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4 Oct 90

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ROMANIA: THE INSIDE STORY

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October 4, 1990

Although I did not use
all of this information and in
fact added to it, this draft
copy can be used as a basis
for the minutes. Again, I apologize
for the delay - if you have any
questions please call.
Thank you again
Pierre
10/16/90

ROMANIA: THE INSIDE STORY

During the past two years the world has marveled as we have observed the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the once banned Solidarity movement now leading Poland, a dissident playwright assuming the helm of Czechoslovakia, the effects of perestroika and glasnost in the U.S.S.R., and the reunification of Western and Eastern Germany.

Democratic processes appear to be well underway in Eastern Europe. The challenge facing Eastern European countries in the 1990s is to secure the democratic institutions, systems, and structures that seem to be developing. Kent Hill, director of the Institute on Religion and Democracy in Washington, DC, has said:

"It cannot be assumed the democratic institutions and structures will automatically replace a suddenly retreating totalitarianism. If the democratic systems with majority rule don't progress in guaranteeing minority rights, then the ethnic tensions which predate the rise of marxism will spawn

violence and anarchy. If this happens, the return of dictators is likely."¹

In no country is this more likely to occur than in the country of Romania. I do not consider myself an expert in foreign affairs in general or on Romania in particular. However, I find myself in a unique position of having sent students and staff members to Romania over the past ten years, of having personally visited Romania while it was still under the Ceausescu regime, and of then having talked at length with many Romanians after the revolt ending Ceausescu's reign and the subsequent "election" of his successor, Iliescu. While spending several days in Romania certainly does not make me an expert, I did see enough and meet with a sufficient variety of people to draw some very strong conclusions about the country. All of this, I believe, gives me the ability to analyze from a personal viewpoint what is happening in Romania today and will give you a greater understanding of the "inside story."

It was in March, 1988 that I, my wife, and a group of students, including two students traveling under Romanian

passports, went behind the now ripped iron curtain to visit Romania--a nation most experts consider to be one of the most depressed and repressed Communist controlled nations since the Stalinist era of the U.S.S.R. Romania is second only to Albania in terms of the stranglehold its leaders had on it.

Not only were we apprehensive about our first trip behind the iron curtain, but we were made aware of certain facts that could cause us additional problems.

1. My younger daughter was on President Reagan's personal staff in the White House, and The State department had anticipated possible ramifications if anything of an embarrassing situation should arise.
2. I had already been refused a visa to visit the U.S.S.R. because of my affiliations with certain government entities.
3. Two of the students traveling with us were Romanian students returning to their own country to visit family and friends.

While my main purpose for visiting Romania was to assess what was happening with seminaries and churches in that country, I did

learn enough about the country, its people, and its government to see what the world learned overnight through a bloody revolution and public execution of its leaders. That is, what is termed peristroika and glasnost in the U.S.S.R. and a "new openness" in Romania is in reality a very successful foreign public relations campaign.

To place Romania in global perspective, to understand what has happened, what is happening, and what may happen in the future, perhaps a brief look at the geography, history, and economy of Romania is in order.

What comes to your mind when you think of Romania? Gypsies in embroidered and brightly colored costumes laughing as they dance to festive folk music? A sinister Count Dracula emerging in the moonlight from a cold castle in Transylvania?

In reality, on the world scene Romania is a relatively small, insignificant country in southeastern Europe. It is slightly smaller than Oregon, or slightly smaller than New York and Pennsylvania combined.

Romania is bordered on the southwest by Yugoslavia, on the northwest by Hungary, on the north and northeast by the U.S.S.R., on the east by the Black Sea, and on the south by Bulgaria.

"The Carpathian Mountains divide Romania's upper half from north to south and connect near the center of the country with the Transylvanian Alps, running east and west.

"North and west of these ranges lies the Transylvanian plateau, and to the south and east are the [wide] plains of Moldavia and Walachia [through which the rivers of the Danube system flow]. In its last 190 miles, the Danube River flows through Romania only. It enters the Black Sea in northern Dobruja, just south of the border with the Soviet Union."²

Historically Romania has had very little experience with democracy. It is a land of people who are accustomed to having their lives controlled by someone else. This probably accounts for Ceausescu's ability to control the Romanian people.

From A.D. 100 to 271, "most of Romania was the Roman province of Dacia...From the 6th to the 12th century, wave after wave of

barbarian conquerors overran the native Daco-Roman population. By the 16th century, the main Romanian principalities of Moldavia and Walachia had become satellites within the Ottoman Empire.... After the Russo-Turkish War of 1828-29, they became Russian protectorates...[It was not until] 1881, after the Congress of Berlin," that the nation finally became a kingdom.

