

Martin Veith



**War against
war**

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ANARHIVA aims to gather and document the little-known history of the emergence of anarchist ideas in Romania, from the 19th century to the present day.



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Editorial note (2022)

The translation of this text, published by Martin Veith in 2012, was started a long time ago. We have recently resumed translating it, motivated, on one hand, by the desire to bring to light unknown aspects of local libertarian history; and, on the other, by the conviction that history has its lessons, which we can better decipher by looking not so much back, as forward.

The article is devoted to a little-explored theme in the historiography of the anarchist movement in Romania: the opposition that existed before the First World War to militarization and to war.

In general, the period is treated almost exclusively through the prism of a nationalist discourse that glorifies the army, the important political figures of the period, or the royal house, painting a picture of an almost complete consensus regarding Romania's participation in the war. Few histories of the period mention the deprivations, the revolt of those who refused to die or kill for an illusory "homeland", the brutal repression of the workers' movement by the state, or the precarious and harsh conditions of their existence. Too little of the official narrative includes the military and humanitarian catastrophe that followed, the destruction, disease and death that was paid for the so-called "national reunification". At the same time, the workers' resistance to the war is not to be overlooked precisely because it tells a different story altogether, one that, especially today, we should take into consideration. It is not the story of the enlargement of borders, but of the solidarity of those who sought a better

life for all, regardless of nationality. It is not the story of cruelty, murder and dehumanization, but of hope, desire for life and resistance. The historical contexts are different, but many patterns remain unchanged today. Therefore, the example of those who opposed war and militarization can give us a good opportunity to reflect on the society in which we live today, but also the feeling that, in history, not only the voice of cruelty, greed and death (pompously called patriotism) has prevailed and can still prevail, but also the voice of reason, solidarity and life.

Anarhiva

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Martin Veith (b. 1972) is a worker, researcher and publicist in the anarcho-syndicalist and anarchist press. His studies and articles concern the anarcho-syndicalist movement in Germany, the history of anarchism and syndicalism in Romania and the anarchist anti-war movements. In Germany, he has published two volumes on the Romanian anarchists and on the revolutionary labour movement, one dedicated to Panait Muşoiu and the other to Ştefan Gheorghiu. He is also an active member of the “Institut für Syndikalismusforschung” [Institute for the Study of Trade Unionism] and edited the journal *Bună – Zeitschrift für Befreiung & Emanzipation – nicht nur in Rumänien* (2014-2022).

„War against war!” Agitation and resistance of anarchists and syndicalists against the First World War in Romania¹

The resistance of Romanian anarchists and syndicalists² against the First World War has not been researched until now. During the period of state capitalism (“real socialism”), representations of resistance from the worker and socialist movements against the First World War categorize syndicalists under the generic term of “socialists”. They omit to mention or discuss the anarcho-syndicalist ideas and practices behind some of the anti-militaristic and anti-war positions during that period. The focus of these publications is on various currents within Romanian social democracy. A great deal of attention is also given to the activity of those who became founding members of the Romanian Communist Party in 1921. However, in the case of militants with previous syndicalist or anarcho-syndicalist sympathies their respective activities are generally glossed over. This is the case, for example, of the printer, syndicalist and editor of revolutionary newspapers, Gheorghe M. Vasilescu

1. The original version of this text, with the title “«Krieg dem Krieg» – Agitation und Widerstand von Anarchisten und Syndikalisten gegen den Ersten Weltkrieg in Rumänien”, originally appeared in the volume edited by Andreas W. Hohmann (ed.), *Ehern, tapfer, vergessen – Die unbekannt International. AnarchistInnen & SyndikalistenInnen und der Erste Weltkrieg* [Honest, Brave, Forgotten – The Unknown International. Anarchists and Anarchists and Syndicalists in the First World War], Edition AV, Lich/Hessen, 2015 (n. ed.).

2. “Syndikalisten” is a German term for revolutionary trade unionism. We have opted for the simple version “syndicalism/sindicalist” in translation, adding “revolutionary” where we thought it needed to be clarified, to distinguish it from reformist trade unions or professional unions (ed.).

(1891-1929); of the syndicalist, mechanic and leader of the Transport Workers' Union, a union with strong revolutionary influences, Constantin Mănescu (1882-1971); or the anarchist publicist and syndicalist organizer Iuliu Neagu-Negulescu (1878-1940).

Interest in the history of the anarchist and syndicalist movement in Romania has grown since 2008, both at home and abroad, leading to more research on the subject.³

For the present text, dedicated to the anarchist and syndicalist resistance against the First World War, I have used, among others, the secret police (Siguranță) documents that have been made public, as well as other historical researches and information. I would like to mention here, in particular, the valuable contribution of historian Mariana Hausleitner. Her 1988 dissertation, *Die nationale Frage in der rumänischen Arbeiterbewegung vor 1924* [*The National Question in the Romanian Labour Movement before 1924*], also contains a detailed overview of the resistance of socialists and social-democrats in Romania against the First World War and militarization. It also briefly presents the activities of syndicalists, where relevant information from that period was available.⁴ Today's representations of the First World War in Romania are almost exclusively nationalistic, glorifying the army, the generals, the royal house or the secret services.⁵

3. There are plenty of informative contributions on anarchist and syndicalist currents within the Romanian labour movement. Regarding their role in the more general context of the socialist workers' movement in Romania, we can mention some works from the late 1980s. For example, Jochen Schmidt: *Populismus oder Marxismus: Zur Ideengeschichte der radikalen Intelligenz Rumäniens 1875-1915*, Tübingen, 1992. The Institute for Syndicalist Research in Bremen (Institut für Syndikalismusforschung) has also researched the anarchist and syndicalist movement in Romania and has published several articles on the subject in recent years: <http://www.syndikalismusforschung.info/>.

4. See: Mariana Hausleitner, *Die nationale Frage in der rumänischen Arbeiterbewegung vor 1924*, Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, 1988.

5. A particularly uncritical study of the Siguranță (the secret police) has recently appeared at Editura Militară: Alin Spănu, *Serviciul de informații al României în războiul de întregire națională (1916 – 1920)*, București, 2012.

National defense cannot be taken into account, for it is not national defense, but the defense of the interests of the rich, the few against the poor, the many.

To be able to establish peace, to emancipate ourselves from military servitude, we must fight for ourselves. And there is only one effective way to do this: to refuse to submit!

As long as we continue to be docile, as long as we have the impudence to serve them as cannon fodder, the cannon will fire. Let us refuse this and the cannon will fall silent.

The disarmament dreamed of by pacifists can only be achieved by our willingness to disarm ourselves.

