The Socialist Republic of Romania (Romanian: Republica Socialistă România, RSR) was a single party socialist state that existed officially from 1947 to 1989. From 1947 to 1965, the state was known as the Romanian People's Republic (Republica Populară Română, RPR). The country was a Soviet-aligned Eastern Bloc state with a dominant role for the Romanian Communist Party enshrined in its constitutions.

As World War II ended, Romania, a former Axis member, was occupied by the Soviet Union, the sole representative of the Allied powers. On 6 March 1945, after mass demonstrations by communist sympathizers and political pressure from the Soviet representative of the Allied Control Commission, a new pro-Soviet government that included members of the previously outlawed Romanian Communist Party was installed. Gradually, more members of the Communist Party and communist-aligned parties gained control of the administration and pre-war political leaders were steadily eliminated from political life. In December 1947, King Michael was induced to abdicate and the People's Republic of Romania was declared.

At first, Romania's scarce post-war resources were drained by the "SovRoms", new tax-exempt Soviet-Romanian companies that allowed the Soviet Union to control Romania's major sources of income.[1] Another drain was the war reparations paid to the Soviet Union. In the 1950s, however, Romania's communist government began to assert more independence, inducing, for example, the withdrawal of all Soviet troops from Romania by 1958.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Nicolae Ceaușescu became head of the Communist Party (1965), head of state (1967) and assumed the newly established role of President in 1974. Ceaușescu's denunciation of the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and a brief relaxation in internal repression helped give him a positive image both at home and in the West. However, rapid economic growth fueled by foreign credits gradually gave way to an austerity and political repression that led to the fall of his totalitarian government in December 1989.

A large number of people were executed or died in custody during communist Romania's existence, most during the Stalinist era of the 1950s. While judicial executions between 1945 and
1964 numbered 137,\(^2\) deaths in custody are estimated in the tens\(^3\) or hundreds of thousands.\(^4\) Many more were imprisoned for political, economical or other reasons and suffered abuse, torture and/or death.

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### History

#### Soviet occupation and rise of the Communists

*Main article: Soviet occupation of Romania*
When King Michael, supported by the main political parties, overthrew Ion Antonescu in August 1944, breaking Romania away from the Axis and bringing it over to the Allied side, Michael could do nothing to erase the memory of his country's recent active participation in the German invasion of the Soviet Union. Romanian forces fought under Soviet command, driving through Northern Transylvania into Hungary proper, and on into Czechoslovakia, Austria and Germany. However, the Soviets treated Romania as conquered territory, and Soviet troops remained in the country as occupying forces under the pretext that Romanian authorities could not guarantee the security and stability of Northern Transylvania.

The Yalta Conference had granted the Soviet Union a predominant interest in Romania, the Paris Peace Treaties failed to acknowledge Romania as a co-belligerent, and the Red Army was sitting on Romanian soil. The Communists played only a minor role in Michael's wartime government, headed by General Nicolae Rădescu, but this changed in March 1945, when Dr. Petru Groza of the Ploughmen's Front, a party closely associated with the Communists, became prime minister. Although his government was broad, including members of most major prewar parties except the Iron Guard, the Communists held the key ministries. The King was not happy with the direction of this government, but when he attempted to force Groza's resignation by refusing to sign any legislation (a move known as "the royal strike"), Groza simply chose to enact laws without bothering to obtain Michael's signature. On 8 November 1945, King Michael's name day, an anti-communist demonstration in front of the Royal Palace in Bucharest was met with force, resulting in dozens of killed and wounded; Soviet officers restrained Romanian soldiers and police from firing on civilians, and Soviet troops restored order.

Despite the King's disapproval, the first Groza government brought land reform and women's suffrage. However, it also brought the beginnings of Soviet domination of Romania. In the elections of 19 November 1946, the Communist-led Bloc of Democratic Parties (BPD) claimed 84% of the votes. These elections were characterized by widespread irregularities, including intimidation, electoral fraud, and assassinations. Archives confirm suspicions at the time that the election results were, in fact, falsified.

After forming government, the Communists moved to eliminate the role of the centrist parties; notably, the National Peasants' Party was accused of espionage after it became clear in 1947 that their leaders were meeting secretly with United States officials. A show trial of their leadership was then arranged, and they were put in jail. Other parties were forced to "merge" with the Communists.

