

- **Central Europe in 1950s**

# • The Defeat of Democracy in Czechoslovakia

- 1946 – last “ democratic“ election - National Assembly
- Parties:
  - ✓ - Communists (mass party. 1,000,000)
  - ✓ - National Socialists
  - ✓ - The People's Party
  - ✓ - Social Democrats
  - ✓ Democratic Party – Slovakia,...

# • Election 1946

- Czech lands:
  - ✓ Communists – 40%
- X
- Slovakia:
  - ✓ - Democratic Party – 62% x Communists – 30%



- May 1946 “half free“ elections - people can choose from several political parties but right-wing parties were not allowed
- Elected National Assembly of Czechoslovakia
- June 1946 Edvard Beneš re-elected – President
- New Government: Prime Minister – Klement Gottwald – Communist Party

- **Czechoslovakia 1945 - 1948: Economical and Political Changes**

# • Growing power of left

- 1947 – catastrophic drought → crop crop failure - food imports from the USSR
- Reduction of the supplying – growing black market
- Slovakia – real poverty
- 1947 (June-July) - Marshall Plan - plan presented by US Secretary of State George Marshall – Economic Recovery of Europe; Soviets promptly rejected it. Czechoslovakia was interested, but J.V. Stalin did not agree
- Soviet Union help – 600,000 tons of grain x propaganda – Soviets saved Czechoslovakia again...
- Disputes: Communist Party x Democratic Party (non-communist)
- Communist Party controled Ministry of Interior → organized provocations against Democratic Parties

- Ministry of Interior during Fall 1947 revealed a "*conspiracy*" in the Democratic Party
- Communists managed to limit the influence of Democratic Party provocations, but still alive
- "Millionaires" - Communists pushed through extraordinary tax - all property over 1 million

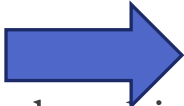
- **Czechoslovakia 1945 – 1948: Economical and Political Changes**

# • Millionaire Dose

- Communists – mass POPULARITY
- Extra income to the Treasury
- Government succumbed to pressure – state budget + 6,000,000,000 Czechoslovak crown (CZK76 304 993 000)



# • Communists

- Propaganda and publicity campaigns, mass protests, staged affair and assassination attempts, some of the policy component – provocation and espionage + close ties to the Soviet Union  effort to influence opinion about situation in Czechoslovakia
- Convergence process of democratic forces began late – lack of unifying personality





# • February 1948

❖ February 1948 - two affairs at the National Security Corps:

- **Affair of Most** - secret police agent tried to falsely accuse leaders Czechoslovak National Socialist Party of preparing a coup d'état
- Case of Krčmaň - ministers of Czechoslovak National Socialist Party and minister Masaryk (all non – communists) received boxes with explosives. Minister of Interior Minister Václav Nosek (KSC), it "*is not able to investigate*" → non-communist parties in government are demanding to investigate both affairs. V. Nosek responded by strengthening the positions of the Communist Party in the National Security Corps → Government decided to stop the implementation but Václav Nosek refused

- 20th February – 12 non-communist Ministers resigned. They hoped that President E. Beneš will not accept it (new election or Communists retreat) but Communists started coercive actions to force E. Beneš to accept the resignation → manifestation,...and 24th February – General Strike
- J.V. Stalin encouraged → K. Gottwald necessary to ask the Soviet Union for military aid (Soviet Army was ready: Hungarian-Slovakian border). K. Gottwald aid refused, apparently handle the situation himself and Action Committees of the National Front raise the power of the Communist Party, depriving political functions of their opponents
- The only one public opposition action to the Communist Party was a demonstration of University students on 25th February – suppressed manifestation
- **25th February 1948 - President E. Beneš accepted the resignations of the non-Communist ministers and appointed a new government in accordance with KSČ demands → Final Victory of Communist Party**

## • Czechoslovakia: February 1948

# • Readings

- Feis, H.: *Between War and Peace: The Potsdam Conference*. Greenwood Publishing Group, 1983.
- Roberts, G.: *Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953*. Yale University Press, 2006.
- Kaplan, K.: *The Short March: The Communist Takeover in Czechoslovakia, 1945-1948*. C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 1987.
- Zeman, Z.: *The Life of Edvard Beneš, 1884-1948: Czechoslovakia in Peace and War*. Clarendon Press, 1997.

