

Petre Țuțea’s Economic Philosophy

Sorinel Cosma

“Ovidius” University of Constanța, Faculty of Economic Sciences, Romania
sorinelcosma@yahoo.fr

Abstract

Petre Țuțea (October 6, 1902 – December 3, 1991) was a Romanian Christian thinker and an orator, who was preoccupied with philosophical and religious matters. He was the author of numerous studies and articles that focused on economic, social and political issues in the inter-war era. This paper intends to point out the main guiding lines of Petre Țuțea’s system of thought as an economist and his personal comprehension of the relation between the economic and the political elements.

Key words: liberalism, communism, nationalism, democracy, entrepreneur
J.E.L. Classification: B31

1. Introduction

Petre Țuțea was born in Boteni (Argeș) on October 6, 1902. He attended *Dinicu Golescu* High School in Câmpulung-Muscel, then *Gheorghe Bariț* High School in Cluj. He received a Bachelor Degree in Law from the University in Cluj in 1927 and then a PhD title in administrative law from the same University in 1929. That was the year he began his political career.

Although his ideology was a bit to the left (though he dismissed the Stalinist totalitarianism) in the beginning, he became a member of the National Peasants’ Party. With candor and humor, he later on admitted that in his youth he had communism and communitarianism mixed up: “if you are not a leftist by the age of 30, you have no heart; if you are still a leftist and not a conservationist after the age of 30, you are a moron” (***, 1993, p. 101-102). Later on, he understood everything (he “saw the light” as his good friend Nae Ionescu put it), and, just like many other personalities of those times, he became an extreme rightist, as a radical position against the Russian bolshevism manipulated by the Jews.

He got a job with the Ministry of Industry and Trade (later on the Ministry of National Economy), from which he was deployed as an attaché to the Economic Agency in Berlin just as the German national socialism was rising, a current that would significantly mark his political aspirations. During the time he spent in Berlin, he intensively studied and “prepared his intolerable illusions for a democratic reform of his country” (Cioran, 2017, vol. II, p. 1035). Aware of Țuțea’s inner torments and implications in the economic and political life, Cioran addressed him as a friend in a letter in 1938: “[...] for an infinitely superior spirit indifference is the only solution to useless restlessness” (Cioran, 2017, vol. III, p. 421).

Despite the feelings of friendship and appreciation that Cioran had for him, Țuțea decided to keep on getting himself involved as a publicist and a political activist. Back in the country, he “steered right”: uplifted by the nationalist goals of the legionary movement, he stated that the Romanian right wing was clearly different from the European one – Italian fascism and German national socialism – through its religious, mystic and Christian streak.

Called back to the country from Berlin, he received a position as secretary general within the Ministry of National Economy. As such, he was a member of several delegations whose mission was to carry out inter-governmental economic negotiations in Berlin and Moscow. Until 1948 he held different positions within that ministry.

He was imprisoned by the Communist regime (1948-1953 and 1956-1964). After he was set free, after 13 years of hard imprisonment, the former political prisoner sent the authorities a “Project for Romania’s economic reform”, which was rejected as it was not in accordance with the Marxist-Leninist doctrine.

Renegaded by the regime with which he refused to make even the slightest compromise, Petre Țuțea lived in poverty, on a pension received from the Writers’ Union, in a studio he would have liked his friend Emil Cioran to have bought since he said that in a piece of property owned by Cioran I do not feel like a tenant (Cioran, 2017, vol. III, p. 1188). He died on December 3, 1991.

As Emil Cioran claimed, there is no book, no text, to reveal an absolutely authentic image of Țuțea (Cioran, 2017, vol. IV, p. 1668). He considered Țuțea a true “linguistic genius” (Cioran, 2017, vol. IV, p. 1665) and said that he was the only genius spirit he had the chance to meet in his life (Cioran, 2017, vol. IV, p. 1978).

After Țuțea’s death, many writings and anthologies were written. Amongst them, the following are tangential to his economic, social and political views: *Între Dumnezeu și neamul meu*-Between God and My Nation (1992), *321 de vorbe memorabile ale lui Petre Țuțea* [321 Memorable Words of Petre Țuțea] (1993), *Manifestul revoluției naționale* [The Manifesto of the National Revolution] (1998), *Ieftinirea vieții* [Cheapening of Life] (2000), *Reformă națională și cooperare* [National Reform and Cooperation] (2001), *Anarhie și disciplina forței* [Anarchy and the Discipline of the Force] (2002).

