

Collapse of
REVISIONISM
in the East

By Frank O'Malley
(Late winter 1990)

The West has been saturated with stories of how millions of Romanians are awakening from the Ceausescu nightmare and going through a difficult period of apprenticeship as they learn to build a Western-style democracy. This twisted view of what the revolt there was all about and what the people hope for has been greatly

pondering from afar. One man asked whether television scenes he had watched of homeless in New York City might have been staged-managed by the Ceausescu regime - America is so rich, such poverty could not possibly be permitted to exist there, he reasoned. Such naivety might draw a knowing smile, but more

order. That's something the ruling classes East and West are trying to understand - and so should the revolutionaries.

One of the dividing lines pitting people against each other all over Romania is the stand one takes towards the old ruling elite. The National Salvation Front (NSF) is trying to protect as much as it can of the old order, giving in a little when some especially exposed tyrant is targetted by the masses or opposition forces, but using its grip on state power and the media to wear resistance down and steadily reinforce its power.

* Gabriel Nicolas, along with his pal Petru, the sons of workers who had gone to technical college for a year or so and were now

serving the 21 months military service compulsory for all Romanian males, agreed to do an interview on the situation in the army. But it seemed that the opportunity to speak to a larger audience burst a dam holding everything back inside Gabriel, and a flood of bitterness, rage and repressed hopes came pouring out:

"We are two soldiers who want to make a statement to our brothers in the Romanian army, and in memory of those who fell in battle in Bucharest, Timisoara and Sibiu. We should mention that we

facilitated by journalists who latch onto Westernised urban intellectuals in Romania and present them as the sole voice of the people.

The people who speak through these pages are not government bureaucrats, military officers, university professors or anyone else from the Romanian elite. They are common people, who look westward not only with curiosity but often with dread. Sometimes they are wildly ignorant of elemental facts about the West; sometimes their comments reflect a lifetime of looking on and

importantly it should refreshen a sense of the need to do even more to bring an end to a system that does indeed permit this and many other horrors, in New York and in Bucharest.

As for the people of Eastern Europe in general, one Western editor reflected the general tone of the media when he reported that they were "finally learning to smile again". How sweet and smug! Some East Europeans also learned to pick up AK-47s and blow holes in the elite guardians of the reactionary established

Unheard Voices from Romania



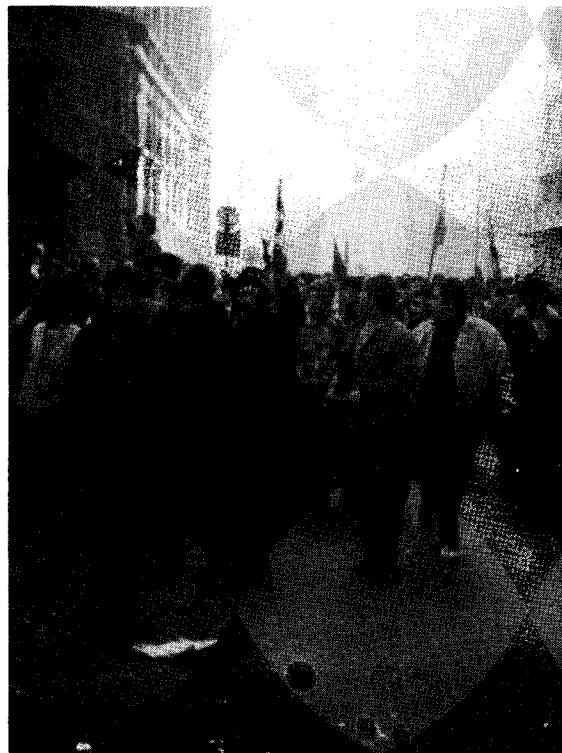




Top: Women with rifle celebrating the fall of Ceausescu.

Bottom: University building on left, site of initial armed struggle against Securitate.

