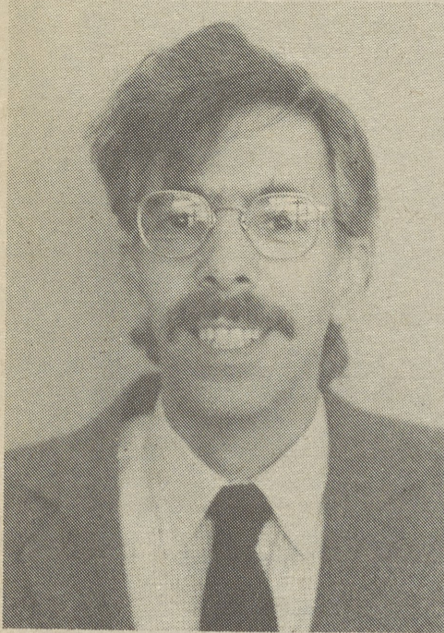


Sorkin Tells of Romania Before the Revolution

(Continued from Page 3)



basics like flour, sugar, butter, cooking oil.

Even peoples' use of their bodies was legislated, particularly women's: birth control was illegal and abortion likewise outlawed. Doctors could not perform an abortion even in a medical emergency without an official of the Ministry of Justice giving permission. Instead, women died. To enforce these policies, the government made women at the workplace subject to medical examinations in order to record pregnancies. Childlessness was taxed heavily. But even without childbearing as a patriotic duty, a woman's life could be particularly bleak. With the time-consuming chore of standing on multiple, long, slow-moving lines to shop for food or clothing, and with attitudes that made household work a woman's domain even though she worked full-time, let alone with the continual shortages and a lack of labor-saving conveniences, life for a woman was difficult in the extreme.

It was worse, however, for any citizen who dared to speak his or her mind. For instance, writers who did not adhere to the official views were forbidden to publish, or, like the poet Mircea Dinescu, some of whose poems I translated, they were placed under house arrest. The poet Ana Blandiana got into trouble for a children's poem about a vain tomcat. Six prominent politicians, including patriarchs of the Romanian Communist Party, were interrogated or jailed last spring for writing a letter of protest about conditions and policies, with the son of one (freed since the December events) being convicted of high treason, a capital offense. Typewriters had to be registered with the police along with a sample of their type.

Many ordinary unknown citizens, too, were imprisoned and executed for words or acts of protest, even for thoughts in private diaries. Although the Securitate turned out to be inept at upholding the government or protecting the leader during the revolt, the secret police organization was notoriously effective at intimidating the general population, just as it was at killing innocent victims in December. It was especially skilled at convincing, trapping, or forcing people to report on one another. People I knew in Bucharest estimated that one out of two, or maybe two of three, in the city informed on their fellow Romanians. Whether these statistics are true, the level of fear had its desired results. I found many of my academic colleagues at the University of Bucharest, with which I was associated, markedly timid. Not only did they have to be Party members (a mechanism designed to ensure ideological purity), but there was no vital tradition of academic freedom to protect independent thought and sustain freedom of expression.

Individuals' work, moreover, was subject to changing policy and politics, as well as to the whims of the censoring apparatus. A research professor in psychology whom I knew in 1981, then content with Romanian life despite inadequacies he recognized, lost his job when his institute arbitrarily fell into disfavor, was prohibited from publishing his work or even using his notes (a lifetime's work), and was told he

had to "rehabilitate" himself by working in a laundry. It is no wonder that, more than in other East European countries, people were extremely fearful, and there was no internal dissident movement. Dissidents were silenced, or had to flee by defecting.

As I write, the provisional National Salvation Front government is in power, but it is clear the revolution will continue unpredictably. The government has made admirable steps to include Romania's ethnic minorities (especially Germans and Hungarians, but to my knowledge not the nation's most oppressed group, the gypsies), and to take account of regional loyalties which exist. In some areas of the countryside, however, the army has assumed power. Food supplies remain scant. I also read of widespread criticism that the new regime is too soft on past leaders and contains many former officials, who are tainted by being Communists and, worse, by having been associated with the deposed tyrant. Animosity toward the Party and the former hierarchy is intense — and well earned. One wonders, on the other hand, given the Romanian experience since the Second World War, where else is leadership experience to derive from?