WAR AGAINST WAR!
„Propaganda Sindicalistă” circle from Ploiești (1912)

airships, machine guns, latest-formula explosives, latest-model projectiles etc. We shall witness mass massacres, by electric light and wireless telegraphy!

And now, why these rivers of human blood, why these piles of corpses? Why this suffering, why this insane destruction of wealth and property? Why the wanton waste of so many lives, so much energy, so much heroism?

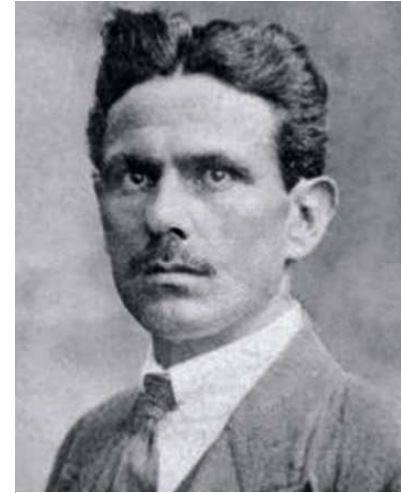
Only and only in order to know which big financiers, landlords, businessmen, politicians, masters of social wealth will have the right to own and exploit poor Macedonia... No matter how you twist and turn the issue, for the working people, it has no other meaning.

That is why, in so-called enlightened times, we shall have war everywhere around us; and no one knows that it won't spread like a spark, setting the whole of Europe ablaze.

That is why today, when everywhere there is only talk of disarmament, of peace, when sovereigns and ministers only open their mouths to assure us of their infinite desire for world peace, the madness of war is about to break out in all its fury!

Will we, the workers, at least be able to learn from these events? Will it dawn on us that, from the mouths of those whose whole life is nothing but greed and violence, the desire for domination and riches, every word of peace is a lie and shameless hypocrisy?

If we want the crimes of war to come to an end, then let us refuse to be the victims and accomplices of our masters! As long as the imbecile religion of the Fatherland rules us, we will be their slaves; we will be their cannon fodder. Enough with all this crime, nonsense and mischief! It's time to put an end to this sinister comedy that has been playing at our expense for so long. When they keep saying that "The Fatherland demands, the Fatherland wants", let's close the mouths of the charlatans once and for all with: "The Fatherland is us, the workers, the producers of all social wealth, and only we know better than anyone what has to be done!"



Ștefan Gheorghiu

A peculiarity of the history of anarchism and syndicalism in Romania is that neither of these movements gave rise to independent national organizations. The only attempt in this direction, probably made with the intention of founding a broader syndicalist federation, failed in 1912, after a short time.⁶ As far as we know, independent anarchist federations, as in other neighbouring countries, such as Bulgaria or Ukraine, have never existed in Romania.⁷ The result was that syndicalists, anarcho-syndicalists and class struggle anarchists were active within the general organizations of the workers' and socialist movement. This was especially the case with the Central Commission of Romanian Trade Unions (CGSR), an organization strongly influenced by social-democratic and Marxist leaders.

At the local level—and, in the case of Ștefan Gheorghiu (1879-1914), a syndicalist with anarcho-communist sympathies,⁸ and Constantin Mănescu, also at the national level—syndicalists had a strong influence on the small workers' movement in Romania, a predominantly agrarian country at the time.⁹ Much

6. See the chapters „Vremuri Noi” and „Mișcarea Socială” in Martin Veith: *Unbeugsam – Ein Pionier des rumänischen Anarchismus – Panait Mușoiu*, Edition AV, Lich/Hessen, 2013.

7. It was only in the early 1930s that an explicitly anarcho-syndicalist organisation with around 200 members existed in Bukovina, with its centre in Chernivtsi. Most of the members were Jewish workers and tradesmen and they formed a section of the anarcho-syndicalist International. This section was pursued and eventually crushed by the Romanian state and secret service by brutal methods.

8. On Ștefan Gheorghiu see Martin Veith, „În memoria lui Ștefan Gheorghiu”, text available on the Râvna blog: <https://iasromania.wordpress.com/2018/03/19/in-memoria-lui-Ștefan-gheorghiu/>. Also see Martin Veith, *Militant! Ștefan Gheorghiu und die revolutionäre Arbeiterbewegung Rumäniens* [Militant! Ștefan Gheorghiu and the Romanian Revolutionary Labour Movement], Verlag Edition AV, Lich, 2015.

9. According to 1913 statistics, there were 308,358 workers and craftsmen in Romania. They represented 4.5% of the total population of 7.5 million people. See Mariana Hausleitner, *Die nationale Frage...*, p. 214.

to the dissatisfaction of Marxists, they popularized the syndicalist tactic of “direct action” and the idea of autonomous syndicates. The carpenter Ștefan Gheorghiu, in particular, was very popular among the workers because of his modest and sincere character, but also for his revolutionary intransigence and personal commitment.

The syndicalists’ work also aimed to raise the consciousness of the workers. It was not geared towards winning seats in parliament or reforms, but towards concrete change through strikes and social revolution. The syndicalists had the greatest influence on port and transport workers in Brăila and Galați and in the oil regions of the Prahova Valley, around the small town of Câmpina, north of Ploiești. In the Prahova Valley, syndicalist and anarchist propaganda and education can be traced back to 1902, and in the two port towns already mentioned, it dates from the 1880s. Through the educational activity of syndicalists and anarchists, workers also became familiar with anti-militarist ideas. In addition, the workers, both in the Prahova Valley and in the port cities, were of a markedly multi-ethnic composition. The syndicalists and anarchists put the common interests of the workers first, regardless of their nationality.

The Balkan wars

South-Eastern Europe and the Balkans have periodically been ravaged by wars. The geopolitical interests of governments, often cloaked in nationalist rhetoric, were imposed by armed force. During the First Balkan War (September 1912-May 1913), which destroyed the influence of the Ottoman Empire in the region and saw Bulgaria and Greece emerge as local powers, Romania took a hesitant and neutral stance, even though the mainly nationalist press inside the country supported the entry into the war. Romania abandoned this attitude with the outbreak of the Second Balkan War (June 1913-July 1913). Bulgaria, which was not content with the territories it had acquired during the First Balkan War, and had additional territorial claims,

War against war!

Patriotism is the father of the
monster called war.

Let’s disarm ourselves!

The Balkan peninsula has been gripped by the claws of war for some time. Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, Turkey and even tiny Montenegro have mobilized their armed forces. More than a million men armed to the teeth with the deadliest weapons stand face to face, ready at a signal from their masters to furiously throw themselves at each other.