On the left: 21 December 1989. Debate rages everywhere.



"RCP (Romanian Communist Party) Activists, Securitate Agents - The Mines Are Waiting for You!"

- Graffiti in
Bucharest

are members of unit xxxx, who fought during the uprising around the Military Hospital in Sibiu. We Romanian soldiers continue to lead a hard life, a life persecuted by the officers and the elite, who still cling to their Ceausescu principles, their old exploiting principles; they drive us continually and mercilessly. A Romanian soldier has no rights, not even the right to speak - the only rights we have are to be mistreated and beaten.

"During the revolution, the officers should have set an example - and they know it - of courage in front of the soldiers who fought and died. And many of us died, but very few of them. Instead of leading us into battle, they sat behind and ordered us to the front. They should be ashamed. The soldiers were brave because they were with the people, because the soldiers represent our brothers and sisters, our parents and friends, the children and the old people, all the people of the country. We risked much for the revolution; since then, we have listened to the reforms announced by Ion Iliescu and Petru Roman, but what have we received? Nothing but

pretty melodies from a few radios installed in the barracks.

"The officers and the old bosses have kept their positions and have burrowed into the new government, they go on television and make excuses for themselves and say they didn't know what was happening. They lie, you know they are lying; it was they who benefitted from the Ceausescu system, they had big salaries, privileges, advantages; the Romanian worker never had any of this.

"Look at what has happened with all the aid from abroad. People from Europe and all over the world sent aid to the people and to the soldiers of Romania, yet the Romanian soldier has received nothing. Where has it gone? Ask the officers, those who know only how to steal right out of the mouths of others. While they drank their bottles of French champagne, they gave us a chocolate bar and a glass of port wine. As if this is what the Romanian soldiers need! Even so, with all our heart we thank everyone abroad who sent aid.

"I want to say, with all my heart, that I am not anybody's pawn - I am an individual soldier who took part in the difficult battle for Sibiu. I saw with my own eyes most of my unit wounded or killed. How can it be that after the revolution nothing has changed?

"Dear Romanian soldiers, let us be heard - you know we speak the truth, you know that under Ceausescu we were nothing, less than dogs, beaten, downtrodden, famished, cold and sick. It wasn't just the Ceausescu clan, as it is now claimed by many, especially those petty, banal, hideous personali-

ties who knew only to lock others up so as to take what they had for their own. Romanian soldiers - cease following dangerous, impossible orders. Refuse! There has to be change in the army, from the bottom of my soul, things have got to change. We must stop being afraid, too much blood has been shed to be afraid now - organise yourselves into soldiers' fronts, make your demands known, confront the commanders, go to the Minister of Defence himself.

"We, a group of young Romanian soldiers, are prepared for a new revolution, though we have seen too many die and too much death in our country, and this is not what we want. The revolution must be completed. We want Romania to be a country worthy of pride - it once was, in 1944 we fought heroically, and even helped liberate other countries, before the country was taken over by the Ceausescu clan and the Communist Party. So much blood has been spilt, the miners in Petrosani in 1977, the workers in Brasov in 1987, the uprising now. Never again should such a party be allowed to exist, anywhere in the world. What we want is a better life. We want to cooperate and to be friends with the people of Europe and the people of the whole world. This is what we Romanian soldiers want, in the name of our children, our families, our dead and all those who have shed their blood for freedom."

I asked them how many soldiers thought like this. "All of us", Petru answered.

We discussed the trials going on then in Sibiu of Securitate agents. Petru said that the government was going to put 150 on

trial in Sibiu, but large numbers of Securitate, some said 350, had been released because the government said there was no proof they had committed any crimes. Didn't this show that the National Salvation Front (NSF) was conspiring to carry on "Ceausescu policies" without Ceausescu? How long would it be before the Securitate were in action again, with only a name change?

