

# FIDELITY OR FURY? A STUDY OF EAST GERMAN, HUNGARIAN, AND POLISH LOYALTY TO THE SOVIET UNION DURING THE EARLY COLD WAR

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Throughout the Cold War, the world waited for the Soviet Union and its Eastern Bloc allies to instigate an armed conflict with the West. Yet a military confrontation in Europe never materialized. The two most common explanations as to why Soviet leaders allowed the Cold War to remain “cold” are that they recognized the catastrophic ramifications of nuclear war and believed capitalist nations would collapse naturally due to their underlying ideological flaws.

In 1951 and 1952, Joseph Stalin armed his Eastern European satellites. But following Stalin’s death, three of these nations quickly revolted against Moscow. These uprisings led the Soviets to realize that their allies were not reliable, giving rise to another possible reason why they let the Cold War stay cold: *the Soviet Union was not willing to invade Western Europe because it knew that it could not count on the loyalty of its satellite soldiers or civilians.*

Eastern European nations could have used war as an opportunity to rebel, not only costing Moscow millions of soldiers, but also crippling its supply lines to Western Europe. Dr. Pakh Tibor, a Hungarian soldier during World War II and a 1956 revolutionary, said in an interview that “the majority of the military was not loyal to the Soviet Union,” and “of course the Russians knew the Hungarian army would not fight for them – they had spies everywhere.”<sup>1</sup> Soviet intelligence networks and Eastern European rebellions forced Moscow to recognize this disloyalty, making an invasion of Western Europe too big of a risk to take. Yet the Soviets continued to hang the threat of war over the West, which may have been one of history’s greatest bluffs.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Pakh Tibor, Interview conducted in Budapest, Hungary, by the author, 12 March 2015.

American intelligence would have been tasked with unearthing this bluff, but Moscow hid it well. Former CIA Director Allen Dulles admitted in 1953 that his Agency's understanding of the Soviet Union was crippled by "shortcomings of a serious nature."<sup>2</sup> While discussing the time period with Donald Gregg, who served in the CIA from 1951 until 1982 and then as National Security Advisor to George H.W. Bush, he acknowledged, "The Agency missed most of the big calls on the Soviet Union during the early Cold War, the largely unexamined assumption being that the Warsaw Pact was far more monolithically loyal than it really was."<sup>3</sup>

It took the United States decades to catch on. A report from the Office of Technology Assessment dated 1987 finally explained, "Questions have been raised as to whose side the East Europeans would fight on should hostilities begin."<sup>4</sup> America may have misjudged the loyalty of Eastern Europe for decades, but the Soviet Union did not. Former Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Russia on the National Security Council Thomas Graham said, "There definitely would have been Soviet doubts about the capabilities and loyalties of most satellite countries, particularly in an offensive operation."<sup>5</sup> A CIA publication dated 1983 and recently declassified also suggests that the Soviets were aware of this disloyalty early on. While describing Eastern European revolts from the 1950's, the report states, "Soviet armed might or the threat of it has been required to quell internal disorders," which "undoubtedly contributes to their concern when assessing the overall reliability of their Allies." To the Soviets, East Germany remained a "recent enemy" and Poland and Hungary had become "suspect allies."<sup>6</sup>

The cases of East Germany, Hungary, and Poland are examined as a proxy for the Eastern Bloc theory as a whole herein. This analysis will attempt to prove that: 1) These nations deeply resented the Soviet Union; and 2) After the revolts of 1953 and 1956, Moscow fully recognized the magnitude of their animosity and its implications on their reliability as allies.

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen Kinzer, *The Brothers: John Foster Dulles, Allen Dulles, and Their Secret World War* (New York: Times Books, 2013), 155.

<sup>3</sup> Donald Gregg, Interview conducted in Armonk, New York, by the author, 15 March 2014.

<sup>4</sup> John Gibbons, *New Technology for NATO: Implementing Follow-on Forces Attack*, (Washington D.C: U.S Government Printing Office, 1987.), Office of Technology Assessment, June 1987, (accessed February 22, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Graham, Interview conducted at Yale University by the author, 22 February 2015

<sup>6</sup> "Military Reliability of the Soviet Union's Warsaw Pact Allies," *CIA Historical Review Program* (1983): 1-10.

## **Part I: World War II - "Liberation"**

The resentment that would have caused soldiers in Hungary, East Germany, and Poland to not remain loyal to the Soviet Union originated during and immediately after World War II. The first impression is often the one that counts the most, and the Soviet Union did not make a good one. While moving across Eastern Europe, the Red Army destroyed, stole, raped, and, in Poland, infamously murdered thousands of officers in cold blood. Once the war ended, millions of ethnic Germans were forced to undergo brutal migrations, and thousands of Poles, Hungarians, and East Germans were imprisoned. These actions were all supported by Moscow, and had a lasting impact on the way in which the citizens of these three nations viewed the Soviet Union.

### **Destruction, Theft, and Rape**

As the soldiers of the Red Army marched toward Berlin in 1944, they finally had the chance to avenge the 24 million Soviets who had died during World War II. There was unavoidable collateral damage along the way; however, the Red Army subjected these three nations to needless destruction. For example, in the militarily unimportant Polish city of Gniezno, Russian tanks destroyed a thousand year old cathedral, and after capturing the city of Breslau in western Poland, the Red Army promptly burned it to the ground.<sup>7</sup> In Hungary, the Red Army eliminated 40 percent of the nation's non-human wealth between October 1944 and April 1945.<sup>8</sup> But the destruction was most severe in East Germany, as soldiers sought to punish their historic enemy. These violent acts were often inflicted upon innocent civilians, and, in most cases, contrasted starkly with the Anglo-American liberation of Western Europe.

The Red Army stole from the towns that it passed through, at least partly in response to Eastern Europe's high standard of living compared to that of the Soviet Union. Many soldiers believed these countries must have robbed the rest of Europe, so they felt justified in their looting.<sup>9</sup> They took anything that was not rooted to the ground, from liquor, furniture, and bicycles to linens and watches.<sup>10</sup> They robbed warehouses, stores, and private homes, with one Communist informant reporting that the soldiers

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<sup>7</sup> Anne Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956* (New York: Doubleday, 2012), 28.

<sup>8</sup> William A. Bomberger and Gail E. Makinen. "The Hungarian Hyperinflation and Stabilization of 1945-1946," *Journal of Political Economy* 91.5 (1983): 801-810.

<sup>9</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 26-27.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

“take absolutely everything and exchange it for vodka.”<sup>11</sup> As time passed, theft worsened. A report from a Polish Citizen living in Cracow in July 1945 stated, “Occurrences of looting, in daylight as well as during the night, by Soviet soldiers stationed in specific areas or passing through are multiplying,” and, as a result, “the attitude of the civilian population towards the Red Army is deteriorating daily.”<sup>12</sup>

The Red Army unleashed a third form of abuse upon Eastern Europe: mass rape. While destruction and theft are unfortunate aspects of warfare, the systematic mass rape that the Red Army engaged in while moving through Poland, Hungary, and East Germany beginning in January 1944 and ending well after May 1945 was unprecedented. Poland comparatively suffered the least; a few thousand of its women were assaulted.<sup>13</sup> In Hungary, about 250,000 women were raped - 50,000 in Budapest and the balance across the rest of the nation.<sup>14</sup> East Germans were brutalized, with an organized campaign of “gang rape” leading to the sexual abuse of an estimated 2 million women.<sup>15</sup> Tibor described one dark night in Hungary near the end of the war, during which Soviet soldiers forced his mother into an empty home. “We don’t know exactly what happened inside,” he said. “But in the morning she was dead.”<sup>16</sup>

Some soldiers said the rapes never occurred. Others said Eastern European women either consented to have sex with them or did so to infect the Red Army with disease. Boris Slutsky, a poet who travelled with the Red Army in Hungary, explained that the “Hungarian women loved the Russians in their turn,” and even enjoyed being raped.<sup>17</sup> Such attempts at justification show how indifferent the Russians were toward the suffering of their victims.

Their amoral actions had lasting consequences. A Polish soldier explained that he “heard from Poles that the Red Army was regarded in 1944 as an army of liberation, but after their arrival these friendly feelings

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<sup>11</sup> Bartholomew Goldyn, “Disenchanted Voices: Public Opinion in Cracow, 1945-1946,” *East*

*European Quarterly* XXXII.2 (1998): 139-61.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 30.

<sup>14</sup> James Mark, “Remembering Rape: Divided Social Memory and the Red Army in Hungary 1944-1945,” *Past & Present* 188.1 (2005): 133-161.

<sup>15</sup> Adam Jones, “Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction - by Adam Jones.”

*Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction - by Adam Jones*. Routledge, 2006.

<<http://www.genocidetext.net/>>. (accessed June 23, 2013)

<sup>16</sup> Dr. Pakh Tibor, Interview conducted in Budapest, Hungary, by the author, 12 March 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Mark, “Remembering Rape: Divided Social Memory and the Red Army in Hungary 1944-1945,” 133-161.

changed to feelings of hatred [because of the] NKVD (Soviet Secret Police), looting of Polish property, and raping of Polish women.”<sup>18</sup> Worse still, Eastern Europe was falling under the control of Joseph Stalin, who encouraged rape. He famously stated that people should “understand it if a soldier who has crossed thousands of kilometers through blood and fire and death has fun with a woman or takes some trifle.”<sup>19</sup> Innocent Eastern European women were suffering, and the leader of the Soviet Union approved.

