

LEFTIST CRITIQUE OR FIGHT FOR DEMOCRACY? *CONTIMPORANUL* COVERING THE TRIAL FROM DEALUL SPIRII

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ABSTRACT. *Leftist Critique or Fight for Democracy? Contimporanul Covering the Trial from Dealul Spirii.* The general knowledge about the political dimension of the Romanian historical avant-garde places the groups on the left of the political spectrum. However, there is little work on what this means precisely when it comes to the concrete historical situations. It may well be that *Contimporanul*, the main press organ of the avant-garde “supported a political agenda of socialist origin”, but what does it mean specifically? In order to give a complete historical-intellectual picture of the Romanian avant-garde, specifically of *Contimporanul*, one must also account for the first couple of years of its appearance, when it published a large number of political opinion articles, written mainly by the same authors that would become central for the artistic movement as well. We aim to fill this gap in the scholarship by giving a detailed account of the reactions from *Contimporanul*’s pages to the political events of the time, notably those that involved the socialist movement. The case in point is the Trial from Dealul Spirii and the alleged political assassinations against socialist leaders committed or condoned by the state authorities. The overall image of the political ‘ideology’ of *Contimporanul* from those years shows rather a marked democratic attitude towards the events, and a great deal of journalistic objectivity behind the attacks against the liberal establishment.

Keywords: *Contimporanul*, “The Trial from Dealul Spirii”, Romanian Socialist Party, Romanian National Liberal Party, democracy

Introduction

The Trial from Dealul Spirii – also known as “The Communists’ Trial” – begun on the 23rd of January 1922 and it is considered to be a turning point in the interwar history of the Romanian Socialist Party and also a landmark in the

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evolution of Romania's left wing movements. A political trial of such a magnitude was followed avidly by the public, and the press covered the proceedings extensively, while the partisan newspapers used the occasion to push their respective political ideologies and agendas.

In its first couple of years, before taking a markedly 'artistic turn', in 1924, that would eventually establish its name as the chief organ of the Romanian avant-garde, *Contimporanul* presented its public with a mixed bag of literature, arts, and political opinion articles. The latter are openly critical towards the liberal political establishment, and call for wider democratic and political reforms. The trial gets a lot of space and attention in its columns as well, with some 15 articles published, with a generally sympathetic attitude towards the accused, again in line with the left-leaning press.

This general attitude, as well as the subsequent evolution of the magazine and of its collaborators was used in scholarship to describe *Contimporanul* as "supporting a political agenda of socialist origin".¹ However, the political dimension of *Contimporanul*, was described only in broad strokes – providing at best short descriptions on the political subject matter found in the magazine's articles.² Otherwise, the historians and literary critics analyzed *Contimporanul* either from an aesthetic perspective, or in that of cultural politics,³ while the political opinions and options, the political 'ideology' of *Contimporanul* was left untackled.

However, we maintain that the concrete political ideology of *Contimporanul*, and its dynamics, must be taken into account in any historical-intellectual description of the Romanian avant-gardes, be it only in order to shed more light onto the ways in which the avant-gardes reacted to the local context. After all, the avant-garde was a national as much as it was an international phenomenon.

We consider it to be of critical importance to undertake a more rigorous enquiry into the political 'material' from the pages of *Contimporanul* and, at last, to indicate, as accurately as possible, what were the political ideas advanced by

¹ Dan Gulea, *Domni, tovarăși, camarazi. O evoluție a avangardei române* [Gentlemen, comrades, companions. An evolution of the Romanian avant-garde], Editura Paralela 45, 2007, p. 75.

² Paul Cernat, *Contimporanul. Istoria unei reviste de avangardă* [Contimporanul. The history of a Romanian avant-garde magazine], Ed. Institutul Cultural Român, București, 2007.

