

By Paul Hockenos

AN END TO THE REIGN OF NICOLAE CEAU-
sescu was something few Roman-
ians thought possible before his
biological demise. Now the tyrant
is gone, and Romanians are warily looking
beyond their improbable revolution.

The death toll of post-war Europe's worst
bloodbath, possibly as high as 10,000, climbs
as news of mass graves and slaughtered vil-
lages come to light. In its aftermath a shaky
interim government has set in motion a
transition to a multiparty constitutional de-
mocracy. The nation's centuries-long cycle
of dictatorships and repression, however,
casts a forbidding shadow over the pros-

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pects for a qualitatively different society.

Since the dictator's execution December
25, 1989, the country appears to have at-
tained an uneasy stability. While the real bal-
ance of power is still tenuous, it is clear that
it no longer rests in the people's hands. Iso-
lated units of the Securitate, Ceausescu's
paramilitary police force, are still launching
sporadic attacks on civilians from mountain
camps. The army, which shifted its allegiance
to the citizenry after massacring thousands
of demonstrators, maintains a heavy pres-
ence across the country. In Bucharest, a
group of party reformers have grabbed power,
intent on protecting their own position as
well as turning around Ceausescu's disas-
trous policies as quickly as possible.

The first priority of the new executive,
formed out of the opposition group the Na-
tional Salvation Front (NSF), is to supply the
population with food, gas and electricity. In-
ternational relief efforts led by Hungary have
begun to get medicine to the thousands of
casualties in the war-torn cities. Neverthe-
less, shortages are so acute that the coun-
try's sixth consecutive winter of hunger is
certain to be its most severe yet.

The export of quality agricultural goods
and petrochemical products, which financed
such pet projects as Ceausescu's lavish
palaces and the Securitate's state-of-the-art
weaponry, has already been reversed. Basic
foodstuffs are no longer rationed, but bread
queues stretch for blocks, according to Hun-
garian relief workers. Since Romania has the
capacity to feed its 23 million population,
government spokespeople claim that the
shortages can be rectified in two to three
years. Small peasant farms, which 15 years
ago accounted for nearly half of the country's
produce, will again be encouraged.

Unscientific reasoning: Under the
"Genius of the Carpathians," a man with four
years of elementary-school education, pol-
icy came either directly from Ceausescu's
office or from the sycophantic clique that
surrounded him. If industrial or agricultural
experts objected to the scientific quackery
behind his reasoning, they found themselves
the next day without a job.

"He created a new social category—the
power scientist," said one former official.
"These are people who become scientists
when they acquire power and cease to be
scientists after they lose it."

Real information represented a threat. Day
after day during Ceausescu's oligarchic 24-
year rule, the party newspaper propagated
the self-heralded Conducator's personality
cult with front-page photos of him and his
wife Elena visiting their prosperous factories
or graciously accepting the adoration of
their people. In late December all censorship
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A civilian fighter in the Communist Party Building in Bucharest is seen through a hole cut in the Romanian flag to remove the party symbol.

The domino tumbles— but where will it fall?

laws were lifted. In Transylvania, where a
2-million-strong Hungarian minority had
been denied access to media in their native
tongue, an impressive daily is now publish-
ing. Private typewriters and photocopy
machines, before monitored by the secret
police, are no longer illegal. Students in Cluj
are purging the faculty of its party hacks and
are embarking on a full-scale restructuring
of the sham university system that had for-
bidden the study of such subjects as phil-
osophy, theology and sociology.

The provisional government recognizes
that pulling Romania out of the cellar of the
European house will be no simple task. Cen-
tralized industrial production, based almost
exclusively on low-quality heavy machinery,
will take its toll on the economy for years
to come, said leading NSF member Silviu
Brucan in an interview with Western jour-
nalists.

"For 10 years we did not import any mod-
ern technology. Ceausescu had a fantastic
hostility to the third stage of the industrial
revolution—computers, communications,"
said the one-time ambassador to the U.S.
and the U.N. who had been living in a tiny
village in domestic exile since 1987. Not one
plant for producing computers was included
in the latest 30-year plan.

The transition to a modern, industrial
economy will proceed slowly, in several
stages. "We won't act to lift barriers against
private enterprise until after the elections,"
said Brucan. "It's a matter of focus—you
can't improve material life quickly and insti-
tute deep economic reform. We will use the
levers of power that Ceausescu has neg-
lected."

