



Antigovernment protests replace celebrations during the anniversary of the 1989 upheaval; Iliescu is blamed for the country's food shortages

ROMANIA

If at First You Don't Succeed . . .

One year after the revolt that toppled Ceausescu, many citizens feel the country needs a second revolution

By JOHN BORRELL VIENNA

The same threadbare clothes on the backs and scuffed boots on the feet of the protesters, the same anger on their faces as they trudged through the winter slush in a dozen Romanian cities, the same shouted slogans and crumpled banners demanding the government's ouster. In the year since a spontaneous eruption of fury on Romanian streets toppled the Communist regime, only the names on the lips of the marchers seem to have changed. Where a year ago the demonstrators called for the ouster of dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, last week they demanded the resignation of President Ion Iliescu and his Prime Minister, Petre Roman.

That there were protests rather than celebrations on the anniversary of Ceausescu's downfall reflects a growing belief that the bloody revolution of 1989 has brought little change to Romania. Not only are food shortages as severe as they were under Ceausescu, but the government is promising even tougher times ahead as part of its planned economic reform. There is resentment too that few of Ceausescu's aides or members of the Securitate secret police have been brought to trial and that the ruling National Salvation Front, which won more than 80% of the vote in elections last May, is composed largely of former Communists.

Yet for all the specific complaints and charges, the lingering discontent seems basically a cry from the heart of a confused and unhappy country still unwilling to accept that there are no shortcuts to the prosperity everyone craves. In attacking the Front, many in the burgeoning opposition movement seem to ignore the burden of Ceausescu's legacy and gloss lightly over

the problems of turning a crumbling command economy into a productive free-market system. "The very people who call loudest for change protest the most when we try to introduce it," said Roman last week.

Facing strikes by truck drivers, factory workers and students, the government has backed away from introducing on Jan. 1 a second phase of market-oriented reforms that would decontrol prices of such essential commodities as bread and milk. It has also been forced by trade unions to reconsider a restrictive strike law as well as plans for unemployment benefits, which the unions claim are inadequate.

The widespread hostility to its economic reforms helped persuade the Front to begin discussions Dec. 17 on the possibility of forming a coalition government. Last May opposition leaders rejected joining a coalition led by the Front, but the Liberal Party, the third largest in parliament, now backs a government of national unity. After talks with Liberal leader Radu Campeanu, Iliescu said he hoped the Liberals would be able to persuade other rival groups to join.

While formation of a coalition government might temporarily ease political tensions, it would be unlikely to silence demands for a purge of all former Communists. "The revolution has been stolen from us," says George Serban, president of the Timisoara Society, a radical opposition movement in the city where the revolution began last December. "The new leaders are old figures in different clothing."

Serban was one of about 5,000 people who marched on Timisoara's Open Square in commemoration of the demonstration a year ago against the arrest of the ethnic Hungarian pastor Laszlo Tokes, at which

troops and Securitate agents fired on protesters. Gathering under the balcony where members of the embryonic Salvation Front addressed the revolutionaries after Ceausescu's execution on Christmas, the marchers chanted "Resign, resign!" and "Help us get rid of the Front!"

Tokes, now a bishop, has called for a "second revolution," stressing that it should be peaceful. "I don't mean only a spiritual revolution," he said, "but a political one as well." Tokes has praised the newly formed Civic Alliance, a Bucharest-based movement that is trying to bring disparate groups together to oppose the Salvation Front.

The Civic Alliance, which claims hundreds of thousands of supporters, has backed Campeanu's call for a coalition government. It also proposes early elections, currently not scheduled until 1992, and wants a referendum on whether Romania should be headed by an elected President or a constitutional monarch.

In addition, the alliance supports popular demands for the speedy prosecution of Ceausescu aides and Securitate agents who attempted to suppress last year's revolution. Only a handful of trials have been concluded, and thousands of former agents not only are still at large but also have found employment with a newly created intelligence service, an internal security agency that has some of the same functions as the old Securitate organization. Intelligence chief Virgil Magureanu insists that the 6,000 former Securitate officers hired for new intelligence duties are all "uncompromised." But his statement only heightens opposition concern that last year's revolution has been hijacked by Communists intent on retaining power by any means possible. "Nothing has changed," says Elena Iotcovi, 47, a widow whose only son disappeared last year during the revolution. "Why haven't the Securitate men who took him been punished?" It is a question many Romanians fear Iotcovi may still be asking a year from now. —With reporting by Sean Hillen/Timisoara