the autobiographical novel previously mentioned. Mille registers with two faculties, the Faculty of Law, which he quits attending shortly after registration because of the chancellor called Mucius in the book, who taught by authoritarian methods, and the Faculty of Letters, deemed irrelevant in relation to the prospective writer’s expectations: “I thought I would find a school for poetry. All of a sudden, I saw myself surrounded by boredom. One explained Greek literature while talking about electricity, which is the decisive cause of humankind’s prosperity... Another one translates his course from the book I have, too. Yet another one talks to me about philosophy, including God, superhuman powers... A entire menagerie!”¹³. Rickard’s (dr. Russel), Cara’s (Nădejde), Garanță’s (poet Th. Speranță), Milian’s socialists and other progressive, socialist or republican young men, of whom some are members of the students’ club founded at the end of the 1870s in Iași, gather each day at the Meisner café. They do not discuss only among themselves, they also talk to workers from different crafts. The young men envisage a “federation of all crafts” in Iași and bear relative success since they manage to stimulate the founding of several union associations: “We will all work together to make associations for them, to organize them in mutual help unions, so that they should resist against employers. In the dark smoke of the café, amid beers and horseradish sausages, our voices ring, calling the people to us, opening their eyes on their rights and duties. Our delicate hands, boyar hands, join the people’s sons rough hands”¹⁴. In the noisy milieu of youth, it was deemed that socialist revolution was imminent, a belief that stimulated the students: “Mystery surrounded everything and mystery caught both your fancy and your terror,

¹² Tiberiu Avramescu, *Constantin Mille. Tinerețea unui socialist [Constantin Mille. A Socialist’s Youth]* (infra: Tiberiu Avramescu, *Constantin Mille...*), Bucharest, Edit. Politică, 1973, p. 76.

¹³ Constantin Mille, *Scrisori alese [Selected Works]* (editor Virgiliu Ene, with a foreword by G. C. Nicolescu), Bucharest, Edit. pentru Literatură, 1961, p. 348.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 366.

showing everything in general. Your young gaze saw and, in fact, heard that social Revolution was only a matter of several years, [that] every aspect was ready, [that] the transformation of the society would come very soon and [that] everything would change from head to toes”.¹⁵

The coffee house was not deemed an aseptic area of bohemian socialization, nor was it deemed a place of vulgar entertainment, but a potential focal point of subversive ideas. For instance, the “Decision of the Iassy University judicial Commission” in the matter concerning the Nădejde brothers, expelled from the education institution because of their “nihilistic” propaganda, shows that, in the socialist gatherings at the Meissner café, the following was disseminated: “socialist ideas, hatred against capital and employers, the necessity of organizing workers in cooperative associations whose benefits should be shared equally among all the members of the association...”¹⁶. With the emergence of a certain setting of the socialist movement, young men move from coffee houses to conference rooms. While Iași is in the foreground of the socialist intellectual movement owing to *Contemporanul*, Bucharest is more active in organizing clubs.

In December 1884, in Bucharest, the *Circle of Social Studies* is founded, which included Vintilă C. A. Rosetti, Const. Mille, Paul Scorțeanu, C. C. Bacalbașa and E. A. Frunzescu. The circle intends to contemplate the “fundamental evils in the Romanian society” and to research the means of correcting problems. The conferences exemplify the students’ socialist and democratic concerns: Paul Scorțeanu – *What Is Socialism*, Const. Mille – *The Property from a Historical Perspective, On Patriotism and Cosmopolitism, Scientific Socialism and Utopian Socialism*, C. C. Bacalbașa – *On Prostitution*, Emil A. Frunzescu – *Evolutionist Ethics*, C. A. Fillitis – *The Religion’s Trade with the State*, Filip Gesticone – *On Freedom*. Conferences are organized until March 1885¹⁷. I. C. Atanasiu recalls that at the Matei Basarab high school in the capital, Al. Radovici’s younger brother is admitted, who introduces to his classmates the socialist ideology, during the autumn of 1884. Thus, Atanasiu, with Vasile Buzoianu and Ion G. Radovici (alias Iancu) read the first socialist works in French. They read articles, pamphlets, books of the “new religion” by authors such as Paul Lafargue, Benoit Malon, Jean Grave, Kropotkin, Elisee Reclus, Bakunin, Domella Nieuwenhuis, therefore some Marxist socialists, but also some anarchist socialists. At the beginning of 1885, Iancu invites the above-mentioned to the conference *On the Agricultural Proletariat* of the older brother, in the Franzelaru room, at the *Circle of Social Studies* “*Human Rights*”. Atanasiu

