

Dorin Liviu-Bîțfoi,
Petru Groza, ultimul burghez. O biografie,
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In the Romanian collective memory Petru Groza remains one of the most fateful personalities for his role in the imposition of the Communist regime in Romania and in the destruction of the old social order with all the human and material tragedies resulting from it. Furthermore, Petru Groza has been widely considered as an example of opportunism, an unscrupulous politician ready to make any compromise with the Soviet occupiers, a bourgeois turned into an apologist of Stalin. The Romanian and foreign historiography presents not a better picture of this personage with a figure of a boxer ready to punch one in the face.

A member of the young, revisionist school of historiography (though not educated to be a historian), Dorin Liviu Bîțfoi challenges these views basing his conclusions on an impressive documentation, including many personal documents from the family archives, documents previously not available to any historian. Thus, Bîțfoi proves that Groza's rejection of the old Romanian social and political order started quite early in his political career, especially after in 1927 Alexandru Averescu, the head of the People's Party and Prime Minister of Romania, refused to accept Groza's, then a minister in the cabinet, proposal to continue its mandate despite the dying king's request to resign. Averescu, a hero of World War I, handed over his mandate and Groza retreated in Deva, a small Transylvanian town. He was gradually attracted by the idea of the emancipation of the peasants, the poorest social strata in the Romanian society. This led him to encourage the creation during the Depression of the Ploughmen Front in 1933, a small party representing especially the peasants of his county, and to initiate contacts with left-wing figures, including Hungarian and Romanian communists. Already during the 1930s Petru Groza became convinced that the bourgeoisie order could not subsist much longer unless it was drastically reformed. Subsequently, Petru Groza opposed the dictatorships of Carol II and Ion Antonescu and established close ties with other opponents from the moderate and radical left, including Iuliu Maniu and some communist personalities. He was even shortly imprisoned but quickly released during Antonescu's regime.

All this leads the author of the monograph to the conclusion that Groza cannot be accused of opportunism: it was rather out of conviction than of anything else that he accepted the Prime Ministership in a Soviet puppet government prompted by his belief in the left ideology and his fervour to have Northern and Central Transylvania reintegrated in the Romanian borders. The author accepts the idea that he played a role in paving the access of the Communist Party to the government and the overturning of monarchy (though he is not convinced of the accuracy of King Mihai's depiction of the events), but he also points out to the innumerable instances when Groza, the last bourgeois, as he calls him, saved the freedom, the life and propriety of many political or intellectual figures (some of them former personal

or political enemies) during the worse regime of terror. Bîţfoi proves his statements with the help of many letters and other documents thanking Groza for his invaluable support. Moreover, the author allows it to be understood that Groza might have played a more positive role were not the Soviet – Western relations grew worse in 1946-1947.

Obsessed with the idea he was Dacian as all of his family and many in the Deva area, Groza seems not to have been enchanted by the Western orientation of many Romanian intellectuals. This may have played a role in his critical attitudes towards the western capitalist ideas, although he himself was a rich man reaching for a short while even to the head of the Romanian industrialists. He was equally obsessed with setting up the basis for a peaceful co-existence of the majority and minority in Transylvania, intervening in many instances throughout his career in this scope.

Although not always balanced and often favourable to the central character of his story, Bîţfoi's work successfully disputes many assumptions of the historiography and general public concerning the political and moral role played by this controversial figure in the history of Romania. Even more than being a simple monograph aimed at reversing the historical fortune of a personage, this book is a brilliant piece of history by its rich documentation, literary style and insightfulness.