"At the start of World War I, Romania proclaimed its neutrality, but later joined the Allied side and in 1916 declared war on the Central Powers. The armistice of November 11, 1918, gave Romania vast territories from Russia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

"The gains of World War I, [made] Romania the largest Balkan state."³

In 1938, King Carol II abolished Romania's democratic Constitution of 1923. As Romania entered the 1940s, the stage was being set for its eventual experience in what we know as Orwell's world of 1984.

"In 1940, the country was reorganized along Fascist lines, and the Fascist Iron Guard became the nucleus of the new totalitarian party. On June 27, [1940] the Soviet Union occupied Bessarabia and northern Bukovina [two of Romania's northern land regions]. By the Axis-dictated Vienna Award of 1940, two-fifths of Transylvania [Romania's largest land region] went to Hungary, after which Carol dissolved Parliament, [abdicated his rule], and granted the new premier, Ion Antonescu, full power" of the pro-German Romanian government.

"Romania subsequently signed the Axis Pact on November 23, 1940, and the following June joined in Germany's attack on the Soviet Union, reoccupying Bessarabia. Following the invasion of Romania by the Red Army in August 1944, King Michael [Carol's son] led a coup that ousted the Antonescu government. An armistice with the Soviet Union was signed in Moscow on September 12, 1944.

"A Communist-dominated government bloc won elections in 1946, Michael abdicated [under Communist pressure] on December 30, 1947, and Romania became a 'People's Republic.' In 1955, Romania joined

the Warsaw Treaty Organization and the United Nations. A decade later, with the adoption of a new Constitution emphasizing national autonomy,...Nicolae Ceausescu came to power...."⁴

As we look into the economy of Romania, we find Romania is a member of the United Nations (the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and GATT), COMECON (the Soviet-sponsored Council for Mutual Economic Assistance), and the Warsaw Pact.

"In May 1986 Romania and the U.S.S.R. signed a cooperation agreement for a 15-year program of economic, scientific, and technical development. In 1988 the U.S. Congress abolished Romania's most-favored nation status."⁵

Romania's monetary unit is the leu. According to The News & Daily Advance on Sunday, September 23, Herbert Rand of Sweet Briar College says lei "are 20 to the dollar at the official rate and 120 to the dollar at the black market rate."⁶ Per capita income in Romania is \$2,020.⁷

"The National Bank of Romania (founded 1880, nationalized in 1946) is the State Bank under the Minister of Finance. Half its

profits are allotted to the State budget. There are also a Bank of Investments, a Foreign Trade Bank, an Agriculture and Food Industry Bank, and a Savings Bank. The U.S. Export-Import Bank withdrew Romania's borrowing rights as a sanction in 1988."⁸

The major ethnic groups in Romania's 23 million population are Romanians (89%), Hungarians (7.9%), and Germans (1.6%).⁹ An estimated 1 million Gypsies and 30,000 Jews make their home in Romania.¹⁰

Presently the population of Romania is fairly evenly divided between males and females and between urban and rural dwellers.

A man born in Romania can expect to live 67 years, while a woman has a life expectancy of 72 years.¹¹ Ten of those years are spent in compulsory education, from ages 6 to 16. "Further secondary education is available at lycees [which include several universities], professional schools, or advanced technical schools."¹² Romania enjoys a 98% literacy rate and, interestingly, attendance in Romanian schools is also 98%.¹³

"In 1985, 39 percent of the total workforce, and 42.6 percent of the industrial workforce, were women...The working week is 46 hours with alternate Saturdays free. Men retire at 62, women at 57."¹⁴ And Romania does have a social security plan. By the way, while in Oreada, we met with U.S. embassy staff members who were delivering U.S. Social Security checks to Americans who had retired in Romania.

Romania has an Army, a Navy, and an Air Force. "Military service is compulsory for 16 months in the Army and Air Force and 24 months in the Navy."¹⁵

The very first sight we saw as we were landing in Romania was Romania's national flag flying over the Bucharest airport. The flag had three vertical strips of blue, yellow, and red, with the nation's coat of arms in the center. During the December 1989 revolt, rebels ripped out that center of the flag with its red star that symbolized communism.

