The crisis of the feudal order intensified in Transylvania during the second half of the eighteenth century. The seeds of capitalism began to develop rapidly, the exploitation of serfs intensified, and the aggravation of social contradictions brought about powerful social movements culminating in the great peasant uprising led by Horia, Cloșca, and Crișan.\(^1\) Obviously, reforms could not solve the socio-political problems of decaying feudalism.\(^2\)

Parallel with the struggle conducted by the Romanian serfs, together with the serfs of other nations, against the feudal regime, the Romanian ruling class, now in a formative stage, worked energetically for the Romanians' national emancipation. Romanians were merely “tolerated,” despite being the large majority of the Transylvania population. The leading Romanian class conceived a political program in accordance with the state of affairs in Transylvania and the aspirations of the epoch. The credo of this class was first formulated by Inochentie Micu Clain-Klein,\(^3\) in memorials he addressed to the imperial court in Vienna over a period of sixteen years.\(^4\) Based upon powerful historical\(^5\) and legal\(^6\) arguments, Clain demanded that Romanians be recognized as the fourth nation of the state, with rights equal to those of the other inhabitants of Transylvania.

These demands were voiced in the comprehensive and judicious memorial; which the bishops Gherasim Adamovici and Ioan Bob presented in 1791 to the emperor, Leopold II, on behalf of the Romanian population of Transylvania. Known as the *Supplex Libellus Valachorum*,\(^7\) this document is the most important political act of the Transylvanian Romanians in the eighteenth century. Synthesizing the general

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4. The most important memorial is dated 8 March 1835 (see the text in T. V. Pâclișian, *Cartea de Aur sau luptele politice-naționale ale Românilor de sub Coroana ungură*, 2nd ed., 8 vols. (Sibiu: I. Marschall, 1904-15), I, 60); other petitions and memorials were addressed to the government or to the Transylvanian diet.
5. The historical argument was founded upon the antiquity of indigenous Romanians in Transylvania.
6. The legal argument stemmed from natural law; corresponding to their numbers, Romanians had twice the tasks of other nationalities combined; see Bunea, p. 75 ff.
7. The title of the 1791 edition published by Ioan Piaurtă in Iași is *Repraesentatio et humillimae preces univerae in Transilvania valachicae nationis*; I. C. Eder entitled it *Supplex Libellus Valachorum Transsilvaniae*, in his edition published at Cluj, 1791; the Romanian
demands of Transylvanian Romanians, the tightly reasoned memorial became the actual program of action for more than half a century.

Joseph II's rational policy of reform by decree, i.e. enlightened absolutism— Josephism,8 aimed to adapt society in a time of flux to new socioeconomic conditions. Despite expanding functions, the state remained nonetheless feudal9 in character, because the rising bourgeoisie was not yet strong enough to overturn the old social structure by revolutionary means, as had occurred in France.

The great nobility and higher clergy opposed the new reforms and their application. On the other hand, the rising bourgeoisie—particularly of the politically inferior peoples—embraced warmly the new reforms, seeing in their implementation the possibility of their political and national emancipation. But the bourgeoisie was not strong enough to counteract the intrigues of the great nobles and open the road to revolution. Hoping for imperial concessions, the bourgeoisie largely disregarded alliance with the masses. It was inevitable that reaction should triumph; shortly before his death, Joseph II revoked his projected reforms.10 Under the reign of Joseph's successor, Leopold II, the cancellation of the reforms became the nobility's common slogan in its struggle against the Josephinist system. But such a constitutional reorganization also involved revisions. The tottering imperial institutions simply could not be restored, but only revised to a limited degree. The rising course of history knows no "total" return.

The road to reforms could not be blocked at a time in which the Enlightenment opened the way overseas, and especially when the revolutionary bourgeoisie overthrew the old feudal establishment in France and erected the foundations of a new order.11 France's example constituted a goal for the progressive forces in Europe and a warning to the reactionary nobility, which misunderstood the sense of the age.

For the Romanian people this historical moment was highly favorable. Reformism meant for them paving the way for political and national emancipation. The Romanian people formulated their demands when all political groups in the country were doing so. This was also a time when constitutional "restorations" became the watchword. Romanians profited from the domestic situation, were inspired by foreign examples, and began to emulate them.12 In seeking a constitu-

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8. Of recent works concerning the enlightened despotism of Joseph II, see Fr. Valjavec, Der Josephinismus (Brünn: Rohrer, 1944); Kálmán Benda, "A josephinizmus és jakobinusság kérdései a Habsburg-Monarchiában," Történelmi Szemle (1965), p. 386 ff; and Prodan, p. 239 ff.

9. Regarding the consequences of Josephinism upon the Transylvanian Romanians see N. Iorga, Istoria românilor, 9 vols. in 10 (București: n. publ., 1936-38), VIII, 23 ff.

10. On 28 January 1790 the emperor revoked all the reform dispositions, except decrees concerning serfs, clergy, and toleration; the emperor's death occurred on 20 February of the same year.


12. See Prodan, passim, which offers a lively and complete image of the epoch.