

## The Newspaper Editorial Board, the Strength of the Journalistic Success (The Case of *Curentul*)

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**Abstract:** *Curentul* newspaper and Pamfil Seicaru, its owner and director, practically changed the interwar journalism. The editorial board was made up of well-known journalists, with extensive experience and a special polemic verve. Due to them, *Curentul* newspaper soon became a distinctive voice in the interwar media, its sources of information being among the most consistent and extensive. As a consequence, Seicaru's newspaper held a primacy of information during that age, being a paper of wide circulation, moulding the public to like sensational and shocking news, those who read it accidentally. In one way or another, the journalistic method of the editorial staff is similar in many ways to that of a tabloid as it was conceived in the interwar years. At the same time, *Curentul* was a real newspaper of civic opinion and firm political attitude, despite some ideological and inherent derailments in the interwar years preceding the Second World War.

**Keywords:** audience; editorial; ideology; journalism; blackmail

*Curentul* newspaper is one of the most interesting journalistic achievements of interwar Romania. A few years after its establishment, the newspaper competed with Stelian Popescu's *Universe*, "the most influential and wealthy press tycoon in interwar Romania" (Ciachir, 2008, p. 23). The journal founded by Pamfil Seicaru enjoyed a warm welcoming from readers even from its first issues and the success came as a result of the efforts made by the owner to hire experienced journalists and editors popular among the public. Besides, the articles written in a highly polemical tone met the demands required by the readers of those times. The first famous journalists hired by Seicaru in order to ensure a wide circulation were Cezar Petrescu and Nichifor Crainic. It was not the first time when the three journalists were working together, their journalistic careers having met repeatedly. When they had the opportunity, Seicaru, Crainic and Petrescu made a good impression due to their talent showing brightness to the newspapers or magazines they were signing in. Among their achievements, we can include the brief, but fruitful collaboration at *Neamul Romanesc*. The publication, edited in a new format, with the arrival of the three journalists in the editorial board, would be categorized as "a Western newspaper" even by Nicolae Iorga (Crainic, 1991, p. 188). The leaving of the "trio" from *Neamul Romanesc*, after an "unexplained moodiness" of the greatest journalist that "our race gave us - Nicolae Iorga" (Crainic, 1928) created the premises of one of the most influential journals from interwar Romanian - *Cuvantul*. In a short while, with the financial support provided by Titus Enacovici, a former sponsor of *Neamul Romanesc*, the new paper would be among the top selling publications in the country.

The disagreements between Nae Ionescu, who joined the editorial board in 1926, in order to replace Nichifor Crainic, chosen as Secretary General of Cults and Arts Ministry, and Seicaru, led to the

departure of the latter one and thus, to the establishment of *Curentul*, with the help of the team that created *Cuvantul*. Nichifor Crainic speaks in his *Memoirs* about Seicaru's efforts to reunite the old editorial board: "When the appearance of *Curentul* was ready, our mutual friends [...] insisted that I should join the new paper, pleading for the reunion of the old group, who brought a new spirit in the Romanian press" (Crainic, 1991, p. 207). Seicaru's efforts were successful, and thus, Nichifor Crainic and Cezar Petrescu were members of *Curentul* editorial board even since the first issue. The editorial team was completed by: Al. Busuioceanu, C. Arsene, I. Biciolla, Dem. Theodorescu, T. Theodorescu-Braniste, who, after only two months of activity left *Curentul* editorial board to write at *Adevarul*, Ion Dumitrescu, Dr. Ion Istrati, Dr. Nicolae Rosu, Ionescu-Vion, Sever Stoica, Victor Rodan. The economic chronicle was signed by Ricardo, which was the pseudonym of engineer Alex Froda. At *Curentul* wrote also: Ion Vinea, Nicolae Carandino, Grigore Patricius, who signed Geer Patrick, and engineer Ion Scutaru. The Editorial Secretary position was occupied by Dem. Zaharescu, who would die in a plane crash, his place being taken by Lorin Popescu.