When our group arrived at the airport in the capital city of Bucharest, Romania's largest city, we were immediately met by

armed guards as we deplaned. Upon entering the airport building one could not but be shocked by the condition of the airport. Considering the size and importance of Bucharest--a capital city of 2 million people--one would have expected to find an attractive and comfortable facility. However, the buildings were a concentration camp gray, almost completely void of color, unheated, and dimly lit with but a few low wattage light bulbs. The cold, suspicious looks upon the faces of the guards and government officials made it clear that the cold, uninviting decor of the airport reflected the hopeless, joyless lives of the people. As we entered a screening area, the armed military personnel remained with us. Our luggage was thoroughly searched, books especially were closely inspected, and after what seemed to be an unusual length of time, our passports were returned to us. As our transportation from the airport had been previously arranged, our escort, who later we learned was a member of Ceausescu's security force (in plain clothes) accompanied us to our hotel. He also stayed with us throughout our entire stay in the country.

As we drove through the city it seemed as if we were in the twilight zone and had been transported back in time to the early 1940s. The buildings, the clothing of the people, everything was as if a motion picture company had constructed a set of that era. I was especially struck by the long lines at virtually every little shop or store, the emptiness of the store windows, and the absence of color. The absence of color was particularly noticeable.

When we registered in the hotel our passports were taken from us. This is a normal practice in European countries, but it added to the apprehension that was already evident on the faces of the members of our group. I think our anxiety was the final realization that we were very much at the mercy of a dictatorial regime.

Our hotel was considered one of their best. Yet the lobby was unheated, dark, and dingy in appearance. The furniture was in disrepair. One 40 watt light bulb was all we had in a room about the size of this boardroom.

From our hotel room, we could see the satellite dishes and antennas of the equipment used as listening devices to monitor our conversations. The fact that our telephone conversations were being monitored was very evident when one of our Romanian students who had accompanied us tried to make contact with his family. In attempting to give instructions to his family members he could not remember the name of the hotel. The operator listening in on the conversation unthinkingly injected herself into the conversation by giving the name of the hotel. Later we learned that every telephone in the entire city of Bucharest was being monitored by the secret police, a fact covered at length by Ted Koppel (of ABC News) after the Ceausescu downfall.

Our movements were closely watched. The presence of military, both Soviet and Romanian, was on every street. Any effort to take pictures of the military personnel was immediately discouraged, especially by my nervous staff who did not want to pull me out of a foreign hoosegow. One of our staff members was in fact detained

at gunpoint for an hour for attempting to take a picture of what he later learned was a fire station.

Our hosts identified known informers and agents as we met with various groups. On one occasion, I met with one informer in the privacy of a church office. On the pretense he wanted to get a message to the free world, he asked if I would carry a letter to America for him. Fortunately I had been warned about this possibility. If I had accepted the letter, I would have been arrested.

Another purpose for visiting Romania was for me to speak in several churches and to lecture in some of their underground schools and seminaries. The extent of underground communications was fascinating and the responses to our meetings were extraordinary when you consider the security under which the churches and seminaries operated. Telephone books were not allowed, free newspapers, radio, or T.V. stations did not exist, and even typewriters had to be registered, however, news that we would be holding religious services spread quickly and we saw

2,000-3,000 people attend the services and willing to sit, actually many of them stood, three to four hours.

On another occasion I addressed a group of about 3,000 persons in a meeting which actually served as a distraction for other meetings. I was there to meet with pastors and religious workers in an unregistered seminary, named School of the Prophets. Because the meeting of 3,000 undoubtedly was attended by informers, secret police, and members of the Soviet KGB, each of the 50 to 60 men and women who risked danger to assemble in the School of the Prophets was carefully screened. As I left the platform of the one meeting to go to the other, I was escorted through a labyrinth of corridors and doors to a small room; and should the police have attempted to raid the meeting, I would have been escorted through other passageways to avoid open confrontation. I spoke to this group of dedicated men and women on several occasions. This scenario was typical of the environment in which we functioned during our visit.

Throughout our trip I met with men and women who had been cruelly beaten, unlawfully imprisoned, and heartlessly evicted from

their homes. Many of our conversations had to be conducted as we drove in cars because these people were too afraid to talk in their homes or in buildings knowing of Ceausescu's extensive electronic surveillance.

I experienced first hand the intimidation of a government that turned off the electricity in buildings in which I was speaking. As the electricity was turned off and police cars surrounded the church, everyone scattered rapidly throughout the city. My wife and I were guided through dark streets and back alleys to our hotel.