### **The Katyn Massacre, the Home Army, and the Warsaw Uprising**

In 1939, the Soviets invaded Poland in concert with the Germans and imprisoned 14,300 military officers, many of whom were fleeing from the Wehrmacht. In 1943, the Nazis found a mass grave in the Katyn Forest filled with thousands of dead Polish officers.<sup>20</sup> Despite Soviet denials, it was widely understood that the NKVD had perpetrated what became known as the Katyn Massacre.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, in eastern Poland, the Soviets deported an estimated 315,000 Poles, arrested 110,000, and executed 30,000 between 1939 and 1941 from a region in which approximately 13 million had lived.<sup>22</sup> The Katyn Massacre and these other brutal actions gave the Polish population powerful reasons to resent the Soviets.

Similar to those executed in the Katyn Forest, members of an underground group known as the Home Army attempted to fight the Nazis. Loyal to the exiled London Government, the Home Army had an estimated 300,000 members in 1944.<sup>23</sup> However, the Soviets did not trust the Home Army, and by July 20, 1944, the NKVD had arrested 6,000 of its members.<sup>24</sup>

The remaining Home Army soldiers desperately launched the Warsaw Uprising on August 1, 1944 to reclaim Warsaw from the Nazis before the Red Army arrived. Rather than help, the Red Army set up camp

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<sup>18</sup> Goldyn, "Disenchanted Voices: Public Opinion in Cracow, 1945-1946," 139-161.

<sup>19</sup> Andrew Roberts, "Stalin's army of rapists: The brutal war crime that Russia and Germany tried to ignore" <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1080493/Stalins-army-rapists-The-brutal-war-crime-Russia-Germany-tried-ignore.html> (accessed November 22, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> Richard Starr, "The Communization of a Captive Nation: Poland, 1944-1947," *Studies on the Soviet Union* 11.4 (1971): 310-320.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*, (New York: Basic Books, 2010) 151.

<sup>23</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 91.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

at the Vistula River and watched as the Nazis slaughtered 200,000 Poles.<sup>25</sup> The Allies airlifted supplies to Warsaw, but Stalin would not allow their planes to refuel on Soviet territory.<sup>26</sup> In bulletins, Home Army leaders explained that they had received little assistance from the Soviets but large amounts from the Anglo-American effort.<sup>27</sup>

This anti-Soviet atmosphere led many to support the West. A British agent in Poland explained in 1945: "In general, the intervention of the allies is counted on. The general opinion is characterized by the often-expressed view that we have lived through five years of German occupation, and we shall also live through these few months to independence."<sup>28</sup> If this account is accurate, a large number of Poles were waiting for the West to save them from Soviet occupation.

### **Mass Migrations**

Following World War II, many Eastern Europeans felt unsafe around ethnic Germans.<sup>29</sup> Under Soviet direction, Eastern Europe rallied around the idea of sending these ethnic Germans to East or West Germany. Between 1945 and 1950, 12 to 14 million German-speaking civilians, consisting mostly of women, children, and the elderly, were forcibly removed from Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia, and western Poland.<sup>30</sup> An estimated 400,000 of them died in the process.<sup>31</sup>

Polish leaders told soldiers to celebrate "the expulsion of German filth from Polish land" and that "every officer, every soldier should be aware of the fact that today he fulfills a historic mission, for which generations have been waiting."<sup>32</sup> A remarkable 75.9 percent of Hungarians either approved of or wanted to intensify German deportations.<sup>33</sup> Czechoslovakian President Edvard Benes claimed that Germans had behaved so cruelly that they "must pay with a great and

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<sup>25</sup> Staar, "The Communization of a Captive Nation: Poland, 1944-1947," 310-320.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 95.

<sup>28</sup> Public Records Office, Foreign Office, London, England, 371 47578 N155476G55 (Accessed September 15, 2014)

<sup>29</sup> R.M Douglas, "The European Atrocity You Never Heard About" <http://chronicle.com/article/The-European-Atrocity-You/132123/> (Accessed October 24, 2012)

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 121-122.

<sup>33</sup> A.f. Noskova, "Migration of the Germans after the Second World War: Political and Psychological Aspects," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 16.1-2 (2000): 96-114.

severe punishment.”<sup>34</sup> In the Benes Decrees, ratified in March 1946, Czechs were given permission to seize German property, evict German residents, revoke German citizenship, and resettle German land.<sup>35</sup> As hundreds of thousands of ethnic Germans left Czechoslovakia, many despaired, leading 5,558 of them to commit suicide in 1946 alone.<sup>36</sup>

By 1950, 16.5 percent of West Germany and 25 percent of East Germany were comprised of refugees.<sup>37</sup> Some hoped to return to the homes they had abandoned in the East, but unlike Germans in Poland following World War I, returning was never an option. Instead, they had to make the best of the situation imposed upon them by the rest of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

Moscow supported these migrations. Stalin brazenly told Czech leaders to “throw them (the Sudeten Germans) out. Now they will learn themselves what it means to rule over someone else.” He also told Poland to “create such conditions for the Germans that they want to escape themselves.”<sup>38</sup> Stalin had approved of the mass rape of 2 million German women as well as the forced migration of more than 12 million ethnic Germans. Such harsh treatment was shortsighted, as the Soviets wanted, and, in 1952, would begin to rely upon, East German military support.

### **Widespread Arrests**

The secret police targeted any potential anti-Soviets to solidify Moscow’s control over Eastern Europe. Arthur Lane, US ambassador to Poland, explained that in 1945 “anyone not supporting the government was in danger of arrest.”<sup>39</sup>

Between January and April of 1945, the NKVD arrested 215,540 Eastern Europeans, including 138,000 East Germans and 38,000 Poles, with many civilians simply disappearing overnight.<sup>40</sup> In 1945, 140,000-200,000 Hungarians were imprisoned. Often, the Hungarian secret police arrested civilians for the sole purpose of meeting their quotas.<sup>41</sup> They even arrested proven antifascists, including those who did not speak a word of German. One Hungarian remarked, “Anyone who had ever worked for or

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<sup>34</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 119.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>37</sup> Rainer Schulze, "The Politics of Memory: Flight and Expulsion of German Populations after the Second World War and German Collective Memory," *National Identities* 8.4 (2006): 367-82.

<sup>38</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 125.

<sup>39</sup> Goldyn, "Disenchanted Voices: Public Opinion in Cracow, 1945-1946," 139-161.

<sup>40</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 193.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

praised any of the prewar governments, party leaders, or politicians was at risk.”<sup>42</sup> Fifteen year-old Gisela Gneist, for example, started a club for democracy. Soon afterward, she was arrested and jailed. Gneist was beaten before finally admitting to leading counter-revolutionary activities, resulting in her incarceration.<sup>43</sup>

An additional 150,000 East Germans were jailed between 1946 and 1953, a third of whom ultimately died in prison. To be clear, they were not murdered – horrid conditions led to their deaths.<sup>44</sup> Because of these seemingly arbitrary arrests, the citizens of these three nations grew to further distrust the Communists. In September 1945, a delegate at a district conference in Cracow declared, “If there is a democracy, then the prisons should be set free.”<sup>45</sup> But these three nations were not democratic, and innocent civilians were left in prison for years.

### **Conclusion**

Wartime abuse strongly impacted the way in which Poles, Hungarians, and East Germans viewed the Soviet Union. A Polish security officer explained in February of 1945 that Red Army soldiers “behave toward Poles in a manner that is harming Polish-Soviet friendship and weakens the feelings of gratitude the people of Poznan had for their liberators.”<sup>46</sup>

Eastern Europeans had hoped for heroes. Instead, they gained new oppressors. An unidentified woman from Berlin explained in 1946 that Soviet violence added to the “fear and mistrust with which we approach everybody who wears a certain uniform.”<sup>47</sup>

East Germans, Hungarians, and Poles witnessed the brutality of the Red Army first hand. Henry Minc, Minister of Polish Trade and Industry, explained on July 12, 1945 that due to “incidents of marauding, the presence of a large army on a small area of territory, and the centuries-old hatred toward Russia, a black tide of hatred towards the Red Army is rising.”<sup>48</sup> As upcoming elections would soon illustrate, this acrimony did not fade with time.

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>45</sup> Goldyn, “Disenchanted Voices: Public Opinion in Cracow, 1945-1946,” 139-161.

<sup>46</sup> Andrew Roberts, “Stalin’s army of rapists: The brutal war crime that Russia and Germany tried to ignore” <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1080493/Stalins-army-rapists-The-brutal-war-crime-Russia-Germany-tried-ignore.html> (accessed November 22, 2012)

<sup>47</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 30-31.

<sup>48</sup> Goldyn, “Disenchanted Voices: Public Opinion in Cracow, 1945-1946,” 139-161.