Seicaru's focus on the contributors' selection is highlighted by Liviu Rebreanu in *Gorila*. The novel's main character, Toma Popescu-Pahontu, alias Pamfil Seicaru, demonstrates great skill when selects the editorial board of *Romania* newspaper. Pahontu hires many young people in the team, but takes care that "for all economic columns that all those which could be productive to employ experienced editors. He did not want any revolution, but an apparently revolutionary renewal or, as he said, a realist revolution. Instead of the upheavals destroying everything and then try to build a new world on a heap of ruins, he sought some successive partial collapses, in their place the new constructions could be readily built in the new style of the new world ..." (Rebreanu, 2001, p. 402). A.P. Sampson as well talks about the value of Seicaru's editorial board, in *The Memoirs of a Journalist*. The memorialist believes that the page of *Curentul* political reportage "was one of the best". This was explained by the good organization of the editorial work. For example, Samson shows the work done by reporter Paul Costin, a colleague of Editor Victor Rodan. Costin's technique consists in an exchange of "confessions": "On the halls of the Chamber or inside the ministries, he would come close to the politician and start whispering to his ear all sorts of political secrets, unfinished sentences, fragments of words uttered in a mysterious way and with no any meaning. Meanwhile, the character felt compelled to respond this trust with serious reliable information that Costin immediately transmitted to his subordinates. They would complete it, would write texts and all these would arrive on Victor Rodan's table, who would rewrite them and connect each other to form a page impressive due to its real or at least apparent richness" (Samson, 1979, p. 104).

To enjoy the services of the best journalists, Seicaru paid a special attention to their salaries. Ion Vinea confessed that the founder of *Curentul* used the same principle in *Cuvantul* editorial board: "All of them were given a very honorable salary so that the journalist could live with dignity from his work, daily work of daily renewal, the most difficult and exhausting of all works of thought, even when nature endowed you with intelligence and talent" (apud Vuia, 2007). In addition to significant amounts of money, Seicaru offered his collaborators something else: freedom of opinion. In 1979, Pamfil Seicaru, who was in exile in Dachau, said in a letter intended to Ovid Vuia, Romanian doctor settled in Germany, that at *Curentul* each editor was free to write the way he wanted. The great journalist said: "In my editorial board I had all opinions, from the Secretary-General Lorin Popescu, legionnaire, former president of students, to Voitec, socialist follower of Titel Petrescu and, between these two extremes, cuzists, national-peasants, liberals [...] The result was a unity in diversity. We leave aside the fact that different ways of judging a political situation might have occurred, especially what reporters brought, as it gave a note of objectivity revealing the employee's independence" (Vuia,

2007). That does not mean that Seicaru left unpunished the editors who dared disobey the required editorial standards. We shall use as evidence a confession made by Vlaicu Barna. This event occurred at *Curentul* editorial board and the protagonists were Seicaru, Dragos Vranceanu, who “introduced himself as Ph.D in Philosophy at the University of Florence” and Barna, as observer. The memorialist, then a young man with journalistic ambitions, was waiting outside Seicaru’s office, who wished to offer him a post of editor, when “at a time, that door cracked like a blast and the dark Pamfil Seicaru appeared in person, with strong steps and frowning face, putting his hands on hip and staring at him addressed him with a deep hoarse voice: *You, who the f... taught you the gibberish language of the Jewish in Sarindar, that you used for writing my article today. My journal is not some drain for your pestilential style ...*” (Barna, 2005, p. 112). The “incriminated” article was a first page where Vranceanu had used some bold neologisms.