The interim government's authority is shaky, and it seems torn by an indecisiveness arising from unfamiliarity with governing in the context of public debate and pressures as much as from what must be intense behind-the-scenes politicking. A few weeks ago, angry demonstrations in Bucharest caused the interim leaders to promise a national referendum for January 28 on reinstating capital punishment for political crimes; the regime had done away with the death penalty after international dismay at the secrecy and the rapidity of the Ceausescu's military trial and execution. The interim rulers also first banned the Communist party and then reversed the ban a day later, promising to include the question in the same referendum. But the government has just canceled the

PSU Gets Big Grants

(Continued from Page 1)

Mellon Bank; \$70 thousand from the Japan Foundation; and \$50 thousand from alumnus L. Robert Kimball.

Here's where it's going (this might help you choose a major): the Smeal gift will endow faculty positions in the College of Business Administration. The IBM grant funds the acquisition for Penn State of the nation's largest IBM computer used exclusively for academic research and instruction (it occupies an entire floor in the Computer Building on Main Campus).

The Huck gift is slated to create four new faculty chairs in molecular and cell biology, nutrition, natural sciences, and special library collections, while the Mitrani grant will help create a faculty chair in Jewish Studies.

Bell's grant goes toward six innovative economic development programs throughout the state to be staffed by Penn State grads. Mellon's gift creates a Faculty Fellowship in business to analyze and encourage successful entrepreneurship in central Pennsylvania.

The grant from the Japan Foundation will add a specialist in Japanese history to the department of history, while the Kimball gift will go to a Living Laboratory featuring exposed state-of-the-art lighting and ventilation systems in the architectural engineering department.

Overall, the funds raised will go toward increasing academic enrichment (32%), facilities and equipment (24%), faculty resources (16%), student aid (12%), and library acquisitions (1%). Other areas and unrestricted funds make up the remaining 15%.

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vote, saying its own initial decision to hold it was panicky. Minority parties are forming and raising their voices. Political alliances dormant since the 1930s are struggling to form again. Local elections to be held imminently in some counties are likely to make the political scene more complex. Students, who were crucial to the uprising, are forming a union, and they demand a more up-to-date, less propagandistic education in all fields, from medicine, technology and the sciences to the social sciences, humanities and arts. There is unprecedented confusion, turmoil and ferment in national life.

I would not have predicted the current revolution when I left only five months ago (at a time when East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria hadn't undergone change yet). I shall not guess as to what comes next, except surely there will be more crises and further turmoil. In a sense, the hardest part of the revolution is the changes that have to follow: the creation of a lasting and viable democratic tradition, whether on a socialist, capitalist, or some other model; the creation of new political, economic and social institutions respectful of individual rights and conducive to stability and prosperity; the creation of a fabric of trust in a society torn apart by hatred and informing.

Those of you with a sense of modern history will know that at the start of the current century, the Balkans were a major trouble spot. In was there, for instance, that the immediate events which precipitated the First World War took place. In this first year (and new decade) of a liberated Eastern Europe, I honor the Romanians who knowingly risked their lives (some paid the price) and futures for freedom and a better life. Their revolution was the only bloody one in the new Eastern Europe (only Albania is yet to change). I am surprised, and glad for them, that it was not bloodier.

But at the same time I also worry that, with the lid of state control finally removed (just as the lid of Soviet control has under Gorbachev been removed from the former satellite countries), the national pot may boil up in internal dissension. Will changes occur quickly enough to satisfy nearly starving people whose level of expectation has suddenly

and dramatically risen? Will ethnic nationalism, traditions of religious intolerance, or regional loyalties destabilize the nation? Will a power vacuum or anarchy sabotage establishment of a representative government? Can a democratic transition be made?

I am not pessimistic about the future, but I want to close by noting the modern era's worrisome symmetry: as the twentieth century ends, the Balkans are again an area of possible conflicts that could flare up major-power disagreements. We must hope for wise and cool heads, deliberate efforts at political compromise, patience and peace. It would be more than a tremendous shame for a newly freed Romania (or other East European nation) to contribute to making the 1990's maintain our century's doleful record as by far the cruelest and bloodiest age in world history.

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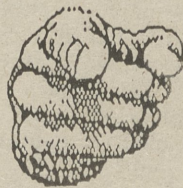
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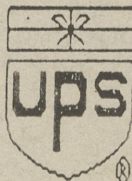
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