I received food from the hands of people who were deprived by their government. According to some reports, many Romanian families received only three kilograms (about six and a half pounds) of meat and fifty grams of butter per month. Sugar, oil, and flour were rationed to these families. Their apartments and houses had hot water only once a week, and in winter their residences were rarely warmer than fifty-five degrees.¹⁶

Although we were allowed to speak in church services, our

group was not supposed to do anything that would cause a crowd to assemble in a public area. Traveling with us was a student who was adept at twisting balloons into animal shapes. Children were captivated when she began doing this on a downtown street one day, and people stopped to watch. Before long a crowd had gathered. Naturally, this caught the attention of the soldiers who became enchanted by the balloon tricks. Their presence caused the crowd to immediately disperse (our group included). Naturally, we asked the young lady not to repeat the performance.

Prior to our entering the country, we had been warned not to keep diaries of our trip, and absolutely no names of those people we came into contact with were to be written down for fear they would be harassed, arrested, and tortured. In fact, the day after we left, two of the pastors who served as our hosts were arrested, beaten, and questioned. As we traveled throughout the country, our bags were repeatedly searched for film, tape recordings, or written records of our contacts, and our passports were checked and rechecked by many different officials within minutes of each other.

Police dogs checked compartments and the crawl spaces above the compartments on the trains on which we traveled. On one occasion one of the trains on which another group of our students were traveling from Hungary to Romania was stopped at the border. The cars in which they were riding were disengaged, put on a side track, left with no food or water and only limited bathroom facilities for 14 hours, and then sent back to Budapest, Hungary. To visit in the home of a Romanian, our names had to be registered and cleared through the police.

Such was our introduction to the country of Romania.

To understand what brought about the bloody revolution, you need to understand the personal history of the Ceausescu family.

Nicolae Ceausescu, who was born January 26, 1918, had a "life and career [that] closely resembled Stalin's. Like Stalin, he was born in poverty--to a peasant family from a village...about 100 miles west of Bucharest. He received only a few years of education before at the age of eleven, he left his family, moved to the capital, and found work as a shoemaker's apprentice.

"Like Stalin, he became a Communist and a revolutionary while he was still in his teens." He was imprisoned for Communist activity for 2 years. "Like Stalin, he received his higher education from fellow-revolutionaries in trouble with the law." And from 1936 to 1944 he was constantly in trouble with the authorities.

"Romania in those years concluded a brief, not particularly successful experiment with democratic government--the only time in the country's history when it had ventured to try democracy.

Between [World War I and World War II], Romania had a

constitutional monarchy under Kings Ferdinand and Carol II...members of a German noble family that the Romanian aristocracy had invited into the country in 1866 to become its rulers, after five centuries of Ottoman suzerainty. Romanian politics, after WWI, featured many parties, many elections, and 21 different governments. [As I indicated earlier,] one of the more robust groups...spawned during those years was the Iron Guard, a native Fascist organization very similar to the Nazi Party in Germany."¹⁷

As previously discussed, during WWII, the monarch abdicated, "paving the way for a pro-German government under General Ion Antonescu....Romania fought on the side of the Axis forces until the summer of 1944, [but changed its allegiance to the winning side when the Soviets were ready to push] the Germans back through the Carpathians....Although many Romanians hoped the Allies would restore a democratic system, the presence of the Soviet Army settled their fate. By 1947, the government was firmly under the control of the Communists, and Ceausescu, as one of the few Romanian Communist Party members whose allegiance predated the

arrival of the Soviets, was well launched" on a career in the new government.¹⁸

Ceausescu became general secretary of the Communist party in 1965, posturing himself as a reformer and a nationalist. "He publicly opposed Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968, and many Romanian intellectuals joined the Party in those years...But Ceausescu's devotion to liberal reforms lasted only as long as it took him to eliminate the old Stalinists in the Party who might challenge [his authority and] power. He gained control over the military in 1969 and became President of Romania in 1974. [It is said], he had accrued power so gradually at first that for years many Romanians and many outsiders who studied the country could not quite believe what he had become.

