

THE 1926 LOCAL ELECTIONS IN CĂLĂRAȘI

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With the accomplishment of the Romanian national state after centuries of yearning and struggle, confirmation of the universal suffrage and the emergence of new political parties and trends enhanced and invigorated the political life of the country. Parliamentary elections contributed significantly to the arrangement of the political scene at certain important moments of our history between the two World Wars.

Following constitutional provisions, the I. I. C. Brătianu Cabinet withdrew from office on March 27, 1926, after a four-year mandate, leaving behind an apparent vacancy for succession¹. Disputes within the opposition² paved the way for the government led by Gen. Alexandru Averescu³, installed in office on 30 March 1926 with the tacit support of the National Liberal Party, as previously promised⁴.

The parliamentary elections of May 1926 were a notable event as a unique election law⁵ applied to all adult citizens of Greater Romania. They were also a particularly tense event as they were organized - and eventually won - by the People's Party after much interference and rigging⁶.

There were six eligible candidates for Ialomița County, with four lists to be submitted. 44,430 effective voters were recorded out of the 51,831 who had initially registered⁷. The list for the People's Party featured the following candidates: gen. Al. Averescu, Dr. Nicolae Mețianu, Vasile Roșețeanu, Gh. Lupu, Duțu Dobrescu, Ioan Nițescu. As the list absorbed 20,633 votes, i.e. 46.44%, all of the candidates were elected to occupy all the seats the party had been allocated⁸.

The candidates from the National Liberal Party (Constantin Banu, Marius Roșca, I. Nițulescu Dor Mărunt, N. Popescu Băleni, Dr. D. Georgescu, Ion Andreescu) obtained 4,535 votes which granted them as far as 10.21%⁹.

¹ Ioan Scurtu, *Din viața politică a României (1926-1947). Studiu critic privind istoria Partidului Național - Țărănesc*, București, 1983, pg. 45.

² Nicolae Iorga, *România contemporană de la 1904 la 1930. Supt trei regi*, București 1932, pg. 401; *idem*, *Memorii*, vol. V, pg. 115.

³ M. Theodorian – Carada, *Efemeridele, Insemnări și Amintiri (1908-1928)*, Roman, 1937, pg. 132.

⁴ Ioan Scurtu, *loc.cit.*

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ Ioan Scurtu, *Alegerile parlamentare din mai 1926*, în "Studii și comunicări. Arheologie Istorie", Sibiu, 1974.

⁷ "Monitorul Oficial", nr. 122 din 4 iunie 1926.

⁸ *Idem*.

⁹ *Idem*.

The Peasants' Party list (Ion Mihalache, Alex. I. Bădulescu, Gh. Vlădescu Albești, Iulian Petrescu, Constantin Nicolescu, Atanase Georgescu) received 16,549 votes - a comfortable 37.25%¹⁰.

Finally, 5.02% of the total suffrage (2,232 votes) went to the National Party with Petre P. Haneș, Nicolae Topescu, Ștefan Istrate, Al. Nițescu, Ioan Vasilescu, Nicolae Stănescu)¹¹.

An additional partial election took place in Ialomița on September 6 to fill in one seat in the Deputies' Assembly that had remained vacant after the 25 May¹² round. The figures were comparatively close: 43,814 active electors out of a total 52,442 entries. Ioan Nicolae stood in for the People's Party, Ion Răducanu for the Peasants' Party, and Constantin Banu for the National Liberals¹³. With much less rigging than before, the Peasants' Party surfaced this time as a result of a better organised campaign and more freedom of expression for the electorate: 22,714 votes as against the People's Party's 12,491 and the Liberals' 6,885¹⁴.

