

portion of the Islamic vote — although it is not alone in this field. A Christian Democratic Party and a Christian Republican Party have appeared on the electoral scene, alongside the many small parties which have burgeoned in the recent past. Fr Subev has stated that he will not seek election himself, but some of the Independent Committee's ad-

herents may decide to do so. However, none of the parties so far generally regarded as significant opponents of the BCP can be identified as strongly representative of the Christian outlook. Bulgarian believers are likely to find that they have a difficult choice to make.

ROBERT HOARE

Romania

Political change did not come to Romania until the army withdrew its loyalty from President Nicolae Ceausescu. The demonstrations which toppled him were by far the largest to have occurred during 41 years of communist rule. The only previous cases of popular unrest during that time were the strike of the Jiu Valley miners in 1977 and the Brasov riots, in which an estimated 10,000 factory workers participated in 1987. Ceausescu's repression of the Romanian population was so thorough that a spontaneous popular uprising on a national scale was the only possible threat to his hold on power. Throughout his 24 year leadership of the Romanian Communist Party, there had been no serious attempt to oust him within the party, and there were no organisations outside the party challenging its monopoly of power. Despite the lack of organized resistance, the actions of the demonstrators, who faced death by coming onto the streets, showed the intensity and scale of popular anti-government feeling.

Demonstrations which began in Timisoara on the night of 16 Dec-

ember, continued into the next day as troops opened fire on the demonstrators. Eye-witnesses report that, instead of dispersing, the crowd moved towards the source of fire, some baring their chests to the guns. After thousands of demonstrators (the number was later said to be much lower) were believed to have been killed in Timisoara, unrest spread to the nearby towns of Arad and Oradea, Cluj, Brasov and finally the capital, Bucharest, on 21 December.

On 20 December even larger demonstrations, involving 100,000 people, occurred in Timisoara, where the army had been guarding the streets since 18 December. This time the army withdrew and sided with the demonstrators. In Bucharest an officially organised rally in support of President Ceausescu on 22 December turned against him. The crowd in front of the government headquarters began to shout 'Timisoara' and to heckle him. The rally was televised live, and thus encouraged mass demonstrations in the capital. After initial hesitation the army and Securitate fired on the demonstrators, but protests continued. On

that morning the death of Ceausescu's Minister of Defence, Colonel General Vasile Milea on 21 December had been announced. It was at this point that the army switched sides and Ceausescu fled the Presidential Palace by helicopter.

What part then did the church play in the events which led to the downfall of Ceausescu? The church's main contribution was to have provided a catalyst for the mass demonstrations which began in Timisoara. The first large scale demonstrations here on the night of 16 December grew from a smaller demonstration around the church of Hungarian Reformed Pastor László Tökes. Members of his congregation started a protective vigil around the church following a court order to evict Tökes. They were joined by members of other churches in Timisoara, notably the Romanian Orthodox church and the Baptist church of Pastor Petru Dugulescu, with whom Pastor Tökes had good relations. Although the pastor's supporters did not want their vigil to go beyond prayerful support on Tökes' behalf, they were joined by people outside church circles who then split off from the vigil and marched to the town centre. László Tökes was well known locally for his defiance of the authorities and secret police. At a time, when Ceausescu had lost all political support within the rest of the Warsaw Pact, when the population had reached a stage of total despair and had nothing further to lose, what necessitated political change in Romania was for the spell of fear to be broken. It was by Pastor Tökes and his supporters, who led the local population onto the streets.

This was, however, the limit to the church's lead in the demonstrations. The extent of Tökes' dissent was to have tried to uphold the integrity of the Reformed Church in Romania and to speak out about the abuses of

the rights of the Hungarian minority. He had criticized the leaders of the Reformed church in samizdat articles during the early 1980s, saying that they subordinated the interests of the church to those of the government. His bishop at the time, Gyula Nagy of Cluj, moved him from Dej to Timisoara. At a meeting of the Arad deanery in September 1988, Tökes, together with three other Hungarian Reformed pastors, spoke in favour of a memorandum inviting the leadership of the Reformed and other churches in Romania to plan a co-ordinated dialogue with state officials over the government's village systematization plan. Fifteen out of twenty-six pastors voted to support this memorandum. Tökes also proposed that at Sunday services, Reformed church congregations should pray for specific villages earmarked for demolition. On 1 April, the Bishop of Oradea, Laszlo Papp, ordered László Tökes' transfer to the remote village of Mineu. Tökes refused to comply with that order, on the grounds that it was against church law. The Bishop then began civil proceedings to evict him. In July an interview with Tökes was broadcast on Hungarian television in which he spoke out against the village systematization plan, calling it an attempt to eradicate the heart of Hungarian culture in Romania.

Bishop Papp dismissed Tökes from the ministry on 25 August, an action which violated church law. Tökes' lawyer, Elod Kincses, pointed out that the disciplinary code of the Reformed Church states that only the disciplinary body of the church has the right to dismiss clergy. Papp acted with the sole support of the Department of Cults, and not of the church disciplinary body. In fact, on 14 October, eight members of the Reformed Church Council were brought to a meeting under conditions of arrest. The remaining 23

members were in hiding, but those at the meeting voted to dismiss Tökes. A court order was passed for Tökes' eviction on 20 October, which his lawyer also said was contrary to Romanian civil law. The pastor did not move out of the church flat, even though, since the July TV interview, his telephone had been cut off, the flat permanently surveyed by Securitate agents, and anyone entering subjected to body searches and interrogation. On 2 November attackers armed with knives broke into the flat but fled after Tökes and his friends managed to fight them off.