³ See: Marin Mincu, *Avangarda literară românească, Volumul I. De la Urmuz la Eugen Ionescu și Volumul II: De la Gellu Naum la Paul Celan* [The Romanian literary avant-garde. Volume I. From Urmuz to Eugen Ionescu and Volume II. From Gellu Naum to Paul Cernat], Ed. Minerva, București, 1999; Ion Pop, *Avangarda în literatura română* [The avant-garde in the Romanian literature], Ed. Atlas, București, 2000; Ion Pop, „Din avangardă în ariergardă (I)” [„From avant-garde to rearguard”], în *Tribuna*, anul IX, No. 179, 16-28 februarie 2010; Paul Cernat, *Avangarda românească și complexul periferiei* [The Romanian avant-garde and the complex of periphery], Ed. Cartea Românească, București, 2007, etc.

Contimporanul, that is to answer the question: how can we best describe the avant-garde magazines' "ideology"? For this matter, we consider the manner in which *Contimporanul* addresses The Trial from Dealul Spirii serves as a worthwhile material.

The Trial from Dealul Spirii: a Political Manoeuvre?

In 1920, a delegation of the Romanian Socialist Party leaders attended the Second Congress of the Komintern, in Petrograd and Moscow. Upon their return, they organized the First Congress of the Romanian Socialist Party with the purpose of deciding the affiliation to the Komintern. On the 12th of May 1921, when the final vote came – with 428 votes in favor and 111 against –, the law enforcement intervened, arresting and detaining all those who voted for the affiliation. At Trial from Dealul Spirii the prosecutors accused of treason the socialists that attended the Communist International and those who voted the affiliation to Komintern. Also “the prosecutors tried to establish a connection between the social-communist with radical views and the bomb attack launched by the anarchist Max Goldstein, from December 1920.”⁴ Overall, at the Trial from Dealul Spirii were prosecuted “271 activists, arrested on different occasions, in 1920-1921”.⁵ In the first Issue of *Contimporanul*, Dem. Theodorescu recounts:

In Dealul Spirii, five officers execute the order «to bring to justice» about two hundred Romanian citizens, accused of «affiliation to the III-rd International». This is one of the most shameful spectacles in a history of abuse and stupidity. [...] The indictment document signed by the Major [n. Cernat] is a masterpiece of reflexive and flaunted foolishness. Such a trial could not exist without such an accusation; the mocked misery of the 250 citizens is by that accusation already avenged.⁶

⁴ Adrian Cioroianu, *op. cit.*, p. 29. On 8 december 1920, Max Goldstein placed a bomb in the Senat. The Senats' president was badly injured and some of those located in the front row (the Minister of Justice, Dimitrie Greceanu, the Bishop Radu Dimitrie and a senator) died; Adrian Cioroianu, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁵ Adrian Cioroianu, *Pe umerii lui Marx. O introducere în istoria comunismului românesc [On Marx's shoulders. An introduction to the history of the Romanian communism]*, Ediția a II-a, Curtea Veche, București, 2007, p. 29.

⁶ Dem. Theodorescu, „Rușinea de a fi român” [“The shame of being a Romanian”], *Contimporanul*, Year I, No. 1, June 3 1922, p. 4.

Contimporanul disapproves the idea of prosecuting together the socialist party members and the anarchist Goldstein. Though not explicitly, *Contimporanul's* contributors deliberately delineate the violent acts carried by the anarchists, such as Goldsteins', from that of the Romanian socialists:

Tremendous, majestic, fatal is the way the juridical method by which the Major managed to put in the same pen⁷ both Dobrogeanu-Gherea and the deranged Goldstein: «For those who, either as main authors, or as accomplices, their activity was a mass action and also relating to others, they will make a common ground and will be treated as a «single body».⁸

Contimporanul placed Goldstein among all those who took action only on part of their own interests. In *Contimporanul's* perspective, these groups did not represent a class and had no understanding for “the national life”. For instance, Ion Vinea, signing under the pseudonym Aladin, argues:

On the one side, there's Goldstein and his small group of no-names, standing apart from the national life and the class which they claim they represent. On the other side, the types of Bratianu, Filipescu, Agetoianu and all other *ciocoi* [n. upstarts], as strange to the national interests as the first ones [...] without a root in any of the social classes.⁹

In its effort to confine Goldstein to a separate, disparaged group, *Contimporanul* depicted Goldstein's features by using strong words: “the hysteric and half-learned assassin, Max Goldstein, a worthy opponent of the royal commissioner when it comes to raising controversies”.¹⁰

In *Contimporanul's* opinion, a separation of Max Goldstein from the socialists was essential. Max Golstein was part of a group that acted in its own behalf, as did not represent the interests of the Romanian workers, neither that of the peasants – they were “declassed”. For *Contimporanul*, Goldstein and also groups formed of clandestine and “crooks”, financed from Moscow, were equally guilty of misunderstanding and “befuddlement” among the public sphere.

⁷ The contributor uses the term “pen” because the bench of the accused was enclosed by fences.

⁸ Dem. Theodorescu, „Rușinea de a fi român” [„The shame of being a Romanian”], *Contimporanul*, Year I, No. 1, June 3 1922, p. 5.

⁹ Aladin, „Comedia declasaților” [„The comedy of the morally discredited”], *Contimporanul*, Year I, No. 5, July 1 1922, p. 7.

¹⁰ *Idem.*

Regrettably, their only achievements were those of breaking the unity of the Romanian Socialist Party and derailing its program:

Face to face: the hysteria of the upstart and that of the vagabond. To what end? The murders committed by Max and the conspiracy of a few clandestines, crooks who received Moscow's money, rabble raisers in the unions, spies of the Romanian and Russian Secret police, all those who terrorized the leaders of the organized working class, throwing them into befuddlement, leaders who cave under their pressure and ruined the party, once they decided to undertake the general strike.¹¹

Contimporanul decried the interference of Moscow in the Romanian party's affairs. St. Streitman sums it up:

Ah, the extremists! Forever meddling and creating havoc, they (exaggerate) the teachings, aspirations and goals of the new movements and parties. Worse still: they spoil the leaders plans... Not from yesterday, the poor leaders fall victim to the hard-liners. True martyrs, these ones!¹²

Even though *Contimporanul* held the leaders of the Romanian Socialist Party accountable for the downfall of their party, they considered the decision to affiliate to Komintern as part of a different – unfortunate – scenario. Ideally, the Romanian Socialist Party did not act under the influence of Moscow, but guided solely by its desire to answer the interests of the class it represented. Hence, its goal was to deliver a program that spoke to the Romanian working class. *Contimporanul* felt that, at the time, a program that answered the workers needs did not exist. On the other hand, in *Contimporanul's* viewpoint, The National Liberal Party, led by Ionel I. C. Brătianu, Romania's prime-minister, represented only the interests of the bourgeoisie – a minority in Romania. In addition, the National Liberal Party had in *Contimporanul's* viewpoint benefited from too greater power, since it met no opposition on the Romanian political scene. On numerous occasions *Contimporanul* declares the current social and political establishment as "oligarchic". *Contimporanul* hoped that, since the citizens had the opportunity for the first time in the state's history to exert their universal vote, one might have a chance to base a democratic political scene. After all, by representing the populations interests,

¹¹ *Idem.*

¹² H. St. Streitman, „Revizuirii” [„Revisions”], *Contimporanul*, Year I, No. 4, June 24 1922, p. 12.

the Romanian Socialist Party – as well as the People’s Party – stood a chance in the future election. Regrettably, the Romanian Socialist Party missed the opportunity to convince its electorate at the upcoming election once it decided its affiliation to Komintern. Needless to say, to top it all, the affiliation to Moscow came against the state’s interests – The Komintern named Romania “an imperialist state” and did not recognize Romania’s Great Union. And as unhappy as they were with their living conditions, the Romanian citizens were thrilled with the idea of finally coming together as a nation.