2. Theoretical background

Among the writings on Petre Țuțea’s bibliography and work, we mention the following: Aurel Ion Brumaru, *Pariul cu legenda sau viața lui Petre Țuțea așa cum a fost ea* [The Bet with the Legend or Petre Țuțea’s Life as It Was] (1995), Marcel Petrișor, *Sacerdotul fără parohie* [The Priest without a Parish] (2019) and Radu Sorescu *Petre Țuțea. Viața și opera* [Petre Țuțea. Life and Work] (2019).

A well-documented study is *Petre Țuțea – românul absolute* [Petre Țuțea – The Absolute Romanian], which was published in *Atitudini* magazine in 2015. A special writing about and with Petre Țuțea is *Jurnal cu Petre Țuțea* [Journal with Petre Țuțea] (1992), published by theologian Radu Preda.

Petre Țuțea’s economic ideas are probably best presented in Vasile C. Nechita’s writing *Petre Țuțea și provocarea sa economică* [Petre Țuțea and His Economic Challenge] (2000), in which the professor from Iași was well inspired to call Țuțea “a philosopher among economists and an economist among philosophers”.

Varujan Vosganian published a remarkable study titled *Viziunea economică a lui Petre Țuțea* [Petre Țuțea’s Economic View] in *Rost* magazine in 2002, and Mircea Coloșenco grasped Țuțea economic ideas in his introductory studies to the volumes *Ieftinirea vieții* [Cheapening of Life] (2000), *Reformă națională și cooperare* [National Reform and Cooperation] (2001), and *Anarhie și disciplina forței* [Anarchy and the Discipline of the Force] (2002).

3. Research methodology

Searching for the most representative elements of Petre Țuțea’s economic philosophy was a challenge that we accepted after covering an extensive number of writings written by him or written about his life and work. We have not been the first to be fascinated by his ideas and the way they developed and changed throughout his existence. To understand his analysis of the realities of those times and to comprehend the solutions he put forward in his books and articles, we used the method of descriptive research. In this way we were able to delineate in our paper Țuțea’s place and importance in the history of the Romanian economic thought.

4. Findings

4.1. Liberalism, Entrepreneur and Democracy

Liberalism is considered to be “the most suitable social and political system” as it insures the “triumph of personality, the triumph of the leading elite” (***, 1993, p. 64), but it has one single flaw: competition inevitably generates the existence of socially assisted people (social waste, as Țuțea called them).

At the same time, democracy was seen by Țuțea as a victory of quantity over quality (***, 1993, p. 39) and was figuratively compared with canine distemper: only those that are strong survive!, he said. (***, 1993, p. 41); he questions the very major prerequisite of democracy, that according to which people are equal by nature. (Țuțea, 1992, p. 89)

Despite the fact that he assumed the clear extremist position of a political partisan, Țuțea did not revoke the intrinsic fundamentals of his liberal thinking, as his economic creed was that one can change an actual mechanism in case it does not work properly, but one cannot change the natural economic order”. (Țuțea, 1940, no. 1)

While in Berlin, Țuțea met Werner Sombart, the last great representative of the historical German School of Economics, who believed that the trivalent entrepreneur (conqueror – organizer – negotiator) was the driving force of economic development. (Sombart, 1926, p. 69-74). As a true Sombart supporter, fully convinced that the central element of the liberal economic view was the entrepreneur, Țuțea stated that modern civilization is born upon the steps of this very grand gentleman that is called an entrepreneur, upon his very steps. (***, 1993, p. 65)

In the article *Întreprinzătorul în regimul legionar* [The Entrepreneur in the Legionary Regime], Țuțea analyzed the role and the importance of the entrepreneur in the economic activity: his decisions and his plans insure the activity of the enterprise, as the cell of the economic life. Bankers, industrialists, traders, they all have beneficial characteristics: “initiative, courage, unlimited desire for profit, instinct for possession”. However, if this entrepreneur clearly sees his interest, even though he has freedom of action, he has to take into consideration the interests of his employees, of his competitors, of the economic players in the non-capitalist area, of the nation as a whole, and of the government.

