

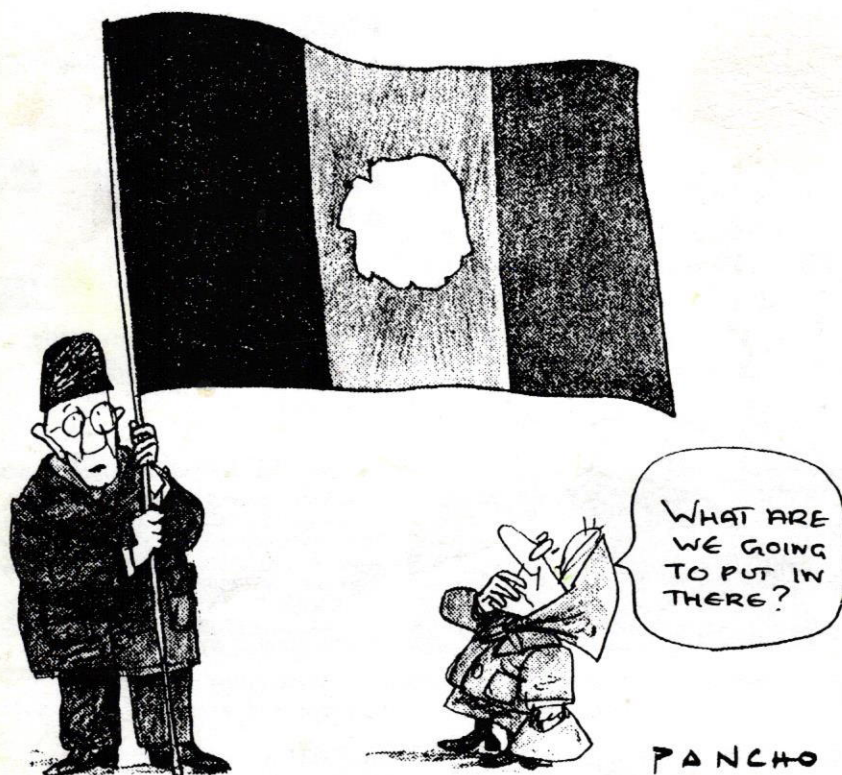
International VIEWPOINT

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After Ceausescu's overthrow — who rules Romania?



INSIDE:

SOVIET UNION

Uprising in Azerbaijan
PLUS
Soviet publication
interviews Trotskyist
economist

ZIMBABWE

"Role model" or
"complete turmoil" —
Sophie Hawes

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

"We must preserve
respect for social
justice" — *interview
with Petr Uhl*

ROMANIA

Hopes and fears after
Ceausescu's downfall —
Gerry Foley
PLUS

Documents from
independent trade
unions

As the Palestinian Intifada enters its third year

**Exclusive interview with
George Habash**

Contents:

ROMANIA 3

THE FIRST STEPS of mass organization.
Gerry Foley reports from inside the country on the situation developing in the wake of the victorious mass uprising

PLUS

Documents of the new trade-union organizations

USSR 9

WHY Gorbachev moved to crush the Azerbaijani national movement — *Gerry Foley*

PLUS

MOST WIDELY read Soviet publication interviews Trotskyist economist

CZECHOSLOVAKIA 11

REVOLUTIONARY MARXISTS in the crisis of the bureaucratic regime — Interview with *Petr Uhl*



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ZIMBABWE 14

AS THE PROVISIONS of the independence accord come to an end, social tensions are rising — *Sophie Hawes*

INTIFADA 19

LEADER OF THE POPULAR FRONT for the Liberation of Palestine draws a balance sheet of the two years of mass struggle against the Israeli

state.

Exclusive interview with *George Habash*

PLUS

A contribution to the discussion by *Salah Jaber*

Around the World 27

● Mexico ● Britain

PANAMA 28

Alfonso Moro examines the consequences of the US intervention

International VIEWPOINT

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After Ceausescu's overthrow — hope, fear and distrust

THE FIRST victorious mass uprising in a Stalinized country since the Hungarian revolution took place in Romania in the days around Christmas. While the army took command of the fighting and managed subsequently to disarm the irregular forces, under the pretext of stamping out the "terrorism" of the secret police diehards, the state repressive apparatus has been thrown into disarray. Romanian journalists speak of a "phantom state." The Communist Party is so much on the defensive that its members and leaders claim that overnight it vanished totally and forever. In response to a small demonstration in Bucharest on January 12 that reflected a general feeling that the same people are still running the country under various disguises, the new government, itself composed mainly of former CP leaders, declared the party illegal, although they have since back-tracked. The "National Salvation Government" is clearly terrified of any demonstrations getting started, and prepared to promise practically anything to prevent them.