However, *Contimporanul* disapproves the manner in which the authorities decided to take action against the socialists. The intervention of the authorities and the arrests at that particular occasion amounted to a breach of the fundamental democratic right to free, political, assembly. And if that did not count for anything, *Contimporanul* disapproved the act of holding a public trial just to smear the opposition parties’ image or for the purpose of intimidation. For, as serious as the accusations were, *Contimporanul* saw the trial as merely

a savage hunt carried out by the fearful politician, an incitement to maim and murder, a race in organized cruelty and bestiality, with mockery and bonuses given in encouragement, all in broad daylight and in front of the judiciary praetorium, just to intimidate.¹³

But the plan of the National Liberal Party backfires. As Gheorghe Neacșu and Ioan Scurtu recount, eventually: “the communists transformed the trial into a platform of propaganda, in support of the Communist Party”.¹⁴ Not only did the defendants have respectable public figures as advocates for their cause, but the local left-wing media also created a “martyrized” image of the accused. As Stelian Tănase narrates: “The scenes are melodramatic, the press, impressed. The defendants [...] [b]ereft of voice, lay on benches, lean on each other etc. A few vials of ether are open and immediately the room starts resembling a hospital hall.”¹⁵ Apparently aware of the fact that the socialists were about to gain the sympathy of the electorate, Ionel Brătianu convinced King Ferdinand I to issue an amnesty decree. The amnesty was given on the 3rd of June 1922 leading to the release of 213 individuals condemned in the trial. Again, *Contimporanul* considered the

¹³ Aladin, „Comedia declasaților” [„The comedy of the morally discredited”], *Contimporanul*, Year I, No. 5, July 1 1922, p. 7.

¹⁴ Gheorghe Neacșu, Ioan Scurtu, *Leonte Filipescu*, Editura Politică, București, 1973, p. 34.

¹⁵ Stelian Tănase, *Clienții lui Tanti Varvara [Mam’s Varvara clients]*, The Second Edition, Humanitas, București, 2008, p. 47.

amnesty as a means of the National Liberal Party to ensure its own popularity: “The newspapers assure us the Council of Ministers decided for the amnesty. That is, the Government decided to make use of one of its great means of becoming popular”.¹⁶

For *Contimporanul*, the National Liberal Party tried once again to impede the ascendance of the socialists on the political scene: “Fierce was the oligarchy against the socialist movement. [...] After three years of atrocities, finally, came the amnesty.” [“Înverșunată a fost însă oligarhia față de mișcarea socialistă. [...] După trei ani de atrocități, intervine, în sfârșit și aici, amnistia”].¹⁷ Also, the context in which the amnesty was granted, gave way to endless ridicule. In articles such as “Amnistia” [“The Amnesty”],¹⁸ “Recunoștința unui amnistiat” [“The gratitude of an amnestiated”]¹⁹ or “Povestea vorbeii” [“The Tale of the Talk”]²⁰, *Contimporanul* sarcastically gives its thanks to the royal family, praising the princely wedding that so graciously made way to the King’s act of clemency. For instance, Dem. Theodorescu’s expression of gratitude is but a double edge remark:

I respectfully thank the royal marriage, who provides me with the forgiveness for some deeds I do not retract and have no guilty consciousness for! I thank the marriage for the people that are no longer beaten in the military prison by the royal beasts over there [...] For the end or just the half-end [sic!] of a spectacle that was taking the country of such a happy king [...] out of the ranks of humanity and the European regime. [...] Long live the bride!²¹

Contimporanul also suspected the King would not give the amnesty unless Ionel Brătinu convinced him of its necessity: “The bestow [n. of the clemency] comes only when the two conditions are met: a royal wedding and the presence of a certain party to power!”²²

Contimporanul underlines hereby the powerful role played by the Romanian National Liberal Party, through its leader, who reinforces the parties’ position on the Romanian political scene.

¹⁶ V., „Amnistia” [„The Amnesty”], *Contimporanul*, Year I, No. 1, June 3 1922, p. 7.