The Government's candidate apparently failed both because the People's Party did not enjoy genuine popularity in this part of the country, and because his chances were sunk by conflicting interests at top and local level. The official candidate submitted to Gen. Averescu a memorandum backed up by 'circumstantial documentation' to give an account of the election course. The document is entered in the patrimony of the National History Museum of Romania, under No. 30058 and titled: *Alegerea parțială de la Ialomița - 6 septembrie 1926. Acte și fapte* [Local Elections in Ialomița, 6 September 1926. Documents and Doings]. The file exhibits Gen. Averescu's resolution of 9 October 1926: "Mr. I. Atanasiu, deputy, former State Undersecretary, is authorised to carry out a detailed and perfectly impartial enquiry on the ground to make a clear record of the course of events."

A grossly biased interpretation of the events as the documents of the time may display, they are important, however, as a record of quite a few political figures of the county and of the distribution of votes coming from each village for the main political parties. These documents are also a reminiscence of political mentalities of the time. The often faulty and obscure syntax — of which a faithful translation would only obliterate all reasonable meaning — gives credit to an outstanding classic of Romanian drama, Ion Luca Caragiale, whose comedies are a mock-humorous finger pointed at the social and political manners of the day.

We shall quote in full what we consider to be the most significant document, i.e., the memorandum to Gen. Alexandru Averescu:

¹⁰ *Idem.*

¹¹ *Idem.*

¹² "Monitorul Oficial", nr. 204 din 12 septembrie 1926.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

MEMORANDUM

On the Local Deputy Elections in the County of Ialomița,
6 September 1926.

The Peasants' Party, in agreement with the National Party, started the election campaign in Ialomița County, as soon as the papers had announced and confirmed the election day.

Seven automobiles full of propagandists, mostly deputies, led by I. Mihalache and Dr. Lupu, made up centres for propaganda as they spread out their propagandists in most villages across Ialomița County.

As the candidate himself declared, over 300,000 lei's worth of manifestos and other printed material rained in on the county for a whole month and a half.

The benevolence of the Prefecture, with Mr. I. F. Buricescu at the head, who is also President of the local organisation of the People's Party, was obvious all the time if not dubious, as for over a month's time there was no step taken to oppose this political raid on the neighbourhood.

I was prompt to write about the situation to Minister Garofild and Mr. Buricescu too, who thought it wise to go on leave right before the elections in answer to my letter — moreover, extorted a letter from me saying I would have no claim on him in case I failed in the election. Although Mr. Buricescu knew only too well, as a politician, that the existence and the strengthening of the Peasants' Party is the very denial of the existence of the People's Party, and the larger representation of the People's Party in the country's Government means the struggle against this electoral demagoguery which is a menace to the peace and the term of office of this government as of the next one.

The above-mentioned benevolence is tantamount to an attempt against the higher interests of the country, if we are to think of the echo of this failure of the government, both at home and abroad, at a time such as this, and the more severe it is as it was deliberate and premeditated.

The People's Party sets out on their election campaign a mere 8 days in advance of the elections, that is, exactly 48 hours after Mr. Buricescu departed on leave. The honourable Prefect seems to have found the perfect time to fall behind the scenes, where he could meditate in peace upon the ways of the ostrich. The campaign begins with 5 automobiles which we had at our disposal for a mere 5 days, and with a thin slice of the People's Party, consisting of Secretaries D. Ronetescu and C. Teodorescu, Deputy I. Nițescu and County Council President At. Constantinescu, Mr. Spîneșteanu, Deputy for Vlașca, and Dr. C. Banu, Secretary General of the Public Health Department, as well as other members of the People's Party, all of whom, in deeply heartfelt solidarity, strove like true heroes for 8 days and as many nights to preserve the honour of the Party in these partial elections, even against the official local organisation of the People's Party in coalition with the Peasants' Party and in circumstantial flirting with the Liberals.

For these partial elections, the People's Party and its Government actually stepped into the shoes of the opposition.

The faction who opposed the government, first through indifference, then procrastination, and at last in open hostility, is composed of I. F. Buricescu, president of the local organisation and prefect of the county, absent on a 10 days' leave, deputies V. Roşeteanu, G. Lupu and Duţu Dobrescu with their acolytes, school teachers Elefterescu and V. Georgescu. Actually, the group went in hand with the local administration, as the prefect, out on his 10 days' holiday, was politically engaged against the government on one hand; on the other, he sabotaged the government's measures through the Ştefănescu General Inspectorate, whose administration had received the following order: "Proceed to nothing without my personal sanction; I will be back in a few days and penalise all insubordination."

