

***Midterm test**

* 1950s

Modern History of Central Europe

• Hungary

- 1948 Social Democratic Party was forced to "merge" with the Communist Party to create the Hungarian Working People's Party, which was dominated by the Communists
- Anti-Communist leaders of the Social Democrats were forced into exile or excluded from the party
- All "democratic" parties were organized into a so-called People's Front in February 1949, thereby losing even the vestiges of their autonomy. The leader of the People's Front was **Mátyás Rákosi** himself. Opposition parties were simply declared illegal and their leaders arrested or forced into exile
- August 1949 the parliament passed the new constitution of Hungary (1949/XX.) modeled after the 1936 constitution of the Soviet Union
- 1949 name of the country changed to the **People's Republic of Hungary**, "the country of the workers and peasants" where "every authority is held by the working people"
- Socialism was declared as the main goal of the nation. A new coat-of-arms was adopted with Communist symbols, such the red star, hammer and sickle

Hungary

- **Mátyás Rákosi**, leader of Hungarian Working People's Party was *de facto* the leader of Hungary, possessed practically unlimited
- His main rivals in the party were the 'Hungarian' Communists (led the illegal party during the war in Hungary) and were considerably more popular within party ranks
- Their most influential leader, **László Rajk**, who was minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, was arrested in May 1949. He was accused of rather surreal crimes, e.g. spying for Western imperialist powers and for Yugoslavia, **L. Rajk** was found guilty and executed
- In the next three years, other leaders of the party deemed untrustworthy, like former Social Democrats or other Hungarian illegal Communists such as **János Kádár**, were also arrested and imprisoned on trumped-up charges

Hungary

- The Show Trial of **L. Rajk** is considered the beginning of the worst period of the **M. Rákosi** dictatorship
- **M. Rákosi** attempted to impose totalitarian rule on Hungary. The centrally orchestrated personality cult focused on him and **J. V. Stalin** soon reached unprecedented proportions. **M. Rákosi's** images and busts were everywhere, and all public speakers were required to glorify his wisdom and leadership
- In the meantime, the secret police mercilessly persecuted all "class enemies" and "enemies of the people"
- 2,000 people were executed and over 100,000 were imprisoned; 44,000 ended up in forced-labor camps; another 15,000 people, mostly former aristocrats, industrialists, military generals and other upper-class people were deported from the capital and other cities to countryside villages where they were forced to perform hard agricultural labor
- These policies were opposed by some members of the Hungarian Working People's Party and around 200,000 were expelled by **M. Rákosi** from the organization

- Pre-arranged trials to purge "*Nazi remnants and imperialist saboteurs*".
- Several officers were sentenced to death and executed in 1951, including Lajos Toth, a distinguished hero of the World War II Royal Hungarian Air Force, who had voluntarily returned from US captivity to help revive Hungarian aviation.
- The victims were cleared posthumously following the overthrow of communism.

- **Pre-arranged trials**

- * Hungarian Communist politician, who served as Minister of Interior and Minister of Foreign Affairs
- * He was an important organizer of the Hungarian Communists' power
- * László Rajk was accused of being a "Titoist Spy", an agent for western imperialism and one who planned on restoring capitalism and jeopardizing Hungary's independence
- * In prison l. Rajk was tortured and was promised acquittal if he took responsibility for the charges brought against him
- * Trial 1949: he confessed to all the charges brought against him - after his confession the prosecution decided, against the promise made, to call for the heaviest sentences to be brought down upon him and the other seven men who stood trial with him
- * L. Rajk was to be made an example for the beginning of Stalin's anti-Titoist purges
- * L. Rajk, along with Drs Tibor Szönyi and András Szalai, was sentenced to death

* **László Rajk**

• Show Trial - Raoul Wallenberg

- Preparations for a show trial started in Budapest in 1953 to prove that **Raoul Wallenberg** had not been dragged off in 1945 to the Soviet Union but was the victim of cosmopolitan Zionists
- For the purposes of this show trial, three Jewish leaders as well as two would-be "eyewitnesses" were arrested and interrogated by torture. The show trial was initiated in Moscow, following Stalin's anti-Zionist campaign
- After the death of J.V. Stalin and Lavrentiy Beria, the preparations for the trial were stopped and the arrested persons were released

• Rivality in Hungarian Working People's Party

- **M. Rákosi's** priorities: 1. economy were developing military industry and heavy industry and providing the Soviet Union with war compensation (improving living standards were not a priority)
- **Imre Nagy** was **M. Rákosi's** chief opponent and new Prime Minister

