

# **The Rule of Law and The Working Class**

**An anarchist communist approach of the recent protests in Romania**

Anarcho-Syndicalist Initiative from Romania

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*„The law, in its majestic equality, forbids rich and poor alike to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal their bread.” – Anatole France*

In the following text we are going to try and express an anarchist communist assessment, in as much a coherent manner as it is possible at the present time, of the recent protests against some of the decisions made by the governing party and the manner in which these were perceived as an attack on the “rule of law”, the post-state capitalist trajectory of Romania, and on the “progress” made in the last 27 years.

In a few words, we are of the opinion that we are witnessing a war for power inside the state between representatives of the political class and the hard-power institutions of the state, and that this event does not provide for an interesting subject for the working class and its self-emancipation. The way we see things the main actors of these protests are on the one side the numerous members of the so-called middle class, president Iohannis, and some of the repressive institutions of the state, such as the secret service, DNA (National Anti-corruption Department), and so on, and on the other side PSD (Social Democratic Party) and the political class as a whole. The reason we say this is a war involving the entire political class, and not just PSD, is that despite the opposition parties stating different for reasons regarding electoral interests, we consider that the struggle is carried in these terms. We consider this to be a struggle between rival factions because the legislative changes made by the ruling party are trying to eliminate some legal instruments that have been used by the aforementioned repressive institutions in order to exert control over the politicians in the last decade, in many cases committing abuse while acting in this manner.

At the same time we are not denying the fact that among the people protesting in the streets, one can find many working class members, many dispossessed people, and generally people that can't be counted among the ‘winners’ of the transition to market capitalism. The reason for this might be the mass-media intoxication and the general pro-capital speech that has dominated the Romanian society for the last 27 years. Another factor that can be taken into consideration, and which cannot be ignored, is the total lack of a credible alternative able to support the cause of the working class. Many statements, many actions are definitely inconsistent at this moment, and for this reason we can not express a final approach, capable of taking all factors into consideration.

### ***The middle class; „the beautiful young people”***

*(this term is used regularly to describe the young middle class people which are presented as taking care of the future of the country and moving the country in a positive, European, Western direction; the opposite of this segment is usually made up of poor pensioners, and people on welfare, which are associated en masse with the “communist” times and make the electoral base of the Social Democratic Party)*

The Romanian middle class is composed of those parts of the population that have an above average standard of living, that have hope for achieving a standard of living similar to that of their counterparts in the Western world, and that generally subscribe to the whole perception of civilised progress that the Western colonial capitalist culture stands for. Although many of them remain wage slaves, some of them have the possibility to accumulate important capital, others not, their class betrayal shows itself in their aspirations to join the ranks of the bourgeoisie, with which they identify themselves.

Their class consciousness resumes to that of soon to be bourgeoisie, or of temporary embarrassed bourgeoisie. Another important feature of the romanian middle class is its total contempt for the working class masses and the poor, which they associate with “communism” (state capitalism), material scarcity, and the reasons for why their path to joining the ranks of the bourgeoisie is so wavy. Inside the ranks of this class, the most active elements are the urban, westernised ones (they desire a country like in the West), which can often be described by their affiliation with both the multinational corporations operating in Romania, and the NGO industrial complex, where they are payed above average.

### ***The Social Democratic Party – party of the corrupt***

PSD is a political party that is no different in any important fashion from other european parties that lay claims to a social-democratic tradition (a reformist and capitalist tradition, but this is an entirely different discussion). One can hardly say that PSD is a more corrupt party, or that is different in a profound manner from other parties both in the past, or in the present. Because we do not wish to talk of PSD as a neoliberal party (although it definitely is), in the sense that a political party takes more care of the interests of capital, than of those of the workers – the opposite of this was bassically never true, the pre-neoliberal exceptions in the so called welfare western states having more to do with the historical conditions in which capitalism found itself at the end of WWII) – we shall refer to it as a political party whose traditional electoral base was made up of both large parts of the working class, and the most dispossessed sections of the romanian society.

Heir of the National Salvation Front (the descendant of the former single rulling party), like other parties PSD also enabled the primitive accumulation process that started after the former regime was overthrown when the country moved in the direction of a capitalist market economy. During PSD rule many privatisations took place, new markets were created for investments, many lay offs and social spending cuts were made. Looking at things from this angle it is difficult to point to clear differences between PSD and other ruling parties since the 90’s, considering this was the main line adopted by all governments, one that was concerned in furthering the interests of capital (and mostly those of the foreign capital) and that totally ignored the growing precariousness of the working class.