A small circle of friends: Although elec-
tions are scheduled for April and a new con-
stitution is in the works, the direction of

political reform has already come under fire
from nascent opposition parties. The 11-
member ruling group was selected from the
previously unknown NSF, a coalition of party
reformers, dissidents and intellectuals who
took power immediately after Ceausescu's
fall. Conspicuously absent from the new ad-
ministration is Laszlo Tökés, the Timisoara
pastor on whose behalf the first demonstra-
tion was staged, which in turn sparked the
nationwide rebellion. Rather, power appears
concentrated in a small circle of the former
old guard. Although its members lack popu-
lar legitimacy, the general feeling of "any-
one but Ceausescu" has enabled these lead-
ers to solidify their base. At the moment
they appear at least nominally in control of
the army.

The extent of the interim body's commit-
ment to pluralism and power-sharing is still
unclear. After announcing that it would not
contest elections, the NSF reversed its posi-
tion. "The committee will be so powerful,"
said Brucan, "that there will be very little
room outside of it. But, of course, other par-
ties will operate. We will ensure that they
do."

Within the top leadership are many former
ministers who lost their positions after fall-

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ing into the ruler's disfavor. Gorbachov-
minded reformer Ion Iliescu, the executive
committee's president, is representative of
its membership. The son of a founding party
member, he joined up at the age of 14. A
promising star, Iliescu rose rapidly through
the Stalinist bureaucracy to high positions
under Ceausescu. But when he publicly
criticized Ceausescu in the early '70s,
Iliescu's demotion from one post to another
began, ending with his most recent job as
vice director of a scientific publishing house.

The charismatic 59-year-old, long viewed
as a possible successor to Ceausescu, is con-
sidered well equipped to stabilize the reign-
ing domestic turmoil. Personable and intel-
lectual, he is an excellent communicator and
is respected within the bureaucracy as well
as abroad. And the new man in Bucharest
was a friend of Gorbachov's during their col-
lege days in Moscow and enjoys the Soviet
leader's full support.

The long road ahead: In contrast to the
East German or Czechoslovakian opposition,
an organized underground had no room to
bud under Ceausescu's dictatorship. Yet by
early January several still-undefined new
parties and groups had hit the campaign
trail. In addition to four parties—including
an ecological group—an independent trade
union, a student league and organizations
representing the Hungarian and German
minorities have formed. The official Roman-
ian Communist Party, for years only a hol-
low front for Ceausescu's purposes, expired
along with its leader, but a revamped party
will stand in the April vote.

With the exception of a virulent anti-com-
munism, the parties have yet to outline even
sketchy platforms. The brand-new Liberal
Party demands the introduction of a market
economy, full privatization and new laws to
facilitate foreign investment. The National
Christian Peasant Party, certain to be a sig-
nificant force in years ahead, expresses the
strong conservative nationalism that the rev-
olution has unleashed. Affiliated with the
Romanian Orthodox Church, the party urges
a "moral rehabilitation on a Christian and
peasant foundation, which for 2000 years

proved to be the Romanian nation's backbone."

That tradition has been at the center of the country's tragic history. Unlike the other Eastern European countries, Romania has no democratic precedent or legacy of a sustained popular movement. Centuries of monarchy, fascism in the '40s and four decades of nationalist Stalinism inform the political culture. Ceausescu's tactical depoliticization of the working class has left only a handful of intellectuals capable of thinking beyond the structures of totalitarianism.

Ceausescu's ideal proletarian, now nearly a quarter of the population, was the peasant-turned-worker. At least in the near future, the working class is likely to play a very conservative role in Romanian politics.

The old powers of the military and the church have already re-emerged. The army has begun to assert its authority, maintaining control of government buildings and disbanding the civilian militias. Equally dangerous is the influence of the nationalistic Orthodox Church, whose values run deep in native Romanians. Both forces will figure in

any key government decisions. There is a real possibility that an army-nationalist coalition will operate behind the government's liberal facade, wielding the decisive power in Bucharest.

