

Controversies on the Publishing of the Newspaper “*Curentul*”

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Abstract: The emergence of “*Curentul*” Journal has been enthusiastically welcomed by the readers, this publication bringing a fresh vim to the Romanian inter-war press. Many contemporary journalists have distrustfully considered Pamfil Șeicaru’s Journal. This “horrendous” journalist was charged by his peers of having sustained this publication with funding provided by the Government. The controversies derived from this subject can be found in the articles and memories of those who knew the director of “*Curentul*”, but also in the novels which had him as a source of inspiration.

Keywords: ethics; exile; journalism; fascism; blackmail

1. Background

The circumstances that led to the publishing of the newspaper *Curentul* represented one of the most debated issues by those who contested Pamfil Șeicaru’s place among the most important journalists in Romania. When it was issued on the market, *Curentul* had articles signed by one of the most famous journalists of those times. The question that may prevail is the following: where did Șeicaru have the money necessary to support the editorial team mainly formed of the real stars of the interwar press from? The adversaries of the fearful journalist claimed that Șeicaru made his fortune using a strategy based on blackmail, petty compliance, defamation etc.

Nichifor Crainic, editor at *Curentul* for almost two years (Crainic, 1932, p.1), wrote in an article published in the newspaper *Calendarul*, in August 1932, that his former colleague and friend was the beneficiary of some help coming from powerful politicians in order to release one of the best newspapers of those times. Thus Crainic claimed that “the *Curentul* funds had been provided by the Government itself” (Idem, 1932, p. 1). This accusation had an important impact on the public opinion since the two journalists had had a common background in this field. By the release of *Curentul*, Nichifor Crainic and Pamfil Șeicaru enjoyed their glory together at publications, such as *Gândirea*, *Neamul Românesc* or *Cuvântul*.

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According to Cezar Petrescu, Crainic may be considered one of Pamfil Șeicaru's most important colleagues. The accusation launched by the director of the newspaper *Calendarul* is sustained by novels for which Șeicaru was a source of inspiration. In *Delirul*, Marin Preda shows that Pamfil Șeicaru, the character Grigore Patriciu, received money from I.G. Duca, a politician from the Liberal Party, in order to publish his own newspaper. In another novel, *Gorila* by Liviu Rebreanu, the fearful journalist, represented by the character Toma Pahonțu, needs some governmental help in order to carry on his dream of having his own gazette.

But in the article "Geneza unei gazete: *Curentul*" (Frunză, 2001, p. 343) / "The Genesis of a Gazette: *Curentul*" (1943), Ion Vinea claimed that after Pamfil Șeicaru left the editorial team of *Curentul*, he was eager to start over and that he obtained the money necessary to publish his own newspaper by selling some of the oil fields that he owned. Șeicaru's financial power is confirmed by the magazine *Sfarmă-Piatră*, a publication released by Nichifor Crainic. Wishing to prove Pamfil Șeicaru's illegal activities in the oil business, Al. Gregorian showed in the article "Debutul petrolistului nostru" / "The debut of our oil business man" that in 1924, the fearful journalist won 11.4 milion lei out of one business (Gregorian, 1937, p. 2). Despite the accusations brought by his adversaries, the director of the newspaper *Curentul* enjoyed the fame of a *self-made man* (Carandino, "The inquiries of *Facla*. What is it, What should it be, What is its actual influence?", 1936, p. 5). In the article "Stăpânii presei" / "The owners of the press", published in *Cuvântul*, in 1925, Pamfil Șeicaru shares his intention of becoming an independent man:

"Today, a newspaper is, first of all, a commercial factory which requires some capital investments, the risks bringing the gaining possibilities almost to zero. The journalist is, thus, a mere worker who uses paper, ink and plumes, a daily lawyer of some causes given by the owner. To have a bias opinion on whatever matter means to commit an insurrection act against the owner, which will finally lead to some lame firings." (Șeicaru, 1925, p. 1) (our transl.)

Pamfil Șeicaru had pinpointed since 1922 the danger that *Finanță/ Finance* represented. He showed that the sums collected from the newspaper sales solved just a part of the expenses of the editorial team, of the administration and of the publishing house, the difference being covered by the money coming from the commercial advertising. But for the industrial and financial factories, the commercial advertising was a means of altering the press freedom, the financial difficulties being replaced by the pressures imposed by the administration upon the editorial team: "Democracy means the prevailing of opinions and the finance has the interest of having the creative power of opinions as its slave." (Idem, , 1922, p. 2) Since the beginning of his journalist career, Pamfil Șeicaru showed an anti-liberal attitude in his writings. It is interesting to observe whether such an attitude can also be found in *Curentul*, a newspaper which, as we have mentioned above, is

said to have been published using the money given by the liberal government. Thus I aimed at analyzing the articles signed by Pamfil Șeicaru during the first month when *Curentul* was launched and during the last month when Pamfil Șeicaru was a member of the editorial team of *Cuvântul*, a newspaper supporting King Carol. For *Curentul*, I analysed the articles published between January, 11 and February, 11, 1928. For the gazette whose director was Titus Enacovici, the articles analyzed were published between November, 17 and December, 17, 1927.