- **Sekora, Ondřej:  
1950.**



potato beetle

# • Period of Repression and Lawlessness in Czechoslovakia

- Emigration
- Manifestations of discontent (Sokol festival)
- State Security - goal to end the regime's opponents, help from Soviet advisors
- Wave of terror similar to the Nazi regime
- First victims: enemy of the regime → Political Processes/Trials - people were prosecuted for crimes they did not commit!!!
- 1949 **General Heliodor Píka** was executed (arrested without a warrant and accused of espionage and high treason)
- June 1950 process with the National Socialist MEP **Milada Horaková**

- **Show Trials/Political Trials/Monster Trials:**  
against priest, diplomats, officers, participants of resistance, Communist Party members,...
- Public trial in which the judicial authorities have already determined the guilt of the defendant. The actual trial has as its only goal to present the accusation and the verdict to the public as an impressive example and as a warning to other would-be dissidents or transgressors
- **Political Trials/Show Trials/Monster Trials**

- In a farewell letter to his family, written the night before his execution, he wrote:

*"I am sure that this is not a judicial error but a political murder."*



- **General Heliodor Pika**



- <http://www.ustrcr.cz/en/milada-horakova-en>

- **Milada Horáková**



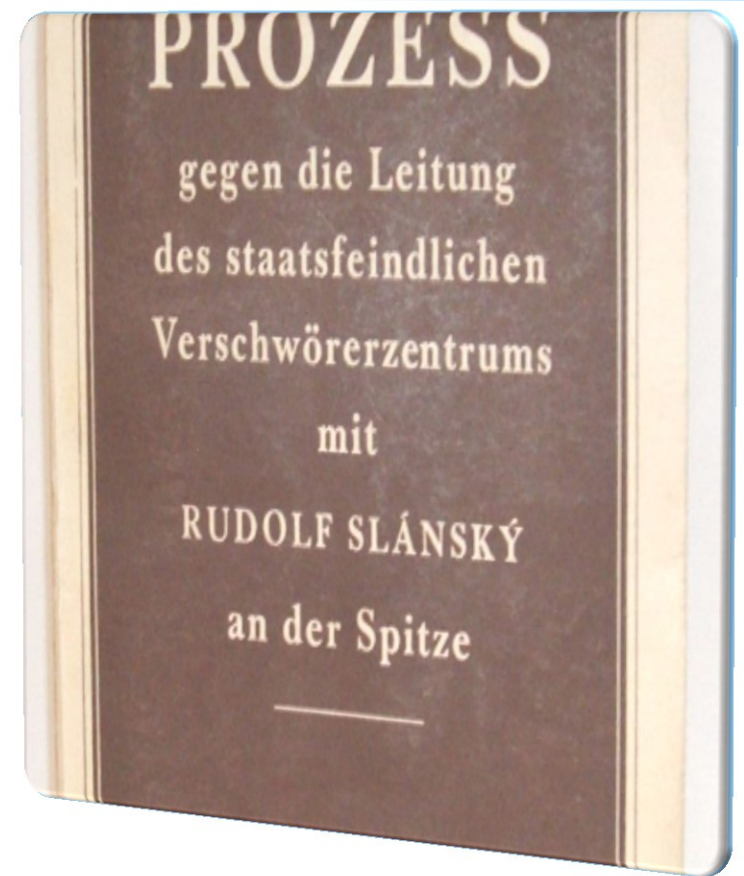
# • Dr. Milada Horáková

- Milada Horáková along with others was sentenced to death and despite the protests of prominent foreign figures e.g. Albert Einstein, Winston Churchill or Eleanor Roosevelt, (contrived conspiracy and treason), **judicial murder**
- <http://www.radio.cz/en/section/special/olga-hruba-supporter-of-milada-horakova-and-campaigner-for-religious-freedom>



# ● 1950<sub>s</sub>

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8tNMgCGahyM>
- Political trials: later also against Communists – **Rudolf Slanský**
- Economy: central planning, tasks that have to be fulfilled were included in the five-year plans, collectivization, decline in living standards
- 1953 monetary reform
- 1953 † **Klement Gottwald**
- President of Czechoslovakia **Antonín Zápotocký**