In 1946 and 1947, hundreds of participants in the pro-Axis government were executed as war criminals, primarily for their involvement in the Holocaust and for attacking the Soviet Union. Antonescu himself was executed 1 June 1946. By 1948, most non-Communist politicians were either executed, in exile or in prison.

By 1947, Romania remained the only monarchy in the Eastern Bloc. On 30 December that year, Groza and Gheorghiu-Dej called on Michael and demanded his abdication. With either Groza or Gheorghiu-Dej holding a gun on him, pro-Communist troops surrounding his palace and his telephone lines cut, Michael was forced to sign a pretyped instrument of abdication. Hours later, Parliament abolished the monarchy and proclaimed Romania a People's Republic, formalized with the constitution of 13 April 1948.

The new constitution forbade and punished any association which had "fascist or anti-democratic nature". It also granted the freedom of press, speech and assembly for the working class. In the face of wide-scale killings, imprisonments and harassment of local peasants during forced collectivization, entire private property nationalization and political oppressiveness, the Constitution of 1948 and the subsequent basic texts were never respected by governments or the new judges appointed during dictatorship.
The Communist government also disbanded the Romanian Greek-Catholic Uniate Church, declaring its merger with the Romanian Orthodox Church.

**Romanian People's Republic**

**Early years**

The early years of Communist rule in Romania were marked by repeated changes of course and by numerous arrests and imprisonments as factions contended for dominance. The country's resources were also drained by the Soviet's SovRom agreements, which facilitated shipping of Romanian goods to the Soviet Union at nominal prices. In all ministries there were Soviet "advisers" who reported directly to Moscow and held the real decision-making powers. All walks of life were infiltrated by agents and informers of the secret police.

In 1948, the earlier agrarian reform was reversed, replaced by a move toward collective farming. This resulted in forced collectivization, since wealthier peasants generally did not want to give up their land voluntarily and had to be "convinced" by beatings, intimidation, arrests and deportations.

On 11 June 1948, all banks and large businesses were nationalized.

In the Communist leadership, there appear to have been three important factions, all of them Stalinist, differentiated more by their respective personal histories than by any deep political or philosophical differences:

1. The "Muscovites", notably Ana Pauker and Vasile Luca, had spent the war in Moscow.
2. The "Prison Communists", notably Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, had been imprisoned during the war.
3. The somewhat less firmly Stalinist "Secretariat Communists", notably Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu had made it through the Antonescu years by hiding within Romania and had participated in the broad governments immediately after King Michael's 1944 coup.

Ultimately, with Joseph Stalin's backing, and probably due in part to the anti-Semitic policies of late Stalinism (Pauker was Jewish), Gheorghiu-Dej and the "Prison Communists" won out. Pauker was purged from the party (along with 192,000 other party members); Pătrășcanu was executed after a show trial.

**Gheorghiu-Dej era**

Gheorghiu-Dej, a firm Stalinist, was not pleased with the reforms in Nikita Khrushchev's Soviet Union after Stalin's death in 1953. He also blanched at Comecon's goal of turning Romania into the "breadbasket" of the East Bloc, pursuing a program of the development of heavy industry. He also closed Romania's largest labor camps, abandoned the Danube–Black Sea Canal project, halted rationing and hiked workers' wages. Further, there was continuing resentment that historically Romanian lands remained part of the Soviet Union as the Moldavian SSR. These factors combined to put Romania under Gheorghiu-Dej on a relatively independent and nationalist route.
Gheorghiu-Dej identified with Stalinism, and the more liberal Soviet government threatened to undermine his authority. In an effort to reinforce his position, Gheorghiu-Dej pledged cooperation with any state, regardless of political-economic system, as long as it recognized international equality and did not interfere in other nations’ domestic affairs. This policy led to a tightening of Romania's bonds with China, which also advocated national self-determination.

Gheorghiu-Dej resigned as the party's general secretary in 1954 but retained the premiership; a four-member collective secretariat, including Nicolae Ceaușescu, controlled the party for a year before Gheorghiu-Dej again took up the reins. Despite its new policy of international cooperation, Romania joined the Warsaw Treaty Organization (Warsaw Pact) in 1955, which entailed subordinating and integrating a portion of its military into the Soviet military machine. Romania later refused to allow Warsaw Pact maneuvers on its soil and limited its participation in military maneuvers elsewhere within the alliance.