¹⁵ Const. Mille, *Sub copacul cel umbros (Amintiri din tinerețe)* [*Under the Shady Tree (Youth Memories)*], „Viața socială”, I, no. 1, February 1910, p. 54, in Tiberiu Avramescu, *Constantin Mille...*, p. 59-60.

¹⁶ Tiberiu Avramescu, *Constantin Mille...*, p. 82.

¹⁷ Constantin Bacalbașa, *Bucharesti de altădată* [*Bucharest Once upon a Time*] (1878-1884), editors Aristița and Tiberiu Avramescu, Bucharest, Edit. Eminescu, 1993, p. 224.

records that the room, used for dances, but now hosting a public thirsty for new information, wore red flags, which signalled the lecturers' ideological membership. There he saw for the first time the socialists who later stood out in the autochthonous public space: C. Mille, C.C. Bacalbaşa, C. A. Fillitis etc.¹⁸. In November 1886, the activity of the *Circle of Social Studies* is restarted, this time in hotel Fieschi, not in Franzelaru Room (used during 1884-1885). There is not sufficient proof on the circle and it appears it no longer operated with the previous intensity. Many conferences were held by students. Their theme is circumscribable by the positivist doctrines of the epoch (*Socialism and Darwinism*) and by the socialist ideological currents (*Social Contradictions, The Socialist Program and Its Practical Reforms* starting from the program made at the time by Gherea in *What Do the Romanian Socialists Want*). Mille readies a course of political economy that deals with *The Importance of the Economic Studies and the Definition of Political Economy according to Different Schools, The Property in a Philosophical, Juridical and Economic Approach* etc.

While in Romania were more workers' circles and clubs, the most important, by far, was the Bucharest Workers' Club, established in 1890, formerly the workers circle. The club precedes the founding of the socialist-democratic party. The Executive Committee includes Ioan Nădejde, Const. Mille and Al. Ionescu. Apart from the workers' conferences and meetings, the club publishes the weekly *Munca* until 1894. The club aims to improve the workers' moral and material status and carries out their activities in the famous Sotir room. Starting with 1894, one year prior to the establishment of the Romanian Social Democratic Workers' Party, the club relocates to a more elegant address, in the Băile Euforie building. Similar clubs open in the majority of the big towns in the kingdom. Sotir Room is described as a badly lit chamber, with long tables and "primitive" chairs, where each Saturday conferences would be organized, in which Romanian and foreign intellectuals, workers, pupils and students took part. Most often, lectures would be held by Mille and Tony Bacalbaşa, the latter being famous for the savoury propaganda and the harsh tone of his discourse. Sometimes, lectures would also be held by Nădejde and Morţun and rarely by Gherea. Occasionally, pressmen workers Al. Ionescu and Al. Georgescu or other representatives of the workers would speak. Future liberal I.C. Atanasiu recalls the participation of painter Ştefan Popescu, of later famous professors, such as Constantin Kiriţescu, literary critics such as H. Sanielevici, socialist poets, journalists like I. Teodorescu, the intellectual elite of the Bucharest society, which shattered the class barriers of the epoch¹⁹.

¹⁸ I.C. Atanasiu, *Mișcarea socialistă [The Socialist Movement], 1881-1900*, Bucharest, Edit. Adeverul, p. 11-17, in Tiberiu Avramescu, *Amintiri...*, p. 159-160.