GERRY FOLEY

H OPE, mixed with apprehension and distrust — those were the feelings of a group of Romanian-Hungarian refugees returning to their country on January 2. One had fled illegally across the "green frontier," like many thousands of others threatened by Ceausescu's police. I found myself in the same compartment with them. It was the first train from Budapest to Bucharest in four days. (There is only one, and it goes overnight.) Rail traffic had been halted after secret police diehards fired on the international trains. As we approached the Romanian frontier, my companions pulled the blinds shut and turned off the lights for fear of snipers.

They begin to talk fearfully about what might await them at the frontier. They recalled incidents of harassment in the past, waits of up to seven hours. I told them about the treatment Irish people get at points of entry in Britain and about the way the French government treats Basque refugees. That started a long and very fraternal discussion about the resemblances among oppressed peoples.

A journalist from the publication of a nationalist pro-capitalist organization in Hungary was pessimistic about the future for Romanian Hungarians. He had grown up in Romania, and thought that nothing had really changed; the Romanians were still chauvinists and only making pretences for the sake of European public opinion.

Attitude to national minorities a touchstone

I said I thought the future depended on whether the revolution went forward and that a touchstone of any revolution was its attitude toward national minorities. If the revolution advanced and the people took their lives into their own hands, the demands of the Hungarians would be met; if it went backward, the minorities would be the first to be attacked. Most of them were hopeful.

We reached the border around midnight. The officials were notably unaggressive. The Hungarians were astonished. But the whole elaborate apparatus was obviously intact. We waited for three hours in a desolate frozen landscape with snow falling and filtering into the poorly constructed cars, as officials slowly went their rounds and soldiers searched. The train was almost totally empty after we passed the first big Hungarian towns inside Romania.

The Hungarian journalist went all the way to Bucharest, his hometown. When he arrived, he said, with relief, that the rhythm of life seemed normal. That proved to be a superficial impression. Very little had been done to repair the damage done in the fighting. Broken glass still lay everywhere. Bullet holes could be seen in plate glass windows. In buildings around the downtown squares, rows of windows stood empty, surrounded by

traces of fire. Along the sidewalks in the central squares were shrines to the martyrs of the revolution — rows of candles in front of placards and makeshift altars, often covered with loaves of bread and fruit. Crowds were always gathered around them, mostly made up of young people, many of high school age. The papers were full of homage to "the heroic youth."

There were slogans on the walls, but they seemed to date from the previous weeks — "The dictatorship has fallen," "the shoemaker [Ceausescu] has fallen," "Shoemaker, we will make shoes out of your hide." There were some slogans of "Down with Communism." There were

many posters, but they seemed essentially to have been put up by the new government. The message was always along the lines "the people have won, and now the National Salvation Front is in charge and everyone must rally behind it." In the underground stop at the Piata Universitarii in the city center, typed communiques were pasted up apparently by private groups. There were always crowds reading them. Mostly they were appeals for democracy and "dialogue."

Here and there were lines in front of stores, apparently for meat, fish and cigarettes. The longest lines seemed to be for newspapers and books. The journalists I talked to estimated that the demand for

ROMÁNIAI
MAGYAR SZÓ
KÖZPONTI DEMOKRATIKUS NAPILAP — BUKAREST

Új, demokratikus lapunk,
a romániai magyarság
szócsové,
ma különkiadásban
jelenik meg

1. szám
1989.
december 23.
szombat
Új sorozat

GYŐZÖTT A NÉP! MEGDÓLT A DIKTATÚRA!

3

papers was four times the supply. They thought it would be impossible to increase the press runs to anything like that amount because of a lack of paper. Romania has its own paper industry, but a lot of it was exported.

Some critical books, originally printed in tiny editions, were being reprinted. One was Marin Preda's *Cel Mai Lubit dintre paminteni* ["The Most Beloved of Earthlings"], a fictionalized account of the early days of the Stalinist regime. The longest line I saw was for such books at the Sadoveanu bookstore near the Piata Universitarii. By the end of the day, it was possible to get into the store, but it needed an extraordinary hunger to fight one's way to within actual reach of the books.