The dominant position of the entrepreneur (monopoly, as Țuțea said) resulted from a separate action or from one that combined several factors: the personal skills of the entrepreneur, the pure chance, but also “the will of the political leadership”. The limiting of the entrepreneurial liberty by the government was justified and compensated in Țuțea’s view by advantages such as the increase in the level of security and stability. Social harmony was no longer the automatic result of an invisible hand’s action – Țuțea thus questioned the validity of the dogma of the classical economic liberalism – but “it involves an intervention from above, to obliterate conflicts” which has as a supreme and well-justified goal to match the national interest to the individual one. (Țuțea, 1940, no. 22).

4.2. Manifesto for a National Revolution

Petre Țuțea was concerned about the actual and fundamental problems of the Romanian economy. Together with philosopher Sorian Pavel, priest Ioan Crăciunel, mathematician Nicolae Tatu, economist Petre Ercuță, and diplomat Gheorghe Tite, Petre Țuțea signed the *Manifestul revoluției naționale* [Manifesto for a Romanian Revolution] in 1935. This document is a well-argued X-ray of all the levels of the Romanian society (economic, social, political) that started from the fundamental idea that Romania’s history had always been under the sign of the “feud” between its two Fates: the western money and the Romanian nationalism. (Țuțea, Pavel, Tite, Tatu, Ercuță, Lăpușneanu, 2001, p. 33)

Even in the prologue of this essentially anti-liberal manifesto, its authors point out the fact that Romania was not the national country of the Romanians, but the western bourgeoisie’s branch country at the mouth of the Danube (Țuțea, Pavel, Tite, Tatu, Ercuță, Lăpușneanu, 2001, p. 35). Political subject, ethnical mixture and economic colony, the Romanian country was plundered and ruined by the liberal political regime, whose supporter and accomplice was the West.

The Manifesto for a National Revolution has three parts:

1. The first one is an introduction to the history of the Romanian politics;
2. The second one is an analysis of the status of the Romanian country in those times;
3. The third one brings forth solutions for the freedom and the development of the Romanian people.

We will limit ourselves to presenting the political and economic component of the third part of the Manifesto, as it was undoubtedly thought out by Petre Țuțea.

The political view of the authors includes identifying the country with the nation (thus solving the issue of ethnical minorities and foreigners). It was a national monarchal country (authoritarian and totalitarian), built upon the principles of hierarchy (aristocratic principle of nature, placing the good ones, not the money or family privileged ones, in command) and of dictatorship. Dictatorship was a constitutional expression of the government and stood for concentrating the political power in the hands of a ruler and of an aware minority around him, for giving up the (artificial!) principle of the separation of powers and for abolishing “the egalitarian anarchy of the democratic country”. (Țuțea, Pavel, Tite, Tatu, Ercuță, Lăpușneanu, 2001, p. 84-86)

The economic view (presented in 12 articles) rejected both the ideology of the (western) liberalism and that of the Soviet communism (Țuțea explicitly launched himself in a diatribe against the famous *Manifesto of the Communist Party*). Țuțea stated that the control over the national economy was the fundamental economic principle of the national country. (Țuțea, Pavel, Tite, Tatu, Ercuță, Lăpușneanu, 2001, p. 119)

The government had to ensure the balance of the domestic market, which was being negatively affected by the process of birth and economic and social development of the bourgeoisie in the era when feudalism was disintegrating.

Homo economicus of the liberalism, as it had been analytically drawn by Francois Quesnay, Adam Smith and David Ricardo, turned into a merchandise-man, whose living standards were incorrectly measured through prices against his own nature, and at the same time crashed by accountancy procedures (Țuțea, Pavel, Tite, Tatu, Ercuță, Lăpușneanu, 2001, p. 106). To continue this social view, Țuțea made a statement that is both categorical and surprising: “The logical value of the solutions given through the mathematical method to economic problems is deeply controversial!” (Țuțea, Pavel, Tite, Tatu, Ercuță, Lăpușneanu, 2001, p. 108).