• **Imre Nagy and reforms**

- New Prime Minister **Imre Nagy** slightly relaxed state control over the economy and the mass media and encouraged public discussion on political and economic reform
- In order to improve the general supply, he increase the production and distribution of consumer goods and reduced the tax and quota burdens of the peasants
- **I.Nagy** also closed forced-labor camps, released most of the political prisoners
- **Gábor Péter** (head of secret police) was convicted and imprisoned in 1954
- All these rather moderate reforms earned him widespread popularity in the country, especially among the peasantry and the left-wing intellectuals

• **M. Rákosi's second reign**

- 1955, the Central Committee of the Hungarian Working People's Party condemned **I. Nagy** for "rightist deviation". Hungarian newspapers joined the attacks and **I. Nagy** was accused of being responsible for the **country's economic problems** and on 18 April he was dismissed from his post by a unanimous vote of the National Assembly
- **I. Nagy** was even excluded from the Party
- **M. Rákosi** again became the unchallenged leader of Hungary
- **M. Rákosi's** power was undermined - Nikita Khrushchev in February 1956, in which he denounced the policies of J.V. Stalin and his followers and the cult of personality
- The fall of **M. Rákosi** was followed by a flurry of reform agitation both inside and outside the Hungarian Working People's Party (e.g. **László Rajk** of the showcase trial of 1949 was cleared of all charges, and on 6 October 1956, the Party authorized a reburial, which was attended by tens of thousands of people and became a silent demonstration against the crimes of the regime; on 13 October it was announced that **Imre Nagy** had been reinstated as a member of the party)
- **Ernő Gerő**, as his successor, who was unpopular and shared responsibility for most of **M. Rákosi's** crimes

• Hungarian Revolution

- Tension btw Neo – Stalinist and reformists since 1953
- After **J. V. Stalin** died – **M. Rákosi** was able to keep his power
- March 1955 **M. Rákosi** accused **Imre Nagy** (reformist) of right-wing opportunism
- **M. Rákosi** – oriented to Moscow – help from Moscow against opposition
- Fear from similar event as happened in Poland – **N. S. Khrushchev** removed **M. Rákosi** from his post
- Hungarian society was not satisfied
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LVdQ9PK9Q5o>

• Hungarian Revolution

- **Polish October** - information about events in Poland led to a wave of discontent
- **23rd October 1956** – Budapest - manifestation of solidarity with the Polish workers – more than 200,000 people came, **their requirements:** 1. **Imre Nagy** – Prime Minister; 2. departure of Soviet troops from the country; 3. punishment of all who participated in the Stalinist processes and lawlessness
- Riots spread, new leader of Hungarian Working People's Party **Ernő Gerő** and his speech in Hungarian radio on 23rd October evening – huge **impulse for public anger**
- People started to occupy the public buildings
- Demonstrations escalated into a Popular Uprising



- Soviet tanks in Budapest



- **Man spitting on decapitated head of J.V. Stalin statue**

• Hungarian Revolution

- Head of new government **Imre Nagy**
- Soviet troops (in response to requests for assistance) entered to Budapest on 24th October 1956 and Soviet tanks occupied militarily significant points
- 25th October – peaceful demonstration in front of the Parliament – Soviet army was attacked by machine-gun salute and they responded and more than 60 demonstrators died → shooting before Parliament was obviously a provocation from the side of members of the Secret police → from this moment uprising in Budapest – bloody character and anti – soviet as well

• Hungarian Revolution

- Similar situation in other place (as in Budapest)
- Real power in the hands of revolutionary or National Councils
- General strike – main motto: immediate withdrawal of the Soviet Army
- **Ernő Gerő** was replaced by **János Kádár**
- **N.S. Khrushchev** – only military intervention is the solution
- 1st November 1956 neutrality of Hungary and leaving from Warsaw Pact – even better reason for Soviet bloc to intervene – it is not possible in such times of to leave the Pact and weaken the strength (NATO could abuse the situation)

• Hungarian Revolution

- All satellite states gave their agreement to military intervention
- Soviets learnt that US and NATO will not react – confirmed by **J. F. Dulles** and even **D. D. Eisenhower**
- France and G. Britain – interested in Suez Crises
- Hungarian uprising was supported just by Radio Free Europe and Austria – possibility to cross the borders for refugees
- 4th November 1956 – soviet attack – Red Army - soviet tanks in Budapest
- Fights took more than 1 week in Budapest, some places even more
- Imre Nagy asked UN to help – only formal answer – Hungary stayed **ALONE**, western democracies confirmed their agreement with Soviet intervention
- Hungarian resistance was broken, massive exodus to Austria more than 200,000

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LVdQ9PK9Q5o>
- **CONSEQUENCES:** 20,000 people were killed, nearly all during the Soviet intervention; **Imre Nagy** was arrested and replaced by the Soviet loyalist **János Kádár**. **I. Nagy** was imprisoned until his execution in 1958; Other government ministers or supporters who were either executed or died in captivity

- **Hungarian Revolution**