¹⁷ *Idem*.

¹⁸ V., „Amnistia” [„The Amnesty”], *Contimporanul*, Year I, No. 1, June 3 1922, p. 7.

¹⁹ Dem. Theodorescu, „Recunoștința unui amnistiat” [„The gratitude of an amnestied”], in *Contimporanul*, Year I, No. 2, June 10 1922, p. 7.

²⁰ P. V. F., „Povestea vorbeii” [„The Tale of the Talk”], *Contimporanul*, Year I, No. 2, June 10 1922, p. 15.

²¹ Dem. Theodorescu, „Recunoștința unui amnistiat” [„The gratitude of an amnestied”], *Contimporanul*, Year I, No. 2, 10 Iunie 1922, p. 7.

²² P. V. F., „Povestea vorbeii” [„The Tale of the Talk”], *Contimporanul*, Year I, No. 2, June 10 1922, p. 15.

Was *Contimporanul* taking sides? Was it advocating for the socialists? What conveys their reaction to the Trial from Dealul Spirii? We consider that *Contimporanul* kept a neutral stand, criticizing all parties' decisions. On one side, *Contimporanul* disapproves the authorities decision to arrest the socialists members and to hold a public trial involving hundreds of Romanian citizens. Not only did the trial seem a witch-hunt, but it was considered by *Contimporanul* just an action taken by the Romanian National Liberal Party as means of intimidate and crush the opposition. On the other hand, the collaborators were displeased with the action taken by the Romanian Socialist Party leaders. By deciding to follow the Komintern line, the socialist leaders had not only broken the unity of the party, but also derailed from the parties' initial program. The radical wing of the socialists and the instigators of Kominter's propaganda machine ("the crooks", Max Goldstein and others) were in *Contimporanul's* perspective equally guilty of compromising the Romanian socialist movement. That did not mean the socialist party members and the anarchists had to be taken as "a single body". On contrary, the socialists still acted within the law, meaning in the name of a political organization, while the anarchists acted not only outside the law, but also against it. The Socialist Party was guilty only of taking disastrous political decisions, the affiliation to Komintern being just one of them. With all the sympathy towards the socialist movement and the hope in a strong popular opposition to the old parties – notably the liberals –, *Contimporanul* did not encourage it, nor did it found this approach suitable for the chances of the opposition. With the end of the Trial came also the end of a dream: that of having a vigorous Socialist Party capable of standing its ground on the Romanian political scene. The National Liberal Party had yet again no opposition and was free to govern by its whims and interests.

Political Assassinations

In its coverage of the Trial from Dealul Spirii, *Contimporanul* criticized the arrests and the staged-up trial as abusive and calumnious. In *Contimporanul's* perspective the Trial from Dealul Spirii was nothing short of a defamatory action taken against a political opponent. But the critique against the Romanian authorities' unscrupulous political actions did not stop with the resolution of the trial. In the aftermath of the trial, *Contimporanul* revealed also a number of cases in which the authorities may have silently ordered, consented, or failed to react to acts of murderous violence carried against 'suspect' or 'dangerous' individuals by the law enforcement. Denouncing a spree of "political assassinations" committed

against communists, *Contimporanul* decries this time the fail of the government to again act according to the democratic laws and the unwillingness of the state to bring to justice those, from their own apparatus, guilty of committing political crimes. Once again, alarmed by the undemocratic practices of the authorities, *Contimporanul* reacts by bringing to the public attention these cases of “official crimes”. The most prominent are the murder of Leonte Filipescu (1895-1922) and the political assassinations condoned by General Popovici, the Governor of Bessarabia.