These two soldiers were straining to carry forward the struggle, yet they often substituted their own outrage for any clear idea of who could lead such a struggle, how, against whom and, finally, for what. Despite their hatred of the officers, they harboured illusions about what the army was. However much the soldiers' hearts might be with the people, their marching orders came from the Romanian High Command. Though the army had finally come out against Ceausescu, it fought for the interests of the Romanian officers and the elite, not for the people. Many Romanians talked of how it had been the army who carried out much of the actual killing in Timisoara and other cities. The army is a thoroughly reactionary institution that must be smashed, not made more "responsive" to the rank and file, and today it is being used to impose order and stability and keep the masses of people down throughout the country.

Nonetheless, these soldiers' statement stirred the heart - at a time when the Army chiefs were strutting everywhere proclaiming themselves the saviours of the revolution, this statement vividly exposed their hypocrisy. Nor was theirs

one of those voices which set Western journalists drooling by its whining for the petty comforts of Western life; it was a roar of rage from below, and one which anyone who had served in any reactionary army anywhere could identify with.

The "Passage de Jos", the "underground passage", near the University of Bucharest: from early morning till late night, hundreds of people gather to discuss

"RCP bosses - haven't you heard of hari-kiri?"

- Graffiti in the Passage de Jos

politics. On one side an improvised funeral bier, adorned with flowers and dozens of candles, marks the spot where two of the first victims fell to the sniperscopes of the Securitate. Each night, a few youth huddle in their meager cloth coats near the candles' warmth, telling and retelling the story of the two victims to passers-by.

Glued to the wall are posters and leaflets which people strain to read in the dim light; the favourites are the handwritten statements: poetry eulogising dead martyrs, satires of the Front, letters denouncing one or another local tyrant who has somehow managed to hold onto his post.

The groups that form to debate politics invariably polarise around the Front. Tonight, the largest group formed around a young representative of the National Peasant Party (NPP), a Christian Democrat-style party which had even allied with the Romanian

fascists before World War 2. A group of three or four workers from the August 23rd factory was at the centre of the debate with him, led by another young man, tall, with a hawk face and flashing eyes.

The NPP representative was arguing that, even if it is necessary to keep a few of Romania's most critical enterprises in the hands of the government, the key to economic recovery is reliance on the mechanisms of the free market.

- Who's going to benefit from that, shot back one of the workers.
- Everyone can. It will raise the general level of the economy.
- Look,

Ceausescu was no good, but before World War 2 we had your free market and things were bad then too.
- But look at the West. The free market and democracy made them rich.
- What do they want with us though? We don't want to end up as nothing but cheap hands working to make the West rich. That's all they want from us. I say, No to the West!

- No to the Russians too, someone else cried.
- We don't need any foreign help, another threw in for good measure.

The NPP representative countered: Where are we going to get modern technology from? Who's going to set up computer factories for us? That takes experts, and the best ones are in the West. Who's going to do it if they don't help - can you?

- Why do you say they're out to help us? They're out to make money any way they can.

- So are you going to do it?, the NPP person insisted.

- We're better off starting at zero, with what we have now, than relying on capitalism.

- Then we'll never get anywhere. The problem with communism is it was utopian, people just aren't like that. They need incentives to work. That's why the West is rich. Even if you don't want the West here, we have to have the free market. Then someone that's got a good idea or works extra hard can buy what's needed to start their own business.

- If someone comes to you and says, I want to buy this fancy restaurant from the government and start up my own business, you're not going to wonder where they got their money from? Maybe it's a worker, maybe an old Securitate or party boss - you don't know and you don't care?!

- If he's not a criminal, it's a free world. If he's a criminal, that's different, and you have to find out.

- Then just answer this one question: who has that kind of money? Where can anyone get such money in Romania today?
- Maybe you just sold your house to start a business....

- And where'd I get such a nice house?

- You can borrow money from the bank - that's what they do in England.