"Once he had achieved power, he [maintained] it by... nepotism....His brother became a vice-minister of defense. A second brother became a lieutenant general in the security forces. A third brother became the first vice-chairman of the state planning agency. Ceausescu's youngest child and namesake, known

as Nicu, became head of the Communist youth organization and then [Communist] Party [chief] in Sibiu, Transylvania."¹⁹

Ceausescu's wife, Elena, benefited the most from Ceausescu's nepotism. For example, a Romanian encyclopedia listing the year of her birth as 1917 was recalled and destroyed. The next edition indicated she was born in 1919 instead of 1917. In 1967, Elena, who had never finished grade school, decided she wanted a doctorate in chemistry. She asked one of Romania's most respected chemists to award her one. He refused and subsequently went into premature retirement. Eventually she was awarded the degree, and soon thereafter she was appointed the Chairman of the National Council for Science and Technology. Soon, textbooks and scientific encyclopedias were published under her direction and the media began to praise her as one of the world's most distinguished scientists. Mrs. Ceausescu meanwhile added political work to her scientific duties. She became a ruling member of the Romanian Communist Party's Central Committee in 1974.²⁰

"Romania became a diarchy, and Mrs. Ceausescu was so much feared that the people referred to her only as 'She.'" On one occasion she withdrew over \$2 million from a government bank account for her personal use. The money in the account had been donated by foreign companies to rebuild a demolished building after a major earthquake struck Bucharest in March, 1977. Of course the bank officials took no action to recover the funds.²¹

"Romania is a fertile land, and only gross mismanagement could drive it to abject poverty. The Ceausescus provided just that. In the early years of the regime, Romania borrowed deeply from abroad to build heavy industry--particularly petrochemical factories, which would rely on imported oil. But world oil prices soared, and there was little demand for Romania's industrial production. Ceausescu then determined the repayment of the nation's debt would be the nation's highest priority, lest it fall under the [control] of foreign creditors. To accomplish [the repayment of debt], he squeezed the consumer sector unmercifully,

shipping [most] of the country's food abroad"²² in general and to Russia in particular.

One of our students told us that after Chernobyl the food in his area disappeared, and one week later Russian canned goods from Chernobyl appeared on the shelves in Romania. Their media had not informed them of the Chernobyl disaster and possible food contamination.

"In April of last year, the government triumphantly announced that the debt had been paid, but no improvement in consumer supplies followed....

"While Ceausescu was paying off the debt, he was also pouring resources into a demolition-and-construction program he called 'systematization'...Had he completed his 'systematization' [program he would have leveled] the majority of the nation's 13,000 rural villages" and more than 90% of the existing housing in the towns and cities, as well as dozens of churches--all to be replaced with concrete apartment blocks.²³

Ceausescu believed in the 1930s Soviet model in building a new society, a new society in which human beings would "willingly, cheerfully, and diligently carry out all the orders given by the leadership. To have such an individual, [he believed] you must create a new environment for him," an environment in which he is "totally dependent on the collective from his birth to his exit, [for] then he will react according to the will of the collective."²⁴

The centerpiece of Ceausescu's systematization is a swath of land in the center of Bucharest about three miles long and a quarter of a mile wide cleared for the "Boulevard of the Victory of Socialism." While in Bucharest, we travelled along this boulevard where, it is estimated, "at least 40,000 people lost their homes, and where some of Romania's oldest churches and monasteries were either destroyed or moved...Flanked by parallel rows of nearly identical white ten-story apartment buildings, ornamented with balconies and columns, the boulevard is about 90 yards wide--wider, Ceausescu's architects like to boast, than the Champs-Elysees. At the west end looms a new House of the People,

on which construction started in 1986, and which covers three times as much ground space as the U.S. Capitol. It has about a thousand rooms, many of them the size of respectable college gymnasiums. The interior decor features white marble, enormous columns, and gilt." It is said that it was modeled after the grand avenue that Adolph Hitler planned for Berlin.²⁵

Like all dictators, we will never know if Ceausescu really believed that his people loved him. If he did, he possessed a paranoia about being poisoned, as well as an abnormal fear of germs. He installed radiation detectors in his offices and residences. Special body guards tasted all his food before he ate it. After shaking hands with strangers he washed his right hand in alcohol. Children who presented him with flowers or kissed him at official functions were selected in advance and had to be certified free of infection. His security apparatus had over 3 million, out of a population of 23 million, working for or informing for the secret police. Handwriting samples of 60% of the

population were kept on file. Mail as well as telephones were monitored.

Why couldn't Nicolae Ceausescu tolerate people who thought differently than he did? Was it because of his dogmatic communism? Most likely not. It was probably his own central desire to control power, and he merely used communism as a means by which to control the people.

Much has been reported about the revolution in Romania, however, the most accurate report was given in an article published in the April 2, 1990 issue of The New Yorker entitled "Report from Romania: Down with the Tyrant" by Robert Cullen. I have interviewed Romanian officials, pastors, and students and have determined that Mr. Cullen's article most accurately reflects what actually took place during those fateful days. From Mr. Cullen's articles and comments by those who were actually in Timisoara at the time of the incident and mutual friends Pastor Tokes and I have, I have gleaned a chronological perspective of what occurred.