## **Part II: The Illusion of Political Loyalty**

Communist governments took control of Poland, Hungary, and East Germany following World War II. To the West, it appeared as if Eastern Europe had united under communism. But the Soviets knew that these governments had taken power through violence and intimidation. When fair elections were held, the Communists did not win a single one. The alternative political factions that did win these elections were quickly eliminated. Deprived of the protection of a true multi-party political system, anti-Communists were unable to safely voice their opinions. This cowering of the civilian population led to the illusion of Communist support within these three nations, even though their citizens truly supported other parties.

### **Poland**

The fall of the Home Army forced Poles to accept that armed resistance was pointless for the time being. The secret police was too adept at finding and eliminating military opposition. But the Polish People's Party (PSL) did give citizens an opportunity to resist through elections.

Stanislaw Mikolajczyk, President of the PSL prior to the war, became Prime Minister of the exiled London Government in 1943. In the spring of 1945, Stalin invited him to return to Poland to help lead the provisional government.<sup>49</sup> Anti-Communists criticized him for returning, because doing so increased the legitimacy of the interim government. But to Mikolajczyk, he was returning to save Poland from communism.<sup>50</sup>

Thousands gathered to greet Mikolajczyk upon his arrival in Warsaw on June 27, 1945. Citizens cheered, followed, and in some instances lifted him into the air in celebration. Mikolajczyk himself explained that he would "never forget these starved but hopeful people, men and women who lifted the entire car on their backs and carried it."<sup>51</sup> According to a British informant, in April 1945 "Mikolajczyk's name still carried the same prestige and he could count on the support of the great bulk of the peasants."<sup>52</sup>

In response to Mikolajczyk's popularity, the NKVD tried to intimidate him. For example, one night a soldier with a machine gun fired a warning shot at Mikolajczyk as he walked home from a meeting in

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<sup>49</sup> Staar, "The Communization of a Captive Nation: Poland, 1944-1947," 310-320.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Goldyn, "Disenchanted Voices: Public Opinion in Cracow, 1945-1946," 139-161.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

Cracow. Despite this show of force, Mikolajczyk and his followers continued to lead a brave campaign against the Communist Party.<sup>53</sup> All anti-Communists in Poland, from socialists to nationalists, were behind him. Jan Frey-Bielecki, Chief of Security in Cracow, admitted that the Communists were often “treated as representatives of a foreign power,” and even Wladyslaw Gomulka, the Party’s First Secretary, admitted on July 12, 1945, “In Polish Society, old anti-Russian traditions and new anti-Soviet feelings run deep.”<sup>54</sup>

The PSL famously published the popular *Gazeta Ludowa* (People’s Paper). Although 500,000 Poles wanted a copy, only 70,000 could be printed initially. The paper described the arrests, torture, and mistreatment of Polish citizens and PSL members. It revealed that when Mikolajczyk spoke in parliament, Communists booed so loudly that no one could hear him.<sup>55</sup> These revelations further reduced Communist support, which was exemplified on January 19, 1946 at a workers meeting in Cracow. When a Communist official began to speak, Poles shouted, “We don’t want Communism! Don’t let him talk further!”<sup>56</sup>

The Communist Party wanted to prove that it had more support than the PSL did, so its leaders decided to hold a referendum in the summer of 1946. The referendum asked three questions, and the Communists spread the slogan, *Three Times Yes*, which meant that they wanted all Poles who supported them to vote yes to each question. In retaliation, Mikolajczyk told his supporters to vote no to one of the questions.

The Communists printed 84 million posters, leaflets, and brochures to entice Polish voters. They even arrested citizens who were planning on voting “once no” in a desperate attempt to ensure victory.<sup>57</sup> These overly aggressive policies actually hurt the Communist Party. During a soccer match between Yugoslavia and Poland, Communist representatives briefly spoke of the referendum. The crowd responded by booing and chanting Mikolajczyk’s name.<sup>58</sup>

A remarkable 85.3 percent of eligible voters, or 11 million people, voted in the referendum. The “official” results stated that 68.2 percent of Poles voted yes to the first question, 77.3 percent to the second, and 91.4 percent to the third.<sup>59</sup> But the Communists had manipulated these results.

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<sup>53</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 198.

<sup>54</sup> Goldyn, “Disenchanted Voices: Public Opinion in Cracow, 1945-1946,” 139-161.

<sup>55</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 199.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>59</sup> Goldyn, “Disenchanted Voices: Public Opinion in Cracow, 1945-1946,” 139-161.

The actual data revealed that just 25 percent of Poles voted three times yes. Whether they liked it or not, the Communists now knew that they did not have the support of the Polish population.<sup>60</sup>

The only way for the Communists to achieve total control was to eliminate the PSL.<sup>61</sup> In between the referendum and parliamentary elections, which were held on January 17, 1947, the secret police arrested PSL leaders, held show trials, and interrogated the PSL's press department.<sup>62</sup> The night before the general election, Communist agents spread a rumor that Mikolajczyk was dead, only worsening electoral corruption.<sup>63</sup> On Election Day, soldiers often reviewed votes before they were cast and, in some cases, removed the PSL from the ballot.<sup>64</sup>

The results were predictable, with a reported 80 percent of the vote going to the Communists and just 10 percent going to the PSL.<sup>65</sup> Mikolajczyk believed that he had truly received 65 percent to 85 percent of the vote. Lieutenant Colonel Jozef Swiatlo affirmed Mikolajczyk's suspicions, explaining, "Falsification of election returns in 1947 took place at all levels, from top to bottom."<sup>66</sup> Either way, Mikolajczyk could not change the results. He resigned in protest and Boleslaw Beirut became President. Mikolajczyk then fled to England in October 1947 to escape arrest.<sup>67</sup> With Mikolajczyk gone, the PSL lived on only in name. The Communists had taken power in Poland.

### **Hungary**

The first free elections in Hungary's history were held at the end of 1945. Women, peasants, and the uneducated were allowed to vote. Mátyás Rákosi, the Communist leader in Hungary, expected an electoral victory because unemployment and discontent were high.<sup>68</sup>

The Communist slogans of 1945 focused on patriotism, reconstruction, and unity. The Party's major adversary, the Smallholders Party, attracted those who supported neither communism nor democratic socialism. Although the name suggests an affinity for peasants, the

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<sup>60</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 201.

<sup>61</sup> Staar, "The Communization of a Captive Nation: Poland, 1944-1947," 310-320.

<sup>62</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 204.

<sup>63</sup> George Sakwa and Martin Crouch, "Sejm Elections in Communist Poland: An Overview and a Reappraisal," *British Journal of Political Science* 8.04 (1978): 403.

<sup>64</sup> Staar, "The Communization of a Captive Nation: Poland, 1944-1947," 310-320.

<sup>65</sup> Goldyn, "Disenchanted Voices: Public Opinion in Cracow, 1945-1946," 139-161.

<sup>66</sup> Staar, "The Communization of a Captive Nation: Poland, 1944-1947," 310-320.

<sup>67</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 205.

<sup>68</sup> Paul Ignotus, "The First Two Communist Takeovers of Hungary: 1919 and 1948," *Studies on the Soviet Union* 11.4 (1971): 338-352.

Smallholders Party primarily represented the middle class. Skilled workers benefited most from its policies, but farmers, workers, and bourgeoisie who believed in a compromise between capitalism and communism also joined.<sup>69</sup> According to Tibor, whose father was an officer in the Smallholders Party, Hungarians opposed to communism usually sided with the Smallholders.<sup>70</sup>

In a municipal election held on October 7, 1945, the Smallholders Party received more than half of the vote. In response, Rákosi was as “pale as a corpse, and sank into his chair without saying a word.” In the November 1945 national elections, the Communists received just 17 percent of the vote versus 57 percent for the Smallholders.<sup>71</sup> The success of the Smallholders Party was largely considered a result of the abuse that the Red Army had inflicted on Hungary.<sup>72</sup>

Upon the victory of the Smallholders Party, Zoltán Tildy, the Party’s leader, asked for half of the seats in the cabinet and control of the Interior Ministry. Under instructions from Moscow, Rákosi informed Tildy that the 17 percent of the vote that the Communists had received represented the strongest force in the country: the working class.<sup>73</sup> Consequently, he reasoned that the Interior Ministry should be put under Communist control. Tildy agreed out of fear for his safety.

After Tildy’s capitulation, Rákosi began to “slice off” the Smallholders Party “like pieces of salami.”<sup>74</sup> He first eliminated the “right wing” Smallholders, who consisted of outspoken Communist opponents. He then targeted the bulk of the Party through a false conspiracy. Béla Kovács, one of the Party’s leaders, was accused of taking part in the plot. The Communist Minister of the Interior, László Rajk, prepared to arrest him. Rather than wait for Rajk, Soviet police seized Kovács. This was one of the few times that the Russians directly interfered in Hungarian affairs, and their actions proved worthwhile. The Smallholders were intimidated, leading Prime Minister Ferenc Nagy and many of his followers to flee Hungary in May 1947.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ignotus, “The First Two Communist Takeovers of Hungary: 1919 and 1948,” 338-352.

<sup>70</sup> Dr. Pákh Tibor, Interview conducted in Budapest, Hungary, by the author, 12 March 2015.

<sup>71</sup> Ullin McStea, “Slowing Sovietization: The Labour Party, the Hungarian Social Democrats and the Elections of 1947,” *European History Quarterly* (2006): 350-68.

