

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE STUDY NUMBER 15

OFFICE OF STRATEGIC SERVICES
RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS BRANCH

R & A 3070S
27 APRIL 1945

THE DEMOCRATIC FRONT GOVERNMENT OF RUMANIA

The present pro-Soviet Government of Rumania consists of a coalition of leftist parties known as the Democratic Front, which in turn is dominated by the Rumanian Communist Party. During the seven weeks since its accession to power the Democratic Front has taken energetic steps to consolidate its control of the country. These steps have included intimidation of conservative opposition leaders by means of press attacks and arrests; purge of the Rumanian army, police, and administrative officials; and a strict leftist censorship of the press. A systematic effort has been made to conciliate financial and industrial leaders, some of whom are tainted with collaborationism, but whose cooperation is considered essential to the functioning of the Rumanian economy and the fulfillment of obligations to the USSR. The Government has also made a strong bid for peasant support by putting through a law providing for the division of large landed estates into small farm holdings. The position of the new regime has been further strengthened by the support of the Rumanian Orthodox Church. Although the totalitarian measures of some Communist officials have caused distrust and tension between the Communist and non-Communist Government parties, the stability of the Cabinet probably will not be seriously threatened while it continues to enjoy Soviet support.

The Democratic Front Government, which came to power on 6 March, had been preceded by the coalition Cabinet of Premier Radescu, in which conservative as well as leftist parties were represented. The resignation of Radescu on 28 February came as the climax of a month-long political crisis marked by increasingly aggressive leftist attacks on the Liberal and Peasant Parties and their representatives in the coalition Government, by Radescu's gradual shift from a non-partisan position to the leadership of the conservative parties, and by final Soviet intervention in favor of the Democratic Front. Both Radescu's resignation and the appointment of Premier Petre Groza were ordered by Soviet authorities. In presenting the Soviet demands, Vice-Commissar Vyshinski reportedly declared that the USSR was reluctant to intervene in Rumanian internal affairs, but was forced to preserve order behind the front.

Meanwhile American authorities in Bucharest, who had not been notified in advance of the Soviet decisions, informed the Soviets that they would look with disfavor on any non-coalition regime and expressed the wish that no decisive steps be taken until consultations had been held among Allied representatives. Rumors that more active American intervention would be forthcoming momentarily strengthened the posi-

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APPROVED FOR RELEASE
DATE: JAN 2002

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tion of the conservative parties. Nevertheless the Groza Government as finally formed included 14 members of the leftist Democratic Front and four dissident members of the conservative parties. Of the latter the most prominent is Vice-Premier Tatarescu, who had been expelled from the Liberal Party because of his participation in King Carol's dictatorship in 1940. Thus, neither Maniu's relatively strong Peasant Party nor the orthodox Liberal Party headed by Bratianu is represented.

The Moscow radio and press immediately hailed the Groza Government as the choice of the people and as a victory for Allied unity over "pro-fascist cliques" which had sought to involve the Rumanians in "fratricidal civil war." Four days after its formation the new Government gained considerable prestige from the Soviet transfer of northern Transylvania, which had been promised in the armistice terms, but which had been refused to previous Rumanian cabinets on the ground that Rumanian persecution of Hungarians interfered with the Soviet war effort.

The new Government, which naturally entertained better relations than its predecessor with locally chosen leftist officials in the provinces, moved quickly to strengthen its hold on the country. In the traditionally conservative Rumanian Army 52 generals were retired within one week and three others arrested, apparently on charges of having permitted members of the fascist Iron Guard to escape from Rumania to Germany. The number of Rumanian troops stationed in the country was drastically reduced and their permanent regimental and divisional headquarters disbanded by order of the Soviets.

The Bucharest police force, which the Soviets had ordered reduced in size during the Radescu regime, was now speedily augmented by civilian recruits, chiefly from radical left-wing groups. These Citizens' Guards were instructed to deal severely with "all who try to prevent the application of the new Government's program." They appear to have been at least as concerned with suppressing the efforts of the Peasant and Liberal Parties to mobilize their supporters as with the maintenance of law and order. By the end of March a well-informed Communist estimated that political arrests in Rumania had reached a total of 30,000. Though such arrests are often temporary and are officially stated to have been confined to collaborationist and pro-fascist groups, they appear largely to have been designed to intimidate the conservative opposition.

The strict press censorship instituted by the Soviets during the cabinet crisis has apparently been continued by the Rumanian Propaganda Ministry. According to one account, press representatives are given daily instructions not only as to what dispatches may be printed but also as to the accompanying comment. The penalty for violation of instructions is the suppression of the offending publication. Late in March the conservative Peasant Party, whose two newspapers in Bucharest had previously been banned, lost over a dozen provincial journals. Liberal Party papers had already been forced out of publication by the

Communist-dominated typesetters' union early in February. This appears to leave the entire newspaper field to the Democratic Front and a few "independent" but strictly controlled papers.

The Democratic Front has also strengthened its position by encouraging splits within the Peasant and Liberal Parties, both of which are divided over policy toward the Soviets and the Rumanian Left. An increasing number of Liberal Party members appear disposed either to join the dissident Tatarescu and his followers, who already hold Government posts, or to make Tatarescu head of the Liberal Party in place of the present anti-Communist leader, Bratianu. Within the Peasant Party there is a strong move to replace Maniu with a leader more willing to compromise with the Democratic Front. The leftist aim in encouraging such splits is not necessarily the destruction of the conservative parties, but may be rather to absorb their more docile elements into the Democratic Front.

