

A Multi-Ethnic Anti-Semitic Movement

The National-Christian Defence League in Interwar Romania (1923-1940)

This project investigates how a unified anti-Semitic movement emerged in interwar Romania under the leadership of the main far-right party, the National-Christian Defence League (LANC)—also known as the National Christian Party (PNC) after 1935. The party organised one of the most violent anti-Semitic movements in Europe. Anti-Semitic riots as a political practice, well-organised paramilitaries, and close connections with the NSDAP were its primary characteristics. While most studies on anti-Semitism have focussed on the Legionary Movement, the LANC/PNC is often mentioned in reference to the Shoah in Romania. Despite the extensive anti-Semitic laws it implemented in December 1937, its history is still largely unknown.

Based on the few studies on the LANC's ideology, the project approaches the rise of anti-Semitism through empirical social history methods, focussing on organisational and regional aspects. I argue that the LANC's success was attributable to multiple anti-Semitic imperial legacies the party managed to reactivate and intensify after 1918. The primary hypothesis in this study is that the LANC had its strongholds in the multi-ethnic eastern part of the country, as it applied a multilingual anti-Semitic strategy. As a complex nation- and state-building process was underway in the territories Romania gained from the Habsburg and the Russian Empire, I conjecture that Romanian anti-Semitic leaders applied a multi-ethnic anti-Semitic approach to turn the former imperial subjects into anti-Semitic citizens of the Romanian state and integrate them into the new national state.

I rely on theories that emphasise the role of violence as a community mobilisation factor and on a middle-class theory to analyse the party's organisations, political practices as well as its social structures and the use of violence. First, I examine the connections to post-imperial anti-Semitic legacies, identify the district leaders, and the role of the paramilitaries. To what extent did the NSDAP and King Carol II support the political rise of PNC? Through the method of collective biography, I reconstruct the social profile of the anti-Semitic leaders, and through a thick description method, I scrutinise episodes of intensive anti-Semitic violence. I inquire in regional case studies how the multi-ethnic and multilingual integrative anti-Semitic strategy was applied and its effects. The study draws on several sources: personal papers of several anti-Semitic leaders, court records, reports of the security forces, and regional church archives.

By providing the first comprehensive study on the LANC/PNC, the project tackles the organisational strength and integrative function of anti-Semitism in the post-imperial context of the Romanian national state after 1918. In addition to filling an apparent research gap in the rise of anti-Semitism in interwar Europe, the project makes a significant contribution to the historical context of the Shoah in Romania.