Throughout these attempts to isolate and intimidate the pastor, he received public support only from his family and congregation. Efforts were made to intimidate the congregation after a delegation from the church sent a petition to Bishop Papp in defence of their pastor, and actually went to see the bishop on 26 May. One member who took part in the delegation, Erno Ujvarossy, was found dead in suspicious circumstances on 14 September. The Tökes family was also put under pressure. His father, Istvan, a teacher at the Cluj Protestant Seminary until Bishop Nagy dismissed him, was arrested and taken for questioning when he arrived in Timisoara in October to visit his son. Other members of the family who tried to send him food after the authorities confiscated his ration card, were accused by police of illegal black market dealings. An open letter was signed by seventeen ethnic Hungarians of Transylvania in support of Tökes on 27 September, but the only signatory from the clergy of the Reformed church was Istvan Tökes. One of the signatories was a Roman Catholic priest.

Like other dissidents in Romania, Tökes stood virtually alone in his struggle with the authorities. Doina Cornea, the Eastern-rite Catholic

university teacher who wrote several open letters criticising the government much more directly than Pastor Tökes did, was also subjected to harassment by the Securitate. While some individuals added their signatures to her letters, she received no further public support. In November 1988 she sent an open letter of support for the strikers of Brasov to foreign radio stations. In September of the same year she wrote a letter to the Pope, to which three other fellow believers put their names, asking for his help in obtaining legal recognition for the Eastern-rite Catholic Church. The church, with an estimated 1 million members, was banned by the Communists in 1948. The Eastern-rite Catholic clergy and faithful resisted strongly attempts to compromise their church and bring it under government control. For this reason, it was forcibly assimilated to the Orthodox church and all 12 bishops and hundreds of clergy and laity were imprisoned. However, the church continued to operate underground and there were several unsuccessful attempts made to acquire legal recognition.

Within the Roman Catholic Church, there had been one isolated case of organised opposition to the authorities in recent years. This took the form of a letter, signed by 19 Transylvanian priests, addressed to the Bishop of Alba Iulia, Antal Jakab. It requested that the concerns of the clergy and the faithful be made known to the state authorities by the bishop. The concerns expressed in the letter touched on restrictions on religious life, discrimination against believers, as well as nationality and social issues. It was not, however, directly critical of the government.

The question of whether popular opposition to government could be given a framework by the church rested on the role of the Orthodox

Church. The largest church in Romania, it has 17 million adherents out of a population of 23 million. It was the traditionally passive role of priests in society and the willingness of the church hierarchy to carry out Ceausescu's repressive policy towards religious dissidents, that were responsible for the Orthodox church's lack of contribution to political change. By tradition the Orthodox clergy restricted their activity within the community to the spiritual life of the population and did not involve themselves in social work or in politics.

During the communist takeover of 1945-48, and the early years of communist rule, the church was subjected to the same purge which was carried out in all the denominations. Those clergy who refused to compromise were imprisoned or killed. The leaders of the church in place after the purge were totally subservient to the regime. After the purge, though, some Orthodox priests did defy the church leadership and the government, but they acted mainly as individuals, and as such, it was easy to punish them.

Fr Gheorghe Calciu-Dumitreasa, a teacher at the Orthodox Seminary in Bucharest, spoke out in his lectures to students against the destruction of churches in Bucharest and the atheist indoctrination of young people. He became an immediate target for harassment by the secret police. While his students continued to support him publicly at first, the church leadership denounced him as a fascist and publicly supported his imprisonment in 1980. He was supported by the Christian Committee for Religious Freedom and Freedom of Conscience, who campaigned on behalf of victims of persecution in Romania in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This was a small committee composed of evangelical, mainly Baptist, clergy and faithful and

constituted the only organized group of religious believers to have committed themselves to campaigning for religious and other human rights, in Romania. The government increased its persecution of members of the organization, and some of its leaders eventually emigrated. Since then the evangelical churches have not produced any other organised opposition to the government, even though individual churches and pastors have defied attempts to curb their religious activity.

The contribution of the church to political change in Romania was thus purely spiritual. It provided a personal haven for individuals and was a source of moral values. Individual religious figures who were victims of persecution gave people an example other than that set by official propaganda. Opposition was expressed by just a few individuals who were isolated in society — they lost their jobs, were moved or put under house arrest, their telephone and mail monitored or cut off, and were subject to intimidation. President Ceausescu controlled the population through the secret police, who worked through a wide network of informers. The militia ensured tight control on people's movements — a curfew operated after dark in the main towns and vehicles were subjected to frequent police checks on all the main roads. The dire shortages of food and other basic commodities which resulted from Ceausescu's economic policy, meant that most were preoccupied with physical survival. Misinformation was used to inspire fear and mistrust among the population. Only when the whole population united and freed themselves of their fear, were they able to topple Ceausescu.