The leave requested by Mr. Buricescu was the only way he could stay home and plot freely against the official candidate, a perfect instance of foul play for any man who considers himself a civilised person.

Under the circumstances, the official candidate had no support from the police or the administration, and Inspector General Ştefănescu from the Prefecture was tied hand and foot by Mr. Buricescu's subversive encouragement of the Peasants' Party's propaganda which brought them a 40% advance from the very beginning.

With Mr. Buricescu's leave, the political bureau of the party all moved to his home, where all the mayors received instructions as to whom the people were to vote for, and deputies Roşeteanu, Duţu Dobrescu and Lupu openly recommended the citizens and told the mayors to instruct the citizens to vote for either the Peasants' ring or the Liberals, a recommendation passed under pressure from Prefect Buricescu, whose holiday happened to be ending right after election day.

It was enough to mistify the People's Party's electorate completely and make them look to the Peasants' Party, for the commoners have little understanding of the blank vote, and since they had been dissuaded to vote for the Star as the orders had been, they voted for the Peasants' Ring to serve the head of the local party, Mr. Buricescu and his company.

In this way the authority of the head of the local party and the quality of county prefect were used against the official candidates agreeable to the head of the government and of the party, according to his legitimate rights.

This massive Averescan suffrage will hardly be recovered from the Peasants' Party, where they have been pushed to be drowned there in perverse premeditation. This malfeasance was an attempt against the very standing of the People's Party in Ialomiţa County, and has shaken the political life of the country. Because the Peasants' Party rise to such formidable power in Ialomiţa by such crooked means is a sprouting trend that will be spreading all over the country, building up like an avalanche to bring hell to this government and the next. The duty of the People's Party today is the exact opposite to an electoral rise of the

Peasants' Party. How serious a political crime Mr. Buricescu and his partners committed during this partial election by their indiscipline, moreover, their anarchic attitude, driven by sheer personal interests and the local clique, can be seen from the echo produced by the Ialomița partial election in the press and the public opinion.

If not properly sanctioned, such unprecedented political offence might come to breed the like of it, which would be a threat to the party's strength and the devotees could be easily dispirited.

Despite the goodwill and experience of Chief Inspector Ștefănescu, delegated to the prefecture of Ialomița for 8 days, he was sabotaged and opposed by the local authorities who would not execute the orders they received from Mr. Buricescu, under threat of punishment to be inflicted shortly, upon return from his pretended leave, because he ran a fervent political activity against the government all this time.

Chief Inspector Ștefănescu sent regular reports about the bizarre course of this election. Moreover, the meeting where the electoral committee was appointed was attended by Mr. Buricescu, Mr. Roșteanu, and Mr. Duțu Dobrescu, all of whom assured us of their support, while Mr. Roșteanu and Mr. Buricescu declined any active role in the electoral campaign. They simply misled the honest competitors, which was a death blow inflicted in ill faith on this electoral campaign, as the facts showed the perfect opposite.

Electoral instruments

Besides the electoral instruments mentioned above, the Peasants' Party had a delegate for each polling station. As leaders of the election, they had plenty of money, at least one million lei from Blank Bank, plus total freedom and every support in the propaganda from Mr. Buricescu. The People's Party and their candidate only had 5 automobiles for the last week and the few fellows mentioned above to serve the cause.

Mr. Buricescu's group was the most dangerous adversary during this election. Their attitude was characterised, first by blameworthy nonchalance, then by procrastination and misleading conduct, and finally by open, manifest hostility in sheer treason of our party.

In point of material means the official candidate, who was ordered to sit in for this election, only to be later suppressed by his own party, had no more than 200,000 lei plus another 100,000 lei from the government to spend on this election, whereas the general election absorbed over 500,000 lei for a contest hardly more arduous than this partial election, where the government's candidate was up against the officials of the People's Party, who also held control of the administration, while the Peasants' Party joined forces with the National Party and the Liberal Party.

