

A week's little ironies

The arrival of Spring was, of course, the big news here this week so not too many people paid attention to either the visit of Romania's dictator, Nicolae Ceausescu or Joe Clark's latest condemnation of "evil" South Africa. And even fewer saw the little ironies that intertwined these events.

Ceausescu had to cancel a planned visit to the nuclear reactor at Pickering because of labor troubles at the generating station. Such an outrage would never occur in the workers' state, Romania. Strikes and protests there are illegal. Two years ago some miners did try to strike but were either shot or jailed.

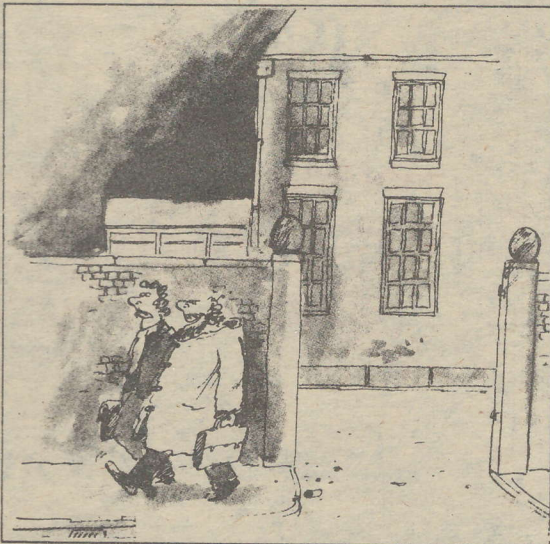
Romania's ubiquitous secret police, the Securitet, make sure that everyone does precisely what the leader orders. Even among Eastern European states, Romania is noted for its brutal repression and legions of informers.

According to western human rights groups, there are 300,000 to 500,000 political prisoners in Romania's concentration camps; Romanian exiles put the figure at one million. For a nation of 20 million, even the lowest figure is horrifying.

Romania is a rich, verdant land yet its people have barely enough to eat. In some rural regions, malnutrition is prevalent. Government stores purposely sell only stale bread so that people will eat less. Only one street light in 20 is lit. In the seedy capital, Bucharest, once called the "Paris of Eastern Europe," Ceausescu and his family run just about everything in the nation.

Wife Elena is Number Two and son Nicu the heir apparent and crown prince. Brothers and sisters have top jobs: Deputy defence minister, vice-chairman of planning, head of science ministry, deputy prime minister — and so on. Romania may become the first communist nation (North Korea is second

Punch



"Very good deal, really—ten days in France—Provence, Arles, footsteps of Van Gogh and all that—lectures, tours, sessions with local artists ... three hundred quid, all told. Then I thought, heck with it, and bought a video ..."

ERIC MARGOLIS



for now) with a hereditary leader, hardly what Marx had in mind.

Romania is simply the second-worst police state in the Eastern bloc after Albania. It has no human rights. But here in Canada, we receive the Romanian dictator with open arms and big smiles. Romania bought some Candu nuclear reactors and Ottawa, desperate to sell some more before its nuclear industry collapses, put out the red carpet for the Romanians.

No mention at all of human rights violations, concentration camps, or spying activities against the West. Save all of that nastiness for the "evil" South Africans, as Joe Clark did this week. Now Clark has not, I believe, been to either South Africa or Romania. Yet he is quick to demand that we cut our commercial ties to the Republic of South Africa while our government urges more trade with Romania.

Well, Joe, how many political prisoners are there in South Africa? Not more than a few hundred, at most. How many in Romania? Three hundred thousand at least. South African courts routinely strike down government laws. When was the last time we heard Romanian courts say no to Ceausescu?

What about persecution of Romania's Hungarian minority? Not a peep out of Ottawa. Instead, we hear how Romania is a "maverick" in the Eastern bloc, a nation that won't allow Soviet troops manoeuvres and that has good relations with Israel. That's fine for the diplomats. South Africa is even less friendly with Moscow and shares nuclear and military projects with its closest ally, Israel.

I just don't understand Ottawa's thinking. We gladhand a cruel communist dictator in hope of selling a few more reactors — even though everyone but our diplomats seems to know the Romanians are flat broke. We could triple our already substantial trade with South Africa — and sell it nuclear technology — but won't. When the South African government tries to make reforms, Joe Clark poo-poops these efforts.

If we really are so moral, then Joe Clark should say the same things to Ceausescu as we do to South Africa. But, sadly, we are all by now painfully aware that we have a government that lacks the gumption to say no to any domestic pressure group. Our goodly United Church will have nothing to say about totalitarian Romania but don't let us dare ship lumber to the wicked racists in South Africa.

Let's at least have some consistency in our trade policy if we cannot completely escape hypocrisy. We should either do like the cynical French and trade with everyone or else go on record that we will not deal with prison camp nations until they set their people free. Perhaps if Joe Clark toured some of Romania's concentration camps he would not be so upbeat about our new friend in Eastern Europe.