¹⁹ I.C. Atanasiu, *Mișcarea socialistă [The Socialist Movement], 1881-1900*, Edit. Adeverul, 1933, p. 49-52, in Tiberiu Avramescu, *Amintiri...*, p. 303-307.

The modest Sotir room was owned by a landlord (whose name had been given to the room). According to Mille, who presents the room in his autobiographical novel *O viață (A Life)*, the attendants' descriptions are in the following manner: "... the smooth-faced, dreamy young man who has created a social ideal from books, who has given a noble and saint purpose to his life, the purpose of living for his fellows' emancipation..., the factory worker, crushed by the day's labour, who dreamt as in a church, comprehending only little of such phraseology, but understanding at least that here his fate was discussed, that he also contributed to the great structure of a world that would abolish injustice"²⁰.

Socialism was fascinating to the journalist and writer Al. Nora (1876-1947), since he felt it suggested solutions of alternative economic and social development. However, these alternatives were not endorsed by the epoch's political and cultural establishment – socialist texts were not accepted in library because of the dissemination of subversive ideas, which challenged the time's social order. On the other hand, there are teenagers that grow up with the affordable leaflets of the upcoming party. The leaflets allows them to understand the descriptions that did more than analyze the current society; they also foresaw the seeds of the future society: "And, once the first speaker was on the stand, silence would embrace the hall, since each listener wanted to understand the entire line of arguments and presentations carried on, adding new documents to the forecasts of the transformations to be sustained on the realm of social organization"²¹. Journalist Alex F. Mihail draws the attention that, at Sotir, in Amzei Square, scientific conferences would be organized, too, apart from political and ideological ones. Additional to Toni Bacalbașa's sparkling speeches or to Nădejde's lectures on political economy, conferences for scientific promotion were also appreciated; they were held by socialist sympathizing scientists such as Emil Racoviță or I. Cantacuzino²². The readings that drew adolescent Constantin Kirițescu to the Sotir Room was the socialist utopia of writer Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward. 2000-1887* which "exalted" his adolescent aspirations toward a more rightful society, the popular novels and propaganda leaflets on the Russian revolutionaries' and rebels' heroic life, Eminescu's poems such as *Emperor and Proletarian*, which he would recite when he was 16 years old²³.

²⁰ Tiberiu Avramescu, *Constantin Mille...*, p. 285.

²¹ Al. Nora, *La Clubul Sotir*, Edit. Cartea Românească, [*At the Sotir Club*], in *Un om uitat: Const. Mille (A Man Forgotten: Const. Mille)*, Bucharest, 1945, p. 19-24, in Tiberiu Avramescu, *Amintiri...*, p. 312-313.

²² Alex F. Mihail, *Se dărâmă vechile săli socialiste [Eminescu și Caragiale printre socialiști] (The Former Socialist Rooms Demolished [Eminescu and Caragiale among the Socialists])*, *Adeverul*, 49, no. 15.844, 12 September 1935, p. 3, in Tiberiu Avramescu, *Amintiri...*, pp. 317-318.

²³ Constantin Kirițescu, *Tarapanaua prietenului Pițurcă (fragmente) [The Mint of Fellow Pițurcă (fragments)]*, in *Printre apostoli [Among Apostles]*, Bucarest, Cartea Românească, 1929, p. 81-103, in Tiberiu Avramescu, *Amintiri...*, p. 322.

Although Constantin Mille and Tony Bacalbașa were the main animators of the Workers' Club at the Sotir Room, they did not dare lecture on doctrine and ideology issues, where they acknowledged their disinterest in generalization, but they commented harshly on the political and social autochthonous reality, which was preferred by the workers. However, one of the coherence issues of the workers' movement is the lack of lecturers with solid intellectual desires who could maintain a long-term movement. Since Gherea came rarely to the club, Nădejde, who had moved in Bucharest in 1894 in order to lead the socialist party, was known for his halting speech and convoluted explanations. Beyond all shortcomings, the Sotir room had been meant to substitute, in terms of importance, the journal *Contemporanul* (that closed at the end of the 1880s) particularly because the lectures and debates emerged branched out to various fields: arts, economy, sociology, politics, science, social justice, religion²⁴.