In *Cuvântul*, Șeicaru's articles mainly represent attacks against the government. These are some titles: "După achitarea d-lui Manoilescu"/ "After Mr. Manoilescu's discharging" (November, 17, 1927), "Pentru o pâine, șefule"/ "For a loaf of bread, boss" (November, 18, 1927), "Între zâmbet și ciomag"/ "Between a smile and a club" (November, 22, 1927), "Bugetul instigator"/ "The provoking budget" (November, 24, 1927), "Destindere economică"/ "Economic relaxation" (November, 27, 1927), "La mijloc"/ "In-between" (November, 29, 1927), "Ce nu face statul"/ "What the state does not make" (December, 7, 1927), "După nouă ani"/ "After nine years" (December, 9, 1927), "Scăderile diplomației noastre"/ "The flaws of our diplomacy" (December, 10, 1927), "Desființați Blajul"/ "Abolish Blaj" (December, 13, 1927).

During the first week of the time period under analysis, Pamfil Șeicaru's main target was the Prime Minister, Ionel I.C. Brătianu. The fearful journalist considered Brătianu the main guilty person for the difficult state that the national economy had been going through. At the same time, Șeicaru blamed the Prime Minister for giving the most important ministry, namely the Ministry of Finance, to Vintilă Brătianu, "the one who represents the politics of national poverty". (Idem, 1927, p. 1)

In the article *Între zâmbet și ciomag/ Between a smile and a club*, Șeicaru condemns the behavior adopted by Ionel I.C. Brătianu against the national peasants' party members who refused to collaborate with the Liberal Party members:

"It is something totally tragic within the end (we do not dare say agony) of Mr. Ionel I. C. Brătianu's political career. He was forced to choose between the dominator's certain threat and the honey-coated offer of the governing transition. «Collaboration or abolishment», this is the less elegant offer that the head of the National Liberal Party provides to the National Peasants' Party members. We will not talk about the moral essence of this offer accompanied by a threat because the moral element of the political actions is almost invisible, thus without having the chance of being achieved, but we will analyze the possibilities of putting into practice this alternative which could not be equated with the liberal words «girdle or life». Abolishment? But, since January, 1922, Mr. Ionel I.C. Brătianu, angry that Mr. Iuliu Maniu turned down his collaboration offer, has been trying to abolish the

national peasants' party members from Transylvania and from the Old Kingdom. For national party members, he mentioned the nostalgia for the millennial slavery of Budapest, and for the peasants' party members, he brought serious accusations for different sales to Lenin's Moscow and Stambolinski's Sophia." (our transl.) (Idem, 1927, p. 1)

In the article *Bugetul instigator/ The provoking budget*, the fearful journalist shows that Vintilă Brătianu's ability in financial matters can be seen "in the suite of the frightful bankruptcies, in the interests that rob the unhappy producing inhabitants, in the spirit of the petty public-officers who have to choose between robbery and the compensating agony of honor, in the country disarming, in the irritation state of the new counties." Thus, Pamfil Șeicaru raises the following questions: "What is the use of this sinister hero from the drama of the active fanatic stupidity? Since Mr. Ionel I.C. Brătianu has been making desperate moves against a frugal shadow, since the government has felt itself trapped and has been struggling with all the past sins, how could it allow itself the luxury of putting up with Mr. Vintilă Brătianu's provoking presence?" (our transl.) (Idem, 1927, p. 1.) After November, 26, 1927, when the death of Ionel I.C. Brătianu, the one who "was the master of the country" (Idem, "In-between", 1927, p. 1), was announced in *Cuvântul*, Șeicaru's attacks focused on Vintilă Brătianu. In an article written about Vintilă Brătianu's election as the head of the Liberal Party, Pamfil Șeicaru analyses the discourse uttered at a meeting at the club of the party:

"Within the poor string of words, not a single idea, not a single formulation of principles could be grasped. Having a touching void of political thinking, the new head of the National-Liberal Party exhibited himself with some lame knowledge which might provoke everyone's pity. As Mr. Vintilă Brătianu's speech on the critical situation of the Liberal Party and on the economic crisis (the political one being its external counterpart) is concerned, you may be totally dismayed by such a sheer almost unconscious simplicity." (Idem, "On the starting line of licking", 1927, p.1) (our transl.)

In another article, the Romanian public had the opportunity of seeing, through the fearful journalist's eyes, Vintilă Brătianu addressing the members of Parliament:

"Mr. Vintilă Brătianu, gloomy and stunted, is reading the Government declaration, in an annoying and quiet tone. [...] A distressing scarcity of words, a crazy search of expressions, a complete stammering in his statements, a repetition of vowels within his own words, a desperate jerk of defining his thought, a sympathetic urge against a scanty nature." (Idem, "The legislative bodies", 1927, p. 3) (our transl.)

