Part I. Economic and Social Development in Romania: Introduction

John W. Cole

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Introduction

The papers in this section make clear the determination of the Romanian Communist Party to carry through an ambitious plan of economic and social development. The first three papers, each by a prominent Romanian scholar, demonstrate a strong pride in the nation's accomplishments and lavish praise for the leadership role played by the Romanian Communist Party and by its first secretary, and president of the republic, Nicolae Ceaușescu. Romanian scholars will recognize this as a standard feature of Romanian social science literature. It is indicative of the significance of the Party and its leaders in most aspects of Romanian life. Indeed, given the degree of commitment required by the party-led drive to modernize, social science research in Romania, supported as it is out of state funds, can only be justified in terms of its contribution to the construction of a modern socialist society.

These three contributions all discuss the nation as a whole and demonstrate the importance of central planning in directing the process of change. The principal goal of the planning, as the papers make very clear, is to transform Romania into an urban industrial society. The first paper, by one of Romania's foremost economic planners, Ioan V. Totu, outlines the major indicators of Romania's progress up to 1977. As a result of rates of investment and economic growth, which were among the highest in the world during the 1960's and 1970's, Romania was leaving the ranks of "underdeveloped" or "developing" nations to become what Totu refers to as "a country of medium economic level." To Romania's leaders, this meant that some significant changes were to be made in the nature of Romanian planning. In the Romanian five year plan for 1981-85 and in plans extending into the 1990's, the level of investment and economic growth would be somewhat reduced in order to raise the standard of living of the population. This would be done by increasing real wages, devoting higher percentages of national productive capacity to consumer goods, and expanding levels of foreign trade.

I believe that behind Totu's vision of a world trade more equitable to small developing nations lies a realization that more involvement in world trade carried dangers for Romanian economic plans. In any case, Romania's balance of payments deteriorated markedly in the early 1980's during the period of world economic recession. Its experience paralleled that of other countries such as Mexico, Brazil, and even Poland, which were also struggling to become developed industrial states. The optimism for the future displayed in these papers, projected on the basis of past performance, has in the event turned out to be ill-founded. Instead of reaching the heights envisioned here, Romania now finds itself struggling to maintain the economic position it had achieved at the time of the conference (see end note).
Clearly associated with the economic development of the country has been its transformation into a more urban society. Ion Iordachel, head of the Sociological Institute of the Romanian Academy of Sciences and editor of Romania's leading social science journal, Viitorul Social (The Social Future), provides an array of statistical information to demonstrate both the economic and social changes that have taken place in Romania. The trends indicate movement from farming to industrial occupations and growth in the percentage of the population living in cities.

However, both Iordachel and the Romanian ethnologist, Paul Simionescu, also mention the transformations that have taken place in rural life. Simionescu, in fact, stresses the point that urbanization means more than people moving from the country to the city, in that it also includes transformation of existing cities as well as the urbanization of the countryside.

This is an especially important point for Romania. While it is true that the percentage of people living in cities has grown markedly, it is also true that the number of people living in the countryside is nearly as high as it was at the beginning of the period of socialist modernization. The growth of cities has indeed absorbed all of Romania's population growth, but it has made only small inroads into the size of the population living in rural villages (Cole, 1981:78-80). However, since almost all agriculture has been organized into either collective or state farms, and since a substantial percentage of workers living in the countryside commute to jobs in the city, rural life too has been bureaucratically organized. In the final contribution to this section by Steve Sampson, an ethnographer at the Department of Ethnology and Anthropology at the University of Copenhagen, we learn of yet another mode of urbanization, the creation of new towns out of rural villages.

While the first three articles in this section of the research report are national in their focus, the final contribution by Sampson focuses on the experiences of a single community. From Sampson we learn about the complexities of putting a national plan into effect at the local level. Sampson traces the planning linkages between village and region and between the regional and national capital, and discovers the difficulties experienced within the community. He analyzes these difficulties in an effort to determine which of them are inherent to the planning process, which can be attributed to the socialist context of the plans, and which are a product of the unique characteristics of Romania or of the community itself. Sampson's analysis gives meaning to the words of Nicolae Ceausescu, quoted in Iordachel's contribution (page 14), about the dangers of allowing contradictions to develop between segments of the population to the point that they become antagonistic. In this instance, Sampson finds that the contradictions could have been dampened by certain modifications in the planning process.
Note: The volume edited by Daniel Nelson which appeared in 1981 provides chapters by different authors on a wide range of topics about Romania as it entered the 1980's. For an excellent short introduction to modern Romania which stresses the relationship between Romania's internal development and its external relations, see Lawrence Graham (1982). To compare Romanian planning with socialist planning in general, see Ellman (1979).

References Cited

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