

# The Memorable Year 1944

## SOLIDARITY

"The Romanian National Front, the only organization representing the 14,000 Romanians living in France, voices in this letter its opinion on a big trial that has been given much publicity in the press, radio and propaganda of the enemy.

"Twenty-two men and a woman accused of 'terrorism' were sentenced to death by a German military tribunal. The mere fact that these people were condemned by a German tribunal tells the majority of the population of France the truth about these 'terrorists...'

"Reading in the press of the courageous attitude they have shown during the trial, our hearts as Romanian patriots have beaten more strongly, and their example urges us even more to fight the hated Germans who are trampling underfoot the sacred soil of France... convinced as we are that each blow dealt at Germany means a step forward to a free and independent Romania and France."

Paris, March 1944

The letter of the Romanian National Front of France addressed to the National Council of the French Resistance was published in No. 4 for March 1944 of *La Roumanie libre* (Free Romania), the underground paper of the Romanian National Front committees in the Nazi-occupied French territory, and concerned the trial of a group of patriots of various nationalities, partisans and franc-tireurs of the French resistance movement. Among them were the Romanians Francisc Boczor condemned and shot at Mont Valérien, and Olga Baucic, beheaded by the Nazis after three months of imprisonment.

The reply of the National Council of Resistance to the letter of the Romanian patriots was encouraging and because of its mobilizing significance was broadcast by Moscow radio and the BBC. The reply declared, *inter alia*, that all those fighting fascism should be considered heroes "irrespective of their nationality or religion."

The dialogue between the two patriotic organizations — one French and the other Romanian — was an expression of the essence and meaning of what went down in history as international solidarity in the resistance movement. And if, chronologically, the letter and the reply became public in March 1944, similar documents and events conveyed their militant message in the course of a dramatic period, recorded by contemporary history as the decade of the struggle against the danger, rise, aggression and expansion of fascism.

In this struggle, which gradually encompassed the whole of mankind, the Romanian people had its share of responsibilities, sacrifices, battles, victories and defeats, being one of the peoples which had to pay heavily for the right to preserve, regain and strengthen their national independence and sovereignty.

There is a proverb in Romanian folklore which sums up the psychology and wisdom of this people: "A friend in need is a friend indeed." Consistent with this traditional creed, which grew stronger under the exceptional historical conditions, the Romanian people helped its friends in need, giving multiform expressions to its solidarity with the peoples whose existence and independence were seriously threatened by the characteristic aggressiveness of fascism in its diverse variants.

Solidarity was spontaneous and simultaneous with the chronological evolution of events; to evoke it let us turn the pages of a calendar which we shall name **CALENDAR OF THE ROMANIANS' INTERNATIONALIST SOLIDARITY**.

Since the space reserved for this article does not permit us to go through all the pages of the calendar (important is the fact that there are a great many), we shall dwell on those which we consider the most significant.

**1922** — The working-class parties of Romania vehemently condemn the terror unleashed against the antifascist revolutionary militants accompanying the setting up of Mussolini's dictatorship in Italy.

**September 1923** — After the bloody suppression of the antifascist insurrection organized and led by the Communist Party in Bulgaria, a great number of Bulgarian refugees terrorized by Tsankov's government find shelter and encouragement in Romania.

**June 1924** — Giacomo Matteotti is killed. Together with other expressions of protest "the socialist organization of Romania's capital city sends its message of encouragement and fraternal socialist solidarity to the Italian comrades so heavily hit by this loss."

**1926-1932** — The Romanian Communist Party initiates a vast campaign of support for the struggle of the Chinese people against Japanese aggression.

**January-February 1933** — The railwaymen and oilworkers of Romania are involved in heroic strikes and battles, one of the first large-scale actions of the world proletariat after the coming to power of Hitlerism in Germany; warm messages of international solidarity are received by the Romanian working class from everywhere.

**February 27, 1933** — The Reichstag is set on fire. It is followed by the Leipzig trial. In this country a great many protest actions, initiated by the working-class parties (communist, social democratic and socialist), involve wide social sections. The *Brown Book* (published by the international commission that investigated the Reichstag fire) is published in Romania in several editions; the National Antifascist Committee of Romania launches an appeal for "the exposure of the real incendiaries," demanding that "those unjustly brought to trial be set free without delay"; the dockers in the ports of Brăila, Galați and Constanța refuse to work on ships sailing under the Hitlerite flag, and demand the release of Gheorghe Dimitrov and the other defendants in the Nazi frame-up.

**Summer of 1933** — At the initiative of the Romanian Communist Party, the National Antifascist Committee prints and disseminates the pamphlet *The Brown Plague in Germany*, and the Red Aid the one entitled *The Nazi Crimes in Germany*; both of them expose the terror and atrocities in Hitler's Germany and demand the release of Ernst Thälmann and of the other numerous antifascist victims of the Gestapo.

**February 1934** — The working-class and democratic movement actively supports the antifascist insurrection of the Austrian proletariat: "Bucharest's organized workers... express through their representatives their revolt against and contempt of the current rulers, assassins and usurpers, of Austria."

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The grave of Nicolae Cristea, one of the Romanian fighters of the French resistance movement, in the "square of the shot" in Jery century.

Cuttings from contemporary newspapers expressing the Romanian people's solidarity with the peoples fighting fascist aggression.



Poland by Nazi Germany produce strong proofs of solidarity with and direct support of the peoples of those countries in the ranks of Romania's public opinion and in political life.

