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Canada At A Crossroads



EASTERN EUROPE

A horrible crackdown

The last hard-liner lashes out at a revolt



SCHROEDER SENNEPORT/SIPA

Bucharest peasant and Tokes (below): civilians were crushed to death by tanks

Day by day last week, the ugly details seeped out of Romania from behind its sealed-off borders. Faced with a spontaneous public outburst against his ironfisted regime, Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu had unleashed the full weight of his security forces on the western Transylvania city of Timisoara (population 350,000). Witnesses said that hundreds—perhaps thousands—of unarmed civilians were shot, bayoneted or crushed to death by tanks. The 71-year-old Ceaușescu then flew to Iran for a three-day state visit, leaving his strong-willed wife, Elena, 70, to continue the crackdown. Hundreds more Romanians were arrested and may have been summarily executed. As the bloodbath continued, Romania's most famous expatriate, the playwright Eugene Ionesco, delivered a pungent condemnation of Eastern Europe's last hard-line Communist regime. From his home in Paris, Ionesco declared:

"Ceaușescu is a madman. His wife, thirsty for power, is also mad. And it is these people who are being allowed freely to torture 23 million people."

At midweek, the Ceaușescu government declared a state of emergency in the western district, but the protests spread. Chanting demonstrators disrupted a pro-government rally in Bucharest, the Romanian capital. They even shouted down Ceaușescu, who was addressing the rally after returning from Iran. According to the Soviet news agency TASS, police tried but failed to prevent more demonstrators from joining the crowd. Finally, they used tear gas to try to

disperse the demonstrators. Then, TASS said, "automatic-rifle fire was heard. People in panic were hiding in doorways and courtyards." Reported the official Yugoslavian news agency, Tanjug: "Police began firing on the trapped mass of people. Eyewitnesses said many were wounded and probably killed."

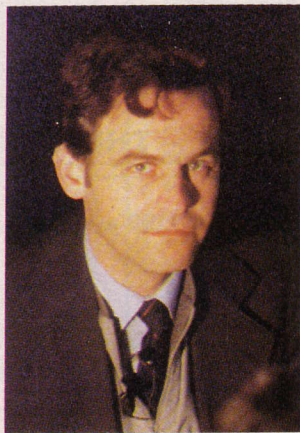
Ceaușescu's decision to apply the so-called China Solution, a reference to last June's massacre of pro-democracy demonstrators in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, contradicted the liberalizing current sweeping through the rest of

what used to be called the Soviet Bloc. In a five-hour speech to his Communist party congress in November, Ceaușescu had issued a warning that, unlike the leadership in Hungary, Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria, he would not yield to demands for reform. And after a relatively minor incident in which police tried to evict a dissident Calvinist minister, Ceaușescu acted in a manner that has characterized his 24-year dictatorial rule.

The events that led to the Timisoara massacre began in part last March, when two members of a freelance Canadian television team slipped into Romania as tourists. Former Quebec cabinet minister Michel Clair and television journalist Réjean Roy wanted to report on the problems of a 1.7-million-strong ethnic Hungarian community, located mainly in the western region of Transylvania. They taped a lengthy interview with one of the community's most outspoken leaders, 37-year-old minister Laszlo

Tokes, at his church in Timisoara. And when they failed to find an outlet for their report in Canada, Clair said, they passed it on to Hungarian state television, which screened the documentary in late July. It was seen across the border in Transylvania, where Hungarian TV has a wide audience.

In the interview, Tokes criticized human rights abuses in general and discrimination against the Hungarian minority in particular. That clearly angered the leadership. The minister had already been blacklisted as a dangerous dissident, and the secret police attempted to frighten him into quitting the congregation. First, according to Tokes's brother Istvan, who lives in Montreal, they sent masked men to attack him and his family in their



MICHEL CLAIR

apartment last month. The minister and two friends fought the attackers off, and Tokes, with his pregnant wife, Edit, and son Mate, remained inside his barricaded home. Then, in mid-December, uniformed police arrived to evict the Tokeses, but they found about 200 parishioners protecting the family. The police sent for reinforcements—and, eventually, the incident escalated out of control.

The confrontation turned into a mass anti-government demonstration by thousands of people of all ethnic groups. They chanted "Freedom" and "Romanians arise," and police responded by firing indiscriminately. A doctor who was visiting the city later told the Austrian news agency APA: "The first three rows of protesters collapsed dead or injured. Blood and torn clothing lay everywhere." The next day, the government ordered in tanks and helicopters. "It was horrible, horrible," said a Yugoslav medical student who witnessed the scene.