Leonte Filipescu

Leonte Filipescu was an important figure of the Romanian interwar left wing movement. Arrested and incarcerated on 16 November 1921, Filipescu was assassinated just days before he was due to appear as witness in the Trial from Dealul Spirii. The story goes that he was murdered by one of the guards that were supposed to supervise the prisoner while he was being transferred to the Jilava prison. The official report read that the prisoner tried to flee; hence two fires were shot, one in the head, and the other in his heart.²³ His death made the news of many left wing newspapers. The strange circumstances in which the event occurred were widely discussed. For instance, it was argued that the prisoner was held in custody wearing handcuffs even during his hospitalization, but on this occasion, was marched 14 km. to Jilava with no handcuffs.²⁴

Such cases and official explanations were not exceptional, apparently, on the contrary. Already in its first issue, *Contimporanul* contested the argument by which the communists try to flee under escort:

Oh, yes! We have, once in a while, the amusement of a gunfire discharged without savant preparations in the back of the head of a communist that wants to flee. What a thrill of a too stressed up system. It is like, suddenly, in one piece, you jump on a box spring...²⁵

When Filipescu’s death made the news, *Contimporanul* emphasized the prolixity of the assassination cases, as to suggest that this was a quite common practice against presumed or known communists. Filipescu’s death was listed as one among many others:

²³ *Apud.* „Un asasinat misterios” [„A mysterious crime”, *Aurora*, No. 145, April 16 1922, in Neacșu, Scurtu: *op. cit.*, p. 72.

²⁴ Neacșu, Scurtu: *op. cit.*, p. 75.

²⁵ Nesemnat [without author], „Povestea Vorbei” [„The Tale of the Talk”, *Contimporanul*, Year I, No. 1, June 3 1922, p. 16.

A worker, Leonte Filipescu, is shot on order on the margins of Bucharest. A carpenter, whom the sleepy brightness of a night patrol policeman had found <suspect> is killed without much talk on Vântului Street. Another worker, known communist, finds his death in exactly the same circumstances, on a street in Chişinău.²⁶

In an article titled “Asasinatul politic ca omagiu” [“The political assassination as tribute”], T. Bobeş declared: “The political assassination [...] is becoming embedded [...] in the arsenal of public opinion, replacing the prostitution of words”.²⁷ The use of the strong term “political assassination” is deliberate. Discontented with the lack of attention the authorities show in regard to the assassinations, *Contimporanul* accuses the officials of having consented to such dealings. In his article T. Bobeş refers to the political assassination in Germany – the case of Erzberger and Rathenau – and questions their ‘success’, since

In many occasions, death turns the adversary into a martyr and, through the violent tremble it produces in the hearts of those who remain, opens up the opportunity to produce fateful consequences in the plans of its moral perpetrators.²⁸

In the case of Leonte Filipescu such prediction seemed accurate. According to Neacşu and Scurtu, the communist party turned this case as an epitome of the violent repression against the movement and called for national and international protests.²⁹ Apparently, the fear that Leonte Filipescu might be turned into a “martyr” became so real in the eyes of the officials that, after his funeral, the law enforcement tried to hide the place of his burial and kept surveying the area.³⁰ Furthermore, the assassination of Leonte Filipescu gave way to a strong wave of protests in Ploieşti, Cluj, Braşov, Reşiţa and other Romanian cities.³¹ All things considered, one may assume that the amnesty was given not only to prevent the spread of the positive image the socialists’ had created for themselves at the Trial from Dealul Spirii, but also to die down the rumor caused by the assassinations.

²⁶ Andrei Branişte, „În jurul câtorva fapte diverse” [„About some various facts”], *Contimporanul*, Year I, No. 1, June 3 1922, p. 2.

²⁷ T. Bobeş, „Asasinatul politic considerat ca omagiu” [„The political assassination as homage”], *Contimporanul*, Year I, No. 6, July 8 1922, pp. 3–4.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁹ Neacşu, Scurtu, *op. cit.*, p. 77, pp. 79–80.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

General Popovici, the Governor of Bessarabia

Contimporanul brought in the public's attention the case of the governor from Bessarabia in the effort to unmask the lack of response on part of the authorities with regard to alleged political assassinations of communists committed by law enforcement under his authority. *Contimporanul* considered that as long as the crimes were overlooked, the situation could get out of hand, leading potentially even to a military regime; the lack of reaction and oversight of central government would only prove criminal consent, which would confirm the deeds as a use of state means for political purposes.