Massive shortage of books and dictionaries

There were, in fact, few books of any kind in the bookstores. Ceausescu had been suspicious of all kinds of books, I was told, even Russian ones. This was the first major city I have ever been in where there was no Russian bookstore. Dictionaries of foreign languages were virtually unattainable. Contacts with foreigners had been forbidden. But many Romanians spoke French — the country has been under French influence since it achieved independence, and especially in the inter-war period. Moreover, it is an article of nationalist faith that Romanians are a Latin people, and that gives a special importance to the language of the major "Latin" power.

I saw a huge crowd surrounding a truck full of newspapers. They were copies of the Paris daily *Libération*. The crowd pounced on them like famine-stricken people on food relief.

Almost all the periodicals in Bucharest were published in a Stalin-gothic palace on the northern edge of the city, called the Casa Scintei, for *Scinteia*, the organ of the Communist Party. It is now called "Freedom of the Press Square." The building was ringed by military forces and armed guards belonging to the building's staff. I went first to the office of the official press agency. The staff there had not been changed. An official told me that she had been offended by a denunciation of the CP by Brucan, himself a former CP leader. "He was privileged; I wasn't." She was bitter about the cuts the Ceausescu regime had made in the agency's budget. It had cut off all the foreign press services and subscriptions. She noted that the budget for them amounted to about as much cash as Ceausescu's daughter, Zoia, had on her when she was captured.

I went to the editorial offices of *Adevarul*, the old CP organ renamed. I met a journalist who was on the staff for his second day and had just written his first article. He told me, "I participated in the revolution. As soon as it was over, I came to this paper and asked them if they want-

ed someone from the revolution on the staff." Otherwise, the paper's staff remained essentially unchanged, and it had been unchanged for a long time. There had been a freeze on hiring, and for years, there had been virtually no openings for young people.

He thought that National Salvation Committees now existed at all levels of the society, but he did not have much concrete knowledge about them. It soon became clear that the situation was quite uneven. In *Adevarul*, there was a National Salvation Committee that played a monitoring role. It was explained that such a committee was necessary there because the staff had been so little changed and the old party organ remained suspect.

In the case of *Romania Libera*, another Bucharest daily, three well-known dissidents, people who had tried to start an underground journal but were grabbed by the secret police during the printing of the first issue, had taken over the editorship. They had credibility, and so it was felt that there was no need to form a National Salvation Committee there.

New editors elected on CP youth paper

At the other Romanian daily published in the Casa Scintei, *Tineretul Liber*, the former CP youth organization paper, new editors were elected the very day I visited the paper. Since there had been elections, it was argued, there was no need for a National Salvation Committee.

Government subsidies had been cut off. All the papers claimed to be independent. But no new system of financing has been conceived. For the moment income from sales is unusually high, but it is far from clear that the press can be financed that way. The staffs are small for daily papers, about 100 for *Adevarul*, 40 for *Tineretul Liber*, 62 for the Hungarian daily *Magyar Szó*. The printing plant workers have already organized and won Sundays off.

"The first legal student rally in 45 years," as the students and the press billed it, took place on Sunday, January 7, at the Polytechnic Institute. The report of it in *Adevarul* of January 9 was an indication that the population had good reason to mistrust the old party paper.

The article reported none of the conflict between the government and the new student association that formed the background to the rally, that had been called to protest decisions taken by the Ministry of Education to set the winter term without consulting the students.

In fact, the students had wanted to hold a demonstration, but found that the government was dead set against that. It told them that there was no reason for demonstrating because the government would agree to any demands they raised. At the same time, a decree was issued requiring 48 hours notice for any demonstration. A prolonged argument continued among the

students about whether to hold the meeting indoors or outside. The issue seemed finally to be decided by the freezing weather.