According to Pamfil Șeicaru, the reason for which the leader of the Liberal Party had an improper way of governing the country was that "Vintilă Brătianu has no skills whatsoever, not being able to perceive but the near future, not being able to anticipate, by examining a situation that can arise from today's or tomorrow's

contexts. Mr. Vintilă Brătianu does not have the necessary imagination, being the pettiest political intelligence ever seen and he cannot achieve anything great without any grain of imagination.” (Idem, “Politics of unskilled people”, 1927, p. 1) (our transl.)

At the same time, Șeicaru claimed that “Mr. Vintilă Brătianu has the passion of hunchbacks” and “he wants a country of hunchbacks”, a hunchback being “the arch of subjugation” (Idem, “A country of hunchbacks”, 1927, p. 1). Șeicaru’s leaving *Cuvântul* did not bring any changes in his writings. Even after making his own newspaper which was his perfect embodiment, the fearful journalist carried on writing about the liberal government politics, using a severe tone.

Most of the articles signed by Pamfil Șeicaru in the first month of release of the newspaper *Curentul* had Vintilă Brătianu as the main target. During the time span under analysis, one of three articles written by Șeicaru embedded accusations against the person who held the position of a Prime Minister between November, 24, 1927 and November, 10, 1928. These are some titles which show the way in which the liberal politician’s administration manner was criticized: “Ar fi mai potrivit”/ “It would be better” (January, 11, 1928), “Ce ne lipsește”/ “What we still need” (January, 12, 1928), “Invitația la dans a Târfei”/ “The dance invitation of the whore” (January, 14, 1928), “Suflete moarte”/ “Dead souls” (January, 15, 1928), “Ecuția politică a târfei”/ “The whore’s political equation” (January, 16, 1928), “De unde se pot recruta îndrăzneții”/ “Where can the daring ones be recruited from?” (January, 26, 1928), “Ca să facem politică”/ “In order to make politics” (January, 28, 1928), “Scoși la lumină”/ “Brought to light” (January, 30, 1928), “Pribegii orașelor”/ “The town wanderers” (February, 4, 1928), “Din școala Târfei: Colțescu”/ “Out of the Whore’s school: Colțescu” (February, 5, 1928).

Within the *Curentul* pages, the head of the Government was depicted as “a fanatic, a man whose intelligence once dominated by an idea, cannot use the critical spirit anymore.” (Idem, “Brought to light”, 1928, p. 1) Vintilă Brătianu is *attacked* by the fearful journalist in the very first number of *Curentul*. In the article “Ar fi mai potrivit”/ “It would be better”, where there is tackled upon the lack of interest showed by the liberal government for the financial problems which the business men from Transylvania had to be confronted with, the statesman is criticized for the difficult way in which he was dealing with the issue of investing foreign capital in our national economy:

“Good children receive nice presents, the (educated or uneducated) grown-ups of Great Romania will get a loan made too late, but it is better later than never. [...] This means that Mr. Vintilă Brătianu does not get the things right away and it takes too much time for him to reach a proper conclusion. It seems that out of his mathematical skills, he has chosen the method of demonstration by reduction to the absurd; he was forced to convince us of the stupidity of this principle using us as

guinea pigs (revaluation was nothing but the application of this principle to our currency) and that is why he put us through all these sufferings throughout all these years, which finally led to his abandonment through ourselves. The demonstration by the reduction to the absurd was performed, the grown-ups of Great Romania were very patient and good, and they understood the absurdity of the guinea pig experiment and now they will receive, very thrilled, as the Jews received the hand in the desert, the politics in the exchange of the hostile politics uselessly experienced.” (Idem, 1928, p. 1) (our. transl.)

In the editorial “Invitația la dans a târfei”/ “The dance invitation of the whore”, published on January, 14, 1928, Pamfil Șeicaru blamed Vintilă Brătianu for having given the *Wolf Business* to Tancred Constantinescu (“the whore”), the former Minister of Industry between 1923 and 1926, thus provoking a substantial loss to the state. As it is shown in the article, the *Wolf Business*, whose value was 50-million golden marks (almost 2 billion lei), implied the acquisition of railway materials, made of old iron, whose price was 30% higher than the one on the international market.

Analyzing Pamfil Șeicaru’s journalistic activity within the two moments, namely the end of his working activity at *Cuvântul* and the beginning of his activity at *Curentul*, we can conclude that a relation of collaboration between Pamfil Șeicaru and the liberal government was impossible. Even Zigu Ornea who did not hesitate to call Șeicaru “a blackmailer”, places *Curentul* among the newspapers which “knew how to maintain an impartial relation with political parties.” (Ornea, 1999, p. 179)

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