- And what bank is going to give so much money to a worker who makes 2500 lei [150\$ official rate, \$30 on the black market] a month? You're just going to reward speculators who sit around and trade, buying from one person and selling to another. There's nothing honest in that. There's nothing in this for the workers.

- But this is the way you can get something, not just for yourself, but for your children, so

they can have something to start their lives with. This is how they got ahead in the West.

- This is the same shit we had already, all those people who just gave orders all the time and didn't know how to work.
- But they'll have to learn how to manage the work or they won't get ahead, see, that's the difference free enterprise makes. It gives incentives. Why else is someone going to spend 10 years in the university learning science, while you're out working and making money, unless there's something extra in it for them?

- Look comrade....

- Who are you calling comrade?!

- Well what do you want me to call you - Sir?

- I don't know what we should call each other. That's our problem, isn't it?

If the NPP representative was trying to hit a note of accord, it backfired. The worker turned to several other members in the crowd and sarcastically asked, Dear Gentlemen, His Lordship wants to know which of you have a few million lei to start a business and help free enterprise get going in Romania?

Several people laughed.
- The only people that have that kind of money, he continued, are the same people who've already been ruling us like devils. If we go your route, it'll be just like with the old bosses, the party bigshots - them telling us what to do, us obeying like slaves, us doing all the work. He who does not work shall not eat, that's what I say.

The discussion raced on for hours. For anyone who knew how this kind of debate among the masses had been frozen for many years by the vicious

repression throughout the Soviet imperialist bloc, it was exciting to see the hunger and passion with which these workers sought to understand what had happened to their society, and where it was going next. Yet it was also painful. Though they were desperately staving off the swell of propaganda aimed at convincing them of the superiority of Western capitalism, because they failed to understand that their society was a state capitalist one they had their backs up against the wall coming up with any real alternative. Many talked of a third path, an alternative between the Soviet system and American-style capitalism (which provoked deep skepticism); they imagined Romania following the path of Sweden or social-democratic France. Many others believed that the future was bleak, and simply hoped that the opening to the West would allow a few, including themselves, to find some individual escape.

I wondered too at the way they looked at their relationship to the West. Even militant workers like these viewed opening up to the West as if it were a new question – while for years Romania had been paying off billions of dollars to Western banks and exporting the cream of its agricultural and industrial produce not only to the USSR but also to W. Germany, France, Italy and the U.S. But the people had been isolated, forbidden to travel, to have foreign currency, or even to talk to foreigners, while the country's actual economic relations were covered with the blanket of Ceausescu's nationalist demagogy. While there were indeed many new questions coming onto the people's agenda,

some of the most important ones still consisted in more thoroughly understanding and settling accounts with the country's immediate past.

"Lupul își schimbă părul dar nraul ba. Faceți atențiune."

("The wolf changes his coat but not his nature. Be careful.")

– poster, University of Bucharest

In a former classroom at the University of Bucharest, a group of students in and around the leadership of the Student League, most of whom were active in the uprising, were installing a radio transmitter provided them by FUN radio in Paris. The Romanians hotly debated one of the conditions FUN had put on use of the radio in a formal contract, that the Romanian "affiliate station" play "at least 50% music" and remain strictly "apolitical" (or else the Parisians had the right to take back their radio equipment!). While some students remained adamant that it is ridiculous to say they're "apolitical" when they just overthrew Ceausescu, others argued that being "apolitical" had been a way of fighting the regime. Sayings of the Ceausescu clan had been used to rationalise every oppressive measure. Being "apolitical" meant rejecting all government intervention in the people's affairs.

Towards midnight, I went down with a few of the students to where they slept: the Office of the University Rector. A

television had been installed along with five or six old mattresses, and the students were alternately strumming on guitars and watching a televised political

Intercontinental Hotel. A young architecture student and some of his friends were working as translators for Japanese reporters, making \$30 in a single day – equivalent, at black market rates, to a month's wages for a worker. FUN radio, though technologically simple, had driven the government's main radio off the airwaves with its non-stop Western music, which was piped into most cafes, restaurants and even in the tube stations.