Competence must be the criterion

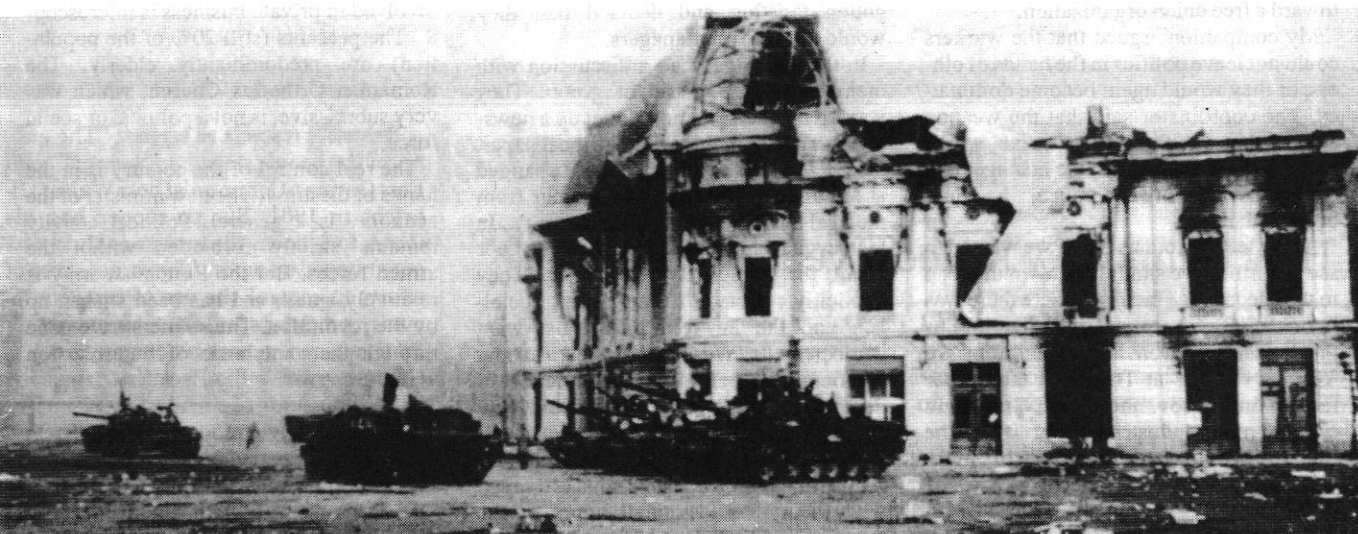
Three or four thousand students showed up, despite the vacations and return of the large numbers of students from the provinces to their homes. Slogans against corruption predominated — "Merit and competence," "No bribes [to professors to pass exams]." There was also a placard against "politics." There were expressions of hostility to "former Communist Party members."

The organizers of the meeting said over and over again that the new student associations would be "nonpolitical." Their explanations that the students were too young and inexperienced to take political positions did not seem to be well received. But a rejection of "politics" — meaning the substitution of political criteria for scholarly ones, political domination and political corruption — was very much in evidence. The students' demands included university autonomy and the inviolability of university precincts.

On the other hand, the "nonpolitical" nature of the associations was invoked every time the question of possible differences with the National Salvation Front came up. The question of political positions was raised in the press conference following the rally by a Romanian exile who had returned as a correspondent for the *New York Post*. He argued at length that elections were coming up in a couple of months and the students could not remain passive. The representativeness of the student spokespersons was also challenged by Romanians present.

During the rally, students told me that they had heard that teachers were involved in the initial organizing committee, and that they were opposed to that. They wanted a purely student organization. (The teaching staffs were generally corrupt, and are very discredited.) This distrust of the first groups to come forward and propose new organizations became a constant theme. The journalist at *Adevarul* said, for instance, that he had the feeling that while he was fighting in the revolution little groups of the old opportunists, "the people with political experience," were meeting and deciding how to put themselves forward again.

There were a large number of monitors to maintain order at the rally. One of them told me that he felt that the world was looking to them with hope, and was worried that the foreigners were disappointed with the timidity of the students. A delegation spoke from the French National Union of Students and one from the Polish Independent Student Union. The latter hung out a banner in Romanian from a balcony saying "We are with you."



I was joined by a comrade from Socialist Action, an American Fourth Internationalist group and the editor of an opposition paper for the rail unions. We went together with the journalist from *Adevarul*, who had been a railway employee himself until a few days before, to try to talk to rail workers.

Contact with railworkers impossible

Our friend said that he had been one of the initiators of the free union at the railroad, but that he had not been able to get any information about it since leaving. We found it impossible to make any direct contact with the railworkers. The railroads are called the "the country's second army," and remain under tight military control.

We were able to talk to Ionel Chiru, the editor of the railway workers' paper, *Lupta CFR* ["Railway Struggle"]. The *Adevarul* journalist told us that this was one of the few journals in the country that did not have to change its name because it was able to maintain a relatively good reputation even under the old regime. (It is a continuation of a militant railworkers' journal founded in 1932.)

