

Romanian prime minister resigns amid rising social tensions

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Romanian Prime Minister Mihai Tudose and his deputy Marcel Ciolacu announced their resignation on Monday amid factional infighting within the ruling Social Democratic Party (PSD) and rising social tensions.

This is the second change at the head of the government within seven months, after the PSD brought down its own government in a vote of no confidence in June 2017. The PSD leadership is accusing sections of the “deep state” of working to undermine the government.

This comes in the context of reports which surfaced last year that the Romanian Intelligence Service (SRI), the National Anticorruption Directorate (DNA) and the CIA station in Bucharest had colluded to influence political decisions in the country.

The PSD national council adopted a resolution against the “parallel and illegitimate state,” accusing the DNA and sections of the secret services of attempting “to take control of the state.”

That the PSD is presenting itself as an opponent of the security services and proponent of democracy is a contemptible lie. The PSD is the party that built the edifice of a police state to shield itself from workers’ resistance to capitalist restoration.

The Social Democrats, who emerged from a section of the former Stalinist ruling party, have presided over a social catastrophe in Romania as the main party of capitalist restoration, leading governments in key moments when the bourgeois order was threatened. Having formed the first government after 1989 that led the drive to privatize and loot state property, it stabilized capitalism after the miners’ marches in 1999 and again after the conservative government of Emil Boc was brought down by mass anti-austerity protests in 2012.

It is by now openly recognized that army and secret service officers, promoted to high political offices and given virtual immunity from oversight during the PSD’s terms in office, played the crucial role in the country’s accession to NATO and collaboration in the criminal CIA black sites program.

The NATO war drive to encircle Russia and the increasing militarization of the country have exacerbated these trends in recent years. A bloated military budget, weapon acquisitions and constant military drills have been accompanied by an increasing role of the secret services in combatting “Russian influence” in the region. The Romanian ambassador to the US and former head of the SRI, George Maior, recently boasted in an interview for *The Cipher Brief* that Romania has become the second largest provider of secret information in NATO.

These developments should be a stark warning to the working class, that war preparations and the drive to police state dictatorship are well advanced, and supported by the entire bourgeois political establishment.

At the same time, however, there is increasing militancy among Romanian workers.

Autoworkers at Ford are locked in a struggle against management, the union and the PSD government. The US-based company is attempting to force a rotten two-year contract on the workers, aided by the government’s tax overhaul. The new law, which came into effect on January 1, shifts the tax burden completely onto the back of the workers by forcing them to bear the full cost of health care and social insurance. The new tax law represents an unprecedented attack on the historic and hard-fought gains of the working class.

The government has absurdly said that employers

will raise salaries to compensate the workers' loss of income. It is clear however that companies will see this for what it is: a signal from the government to increase the exploitation of workers. Companies have used it to blackmail workers into signing bad contracts, as in the case of Ford, outright lower workers' incomes or grant temporary bonuses.

Health care and public sector workers are also protesting the new tax laws, with the PSD-linked unions holding token demonstrations in November. Family doctors are struggling against the government over mismanagement and lack of funding, with Sandra Alexiu, vice president of the National Society of Family Doctors accusing the government of trying to turn over primary medicine to private clinics. This is part of a cross-party drive to privatise health care.

Workers at the Dacia Renault Plant in Mioveni, who are constantly under the threat of production being completely moved to the company's plant in Morocco, organised a massive demonstration against the PSD's tax plans in November.

The ruthless exploitation of the working class has been a constant in Romania and across Eastern Europe ever since the region was transformed into a cheap labour platform after the restoration of capitalism in the 1990s. Corporations see the exploitation of the region's working class as critical in their efforts to extract superprofits and reduce labour costs in the West.

The creation of a corrupt local oligarchy was intimately bound up with the EU's eastern expansion, with fire-sale privatisations and the destruction of the welfare state being the only reforms prescribed by the EU and the IMF.

After the 2008 financial crash, Romania was again a staging ground for the EU's continent-wide attacks on workers. The country saw the imposition of the harshest austerity measures in the EU, including brutal social experiments, such as the overnight closing of half the country's hospitals. Since then, incomes have remained essentially frozen, despite a purported economic recovery and the highest reported rate of economic growth in the EU.

The social impact of the restoration of capitalism and the EU expansion in Eastern Europe is impossible to fully quantify. Government statistics routinely lie about a social crisis whose extent stands as an indictment of

capitalism and the EU apologists' nostrums of a progressive and social bloc.

The latest Eurostat figures show that Romania is the poorest country in the EU, while the National Statistics Institute reveal that it is the most unequal. This is a pale reflection of a situation in which a handful of plutocrats rule over a social wasteland.

The Eurostat report shows half the population without proper access to basic human needs. Another telling report by the Centre for the Study of Democracy NGO shows over 20 percent of Romanian households live in energy poverty, unable to afford to pay for or are without proper access to electric energy.

Unemployment statistics are consistently false, skewed not only by the large number of those who have stopped looking for work or are working as day labourers, but also by the estimated 4 million workers who have been forced to look for work outside the country.

The government's National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights reported in 2017 almost 100,000 children left in the country whose parents went to work abroad, with the Save the Children NGO saying the number is probably closer to a quarter of a million. These children, completely ignored by the state, suffer from economic deprivation and the accompanying emotional and psychological problems.

Finally, workers are employed in precarious conditions, without safety regulations or protection from abuse. Three accidents in the space of a few months have shed light on the dramatic situation facing Romania's coal miners. Four workers died in October 2017 in accidents at the Lupeni and Uricani mines, both scheduled for closure, and another miner lost his life after an accident in December at the Livezeni mine.

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