<sup>72</sup> Ignotus, “The First Two Communist Takeovers of Hungary: 1919 and 1948,” 338-352.

<sup>73</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 208.

<sup>74</sup> Ignotus, “The First Two Communist Takeovers of Hungary: 1919 and 1948,” 338-352.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

Following Nagy's escape, an election was held on August 31, 1947, during which 700,000-800,000 Hungarians were barred from voting. The Communists won by default. Their major opponent, the Social Democrats, eventually ceased to be an independent political force, and all other opposition resulted in imprisonment. So again, from a political standpoint, the Communist Party had achieved total control.<sup>76</sup>

### **East Germany**

A similar story unfolded in East Germany. The Communist Party had forcibly merged with the Social Democratic Party in 1946, and was known as the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED).<sup>77</sup> Elections were to be held to satisfy the West and legitimize the SED.<sup>78</sup>

Moscow commandeered the SED's electoral campaign. The leader of election propaganda, Colonel Tiul'panov, explained in internal communication that, "All of the SED's decisions must be agreed upon by the leadership of the Soviet Military Administration."<sup>79</sup> The Soviets were determined to win, so they temporarily halted reparations, sent more raw materials to East Germany, and increased food rations.<sup>80</sup> The SED also printed more than a million leaflets to strengthen its popularity. While campaigning, SED officials rarely mentioned communism or the Soviet Union, because they understood that many East Germans resented the USSR.

The Christian Democratic Party (CDU), a strong adversary to the Communists, ran with a primarily religious platform. Jakob Kaiser led the party. His major goals were to make Christianity the heart of German culture, care for German refugees, limit Soviet land reform, and resist one party rule.<sup>81</sup> The Soviet Military Administration in East Germany delayed the establishment of local Christian Democratic Party organizations, so only 2,100 out of 11,600 East German communities had CDU representatives by 1946.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 209.

<sup>77</sup> Hans W. Schoenberg, "The Partition of Germany and the Neutralization of Austria," *Studies on the Soviet Union* 11.4 (1971): 321-327.

<sup>78</sup> Stefan Kreuzberger, "The Soviet Military Administration and East German Elections, Autumn 1946," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 45.1 (1999): 89-98.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 216.

<sup>81</sup> Sean Brennan, *The Politics of Religion in Soviet-Occupied Germany: The Case of Berlin-Brandenburg 1945-1949*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2011), 503.

<sup>82</sup> Kreuzberger, "The Soviet Military Administration and East German Elections, Autumn 1946," 89-98.

Elections were held on October 20, 1946. The Communists did not win a majority at the regional level, so they were forced to share power with the CDU. The SED had hoped for a firm victory, but they received barely 50 percent of the vote. In Berlin, the Social Democrats had not yet been absorbed by the SED. They won 49 percent of the vote, with the CDU winning 22.2 percent, followed by the SED's 19.8 percent.<sup>83</sup> To the Communists, these results were a disaster. When comparing 1946 electoral results to those of 1933, Communist support had actually decreased.<sup>84</sup>

The CDU was slowly dismantled following the 1946 election. Secret policemen began targeting CDU members. In the spring of 1947, CDU leader Manfred Klein was arrested.<sup>85</sup> In March 1948, Ernst Benda, the chairman of the students' association of the CDU, was on the phone with another party member when a third voice spoke into the phone and told him, "Just do be careful."<sup>86</sup> Benda then fled East Germany and did not return for another forty years.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, Jakob Kaiser resigned as the head of the CDU in 1947 and fled to West Berlin in 1948. In the blink of an eye, the leaders of the SED's major opponent were gone.<sup>88</sup>

### **Conclusion**

By the end of 1947, Mikolajczyk had escaped to Britain, Nagy was en route to the United States, and Kaiser was preparing to leave East Germany. It had been less than three years since the end of World War II, yet all political avenues of Communist opposition had ceased to exist.

A majority of Poles, Hungarians, and East Germans had tried to prevent Communists from taking control. They voted against them whenever they had the chance to and rallied around leaders who gave them hope and presented a viable alternative to communism. Unfortunately, mere hope was not enough to stop the might and will of Moscow.

These civilians kept their doubts to themselves and bided their time until an opportunity to replace the Communists presented itself. While an invasion of Western Europe might have presented such an opportunity, revolt was another option. Unsurprisingly, within the next decade, citizens in all three countries would protest against their fraudulently elected governments.

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<sup>83</sup> Schoenberg, "The Partition of Germany and the Neutralization of Austria," 321-327.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 218.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Brennan, *The Politics of Religion in Soviet-Occupied Germany: The Case of Berlin-Brandenburg 1945-1949*, 504.

### **Part III: Destruction of Religious Institutions**

When the Smallholders Party and the PSL were eliminated, Hungarians and Poles could no longer look to politicians for support. Consequently, local priests and church leaders became an alternate source of authority. In East Germany, the CDU was inextricably bound to religion, so when the CDU was attacked, religion was as well.

Communist ideology considered religion to be an opiate that undermined class-consciousness and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Worse yet, Communist leaders believed that religion undermined their power because millions of people looked to their religious leaders for guidance. To gain the loyalty of these civilians and to stay true to their ideology, the Communists targeted religion. They arrested thousands of priests, confiscated church lands, and nationalized church schools, effectively removing religion from public life in just a few years.

Rather than increase Communist support, the suppression of religious institutions only deepened popular resentment. Priests and national religious leaders, most notably József Mindszenty, served as religious martyrs for the millions who adored them, and through their persecution emerged a powerful hatred, shared by millions, of communism and the Soviet Union.

#### **Initial Suppression of Religion**

When the Communists first arrived in Poland, Hungary, and East Germany, they largely left religious institutions alone. Starting in the fall of 1945, however, the Red Army began to arrest Polish priests.<sup>89</sup> In Hungary, the targeting of priests began with the arrest of Father Kiss, who was accused of murdering Red Army soldiers in 1946.<sup>90</sup> In East Germany, the Soviets moved relatively slowly, although some Protestant and Catholic parishes were targeted as early as 1945.<sup>91</sup>

The Communists abandoned the pretense that they had any affinity for the church after elections revealed their unpopularity in 1946 and 1947. They used these elections as an excuse to attack religion, coming to the conclusion that religious leaders were not dying quickly enough and that the church was preventing young citizens from joining the Communist movement.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Michael Szporer, "Managing Religion in Communist-Era Poland: Catholic Priests versus the Secret Police," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 12.3 (2010): 115-120.

<sup>90</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 258.

<sup>91</sup> Brennan, *The Politics of Religion in Soviet-Occupied Germany: The Case of Berlin-Brandenburg 1945—1949*, 502.

<sup>92</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 503.

Unlike in Poland and Hungary, East German elections were directly related to religion. The CDU, led by Jakob Kaiser, was committed to the doctrines of Christian Socialism. As described in the previous section, the Communists were responsible for the Party's downfall.<sup>93</sup>

Land reform offered the Communists an easy way to target religious institutions in Hungary and Poland. For centuries, churches of various faiths had held enormous amounts of land in these two nations, giving them wealth and power. Through extensive reorganization, their land was nationalized and their influence diminished.<sup>94</sup> In Hungary, for example, the government confiscated 75 percent of Roman Catholic land and 50 percent of Protestant land.<sup>95</sup>

Religious youth groups gave the Communists another opportunity to lessen church influence. Approximately 6,500 of Hungary's religious schools were converted into state schools by 1950.<sup>96</sup> In 1947, the SED passed laws that pressured children to abandon CDU youth groups and join the Free German Youth.<sup>97</sup> These students had to choose between religion and education. Many young adults realized how unfair such an ultimatum was, so they fled to West Berlin.<sup>98</sup>

By the early 1950's, thousands of Eastern European priests were incarcerated. In Poland, church property continued to be seized, church publications continued to be limited, and church housing projects continued to be closed.<sup>99</sup> Influential priests like Lajos Ordass and Laszlo Ravasz were in prison, and Catholic charities were under attack. The Catholic charity Caritas, for example, cared for 166,700 orphans and controlled 241 soup kitchens at its peak, but the Communists decided to dismantle it anyway.<sup>100</sup>

### **Cardinal Mindszenty and the Lublin Miracle**

With so many priests in prison, remaining religious leaders became beacons of hope for Eastern Europe. Some of these figures negotiated with their new governments, but others fought. Jozef Mindszenty, appointed Hungarian primate in 1945, led rallies against the

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Szporer, "Managing Religion in Communist-Era Poland: Catholic Priests versus the Secret Police," 115-120.

<sup>95</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 259.

<sup>96</sup> Brennan, *The Politics of Religion in Soviet-Occupied Germany: The Case of Berlin-Brandenburg 1945—1949*, 503.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 504.

<sup>98</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 260.

<sup>99</sup> Szporer, "Managing Religion in Communist-Era Poland: Catholic Priests versus the Secret Police," 115-120.

<sup>100</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 261.

Communist government. Hundreds of thousands of citizens travelled large distances to attend.<sup>101</sup> They watched Mindszenty rebel with excitement and horror, as a Cardinal fought an empire.<sup>102</sup>

Mindszenty spoke out against the closure of church schools, the imprisonment of priests, and the authoritarian government, going so far as to state, "It seems a totalitarian dictatorship is starting to replace the previous one."<sup>103</sup> The government even closed roads and shut down trains in an effort to prevent civilians from attending his speeches.