Chiru gave us a picture of a very oppressed workforce. Workers were forced to work unpaid overtime, called "voluntary hours," and often ended up working 12 hours a day for only 70% of the pay due them for an 8-hour day, since the administration claimed that they failed to meet the norms and docked them 30%. The January 4 issue of *Lupta CFR* published the program for a new free union of transport and communications workers on its back page.

We got closer to the process of working class organization at the Peripheral Electronics Plant (a computer research and production center) in Bucharest's industrial suburb of Pipera. Even there it was not easy. We asked to speak to the organizers

of the free unions.

It was the manager of the factory and the coordinator of the National Salvation Committee who came to meet us. The coordinator was a young programmer in his late twenties or early thirties; the manager a middle-aged man. Both stressed that there was very good cooperation between the management and the workers' representatives.

The factory management had been known to be a liberal one. That was confirmed by people outside the plant. The coordinator explained that here workers were assured of getting their full wages. The manager said "voluntary hours" had not been imposed. The workers were idle part of the month because of supplies problems; then they had to work overtime to make up the slack, but they ended up working even less than the basic time.

Ceausescu outlaws use of word "computer"

The plant was unusual in many respects. It was a new industry, and one mistreated by a regime that "put politics in command" in the style of the cultural revolution and looked down on technology. The manager told us that for a period even the word "computer" was banned from the official publications. Thus the management and the workers were united by a common cause.

The National Salvation Committee was made up of 30 delegates, one from each of the plant's 30 departments. Its composition thus reflected the workforce, about four fifths production workers. The coordinator said that organizing committees for free unions existed in only 10 of the departments.

Defense of the plant was organized by a committee of eleven, including both the manager and the coordinator, which was formed during the revolution. The plant guards were independent within the plant

grounds, but subordinate to the army command outside the plant limits. The two told us that the same setup existed at all the factories in Pipera. The manager expected the guards to be disbanded in a few days. The coordinator agreed, although with an apparent reserve, and he stressed that even if they were dissolved, they would be ready to go into action again immediately if necessary.

Different views on privatization

The manager and the coordinator differed frankly on two questions — the future of the plant's National Salvation Committee and the question of privatization. The committee was supposed to be a provisional body, formed to operate in the interim before the April elections.

I asked why they linked the committee, which they said was "nonpolitical", to the elections. They had no answer, although the manager said that this was actually a good question. He thought that the committee would break up into different political parties. The coordinator was dead set against the existence of political parties in the plant. They introduced nonprofessional criteria into staff relations, he said. They could be divisive and obstruct effective collaboration. "What we need to do now is earn money." As an example of the dangers of parties, he mentioned that some of the new parties were calling for reestablishing the monarchy. He was against privatization, and thought that the plant could function on a collective basis: "We feel that we are the owners."

The manager said that he was not so sure that the plant could function collectively. "I am older and not so optimistic." He thought privatization could be a good thing, but that it had to be done "prudently." Both hoped to see foreign investment, but the coordinator stressed that it could not be allowed to lead to foreign control.

He thought that the committee should lead toward a free union organization.

My companion argued that the workers could not leave politics in the hands of others, or they would again become dominated. The coordinator said that the weapon against that was the right to strike, which was a weapon not against the management but against the army and police, who could become dangers.

As we left, he told us that if we wanted to see a conflict, we should go down the road to the Electronica factory, where there was "trouble." The *Adevarul* journalist told us that in fact there were a lot of conflicts. We found a big one at Tractorul, the tractor factory in Brasov, the country's second city and major industrial center. It was the first case we encountered of a factory manager actually removed by the workers.

1987 revolt in Brasov brutally crushed

There is a massive industrial complex at the edge of the city, dominated by Tractorul and the Red Flag truck factory, each with twenty thousand workers. About 100,000 workers and their families are concentrated in the neighborhood. It is here that a massive revolt against the Ceausescu regime took place in 1987 and was brutally crushed. We arrived just as veterans of this rebellion were giving an interview to a Swedish TV team. One of them, a young man in his twenties, told us he had been given back his old job a few days before. After the rebellion, he had been exiled to a remote town. He told us that he and others had just started organizing a union, and that it would not just talk but actually solve the problems of the plant.

The truck factory was under the control of the National Guard, a militia organization that includes virtually the entire male population and is commanded by reserve army officers. A battle with the secret police had taken place at the tractor factory, and it was under the direct control of the regular army.