Moral cowardice, the habit of submitting without a murmur to the most idiotic, wicked and immoral orders, the cult of brutal force and the religion of violence, the results of patriotic education, are bearing fruit today.

The hard-working people, intoxicated by fiery tirades, in which the words fatherland, patriotism, national defense are taken in vain, are dragged towards madness, hideousness and murder. From one moment to the next, we can expect the bloody brawl to break out. Then, the beast in man will come out, all the ancestral dormant instincts will be awakened, and we shall witness murders that will once again bloody the pages of the history of our supposedly civilized times.

We shall see put to the test on the the proletarians the most terrible tools of destruction, all the infernal machines that the gentle scientists have been conjuring up in the peace and quiet of their workrooms: aerial torpedoes, floating mines, submarines, automatic pistols, repeating rifles, rapid-fire guns, airplanes, enormous

Tudoran, Georgeta: „Ștefan Gheorghiu. Publicistică militantă (1906-1913)”, Editura Politică, București, 1980.

Veith, Martin: „În memoria lui Ștefan Gheorghiu”, text disponibil pe blogul Râvna: <https://iasromania.wordpress.com/2018/03/19/in-memoria-lui-Ștefan-gheorghiu/>.

--- *Militant! Ștefan Gheorghiu und die revolutionäre Arbeiterbewegung Rumäniens*, Verlag Edition AV, Lich, 2015.

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“War against war!” manifesto (1912)

Dobrogea (or Cadrilater). It was only after annexation that the Romanian government deliberately colonized southern Dobrogea with Romanian settlers.

“War against war” (1912)

Signs of impending war alarmed syndicalists. In Ploiești, where the independent Propaganda Sindicalistă circle was active, printing brochures, and whose secretary was Ștefan Gheorghiu, the syndicalists decided to go out in public with a manifesto. Published on the eve of the First Balkan War, the manifesto, titled “War against War”, addressed workers and urged them to lay down their arms. The message was also directed against nationalism and patriotism. The text was written by Ștefan Gheorghiu, Constantin Mănescu and Alexandru Vodă and was published on behalf of the Ploiești circle. Below are some excerpts from the manifesto:

was at war with all the other surrounding countries (Serbia in the west, Greece in the south and the Ottoman Empire in the east), and could offer only minimal resistance to the Romanian army, which acting independently of the other states. Romanian troops soon reached the gates of the capital, Sofia. They later withdrew, but Romania claimed and annexed the southern part of Dobrogea, a region along the Black Sea, in order to “liberate the Romanian brothers subjugated by the Bulgarians”, as the officials claimed. However, Romanians made up only 2.3% (6,348 people) of the population of southern

Moral cowardice, the habit of submitting without a murmur to the most idiotic, wicked and immoral orders, the cult of brutal force and the religion of violence, the results of patriotic education, are bearing fruit today. The hard-working people, intoxicated by fiery tirades, in which the words fatherland, patriotism, national defense are taken in vain, are dragged towards madness, hideousness and murder. From one moment to the next, we can expect the bloody brawl to break out. Then, the beast in man will come out, all the ancestral dormant instincts will be awakened, and we shall witness murders that will once again bloody the pages of the history of our supposedly civilized times.

Behind the will to war, the manifesto said, were the financial interests of the ruling classes:

And now, why these rivers of human blood, why these piles of corpses? Why this suffering, why this insane destruction of wealth and property? Why the wanton waste of so many lives, so much energy, so much heroism? Only and only in order to know which big financiers, landlords, businessmen, politicians, masters of wealth will have the right to own and exploit poor Macedonia... No matter how you twist and turn the issue, for the working people, it has no other meaning.

Crimes, the manifesto said, could only be prevented if the workers themselves refused to go to war:

If we want the crimes of war to come to an end, then let us refuse to be the victims and accomplices of our masters! As long as the imbecile religion of the Fatherland rules us, we will be their slaves; we will be their cannon fodder. Enough with all this crime, nonsense and mischief! It's time to put an end to this sinister comedy that has been playing at our expense for so long. When they keep saying that "The Fatherland demands, the Fatherland wants", let's close the mouths of the charlatans once and for all with: "The Fatherland is us, the workers, the producers of all social wealth, and only we know better than anyone what has to be done!"

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To be able to establish peace, to emancipate ourselves from military servitude, we must fight for ourselves. And there is only one effective way to do this: to refuse to submit!

As long as we continue to be docile, as long as we have the impudence to serve them as cannon fodder, the cannon will fire. Let us refuse this and the cannon will fall silent.

The disarmament dreamed of by pacifists can only be achieved by our willingness to disarm ourselves.

WAR AGAINST WAR!

Both the government and the Marxists (social-democrats) reacted immediately to this call. The text, which was sent from Ploiești to other groups and organizations, was generally very well received by the workers. The government saw the text as an “incitement to defection” and ordered the confiscation of all available copies. Ștefan Gheorghiu, Constantin Mănescu and printer T. Ionescu were arrested at the end of September and held in prison for over a month. In court, Gheorghiu refused to give the names of the workers who helped him distribute the flyer and said that “he alone” had drafted the text, taken it to the printer and distributed it among workers. In front of the judges, he declared: “I do not retract anything contained in this manifesto, and I adopt its entire contents”.¹⁰

Constantin Mănescu also stated that he “alone” had distributed the manifesto. T. Ionescu, the printer, also took the blame. He not only declared that he had printed the text, but also claimed that he was its sole author. Mănescu and Gheorghiu should have been released immediately, he claimed, because they were innocent.¹¹ In May 1913, the accused were found guilty of “anti-militarism and anti-patriotism” and sentenced each to five days in prison (including the one month imprisonment) and a fine of 25 lei.

10. Georgeta Tudoran, Ștefan *Gheorghiu. Publicistică militantă (1906–1913)*, Editura Politică, București, 1980, p. 77.

11. *Ibidem*, p. 78.

How did the Marxists of the Bucharest Trade Union Centre react to the text “War against war”? The editorial office of the trade union confederation and the Social Democratic Party newspaper, *România Muncitoare*, refused to publish it. Under the heading “News”, the newspaper reported the publication of the manifesto, but stated that the text contained “positions contrary to those of the party and the trade union”. Within the organization, the executive committees asked all members “to stop, prevent the dissemination of the manifesto” and prevent further “isolated actions”. From the central office in Bucharest, the Social Democratic Party sent two delegates to Ploiești, Nae Georgescu and the former syndicalist militant, Alecu Constantinescu (1872-1949), to persuade syndicalists to destroy the manifesto and refrain from further action. The “Centre” had chosen these two because they were both part of the party’s left wing. For this reason, it was hoped that a “deal” could be reached. If somewhat more “moderate” delegates had been sent, no deal could have been reached. However, the delegates were shown the door and returned unsuccessfully to Bucharest.