Facts

1. On the day when the official candidature was submitted, deputy Roșeteanu turned up on the Tribunal corridor and threatened away Fulgeanu from Roșeți village, the mayor from the village of Patru Frați and I. Mirescu from Coșereni village, urging them to stand down from candidacy. A written report of the incident was sent in due time to Minister Garoflid.

2. Mr. Duțu Dobrescu travelled in the automobile paid by myself with 20,000 lei of propaganda money to the electoral districts of Ciocănești, Plevna and Lehliu, to hand out secret manifestos to the local authorities and advise the mayors to teach the people to either put in a blank vote or vote for the Peasants' Party.

Witnesses to that: the chief of the police station in Lehliu, the mayor of Ștefănești village and others.

3. Mr. I. F. Buricescu, the prefect on holiday, received a neverending line of visitors, mayors and electors, to tell them under various forms that he wished to shake off a candidacy he does not agree with and that he had asked to go on leave only to decline all responsibility, as the candidate did not belong to the local organisation.

Witnesses: the mayor of Ioan Chica village and Ilie Jugănar from Albești.

4. On election day, deputy Roșeteanu was heard to say in a public meeting at Roșeți polling station that the candidate from the Star did not belong to the People's Party from Ialomița, that he was an intruder and advised the voters to rather go with the Peasants' Party. He was heard to say the same at Petroiu polling station, under similar circumstances.

Witnesses: the head of the Roșeți police station, the mayor of Roșeți, the mayor of Petroiu, Mihail Mavrodin, delegate for the election from Roșeți, Dragu Tudor, delegate for the election from Șocariciu village, and Petre Datcu from the village of Dichiseni.

5. Sunday, September 5, on the eve of the election, deputy Gh. Lupu gathered a public meeting to tell the people that the government's candidate must not be voted for as he was not agreeable to the local organisation.

Witnesses: deputy Spăneșteanu from Vlașca, substitute prefect Ștefănescu, who also received the official reports on the issue, plus many locals.

6. The day before election, deputy Roșeteanu went to the polling station in Slobozia and was loud to advise in public against the official candidacy and incited the people to vote for any other list but that of the government.

7. At 6 a.m. on election day, deputy Duțu Dobrescu received the lists of delegates and assistants from Lehliu polling station, where he was to take them back by the time election began. Actually, he did not bring the lists until 12.30 p.m., thus leaving our polls with no delegate or assistant for half a day, which allowed the deputies of the Peasants' Party to deal their own cards.

Witnesses: security inspector Vasilescu and delgate Constantin Năstase from Domnița Maria village, local councillor.

Deputy Dobrescu, delegate to Plevna station, barely passed through the village once, probably to promote opposition to the governmental candidacy, whereafter he vanished in total disregard of this polling station.

8. Barrister Economescu summoned a meeting in the village of Dichiseni with the help of mayor Teodor Niculescu, but there came deputy Roșețeanu who scattered the crowd and intimidated the mayors. Under such circumstances, every attempt in favour of the governmental candidate supported by Subsecretary of State Busuioceanu, deputy Spâneșteanu, Public Health Secretary General Dr. C. Banu and others, was systematically undermined by the oppositon within our party.

In this manner, the opposing Peasants' Party was given such a formidable chance as will put in danger the county's political life in relation to all parties.

9. 70% of the Averescan delegates to the polls were either inert, or hostile, or hid behind the scenes.

Delegate Anastase Teodorescu from Ciochina made the following public recommendation: "Gentle people, if you won't vote for the Stick, then vote for the Ring", and so did delegate Ghiță D. Mușat at Munteni, Buzău. The chief of police in Munteni, Buzău received a written order from justice Ioan Nicolaie to not leave his station all through the election.