In 1956, the Soviet premier, Nikita Khrushchev, denounced Stalin in a secret speech before the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Gheorghiu-Dej and the leadership of the Romanian Workers' Party (Partidul Muncitor economic Român, PMR) were fully braced to weather de-Stalinization. Gheorghiu-Dej made Pauker, Luca and Georgescu scapegoats for the Romanian communist past excesses and claimed that the Romanian party had purged its Stalinist elements even before Stalin died in 1953.

In October 1956, Poland's communist leaders refused to succumb to Soviet military threats to intervene in domestic political affairs and install a more obedient politburo. A few weeks later, the Communist Party in Hungary virtually disintegrated during a popular revolution. Poland's defiance and Hungary's popular uprising inspired Romanian students and workers to demonstrate in university and industrial towns calling for liberty, better living conditions, and an end to Soviet domination. Under the pretext that the Hungarian uprising might incite his nation's own revolt, Gheorghiu-Dej took radical measures which meant persecutions and jailing of various "suspects", especially people of Hungarian origin. He also advocated swift Soviet intervention, and the Soviet Union reinforced its military presence in Romania, particularly along the Hungarian border. Although Romania's unrest proved fragmentary and controllable, Hungary's was not, so in November Moscow mounted a bloody invasion of Hungary. Romania offered to take part in the military intervention in Hungary in 1956, but Nikita Khruschev rejected the proposal.

After the Revolution of 1956, Gheorghiu-Dej worked closely with Hungary's new leader, János Kádár, who was installed by the Soviet Union. Romania took Hungary's former premier (leader of the 1956 revolution) Imre Nagy into custody. He was jailed at Snagov, north of Bucharest. After a series of interrogations by Soviets and Romanian authorities, Nagy was returned to Budapest for trial and execution.

In Transylvania, the Romanian authorities merged Hungarian and Romanian universities at Cluj, putting an end to the Hungarian Bolyai University, and also worked on gradually eliminating Hungarian education in middle schools by transforming them into Romanian ones.

Gheorghiu-Dej spread fears about Hungary wanting to take over Transylvania. He took a two-pronged approach to the problem, arresting the leaders of the Hungarian People's Alliance, but, under Soviet pressure, establishing a nominally autonomous Hungarian region in the Székely land.\[citation needed\]
Romania's government also took measures to allay domestic discontent by reducing investments in heavy industry, boosting output of consumer goods, decentralizing economic management, hiking wages and incentives, and instituting elements of worker management. The authorities eliminated compulsory deliveries for private farmers but reaccelerated the collectivization program in the mid-1950s, albeit less brutally than earlier. The government declared collectivization complete in 1962, when collective and state farms controlled 77% of the arable land.

Despite Gheorghiu-Dej's claim that he had purged the Romanian party of Stalinists, he remained susceptible to attack for his obvious complicity in the party's activities from 1944 to 1953. At a plenary PMR meeting in March 1956, Miron Constantinescu and Iosif Chișinevschi, both Politburo members and deputy premiers, criticized Gheorghiu-Dej. Constantinescu, who advocated a Khrushchev-style liberalization, posed a particular threat to Gheorghiu-Dej because he enjoyed good connections with the Moscow leadership. The PMR purged Constantinescu and Chișinevschi in 1957, denouncing both as Stalinists and charging them with complicity with Pauker. Afterwards, Gheorghiu-Dej faced no serious challenge to his leadership. Ceaușescu replaced Constantinescu as head of PMR cadres.