The majority of the workers from shops and factories had graduated several primary school classes; only pressmen were higher educated. For this reason, socialist clubs in which both intellectuals and workers took part were, together with the publications, the main means of popular education and political (in)formation. The former president of the Gutenberg printing union during the first quarter of the 19th century, Alexandru Ionescu, was born on July 22nd 1862 and worked in a print shop starting with the age of 13. Following a quarrel and since his family had but little financial possibilities, he quits his job and becomes a student at the Royal Court print shop. He learns French in school and becomes a page upmaker for newspapers in the capital. Because of several conflicts with an employer who mistreated his employees, he joins the socialist movement, where he followed his "actual education", i.e. in the Circle of social studies established in Bucharest in 1884: "He was the first worker under the flag of revolutionary socialism"²⁵.

To worker Ștefan Gheorghiu, too, the workers' club in Ploiești, established in 1891, with more than 200 members, is the scene that provides him, during adolescence, with the opportunity of an education, after the end of the work day. At the club, lectures were held by Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea, Ioan and Sofia Nădejde, V. G. Morțun etc. Here, he reads the newspaper *Democrația socială* published by Anton Bacalbașa starting with 1892 and financed by Al. Radovici. Several decades later, the socialist education allows the worker, who had only attended several primary classes, to hold a conference in the social-democratic club in Brăila and the local Commission of the unions; the conference schedule is surprisingly progressive and academic given that the audience was generally unschooled, but interested in obtaining union rights and arguing the claim of such rights in front of the employers and the state. The plan of the conference on "The Origins and Evolution of Socialism" is published in *România muncitoare* on

²⁴ Z. Ornea, *Curentul cultural de la „Contemporanul”*, Bucharest, Edit. Minerva, 1977, p. 161.

²⁵ Al. Georgescu, *Independența tipografică [Print Shop Independence]*, II, series II, no. 1, April 1st, 1904, p. 5-6, in Tiberiu Avramescu, *Amintiri...*, p. 582-583.

November 29th, 1912 – “The matter will be divided in the following chapters: 1. Introduction: a. Origin of the term socialism; b. How old is socialist; c. Primitive communism; 2. Approaching the issue: a. Plato and his republic; b. Christian communism; c. The Moravian Brothers; 3.a. Thomas Moor (Utopia); b. Campanella (City of the Sun); c. Moreli (The Code of Nature). Pioneers of modern socialism: Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier and Robert Owen. Scientific modern socialism: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels etc. Chapter I The era of slavery; Chapter II; The era of servitude; Chapter III The employee stage. Conclusions. The ideal tendency and the political programme, the political and economic parts”²⁶.

The socialist and workers’ circles carry out a random, irregular activity; they are established and then dissolved several months later. According to the newspaper *Munca* from Iasi, in 1887 nearly 2,000 Bucharest workers were organized in unions: the railway workers from the Association of the iron and wood workers (1000), the Gutenberg association of pressmen, shoemakers in Înfrațirea (200), the Association of leather cutters (300). Many of various craft workers (approximately 600) gather in the autumn of 1887 in order to found a workers’ circle, although the regulations are voted only during the following years. The circle is successful, since the successive meetings are attended by several hundred workers.

Union organization is difficult owing to several reasons: the absence of a culture of association on equalitarian bases in the Romanian area, the lack of a numerous proletariat, the employers’ threats with dismissals in case of organising a union, the abusive police interventions on the various owners of halls, in order not to allow the workers’ gatherings. The circle is organized starting with the winter of 1887, in the Sotir Room. Beyond conferences, periodically, amounts of money are gathered for the workers in strike in other centres throughout the country²⁷.