Contimporanul speaks of "an atmosphere of provocation",³² wherein "The Minister of the Interior does not know how to control and prevent the murderous mishaps of the governor of Bessarabia".³³ In the article "Popovici asasinul" ["Popovici the assassin"], Ion Vinea lists the governors' crimes: "General Popovici [...] has committed five new assassinations. Five communists already set free in the amnesty were chopped up and thrown outside the forest Vadul Vodei".³⁴ *Contimporanul* deplores once more the lack of action from the part of the authorities. In its perspective, an inquiry would have been of absolute necessity. However, even if an inquiry did commence, *Contimporanul* doubted its outcome would be of any relevance. As Vinea claims: "The government will order, for sure, at least a fruitless inquiry; since a rigorous inquiry would denunciate, in the first place, its moral perpetrators, the highly placed instigators and accomplices to the serial murders".³⁵

When a formal inquiry did commence, at the governments' request, Ion Vinea adds with reproach:

This investigation is no different from any of the other official comedies, improvised with the occasion of the other countless homicides ordered from above. Its purpose is to gain time until the disappearance of the evidences and the appeasement of the apathetic spirit [...] of the Romanian citizen.³⁶

³² Aladin, „Comedia declasaților” [„The comedy of the morally discredited”], *Contimporanul*, Year I, No. 5, July 1 1922, pp. 7–8.

³³ *Idem*.

³⁴ Iova, „Popovici asasinul” [„Popovici, the assassin”], *Contimporanul*, Year I, No. 5, July 1 1922, p. 9.

³⁵ *Idem*.

³⁶ Aladin, „Avocații generalului Popovici” [„The lawyers of General Popovici”], *Contimporanul*, Year I, No. 7, July 15 1922, p. 3.

Sarcastic, Vinea comes up with a “solution” to the issue:

General Popovici should be promoted and decorated [...] The murder should be openly encouraged [...] We should have an annual celebration of the unpunished massacre of all the condemned, amnestied or absolved prisoners, in the whole country, in the arenas, in the presence of the royal commissioners, of the authorities and of the garrison. And, in the capital, the government and the King himself to cheer from the stands [...] That way our people from everywhere would get used in such a way with the idea that the murder is something permitted and merry, that <the celebration of blood> [...] would call for shrines and raising idols.³⁷

The news of the exoneration of General Popovici was treated by *Contimporanul* as a last proof of the government’s complicity. *Contimporanul* saw in the governments’ non-interference a clear sign of encouragement and approval of the crimes. In this respect, *Contimporanul* considered the government as criminally liable. This is the reason why the assassinations are eventually called “official crimes”, acts placed under command.

For Vinea, there were two possible threats that the government faced at the time. On one hand, the existence of the “official crimes” and “lawlessness of the State” could have tarnished the reputation of the administration and could have worked as “the best propaganda against our bureaucratic oligarchy [...] The current establishment, much defended, is faltering in sheer derision and mockery”.³⁸

On the other hand, in turning a blind eye, Vinea sees an inattentive gesture of the administration that could set the stage for a “military dictatorship”:

It is a sure sign that along with the failing regime, another regime, of another caste, endures and asserts itself. [...] The tools of oppression are coming to life, they gain consciousness, and one day they take the place of those who employed them irresponsibly.³⁹

And if other nations took measures against the danger imposed by the military order, in Romania, Vinea argues, “the Romanian Governments, with their lack of experience, are coming to the same end [n. military dictatorship]. For now,

³⁷ Iova, „Popovici asasinul” [“Popovici, the assassin”], *Contimporanul*, Year I, No. 5, July 1 1922, p. 9.