Shortly afterwards, an event in support of the manifesto was held at the Ploiești Workers’ Club. Among those in favour was the socialist and publisher Mihail Gh. Bujor (1881-1964). Support also came from workers’ clubs in Turnu-Severin, Giurgiu, Craiova and Botoșani. In their telegrams to *România Muncitoare*, workers declared their solidarity with the manifesto (“We cry out with you: war against war and peace to the world!”), while criticizing the actions of the party and leadership.

But that wasn’t all. The “Centre” had to back down, bit by bit. After the manifesto had gained in popularity, the executive committee first declared that the manifesto “formulates a fair criticism of the war”, only to add later, with a didactic finger raised in the best political fashion: “The manifesto contains false views which may cause confusion within the workers’ movement and which could weaken the movement and thereby endanger its unity. Moreover, it could create the pretext for provocations and police witch-hunts against the syndicalist and socialist movement”.

as Otto Korvin. Martyn Everett, who has researched anarchists and syndicalists in Hungary, puts the number of victims of counter-revolutionary terror at 30,000, of whom 4,000 were executed and 9,000 died of starvation and/or torture in camps.⁴⁰

At the end of the First World War and the military campaigns in Hungary and Transylvania, about 350,000 Romanian soldiers had lost their lives. Romania’s ruling class had won. Huge territorial gains in Transylvania, Banat and the annexation of Bessarabia to the Romanian kingdom (April 8, 1918) enlarged Romanian territory and made it possible to exploit new resources. This is how Greater Romania was born.

The courageous resistance of anarchists and syndicalists against the war and imperialist aspirations was not enough to stop them. Without joint action with the peasants, who remained passive, the small, class-conscious workers’ movement in Romania could not have much influence. This numerical minority position probably also explains why, unlike in Germany and Hungary, there were no large-scale workers’ uprisings in Romania following the Russian Revolution. Anarchists and especially syndicalists in Romania did everything they could to change things in a positive direction, while recognizing the interests of big business behind the war. It is well suited to them what Alexander Schapiro (1882-1946), secretary of the International Trade Unionist Workers’ Association (IWA-AIT), remarked: “The deep differences, the national enmity and hatred, which separate states and drive them to fight wars, whatever they may be, end at one point. States and governments all over the world are united, even very united, when it comes to allying against the common class enemy: the proletariat. For the working class, international solidarity has never been empty words. Workers in all countries have always been aware that they share a common fate, that of being oppressed and exploited. And this brought them together, made them united.”⁴¹

40. Martyn Everett, *War and Revolution*, p. 25.

41. Alexander Schapiro, Secretary of the IWA-AIT, in „Tactica IWA-AIT” [f.a.].



Romanian Revolutionary Battalion in Odessa, 1918.

(although Transylvania had never been part of the Romanian state). Romanian army units occupied Transylvania.

Within weeks, as it advanced, the Romanian army crushed the workers' and soldiers' councils in Arad, Oradea and other towns, and by July 1919, it was at the gates of the Hungarian capital. In defense of the Soviet republic, the socialist trade unions and syndicalists in the Budapest factories managed to mobilize 50,000 workers, but they were only able to stop the advance of the Romanian army for a short time.³⁸ But this was enough time for a group of Hungarian communists, led by Béla Kun (1886-1938), the leader of the Soviet republic, to negotiate a secret treaty with the French government and flee the country.³⁹

On August 1, 1919, the Romanian army's final offensive begun, and Budapest fell. The massacre of the revolutionaries immediately followed. The capital was thus handed over to the ultra-nationalist and reactionary Admiral Miklós Horthy (1868-1957), who seized power in the country. Among the revolutionaries who were tortured to death were well-known anarchists such

38. Martyn Everett, *War and Revolution: The Hungarian Anarchist Movement in World War I and the Budapest Commune (1919)*, Kate Sharpley Library, London și Berkeley, 2006, p. 23.

39. *Ibidem*, p. 24.

This was the typical behavior of party officials and “centrists”, encountered to this day, of condemning the independent actions of the workers, i.e. those which could not be put under tutelage. The workers were again treated as ignorant “sheep” who had to be protected from “confusion” by the party and syndicalist leadership. After all, it was necessary for them to believe only what they were told by the party leadership. Thinking for oneself, drawing one's own conclusions and autonomous action were opposed to “party discipline”.

Even after this stance, those in the party and trade union leaderships could not rest easy. Under increasing pressure, they were forced, in January 1913, to defend the manifesto, because “socialism does not exclude any kind of mass action, neither general strike nor joint action as described in ‘War against War’”.¹² The syndicalists in Ploiești added something to the discussion. In the manifesto “Our Fault”, published afterwards, they pointed out that “our fault lies in the fact that we positioned ourselves against the dominant interests”.

I have detailed this manifesto and the reactions to it in order to highlight the fact that the rank-and-file syndicalists were clearly much more radical than the “centre” wanted, as unfolding events demonstrated. In addition, there was a strong anti-militarist and revolutionary stance among class-conscious workers in Romania, who identified the enemy in their own exploiters and oppressors, and not in the workers and ordinary people of other nationalities. Because of their common fate as wage earners, the workers felt solidarity among themselves.

Anarchist agitation against the war

Bucharest was not only the headquarters of the party and the trade unions, but from 1900, the anarchist monthly *Revista Ideei*, published by the well-known anarchist and pioneer of the workers' movement, Panait Mușoiu (1864-1944), also appeared there. Anti-militarist articles were a constant feature in the pages of his publications. In addition to the magazine, Mușoiu also published a collection of libertarian and educational pamphlets, “Biblioteca Revistei Ideei”.

12. M.Gh. Bujor, Ștefan *Gheorghiu și epoca sa*, Ed. Politică, București, 1968, p. 198.

In spite of the surveillance by the Siguranță (the secret police), which had increased on the eve of the Balkan wars, Mușoiu intensified his anti-militarist activity. In November 1912, a text by the Russian anarchist Pyotr Kropotkin (1842-1921) titled “War” appeared in the series of pamphlets mentioned above. Kropotkin described the economic interests of the representatives of big business who use “modern wars” to grab the resources of other countries to enrich themselves. The 23-page booklet was sold for a very low price of 20 cents and circulated throughout the country. The text even reached some military barracks, being disseminated among the soldiers by mobilized socialists and syndicalists.