As a rational economist, he had the strength to dispute the utility of making the economic science mathematical! The wellbeing of the individual did not depend on mathematical calculus, but rather on two factors: the subjective effort of each individual and the conscience of the statesman. In the name of social justice, the Romanian society had to be rebuilt according to the principle of excellency of natural qualities and conscientious effort. (Țuțea, Pavel, Tite, Tatu, Ercuță, Lăpușneanu, 2001, p. 112)

We could conclude that the value and the importance of the Manifesto reside not with the correctness and validity of the solutions put forward, but rather with the critical and realistic presentation of the consequences of the democratic and liberal government in those times.

5. Conclusions

In a purely Romanian tradition, many authors consider that “there is a circuit of brilliant ideas in the Romanian culture, including Mihai Eminescu – Nae Ionescu – Petre Țuțea, that awaits being finally captured in a writing of superior synthesis” (Codrescu, 2000, p. 223).

“Socrates of the pubs of Bucharest”, “the conversational philosopher”, Petre Țuțea “was not a man, but a universe” (Liiceanu, 2011, p. 105).

A few months before his death, in a dialogue on the Romanian economy, Țuțea synthesized the essence of his economic thinking and enumerated the major lines upon which it had to be set: private ownership, individual initiative, and legal order. (Țuțea, 1992, p. 354). The number one priority should be the denationalization/privatization, which means building two sectors: the rural one, based upon the insightful and skillful householder, and the urban one governed by enterprises. He believed that, for the well-being of the economy, private property in the countryside or the agricultural / rural family needed to be limited to 50 hectares, while private property in the urban area (industrial, commercial, banking) needed to become unlimited.

The 35 economic articles published in *Stânga* and *Cuvântul* newspapers, in the context of the practical economic activity he carried out at a high governmental level, make Petre Țuțea a remarkable representative of the Romanian inter-war economic thought. After having oscillated his entire lifetime between the left and the extreme right, he self-defined himself as a liberal and as a rightist, as “an absolute Romanian!”

6. References

- Cioran, E., 2017. *Opere [Works]*, vol. II. Bucharest: National Foundation for Science and Art Publishing House
- Cioran, E., 2017. *Opere [Works]*, vol. III. Bucharest: National Foundation for Science and Art Publishing House
- Cioran, E., 2017. *Opere [Works]*, vol. IV. Bucharest: National Foundation for Science and Art Publishing House
- Codrescu, R., 2000. *De la Eminescu la Petre Țuțea. Pentru un model paideic al dreptei românești [From Eminescu to Petre Țuțea. For a Paideia-like Model of the Romanian Right]*. Bucharest: Anastasia Publishing House
- Liiceanu, G., 2011. *Itinerariile unei vieți: Emil Cioran. Apocalipsa după Cioran (ultimul interviu filmat) [Itineraries of a Life: Emil Cioran. The Apocalypse according to Cioran (the last recorded interview)]*. Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House
- Sombart, W., 1926. *The Bourgeois. The Modern Economic Man's Contribution to the Moral and Intellectual History [Le Bourgeois. Contribution à l'histoire morale et intellectuelle de l'homme économique modern]*. Paris: Payot Publishing House
- Țuțea, P, Pavel, S., Tite Gh., Tatu, N., Ercuță, P., Lăpușneanu, Gh., 2001. *Reformă națională și cooperare [National Reform and Cooperation]*. Bucharest: Elion Publishing House
- Țuțea, P., 1940. *Întreprinzătorul în regimul legionar [The Entrepreneur in the Legionary Regime]*. *Cuvântul*, Year XVII, no. 22
- Țuțea, P., 1940. *Stil economic legionar [Legionary Economic Style]*. *Cuvântul*, Year XVII, no. 1
- Țuțea, P., 1992. *Între Dumnezeu și neamul meu [Between God and My Nation]*. Bucharest: Graphic Art Publishing House
- Țuțea, P., 1992. *Mircea Eliade*. Oradea: The Library of Family Review Publishing House
- *** 1993, *321 de vorbe memorabile ale lui Petre Țuțea [321 Memorable Words of Petre Țuțea]*, Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House.