Radislav Dencic, another Yugoslav, said that he saw people being machine-gunned from the air. "Hundreds of people were falling on the pavement before my eyes," said Dencic. After the initial massacre, security forces fanned out to try to prevent additional uprisings. According to an Austrian witness, Gerard Beckmann, downtown Timisoara was in ruins, and the city was without water, electricity and food. He said that the security forces then began rounding up ethnic Hungarians and others suspected of having taken part in the demonstrations.



SCHROEDER-SENNEPORT/SIPA

Typical working-class home in Bucharest: using the so-called China Solution

"People are being dragged out of their houses," he said. "Families are being separated. It has turned into a pogrom." Other observers described the government actions as genocide. By midweek, the Yugoslav news agency, Tanjug, estimated that up to 2,000 people had been killed and hundreds more wounded, many of whom would likely die because of the lack of

medical supplies. Other estimates ranged as high as 4,000 dead.

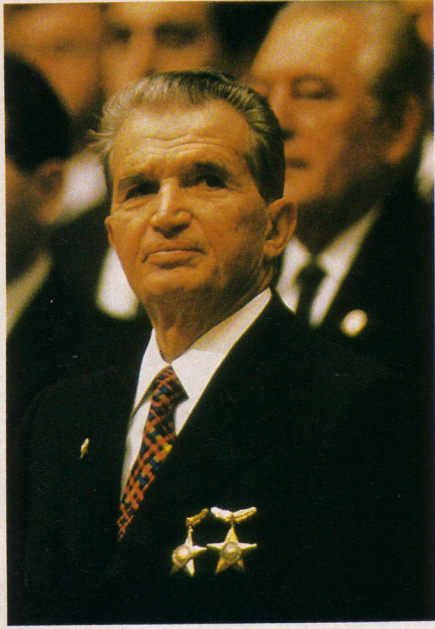
Clair, a former transport minister in the Parti Québécois government of premier René Lévesque, said that Tokes was eager to see the interview aired. He added: "Of course, I never imagined it would result in this. But Tokes insisted that the interview should be broadcast.

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He knew it would be dangerous, but he said, 'Somebody must do it.' He is one of the most impressive men I have ever met." Tokes's brother Istvan, known as Steve, an engineer who emigrated from Romania to Canada 20 years ago, said he had learned that his brother and his sister-in-law were taken away by police during the crushing of the demonstration. "I am very much alarmed," he said, "not only for Laszlo, but for my other brothers and sisters—seven in all—who are also in Transylvania." Later, Istvan received word from his parents in Romania that his brother was alive and being held in a small village.

Meanwhile, John Macpherson, manager of communications for CANDU reactor operations of Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd., said that a team of 22 Canadians are overseeing work in Romania on a pair of AECL-designed nuclear power plants. The Canadians are split between Bucharest and Cernavoda, about 150 km to the west. Macpherson said that many of them had already left the country for the holiday when the trouble started. As for the others, he said, "we have a contingency plan to evacuate them, if necessary. But our people there did not feel that it was necessary, so they are continuing to work."

In the rest of Eastern Europe last week, the momentous wave of change continued relatively peacefully. West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl visited Dresden, where he and reformist East German Prime Minister Hans Modrow



DELAHAYE/SIPA

Ceaușescu: the full weight of his forces

discussed wide-ranging financial aid for the failing East German economy. Modrow says that he opposes reunification with the West, but thousands of the Dresden citizens who greeted Kohl chanted "Germany, a single fatherland." After Kohl left, Modrow announced that he will open Berlin's historic Brandenburg Gate to east-west pedestrian

traffic by Christmas, an action that symbolizes the strengthening ties between the two Germanys.

Meanwhile, in Brussels, Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze made an unprecedented visit to NATO headquarters. There, he had what he called "a very necessary, very good and very useful" discussion with NATO Secretary General Manfred Wörner of West Germany. But Wörner apparently turned down a recommendation by Shevardnadze that the two alliances establish formal relations. Still, both men said that they expected 1990 to bring East-West agreement on conventional-force reductions and a treaty cutting long-range strategic weapons by 50 per cent.

Before he left NATO headquarters, reporters asked Shevardnadze about the crackdown in Romania. Only sketchy reports were then available, but Shevardnadze said that if they were true, he could only express his "very profound regrets." The language was diplomatic, but the message was unmistakable. A senior Soviet minister criticizing a Warsaw Pact ally while on premises that, until recently, had been vilified as a hotbed of anti-Communist aggression was another remarkable moment in a year of astonishing change.

JOHN BIERMAN with **PETER LEWIS** in Brussels, **SUE MASTERMAN** in Vienna and correspondents' reports

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