At the truck factory, we met a young engineer who worked in the central office of the complex of 38 factories. He turned out to be a leader of a group of dissident young people that had existed before the fall of the dictatorship, but had not been able to carry out much activity before. He told us that in this coordinating office, the eleven managers had constituted themselves as the National Salvation Committee in the days of the revolution.

The staff demanded a committee of 21, realizing that with such a number it would have to include workers. The managers were forced to accept that, but then they proposed their flunkies and their flunkies nominated them. The election was held in a general assembly. There was another wave of protests, and a new election was to take place the following day [January 11], by secret ballot containing all the names of

staff members. The workers had already gotten together and decided that they would not vote for managers.

In the evening, I had a discussion with members of the dissident group. They wanted to talk about how to set up a newspaper. They explained that the local paper, the *Gazeta Transilvanii*, had not changed at all, and refused to accept articles from them about the problems in the city. In fact, even technically the paper was a poor effort for a big city newspaper. They explicitly rejected "Communism, socialism and the far left." "We just want democracy." "We have to learn about democracy, we have no experience of democracy." But in fact they were very similar to far-left young people in the West—similar origins, attitudes and aspirations. The *Adevarul* journalist discussed with them into the small hours of the morning. As a reporter, he was in the middle of the social process. Given the weakness of the government, people are taking their complaints to the newspapers, demanding that they become the tribunes of the people.

Manager ousted by forge workers

The following day, we had a long discussion with workers in the forge at the tractor factory who had ousted a manager. Physical clashes had occurred, since the manager had bought the loyalty of a section of workers with free drink and other benefits. Despite this radical struggle, however, the workers did not express any conscious aspiration to run the factory themselves or elect the managers. They expressed a desire only for unions that would defend their immediate interests. But in that respect, they were more advanced than many white collar workers, who are refusing to sign up for the new unions on the basis that they are political, that is, that joining them involves taking a public position for something. They are still afraid of putting their names down for anything.

In general, in the second week in January, it was the first tentative steps of organization that were being taken. Generally, people expressed uncertainty, hesitation and self-limitation. But the process is massive, and it is taking place in a political and organizational vacuum left by the collapse of a despotic regime and the total discredit of all its organizations and personalities. The language is generally anti-Communist, with an explicit rejection of anything that is reminiscent of Communist or even Socialist themes.

However, there was little or no concrete talk about privatization. Two reasons were commonly given for lack of interest in privatization, at least immediately: Firstly that the reforms in the USSR had created chaos and secondly that the only people who had the money to start private businesses in Romania were the mafia of

the old regime. The number of people involved in private business is microscopic. The peasants (still 20% of the population) are predominantly elderly. The Romanian Orthodox Church, which was very submissive, is not a political or social force.

The real control of the country is in the hands of the army. The new minister of the economy is a general. Political activity remains strictly forbidden within the armed forces. But the Romanian army is relatively small, and has been shaken up by the revolution. The soldiers have gone through the experience of fraternization with the masses.

Hunger for discussion with foreigners

Most people seem to look to the West—"the countries where there is democracy"—as the model. But there is a general hunger for discussions with foreigners and information about foreign countries. All the people we talked to were willing to listen to a description of negative aspects of the developed capitalist countries.

In 1981 in Poland, I had not always found that to be true. There, some people tended to feel that conditions were so much better in the West that it was useless to tell Poles about "the problems you rich people have."

For example, I raised the question of the Irish struggle with the editors of the Bucharest Hungarian daily, *Magyar Szó*. They said they were happy to have the chance to talk to someone who knew something about it. All they knew was what was in the big press, that is, that there was a problem of terrorism. But they did not believe that.

They knew about the desperation that can develop among an oppressed people. I explained the reasons for the conflict in Ireland, and got a very warm response. "This is your home, too, now; and we hope you come back soon so that we can discuss more."

The Romanian press voices a lot of hopes in the Soviet leadership, in particular for aid, and says nothing about the conflicts in the Soviet Union. The head of the Council of the National Salvation Front, Ion Iliescu, is thought to be close to Gorbachev. But many people raised the question of Moldavia, and the conviction that the Moldavians were now going to be interested in reunification with Romania. That is obviously not going to facilitate good relations with the USSR.