**Persecution, the labour camp system and anti-communist resistance**

Main articles: Romanian anti-communist resistance movement, Bărăgan deportations, and Pitești prison

Harsh persecutions of any real or imagined enemies of the Communist government started with the Soviet occupation in 1945. Although the Romanian government regarded it as an ally against Nazi Germany, the Soviet army behaved as an occupation force and could arrest virtually anyone at will for perceived "fascist" or "anti-Soviet" activities.\[citation needed\]

Once the Communist government became more entrenched, the number of arrests increased. All strata of society were involved, but particularly targeted were the pre-war elites, such as intellectuals, clerics, teachers, former politicians (even if they had left-leaning views)\[citation needed\] and anybody who could potentially form the nucleus of anti-Communist resistance.\[citation needed\]

The existing prisons were filled with political prisoners, and a new system of forced labour camps and prisons was created, modeled after the Soviet Gulag. A decision to put into practice the century-old project for a Danube-Black Sea Canal served as a pretext for the erection of several labour camps, where numerous people died. Some of the most notorious prisons included Sighet, Gherla, Pitești and Aiud, and forced labour camps were set up at lead mines and in the Danube Delta.

The prison in Pitești was used in an attempt to violently re-educate prisoners, mainly former members of the fascist Iron Guard. It involved both psychological and physical torture.\[citation needed\] The ultimate aim was to force prisoners to not only confess their crimes, but also denounce themselves and others, therefore prolonging their prison sentences. This "experiment" ended in 1952, and most involved were tried and condemned.

The Communist government also decided on the deportation of peasants from the Banat (south-west Transylvania, at the border with Yugoslavia), started on 18 June 1951. About 45,000 people were forcibly "resettled" in lesser populated regions on the eastern plains (Bărăgan). The government decision was directed towards creating a
**cordon sanitaire** against Tito's Yugoslavia, but was also used as an intimidation tactic to force the remaining peasants to join collective farms. Most deportees lived in the Bărăgan for 5 years (until 1956), but some remained there permanently.

Anti-communist resistance also had an organised form, and many people opposing the government took up arms and formed partisan groups, comprising 10–40 people. There were attacks on police posts and sabotage. Some of the famous partisans were Elisabeta Rizea from Nucșoara and Gheorghe Arsenescu. Despite a large number of secret police (Securitate) and army troops massed against them, armed resistance in the mountains continued until the early 1960s, and one of the best known partisan leaders was not captured until 1974.

Another form of anti-communist resistance, non-violent this time, was the student movement of 1956. In reaction to the anti-communist revolt in Hungary, echoes were felt all over the Eastern bloc. Protests took place in some university centers resulting in numerous arrests and expulsions. The most organised student movement was in Timișoara, where 3000 were arrested. In Bucharest and Cluj, organised groups were set up which tried to make common cause with the anti-communist movement in Hungary and coordinate activity. The authorities' reaction was immediate – students were arrested or suspended from their courses, some teachers were dismissed, and new associations were set up to supervise student activities.

Tens of thousands of people were killed as part of repression and agricultural collectivization in Communist Romania primarily under Gheorghiu-Dej.[13][14]

**The Ceaușescu government**

Gheorghiu-Dej died in 1965 in unclear circumstances – his death apparently occurred when he was in Moscow for medical treatment – and, after a power struggle, was succeeded by the previously obscure Nicolae Ceaușescu. Where Gheorghiu-Dej had hewed to a Stalinist line while the Soviet Union was in a reformist period, Ceaușescu initially appeared to be a reformist.

During his last two years, Gheorghiu-Dej had exploited the Soviet–Chinese dispute and begun to oppose the hegemony of the Soviet Union. Ceaușescu, supported by colleagues of Gheorghiu-Dej such as Maurer, continued this popular line. Relations with Western countries and many other states began to be strengthened in what seemed to be the national interest of Romania. The forced Soviet (mostly Russian) cultural influence in the country which characterized the fifties was stopped.[15]

**First years**

In 1965, following the example of Czechoslovakia, the name of the country was changed to "Republica Socialistă România" (RSR, Socialist Republic of Romania) and PMR's old name was restored (Partidul Communist Român, PCR; Romanian Communist Party).

In his early years in power, Ceaușescu was genuinely popular, both at home and abroad. Agricultural goods were abundant, consumer goods began to reappear, there was a cultural thaw, and, what was important abroad, he spoke out against the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. While his reputation at home soon paled, he continued to have uncommonly good relations with Western governments and with international capitalist institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank because of his independent political line. Romania under Ceaușescu maintained and sometimes improved diplomatic and other relations with, among others, West Germany, Israel, China, Albania, and Pinochet's Chile, all for various reasons not on good terms with Moscow.
Human rights issues

Concerns over aging populace resulted in reproductive freedoms being severely restricted. Wishing to increase the birth rate, in 1966, Nicolae Ceaușescu promulgated the Decree 770 restricting abortion and contraception: only women over the age of 45 who had at least four children were eligible for either; in 1989, the number was increased to five children.[16] Mandatory gynecological revisions and penalisations against unmarried people and childless couples completed the natalist measures.