- The official 1953 protocol, printed in Prague, in at least seven languages

# • **First Crisis in Soviet Block**

- After J.V. Stalin death 1953 – hope for change
- Growing dissatisfaction
- Demonstration: raise (salary), enough food, trouble-free supply
- Slowly began to manifest itself incidents of political dissent
- These conflicts were compounded by fighting Stalin's followers (after his death in Soviet Union)

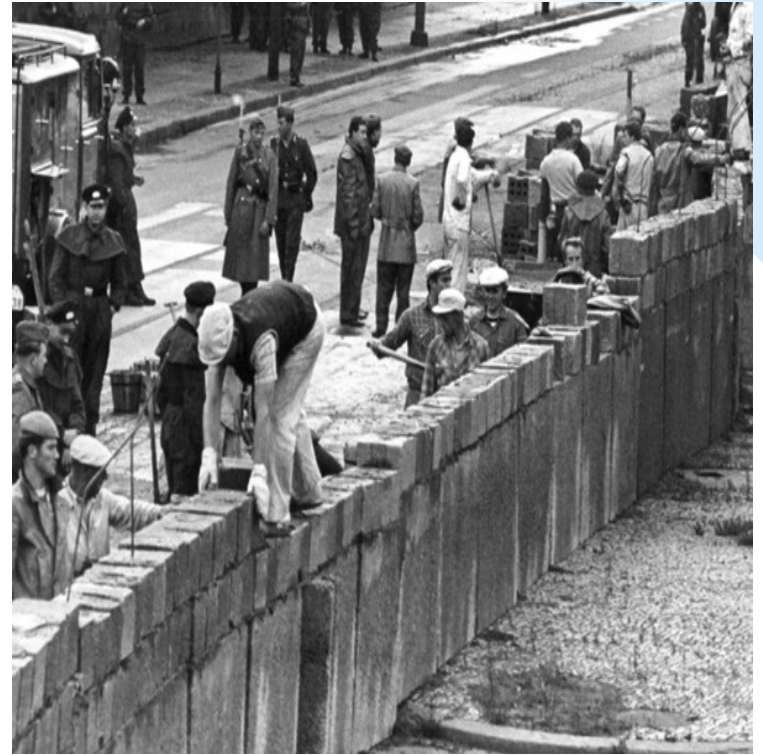
# • J. V. Stalin's death

- J. V. Stalin died in 1953
- 1953 and 1958 **Nikita Khrushchev** outmaneuvered his rivals and achieved power in the Soviet Union
- March 1956 N. Khrushchev denounced J. V. Stalin's cult of personality at the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party
- De-Stalinization
- In the same month as N. Khrushchev's speech, as unrest and desire for reform and change among both intellectuals and workers was beginning to surface throughout the Eastern Block, period of the changes

## • Czechoslovakia and GDR

- First signs of dissatisfaction with the low standard of living, cultural bankruptcies and brutal case of political persecution
- **Czechoslovakia:** monetary reform 30<sup>th</sup> May 1953 - devaluation savings, increased food prices, clothing, and other goods and also meant a crisis of confidence the population
- **GDR:** expression of discontent among Berlin construction workers – 17<sup>th</sup> June 1953 – strike - riots spread. Workers' uprising was stopped by Soviet tanks and state of emergency
- Walter Ulbricht - General Secretary and President of the National Council - repressive measures - continuous flow of refugees to the West: 1949 – 1961 from GDR to West – 2, 700, 000 (well educated - top experts from all sectors) August 1961 – construction on **Berlin Wall** – as prevention