There are many reasons for why PSD is so popular amongst the working class people. One of them is, of course, the fact that there is no other practical alternative that could at least offer the ilusion of focussing its speech on the interest of the lower classes, another one might be the good organizational infrastructure that PSD has in the poorest urban and rural areas. That being said, we think that it’s possible to identify some differences between the parties, even if not very profound ones. This can be revealed best when we take into consideration the public speech of the former technocratic government as opposed to that expressed by PSD (at least the one they had in the electoral campaign).

The technocratic government, which was run by a highly paid european birocrat, opposed the increase in the minimum wage (which was to be increased to around 920 lei, aprox 200 euro net, one of the smallest in Europe) which was decided by the Ponta government (PSD), and also told the romanian working class that it is too expensive and that wages should be around 2 lei per day (50 euro cents) like it is in other underdeveloped or developing countries. However, PSD

promised in the previous electoral campaign an increase in wages and pensions, and also the creation of other social programs – a very important one would consist in providing one hot meal per day for every pre-college student (Romania having one of the largest child poverty and extreme poverty rates in Europe). Despite these promises, PSD did not address the many issues important to its electoral base, and sought to gain votes from traditional voters of the right by promising cuts in taxes and contributions, or the altogether elimination of many.

This strategy proved a winning one, in the last elections PSD reaching outside the borders of its traditional base and managing to get votes from the urban, more educated, previously out of reach portions of the population (an important factor contributing to this event might be the threat of scarcity that it's starting to make itself felt in parts of the population that previously considered themselves safe from the moods of capitalism). Far from representing a local type of opposition to the neocolonial regime that dominates the population, PSD might be perceived by the foreign institutions that are ruling *de facto* the country as being less agreeable in some moments than say an outspoken right wing (or technocratic) government willing to center its speech on the interests of capital and the class that mostly represents those interests.

Another direction for PSD comprised of making a nationalist, conservative, traditionalist call aimed both at the explicitly reactionary parts of the population, and at a working class that at this moment is far from understanding the different internal divisions and hierarchies that are imposed and reproduced for the benefit of the ruling class. That being said we should not be so surprised at the position taken by PSD on the side of the crypto-fascist Coalition for the Family, and of its president that expressed his support for a conservative notion of the family, one that excludes same sex marriage, and even the possibility of forming legal partnerships between non-hetero adults. In a few words, PSD is a very capital friendly party, has a very strong nationalist and conservative flavour, doesn't question and doesn't try to oppose the foreign institutions and power structures that have turned the country into a neocolonial subject (such as NATO, IMF, EU, the American Embassy – regarding the Embassy it is interesting to witness the local political rulers being called for explanations every time a threat to the American interests in the area is perceived; on another note we are eager for the day when the Romanian embassy in Washington will ask for explanations from high officials of the American state, in regards to the direction in which the American state is heading; and so on), but at the same time PSD has a discourse that sometimes might be translated into social policies which is not to be found on the side of the outspoken right-wing parties and which sometimes can bring some minimum temporary benefits for the working class (for example, raising the minimum wage).

### ***Anti-corruption, Iohannis, and the rule of law***

A main part of the ideology of anti-corruption is Romania's path towards a western type market capitalist economy and the drawbacks that must be fought. What we're trying to say by this is that the main accepted discourse starts from the assumption that the best way to achieve the development of the country is by obliterating its industrial infrastructure, cheapening its qualified and educated work force, maintaining the country attractive for foreign investments (keeping some of the lowest wages in Europe), lowering or eliminating taxes on the profits made here and then exported to western countries. What we're describing here is the type of colonial capitalism that rules the country. Whereas corruption is seen as a major obstacle for reaching

that type of western capitalism, and that “country like in the west”. Most of the supporters of the ideology of anti-corruption belong to the middle-class, that privileged portion of the population, which considers anti-corruption in a political form as it was constructed under the Băsescu ten year rule of the country as the main source of its well-being.