Whatever the future holds for Romania, socialism is not in the cards. Concepts such as equality and freedom are ones that Ceausescu made his own, twisting them into their opposites. So extreme was the people's oppression that these words are now distrusted with great intensity. Even the government reformers refuse to pay lip service to

the original ideals of their former party. The absence of a public sphere, or even limited freedom of thought, has inhibited the development of a political consciousness with which to approach social questions.

The impetus for change in Romania has always come from outside. In its four-month transition to democracy, those external forces, from East and West, are certain to clash with the traditions that have dominated the nation's history for centuries. □

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France looks to 'rescue' Romania

By Diana Johnstone

WHEN THE ROMANIAN UPRISING BROKE out, the French rushed massively to the aid of a country where many people speak their language fluently. The first senior Western official to reach Bucharest was France's dashing state secretary for humanitarian action, Dr. Bernard Kouchner, who reported that Romanians used the French word *merci* to say thank you.

IMPERIALISM

"You can't believe how much they love us," the head of the French Red Cross, Georgina Dufoix, a leading Socialist, told her compatriots over television from Bucharest. Even though unfamiliar announcers kept saying "Budapest" for Bucharest, French media followed Romanian events closely. The private TV chain, La Cinq, excelled in its coverage and lost one of its best journalists, Jean-Louis Calderon, who was crushed by a tank in the dark.

French families sent the children away from the television on Christmas eve so they wouldn't see the images of Romanian corpses. The film of the Christmas "trial" of Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu was carried in full on three French chains simultaneously with its first showing over Romanian television.

Romania had a special impact in France not only as the bloody climax to the previously non-violent series of upheavals in Eastern Europe, toppling by far the worst of its Communist regimes. The Romanian drama seemed an almost incredibly appropriate climax to the bicentennial of the French Revolution, which in France has been celebrated with emphasis on the Declaration of the Rights of Man. Most of all, Romania promised to offer new scope to French influence in Eastern Europe. For the first time, a break-away country from the Soviet camp is not looking primarily toward Germany—or in Poland's case, to the U.S.

France to the rescue? The nature of this potential French influence remains to be seen. Ideally, President François Mitterrand's France could help tutor its politically backward Latin cousins in democracy and human rights. The French Embassy announced plans to help the Romanians draft their new constitution. Along with such specialized aid in building democracy, Romania also risks an influx of French "new philosophers" looking for a last frontier for their anti-Sovietism. Moreover, France has been the refuge of choice for generations of Romanian intellectuals, some of whom may now return home.

The Romanian exile communities in France and Italy are reported to be strongly monarchist, favoring a restoration of exiled King Michael, whose 1940-47 reign included an alliance with Nazi Germany, some of World War II's most savage massacres of Jews and a canny last-minute switch of alliances to the victorious Allied side in 1944.

Romania is no democratic Czechoslovakia. Nor does it have the national political experience of Poland, Hungary or Bulgaria, all kingdoms going back to the Middle Ages. A country based on the linguistic identity of its Romance language and culture rather than political traditions, Romania never had a national government of its own until the late 19th century. To rule the new state, it got its royal family from the German Hohenzollerns. The main foreign hero in Romania between the two world wars was Mussolini, whose title of "Duce" was translated into Romanian "Conducator" and used by a fascist strongman before being recycled by Ceausescu. If Romania reverts to its political traditions, it can only revert to feudalism or fascism.

The hope is that Romanians have changed with the times. Many of the transition leaders were Romanian "red-diaper babies," raised in relative privilege because of their parents'

The Christmas "trial" of Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu was carried on French networks.

early services to Communism in the '30s and '40s but opposed to the Ceausescu system. A big question is the extent to which an uprising—the one that happened or one that would have happened a few days later—against Ceausescu had been planned in advance by leaders who turned up on the National Salvation Front (NSF). Oddly enough, some French media appeared anxious to give Gorbachovian plotters credit for overthrowing the dictatorship, the better to disqualify them from taking part in the democracy they were installing.

On New Year's Day, French state-run TV FR3 lured transitional Prime Minister Petre Roman into a live broadcast he had been led to believe would be an interview with French Prime Minister Michel Rocard. There was no Rocard. Instead Roman was abruptly presented with a film taken by an amateur on December 22 allegedly indicating that the NSF had been plotting against Ceausescu for six months. This journalistic coup went out over Romanian television, which had tuned in for the Roman-Rocard encounter. French

television seemed proud of this crash course in journalistic *glasnost* for Romanians, although it would never dare play such a trick on its own prime minister.