Other restrictions of human rights included invasion of privacy by the political police (the "Securitate"), censorship, relocation, but not on the same scale as in the 1950s.

During the Ceaușescu era, there was a secret ongoing "trade" between Romania on one side and Israel and West Germany on the other side, under which Israel and West Germany paid money to Romania to allow Romanian citizens with certified Jewish or German ancestry to emigrate to Israel and West Germany, respectively.

Industrialisation

Ceaușescu's Romania continued to pursue Gheorghiu-Dej's policy of industrialisation. Romania made progress with the economy. From 1951 to 1974, Romania's gross industrial output increased at an average annual rate of 13 percent. Several branches of heavy industry were founded, including the machine-tool, tractor, and automotive industries; large-tonnage shipbuilding; the manufacture of electric diesel locomotives; and the electronics and petrochemical industries[citation needed]

In the realm of foreign trade, Socialist Romania exported machinery, consumer goods, chemicals, agricultural products, and petroleum products[citation needed]

Also, after a visit to North Korea, Ceaușescu developed a vision of completely remaking the country; this became known as systematisation. A significant portion of the capital, Bucharest, was torn down to make way for the Casa Poporului (now House of Parliament) complex and Centrul Civic (Civic Centre), but the December 1989 Revolution left much of the huge complex unfinished, such as a new National Library and the National Museum of History. During the huge demolitions in the 1980s, this area was popularly called "Ceaușima" – a bitter satirical allusion of Ceaușescu and Hiroshima.[17] Currently it is being redeveloped as a commercial area known as Esplanada.

Prior to the mid-1970s, Bucharest, as most other cities, was developed by expanding the city, especially towards the south, east and west. High density dormitory neighbourhoods were built at the outskirts of the city, some (such as Drumul Taberei, Berceni, Titan or Giurgiului) of architectural and urban planning value. Conservation plans were made, especially during the 1960s and early 1970s, but all was halted, after Ceaușescu embarked on what is known as "The Small Cultural Revolution" ("Mica revoluție culturală"), after visiting North Korea and the People's Republic of China and then delivering a speech known as the July Theses. In the late 1970s, the construction of the Bucharest Metro system was started. After two years, 10 km of network were already complete and after another 2 years, 9 km of tunnels were ready for use. By 17 August 1989, 49.01 km of the subway system and 34 stations were already in use.
The earthquake of 1977 shocked Bucharest; many buildings collapsed, and many others were weakened. This was the backdrop that led to a policy of large-scale demolition which affected monuments of historical significance or architectural masterpieces such as the monumental Văcărești Monastery (1722), the "Sfânta Vineri" (1645) and "Enei" (1611) Churches, the Cotroceni (1679) and Pantelimon (1750) Monasteries, and the art deco "Republic's Stadium" (ANEF Stadium, 1926). Even the Palace of Justice – built by Romania’s foremost architect, Ion Mincu – was scheduled for demolition in early 1990, according to the systematisation papers. Yet another tactic was abandoning and neglecting buildings and bringing them into such a state that they would require being torn down.

Thus, the policy towards the city after the earthquake was not one of reconstruction, but one of demolition and building anew. An analysis by the Union of Architects, commissioned in 1990, claims that over 2000 buildings were torn down, with over 77 of very high architectural importance, most of them in good condition. Even Gara de Nord (the city's main train station), listed on the Romanian Architectural Heritage List, was scheduled to be torn down and replaced in early 1992.

Despite all of this, and despite the much-questioned treatment of HIV-infected orphans,[16] the country continued to have a notably good system of schools. Also, not every industrialisation project was a failure: Ceaușescu left Romania with a reasonably effective system of power generation and transmission, gave Bucharest a functioning subway, and left many cities with an increase in habitable apartment buildings.