Student socialist circles were established on Romanian territory starting with the end of the 1870s. The first was in Iași: “The association for culture and solidarity among students”, an informal association, established without any act of incorporation. Doctor Sabin, former socialist, notes that the meetings were informal, lacking minutes and secretaries, organized in the dining hall of the hotel Concordia. While drinking a beer or a glass of wine, they would discuss “social, scientific issues or listened to Sdubcu Codreanu’s stories of the pains endured in Russia”²⁸. According to the doctor, the Iasi socialists’ discussions ranged from the collectivization of labour tools, pacifism, women’s emancipation, workers’ insurance, to political rights for minorities etc. However, the means of carrying out or at least of disseminating the ideals were limited; they were represented by the

²⁶ Georgeta Tudoran (introduction and anthology by), *Ștefan Gheorghiu. Publicistică militantă [Ștefan Gheorghiu. Militant Publishing](1906-1913)*, Bucharest, Edit. Politică, p. 47-48.

²⁷ Tiberiu Avramescu, *Constantin Mille...*, p. 222.

²⁸ dr. Sabin, *Amintiri cu bucluc [Entangled Memories]*, „Dimineața”, X, no. 3190, January 21st, 1913, p. 4, in Tiberiu Avramescu, *Amintiri...*, p. 4.

newspaper *Besarabia* and by the relatively restricted socialist circles for debates. The romantic gap between the social aspirations and the existing means is noted by all testimonials, but the level of the discussions, the arguments and the questioning of certain social realities of the era are appreciated.

The student circle of social studies was established on December 22nd, 1891; the idea cropped up following the weekly meeting at Cafe Union. All the students, albeit poor, would contribute regularly. Such amounts of money made possible the acquisition of books sent from Paris by dr. Ion Radovici. The reading was made in common; Ion Teodorescu would read aloud, then a discussion of the things read would follow. Painter Ștefan Popescu remembers the students' poverty; they had no house and eating hall; such poverty was opposed by their strong belief in the future coming of socialism, which would redeem the injustice of the present world. By fancy and protest, they isolated from an inadequate reality: "I remember a trip we took – boys and girls, students in the party. I had a rugged hat and wore it as if it were a trophy, my cane piercing its hideous hole. A hole in a hat was a reason to be proud! Like the monks during the first renaissance, enlightened, we thought we had finally found the truth, the one and only truth. Our purpose in this world stood clear before us: prepare the world for the times to come. We saw the abyss that separated the classes and we sought to explain to the proletariat their huge role in this fatal, historic transformation. We sought to make them aware in order to avoid a cataclysm"²⁹.

They would read literature, philosophy, and socialist ideology at the circle, as guided by Gherea: "Educate yourselves!" S. Sanielevici (future professor at the university in Iasi), future socialist publicist Panait Mușoiu, Ion Teodorescu, Dem. Dobrescu, future mayor of Bucharest, literates Artur Stavri and I. Păun-Pincio, democrat journalist who had studied political economy in Berlin, Beno Brănișteanu, university professor Dimitrie Ionescu and many other names.

Mille arrives in Paris at the middle of the 1880s where he met Vintilă and Horia Rosetti, Alexandru Radovici, Alex. Bădărău, Mișu Săulescu, Grigore Maniu etc. The testimony is romantic, disillusioned; the pragmatic or otherwise unsavoury current situation of the country invalidated the ideals of youth: "I was at the centre of the cultural life and close to the sun, we were young, the same ideal kept us fed, the same dream cradled us; nothing ugly resided in our confidence, no impurity had touched us, we lived for our dream; we educated our soul and steeled our heart, we prepared so that, once back in the country, we should carry out our parents' work, who, in 1848, had put the basis of a new Romania"³⁰.

²⁹ Alex. F. Mihail (interview), *O oră cu pictorul Ștefan Popescu [An Hour with Painter Ștefan Popescu]*, *Adeverul*, 48, no. 15.418, April 8th, 1934, p. 3, in Tiberiu Avramescu, *Amintiri...*, p. 352-353.

³⁰ Const. Mille, *Adeverul*, XXIV, no. 7671, January 18th, 1911, p. 1, in Tiberiu Avramescu, *Amintiri...*, p. 590.

