

Polish Republic, a move bound to contribute further to the ill-repute into which the whole idea of social democracy has fallen. This limits the choice even more, leaving the door open for an extreme right-wing regime that could replace the present government.

Walesa is currently attempting to outbid his opponents by taking a populist, nationalist, and authoritarian stance. On the eve of the Solidarity congress where he was easily reelected president, he had begun to criticize "his" government, accusing it of "dragging its feet" and calling for "speedier reforms." He was basically referring to the elimination of Communists – or rather, former Communists, since there has been a mass exodus from the party as well as from its successor – who still hold a large number of important posts at various levels of the administration and in state-owned companies. Under the present conditions, a Communist witch-hunt could be a political ploy to divert attention from Poland's economic and social woes. The consequences could be far-reaching, since almost all of the Polish intelligentsia, including most of Solidarity's advisors, have been Communists at one time or another.

The president of Solidarity is now accusing intellectuals of having betrayed him, his tone becoming increasingly hostile. Last May he declared: "I allowed myself to be taken in by the intellectuals. I believed too much in the Polish intellectuals and followed their advice. They misled me."² Contrary to what the Polish government hoped for, Walesa asked for the complete withdrawal of Soviet troops from Poland. In March he affirmed his intention of running for the presidency of the country and has since called for an early election.

It is clear from all this that he sees himself as a new Pilsudski.³ In any case, he remains a national hero in Poland, and if he decided to encourage a general strike, which in the present state of affairs would assume considerable magnitude, he could quite easily bring down the government.



IT IS IN ROMANIA, WHERE ECONOMIC CONDITIONS are catastrophic compared with those of Poland, that the future appears most dismal. I was shocked when I returned there. Romanians' standard of living has fallen to the level experienced by Soviets in the early 1960s. One can say without fear of exaggeration that Ceausescu's ruthless dictatorship and megalomania have reduced the country to an economic, political, and cultural wasteland.

It is exactly these conditions that account for the great paradox of Romania compared to other Eastern European countries. The fact is that the successor to the Romanian Communist party, the National Salvation Front, has been able not only to stay in power, but also to win the May 1990 presidential elections with an unprecedented eighty-nine percent majority, when much more reformist parties in Poland and Hungary were routed.

Over the last few years, repression in Romania has been so severe that in contrast with that in other Eastern bloc countries, no opposition group with any real structure has been able to operate or even make an appearance. There were no political options at hand. It was for this reason that a small group of several former Ceausescu supporters, as well as a few others co-opted at the last minute, was able to seize power in circumstances that remain mysterious.

The events of December 1989 have the character of both a genuine people's revolt and a coup d'état. It was the spontaneous uprising in Timisoara between 15 and 20 December, and in Bucharest a few days later, that initiated Ceausescu's downfall. But it was precisely because they were spontaneous reactions, without organized political direction of

any kind, that Ion Iliescu's group was able to seize power by striking a political compromise with the army, the terms of which are still unknown.

Contrary to initial accounts, it was quickly established that it was not the *Securitate* – the political police – but the army that opened fire on the crowds in Timisoara and Bucharest, the day before Ceausescu's flight. Only at the very end, with the intensification of the popular uprising, did the army turn against the dictator. The main purpose of the grotesque and hastily organized trial, at the end of which Ceausescu was promptly executed for "genocide," was to blame him for everything, to prevent him from speaking, and to play down the army's role in the repression. General Stanculescu, one of the trial's organizers, was allegedly responsible for the crackdown at Timisoara. The most complete recorded version of the trial was cut at the very moment when Ceausescu, having denied giving the order to open fire at Timisoara, was getting ready to point the finger.

Ion Iliescu and several of those in his circle, such as Silviu Brucan and Petre Roman, are surely well intentioned and truly want to see a democratic Romania. They are in danger, however, of being considerably hampered not only by the army and the state machinery, but also by the political apparatus of the former regime. Just as Ceausescu's execution permitted his government to escape trial, banning the Communist party served a similar purpose. The party disappeared in name only, and since it had no real political organization of its own, the new National Salvation Front took over the apparatus the outlawed party maintained throughout the country.

EVEN BEFORE CEAUSESCU'S FALL, HIDDEN CONFLICTS EXISTED AMONG various factions in his regime, especially between the *Securitate* and the army. There were clear indications of this during the events of December and several disturbing incidents have still not been cleared up. We now know that the mass grave "discovered" near Timisoara was a complete fabrication, with "stitched together" bodies transported there from hospital dissecting rooms and morgues. We still do not know who masterminded the operation nor whom it was supposed to discredit. In the days following Ceausescu's overthrow sixty thousand were reported dead throughout Romania. In fact the number was closer to six hundred.

Just an error in counting? The most farfetched rumours continue to circulate in Bucharest. There are those who maintain that someone (who?) tried deliberately to create panic and disorder while the difficult negotiations of setting up the new government were carried out. Nevertheless, it seems that Iliescu must come to terms with forces he barely controls. As a result of the army's refusal to suppress the rioters, in June, he was forced to call on the miners, who, flanked by political organizers from the old Communist party, exceeded their "mandate" – most obviously by arresting leaders of the new political groupings.

Given the underdeveloped political culture in Romania, making Ceausescu take the blame for all the country's ills seems to have largely succeeded as far as the National Salvation Front is concerned. Yet this is not the only reason for its overwhelming election victory. After Ceausescu was eliminated, opposition parties were put together very hastily. The major established parties, such as the re-formed National Peasants Party and National Liberal Party, have for the most part remained empty shells. Their respective leaders, Ratiu and Campeanu, candidates who ran against Iliescu for the presidency, had not lived in the country for many years (thirty-five in Ratiu's case and fifteen in Campeanu's). They had little credibility, and their parties, active mainly in Bucharest, had not penetrated much beyond the capital into the more remote parts of a country still controlled by former party cadres now siding with the Front.

What's more, during the time it was acting as an interim government, the Front adopted "vote-getting" methods of a cynical Western kind. While continuing price controls, it appreciably increased workers' salaries and made Saturday a paid holiday, even though the state obviously had no means of paying for such initiatives. In addition, the Front >