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The Peasantrism

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ABSTRACT

The advent of Peasantrism in Romania was a natural phenomenon amid political and social turmoil of the end of World War I. The year of 1918 brings to the fore of Romanian politics a number of new parties, mostly regional, without being founded on defined ideologies. Peasants' movements that preceded the emergence of the Peasants' Party have developed for decades and prepared the ground for the political assertion of a party to represent their interests. The two political parties, namely the conservative and liberal party, who governed in the second half of the nineteenth century, any the less succeeded in solving problems of the peasants who represented the overwhelming majority of the country's population. The peasantry did not participate in the electoral process so that representatives of conservatives and liberals were concerned about maintaining political influence by supporting rich classes, who had the right to vote. Political instability, internal factions, unresolved issues regarding the peasants, the adoption of universal suffrage, changed political relations, leading to the formation of several parties which were formed and adapted under way, some of them having a decisive influence on the evolution of the Romanian society throughout the whole interwar period.

Peasantrism gradually evolved under the influence of two trends from two regions of the country. The Romanian National Party was the representative of the Transylvanian people, being the result of the struggle of Romanian Transylvanian people against Austro-Hungarian governments after 1867 and until 1918. The leaders of this party distinguished themselves in the process of regaining political rights, and subsequently in the assertion of independence from the Hungarian authorities. Meanwhile, in the old kingdom, peasants' movements take the form of political expression, and after several unsuccessful attempts of building-up of a party of peasants, the Peasants' Party is founded in 1918, whose political objectives were supporting the peasants' class.

Samanatorism and Poporanism were the main trends that have had a direct influence on Peasantrism, especially by means of the traditional view on the evolution of society. In the debate on developing formulas suited to our society, much of the thinkers of the age, opted for preserving Romanian structures, convinced that only the natural, gradual development of institutions could support a normal development over time. Certainly that, realities after 1848 were not the same as those of the early twentieth century, which in turn were different from those from the interwar period. However, many of the ideas of Junimism, Samanatorism and especially those belonging to Poporanism, were preserved and adapted from the political perspective too. The country's modernization, industrialization, was going to be carried out on the substance of these debates. Ideas belonging to

Samanatorism and Poporanism were built primarily around the concept of uniqueness of the Romanian people, of the rural civilization and of national character. Here we identify a meeting place with Peasantrism, who claimed perpetuation of a non-capitalist structure, of a family agrarian economy. Poporanism and later Peasantrism argued that, for society to evolve, democratization of public life and peasants' problem had to be prevalently solved.

The Peasants' Party was formed in the revolutionary atmosphere of 1918, aimed mainly at the concrete supporting of the peasantry through its political involvement. Ion Mihalache, the party founder, built his political platform through a radical attitude toward liberals and conservatives about whom, he was saying that they do not concretely represent the peasantry, but only protect the bourgeoisie and landowners. Romanian population was 80% located in rural areas, mostly composed of peasants, so that Peasantrism ideas had wide field of expression, especially because the peasants were waiting for assignment of land, which was a stated desire for centuries. The Peasants' Party quickly asserts on the Romanian political scene, benefitting from a radical change in the electoral process through the introduction of universal suffrage. The elections of 1919 are an electoral success for both the Romanian National Party which ranks first in options for voters and for the Peasants' Party, which gets a significant number of members of Parliament. Moreover, the two parties along with other regional parties will form the first alliance that will govern Romania in the first months from the election of the first parliament of the unified Romania. The first elections based on universal suffrage give legitimacy to the party, and soon after its representatives discuss agrarian laws, the result being the assignment of land of over two million peasants. Meanwhile the Romanian National Party began a new stage in its politics, having a good political experience resulted from the relationships developed by the Transylvanian leaders with the Hungarian authorities. Nationals enjoyed prestige by the action they have developed for a long time and being as well the main actors of the Great Union of 1918. Their first political actions were popularizing their ideas throughout Romania's territory and concluding political partnerships to counterbalance the action and size of the Liberal National Party that dominated Romanian politics. In the absence of a political doctrine, the Transylvanian leaders promoted some ideas and principles that will be the essence of their political conception and the substance of the party reconstruction after 1989. The national idea, the idea of democracy and social justice were the basis of their political philosophy, which developed a vision of Romanian society. Sure that in addition to the basic principles they formulated concrete proposals on land reform, the question of minorities, the right to vote for women, school reform. On 10th of October 1926 the two parties merged and formed the largest political party in Romania with representation in all counties. Two years later, after winning the elections in 1928, the party will take over the country's government after a long remonstrant campaign

and on the substance of the global economic crisis, which will affect the country for a long time. The results of the governance didn't satisfy the leaders of this party who failed the implementation of the program which they developed, being under the pressure of taking some decisions to save or reduce the losses the country had made as a result of the economic crisis. The crisis mostly affected the peasants who could not sell their products, although agricultural prices recorded the biggest fall. Peasantrism followers implemented a series of reforms in all areas, opened the door for foreign investors and reorganized or established institutions such as the police, the gendarmerie, schools. They developed the telephony system, the lending system in agriculture, modernized and built a network of roads. All in a very short time but the standard of living of the people and especially of peasants had not improved. However, at the end of the Party's governance, the party remained in the voter preferences until the ban of parties activities following the Royal Decree of March 1938.