Until the revolution in December 1989, the vast majority in Romania feared and submitted to Ceausescu, but there were those who did not. One was a pastor, the Reverend Laszlo Tokes, in one of the largest churches in Timisoara, a city of 350,000 people.

Tokes, a champion who did not shy away from controversy, was sent to Timisoara as assistant minister. Only a few dozen people regularly attended the church and the old pastor had long since gone over to Ceausescu's regime. As one report commented, "Sending Tokes to Timisoara probably seemed a safe bet by the bishops; nothing much could happen there. But six months later the old pastor died, and Tokes inherited his post. Tokes taught the Bible --dangerous, subversive stuff in Romania where comparisons with recent events were unmistakable."²⁶

Ceausescu's Romania has been compared with Joseph Stalin's regime in the Soviet Union. Both countries demonstrate vulnerability to absolute dictatorship. "But in at least one respect Romania was different. Stalin's regime tended to deal quickly with any hint of dissent: the police knocked on the door

in the middle of the night, and the victim disappeared. In Romania, the authorities preferred a long and visible campaign of intimidation against dissidents. In the case of Laszlo Tokes, anonymous callers threatened him, and cars filled with watchful men often parked in front of the church. Tokes's residence was broken into, he was beaten, and his face was cut with a knife. "An architect who was working with Tokes on a church-restoration project received calls warning him to abandon the project. He refused, and soon thereafter his body was found in a Timisoara park; the police ruled his death a suicide. On Sundays, uniformed policemen, jiggling their handcuffs in front of them, formed a gauntlet through which members of the congregation had to walk to get to services."²⁷

"Finally, a court ordered [Tokes's] eviction." It was this eviction notice that actually started a chain of events that led to the overthrow of the Ceausescu regime. The government set the eviction date for December 15th. "On Sunday, December 10th, Tokes told his congregation what was going to happen."²⁸

"Word of the impending eviction spread quickly," and one man, a Catholic who did not know Tokes personally went to the church on the 15th to see what might happen. He said what happened "was completely spontaneous."²⁹

When he arrived, he "found that some 50 or 60 people with similar ideas had already shown up and were milling about. He saw no police, but there seemed to be a few Securitate men in plain clothes standing at the church entrance. Hours passed, and the crowd swelled to about two hundred. The idea began to spread among them that if they stayed the Securitate would perhaps think twice about carrying out the eviction...Several hundred people stood watch through the night.

"The next day, Saturday [December 16], the crowd began to sense both the fragility of the established order and its own power. The weather was sunny and unusually warm, and more and more people took to the streets around the...church. The mayor of the city...came and spoke to Tokes, offering a compromise: he could stay on at the church if the crowd dispersed. Tokes then opened

his window and announced to those outside that the problem had been solved, and they could go home. But someone shouted back, 'We don't trust them...'. When the mayor tried to face down the crowd, some women spoke up. 'We'll stay! You leave!' they said. Later, a group of students began singing an old patriotic song called 'Romanians, Awake!'" And as evening fell, someone shouted "Down with Ceausescu!"³⁰

There is no doubt in my mind that what was occurring in the rest of Eastern Europe influenced Romanians, but there was no plan, no call to revolution. There were no conspiracies among government officials or the Army.

"The Timisoara situation was the spark that lit the fires of revolution in Romania." One of the persons I interviewed said in reality it was the church that ignited the fire. Laszlo Tokes, who is now Bishop Tokes, has said, "The scenario was written by God. He gave us a message, and that message was: do not be afraid."³¹

On Sunday, December 17, Ceausescu ordered that anyone in Timisoara who did not submit to his soldiers should be shot.