# ● Berlin Wall



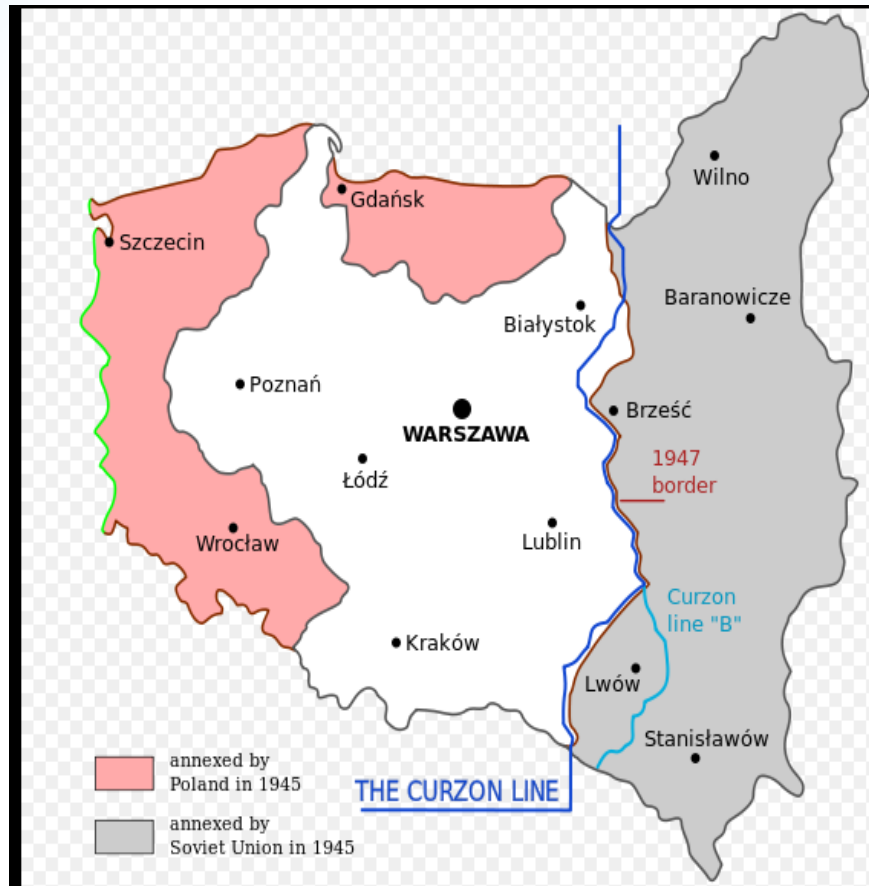
- The **Warsaw Pact**, formally the **Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation, and Mutual Assistance** - collective defence treaty among the Soviet Union and seven other Soviet satellite states in Central and Eastern Europe during the Cold War
- The Warsaw Pact was the military complement to the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CoMEcon), the regional economic organization for the communist states of Central and Eastern Europe. The Warsaw Pact was created in reaction to the integration of West Germany into NATO

