

BOOK REVIEW

Roland Clark (2015). *Holy Legionary Youth*, Bucharest: Polirom (288 pages)

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The socio-economic oscillations that took place in the last years in European Union lead to the aparition and development more emphasized of a far-right political parties. These dispute more and more energetically and virulent the principles that stand at the foundation of the European Union. Even if currently in Romania there are no such organizations or political parties that strong to represent an option for the citizens with voting right, this doesn't mean that the specifics of the romanian society could not lead to that. In the formulation of this statement I take into account the precedent created by The Legion of the Archangel Michael, a far-right organization that was created and developed in Romania's XXth century.

The factors that lead to the appearance, development, manifestation and in the end the disparition of The Legion of the Archangel Michael, were listed in the work entitled „Holy Legionary Youth”. Elaborated by Roland Clark, professor of European Modern History at Eastern Conneticut State University, after studying romanian national archives, biographies of ex-members of The Legion of the Archangel Michael, and not at least the periodicals published at those times, this book, although treats a subject of historical domain, has a multidisciplinary character, even a sociological one.

The sociological character is given by the author's way of describing the relationship of causality between the socio-political factors that emerged into the aparition of a strong antisemitical movement, far-right, in a relatively fragile state, whose society knew the effects of a great economic depression and not only.

The work's title hasn't been chosen accidentally, its meaning is to come up from the text. Thus, the term „holy” reffers to the religious carachter of the Legionary Movement, the term „youth” was chosen because the movement that it refers to, was a youthly one, and the term „legionary” reffers to party allegiance of the members.

The book is structured along eight big chapters, each divided in subchapters.

The first chapter comes as an introduction into the subject, trying to explain briefly the factors that stand at the foundation of the Romanian ultranationalism and antisemitism. According to the author's opinion, at the base of the interwar romanian antisemitism stands the Jewish monopole over such domains as culture, press, education and at least but not last, trade.

The second chapter entitled „Youthly Justice” is developed around one of the pretexts that stand at the base of Romanian antisemitism, namely the monopole, among Jews from the educational field, idea induced by some professors and students from Iași. Thus, after the Grand Union from 1918 schooling became the main engine of social mobility on vertical axis, being asked by more and more Romanian fellows coming mostly from rural areas. Arrived in highschoools or universities, the youngsters originating in the rural sides confronted two major issues. First of them was the competition represented by the youngsters inhabiting the urban places, coming from familis, more often, educated and mainly, Jewish. The second problem was generated by the incapacity of the educational system to deal with the needs imposed by the growing number of students and pupils. Speculating skillfully those two problems, some professors in those times, managed to suggest their students that at the ground of all their needs lies the Jews that benefit, unjustly, of the facilities, that normally, should be shed only among the Romanian students. The succes of the antisemitic propaganda in the academic environment has lead in 1923 to the foundation of an antisemitic student organization called „The League of Christain National Defense” (L.C.N.D), this being the first step of the social movement, the writing is build around.

Chapter three describes the scission of L.C.N.D as following of different visions appeared between two groups within the organization, lead by Professor Alexandru Constantin Cuza on one hand, and the other by the young lawyer, Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu. After some misunderstandings, the last mentioned leader, forms in 1927 „The Legion of the Archangel Michael”, an extremist organization with high military and orthodox character, whose members were, with an outrageous rate, youngsters. The target audience being romanians from rural areas there were build up teams of two to four persons that crossed villages by foot, reciting poems or singing patriotic songs that caught the attention of the ones who gathered around them.

Chapter four and five follow and describe in a new way the evolution and the change of the way to promote that this organization had. If in the first years of existance, The Legion was known for violent protests and public executions, main cause for remaining forever in European and national history as one of the most violent interwar organization, after the year 1931, this atitude changes. Strongly influenced by the authorities` offensive, the lack of searched succes but mostly by the support manifested by the intelectual youth, The Legion began to promote itself with street posters, biassed printed publications, acts of charity and labour camps. Regarding the change of direction of The Legion, the author rallies to those personalities asimilated to this movement, such as Radu Gyr (1905-1975 poet), George Zlotescu (1906-1983 painter), Alexander Constant (1906-1986 economist), Emil Cioran (1911-1995 philosopher), last but not least Mircea Eliade (1907-1986 historian of religion), all these compelled by the injustice that took place at all levels of romanian society from that time, saw The Legion as the only organization capable to bring important changes and to establish a system based on meritocracy. Attracted by the solidarity among the members, the orthodox character and the

military discipline of the organization, the young intellectuals contributed qualitatively with writing the articles, posters, and speeches, especially eliminating the violent character that the organization used to have until that moment.

In chapter six the author presents in a detailed manner the change of approach of The Legion, presenting at the same time the way its members raised funds. From commercial activities, volunteering or even donations, the legionary members developed activities that they were good at, or had access to, in the interest of The Legion.

The penultimate chapter, „Salvation and Sacrifice” is realised around the statement that many orthodox priests had offered to The Legion of the Archangel Michael. For the first time in the modern history of Romania appears a political organization that not just promotes the orthodox value but is also formed around those values. The legionary members, thus, had the opportunity to organize meetings inside churches and promote their ideas through priests which, especially, in rural areas, had a strong influence upon the community. The clergy, on the other hand, took benefit of the material, but mostly physical support from the legionary members, who donated to the church a part of the funds raised and worked at the consolidation or building new churches.

The last chapter catches the abolition and the re-establish of The Legion, which meantime changed its name into „Iron Guard”. In February 1938, Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu transmitted an inter circular to announce the comrades that their organization is abolished. The decision made by Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu seems to be generated by the imposing of the royal dictatorship of King Carol, the Second, in February 1938, through which he disposed the abolition of all political parties and the formation of a new government, with the lead of patriarch Miron Cristea. Shortly after began a harsh hunt for the legionary members which were considered as „dangerous” by Carol, the Second. As a result of this measure, an important number of legionary members were killed, among these, even the soul of the organization, Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu. The ones left alive delimited themselves of this movement, or ran away in diaspora. Fact is that, in 1940, after King`s Carol, the Second abdication, at the head of the organization came Horia Sima, who made a pact with Marshal Antonescu, fact that gave the Legion the chance to gain political power. Arguing with Marshal Antonescu, who found out about their intention regarding his enstrangement from the power, legionary members were defeated after three days of military insurrection.

Although the presented work has a diversified documentation, taking into consideration the subject that it treats, it can be noticed the fact that the author doesn`t maintain necessarily a neutral line in presenting the image upon Legionary Movement. Thus the initiators and sympathizer of The Legionary Movement are depicted in a disadvantageous way, in some shots. This type of subjective presentation, is not necessarily one that creates a wrong picture, taking into consideration the fact that the violent actions and methods used by The Legionary Movement can be considered as having a negative character, though in this case,

can be omitted the positive image of an ambitious youngsters group, found in lack of material resources, that fought for obtaining their purposes.

Even so, this book can be useful to those who want to realise a scientific work on The Legionary Movement or to those who want to lecture an easy-readable book which treats an interesting subject.