"Ceausescu left shortly afterward for a previously planned 3-day visit to Iran, apparently unaware of how fragile his situation had become. His support in the Romanian Army had been eroding for years." And the men of the Romanian Army were not willing to shed blood to preserve the regime.³²

On that Sunday, December 17th, thousands of Timisoara demonstrators moved through the city. A large group gathered outside the Communist Party headquarters. Cries of "Down with Ceausescu" again rang out, and the crowd broke into government buildings, tearing portraits of Ceausescu from the walls. "A fire truck came to the scene, presumably to disperse the crowd by spraying it with fire hoses. The crowd seized the truck and burned it. At that point armed men in civilian clothes opened fire...The shooting spread to other parts of the city in what Timisoarans now call 'the massacre.'"³³

"The confrontation in Timisoara continued for three more days, with government forces either unable or unwilling to kill enough

of the city's 350,000 people to end the uprising. Gradually, power began to shift to the uprising."³⁴

"In Bucharest, people began to talk to their most trusted friends about what they might do to help the Timisoarans...Despite such plotting, the Capital remained outwardly quiet. Ceausescu returned to Bucharest on December 20th, and immediately addressed the nation on television...He called the Timisoara demonstrators 'a few groups of hooligan elements,' and said, '...these actions of a terrorist nature were organized and unleashed in close connection with reactionary, imperialist, irredentist, chauvinist circles, and foreign espionage services in various foreign countries.' He [then] scheduled a demonstration of support for the regime the following day."³⁵

"As the rally began, it appeared that the regime would once again be able to demonstrate that the people were, if not loyal, at least docile." But as the crowd jostled and shoved, a lamppost wobbled, and its lamp fell to the ground shattering with a loud crash. A woman standing nearby shrieked. "Immediately...people

around her assumed she had been shot by the Securitate. Someone shouted 'Timisoara, Timisoara' to suggest that another massacre had begun. [Immediately] some young people at the edge of the crowd chose that moment to unfurl a homemade banner they had been secretly carrying," The unfurled banner said, "Down with Ceausescu."³⁶

Although Ceausescu and his wife tried to regain control of the crowd, the damage to his authority had been done. Soon the streets were full of young people singing and shouting, "Down with Ceausescu, yesterday Timisoara, today Bucharest."

"The center of the turmoil was the university...There was ironic justice in this [because] in 1968 Ceausescu had decided that Romania needed a bigger population to fulfill his plans, and had issued a decree banning abortions...."³⁷ There were also "welfare incentives and tax penalties (on the childless) designed to combat a decline in the birthrate. [Not only were] abortion and contraception illegal, [but] the marriageable age of girls [was] lowered from 18 to 15."³⁸ Thus "the children born during the late

'60s and early '70s were called 'decree babies,' and, because nothing else in the society expanded with the birth rate, they had always been particularly deprived. There were never enough shoes, or toys, or classroom space for them." Now the decree babies at the university, upon whom Ceausescu had depended to be Army conscripts, made up a good part of the crowd in the streets of the capital that fateful day.³⁹

"The regime's ability to intimidate had vanished, perhaps because of Ceausescu's display of weakness, [perhaps] because of the people's knowledge of what had happened elsewhere in Eastern Europe, [and perhaps] because of the people's exhilarating sense that Romanians were finally standing up and asserting themselves after decades of humiliation."⁴⁰

Ceausescu's downfall came the next morning, and he and his wife fled the city.

Power for a moment was available to anyone who had the determination to assume it. Six hours after Ceausescu fled the

city, a man by the name of Iliescu and his colleagues decided to solidify their authority.

On the 22nd, Iliescu and his colleagues decided to dispose of the Ceausescus. The sentence was imposed and implemented--death by firing squad. In a conversation with leaders and students, I asked if it would not have been better for the Ceausescus to be tried. The unanimous response was "no!" The aftermath and election is a fact of historical record.

"Ceausescu's demise completed the extraordinary cycle of revolutions in Eastern Europe in 1989. In some ways, it was the most significant of those transforming events. Of the Eastern European Communist leaders, only Ceausescu tried to crush the popular forces that rose against him. His failure invalidated the first principle of political life in the Communist world--the belief that in the end the Party has the means to force the people to submit--and suggested that instead the Communists still in power may face a choice between yielding power gracefully [or] yielding it as Ceausescu did. [I do not believe it was coincidental] that

a month or so after Ceausescu's fall Mikhail Gorbachev decided that the time had come for the Soviet Communist Party to seek legitimacy through some kind of multiparty system."⁴¹

Now, the question is, who is Iliescu and where is he coming from? Iliescu was part of a group of once prominent Party officials who crossed the Ceausescus and for this had been, as my Romanian friends say, "marginalized." His generation "came of age after the war, and in 1949, according to Vasile Negrescu, a contemporary of his, he was one of thousands of Romanian students who went to the Soviet Union for their higher education. He studied engineering, in Moscow." It has been reported that another student, Mikhail Gorbachev and he became friends. However, Iliescu does not make such a claim and Negrescu, who was also in Moscow then, thinks its "highly improbable that the two [students] studying at different institutions could have known each other well."⁴²

After returning from Moscow, Iliescu rose steadily through the ranks of the Romanian Communist party. In 1971, in

disagreement with Ceausescu over economic matters, he was demoted several times. Nevertheless, he remained "connected" with other "marginalized" intellectuals.