Under the circumstances, the appointed candidate of the government, opposed from three directions - first, by a hostile or passive administration led by the prefect en titre against the local organisation led by the chairman of the organisation; second, by the stubborn alliance of the Peasants' Party and the National Party, and third, by the Liberal Party - barely managed to secure the suffrage of close devotees and possibly a few thousand votes from those of the People's Party who resisted the electoral anarchy conducted by Mr. Buricescu.

One can easily assess the official candidate's weight in both the general election and this latter local round.

10. On the night of the 6th to the 7th of September, Mr. Buricescu & Co. (Duțu Dobrescu, Roșețeanu, Lupu) celebrated copiously the outcome of the election at DADARLAD Cabaretin Călărași until 10 p.m., when they shamelessly wound their way home in the sight of puzzled citizens.

Thus was celebrated the fall of the government's candidate in the local election of 6 September 1926, with a glorious drinking party in a disreputable third-rate brothel.

11. On election day Mr. Mihalache and Mr. Lupu went from one polling station to another, perfectly undisturbed, giving speeches outside the polls, which was completely forbidden to delegates from the government.

Upon arrival to every polls, Peasants' Party leaders Mihalache and Lupu would enquire if deputy Roșețeanu had by chance called.

This is obvious proof of the foul fraternity between certain members of the local People's Party organisation and the Peasants's Party candidate.

Conclusions

1. In the general elections, the People's Party, with loyal support from the moderate wing of the Peasants' Party, obtained nearly 21,000 votes; the Peasants' Party managed 16,000 votes and the Liberals, 4,500.

In the 6 September local election the People's Party, except for Mr. Buricescu's faction, obtained 12,500 votes. 23,000 votes went for the Peasants's and the National Parties together, and the Liberals received almost 7,000 votes.

Mention must be made that the National Party managed around 2,000 votes by itself in the general election. These figures are clear evidence that, within three months of the general election, the People's Party has lost nearly 10,000 votes in Ialomița, most of which drifted to the Peasants and the rest to the Liberals.

However, a difference of 6,000 votes added to the 12,500 for the official candidate would have ensured the government's success.

2. The local People's Party division are in confusion as they have split in two, and their electorate has been criminally diverted on to the side of the Peasants' Party.

Drastic and exemplary penalties should be inflicted on traitors and urgent measures for radical organisation - or else the local faction, nested here indeed before the general election, will bring to ruin the whole party.

The only possible recovery is around the 12,500 votes obtained by the government's nominee on September 6, 1926 - they are all the electoral resources the People's Party can get for now in Ialomița County.

The conspirators, whatever their number, are of no more avail to the People's Party and all they stand for is electoral anarchy and political betrayal, plus total lack of moral authority to accomplish anything good after they have pooled consistent efforts to pull down the party.

3. Personal interests and those of a local clique have got the upper hand of this election round, in total neglect of interests of the government, the party or the country.

10 conclusive documents are enclosed.

Of these documents, the most significant is the report made by Vasile Georgescu, president of the Urziceni District Organisation and of the local committee, and submitted to Ion Nicolae on 7.09.1926.

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- Abstract -

International recognition of Romania as a national state in 1918 made a major impact on the political life of the country: universal suffrage was confirmed, new political parties and trends emerged in the Western European fashion, and parliamentary elections made a difference at several significant moments in the interval between the two World Wars.

Domestic politics, however, often carried the brand of deeply rooted oriental mentalities as politicians struggled to accommodate conflicting private interests within the larger pattern of national legislation. The outcome was a somewhat comic picture of a ludicrous flurry in a frantic race for power, with meek and often ridiculous appeal to the national interest to account for the drive.

Documents of the time have survived to give a record of the confusing atmosphere of local elections, far more prone to compromise and petty arrangements of the kind that provided bountiful inspiration to a classic of Romanian literature, playwright Ion Luca Caragiale. Besides the often faulty language, the dramatist made full use of the threadbare arguments to ridicule the political stage of the day.

On the other hand, the added value of such records comes from the arithmetic they contain. Statisticians and historians will no doubt go beyond the artistic impression to fill in the blanks of local and national history with such figures as are given away in the text.