Much of the thinking of Peasantrism expressed by the Party's theorists is reflected in the analysis and in their vision on agriculture and industry. Although in many analyses appears the idea that Peasantrism followers would have supported agriculture in prejudice of industry is only partially true. They supported only a certain type of agriculture, which was not capitalist, not industrialized. But regarding industry, the Peasantrism followers started the open door politics in order to allow investors to place their capital in Romania, and this politics primarily targeted the industrial sector. It is known that Peasantrism followers staked on agriculture, however, party leaders being convinced that only traditional agriculture would be the economic engine of the country and thus solving the problems of the peasants, who formed the majority. The Land Law of 1921 had a social purpose and met the ancestral desire of the peasantry to be granted land, with positive and negative economic effects, but it didn't produce an improvement in the daily life of peasants. The economic crisis triggered at the coming to power of the Peasantrism followers was felt especially in villages because the most disastrous effects were on the agricultural products which recorded the most accentuated fall in prices. The small peasant household, considered by the Peasantrism followers as the foundation of the Romanian agriculture, has proven itself inefficient and vulnerable before of economic phenomena. The second fundamental thesis of the party refers to the supporting of a cooperative system for farmers for better access to agricultural credit, better outlets for agricultural production and development of large crops in obtaining the best economic results. The idea will not be implemented although small households scattered by land assignment could not survive. Neither the cooperative system nor the small household could be brought to a level of efficiency due to objective reasons that held primarily to the demographic structure of the country, to a gradual implementation over several years of uninterrupted government support. They needed access to capital necessary to investments, that Romania could not provide at a satisfactory

level; it was also a need for an outlet, which could only be created over a long period of time. As I mentioned, regarding industry the Peasantrism followers supported the open door politics so that foreign investors could place their capital in Romania, giving an impulse to economy that was at a backward level in comparison to most European countries. After the customs protectionism practiced by the Liberals, Romanian economy opened itself and become more competitive and the products became cheaper and high-grade. Certainly, in the first phase, Romanian companies registered a decline and also a small number of domestic industries did not have profitability, the market being covered by cheap imported products. Although being accused of opposing industrialization, the Peasantrism followers actually supported industry in a concrete way. Towards the end of the thirties, they pleaded for economic interventionism, being convinced that a part of the Romanian industry, natural resources or the oil industry, the wood industry must be managed by the state. They argued that they should be under state control, to be exploited by the state.

Peasantrism developed as a trend located between liberalism and socialism, trying to be a third way from a political perspective. They articulated their own conception being the defenders of individual freedoms, of democracy while supporting the principles of social solidarity and subsidiarity. It supported individual freedoms and democratic principles unreservedly having the leader Iuliu Maniu as political-electoral hinge, recognized for his uncompromising ideas and political action. The footprint of the struggle born by the Transylvanian representatives before 1918 remained alive both in the interwar period and after 1989. The two parties, though different in approach and through their history, have managed to achieve a great party that managed to attract public personalities who built and shaped a doctrine based and drawn from the Romanian realities. One of the most discussed thesis inside and outside the party was the peasants' state doctrine. The Peasants' state in the party's vision involved the implementation of a new state order, organization around peasant families through state intervention. It was an antithesis to liberal-bourgeois ordering, to the socialist state, in which the dominant role in public life to be the peasantry, because Romania was a country made up in its majority of peasants, therefore political representation should be relative to their importance and number in society. I think the thesis was poorly designed in that it gave the impression that the Peasantrism followers wanted to create an authoritarian system, when in fact they primarily aimed to solve problems in the villages. Surely that analyzing the time the peasants' state thesis was debated, we can say that they rather wanted to emphasize that liberalism was no longer a solution nor economic, nor political, and socialism and the totalitarian trends which outspread throughout Europe and which were making their way in Romanian society also needed to be counter-balanced. Surely events took an unexpected turn, in 1938

political parties being banned, after which the Second World War began and finally Romania went on the way of dictatorship.

Key words: peasantrism, democracy, parties, christian, agriculture