It was this Iliescu who arrived at the Central Committee building and almost immediately took charge. It was the group of intellectuals and others with whom he was affiliated through the Academy of Social and Political Sciences that formed the core of the ruling group that emerged and called itself the National Salvation Front.

It has been suggested that Iliescu and others had previously plotted a coup with Soviet support and that they used the terrorism incident and the events that followed to stage the coup. Although there was fragmentary evidence to support this thought, a member of the opposition party who would have every reason to build upon this suggested that a spontaneous transfer of power was more accurate of the account.

One sidelight to the uprising is the fact that many of the security forces were not from Romania but were in fact from Syria,

Iraq, Libya, and other countries with histories of involvement in terrorism.

The Front quickly appeared anxious to work to reverse some of the worst excesses of the Ceausescu regime. They promised:

1. to provide for free elections
2. to annul laws forbidding abortion
3. to annul laws requiring people to report conversations with foreigners
4. that typewriters would no longer have to be registered.
5. to annul laws requiring citizens to address one another as comrade
6. to forbid exports of food
7. to allow Romanian citizens to secure passports
8. to remain in the Warsaw Pact
9. to abolish the Communist Party's monopoly on power.

Although the Front quickly filled the vacuum left by the disorder that erupted and eventually legitimized their party voted

upon by the people, there is grave concern that the media seemed simply to shift their allegiance from the old master to the new.

The reality is that the transformation of political life has not guaranteed a transformation in other areas. For example, it has not provided more warmth, more light, or even food. People still go through their daily routine with overcoats and hats. Long lines again form outside many stores. The concrete buildings along the Boulevard of the Victory of Socialism still need to be completed and made available to those who were dislodged from their homes.

CONCLUSIONS

Recently some Romanian leaders shared some important concerns with me.

1. THE ELECTORIAL^{AL} PROCESS

The electoral campaigns began under very questionable conditions. Although the chance of free elections existed, the opposition parties had little access to the mass media. For example, from the very first day the National Salvation Front replaced the Communist Party committees in the towns and villages. These new organizations assumed both political and union power to change the local leadership controlling the electoral process.

2. MASS MEDIA

As far as information is concerned, the actual mass media is still almost entirely dependent on the government and the security forces. The opposition has only one daily newspaper and except for insignificant information, nothing is allowed to appear. As for radio and television, those in support of the opposition to the NSF are compelled to broadcast only music and very brief notices but

no political comments. Broadcasters have been physically abused, threatened, and even expelled from the country.

3. HUMAN RIGHTS

Today telephones and letters are still under control although the government has publicly stated that the surveillance apparatus was to be destroyed. Although passport issuances indicate a sign of change, no law has been instituted to protect this right.

4. THE RULE OF LAW

Any system of government of a free people will have divisions comparable to our legislative, executive, and judicial departments.

- a. Romania's executive office does not enforce the laws but acts at its own disposal.
- b. The judiciary is still afraid to interpret the laws and aid to their enforcement.
- c. Citizens not supportive of the NSF are still subject to obstructions and even physical injuries under indifferent eyes of the police.

5. FREE MARKET ECONOMY

Today the real issue in East European countries must be encouraged in their move to democracy. As one Romanian leader told me in my office just recently, this must be done carefully without provoking repercussions that would stop its impetus. This means the Western countries must be very careful with whom they are dealing. For instance, a great majority of economists leading the country have studied in Moscow and are more or less tributary to this centralized system. Those familiar with the internal economic mechanisms are concerned that foreign investments would only reinforce the existing centralized economic system and would not help the development of a free market economy. Further, this would sponsor and fortify the existing government inclined to cosmetic changes to the socialistic system.

Romanians generally feel that they "ousted the hated Ceausescu dictatorship, only to have it replaced by old Ceausescu cronies." Even now thousands have demonstrated in Bucharest against

"postcommunist totalitarianism," and they talk of a "second revolution."⁴³

It is critical to understand that while there may be new openness, there are not any new laws. The "openness" toward freedom that everyone is referring to today is simply a result of lack of enforcement. The laws of the past are legally still in effect today. As long as the laws are not legally changed, the situation could revert to previous conditions on any given day.

A. Pierre Guillermin

October 4, 1990

NOTES

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