

Trouble in Transylvania

Has the tide of democratic revolution sweeping through East Europe finally hit Nicolae Ceausescu's Stalinist dictatorship in Romania? The answer is a very guarded maybe.

In recent days, bloody uprisings have taken place in Transylvania, the western region of Romania, centered in the cities of Timisoara and Arad. Unconfirmed reports speak of hundreds or even thousands of dead as Romanian army and security units fired on demonstrators.

Hard news is scarce because Romania has sealed its borders to the outside world.

What makes this revolt different from those in East Europe's other nations is that the protesters, so far, have been from Romania's two million strong ethnic Hungarian minority. The long-simmering problem of Transylvania is yet another evil legacy of World War I. At the end of the war, the Allies detached Transylvania from Hungary and gave it to Romania as a prize of war.

The main reason Hungary sided with Nazi Germany in World War II was to regain Transylvania. When the war ended, the Soviets gave Transylvania back to Romania.

All Romanians have suffered from the Ceausescu dictatorship. But Romania's Hungarians have been singled out for particularly brutal repression. The latest expression of Ceausescu's megalomania is a plan to raze 9,000 of Romania's 13,000 pastoral villages and regroup their inhabitants into massive farming collectives. The majority of these quaint, thatched-roof villages happen to be in Transylvania. So it was only a matter of time before an explosion occurred among Romania's Hungarians.

Neighboring Hungary is, not surprisingly, outraged. In recent months, Hungary announced it was redeploying its small army toward Romania and away from former positions facing Austria. More Hungarian troops are now moving up to the Transylvanian border. Passions among the volatile Hungarians are rising fast. If the revolt in Tran-

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sylvania spreads, there is a very real chance Hungarian troops will cross the border and intervene to save their fellow Magyars.

This threat comes at a time when Hungary has been openly charging that Romania has secretly developed atomic weapons, using a Canadian-supplied Candu reactor. Romania has shrugged off such charges but has never totally denied them. The Romanians do have the technical capacity to produce and deliver both nuclear and chemical weapons.

Party boss Ceausescu is visiting Iran. He can be expected to hot foot it back to Bucharest where his tough wife is currently holding the fort. The top positions in the army and dreaded security forces are filled by Ceausescu's relatives or cronies. As of this writing, Bucharest is calm, though extra forces have been deployed in the streets and there have been a few reports of student unrest at the University of Bucharest.

Ceausescu is clearly facing the greatest challenge of his long rule. The Soviets have openly denounced Romania for the repression in Transylvania and Mikhail Gorbachev has made no secret of the fact he wants to see a new, moderate leadership in Bucharest. Poland and even Bulgaria have rebuked the Romanians.

Time seems to be running out for Ceausescu. How long he has will depend on the army and secret police. There is a good possibility a military coup could occur — and a lesser chance that long-suffering Romanians will finally take to the streets and demand change. Unlike other East European nations, however, the Ceausescu's security forces are likely to open fire on their fellow Romanians.

If the government falls, Romania's hated secret police could find themselves facing firing squads.

All this is quite a change from the happy days when Nicolae Ceausescu was the darling of the West. During the Brezhnev era, he stood up to Moscow and adopted an independent foreign policy. By maintaining close relations with Israel, Ceausescu earned great favor in the U.S. Congress and won American trade concessions. In those days, no one criticized him. Since then, Ceausescu has literally starved his countrymen in order to pay off Romania's once huge foreign debt.

Today, Romania owes almost nothing — making it almost unique among the debt-ridden nations of East Europe. When Ceausescu is finally overthrown, Romania, with its rich farmland and moderately developed industrial base, will at least start a new life on a sound economic footing.

The next few weeks will probably tell whether Romania finally becomes a modern democratic nation or will go off to join Albania, the Marxist Tibet of East Europe, in sullen, poverty-stricken isolation.

Berry's World



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Jim Berry 12-C
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