The anarchist anti-war agitation among the soldiers did not go unnoticed. On January 12, 1913, the War Ministry informed the secret service (Siguranța) that “Generals Văleanu and Major Jacovolici” had found “an anti-militarist pamphlet being spread among the soldiers”.¹³ It soon became clear that it was Kropotkin’s pamphlet. The secret service raided Mușoiu’s house (once again), confiscating a copy and analyzing its contents. The subsequent report consists of a brief description of its contents and an equally brief evaluation. The report makes a good point about the key idea of the booklet: “The allegations contained in the booklet are directed against the existing social order and the state. It propagates libertarian ideas and advocates the socialization of all areas of society by workers, without oppressors and rulers”.¹⁴

13. Police and General Security Department (F.D.P.S.G.), File 8/1905, page 211.
 14. F.D.P.S.G., File 8/1905, row 209.



First page of *Revistei Ideei* with the article by N. Angell, “Bitter delusion”.

The “Romanian Revolutionary Battalion” made decisions in joint general and company assemblies. The battalion took part in several battles against the German and Romanian armies, but was largely defeated in battles against Austrian and Ukrainian troops in March 1918. The battalion was forced to retreat to the city of Odessa, which, engulfed by fighting, did not last long against the reactionary armies. The revolutionaries fled to Feodosia, in Crimea, where the unit eventually disbanded.

Fighting in Ukraine and Bessarabia between the reactionary “White” troops, the Red Army, set up in the meantime under Trotsky (1879-1940), and the revolutionary-anarchist Makhovshchina (which operated largely in southern Ukraine) lasted until 1921, when the Bolsheviks emerged victorious over both the reactionary Whites and the anarchist revolutionaries.

The end of the First World War was followed by revolutionary movements in various European countries. In Germany, the revolution began in November 1918 and the Habsburg Empire disintegrated. On October 30, 1918, Hungarian soldiers revolted against the monarchy and a general strike led to the proclamation of the Hungarian Republic. But workers, soldiers and some peasants wanted more. They proclaimed the Hungarian Soviet Republic on March 21, 1919. In many towns, power was taken over by the workers’ and soldiers’ soviets.

In Arad, in the region of Banat, a “Red Guard” was formed, numbering several thousand poorly armed members, including socialist militants and representatives of the Romanian population.

Syndicalists and anarchists played an important role in the socialist movement in Hungary, and some of them were founding members of the Hungarian Communist Party in 1919. With the revolution in Hungary and the collapse of the previous state apparatus, the Romanian government felt that the time had come to annex Transylvania, over which it had a claim. In April, Romania declared a “war of liberation” or “war for the reunification of the nation”

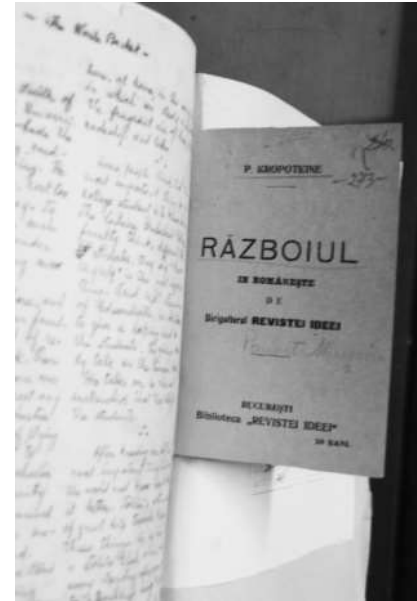
The Russian Revolution inspired workers and soldiers all over Europe and the world, who had glimpsed the possibility of a revolutionary transformation of society towards a socialist society. On December 28, 1917, the “Romanian Revolutionary Battalion” was formed in Odessa, made up of soldiers who had deserted from the Romanian army and several hundred workers forced to work in the Romanian armaments factories that had been moved there. Many of the members were syndicalists who had gained a wealth of experience during the class struggles in the port cities and were highly motivated to achieve social revolution.

The infantry unit thus formed comprised 1,082 soldiers, divided into four companies.³⁵ In addition, a “Romanian Revolutionary Fleet” was formed, made up of Romanian warships and merchant ships stationed in the Black Sea and seized by the revolutionary workers, to which they gave new names. “Imperator Traian” became “Social Revolution”, “Romania” became “Republic of Romania”, “King Charles” became “Ion Roată” (after the eponymous peasant from Moldova [1806-1882] who had publicly advocated the allocation of land to peasants), “Dacia” was renamed “1907” (the year of the peasant uprising), and “Prince Mircea” was given the name “Liberation”.³⁶ The revolutionary fleet was joined by sailors who had rebelled against the officers of the cruiser “Elisabeta” in the small port town of Sulina. On the night of December 31 to January 1, 1918, they raised the red flag on the mast. One of the leaders of the rebellion was Gheorghe Stroici, who was elected to the Revolutionary Military Council of the Odessa battalion shortly after the uprising.³⁷

35. Clara Cușnir-Mihailovici, *Mișcarea muncitorească din România între anii 1917-1921. Crearea P.C.R.*, Editura Politică, București, 1961, p. 141.

36. *Ibidem*, p. 150.

37. Gheorghe Stroici was a dock worker in Galați and, before joining the army, was active in the transport workers’ union, which had a revolutionary profile. In May 1914 he participated as a delegate from Galați in the 2nd Congress of the Transport Workers’ Union held in Sulina and was elected to the leadership of the congress. See *Tribuna Transporturilor*, organ of the *Uniunea Sindicală a Muncitorilor de Transport pe Apă și pe Uscat din România*, Brăila, no. 1-2, 1914, p. 5. In 1919 Stroici returned to Romania and was arrested. He was sentenced to 25 years of hard labour for his revolutionary actions and died in 1928 as a result of detention.



The pamphlet “Războiul” by P. Kropotkin from Panait Mușoiu’s Siguranță File

At the start of the WW1, Romania remained “neutral” for a while. Mușoiu, however, continued his anti-militarist agitation in *Revista Ideei*. The 1914 issues are full of anti-war articles. Among these, the translation of *The Great Illusion: The Great Illusion. A Study of the Relation of Military Power to National Advantage* by Norman Angell (1874-1967)¹⁵, an English writer, is particularly noteworthy. The Romanian translation bears the title, chosen by Mușoiu, “Amara amăgire”. The entire issue 131 of the journal consists exclusively of this translation, continued in smaller parts, up to issues 139-140. Mușoiu subsequently published the text as a booklet in “Biblioteca Revista Ideei”. In the same year, he also published an article by the well-known Dutch anti-militarist Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis (1846-1919), who had switched from Christian-influenced socialism to anarchism. Nieuwenhuis advocated strike action and the complete rejection of war.