*Curentul* released its first issue on January 11th, 1928, on a Wednesday day. On the first page there were articles by Cezar Petrescu, *Why We Hate Them*, Crainic, *On the Same Way*, Dem. Theodorescu, *The Animal’s Eulogy*, Pamfil Seicaru, *It Would Be More Appropriate* a.o. Largely, the articles contained critics addressed to the Liberal government. For example, in the article *Why We Hate Them*, Cezar Petrescu tells about a terrible happening which took place “in the vicinity of a town in Moldova”, in the days when Christians were celebrating the birth of the Holly Child. He talks about the tragedy of two “frozen sentinels” while guarding a ammunition depot. Cezar Petrescu's article is continued by Dem. Theodorescu with *The Animal’s Eulogy*, where the following question is asked: “How is it possible [...] that such an intelligent community should be generally represented or managed by some animals?” (Theodorescu, 1928). The critical tone is then taken by Pamfil Seicaru. In the article *It Would Be More Appropriate* the governmental policy in Ardeal is criticized. Besides, Seicaru notices the wit of the Hungarian bankers who managed to attract the business people from Ardeal to Budapest, the secret being the small interest charged for loans. The questions raised by journalists were particularly serious. The articles published in *Curentul* could not remain unnoticed, the success being guaranteed from the start.

In turn, in *On the Same Way*, Nichifor Crainic talks about the mission of *Curentul*: imposing a “new writing”. This intention is also signaled by the lack of a “programmatic article” in the first issue of the newspaper. Several decades later, Seicaru answered the critics that this absence was just a refuge: “In the first issue of a newspaper, although it is the most well taken care of, there is a critical oversight; and we forgot something at *Curentul*, noticed in the last moment: the lack of a programmatic article. [...] We have written to meet a tradition, a program of three lines: *We do not start. We continue. Our program? None. I have not turned 40 yet.*” (Seicaru, 2007, p. 304). This explanation, however, can not stand before a serious analysis. It is hard to believe that the journalists around Pamfil Seicaru could forget something as important as “Programmatic article”. This “oversight” seems rather a writing strategy that was meant to raise the readers’ awareness of “the new writing” proposed by *Curentul* editorial board.

Seicaru's newspaper did not impress only with the value of the items contained. The pages of the newspaper were arranged with great care. According to the pattern practiced at *Cuvantul*, Seicaru set the same rule for *Curentul*, meaning that different columns from the front page were assigned to the employees according to their temperament and specialization. Pamfil Seicaru’s article was placed in the middle of this page and Cezar Petrescu's article was almost always on the right side, a space considered suitable for literary topics, as stated by Ion Vinea in an article written for the 15th anniversary *Curentul* (Geneza unei gazete: *Curentul*, 1943). Thus, the first page was reserved for the most important persons in the editorial board. On the second page there were articles focused on

culture, fashion, the results of the “Lottery of the victims”, book releases. Here they also published the list of the “opened pharmacies”. On page three, the country's economic problems were debated. Pages four and five were reserved for the news regarding the capital and main cities. Finally, page six was meant for the latest information. In the release year, a copy of *Curentul* cost three lei and the subscription rate was calculated as follows: 700 lei per year, 350/six months 200/three months. Following the success it had, the newspaper saw some improvements. For example, in 1933, the newspaper had eight pages and the graphics was superior to the one in 1928. Seicaru's financial strength became evident in 1936 when *Curentul* Company, formed two years before, opened its own printing press, equipped with most modern printing techniques at the time. Pamfil Seicaru showed that, in 1939, at *Curentul*, he installed, in addition to the rotating Frankental, 18 linotypes manufactured in 1938 and also the last rotation model, created by MAN. “For that type only two copies were made, one for *Prensa* newspaper in Buenos Aires and another one for *Curentul*.” (Seicaru, apud Manolescu, 2003, p. 645). After 1941, *Curentul* would have a circulation of 200.000 copies.

Despite the success of *Curentul* newspaper, the friendship that tied the three great journalists, Seicaru, Crainic and Petrescu deteriorated. Crainic was the first who left the editorial board. In 1932, the journalist founded *Calendarul* newspaper. Cezar Petrescu remained with Seicaru until 1937, when he accepted the offer of King Carol II to lead *Romania* official newspaper. Despite these departures, *Curentul* continued its progress until 1944, when his employer was forced to choose exile. The talent of attracting funds did not bring benefits for the one that Victor Frunza called “the greatest journalist after Eminescu” (apud Tartler, 2002). His reputation of a blackmailer, appeared in the interwar period and reinforced in the Communist regime, overshadowed his journalistic achievements and compromised *Curentul* editorial board, built in the 16 years of activity.

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