While still attacking recalcitrant conservative politicians, "pro-fascists," and war criminals, the Democratic Front has continued to seek the support and cooperation of other normally conservative Rumanian elements. On 17 March the new Cabinet announced that, although officials who had been instrumental in coordinating the Rumanian economy with the German war effort would be punished, businessmen who had exposed themselves to prosecution as collaborators would be spared. This step apparently was prompted by the drastic drop in Rumanian industrial production which had followed the purge of managerial and technical personnel. An example of the length to which the Government is prepared to go to remedy this situation is the treatment accorded Nicolae Malaxa, former owner of one of the largest industrial plants in Rumania. A former close associate of King Carol and heavy contributor to the fascist Iron Guard, Malaxa had been jailed and his stock in the Malaxa works confiscated because of his role in the unsuccessful Iron Guard *putsch* of 1941. Later he was released, allegedly as a result of German pressure. Under the present regime Malaxa has not only been reinstated as manager of his plants but is also to receive a Government indemnity for machinery removed by the Soviets. Malaxa's technical manager, who was ousted several months ago as a known pro-German, is apparently also to be reinstated.

The position of the Groza Government has been further strengthened by the attitude of the church. While the Rumanian Orthodox Church as a state-supported institution normally supports any Rumanian Government, its clergy has in the past shown considerable suspicion of the Left. Nevertheless, soon after the installation of the new Cabinet the Rumanian Patriarch issued a pastoral letter urging the clergy and the faithful to support the Government, which he called a "creation of the people." Such prompt endorsement of the Democratic Front may mean that the present tendency of the Orthodox Church in the Balkans to adopt a pro-Soviet and hence a pro-Left position has now spread from the Slavic countries to Rumania. It may also reflect

the growing strength of the Ploughmen's Front (the peasant component of the Democratic Front) among Rumania's large and traditionally pious peasant population.

The agrarian following of the Groza Government may have been further increased by a reform decree of 22 March which, while reaffirming the principle of private ownership of farm lands, breaks up all estates of more than 123 acres into small peasant holdings. In many localities this decree will merely confer legality on a process already completed. On the other hand, the Government's decision not to compensate former owners for expropriated lands has been heatedly opposed not only by King Michael, who has asserted that it is unconstitutional, but also by Vice-Premier Tatarescu, himself a landowner. Tatarescu's efforts to assure compensation for expropriations, which he maintained had been promised before he took office, have thus far succeeded only in incurring Communist displeasure and threats that he will be dismissed. The issue of the law's constitutionality may be solved by a proposed decree to amend the constitution, though King Michael is reportedly unwilling to sign such an amendment.

Other developments have contributed to the growing tension between the Communists and their more moderate leftist associates. The Communist seizure of control in the most important labor unions and in the General Federation of Labor was apparently carried out against the will of the rank and file of workers and was resented by other Government parties. The mounting number of political arrests has caused apprehension among the non-Communist ministers. The Communists, aware of tacit Socialist opposition to their authoritarian methods, have reportedly begun to classify even the Socialists as "reactionaries" and are said to have denounced the Socialist leader, Petrescu, as a traitor. Finally Premier Groza, leader of the moderate-leftist Ploughmen's Front, is said to resent the tendency of Communist officials to administer the country without his advice. Recent arrests have deprived Groza of members of his personal staff in whom he placed great confidence, and he is now reported to be determined to block certain extreme leftist proposals. The Communists, on the other hand, are said to be displeased with Groza's relative leniency toward the conservative parties, and to have declared that if he continues to oppose the extremists, he will be replaced by some "neutral" figure.

However, despite distrust and occasional friction between Communist and non-Communist members of the Cabinet, the balance of power lies with the Communists and the Government appears relatively stable. As long as the present regime continues to enjoy Soviet support it is unlikely to undergo any drastic change. While the extent of Soviet support is not entirely certain, and Soviet officials remain very critical of continued Rumanian inefficiency and lack of good will in carrying out armistice obligations, Cabinet changes in the immediate future will presumably be of an administrative rather than a political character.

On the other hand, the continuance of severe Soviet economic pressure is reported to have caused disillusionment even among Rumanian Communists, at least one of whom is said to have predicted that the unsympathetic attitude of the Soviets would soon undermine the cabinet and force it out. Moreover, difficulties have arisen in the negotiations for a USSR-Rumanian commercial treaty. The Bucharest Foreign Office expects the Soviets to insist that the treaty include a clause providing for their financial penetration of the Rumanian economy. Vice-Premier Tatarescu, who also holds the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is said to be unwilling to go to Moscow to conclude the treaty which, if it includes such a clause, would further weaken his position and might force him to resign. Finally, there is evidence of continued inefficiency on the part of the Bucharest Government in coordinating central and local administration. Local officials, leftists themselves, criticize the issuance of requisitions from Bucharest without reference to local conditions. However, at present no opposition group appears capable of exploiting these weaknesses of the Groza Government because no other political force in Rumania is likely to win Soviet backing.