During the First World War, food speculation increased in the country. Capitalists and merchants wanted to take advantage of the situation, and the price of staple foods like bread, potatoes, eggs etc. rose rapidly. Many working families ended up going hungry because of the high prices. Cornelia Ștefănescu, a contributor to *Revista Ideei*, reports in her article “Halele Centrale în 1916”, published in March 1916, on the speculation of basic produce in the markets of Bucharest.¹⁶

15. For his activities on the Executive Committee of the League of Nations and the British Peace Committee, Angell was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1933.

16. See: *Revista Ideei*, nr. 147, 1916.

However, *Revista Ideei* also paid attention to anti-militarist movements in other European countries. The First World War was used as a pretext by governments in various countries to censor many anarchist publications or to ban their publication. In Austria, the anarchist newspaper *Wohlstand für Alle* was a strong and consistent anti-militarist voice. When Austro-Hungary declared war on Serbia, the editor Pierre Ramus, i.e. Rudolf Grossmann (1882-1942), was arrested for refusing to join the army, charged with “high treason” and “espionage” and eventually sentenced to several years in prison. To him, as well as to the French anti-militarist Paul Savigny—who also refused to be drafted and was sentenced to death by a war tribunal, being executed by firing squad in 1915—*Revista Ideei* dedicated a long article signed by Petru Țărnă. The two anti-militarists were presented to the readers under the title “Our Heroes” and their attitude was appreciated and honored. “We are proud of our heroes” are the words with which the article ends.¹⁷

With Romania’s entry into the war, in August 1916, the government suppressed the entire socialist and anti-militarist press in the country. *Revista Ideei* was banned. In the same year, Panait Mușoiu, certainly animated by anti-militarist intentions, published the comedy *Lizistrata* by Aristophanes, in a first Romanian translation. The theme of the play is the ancient war between the Athenians and the Spartans, which women ended by refusing to have sex with warring men. They went on strike and barricaded themselves on the Acropolis until their demands were heard.

The workers’ movement in Romania against the war: 1915-1916

With the outbreak of World War I, anti-militarist agitation in Romania intensified. Statements and public gatherings discussed the link between high food prices and the war. To prevent radicalization, the government issued a “ban on political agitation in the villages” in 1914, to prevent solidarity between organized workers and peasants.

17. P. Țărnă, „Eroii noștri”, in *Revista Ideei*, nr. 144, 1915, p. 52.



Romanian Revolutionary Battalion in Odessa, 1918.

General Shcherbachev, the commander of the Russian armed forces, but failed in the face of resistance from the Romanian army leadership, who ordered the arrest of the Russian soldiers. This led to demonstrations of solidarity by Russian revolutionary soldiers in Romania, while in Russia the Bolsheviks arrested the Romanian envoy. As a result, there were several clashes between Romanian and Russian troops stationed in Romania, who were eventually pushed back to Bessarabia. The new situation led to a tacit agreement between the Romanian, German and Austrian military leaderships, all of whom wanted to prevent a victorious socialist revolution in Russia.

In January 1918, Romanian and German troops, once enemies, entered Bessarabia together to crush the revolution. The intervention was warmly welcomed by the big landowners. Shortly after the outbreak of the revolution, Romanian socialists in Bessarabia and southern Ukraine founded a “Romanian Social Democratic Action Committee”. They called on Romanian soldiers who had invaded Bessarabia to “turn their weapons against their own oppressors”.³⁴

34. M. Hausleiter, *Die nationale Frage...*, p. 309.

education. Certainly, also thanks to the contribution of anarchists and syndicalists, the oil workers were among the most radical in the country, demonstrating this on various occasions.³¹

In September 1917, a leaflet of the “Prahova Illegal Group”, formed around Constantin Mănescu, was published. “The leaflet was titled «An Unpleasant Visit» and had as its theme the visit of Emperor Wilhelm II to Romania. The text harshly criticized the German military’s policy of plunder and conquest, which prompted the occupation authorities to arrest over a hundred suspects. However, the group’s well-hidden multiplication machines [...] were not discovered.”³²

In 1918 there were workers’ strikes in Bucharest, Turnu Severin and at the oil company in Câmpina. These were directed against the poor food supply situation of the population, as well as against low wages. Again, syndicalists around Constantin Mănescu were involved in the workers’ actions. As a “militarily important enterprise”, the oil company was under the direct control of the German army, which reacted immediately to the strike by arresting 48 striking workers on day one. They were subsequently sentenced to several weeks in prison. Two workers were identified as “leaders” of the strike: Constantin Mănescu and another worker, who remains unknown. Both were handed over to the German military court. It is not known what happened to them.³³

In Russia, revolutionary events brought the Bolsheviks to power, and this reversal had a considerable impact on the course of the First World War. The Central Powers and Romania, which had just lost its Russian ally, agreed on a peace treaty on December 9, 1917, in Focșani.

After all, the generals of the tsarist army in Romania could no longer rely on most of “their” soldiers. Revolutionary soldiers tried to arrest the “white” tsarist

31. During the peasant uprising of 1907, acts of sabotage were organized in solidarity with the rebellious peasants in order to prevent oil supplies for the army and to hold back the troops.

32. M. Hausleitner, *Die nationale Frage...*, p. 319.

33. *Ibidem*, p. 322.

In April 1914, socialists distributing leaflets in the Bucharest area were arrested.¹⁸ In 1915, anti-war rallies organized by the workers’ movement took place in many cities. Demonstrations for higher wages, better working conditions and against price rises were combined with anti-militarist protests. There were also frequent clashes with the army, which repeatedly resorted to violence against workers.

In August 1915, the carters of Brăila went on strike. When attempts were made to replace them with strikebreakers, many of the dockers and other transport workers joined the strikers and marched through the city to the port, where they were stopped and attacked by the army. As a result of the brutal clashes with the soldiers, at least 50 of the 6,000 workers who took part in the demonstration were injured.¹⁹

The radicalization of the workers was also evident on 1 May 1916. Compared to the previous year, participation in the May Day demonstration had increased. In Bucharest 20,000 workers took to the streets, in Ploiești 10,000 and in Brăila 5,000. The central theme of the demonstrations was linked to the price hikes: “The speakers demanded accountability from the supporters of the big cartels, joint-stock companies and banks, led by the war politicians”.²⁰

In June 1916, a massacre was committed against workers in Galați. After the local authorities banned a public meeting against price increases, the workers decided to go on a 24-hour protest strike. On June 13, 1916, 6,000 workers demonstrated in Galați against the ban, price rises and the looming war. The demonstration was led by syndicalists and other radical workers. In front of the prefecture headquarters, the army stopped the march and opened fire without warning. Nine demonstrators were killed and more than a hundred wounded. A wave of repression was unleashed against the labour movement in Galați and Brăila.²¹ Many well-known syndicalists were arrested (including Janeta Malthus

18. M. Hausleitner, *Die nationale Frage...*, p. 258.

19. *Ibidem*, p. 259.