Biologist and writer Paul Bujor (1862-1952), future university professor in Iasi, spent his student years in Paris and in Geneva during 1887-1891, where he attends the circle of the Romanian socialist students. The circle, including students such as the Radovici brothers, George Diamandy, Costică Anghel, Emil Racoviță, Dionisie Many etc. met in Paris, deemed the world's cultural capital, in various cafés in the epicentre of the French intellectual life, to which future remarkable politicians also took part, such as Aristide Briand, minister and prime minister at the beginning of the 20th century, the Marxist doctrinaire Jules Guesde and ideologist Paul Lafargue etc. Unlike the era of his youth, Bujor, similar to so many other socialists, notices the gap between the hopes of the socialist youth and the "reactionary" spirit of the 1930s in Romania³¹. Dr. Al. Slătineanu (1873-1939), future chancellor of the Iasi university, receives his doctorate in medicine in Paris, is fascinated by socialism since adolescences because of the Pyotr Kropotkin's leaflet *To the Youth*, interested in a "more just distribution of earthly belongings". The readings from *Contemporanul*, the initiation in the works of Marx, under the guidance of Nădejde, represent the first steps, succeeded by additional knowledge attained in the Parisian socialist environment. Slătineanu remembers they met at the end of each week in dr. Ion Radovici's dining room and debated ideological subjects³². Then, they would meet daily in the café Cluny and attended conferences held by the ascending socialist leader Jean Jaures, they kept an eye on the Dreyfus affair, empathized with Diamandy's attempt of publishing the French magazine *L'Ere Nouvelle* to which the most important left-wing French doctrinaires contributed, such as Guesde, Lafargue, Deville or Georges Sorel. C. D. Anghel notes the socializing students in Paris, who met each day in the café Vachette, when cafés "had not yet disappeared in front of the American bar invasion, in which cocktails and other strong alcoholic beverages are now served, on the run, while standing". The 20th century had not yet invaded the leisure of the students who drank their coffee for hours, while reading newspapers and magazines, telling stories, accompanied by their friends, as Anghel writes down nostalgically, *de omni re scibili et quibusdam* (about anything that may be known and more). Dr. Radovici dominated the heated discussions on the Dreyfus affair, on the danger represented by general Boulanger's authoritarianism, which could overthrow the radical democrat government or on socialist ideology³³. The socialist group in Paris had 27 members, according to C. D. Anghel; in 1894, they draw a report for the second Congress of PSDMR, concerning the socialist activity. A decade prior to

³¹ C. Săteanu (interview), *With Professor Paul Bujor on the Former Socialist Movement*, Adeverul, 47, no. 15.338, January 3rd, 1934, p. 3, in Tiberiu Avramescu, *Amintiri...*, p. 279-280.

³² Al. Slătineanu, *Nedumeririle unui fost socialist [A Former Socialist's Query]*(fragment), *Însemnări ieșene*, Iași, I, no. 3, February 1st, 1936, p. 79-81, in Tiberiu Avramescu, *Amintiri...*, p. 286-287.

³³ C. D. Anghel, *Amintiri din vremuri apuse [Memories from Times Forgotten]*, *Libertatea*, I, no. 15-16, 5-20 August 1933, p. 241-245; no. 18, September 20th, 1933, p. 278-279, in Tiberiu Avramescu, *Amintiri...*, p. 414-415.

Anghel's studies in Paris, Mille remembers that the Romanian left wing in Paris, socialist or merely radical, met in the café Cluny, the headquarters where the journal *Dacia viitoare* was edited. The meetings occupied the whole day, until late in the night, when the café would close. Not all of them had money like grand boyars' sons, but, even if they did not order much, the ideas were discussed passionately.