**1980s: severe rationing and construction of the Palace of the People**

*Main article: 1980s austerity policy in Romania*

Romania continued to make progress. High rates of growth in production created conditions for raising living standards of the people. From 1950 to the mid-1980s, the average net wages increased more than eightfold. The consumption fund increased 22-fold, and a broad program of building cultural facilities and housing was carried out. Over 80 percent of the country’s population had moved to new apartments during this period.[18]

Measures in the mechanization and chemicalization of farming helped to increase the output of agricultural products. In 1950, more than 300 kg of cereals was gathered per head of the population, whereas in 1982 this amount increased to 1 ton. Meat production increased from 29.5 to 100 kg.[18]

In the late 1980s, the United Nations Human Development report classified Romania as having had high human development. The life expectancy was 71 years, literacy rate at 96%, and the Real GDP per capita at $3000.[19]

During the 1980s, Ceaușescu became obsessed with repaying Western loans and with building himself a palace of unprecedented proportions, along with an equally grandiose neighborhood, Centrul Civic, to accompany it. These led to a shortage of available goods for the average Romanian. By 1984, despite a high crop yield and increased production of cereals, there were shortages of basic goods such as cooking oil, sugar, and meat.
food production, widespread food rationing was introduced. The government promoted it as "rational eating" and "a means to reduce obesity". Most of what was available were export rejects, as most of the quality goods were exported, even underpriced, in order to obtain hard currency, either to pay the debt, or to push forward in the ever-growing pursuits of heavy industrialisation.

By 1985, despite Romania's huge refining capacity, petrol was strictly rationed, with supplies drastically cut, a Sunday curfew was instated, and many buses used methane propulsion (they were mockingly named "bombs"); taxis were converted to burning methanol. Electricity was rationed to divert supplies to heavy industry, with a maximum monthly allowed consumption of 20 kWh per family (everything over this limit was heavily taxed). Only one in five streetlights was to be kept on, and television was reduced to a single channel broadcasting just 2 hours each day.

Gas and heating were also turned off; people in cities had to turn to natural gas containers (“butelii”), or charcoal stoves, even though they were connected to the gas mains.

All shops were to close no later than 5:30 pm, in order to preserve electricity.

**Last years: increased social control**

Control over society became stricter and stricter, with an East German-style phone bugging system installed, and with Securitate recruiting more agents, extending censorship and keeping tabs and records on a large segment of the population. By 1989, according to CNSAS (the Council for Studies of the Archives of the Former Securitate), one in three Romanians was an informant for the Securitate. Due to this state of affairs, income from tourism dropped substantially, the number of foreign tourists visiting Romania dropping by 75%, with the three main tour operators that organized trips in Romania leaving the country by 1987.

There was also a revival of the effort to build:

- a Danube–Black Sea Canal, which was completed,
- a nationwide canal system and irrigation network, some of which was completed, but most of which is still a project, or was abandoned,
- an effort to improve the railway system with electrification and a modern control system,
- a nuclear power plant at Cernavodă,
- a national hydroelectric power system, including the Porțile de Fier power station on the Danube in cooperation with Yugoslavia,
- a network of oil refineries,
- a fairly developed oceanic fishing fleet,
- naval shipyards at Constanța,
- a good industrial basis for the chemical and heavy machinery industries, and
- a rather well-developed foreign policy.
Pollution

Another legacy of this era was pollution: Ceaușescu's government scored badly on this count even by the standards of the Eastern European communist states. Examples include Copșa Mică with its infamous Carbon Powder factory (in the 1980s, the whole city could be seen from satellite as covered by a thick black cloud), Hunedoara, or the plan, launched in 1989, to convert the unique Danube Delta—a UNESCO World Heritage site—to plain agricultural fields.

Downfall

Brașov Riot

Main article: Brașov Rebellion

December 1989 was the last act of an end that started in 1987, in Brașov. The anti-communist riot in Brașov on 15 November 1987 was the main political event that announced the imminent fall of communism in Romania.[20]

The revolt started at the enterprise of Trucks Brașov, by a strike begun in the night of 14 November, on the night-shift, and continued the next morning with a march downtown, in front of the Council of the Romanian Communist Party.[citation needed]

The population had heard about this event through Radio Free Europe. Emil Hurezeanu tells: "I remember that Neculai Constantin Munteanu, the moderator of the show, started the broadcast: 'Brașov! So Brașov! Now it started!' This was the tone of the whole broadcast. We had interviews, information, interpretations of some political interpretations, older press articles announcing open street protests against Ceaușescu."