20. *Ibidem*, p. 260.

21. As early as 1913, the first clashes broke out between workers and the army, which had repeatedly been used to break strikes and violently attack rallies and demonstrations. In an appeal

[1884-1873]) and sentenced to many year of imprisonment on trumped-up charges.²²

Shortly before Romania's entry into the war, in August 1916, the government tried in vain to destroy and intimidate the workers' movement in order to "pacify the country". When, in July 1916, the forced conscription and mobilization of those "fit for military service" was announced, the trade unions and social-democrats appealed to those called to arms "to show the bright path until the whole rotten society is swept away".²³ Protest rallies were held in various cities on the day of mobilization. In Bucharest, the demonstration was dispersed by the army.²⁴

The more radical social democrats and Marxists of the Balkan countries met, independently of syndicalists and anarchists, in 1915, in Zimmerwald, Switzerland, to find a common course of action against the war threatening to spread; and also to discuss plans for the formation of a "Balkan Federation". The next conference took place in August 1915, in Bucharest.

Romania in the First World War

In August 1914, the First World War began between the "Central Powers", consisting of Germany, Austro-Hungary, later the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria, and the "Entente", comprising France, Russia and Great Britain.

In Romania, the ruling class was initially divided on the question of supporting one military alliance or the other, with some saying that Romania should remain neutral. In the end, the "Entente" was preferred.

that was distributed among the soldiers, Ștefan Gheorghiu urged them not to fire on their brothers, but to put down their weapons. In addition, he called for the dissolution of the permanent troops and the arming of the people (arming the workers). Ștefan Gheorghiu wrote in *România Muncitoare*: "Down with the standing army! Long live the arming of the people!" (*R.M.* no. 35/1913). It may well be that the syndicalists' position and the popularity Gheorghiu enjoyed were the factors that persuaded the army leaders to withdraw the troops stationed in Brăila and replace them with new troops. Because of the turmoil, the army leadership was no longer sure if they could rely upon the troops.

22. Martin Veith, „Das Massker von 13. Juni 1916 im rumänischen Galați”, in *Syfo – Forschung & Bewegung*, nr. 1, 2011, p. 58 and ff.

23. M. Hausleitner, *Die nationale Frage...*, p. 261.

24. *Idem, ibid.*

the (unfulfilled) promise that they would be rewarded at the end of the war with land and the right to vote.²⁹

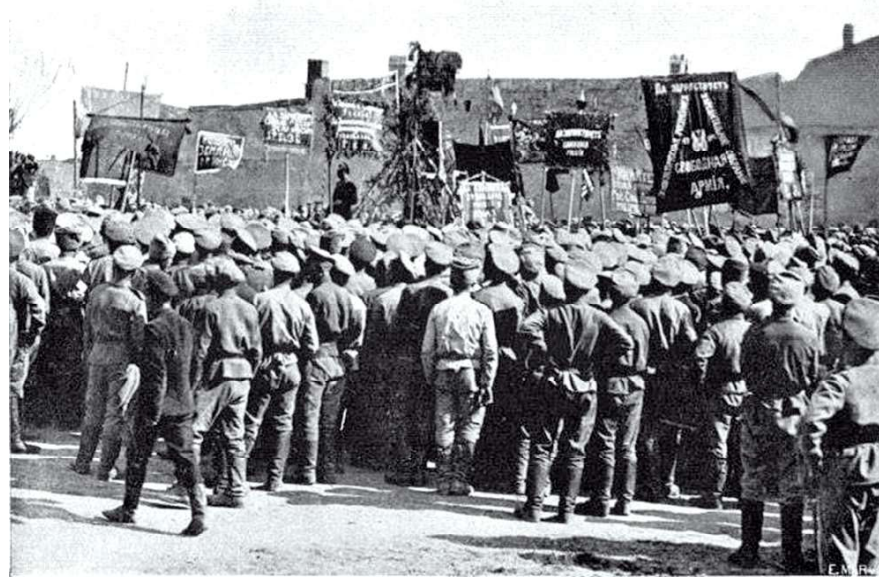
The Romanian government was worried about Russian revolutionary soldiers in Iași, whose presence was a constant threat to the monarchy. On May 1, 1917, with the support of local socialists, including M. Gh. Bujor, 15,000 Russian soldiers marched through the city, demanding peace, socialism and world revolution. The Romanian authorities dared not intervene against the demonstration and had to watch helplessly as Russian soldiers released Rakovsky from prison. After giving a speech to the soldiers in the centre of Iași, in which he called for the abolition of the monarchy and the creation of a "social republic", he and Bujor disappeared from the city. Both travelled to Odessa under the protection of Russian soldiers.

Two days after Racovsky's escape, the Romanian government took revenge on the socialists it could get its hands on. In Iași, the Siguranță arrested the well-known Max Wechsler (1870-1917), a socialist and one of the organizers of the May Day demonstration. Other arrests followed in other cities. M. Hausleitner writes: "The secret service let the 48-year-old escape and then shot him for an alleged attempt to escape. Thirty-four Jews were executed in the city of Bacău; among them were seven Jewish Social Democrats accused of spying for the Central Forces. In Roman, the execution of 14 Jews sentenced to death could only be prevented by a protest demonstration by Russian soldiers."³⁰

Resistance, including the organization of strikes, also existed in the Prahova Valley, occupied by German troops. Anarcho-syndicalists had one of their strongholds there and carried out intense agitation among workers and day laborers, despite constant state repression. In Câmpina, they set up a "popular school" where they taught according to the principles of the rational school expounded by the Spanish anarchist Francisco Ferrer y Guardia (1859-1909). Literacy courses were also given to working-class families, as well as political

29. M. Hausleitner, *Die nationale Frage...*, p. 300.

30. *Ibidem*, p. 304.