Despite potential danger, Mindszenty would not negotiate with the Hungarian government. He was finally arrested in December 1948, but his message gave Hungarians hope for years to come and scared Communist regimes all over Eastern Europe. He became one of the first "symbolic" victims of totalitarianism.<sup>104</sup> It was not until 1956, during the Hungarian Revolution, that he was finally released from prison and granted asylum by the United States.

Mindszenty's rallies helped lead to the further suppression of the Hungarian Church. After his arrest, Hungarian bishops were forced to sign a church-state agreement that was harsher than those signed by other Eastern European nations, such as the Polish version, negotiated by the more conciliatory Stefan Wyszynski. A week after the agreement was signed, the state dissolved Hungary's Monastic order, further weakening the Hungarian church.<sup>105</sup>

Behind closed doors, many citizens retained their religious beliefs, as exemplified by Mindszenty's mass rallies and the "Lublin Miracle," which began on July 3, 1949.<sup>106</sup> Rumors spread all around Poland that a statue of the Virgin Mary, located in a cathedral in Lublin, was crying. Thousands of Poles traveled hundreds of miles to see the miracle. The crowds became so large that policemen arrested spectators for up to three weeks in the hopes that others would not come.<sup>107</sup> This symbolic event illustrates that a supposedly secular Poland was only an illusion.

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>102</sup> O'Sullivan, John. "News." *Cardinal Mindszenty: The Power of the Prisoner*. <[http://www.hungarianreview.com/article/cardinal\\_mindszenty-power\\_of\\_the\\_prisoner](http://www.hungarianreview.com/article/cardinal_mindszenty-power_of_the_prisoner)> (Accessed July 28, 2013).

<sup>103</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 263.

<sup>104</sup> O'Sullivan, John. "News." *Cardinal Mindszenty: The Power of the Prisoner*. <[http://www.hungarianreview.com/article/cardinal\\_mindszenty-power\\_of\\_the\\_prisoner](http://www.hungarianreview.com/article/cardinal_mindszenty-power_of_the_prisoner)> (Accessed July 28, 2013).

<sup>105</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 265.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 425.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 426.

In fact, church authorities helped religious Poles live a pious life throughout the Cold War.<sup>108</sup>

### **Conclusion**

As evidenced by Mindszenty's rallies, the Lublin Miracle, and the CDU's popularity, millions of Poles, Hungarians, and East Germans remained deeply religious. Once the Soviet bloc disintegrated decades later, these civilians finally were able to worship freely once again.

The Soviets unleashed violence, installed corrupt governments, and suppressed religion in a matter of years. These abuses gave the citizens of these three nations many reasons to oppose their new Communist governments. If the Communists had rapidly improved economic conditions, however, perhaps these abuses would have been partially offset. Instead, living standards grew at a rate slower than that of the West, leading to even greater discontent within Poland, Hungary, and East Germany.

### **Part IV: Economic Mismanagement**

The economies of East Germany, Hungary, and Poland were in shambles following World War II. There was hope that the ideas of the Communists would repair this situation and create a paradise for workers; instead, their policies led to stagnation.

Severe economic shortcomings contributed to the long-term resentment that Poles, Hungarians, and East Germans felt toward the Soviet Union. Destruction during World War II, reparation programs, an inability to participate in the Marshall Plan, the nationalization of industry, and hyperinflation were all either Soviet policy or a direct result of such policy. Each of these factors contributed to the slow economic recoveries of these three nations.

### **Wartime Destruction, Reparations, and the Marshall Plan**

As discussed previously, the Red Army's destruction and theft had a detrimental impact on East Germany, Hungary, and Poland's economies. Logically, once the Soviets established their control over Eastern Europe, it would have been in their best interest to actively improve economic conditions, thereby producing reliable allies. Instead, Moscow opted for revenge.

The Treaty of Versailles, signed in 1919, forced Germany to pay reparations for the damage it had caused during World War I. These

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 428.

reparations helped lead to German resentment, jingoistic nationalism, and, ultimately, renewed military aggression. Ignoring this historical lesson, the Soviets forced East Germany, Hungary, and Poland to pay reparations after World War II. These reparations produced similar feelings of anger, this time throughout Eastern Europe and directed toward the Soviet Union.

While the Polish reparations were less demanding than those placed on East Germany and Hungary, they were also the most unjustified. Following World War II, international agreements stated that Poland would not have to pay reparations.<sup>109</sup> Unfortunately, the Polish people could do nothing to stop the Soviets from defying these agreements. The Red Army dismantled and shipped entire factories from Poland to the Soviet Union. Any factory, from steel mills to pipe manufacturers, was at risk of confiscation. The Soviets claimed that they only targeted German property. But most of the time such justification was merely an excuse. In Katowice, a factory that produced zinc oxide was dismantled and sent to the Soviet Union. The factory was entirely Polish - it was located in Polish territory and had been owned by Poles prior to the War. Yet it was still targeted. It was as if the Soviets saw Poland as an enemy.<sup>110</sup>

International agreements allowed Moscow to impose up to \$300 million of reparations on Hungary because Hungary had been a Nazi ally. Between January 1945 and January 1946, Hungary had to provide the Soviet Union with \$33 million worth of goods or else 5 percent interest would accrue monthly.<sup>111</sup> These reparations led to the confiscation of oil, ships, and industrial equipment. The Soviets also dismantled and moved roughly 100 factories from Hungary to the Soviet Union. The assets of any company connected to Germany were seized. Often, Czech and Austrian companies, along with companies that had German shareholders, were targeted too. The Soviets also continued to steal random possessions, such as clothing, artifacts, and food.<sup>112</sup>

The reparation payments, combined with the occupation costs of the Red Army, accounted for 25 percent to 50 percent of Hungary's monthly expenditures and ultimately catalyzed the worst hyperinflation in human history.<sup>113</sup> The reparations accounted for 17 percent of Hungary's GDP in 1945 and 1946, 10 percent in 1946-1947, and 7 percent for all

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<sup>109</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 38.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> Bomberger and Makinen, "The Hungarian Hyperinflation and Stabilization of 1945-1946," 801-810.

<sup>112</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 38.

<sup>113</sup> Bomberger and Makinen, "The Hungarian Hyperinflation and Stabilization of 1945-1946," 801-810.

remaining years up until 1952, at which point they finally ended.<sup>114</sup> In total, it is estimated that the Soviet Union took \$300 million worth of goods (adjusted to 1938 American price levels) from Hungary during this period.<sup>115</sup>

The reparation programs imposed upon East Germany were predictably severe. Anything of value was taken, including broken pipes and old machinery. Moscow's ultimate goal was to dismantle East Germany's economy to the point that East German living standards were equal to those of the Soviet Union.<sup>116</sup> To accomplish their goal, the Soviets confiscated 1.28 million tons of "materials" and 3.6 million tons of "equipment." Between 1945 and 1947, an estimated third to a half of East Germany's industrial capacity disappeared.<sup>117</sup> The Red Army took currency, gold, food, and even animals.<sup>118</sup> Although reparations were reduced over time, they helped lead to an economic crisis in 1952 and revolt in 1953.<sup>119</sup>

In contrast to harsh Soviet reparations, the Marshall Plan aided Western Europe's post-war recovery. The Plan advanced about \$13 billion to various nations, ultimately leading to remarkable economic growth throughout Western Europe. Despite its benefits, the Soviet Union would not allow any Eastern European nation to take part. Stalin believed that the Plan was a manipulative ploy, through which Washington hoped to increase its influence in the post-war world.<sup>120</sup> He was so infuriated by the Plan that in late July of 1947 he told his satellites to prepare for war with the West.<sup>121</sup> He was counting on the military support of Eastern Europe, while simultaneously denying the region an economic recovery as well as religious and political freedom.

A conference was held in Paris in July 1947 to discuss the Marshall Plan.<sup>122</sup> Although nations like Poland wanted to attend, Stalin ordered them not to.<sup>123</sup> Czechoslovakia is not formally studied in this paper, but it is worth noting that its leaders insisted on attending the conference. Stalin summoned Klement Gottwald, the head of the Czech

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<sup>114</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 38.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>119</sup> Jonathan Sperber, "17 June 1953: Revisiting a German Revolution," *German History* 22.4 (2004): 619-643.

