

# Romanians demand ouster of Iliescu

by Konstantin George

Thousands of Romanians demonstrated in the capital of Bucharest March 11, joined by another 15,000 in the western Romanian city of Timisoara, demanding the immediate resignation of the post-Ceausescu, Soviet puppet National Salvation Front (NSF) regime, headed by President Ion Iliescu and Prime Minister Petre Roman. The population detests Iliescu, Roman, and the entire cabinet because they, like the ousted Ceausescu clan, are Communists. The demonstrators, however, are not simply reacting to the fact that Communists *now* hold the power in Romania. Romanians are furious that Iliescu and his cohorts are employing all means possible to rig the so-called "free elections" set for May 20, and thus legitimize their coming to power on Dec. 22, 1989, backed by the Army and the Soviets.

Under Iliescu, anti-communist political parties have been legalized. These include the National Liberal Party and the National Peasants Party, which, both before the war and in Romania's only semi-free immediate postwar election, received the votes of the overwhelming majority. Today these parties are running candidates, but under crippling handicaps imposed by Iliescu. Opposition parties have *no* access to TV and radio, no mass press of their own, and no control over the media. Every basic material necessity for a political party, down to typewriters and copier machines, is lacking. The NSF has proclaimed that it has "surrendered" the Communist "monopoly of power." In reality, it has granted itself a monopoly of the mass media and infrastructure required to compete in an election.

The Iliescu regime is attempting to instill fear that any major break with "socialism" would mean mass unemployment, high inflation, and even greater misery. This media campaign, unreported in the West, has centered on playing up the misery of Poland as an "example" of what will happen should the NSF lose the elections and the opposition come to power. Romanians, as seen by letters received from citizens of that country, react with horror to what is happening in Poland following Poland's decision to capitulate to International Monetary Fund austerity demands. The majority of Romanians have no interest either in preserving the present system or in repeating a Polish tragedy. They will have nothing to do with a system that proved after 45 years it doesn't work, and will not replace it with an IMF "free enterprise"

model that is also a proven failure. The fear campaign is meant to deflect the opposition parties from focusing on a program for Romania's economic and social development based on expanding infrastructure and the productive sphere of the economy, including private agriculture, and calling Iliescu to account for prolonging Romania's misery by his refusal to utilize financial assets acquired by the Romanian state over the years at the expense of the population, as the "motor" to relaunch Romania's economy.

## A fresh start

For reasons ironically linked to Nicolae Ceausescu's ruinous policy of paying off *all* of Romania's foreign debts, Romania has excellent potential to become an East European economic success story. Under Ceausescu, Romania had accumulated, as a result of ending debt repayment and drastically slashing imports, large foreign exchange reserves, estimated by Western experts at upwards of \$1 billion. The nation thus has a starting capital fund for a national bank which, if based on the Hamiltonian model established by the young United States, could grant long-term, low interest credits to finance infrastructural development and industrial and agricultural modernization.

Romania had this extraordinary fund of at least \$1 billion, at least through the Dec. 22 revolution. But the subject of the country's foreign exchange reserves has disappeared behind a curtain of silence imposed by the Iliescu regime. Is it still there? Iliescu must answer. That fund was amassed at the cost of thousands of lives, semi-starvation, and millions living in dark and freezing winters. Has Iliescu thrown away Romania's prime national asset for economic reconstruction by paying Moscow in dollars for Soviet oil, natural gas, and electricity? Are Romania's precious assets being squandered to meet Moscow's looting demands? The \$1 billion (or more) question is the question around which Iliescu could lose the May 20 election. Presidents have been forced to resign in disgrace for much less.

The other Iliescu looting policy, the internal looting of the population through enforced low wages, is already being resisted. The regime's Big Lie, that it enjoys the support of the "industrial working class majority" of Romanians, has been shattered. On March 6, 15,000 coal miners in the Jiu region of southwest Romania began a strike, demanding higher pay, better working conditions, and an independent trade union. The NSF lied on March 9 that the strike was ending; but it continued until March 12, and a mass meeting of coal miners resolved to continue the strike unless their demands were met by March 14. The action is politically significant since it was the Jiu coal miners who, in 1977, carried out the first political mass strike against Ceausescu's despotic regime. That strike was brutally crushed in a bloodbath where hundreds were executed and hundreds more sent to prisons and camps, but the example was crucial in keeping hopes for eventual freedom alive in those dark years.