Peace demonstration by Russian soldiers in Bacău, May 1917.

activities in detail. The head of security in the town of Roman reported to headquarters in Iași: “An unknown number of socialist soldiers (i.e. those from Romania—n.a.) are making propaganda and distributing leaflets in several towns in Moldova with the support of the workers. In addition, in Roman we could detect the presence of an agitator named Vasilescu, a syndicalist from Bucharest, who distributes leaflets. He is a soldier in the 23rd Infantry Regiment, where, according to him, several socialist soldiers have started to make propaganda and distribute leaflets, both among military and civilian personnel and on trains.”²⁸

The reason that in Romania, apart from demonstrations and disturbances within the army, there were no social protests, uprisings or revolutions following the Russian Revolution is explained by Mariana Hausleitner by the fact that the majority of the Romanian army was made up of peasants. King Ferdinand reassured them during a visit to the front in March/April 1917 with

28. M. C. Stănescu, *Gh. M. Vasilescu*, Editura Politică, București, 1968, p. 36.

As early as 1914, Tsarist Russia had assured Romania that it would support Romania’s claim to Transylvania, then part of Austro-Hungary. Romanian big business, on the other hand, was interested in tapping into the region’s resources to boost the underdeveloped domestic industry, and thus increase its profits. Of great help was also the long-running campaign of Romanian nationalists, who emphasized the existence of a large Romanian population in Transylvania, while denouncing its situation as intolerable. At the same time, much of the nationalist rhetoric was directed against the Hungarians, seen as oppressors of the “Romanian language and culture”.

Encouraged by Russian guarantees, Romania felt strong enough to launch an attack in August 1916. Romania declared war on Austria-Hungary and the army immediately entered Transylvania, advancing as far as Sibiu (Hermannstadt). There, it was stopped and forced to retreat by the German army (September 22-29). After long street battles, German troops drove the Romanian army out of Brașov (Kronstadt) on October 8. Coming from the north, the Germans advanced into Romania and occupied the oil-rich Prahova Valley south of Brașov. Romania’s oil production was now used by the German army and industry. This had been one of the goals of the German Reich from the outset.

In November 1916, German, Bulgarian and Turkish military units advanced across the Danube towards Bucharest. The city had been repeatedly bombed by German airships. On December 6, 1916, the German army under Field Marshal August von Mackensen (1849-1945) and allied troops occupied Bucharest. The fall of Bucharest was foreseeable and the Romanian government, the “royal family” and many of the great capitalists fled north, to Iași, a city near the Russian border. Waves of refugees followed the same route. Heavy war industry had already been transferred to Odessa on the Black Sea, before the fall of Bucharest. To maintain war production there, the army forcibly recruited and moved 15,000 additional workers, mainly from Galați and Brăila. In addition, a Romanian military unit was stationed there. Romania was now

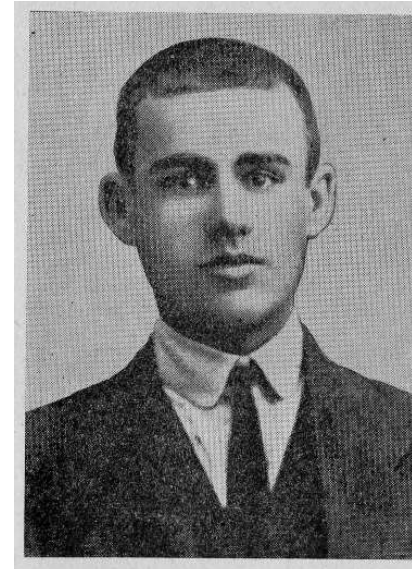
divided into two parts. The west and south, including Bucharest, were under the occupation of the Central Powers. Only the north, with parts of Bukovina and Moldova, was controlled by the Romanian government, which was helped by more Russian military units. The war became a war of attrition, while famine and epidemics spread in the north.

When Romania entered the war, the trade unions and social democratic parties called for a general strike, but no action followed. Instead, the Romanian government began arresting known socialists, including the leader of the Romanian Social Democracy and future Trotskyist, Christian Racovsky (1873-1941). He was sent to a prison in Iași.

For social democrats, the world had already collapsed in 1914, when the German Social Democracy, for many decades the model for the Romanian Social Democrats, accepted war credits and the war. Initially, they did not believe the reports of the SPD's participation in the war. The grey eminence of Romanian social democracy, Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea (1855-1920), even defended the behavior of the German social democrats, declaring that "for socialists it is self-evident to fight against war as long as there is peace and to defend the integrity of the country in case of war".²⁵ Shortly before Romania entered the war, however, he took refuge in Switzerland.

There is little information or evidence of anarchist and syndicalist resistance during the war. In the northern part of the country, dominated by the Romanian government, a close friend of Panait Mușoiu, syndicalist Gheorghe M. Vasilescu, agitated among soldiers, exposing himself to the danger of execution. Like other socialists, syndicalists and anarchists—including the free-thinker and psychiatrist Panait Zosin (1873-1942), or the pacifist ("humanitarianist") anarchist Eugen Relgis (1895-1975)—he too had been mobilized. Zosin had been drafted as a front-line medic in the Second Balkan War and the

25. M. Hausleitner, *Die nationale Frage...*, p. 280.



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First World War.²⁶ Relgis was assigned to a military unit in Botoșani, Moldova. According to his biographer, Vladimiro Muñoz, Relgis was "arrested because of his deafness and, to some extent, because of his passive resistance to the forces of evil that wanted to turn him into a mere executor of orders. He was released after a while, but remained under observation until he was demobilized."²⁷ Gh. M. Vasilescu had been mobilized in the Dobrogea region, located in the south, on the border with Bulgaria. With the advance of the Central Powers' armies, his unit was

forced to retreat to Moldova.

With the February 1917 revolution in Russia, the situation in Romania also changed. Russian soldiers stationed in northern Romania overwhelmingly welcomed the socialist revolution in their homeland. Spontaneous demonstrations of soldiers took place in many towns in Moldova, celebrating the revolution against the Tsar and calling for peace. The demonstrations were usually supported by local Romanian socialist groups. Vasilescu appeared as a speaker at several demonstrations, repeatedly calling for social revolution. He addressed both workers and peasants, who made up the bulk of the Romanian army soldiers. He called for the expropriation of the landlords and the division of land to the peasants. But the secret service, which did not intervene against the soldiers' demonstrations, documented Vasilescu's

26. See: Panait Zosin, *Calea unei vieți: copilăria și adolescența, tinerețea, virilitatea, maturitatea și bătrânețea*, Iași, 1935, p. VII.

27. Vladimiro Muñoz, „Eugen Relgis – Libertarian Humanist”, in Vladimiro Muñoz, *The Rumanian Libertarians*, unpublished manuscript.