<sup>120</sup> Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2007) 71.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>123</sup> Staar, "The Communization of a Captive Nation: Poland, 1944-1947," 310-320

Communist Party, to Moscow to tell him that the Americans were “trying to form a Western bloc and isolate the Soviet Union.”<sup>124</sup> He explained that if Czechoslovakia went to the meeting, it would be seen as an act of hostility toward the Soviet Union. But if the Czechs chose not to go, they would be given 200,000 tons of wheat, barley, and oats. Czechoslovakia’s leaders had to choose between violence and aid. On June 10, 1947, they cancelled their plan to attend the Paris meeting, effectively putting an end to any potential Eastern European participation in the Marshall Plan.<sup>125</sup>

### **Nationalization of Industry and Hyperinflation**

Rather than support the Marshall Plan, the Soviets forced their own economic agenda upon Hungary, Poland, and East Germany. In 1946, the Polish government nationalized 3,300 industrial enterprises, and in Hungary all factories with more than fifty workers were seized.<sup>126</sup> The SED attempted to convince the East German population that the best way to fight fascism was to nationalize industry.<sup>127</sup> Many resisted nationalization, because they thought it would lead to two different economies within one former nation, potentially preventing German reunification. But in 1946 nationalization was approved through a manipulative referendum that “represented” the will of East Germany.<sup>128</sup> By 1948 all factories with more than 100 workers, which included 90 percent of heavy industry and 85 percent of light industry, were under state control.<sup>129</sup>

In addition to nationalization, the Communists introduced new currencies and confiscated large bank accounts. In 1945, East German accounts holding more than 3,000 Reichsmarks were put under state control, virtually eliminating the wealthy class. Rather than aid the economy, new currencies like the East German m-mark helped lead to hyperinflation.<sup>130</sup> In Hungary, differing currencies, the nationalization of industry, the cost of reparations, and economic stagnation led to extreme hyperinflation between July 1945 and August 1946.<sup>131</sup> By the time its currency had stabilized in August, the exchange rate of old for new was

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<sup>124</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 219-220.

<sup>125</sup> Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*, 73.

<sup>126</sup> Staar, “The Communization of a Captive Nation: Poland, 1944-1947,” 310-320.

<sup>127</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 236.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>131</sup> Bomberger and Makinen, “The Hungarian Hyperinflation and Stabilization of 1945-1946,” 801-810.

400 octillion to one.<sup>132</sup> Polish inflation similarly resulted in economic decline and renewed anger toward the Communist government, as countless families lost their life savings in the blink of an eye.<sup>133</sup>

There is a common misconception that the economies of Poland, Hungary, and East Germany faltered only toward the end of the Cold War, but historian Anne Applebaum explains, “Shortages and imbalances plagued the People’s Democracies from the very beginning and lasted until the very end. The economies of Eastern Europe grew after the war because they were starting from nothing. They began literally from ground zero, but they quickly fell behind their counterparts in Western Europe.”<sup>134</sup> These nations needed to recover quickly, but because they were forced to pay onerous reparations, unable to partake in the Marshall Plan, and made to watch as industry was nationalized, their economies remained vastly inferior to those of their Western counterparts from the start of the Cold War to its finish.

### **Poor Conditions and East German Migrations**

Poor urban conditions grew noticeable during the 1950s. Communist governments had assured their citizens that they would create socialist cities with luxurious apartment buildings. They even approved of restaurants and theaters to entertain the working class.<sup>135</sup> But as cities and factories grew, living standards decreased. When places like Sztalinvaros and Nowa Huta increased in size, for example, civil disorder, overcrowding, and crime followed.<sup>136</sup>

While some workers did live in apartments, the vast majority lived in barracks with ten people to a room. As cities continued to increase in size, the gap between utopian propaganda and reality widened.<sup>137</sup> Over time, the people of East Germany, Poland, and Hungary grew tired of the impoverishment that had defined their nations since the beginning of World War II.<sup>138</sup>

The East German economy fell into crisis in 1952 and 1953. The immediate origins of the crisis can be traced to April 1952, during which Stalin ordered Ulbricht to raise an army known as the “garrisoned people’s police.” The organization required artillery, tanks, jets, frigates, and

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 238.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 376.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 377.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 378.

<sup>138</sup> Andrew Gyorgy, "The Nationalist Counter-Revolution in Hungary in 1956," *Studies on the Soviet Union* 11.4 (1971): 549-558.

submarines. With its forces numbering 113,000 by mid-1953, the demand for equipment put a heavy toll on the East German economy. To pay for these hefty expenses, social insurance and welfare were cut, taxes were raised, and the production of consumer goods was scaled back, only adding to the strain of nationalization. By the winter of 1952, supplies of simple foods such as bread and potatoes were low, leather was nearly impossible to find, and coal was in short supply, cumulatively leading to an extremely harsh winter.<sup>139</sup> Most of the available food was tainted and rotten. Cookies in Potsdam, for example, “reeked of petrol” and sickened their consumers.<sup>140</sup>

SED officials held an emergency meeting at the end of 1952.<sup>141</sup> They knew the quality of life in East Germany was not improving, with some going so far as to suggest that living conditions were at the same levels as those of the war torn and desperate East German sphere of 1947.<sup>142</sup> These poor conditions would soon lead to violence, as the general public realized that disappointment, not prosperity, was to be the order of the day in Communist Eastern Europe.

In contrast to East Germany’s economic crisis, West Germany experienced an “economic miracle” in 1950 and 1951.<sup>143</sup> Suddenly, East Germans found themselves in a unique position. Unlike in Poland and Hungary, it was relatively easy for them to sneak into the West, thereby escaping economic hardship and joining a nation on the rise.

More than 500,000 East Germans left for West Germany between January 1951 and April 1953 alone.<sup>144</sup> It was not just the working class that was leaving, but educated members of society as well.<sup>145</sup> The SED tried to stop this mass movement by increasing border security, but their drastic policies instead convinced more East Germans to cross over. A Communist report issued during the migration states that there was “growing unrest among the East German population stemming from the hard line policies of the GDR leadership.”<sup>146</sup>

In total, 3.5 million people, or about 20 percent of post-war East Germany’s population, migrated to West Germany between 1945 and

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<sup>139</sup> Sperber, "17 June 1953: Revisiting a German Revolution," 619-643.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 380.

<sup>142</sup> Sperber, "17 June 1953: Revisiting a German Revolution," 619-643.

<sup>143</sup> Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*, 85.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History*, (New York: Penguin, 2005) 113.

<sup>146</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 436.

1961, crippling the East German economy and demonstrating that many East Germans felt no loyalty to communism or the Soviet Union.<sup>147</sup> Lavrentiy Beria tellingly explained that these migrations were partially motivated “by the desire of some young people to evade service in the GDR armed forces.”<sup>148</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Because of wartime destruction, the banning of the Marshall Plan, and ineffective communist policies, East Germany, Hungary, and Poland were denied an economic recovery similar to that of the West. This inequality in living standards, combined with the brutality of the Red Army, the suppression of religion, and falsified elections, gave the citizens of these three nations economic, political, and religious reasons to loathe the Soviets. They would soon express their resentment, and their disloyalty, through open rebellion.

### **Part V: Protests, Revolt, and Revolution**

After examining the abuses that the Soviet Union inflicted upon East Germany, Poland, and Hungary during and immediately after World War II, one can understand why these three nations might have resisted fighting alongside the Red Army. If post-war elections did not make the feelings of these three satellites clear to Moscow, the revolts of 1953 and 1956 certainly gave the Soviets significant reason to pause as they considered an invasion of Western Europe.

As Moscow’s tight grip upon Eastern Europe began to loosen following Stalin’s death in March 1953, countries revolted and portions of their armies refused to fight for the Soviets. Instead, these soldiers sided with their own people, exposing the cumulative impact of years of mistreatment. Although the Red Army crushed these revolts, they underscored the depth of distrust that existed between the Soviets and their supposed allies.

### **East German Revolt - 1953**

The East German revolt was the first major sign of discontent within the Eastern Bloc. Its short-term causes can be traced to 1952, when Stalin ordered East Germany to rearm. As explained previously, the creation of the East German army led to food shortages and the termination of social welfare programs. Worse yet, secret policemen pressured German

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

youth to “volunteer” for the army.<sup>149</sup> Signs of dissatisfaction soon surfaced, with workers in Magdeburg taking to the streets after their Christmas bonuses were cut in December 1952.<sup>150</sup>

By early 1953, the East German economy was in shambles. The SED reported a very hostile public opinion, and its leaders decided that something had to be done. SED official Vladimir Semenov traveled to Moscow in May 1953 (just two months after Stalin’s death) to meet with Vyacheslav Molotov, and the two sides agreed that East German reparations had to be reduced.<sup>151</sup> This new course would also relax the totalitarian nature of the Stalinist era and give greater priority to the production of consumer goods.<sup>152</sup> SED leaders wanted to close the Berlin border, but Molotov refused. While the outcome of the meeting was significant, it did not address a major demand of East German workers - lower quotas.<sup>153</sup>

On June 10 and June 11, the East German government announced these changes. Aggressive policies against farmers and businessmen ended, the campaign against the Protestant Church stopped, those who had gone to West Germany were invited to return, and the government promised to review the arrests of civilians who had been detained for economic violations. Instead of garnering more support for the Communists, those who supported them felt disillusioned, and those who did not demanded that Ulbricht and his colleagues resign.<sup>154</sup>

Construction workers were discontent because they wanted more favorable piecework rates, so they took to the streets on June 12. The next day, workers rebuilding the Friedrichshain hospital went on strike and demanded a return to piecework rates. Union leaders and party officials attempted to negotiate with the workers but were unable to placate them. On the morning of June 16, protestors marched toward central Berlin to force the government to listen to their demands.<sup>155</sup> They wanted lower consumer prices, free elections, a return to the piecework norm, and the guaranteed safety of all strikers.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Sperber, "17 June 1953: Revisiting a German Revolution," 619-643.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*, 87.