That same time period, starting with 2004, marks the more recognisable formation of a middle class segment at the same when the foreign investments of multinational corporations were starting to grow. This, however, for the large part of the population meant more poverty and a bigger exodus of the local work force (again in the benefit of western capital, which had a lot to gain from the wave of cheap labour force that became available after the collapse of the former regimes in Eastern Europe). At an ideological level the middle class considers the brutality of the transition period towards a market capitalist type of economy (a period of capitalist primitive accumulation – of plain and simple robbery of public wealth which was handed to private owners) of the 90’s to be connected with the corruption of the political regimes that ruled the country in that period. Although between 1996 and 2000 PSD was not part of the government, it is still considered as the main responsible for that dark period, and at the same time it is linked with the pre 90’s regime and considered an obstacle for capitalist development. The discourse of the middle class tends to delimit itself from PSD and its electoral base which is considered to be ignorant, precarious, exposed to all the wrongdoings of capitalism, hence an enemy of european values (of capitalist values), of the rule of law and of western culture which are all considered the main source responsible for their well being.

By engaging in ‘electoral giveaways’, PSD is actually trying to hide its own corruption and contempt for these european values, making itself guilty of attacking the well being of the privileged parts of the population (by preventing the process of capital accumulation through its corruption and incompetence, and by directing funds to social spending instead of investing in the infrastructure needed for the capitalist exploitation).

President Iohannis, on the other hand, is considered the stuff that the highest values of western culture and civilization are made off. German, former mayor of Sibiu, former highschool teacher and tutor par excellence (when he was asked how he managed to raise enough money to buy all his property since he has always worked in the public sector he responded that he offered a lot of tutoring; he also said that other teachers who didn’t manage to do so had bad luck), owner of 6 houses, he is seen as the perfect opposite of the PSD president and its electoral base. By contrast, Dragnea, president of PSD, is looked upon as a provincial, balcanic, corrupt, despotic, uncivilised character. Iohannis is the defender of Romania’s european path, the guarantor of the rule of law, of anti-corruption, and of the strategical partnership with the american fascist empire. Basically Iohannis is the enemy of all those things that could stand against the process of capitalist accumulation and against imperialist interests. Not even by far are we saying that Dragnea is somewhat of a defender of the workers struggle for emancipation. Dragnea, as well as the entire political class, represents the interests of the bourgeoisie. But in this kind of terms, or in similar ones, do the representatives of the middle class which is protesting these days express themselves.

## *The working class*

Unlike many people which constitute the tiny and mainly irrelevant world of the romanian left, we state that for the working class the anti-corruption fight is not important, at least not in the sense of gaining freedom from capitalist exploitation and the state domination. When under the guise of fighting corruption we are spectators to a struggle for power between different sides of the state, when no matter who wins this battle the interests of capital and the bourgeoisie are the ones important, when we know that in the capitalist mode of production governments are nothing else but committees for managing the affairs of the rulling class, we state that the emancipation of the working class can only come from the working class. The working class needs to develop consciousness of its own condition and then needs to organise – both in the workplace, and in its own communities – to put an end to the class domination of the bourgeoisie which is long due to leave the stage of history.

The so-called rule of law is nothing but the political expression of the current social order, a order which is built on the suffering, on the tragedies, poverty, exploitation, on the spirit crushing pressure felt daily by millions of people inside the country and by billions of people on a global scale. For the working class capitalism is the most corrupt system for its daily extortion, for the exploitation of labour power, for its wage slavery that makes victims of all the workers. The historical role of the state is that of ensuring the continuation of class society and the reproduction of capitalism, of making sure that one class is able to live off the work of another class, of doing everthing possible to please the rulling elites. In this sense, the political oppression of the state has to leave the stage at the same time as the capitalist exploitation.

However, we cannot help but see how in this struggle for power between parts of the political class and the repressive institutions of the state, the privileged portions of the middle class take the side of the latter. The protesters have no restrains in showing their support and choice for a set of completely undemocratic institutions, totally lacking in transparency, which lack any serious accountability, such as DNA (anti-corruption department). Somehow this thing makes us wonder if their contempt for the popular vote that brought the PSD government and for political parties which might be prone to implementing certain 'populist' measures (social spending, wage increase) could not be viewed as an aversion for some deficiencies of bourgeois democracy, things such as the popular vote. Plenty of voices could be heard during the last days calling to take away the right to vote for the poor population that constitutes the majority of the PSD voters. From an ideological perspective we might ask ourselves if behind this statement of the middle class one could not see a historical tendency towards fascism and authoritarianism from this class, a tendency that expresses itself by a profound contempt for people representing a class they see as inferior (the working class and poor people) and to which they always turn their heads whenever they consider their privileges are in danger and they feel the need to strike.

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