The film showed a group of people around NSF Chairman Ion Iliescu drafting a communique in the Central Committee building only minutes after Ceausescu had escaped by helicopter from the roof. In the course of their lively discussion over what to call themselves, Gen. Nicolae Militaru, now acting defense minister, exclaimed, "But the NSF has already been functioning for six months." More evidence is needed to conclude whether the front he referred to and the one then forming were the same. Otherwise, there is nothing in the film to dishonor the participants.

French media kept asking Romanian dissidents and exiles whether "the revolution has been confiscated" by the pro-Gorbachov people.

Clearly, if the Gorbachovians remain in power, Soviet influence could be maintained, or rather, strengthened. If they are rejected in a wave of anti-communism, France may hope that its own influence will grow proportionately.

Meanwhile French media can practice their anti-Communism on what remains of their own Communist Party and its leader Georges Marchais, under heavy attack for his past vacation holidays as a guest of Ceausescu. This was the cutting edge of a general free-for-all among French politicians, each party accusing each others of friendly relations with the fallen tyrant. They were all right; France, with its "anti-superpower" pose, had warmly applauded Ceausescu's stress on national independence.

Economically, Romania is potentially better off than the other major Eastern European poorhouse, Poland, thanks to Ceausescu's policy of starving the people to pay off the foreign debt. The debt was indeed paid off last spring, three years ahead of time. Ceausescu was an ideal leader by International Monetary Fund standards, but this is an ungrateful world. Thanks to the anti-Soviet nationalism kept alive by both Ceausescu and his enemies, many Romanians are convinced that their food was all shipped to the Soviet Union. However, available figures suggest that Ceausescu preferred selling Romanian produce to hard-currency countries in the West, and that it was in fact the Free World that consumed the food Romanians were deprived of. Being debt-free puts Romania in a relatively good position to build trade with the West, and especially with its number one customer: France.

Essential to the Gorbachovian revolution is the establishment of the rule of law, at home primarily, but international law as well. This means the recognition of principles such as non-intervention. Not the least sensational details in the thundering spectacle ending the Cold War were the appeals from the West to Moscow to send the Red Army into Romania to help the uprising. The most bizarre of these pleas came from exiled former King Michael, calling on the Soviets to help the Romanian people get rid of their "foreign" oppressors, meaning Arabs allegedly working inside Ceausescu's notorious Securitate police.

Principles and double standards: The Soviet leaders quite rightly kept their heads and stuck to the principle they had just managed to establish, namely that military intervention in other countries is wrong. This is a principle that the U.S. and its allies occasionally hold so sacred that they prefer to support Pol Pot in the United Nations and on the killing fields of Cambodia rather than forgive the Vietnamese for violating it in order to stop the Khmer Rouge massacre. To see the Soviet Union insist on applying the principle even to itself is potentially embarrassing to the U.S.

To meet this embarrassment, Secretary of State James Baker substituted a double standard for a principle: the Soviet Union supported democracy by staying out, whereas the U.S. supported democracy by going in, he explained.

In France, it was touch and go between the principle and the double standard. Former Foreign Minister Claude Cheysson was the clearest voice for the principle. "I don't believe in military intervention," he said. "I condemn it on the part of the Americans in Panama, and I'm very happy that the Soviets resisted whatever pressure they were under to intervene militarily." Foreign soldiers inevitably awaken nationalist resentment, even when they come to liberate, as Cheysson pointed out.

Cheysson's was a fairly lone voice. At an uncertain point in the fighting in Romania, the current French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas suggested organizing volunteer brigades to fight in Romania, a suggestion immediately echoed by a number of French intellectuals, notably Harlem Désir, the popular spokesman of the anti-racist youth organization SOS Racisme.

This allowed the daily newspaper *Libération* to conclude that "civil society" in France had produced a new idea during the Romanian crisis: that of "the duty to intervene." The daily, still routinely described as "left," said that this happily disposed of the "clumsy" suggestion of Socialist Party leader Pierre Mauroy that the military budget could be cut in favor of social spending since the Soviet threat was fading. Military might was still necessary for France's "voice to be

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