<sup>152</sup> Sperber, "17 June 1953: Revisiting a German Revolution," 619-643.

<sup>153</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 438.

<sup>154</sup> Sperber, "17 June 1953: Revisiting a German Revolution," 619-643.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Gregory R. Witkowski, "Peasants Revolt? Re-evaluating the 17 June Uprising in East Germany," *German History* 24.2 (2006): 243-66.

East Germans in Berlin carried banners stating, “Berliners, join us!”<sup>157</sup> The protests then spread beyond Berlin, with government officials telling Otto Grotewohl, Prime Minister of East Germany, that Berlin was much calmer than the rest of the state on June 16.<sup>158</sup> The unrest worsened that evening when RIAS, an East Berlin radio station, broadcasted the protestors’ four demands, which transformed the scattered strikes into a full-blown uprising.<sup>159</sup>

On June 17, thousands of East Berliners marched toward the House of Ministries (the headquarters of the East German government). German historian Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk explained that “in most cases the impulse came from the construction and factory workers but the wave of revolt spread quickly to other social groups so that in addition to workers, masses of peasants, intellectuals, students, housewives, unemployed and retired workers took part.”<sup>160</sup> The countryside actively joined the revolt, including citizens from 7,000 cities, towns, and villages.<sup>161</sup>

In some cities, demonstrators numbered in the tens of thousands.<sup>162</sup> Protestors freed 1,317 inmates from prison and attacked police stations, SED headquarters, and local government buildings. A few SED officials were physically dragged away from their offices – one was unceremoniously placed in a dung heap, another was beaten to death.<sup>163</sup>

SED leadership could not believe that workers would protest against a workers state. Leipzig’s mayor insisted that the demonstrators were marching toward the center of the city not in protest, but in support of the Rosenbergs, who had been charged with espionage in the United States. Once SED leaders understood reality, they hid. The garrisoned people’s police could have been deployed, but Walter Ulbricht did not believe in its loyalty to his regime.<sup>164</sup>

The Red Army received authorization to crush the protests on June 17. Over the next two days, its soldiers put down the revolt. In some locations, demonstrators were killed. However, most soldiers exercised caution.<sup>165</sup> In East Berlin, tanks drove protestors away from the House of Ministries. Some threw stones at the tanks, but the majority fled. As tanks

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<sup>157</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 439.

<sup>158</sup> Sperber, "17 June 1953: Revisiting a German Revolution," 619-643.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> Witkowski, "Peasants Revolt? Re-evaluating the 17 June Uprising in East Germany," 243-266.

<sup>161</sup> Sperber, "17 June 1953: Revisiting a German Revolution," 619-643.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> Witkowski, "Peasants Revolt? Re-evaluating the 17 June Uprising in East Germany," 243-266.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

began to fire on Potsdamer Platz and Unter der Linden, protestors accepted that they could not win.<sup>166</sup> Eastern Europe's first major revolt was over.

Approximately fifty East Germans died during the uprising. Hundreds were arrested, thirteen of whom were ultimately sentenced to death. In total, an estimated 1.5 million East Germans participated in demonstrations.<sup>167</sup> The breadth of the protests startled Moscow.<sup>168</sup>

Although the 1953 East German Revolt was brief, lasting barely a week, it held enormous significance. Memories of mass rape from 1945 overtook many East Germans, as men made protecting their wives a priority. Workers in Stralsund yelled "no rape" and "no 1945."<sup>169</sup> Perhaps most importantly, Ulbricht's decision not to use the garrisoned people's police revealed that he did not trust his own men.

By the end of 1953, it had become clear that East Germans did not want to be a part of the Eastern Bloc. In a memorandum to Nikita Khrushchev (The First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union), East German officials explained, "Abuse, vulgar insults, and violent threats were directed at Soviet soldiers and officials, not to mention the stones thrown at them. The mass of the population has retained a hatred toward Soviet officials, which has now been inflamed again. This hatred was openly on display during the demonstrations."<sup>170</sup> Although the revolt was suppressed, East German hatred simmered.

### **Poznan Uprising - 1956**

The Poles had protested against the Soviets on several occasions prior to 1956, from Mikolajczyk's rallies in 1945 to the Lublin Miracle in 1949. Another notable example of Polish protest occurred in Cracow. On May 3, 1946, 10,000 Poles marched in the city's Main Square. They chanted, "Down with the PPR bandits! Down with Marxism! Democracy does not need propaganda! Mikolajczyk for President!"<sup>171</sup> Police responded, a marcher was killed, and nearly 1,000 citizens were arrested. In response, youth across the country protested. Similar to these demonstrations, the Poznan Uprising of 1956 also revealed anti-communist sentiments.

The Poznan Uprising centered on an ideological struggle between two political factions: the Neo-Stalinists, led by Boleslaw Bierut, and the Liberalizers, led by Wladyslaw Gomulka. Contrary to Bierut, Gomulka

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<sup>166</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 440.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 432.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 443.

<sup>169</sup> Sperber, "17 June 1953: Revisiting a German Revolution," 619-643.

<sup>170</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 444.

<sup>171</sup> Goldyn, "Disenchanted Voices: Public Opinion in Cracow, 1945-1946," 139-161.

hoped to adopt a more progressive version of communism. Naturally, the Soviets did not trust Gomulka, so their agents arrested him in 1951.<sup>172</sup> At the same time, Moscow was expressing “great concern about the ideological direction of the Polish Army, whose leaders were also never quite pro-Soviet enough for Moscow’s taste.”<sup>173</sup>

Soviet doubts increased when Jozef Swiatlo, a senior secret policeman, defected to the West on December 5, 1953. He then went on Radio Free Europe and discussed the corruption of Soviet advisors, the existence of a “party elite,” and the unfair arrest of Gomulka. Millions of Poles heard what he had to say, including informants who feared he would disclose their identities. Swiatlo’s broadcasts helped lead to the release of Gomulka in December 1954.<sup>174</sup>

Classic Stalinism in Poland met the beginning of its end at the Polish Youth Festival in August 1955. Hundreds of thousands of Poles came to see dancing, shows, and other attractions.<sup>175</sup> The festival proved to be a public relations nightmare for the Communists, as the Polish population was exposed to exotic, well-dressed foreigners. As Poles noticed their own distasteful clothing, many began to question anti-West propaganda. Anger swelled, and Poles began to complain about almost everything, from food shortages to low quality events.<sup>176</sup>

Discontent openly erupted on June 28, 1956, when 100,000 workers went on strike in Poznan. They demanded better pay, fewer working hours, an end to dictatorship, and “Russians out.”<sup>177</sup> In response, the Polish Army was ordered to fire on the strikers at approximately 11:00 AM, resulting in an estimated 100 casualties. The public held the Soviets accountable for these deaths, though, as they were the ones who issued the attack orders and held senior military positions.<sup>178</sup> The Polish United Workers Party demanded that Soviet officers be permanently removed from the military and that Gomulka become Party Secretary.<sup>179</sup> Moscow feared that Poland would leave the Warsaw Pact, which could lead to another revolt in East Germany. The Soviets were concerned that a reunified Germany would then align with the West.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 445.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 283.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 446.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 446.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 447.

<sup>177</sup> Sperber, “17 June 1953: Revisiting a German Revolution,” 619-643.

<sup>178</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 456.

<sup>179</sup> [Zubok](#), *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*, 114.

<sup>180</sup> Louis Halle, *The Cold War as History*, (New York: Harper & Row) 325.

When Polish soldiers began to side with the general population, Moscow had to make several hard choices. According to a report on the Warsaw Pact from the Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress, at first, "When the Polish Army and police forces refused to suppress rioting workers, the Soviet Union prepared its forces in East Germany and Poland for an intervention to restore order in the country. However, Poland's newly appointed Communist leader, Wladyslaw Gomulka, and the Polish Army's top commanders indicated to Khrushchev and other Soviet leaders that any intervention in the internal affairs of Poland would meet united, massive resistance."<sup>181</sup>

Gomulka insisted that he could control the country without Soviet interference. He also told armed groups loyal to him to prepare to defend the new government. A battle between Polish troops and the advancing Red Army seemed inevitable.<sup>182</sup> However, Gomulka threw Khrushchev an olive branch by agreeing to stay in the Warsaw Pact, which ensured that the Soviet Union's most vital interests would remain intact. Khrushchev backed down, resulting in Poland achieving a greater degree of autonomy.

### **Hungarian Revolution - 1956**

The most extreme revolt occurred a few months later in Hungary. At the start of the 1950s, many Hungarians blamed the Soviets for the mass arrests, suppression of religion, and fraudulent elections.<sup>183</sup> The "New Course," which was put in place after Stalin's death in 1953, can be seen as the first direct step toward revolution, because its relaxed policies gave citizens an opportunity to revolt.<sup>184</sup> Imre Nagy's releasing of political prisoners like Bela Kovacs also contributed to the revolutionary environment.<sup>185</sup> Besides the more famous captives, regular citizens were released as well. Hungarians grew more discontent as they welcomed their old friends home.<sup>186</sup>

Hungarian working conditions remained poor. In many ways, the Hungarian Revolution can be viewed as a revolution of "rising expectations," because workers were tired of the hardship that had enveloped Hungary since the end of World War II.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> "APPENDIX C: THE WARSAW PACT -- Soviet Union," *Library of Congress / Federal Research Division / Country Studies / Area Handbook Series / Soviet Union / Appendix C* (Accessed July 12, 2013).