Journalist I. Teodorescu writes about the Bucharest socialists' gatherings at Dionisie Many's (1866-1920), where, for three years, a "small intellectual academy" operated, doing without the "stupid, unhealthy and expensive life of bars and cafés". The core was made by Many, Toni Bacalbașa, Artur Stavri, Paul Bujor and I. Teodorescu, but Gherea, Caragiale, Nădejde, Al. Radovici, George Diamandy, Mille etc. would also come. Teodorescu feels nostalgia after the "association of accomplished fellows" at the beginning of the 1890s and is at the same time aware that the beliefs of youth resembled a modern version of social mysticism. In an article published in the newspaper *Adevărul*, journalist Teodorescu compares socialism to a mystical rose, an altruism that appeared to have vanished with the inter-war generations because, we may infer on the memoirist's writing intentions, the new ideological right wing trends were more sceptical and non-democratic with respect to social inclusion issues. Journalist I. Teodorescu also recalls a phenomenon new at that time: the friendship between genders, the platonic relation that existed between men and women who shared ideals.

Izabela Sadoveanu depicts splendidly the socialist motivations of scholar Dimitrie Voinov, rich boyars' son, who had studied in Paris, sporadically attending the Many circle: as a rational human being, he detested the forms of authoritarian power in the society, which inhibited the creative possibilities of people from different social categories. Socialist-born anti-authoritarianism takes shape during his adolescence and when in Paris, where he studies biology, together with other socialists who had later become international scientists: Emil Racoviță, Paul Bujor and I. Cantacuzino. The memoirist notes the Apollonian, platonic love between the genders in the Many circle: "We had gone beyond romanticism and its foolish and often ridiculous excitement. The still new mores provided us, for the first time, with the possibility of seeing ourselves equal to our male fellows. The equality and friendship in the Russian revolutionary movement was the example we hoped to follow. We wanted to be like Tihomirov's heroes and surpass the troubled and uneven states in Tolstoy's nihilist-centred novels"³⁴.

Socialism appears in the memoirist's representations as a political theology, in contrast to a Weber's definition of the public space dominated by capitalism, by utilitarian and lucrative relations. The cafés, the circles and the clubs attended by

³⁴ Izabela Sadoveanu, *Zile de prietenie [Days of Friendship]*, „Adeverul literar și artistic”, XVIII, no. 902, March 20th, 1938, p. 11; no. 905, April 10th, 1938, p. 11-12, in Tiberiu Avramescu, *Amintiri...*, p. 347-349.

the socialists scatter the social barriers of the era and suggest a pattern of fraternity and equalitarian relation, as few institutions suggested at that time. According to Izabela Sadoveanu, the socialists wanted a “laymen’s monastery”, an augmented, considerate fellowship, far from any bourgeois pettiness, like the books of the Russian revolutionaries they read piously or the social criticism theories they discussed later in socialist milieus.

Even the 1939 *Encyclopaedia of Romania* acknowledged, during the Carlist dictatorship, the innovative nature of Romanian socialism as “pioneer of all new ideas”, an aspect owed to the studies in Western university centres by future politicians, journalists and scientists who attended socialist circles³⁵.

The writer Tudor Arghezi deems academic the atmosphere surrounding socialist clubs and publications; these represented the people’s universities owing to the high level at which certain social theories were disseminated and workers’ rights were advocated. Starting from various testimonials by certain socialists or former members of the movement, we have recomposed a portrait of the socialists by the physical, exterior appearance, and the specifically socialist socializing and education places. “The people’s academies” to which reference is made by Arghezi carry in no way a negative meaning, simply because many of the aspects discussed in the cafés and clubs, from political economy to philosophy and art, were not present in the university curricula. The university did not hold a monopoly on knowledge; it does not have it now either. On the contrary, socialist and workers’ clubs imply a progress of the attendants’ education level and social awareness standards, the same as the popular, leisure culture of the era of dance halls, circus, fairs and other forms of socialization could not provide them: “Against the machinery of escapist dissipation, [the socialists] compensated with the argument that workers need to organize their spare time in collective and morally uplifting manners”³⁶.

³⁵ Ion Teodorescu, Izabela Sadoveanu, *Amintiri [Memoirs]*, editor Aristița Avramescu. Foreword and notes by Tiberiu Avramescu, Bucharest, Edit. Eminescu, 1980, p. 8.

³⁶ Geoffrey Eley, *What Is Cultural History?*, „New German Critique”, No. 65, Cultural History/Cultural Studies (Spring – Summer, 1995), p. 27.