1939-1945 — The years of the world conflagration. Due to complex international circumstances, Romania is pushed into Hitler's anti-Soviet war. Besides the internal resistance movement — directed against Avramescu's government and has fascist ally—which acts for the withdrawal of Romania from the nefarious war that is contrary to the country's interests and for its joining the antifascist coalition — thousands of Romanian patriots fight in the resistance movements in several European countries. In Belgium, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia they are members of partisan detachments; in France they join the patriotic maquis. They fight selflessly on the barricades of the Resistance in Paris, Toulon, Marseilles, Grenoble, Lyon, Bordeaux etc. and many of them lay down their lives for century-old Romanian-French friendship.

They had arrived from the Spanish front, or having left Romania several years previously for hospitable France which had become their second home. Among them were Nicolae Cristea, Iancu Zilbermann, Andrei Sas Dragoș, Tosiif Clisiei, Alexandra Lazari, Marin Chilom, Ion Grădinar and many others who died heroically on the barricades of the resistance movement. Alongside of them fought French writers of Romanian origin — Tristan Tzara, Lucie Voronce, Benjamin Fondane — cultural, scientific and artistic personalities, Elena Văcărescu, Trian Vuia, Constantin Brâncuși, Maria Ventura and Stan Goltescan.

In the autumn of 1943 the Romanian National Front was set up; it included all Romanian antifascists of the French Resistance.

Thirty years have passed since the Romanian National Front addressed its letter of March 1944 to the National Council of the French Resistance. The succession of heroic events was climaxed in August 1944 by the glorious antifascist national insurrections in the two capital cities: Bucharest and Paris. In the morning of August 22 on the roof of the Romanian Legation in Paris, says a former fighter, "side by side with the flags of the allies, there fluttered the Romanian tricolor as well: a small group of Romanians breathed the bracing air of liberty, wishing it ardently for their country too." To the credit and pride of the patriotic forces, our people, headed by the Romanian Communist Party, was always present in the general antifascist movement of international solidarity. It honoured the freedom of its forebears: A friend in need is a friend indeed.

Livia Dandara  
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Excerpt from the Motion endorsed at the meeting of February 16 and sent to the Austrian Legation in Bucharest): "We are deeply shaken by the mass assassination of Austrian workers, who fought with sublime heroism in defence of freedom and civilization" (Excerpt from the Protest sent by a group of Jassy intellectuals to Austria's president),  
November 1934-April 1935 — In defence of the insurgents of Asturias (Spain), the National Antifascist Committee "protests and demands an end to the massacre of the Spanish workers and the release of all prisoners", at the European Conference for Assistance to the Spanish Antifascists (held in Paris April 13-14, 1935), the Romanian delegation declares that "the Romanian proletariat will not forsake its duty of international solidarity."

October 1935 — Two delegations, one made up of workers the other of intellectuals, hand Marcos Berhane (Ethiopian diplomat on a visit to Bucharest) messages of sympathy for and support of his country and people, invaded by fascist Italy.

Numerous articles are published in the press, committees of support are set up and many patriots express their wish to volunteer; several physicians succeed in joining health detachments of Ethiopia. Mihai Trecan Rucanu, a writer who visited that country not long before, publishes his book Abyssinia under the motto: "Dedicated to millenary Abyssinia, to the noble and heroic Ethiopian nation, a victim and martyr of 'civilization'." In token of his high appreciation, Emperor Haile Selassie awards him the Golden Star of Ethiopia.

1936-1939 — The Spanish epic. Like other peoples, the Romanians write a glorious page of active solidarity. Expressed in various forms — assistance committees, meetings, demonstrations, military volunteers — it involved wide social sections ranging from the peasantry and the working class to bourgeois statesmen and diplomats.

Scholars and antifascist fighters indistinctly brand the civil war provoked by the fascists as "a German-Italian invasion, a continuation of the new methods of war used by Hitler's Germany" (writer N.D. Cocea); they launch moving appeals: "Rebel generals and directors of Europe! Nobody will be able to scatter the heavy clouds of thunderbolts the curse of the Spanish people has gathered above your heads!" (writer Geo Bogza); they are proud when an action of military assistance starts from Romania: "News reached us here on the front, according to which foreign minister Nicolae Titulescu came forward with the initiative that facilities be created for a quantity of the weapons destined for Romania to be made available by France to the Popular Front government" (Valer Roman, artillery commander of the 11th International Brigade).



Responding to the appeal of the Romanian Communist Party, some 500 Romanian volunteers, overcoming numerous obstacles and hardships, leave for Spain; the antifascist motto on their banner reads: "For your freedom and ours." Organized in the legendary international brigades, they fight heroically in the dramatic military clashes, in the successive stages of the Spanish war: Madrid, Las Rozas, Majadahonda, Jarama, Guadalajara, Brunete, Zaragoza, Teruel... Many of them remain for ever buried in the bomb-shattered soil of Spain.

An excerpt from the letter of volunteer M. Burea: "We endure the fire of hell. Smoke, the smell of gunpowder, explosion, the clash of arms, a deafening noise. Death threatens all of us, but no one thinks of it. We are the envoys of the Romanian revolutionary movement and we want to be worthy of it and do our duty creditably."

As if in reply, the great democratic patriot Dr. Petru Gheza writes in the underground paper Scanteia of July 13, 1936: "The Romanian people thinks highly of your sublime gesture. The time will come when in a free Romania the people will be able to openly express its gratitude to its sons who so heroically held aloft the banner of Romanian democracy on the blood-stained soil of Spain."

The prophecy came true. Thirty years later, on April 13, 1966 Scanteia, now appearing legally, published the speech of Santiago Cardo, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Spain, who said: "The Spanish communists and people will never forget the participation of the Romanian fighters of the international brigades in the Spanish people's struggle against fascism."

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