<sup>182</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 457.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 450.

<sup>184</sup> Gyorgy, "The Nationalist Counter-Revolution in Hungary in 1956," 549-558..

<sup>185</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 451.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>187</sup> Gyorgy, "The Nationalist Counter-Revolution in Hungary in 1956," 549-558.

Khrushchev's "Secret Speech," given on February 25, 1956 and almost immediately leaked to the public, turned revolutionary thoughts into revolutionary actions. In the speech, Khrushchev attacked Stalin and his policies, destroying Stalin's infallibility and Marxist-Leninist reliability in the process.<sup>188</sup> For over a decade, Hungarians had been told to believe in Stalin. But if Khrushchev did not believe in him, why should they?

The Revolution officially began when Hungarians, inspired by the Poznan Uprising, demanded that Nagy be put in power. On October 22, 5,000 students went to the Budapest Technological University and announced their "Sixteen Points," which called for the withdrawal of Soviet troops, free elections, economic reform, and the reestablishment of March 15, which marks the Hungarian Revolution of 1848, as a national holiday.<sup>189</sup> The following morning, 25,000 protestors gathered around a statue of General Louis Bem, a famous Polish military general and a national Hungarian hero, to honor the four-month anniversary of the Poznan uprising.<sup>190</sup> Shouting, "Russians go home!" the protestors marched down streets and destroyed a Russian radio station. That night, a crowd at Hero Square tore down a statue of Stalin himself.<sup>191</sup>

In a confused state, Ernő Gerő, General Secretary of Hungary's Communist Party, demanded Soviet military support. On October 26, the Soviet Presidium agreed to send troops to Hungary. On October 30, the Soviets changed their minds and instead decided to negotiate.<sup>192</sup> This indecision reflected the intense debate going on in the East. Mao Zedong, leader of China's Communist Party, did not support Soviet military intervention. He encouraged the Soviets to simply coexist with Hungary, which he hoped would lessen Soviet influence on the world stage.

In another reversal, the Presidium voted on October 31 to prepare for intervention. Khrushchev explained, "If we depart from Hungary, it will give a great boost to the Americans, English, and French - the imperialists. To Egypt they will then add Hungary."<sup>193</sup> Soviet leaders feared a "domino effect," just as they had during the Polish and East German revolts. Gomulka had told Moscow that a Hungarian success could lead to another Polish uprising.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 458.

<sup>190</sup> Gyorgy, "The Nationalist Counter-Revolution in Hungary in 1956," 549-558.

<sup>191</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 459.

<sup>192</sup> Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*, 115.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>194</sup> Gyorgy, "The Nationalist Counter-Revolution in Hungary in 1956," 549-558.

Moscow accepted Poland's relative autonomy because Poland agreed to stay in the Warsaw Pact. Rather than follow the Polish example, Nagy withdrew Hungary from the Warsaw Pact on November 1. The Soviets crushed the revolt soon after.<sup>195</sup> Their response was swift - Nagy called for free elections and neutrality on November 1, and on November 4 the Red Army invaded Budapest. For ten days, Hungarians fought a hopeless battle against the Red Army.

Hungarian soldiers "deserted the army in droves and began distributing weapons to their fellow citizens. One of the first senior officers to defect, Colonel Pal Maleter, was quickly named Nagy's new Defense Minister. The Budapest Chief of Police, Sándor Kopácsi, also switched sides and joined the revolutionaries."<sup>196</sup> Tibor recalled watching a Hungarian military leader refuse to fire on civilians, stating, "We are for the people, not against them."<sup>197</sup> Because of this widespread disloyalty, Moscow would view the Hungarian army with suspicion for years.<sup>198</sup>

Although Radio Free Europe supported the revolutionaries, the Hungarians did not stand a chance without Western military assistance. General Ivan Serov and his troops arrested Nagy on November 22, 1956 and executed him on June 16, 1958. Miklós Gimes, a politician who played an instrumental role in the uprising, was executed as well.<sup>199</sup>

During the Revolution, 8,000 political prisoners were released, including Cardinal Mindszenty. Tens of thousands lost their homes, strikes continued into January, and almost 200,000 fled.<sup>200</sup> In total, 26,000 Hungarians were put on trial for involvement in the revolt, 22,000 were imprisoned for five years or more, and 341 were hanged.<sup>201</sup>

As 1957 progressed, the Soviets were still "unable to rely on Hungarian forces to maintain order." In response, Moscow "increased its troop level in Hungary from two to four divisions and forced Hungary to sign a status-of-forces agreement, placing the Soviet military presence on a solid and permanent legal basis."<sup>202</sup> Rather than let Hungary leave the

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<sup>195</sup> Halle, *The Cold War as History*, 328.

<sup>196</sup> Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, 460.

<sup>197</sup> Dr. Pákh Tibor, Interview conducted by the author in Budapest, Hungary, 12 March 2015.

<sup>198</sup> "APPENDIX C: THE WARSAW PACT -- Soviet Union," *Library of Congress / Federal Research Division / Country Studies / Area Handbook Series / Soviet Union / Appendix C* (Accessed July 12, 2013).

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>201</sup> Gyorgy, "The Nationalist Counter-Revolution in Hungary in 1956," 549-558.

<sup>202</sup> "APPENDIX C: THE WARSAW PACT -- Soviet Union," *Library of Congress / Federal Research Division / Country Studies / Area Handbook Series / Soviet Union / Appendix C* (Accessed July 12, 2013).

Warsaw Pact, the Soviets would continue to use force to keep their unwilling ally superficially loyal.

### **Part VI: Conclusions**

The factors laid out in Parts I-IV directly led to the East German revolt of 1953 and the Polish and Hungarian revolts of 1956. The significance of these uprisings cannot be overstated. Eastern European soldiers were not just part of command structures – they also were members of their societies. And through open rebellion, these societies demonstrated that they deeply resented the Soviet Union.

Stalin, however, had assumed the opposite. He thought Eastern Europe would remain loyal to the Soviets because they had freed the region from Hitler and installed “workers’ paradises” soon after. Stalin trusted his satellites to the point where he ordered Eastern Europe, excluding East Germany, to rearm on January 9, 1951; he ordered East Germany to do the same in April 1952. Believing that a conflict with the West was inevitable, Stalin wanted Eastern Europe “poised to go to war” at any moment.<sup>203</sup> After he died on March 5, 1953, however, revolts forced his successors to face reality: East Germany, Hungary, and Poland could not be relied upon in a potential war effort, making an invasion of Western Europe tactically impossible.

A 1983 CIA assessment of Eastern European reliability states that before 1956, “Soviet leadership believed that the Stalinist policy of heavy political indoctrination and enforced Sovietization had transformed the national armies into reliable instruments of the Soviet Union. However, the East European armies were still likely to remain loyal to national causes. Only one Hungarian Army unit fought beside the Soviet troops that put down the 1956 revolution. In both the Polish and the Hungarian military establishments, a basic loyalty to the national Communist Party regime was mixed with a strong desire for greater national sovereignty.”<sup>204</sup> The report ultimately suggested that the revolts of 1953 and 1956 revealed to Moscow that the armies of these three nations were not unfaithfully loyal to the Soviet Union.<sup>205</sup> By alienating their own allies, the Soviets had undermined any realistic plan to fight the West.

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<sup>203</sup> Mark Kramer, “Stalin, the Split with Yugoslavia, and Soviet-East European Efforts to Reassert Control, 1948-1953,” (Accessed July 27 2013).

<sup>204</sup> “Military Reliability of the Soviet Union's Warsaw Pact Allies,” *CIA Historical Review Program* (1983): 1-10.

<sup>205</sup> “Military Reliability of the Soviet Union's Warsaw Pact Allies,” *CIA Historical Review Program* (1983): 1-10.

Soviet military leaders understood their lack of support in Eastern Europe after 1956, so they monitored their satellite armies more closely. In March 1957, Soviet Defense Minister Marshal Georgii Zhukov told his officers that “Soviet personnel must not trust Germans,” and “strict security measures must be maintained by the Soviet Army in regard to the GDR army.”<sup>206</sup>

The Soviets rightfully viewed Eastern European armies with suspicion. While these forces had been loyal during peacetime, they had never been asked to fight the West. Events like Stalin’s death and the Secret Speech – which few foresaw – had led to widespread instability in Eastern Europe. The Soviets understood implicitly that an invasion of Western Europe likely would have led to an equally unpredictable reaction from the region, which had grown to resent the Soviet Union during the early Cold War period.

Although the Soviets internally were concerned with the reliability of their satellites, they chose to preserve their global influence by suppressing dissent and externally projecting a united “Red Menace.” But their influence was expressed through proxy wars across the globe, never in Western Europe. Because while the West lived under the threat of invasion, Moscow’s leaders already knew that without Eastern European support, a potential assault on Western Europe was no more than a bluff designed to maintain their superpower status.

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<sup>206</sup> CIA Information Report, 29 March 1957. Subject: "Zhukov Address". *Central Intelligence Agency Historical Review Program* (CIA-HRP)