The Rector had not come back. But his office was now occupied by the Assistant Rector. The students had moved their mattresses up to the radio station. One student brought me up to date on what had happened with the radio. He mentioned that they had an offer of more aid, this time from Radio Free Europe.

Did he know who they were?

Well, they'd heard that the CIA might be involved in Free Europe. But the students had a plan to handle them. FUN Bucharest was going to demand that aid from Free Europe be limited to equipment, with no personnel or taped programs.

How quickly Western penetration had turned some of the student leaders into its open hirelings. But even this kind of influence was restricted mainly to narrow circles in Bucharest and a few other big cities. Beyond those confines another story waited to be told.

Brasov, Transylvania. It was near midnight; we had left Bucharest following a rowdy demonstration of thousands against the NSF, at which the leading members of the

debate. No one knew where the Rector had gone. But, everyone was sure, he definitely would not be returning.

Suddenly the doors opened and in walked a man in uniform with a Kalashnikov ... then another, and another. A student explained to me that they had asked for protection: – We're broadcasting all night long about "Free Romania", and with the Securitate still on the loose, we were worried about being attacked, so we asked the Front to protect us.

This continuing fear of the Securitate hovered over every public activity, but no Securitate had attacked anyone in over two weeks; some more attentive Romanians were discussing whether the Front fanned or even instigated such rumours to justify the continuing presence of the Army everywhere. In any case, it seemed that the students had invited the fox to guard the henhouse.

A week passed before I saw the League students again. One was now a reporter for FUN radio Bucharest, rushing off to an interview she had lined up with some government dignitary in the

government had personally tried to appease the militant crowd, without much success. Suddenly we heard noise and shouting and saw shadows moving over the crest of the hill. We slowed down and discovered that this midnight creature was a demonstration - 50 or 100 youth marching through the street, chanting boisterously. They had heard the events in Bucharest on the radio while at a football match, and decided to head for the city's NSF headquarters. Even in

Brasov suddenly has the makings of a real confrontation.

The crowd calls for the leader of the NSF. Brasov, one of the larger cities in Romania, is only a few hours drive from Bucharest. But the distance between them is not measurable simply in miles. Brasov is an industrial city, mostly workers, with many Germans and Hungarians. There is less talk here of elections and no one asks about vacationing in the West. The main chant of the protestors tonight

Grant Nicu and the rest of the Ceausescus their last wish - the right for all the family to be together

- Bucharest graffiti

relatively backward Romania, where horse-carts outnumber cars on most roads in the countryside, protest literally leaped across the airwaves from city to city in the electrified post-uprising atmosphere.

At the city centre, I found that a line of soldiers already stood guard at the NSF headquarters entrance - the NSF too was learning quickly.

The crunching of snow and the muffled voices of the waiting workers was suddenly interrupted by the rhythmic sound of chanting. A group of 60 to 80 marchers round the corner: "Steagul Rosu - noi sintem poporul!" ("Red Star Factory, we are the people!") They move straight to the entrance of the NSF headquarters, and like a magnet pull with them all the strays milling around. There are only a few hundred people, but the fragility of power in Romania is still on everyone's mind. At 1 AM,

is simple and to the point: No more food rationing!

A silver-haired, pudgy Army officer finally comes out with a sheet of paper in his hand. It takes a few minutes before the crowd allows him to speak.

- "Comrades..." he begins.

- "No more 'comrades'!", he is interrupted at once by a scattering of voices. Laughter ripples through the crowd. "It's probably the first speech the old buzzard ever gave," someone mutters. People hiss and "hoo", but not too menacingly - the workers here, as throughout Romania, still indulge the army. It's fortunate for the elderly officer, for he's barely managed to begin anew when he is shouted down once more.

- "No hands, no hands," the crowd begins to chant. A woman explains that he was using the same exaggerated hand gestures as Ceausescu.