- **Warsaw Pact, 1955**

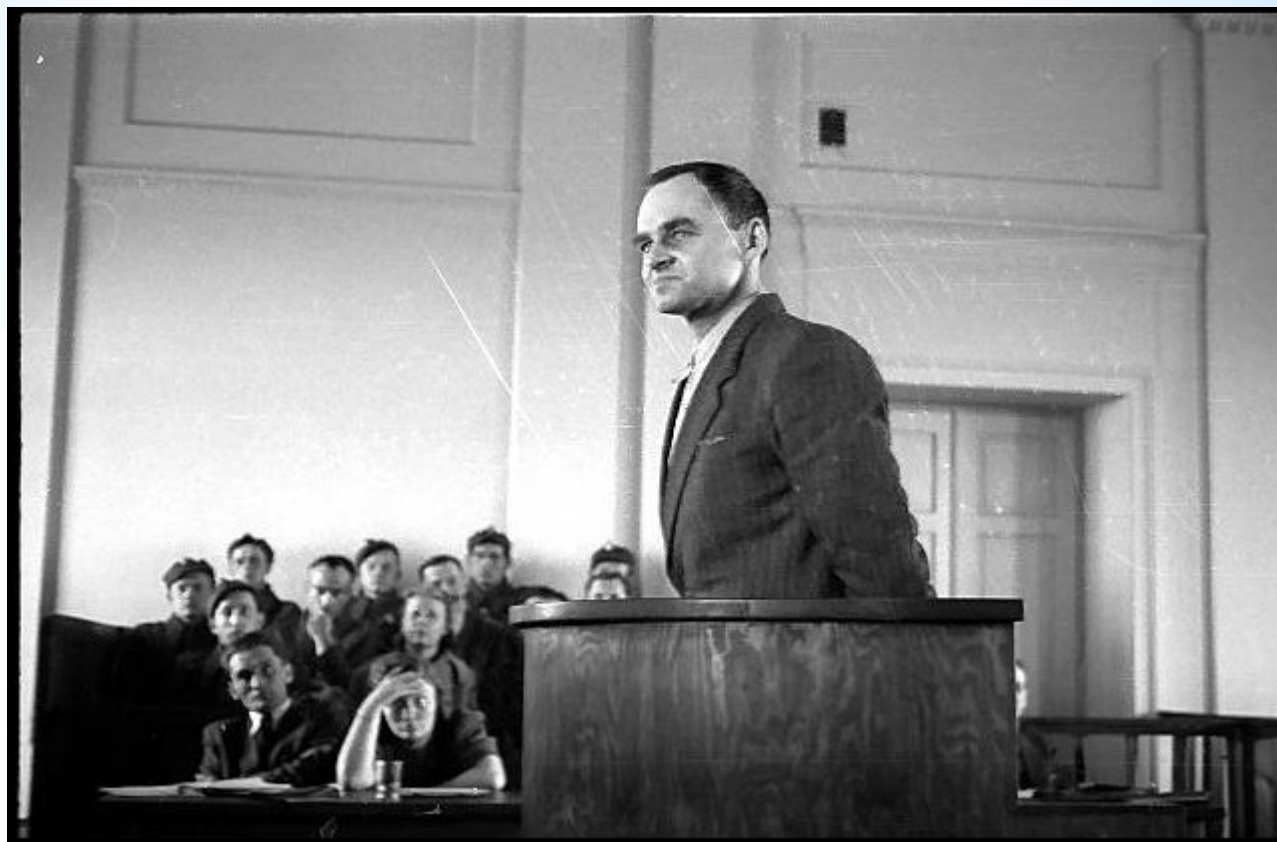


# ● Poland

- 1945 – 1952 Republic of Poland; 1952 – 1989 Polish People's Republic
- After WWII – most powerful **Polish Workers' Party** (*Polska Partia Robotnicza*; PPR) under **Władysław Gomułka** and **Bolesław Bierut**
- 1946 a national plebiscite, known as the "*3 times YES*" referendum (questions about the Senate, national industries and western borders), was held first, instead of the parliamentary elections (nationalization of industry and state control of economic activity in general, land reform, and a unicameral national parliament - Sejm)
- The Communists consolidated power by gradually whittling away the rights of non-Communists, particularly by suppressing the leading opposition party – **Stanisław Mikołajczyk's** Polish People's Party (PSL)
- Political trials: e.g. **Witold Pilecki** (the organizer of the Auschwitz resistance); many resistance fighters were murdered extrajudicially, or forced to exile
- 1947 first parliamentary elections (results were adjusted by J.V. Stalin himself to suit the communists, whose bloc claimed 80% of the votes) → GB and US governments protested the call for its blatant violations of the Yalta and Potsdam accords



- **Poland: territorial changes of Poland immediately after World War II**



• **Witold Pilecki**

# ● Poland

- The rigged elections effectively ended the multiparty system in Poland's politics
- Many opposition members, including **Stanisław Mikołajczyk** left the country
- Western governments did not protest, which led free-spirited Poles to speak about a continued "*Western betrayal*" regarding Central Europe
- In the same year, the new Legislative Sejm created the Small Constitution of 1947
- Over the next two years, the Communists monopolized their political power in Poland
- PAX Association created in 1947, attempted to divide the Catholic movement and promote a communist rule-friendly, collaborationist church.
- 1953 Primate of Poland, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński was placed under house arrest
- In the early 1950s, the war against religion by the secret police led to the arrest and torture of hundreds of Polish religious personalities, culminating in the **Show Trial** of the *Kraków Curia*. Government produced a list of regime-approved bishops

# ● Poland

- In 1948 Communists and Józef Cyrankiewicz's own faction of Polish Socialist Party joined ranks to form the **Polish United Workers' Party** in power for the next four decades
- Poland became a *de facto* single-party state, and a satellite state of the Soviet Union
- Only two other parties were allowed to exist legally: United People's Party (small farmers' party) and the Democratic Party
- A period of Sovietization and Stalinism started
- 1953 Soviet-style secret police and the central security office *Urząd Bezpieczeństwa* grew to around 30,000 agents
- Public prosecutors and judges as well as functionaries of the MBP, *Służba Bezpieczeństwa* and the GZI WP military police engaged in acts recognized by international law as crimes against humanity and crimes against peace (e.g. was the torture and execution of seven members of the 4th Headquarters of the combatant post-Home Army Freedom and Independence (WiN) organization in Warsaw)

