

Phase I of Romanian revolution has ended

by Konstantin George

The Romanian Army coup and popular revolution that overthrew, at the cost of an estimated 60,000 lives, the hated despot, Nicolae Ceausescu, marks, on the hopeful side, the definitive end of Communism and Communist Party rule in Romania. It also marks the equally definitive launching of what will become the Balkan Crisis of 1990. The Ceausescu, Nicolae and Elena, are dead, and their execution symbolizes the end of Phase I of the Romanian revolution. The next phase, already under way, is the jockeying for positions between the new interim government, called the National Salvation Front, and its main pillar of support, the current Romanian Army leadership; and the array of new parties now rapidly forming, between now and the free elections set for April.

There are two levels to what has been going on in Romania since Dec. 22. There is the level of a truly popular revolution, a population which wants nothing less than a total break with not only the 25 years of despotic Ceausescu rule, but the entire 45 years of brutal Communist oppression. Counterposed to this is the new interim government, the National Salvation Front, quite a different animal. The leaders of the National Salvation Front, beginning with its head, Ion Iliescu, are not only Communists, but all belong to Romania's smallest—and next to the Ceausescu clan itself, most hated—minority; members of the 1,000 families that formed the tiny and irrelevant pre-war Romanian Communist Party. In other words, these are Comintern Romanians, and the hardest of the hard-core Soviet assets in that country. To wit:

1) Ion Iliescu, 59, interim President and head of the National Salvation Front, whose parents served as Comintern agents in the pre-war RCP, during the "period of illegality." Iliescu, always a Communist, formally joined the RCP youth right after the Red Army entered Romania in August 1944. He went on to study in Moscow, beginning in 1950, from which time his friendship with Gorbachov stems.

2) Petre Roman, 43, the new prime minister, son of Comintern parents, and whose father fought in the Communist International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War.

3) Alexandru Birladeanu, placed in charge of the Romanian economy by the National Salvation Front. Birladeanu was head of the Romanian State Planning Commission during the 1960s in the last years of Stalinist Ceausescu's Stalinist predecessor, Georghe Georghiu-Dej, and the first years of Ceausescu.

This new government reflects the coup side of the revolution, namely that the revolution succeeded because it was launched by the Army with Soviet backing, and, contrary to Western reports of a black and white "Army versus Securitate" war, by leading factions of the dreaded Securitate, or secret police, in close coordination with Moscow. Ironically, the very fierce resistance by Ceausescu diehards and fanatics has provided through this writing (Dec. 28) the greatest short-term stabilizing factor to the new regime. If there weren't such fanatic, armed resistance, the Iliescu types would have to invent it. As long as fighting continues, popular attention is still largely riveted on completing the first revolution—the mopping up of the last remnants of the *ancien régime*—and deflected, at least partially, from turning on the Comintern Communists turned "democrats."

These considerations played a key role in why Moscow decided not to intervene militarily. Moscow was mooting a military intervention during Dec. 22-23, when it was not clear that the Army would emerge victorious. Once the ultimate victory of the Army forces was assured, Moscow put any intervention on ice, reasoning that a protracted conflict was the best guarantee for short-term stability for the new regime it had installed.

Troop transit rights

We are entering 1990, and 1990 will be the year of Balkan Crisis. Romania is but one sub-theater of this crisis. Yugoslavia is rapidly nearing a point of no return into fragmentation along ethnic lines, and potential civil war. Bulgaria is being hit by strikes and disorders. Last but not least, Hungary's relative political stability could come totally unglued by the end of March, when free elections are held. All these countries border on Romania, and Romania is the country positioned between them and the U.S.S.R. Under these conditions, Moscow's main strategic demand vis-à-vis Romania is an agreement with a Romanian government allowing the passage of Soviet troops across Romania for the contingency of military operations anywhere in the Balkan theater. With Soviet puppet Iliescu in, even as interim President, such accords can be signed. Once that is achieved, Moscow, after the scheduled April elections, would accept a non-Communist government in Bucharest, under two conditions: overall, that the regime's foreign policy, akin to Poland's under Solidarnosc, be pro-Soviet and membership in the Warsaw Pact be maintained; and, that any Iliescu-signed agreements concerning Soviet troop passage rights, be respected.

The National Salvation Front as such will not survive past April. That is certain. The most Iliescu and his cohorts can hope for is a minority status in a non-Communist coalition government. However, between now and April, when the "second revolution" will occur, these Cominternists—who come from the same dirty 1,000 families that produced Ceausescu and wife Elena Petrescu's clan, can do a lot of damage, some of it irreparable.