Tonight *everything* has got to change.

The officer finally gets going and states that the local NSF is holding an urgent meeting to discuss the events taking place in Bucharest and that the head of the NSF will meet them early the next morning. He goes back and forth with the crowd, urging them to be patient and invoking the NSF's incantation that Rome wasn't built in a day and "free Romania won't be either".

I ask some workers why they are demonstrating. A woman, Marina, points to the young girl she's holding by the hand, Look at my daughter. Does she look like she eats right to you? She doesn't even know what most fresh fruits are. This is what we're here for.

We need food. We made a revolution, yet nothing has changed.

I asked about relations between the different ethnic groups in the factory. Marina, a Romanian, responded: - The Ceausescu regime tried to pit us all against each other, Romanians, Hungarians, Germans, all of us. But it didn't work too well. We're all in the same situation here. We have some of every nationality in the factory, and we get along well enough. Ask Valentin, he's of Hungarian origin. I looked over at Valentin, who nodded agreement.

Around 2 AM, the group broke up as Marina took her daughter home and a few of the others drifted off. It was well below freezing, but Valentin planned to stay the night, and offered to show me the scene of the battle with the Securitate.

Valentin first pointed out where, back in 1987,

the workers from Steagul Rosu and 23rd August Tractory Factory staged a rebellion, seizing the centre of Brasov before they were crushed by the Securitate and the Army. -That's why we have such harsh rationing here. Ceausescu started it back in 1987 to punish us for rebelling.

We talked of the uprising, and what was happening now. He said that one of their demands that night had been the overthrow of the factory director at Steagul Rosu. He was a Ceausescu-style tyrant, but so far the NSF had let him stay on. The situation was similar at the 23rd August Tractor Factory, the largest factory in Brasov. Valentin didn't know what was happening elsewhere in Romania.

In fact, many factories, especially in the cities, were seething with rebellion. Pitesti's Dacia plant, Romania's main car factory, had witnessed repeated demonstrations and a factory occupation. The workers elected new managers from the shop floor; the old ones remained, but now worked on the line like ordinary workers.

But neither Valentin nor the workers in the Pitesti plant had a clear idea of what these changes would bring. What pushed them was deep hatred of the way they had been forced to live and work. The new managers should be "people who know us, who think like us", the workers would say. There was a sense that the overthrow of Ceausescu and the RCP, combined with changes in management at the factory level, might be enough. Or at least this was all that was possible.

At the factory level, these rebellions were spontaneous. "Alternative" trade

unions like Poland's Solidarnosc did not exist, and the new bourgeois opposition parties, if they played any role at all, opposed such "chaos". By the end of January, so many plants were idled by the "chaos" that the government decided to let workers in affected plants stay home for a month at 2/3 pay. While touting this as a reform, part of the intent seemed to be to clear the factories of rebellious workers.

Valentin also discussed the problems of the Hungarian minority in Romania. They number almost 2 million out of the total population of 23 million. Under Ceausescu, the only Hungarian university, in Cluj, had been shut down, as well as many Hungarian-language schools. Valentin and his wife were both of Hungarian origin, and spoke Hungarian together, yet their children were forbidden to speak Hungarian at school and knew only Romanian. This hurt him most of all when they visited his mother, who spoke only Hungarian, for his own children could not understand her.

Did they want to rejoin Hungary? Valentin laughed bitterly. This was what Ceausescu had claimed every time Hungarians protested - that they were really agents of the Hungarian government, who wanted to seize Transylvania and rejoin Hungary. A few thought this was the only solution, that the Romanians would never give the Hungarians the right to their own language and culture. But most Hungarians in Steagul Rosu didn't agree. Too much blood already had been shed fighting over Transylvania. Why couldn't it be run for all its inhabitants?