# ● Poland

- Mass arrests continued during the early 1950s - October 1950, 5,000 people were arrested in one night, in the so-called "*Operation K*"
- New Constitution of July 1952 was promulgated and the state officially became the **Polish People's Republic**
- In 1952 over 21,000 people were arrested, and according to official data, by the second half of 1952 there were 49,500 political prisoners being held
- Former Home Army commander **Emil Fieldorf** was subjected to several years of brutal persecution in the Soviet Union and Poland before being executed in February 1953
- Resistance to USSR and Polish Stalinists was widespread among not only the general population but also the PZPR ranks
- The Church, subjected to partial property confiscations, remained largely intact, the marginalized to a considerable degree intelligentsia retained its potential to affect future reforms
- Peasantry avoided wholesale collectivization and remnants of private enterprise survived

# ● Poland

- J.V. Stalin died in 1953 - followed by a partial thaw: Ministry of Public Security was abolished in December 1954; **W. Gomułka** and his associates were freed from confinement, censorship was slightly relaxed
- 1956 March **B. Bierut** was succeeded by **Edward Ochab** as first secretary
- 20th Congress launched also a process of partial democratisation of Polish political and economic life, **E. Ochab** engaged in reforms intended to promote industrial decentralization and improve living standards
- The number of security agents was cut band, by a widespread amnesty, 35,000 detainees across the entire country were released. 9,000 imprisoned for political reasons were freed in all
- Gradual liberalizing changes took place between **J. V. Stalin's** death in 1953 and the Polish October of 1956

- Another crisis of communist regime after the XX Congress – February 1956 - revealed of the bloodiest sides of Stalinist regime brought in all the countries of the Soviet block profound moral and ideological crisis.
- Poland: assassinated of polish communist leaders in soviet prison (before War) - strengthening opposition (center: catholic church) and weakened Communist regime and hatred from WWII for Soviet War crimes in Poland.

- **Polish October**



# • Polish October

- For the People's Republic of Poland **1956** was a year of transition
- June 1956 workers in Poznań went on strike and rioted in response to a cut in wages and changed working conditions. Workers' uprising, violent suppression, 50 people died
- The Poznań revolt's lasting impact was that it caused a deeper and more liberal realignment within the Polish communist party and its relationship to Moscow
- In the Communist Party and among the intellectuals demands calling for wider reforms of the Stalinist system
- All over country: formed Workers' councils
- Crisis in Communist Party: Neo-Stalinist x Reformists
- Realizing the need for new leadership - became known as the **Polish October**
- **Polish October** - also known as **October 1956**, **Polish thaw**, or **Gomułka's thaw**, marked a change in the politics of Poland 1956
- For the People's Republic of Poland, 1956 was a year of transition (international situation significantly weakened the hard-line Stalinist faction in Poland; Polish communist leader Bolesław Bierut died in March; it was three years since J.V. Stalin had died and his successor at the Soviet Union's helm, Nikita Khrushchev, denounced him in February)

# • Polish October

- Protests by workers in June in Poznań had highlighted the people's dissatisfaction with their situation.
- Confrontation culminated – October 1956
- Leader of Polish United Workers Party after 8 years of prison – Władysław Gomułka
- Situation was dramatically
- Even N.S. Khrushchev came to Poland, soviet tanks, demonstration in streets, ...
- In October, the events set in motion resulted in the rise in power of the reformers' faction, led by Władysław Gomułka
- After brief, but tense, negotiations, the Soviets gave permission for W. Gomułka to stay in control and made several other concessions resulting in greater autonomy for the Polish government. For Polish citizens this meant a temporary liberalization
- Eventually though, hopes for full liberalization were proven false, as W. Gomułka's regime became more oppressive. Nonetheless, the era of Stalinization in Poland had ended

- *"...who will dare raise his hand against the people's rule may be sure that... the authorities will chop off his hand."*