³⁸ I. Vinea, „Sabia și vremile” [“The swords and the times”], in *Contimporanul*, Year I, No. 10, August 19 1922, p. 2.

³⁹ *Idem*.

they carry out the dictatorship through militaries”.⁴⁰ Henceforth, *Contimporanul* disapproves of “the diligence with which the parties are searching its adherents among the starry collars”.⁴¹ But most of all, *Contimporanul* criticizes “the timidity of the government that had to take action against a proven assassin such as General Popovici...”.⁴² In the light of the foresaw events, Vinea advises Ionel Brătianu, satirically: “There comes the day when the civilian rule is too weak to be bearable – Mr. Brătianu beware: replace the viceroys from the frontier much more often!”⁴³

Both cases – that of Leonte Filipescu and that of General Popovici from Bessarabia – are, as suggested, examples of *Contimporanul*'s protest against the abusive acts of the authorities and the complicity of the central government. However “dangerous” some of the “communist elements” might have appeared, *Contimporanul* sees no justice in shooting them on the street, with no trial or, worse, after being amnestied. Such actions were considered beyond any democratic regulation. Furthermore, to overlook the abuses of the members of the law enforcements, was to have detrimental consequences for a newly democratic state: its conversion into a military, dictatorial state.

Conclusion

One can conclude that *Contimporanul* had sympathies for the socialist movements. Nonetheless, that does not mean its ‘ideology’ was essentially “of socialist origin”. Our analysis on the articles published by *Contimporanul* in regard to the Trial of Dealul Spirii proved that *Contimporanul* criticized both the action taken by the socialists as well as those carried out by the Romanian authorities. The fundamental interest of *Contimporanul* was to discuss the possibilities of creating a democratic political scene in the interwar Romania. This is the reason why on each occasion *Contimporanul* decries the lack of political opposition against the old political parties, such as the National Liberal Party. The Trial from Dealul Spirii was so avidly discussed because, in *Contimporanul*'s view, it contributed to the failure of the Socialist Party to ascend on the Romanian political scene and to become a viable opponent to the National Liberal Party. On one hand, *Contimporanul* disapproved, among others, the decision of the socialist leaders to affiliate to Komintern, for it did not answer the local social and political context. On the other

⁴⁰ *Idem.*

⁴¹ *Idem.*

⁴² *Idem.*

⁴³ *Idem.*, p. 3.

hand, *Contimporanul* disapproved the authorities' decision to arrest and take into court such a large number of Romanian citizens. The Trial from Dealul Spirii seemed at the time undemocratic – for it breached the right to free assembly –, and also a means to intimidate and stamp out the political opposition. Actually, *Contimporanul* questions in most part the undemocratic means the National Liberal Party employed in order to eliminate its opposition. For this reason *Contimporanul* did not cease its enquiry, nor its critique, as the Trial from Dealul Spirii finally came to its end. For, in *Contimporanul's* opinion, the Trial from Dealul Spirii was just the beginning of the political actions carried by the authorities with the purpose of discouraging its political opponents. In this regard, *Contimporanul* brings into the public's attention the cases of "political assassinations" that occurred with an alarming frequency. Famous at the time were the assassination of Leonte Filipescu and the political assassinations condoned by the Governor from Bessarabia, General Popovici. Hereby, *Contimporanul* covers the crimes with the purpose of pinpointing the moral instigators: the central government and those in the states' apparatus that turned a blind eye from the misdeeds. *Contimporanul* held the inaction of the central government as a violation of the democratic principles and a danger for the preservation of the democratic regime of the young Romanian state. Yet again, *Contimporanul's* concern was that the National Liberal Party fostered such crimes, since it did not meet any opposition and, therefore, it was encouraged to engage further in undemocratic actions.

Though discouraged in the wake of the recent events, *Contimporanul* hoped that, at some point, the Romanian political scene would reflect its electorate's options and become a place of political dialogue and deliberation. For, in *Contimporanul's* view, that was the first step towards a truly democratic regime.

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