I thought back to the Student League leaders in Bucharest. In response to a question about the Hungarian minority, quite a few had indeed charged that the Hungarians wanted to "take Transylvania away" from Romania. Ceausescu's ghost still haunted Romania, but this was hardly surprising: his class was still in power.

The lack of any clear road forward for resolving the national question in Romania made itself sorely felt. While many were drawing lines of demarcation - between officers and soldiers, between workers and bosses - this was all taking place within the framework of the national state: What will help Romania recover its strength? What should Romania do to take its place in the "European community"? As long as the bourgeois parties were able to impose such nationalism and Eurocentrism to set the terms of discussion, it would be impossible to settle thousand-year-old historical battles.

How could this framework resolve the Transylvania question, where roughly equal numbers of Romanians and Hungarians had lived side by side for centuries, ruled now by one government, now by another, with each nationality repressed in turn as the other took power, in a seemingly endless cycle of revenge? The Hungarian Democratic Forum, the leading pro-Western Hungarian party, recently issued its policy statement on Transylvania, which concluded: "The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was a liberal state", thus its treatment of the Romanian minority at that time "can in no way be compared to the situation of minorities living

under emergent dictatorships and totalitarian systems of the twentieth century." In another words, Hungarian rule of Transylvania had been much preferable to Romanian rule because the Hungarians had a "liberal" monarchy(!) while the Romanians had a "totalitarian" regime. No matter that under the Austro-Hungarian "liberal" monarchy Romanians often were serfs of Hungarian lords, nor that Gypsies had been chattel slaves!

National Salvation Front = "National Save-the- RCP Front"

- Bucharest graffiti

As for Romania's NSF, they were momentarily paying lip service to changing Ceausescu's policies, but in practice, like Ceausescu, devoted much more attention to raising the spectre of separatism in response to Hungarian demands for equality, a policy which paved the way for the anti-Hungarian pogrom which erupted in the Transylvanian city of Tirgu Mures in March.

Such were the "solutions" these different bourgeois forces offered to the national question.

The women of Romania suffered in some particularly difficult ways, not least because of the measures taken to implement Ceausescu's demand that every Romanian woman should produce 5 children, which would essentially turn the women into mere breeders for

Romania's workforce. Not only was abortion illegal and contraception virtually unobtainable, many factories and institutes had a gynecological police: women were subjected to monthly check-ups or surprise raids where they were rounded up and given compulsory vaginal exams to check for illegal contraceptives or abortions. One woman commented that having a boyfriend felt like playing Russian roulette.

No one knows how many women died of illegal abortions, but very many people I talked to knew someone who had died or suffered seriously. In Pitesti, site of the Dacia car factory, a male nurse recalled an incident: "I had been working in the emergency ward of my clinic when a young woman came in bleeding badly. It became obvious that she had tried to give herself an abortion and had complications. Unfortunately for her, a Securitate agent happened to see her and questioned the doctor. The doctor was afraid and so admitted the woman probably had an abortion. So the Securitate began to interrogate the woman, demanding the names of all who helped her. The woman denied everything; but the Securitate had to have it their way - they said she had to understand that she would get medical treatment only after she cooperated. They held her in another room so the other patients wouldn't hear her moan. After some time they finally let us intervene, but it was too late. She died. I couldn't get her out of my mind, she was young, healthy. I asked for a transfer from the emergency ward. I couldn't stand it any more. Now that doesn't happen. Those monsters are gone."

Unfortunately, "the wolf has only changed his coat."

**Romania Films presents:
"We Led Them to the Slaughter!"
Directed by Ion Iliescu, in
collaboration with MoscowFilm
Studios, Featuring a Cast of
Thousands!**

- Bucharest poster

Right beside the above anonymous poster was a signed, handwritten letter pasted up on the cement wall of the Passage de Jos:

"In the tradition of Ceausescu, the city has been filled with rumours that what happened was not a revolution but a coup d'Etat." The leaflet argued that this was a common view and then concluded: "We stress that we are of the point of view that these rumours are part of a psychological war which 1) we don't believe in ourselves, and 2) have the goal of introducing dissension between the people and the National Salvation Front, by sensationalizing the view that the great sacrifices of our people were manipulated by long-time members of Ceausescu's clan who sensed that the end was near and preferred to eliminate their head, using the popular hand to establish their new positions."