The reprisals against strikers were rapid. The workers were arrested, imprisoned and their families terrorized, but this act of courage on the part of the workers of Brașov set the stage for future mass revolts.[citation needed]

In this sense, from Radio Free Europe, Emil Hurezeanu says: "... All these have been turned into an offensive. The reaction of the regime was expected.. Very soon it was seen that the regime wants to hide it, to cancel it, practically not to respond to claims, not to take measures, to change anything, not to turn this protest into a public debate or even inside the party, in the Political Executive Committee. And then, the recipe of street confrontations with the regime became the only...possible. It became the leitmotif of all the media analysis. [...] It was the beginning of an action against the system that comprises more items. It was a labor protest in a citadel of Ceaușescu, it was an antidictatorial message, it was a clear political context: the pressures of Moscow, Ceaușescu's refusal to accept the demands of Gorbachev, the breaking with the West, who changed the views towards the regime – all these have made us to believe that the beginning of the end was coming”.

Protests in 1989 before the Revolution

In March 1989, several leading activists of the PCR protested in a letter that criticized the economic policies of Nicolae Ceaușescu, but shortly thereafter Ceaușescu achieved a significant political victory: Romania paid off its external debt of about US$11 billion several months before the time that even the Romanian dictator expected. Ceaușescu was formally reelected secretary general of the Romanian Communist Party—the only political party of the Romanian Socialist Republic—on 14 November at the party's XIV Congress.
On 11 November 1989, before the party congress, on Bucharest's Brezoianu Street and Kogalniceanu Boulevard, students from Cluj-Napoca and Bucharest demonstrated with placards “We want Reforms against Ceaușescu government.” The students—Paraschivescu Mihaela, Vulpe Gratian, the economist Dan Caprariu from Cluj and others—were arrested and investigated by the Securitate at the Rahova Penitentiary (ro), accused of propaganda against the socialist society. They were released on 22 December 1989 at 14.00. There were other letters and other attempts to draw attention to the economic, cultural, and spiritual oppression of Romanians, but they served only to intensify the activity of the communist police and Securitate.[citation needed]

Revolution

Main article: Romanian Revolution of 1989

On 16 December, a protest broke out in Timișoara in response to an attempt by the government to evict the dissident pastor László Tőkés. Tőkés had recently made critical comments against the government to the Hungarian media,[21] and the government alleged that he was inciting ethnic hatred. His parishioners gathered around his home to protect his eviction. Some passers-by, including Romanian students, spontaneously joined the protest. Subsequently, police and Securitate forces showed up at the scene. By 7:30 pm, the protest had spread, and the original cause became largely irrelevant. Some of the protesters attempted to burn down the building that housed the District Committee of the Romanian Communist Party (PCR). The Securitate responded with tear gas and water jets, while the police beat up rioters and arrested many of them. Around 9:00 pm, the rioters withdrew. They regrouped eventually around the Romanian Orthodox Cathedral and started a protest march around the city, but again they were confronted by the security forces.

Riots and protests resumed the following day, 17 December. The rioters broke into the District Committee building. The army failed to establish order and chaos ensued with gunfire, fights, burned cars, and casualties.

Unlike the Soviet Union at the same time, Romania did not develop a large, privileged elite. Outside of Ceaușescu's own relatives, government officials were frequently rotated from one job to another and moved around geographically, to reduce the chance of anyone developing a power base. This prevented the rise of the Gorbachev-era reformist communism found in Hungary or the Soviet Union. Similarly, unlike in Poland, Ceaușescu reacted to strikes entirely through a strategy of further oppression. Romania was nearly the last of the Eastern European communist governments to fall; its fall was also the most violent up to that time. The events of December 1989 are much in dispute.