Despite the hesitations of Romanians surprised by the sudden collapse of an entrenched totalitarian regime, it seems certain that the process of self-organization of the masses, already wide spread, will gather steam, and that as it does so, political consciousness will deepen, and problems will arise for which "Western democracy," offers no answers. ★

Free trade unions begin to emerge

— Documents

DRAFT program of forge workers at Brasov Tractor factory

1. Depoliticization of the work in the enterprise.
2. Freedom of oral and written expression without restrictions or intimidation.
3. The creation of a free union of workers in the forge which will defend their rights through its freely elected leaders.
4. The right to conduct organized strikes, in accordance with the laws in force, in consonance with the urgent needs of the workers' collective in our section, as well as the right of the workers to negotiate, through their representatives, with the management over major problems such as work, working conditions, wages, and social conditions for all workers.
5. The right of solidarity with other committees in the enterprise and outside with respect to their rights.
6. Improvement of working and living conditions in order to assure a civilized and dignified life.
7. Respect for the eight-hour day. Over-

time can be worked on the request of the enterprise in agreement with the unions and at rates of pay in accordance with the labor code.

7. Respect for Sunday as a day of rest.
9. Respect for the major religious holidays (Easter, Christmas) through the granting of time off.
10. Reduction of the workweek to five days.
11. Assurance of free medical and social assistance for the forge workers, both in the enterprise and in social life.
12. For the fulfillment of the production plan transmitted by T. 31 (the Production Service), we request the following:
 - a. Assurance of basic material and energy supplies in accordance with fundamental technological norms.
 - b. Assurance of technical competence.
 - c. Assurance of repairs and of spare parts in accordance with manuals issued by the producers of machines and installations.
 - d. Assurance of a workforce for the maintenance and supervision of the technical level, as well as of productive

personnel at the necessary levels.

13. The stabilization of a qualified work force in the hot sectors through the following measures:

- a. Group I pensions retroactively for all employees.
 - b. Food for all personnel to counter the toxic effects, and bonuses for toxicity.
 - c. Free medical care for special problems.
 - d. A system of steel production in accordance with norms for personnel, wages, protection and work.
14. Abrogation of the rules requiring financial contributions by persons without children.
15. No limitations on the wages that workers and technical personnel can earn in accordance with the quantity and quality of work done.

15. The appointment in the machine shop of a chief of a team for major repairs and spare parts.

17. Preparation of a general overhaul of Section T-32.

18. Generalization of the individual contract for personnel involved directly in production.

19. Exact definition of the roles of technical and productive personnel (review of the Table of Organization).

20. Priority for solving the housing problems of personnel working in the section.

21. An obligation for all workers to respect technological norms concerning the quality of production, failure to do so being punishable administrative sanctions in conformity with the laws in force.

22. Material incentives for inventions and innovations in order to improve efficiency.

23. The formation of hot sections in a separate autonomous factory for forged and cast parts.

As the free union, we call on all workers to respect work discipline and the technical experts (engineers, foremen, technicians, and the management of the production processes), whom we need.

All decisions by senior technical experts must be taken in the framework of rationality and collective analysis.

We appeal to all workers not to engage in acts of hooliganism and personal vengeance and to respect in a civilized and consistent way the laws of the country that are in force, as well as the rules of the work collective.

The National Salvation Committee of Section T32 (The Forge), Tractorul, Brasov ★

Draft Statutes of the Free Union in the Forge at Tractorul, Brasov

1. The free union at T-32 is based on the workplace principle and the defense of the rights of its members with respect to the management of the workshop, section and enterprise management.
2. Membership in the T-32 free union is voluntary.
3. Decisions are by a simple absolute majority (over 50%) in all cases except strike votes, for which a vote of two-thirds of the membership is required.
4. Union meetings are to be called at least once a month or at the request of at least one third of the membership.
5. In its relations with other administrative bodies, the free union will be represented by its leader or his two deputies.
6. The leader of the union and his two deputies will be elected democratically on a roughly yearly basis, and they may not be elected for two consecutive terms or more than four times in ten years.
7. In order to avoid subjectivism, the union leader and his deputies may not hold political posts.
8. The union leader can only make decisions after consulting the union and after it gives him a mandate.
9. The leader and his deputies can be recalled by a simple majority at any time that the organization decides that they no longer represent it well.
10. Nominations to higher union bodies must be made individually and not by slate. Such representatives cannot be leaders of the local unions.
11. Local union leaders and representatives cannot have any more rights than any other union members.
12. Changes can be made in the statutes at organized meetings of the union by simple absolute majority (over 50%). ★