This public letter seemed to be an effort to expose that a coup had taken place while pretending to be against such a view - the sort of tactic long used throughout the Soviet bloc. That the author felt obliged to resort to such a ruse showed how unpopular this view still was in January. But in the weeks

that followed, revelations provided mounting evidence for the coup theory, including the faking of the mass grave in Timisoara, which

pointed to the involvement of high-ranking members of the old regime, people like Mazilu, the former Securitate boss and at that time Foreign Minister of the Front.

A few Romanians said that it had been evident to the demonstrators themselves even before Ceausescu fled that the Army had broken with him, and that this knowledge helped embolden people to rise up. They pointed to the "suicide" of the Defence Minister - it was commonly assumed that he was murdered by Ceausescu for refusing to carry out a Tiananmen-style massacre - and especially the withdrawal of Army units from Bucharest only minutes before Ceausescu's final, ill-fated speech.

According to this scenario, then, with the international stage already set by regimes in the rest of Eastern Europe falling like dominoes against Romania's borders, powerful forces domestically manoeuvred during the crisis to save the system by sacrificing Ceausescu. The bloody scenes from Timisoara were staged to inflame the populace and then, as the initial repression faltered, the coup-makers gathered strength and, at a decisive moment, had the army ostentatiously desert Ceausescu, thus

unleashing a torrent of popular revolt against him. However majestically the masses played their part, the script was already written, the cli-

max set: a new reformist Gorbachev-style government led by high-ranking officials determined not to go down with their Captain - and equally determined to rein in the masses once

again.

Does this mean that the struggle of the masses was pointless or even reactionary? No, no more so than in any of the many other rebellions and revolts where leadership is seized by other class forces who manage to replace one reactionary set-up with another. It does illustrate that, as Mao said, without state power, all is illusion. The same class retained state power throughout the revolt, and managed to use that to assure its continued rule. But, as is illustrated in this article, the masses were rebelling against genuine, deeply felt oppression and exploitation, and it was not at all decided in advance that things would remain within the control of the Romanian ruling class. This time, however, the people were not able to fight under the banner of genuine liberation.

Why did bloody suppression in Romania fail to save the Ceausescu clique, while in China it succeeded? The protests in China certainly revealed no less hatred of the regime there. One important difference was that the top forces in the Chinese government did not crack and turn on each other, as in Romania - in China, the army only

fired on the demonstrators, never on the secret police.

Why this occurred is bound up with the role of the major imperialist powers behind the two regimes and alignments within the domestic ruling classes. Gorbachev made it understood that, for their own reasons, the social imperialists backed reform and reformists; everyone knew the old regimes' days were numbered. Further, the Soviets had the strength to oversee this transition in Eastern Europe - one of the main reasons why this was more chaotic and violent in Romania was, along with the harsh conditions of the masses, the relative weakness of Soviet influence there, including that it is the only Warsaw Pact country where the Soviet army was not present.

Behind Deng and Co. stood the U.S. imperialists - and they did not want to shake up the Chinese regime. Hence only a few months after the students' blood dried on the stones in Tiananmen Square, President Bush sent his personal envoy to tell Deng that "President Bush still regards you as his friend, a friend forever", while in Romania Ceausescu is nothing but worm food and the only message he was likely to get from Gorbachev was "good riddance". It is ironic and fitting testimony to what Western "democracy" is all about that, amidst all the celebration of its triumph over "communism", it was in Romania and China, two of the formerly socialist countries where Western "democracy" had the most influence, that the popular rebellions were the most savagely repressed. □