Protests and riots broke out in Timișoara on 17 December and soldiers opened fire on the protesters, killing about 100 people. After cutting short a two-day trip to Iran, Ceaușescu held a televised speech on 20 December, in which he condemned the events of Timișoara, considering them an act of foreign intervention in the internal affairs of Romania and an aggression through foreign secret services on Romania's sovereignty, and declared National Curfew, convoking a mass meeting in his support in Bucharest for the next day. The uprising of Timișoara became known across the country, and in the morning of 21 December, protests spread to Sibiu, Bucharest, and elsewhere.
On 21 December, the meeting at the Central Committee Building (CC) in Bucharest turned into chaos. The crowd, in a reaction that would have been unthinkable for most of the last quarter-century, openly booed and jeered Ceaușescu as he spoke. He was forced to hide himself in the CC Building after losing control of his own "supporters". The night of 21 December was a fight between protesters and the Securitate, police and part of the army forces. More than 1100 protesters lost their lives during the fights over the next few Revolution days. On the morning of the next day, 22 December, it was announced that the army general Vasile Milea was dead by suicide. Believing that Milea had actually been murdered, the rank-and-file soldiers went over almost en masse to the budding rebellion. A second attempt at a speech the next day quickly failed. Soon, people were besieging the CC Building, coming within a few meters of Ceaușescu.[22] The Securitate did nothing to help him. Ceaușescu soon fled by helicopter from the rooftop of the CC Building, only to find himself abandoned in Târgoviște, where he and his wife Elena were finally tried by a drumhead court-martial, convicted after an hour and a half, and executed by firing squad moments after the verdict and sentence were announced on 25 December.[23] The PCR disappeared soon afterward and has never been revived. Uniquely among former Eastern bloc countries, no party claiming to be its successor has ever won a seat in the revamped Parliament since the end of Communism.

Controversy over the events of December 1989

For several months after the events of December 1989, it was widely argued that Ion Iliescu and the National Salvation Front (FSN) had merely taken advantage of the chaos to stage a coup. While, ultimately, a great deal did change in Romania, it is still very contentious among Romanians and other observers as to whether this was their intent from the outset, or merely pragmatic playing of the cards they were dealt. It is clear that by December 1989 Ceaușescu's harsh and counterproductive economic and political policies had cost him the support of many government officials and even the most loyal Communist Party cadres, most of whom joined forces with the popular revolution or simply refused to support him. This loss of support from government officials ultimately set the stage for Ceaușescu's demise.

Legacy

Despite the harsh austerity measures of the 1980s in Romania being still in living memory, many Romanians respond in polls that they'd prefer a restoration of the communist regime (as much as 53% in a 2012 poll), looking back nostalgically at an era of stability and safety as opposed to the recent economic and political instability.[24]

See also

- Administrative divisions of the Peoples' Republic of Romania
- History of Romania since 1989
- List of Romanian communists
- Presidential Commission for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania
- Reconstruction (2001 film), a documentary about Communist Romania.
- Romania during World War II
- *Scânteia*, the Romanian Communist Party's newspaper.
- Systematization (Romania)
- *Videogramme einer Revolution*, a documentary by Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujică, made from 125 hours of amateur footage, during the December 1989 Revolution.

**References**

3. ^ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945*, Penguin Press, 2005. ISBN 1-59420-065-3. "In addition to well over a million in detainees in prison, labor camps, and slave labor on the Danube-Black Sea Canal, of whom tens of thousands died and whose numbers don't include those deported to the Soviet Union, Romania was remarkable for the severity of its prison conditions".
8. ^ Giurescu, ""Alegeri" după model sovietic", p.17 (citing Berry), 18 (citing Berry and note); Macuc, p.40; Tismăneanu, p.113
9. ^ Giurescu, ""Alegeri" după model sovietic", p.18
10. ^ Rădulescu-Motru, in Cioroianu, p.65

External links

- ceausescu.org (http://www.ceausescu.org/), an extensive website on Communist Romania.
- memorialsighet.ro (http://www.memorialsighet.ro/en/), a memorial site dedicated to the victims of Communism in Romania, based at Sighet prison.


Categories: Former polities of the Cold War | Former countries in Europe | States and territories established in 1947 | States and territories disestablished in 1989 | Soviet satellite states | Communism in Romania | Socialist Republic of Romania | Communist states | Eastern Bloc | Natalism | Single-party states

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