Prime Minister J. Cyrankiewicz in his speech

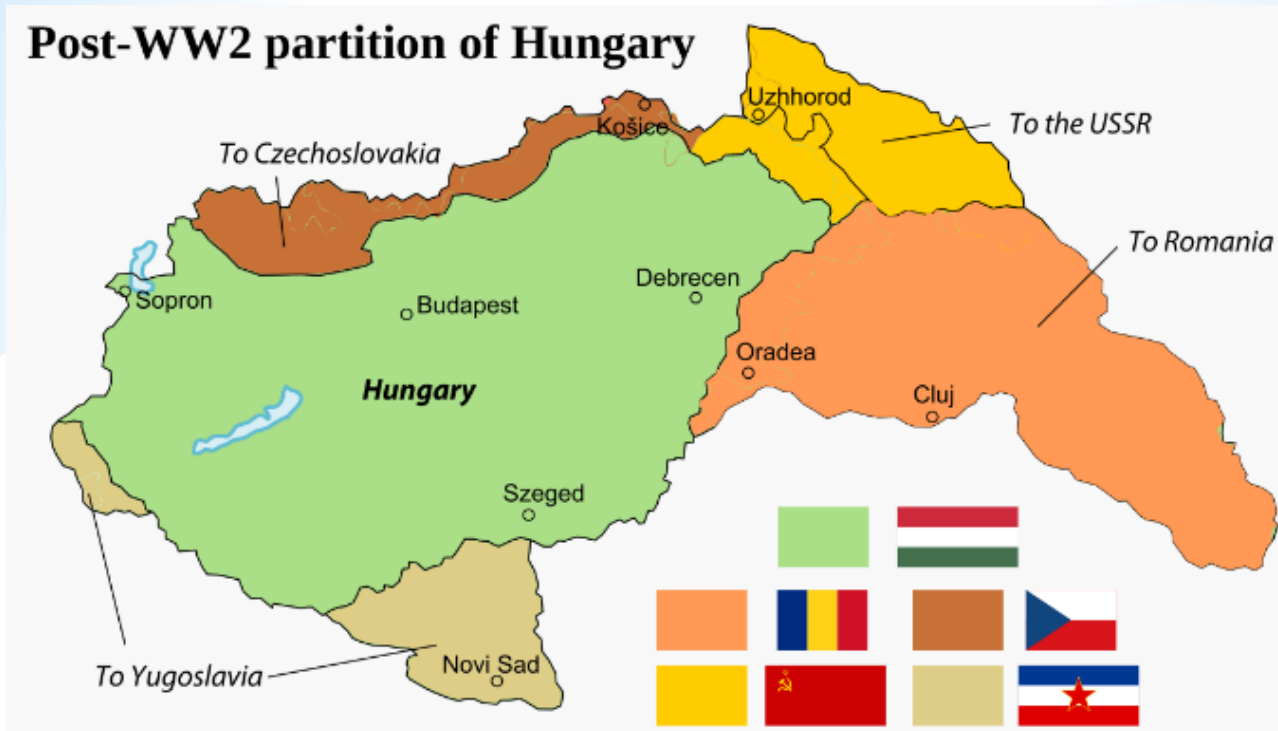
## • Polish October

- Changes: soviet marshal Rokossovskij left Polish army, some Catholic priests were released, relaxation of censorship
- Economical changes: small private business, agricultural cooperatives – canceled, 87% of farmland – private again
- 1957 - restoration of censorship and artistic and scientific life again under strict control of Communist Party and Workers' councils were closed
- W. Gomulka disappointed hopes of his followers, was unable to resist Soviet pressure
- Only: countryside – farmland private and Catholic church remained a privileged position
- **Democratization process failed!**

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ubm6AnoUZBQ>



## Post-WW2 partition of Hungary



- Map of Hungary after WWII

# • 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**

# • 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)
- **Erő 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

# • Hungarian Revolution

- **Polish October** - information about events in Poland led to a wave of discontent
- **23<sup>rd</sup> 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 23<sup>rd</sup> 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 24<sup>th</sup> October 1956 and Soviet tanks occupied militarily significant points
- 25<sup>th</sup> 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
- 1<sup>st</sup> 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
- 4<sup>th</sup> 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**

# ● Readings

- Feis, H.: *Between War and Peace: The Potsdam Conference*. Greenwood Publishing Group, 1983.
- Roberts, G.: *Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953*. Yale University Press, 2006.
- Kaplan, K.: *The Short March: The Communist Takeover in Czechoslovakia, 1945-1948*. C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 1987.
- Zeman, Z.: *The Life of Edvard Beneš, 1884-1948: Czechoslovakia in Peace and War*. Clarendon Press, 1997.