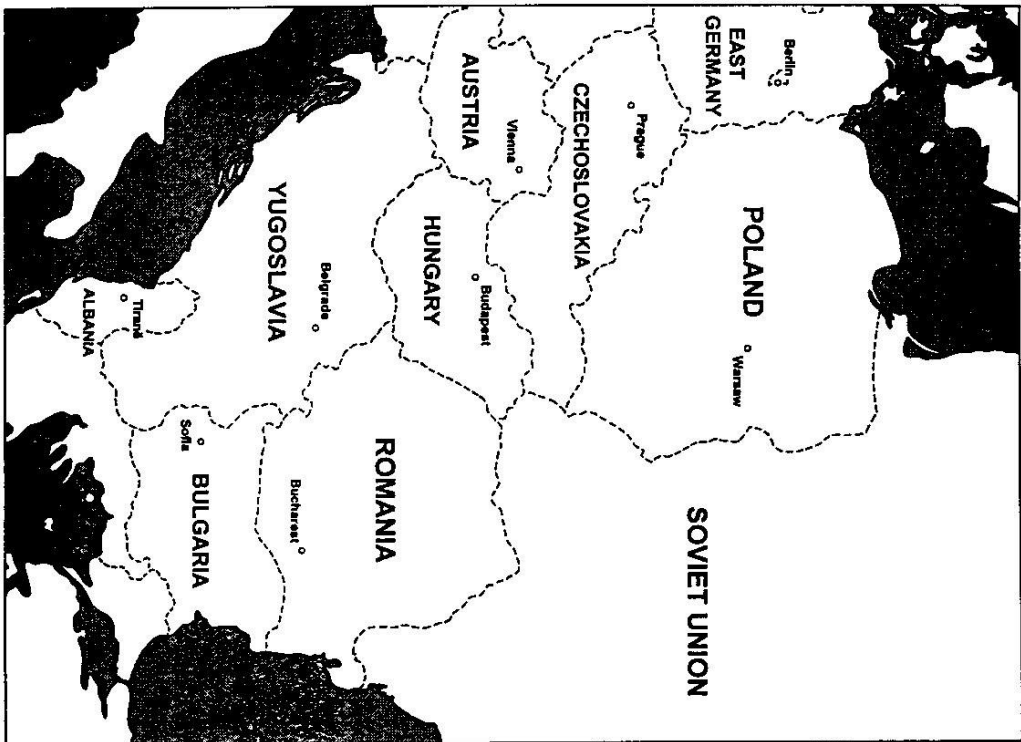


## The Communists Come to Power

## 1



Postwar East Central Europe

To stipulate that Soviet leaders deemed their hegemony over East Central Europe vital and nonnegotiable does not, in and of itself, indicate the precise forms and structures through which that hegemony was to be exercised. Even to go one step further and note that their close brushes with military catastrophe in 1941 and 1942 had left the Soviet leaders (beginning with Stalin in his own time) obsessed with security concerns and with a propensity toward military definitions of their system's security also does not ipso facto explain the style of the Soviet Union's imposition of its control over East Central Europe after World War II. After all, geopolitical security could have been readily ensured by means other than the imposition of Communist regimes and the attempted *Gleichschaltung* (enforced coordination) of socioeconomic arrangements throughout postwar East Central Europe to the model of the Soviet Union itself. To account for the methods that Stalin and his heirs selected to operationalize Soviet hegemony over the area requires the introduction of ideological, systemic, contingent, and even idiosyncratic explanatory variables, in addition to postulating "objective" security concerns.

Today we recognize that many of the Western academic analyses of the 1950s and 1960s subscribed to exaggerated images of a rigid blueprint that supposedly guided Moscow and the local East Central European Communists in implementing the procedures and arrangements that Stalin eventually selected to give effect to his perception of Soviet hegemonial requirements. But while validly correcting those earlier

errors, we should not throw out the baby with the bath water. For though there probably never was a rigid, uniform Stalinist plan to be imposed in cookie-cutter fashion on every state and society of East Central Europe without regard to diverse national histories, institutions, and complexities, the general overall similarities in Soviet and local Communist behavior throughout the area in the first decade after World War II strongly suggest a unified conceptual framework—more flexible at the beginning than toward the close of that decade, never entirely absent yet also never absolutely rigid.

W. Averell Harriman, the nonacademic and reflective American ambassador to the Soviet Union, suggested in April 1945 that Stalin was then seeking a way to finesse three alternative policy options: (1) extending the wartime alliance into continued cooperation with the United States and the United Kingdom; (2) establishing a tight Soviet security zone in East Central Europe, an area that had, after all, served as the springboard for Hitler's recent (and for many earlier) invasions of Russia; and (3) penetrating Western European (and other) societies and subverting their governments through the instrumentality of their Communist parties.<sup>1</sup> While it is clear in retrospect that these three options were incongruous and that the manner in which Stalin was soon to implement the second of them would abort the other two, it may well be that at the time, at war's close, such incongruity did not appear to be tantamount to utter incompatibility. The concept of "people's democracy," which Stalin authorized for East Central Europe as an intermediate social and political order ostensibly alternative to Sovietization and "proletarian dictatorship," may initially have been intended seriously, albeit experimentally, as a formula and an arrangement to harness the three options together, to implement the Soviet Union's perceived security needs and political interests in East Central Europe without sacrificing either the Big Three alliance or the potential attractiveness of Communism elsewhere. Unless we allow for such a latitudinarian conceptual possibility, certain anomalies in several East Central European states between 1945 and 1950 (as well as manifest Soviet unpreparedness and improvisation toward many of their bilateral quarrels) are difficult to explain on the alternative premise of a predetermined intention uniformly to communize the area. Yet given the kind of person that Stalin was, the kind of operational system that Leninism-Stalinism had become, and the vast disparity in power between the dominant Soviet Union and the subordinate states of East Central Europe, the Soviet self-restraints that would have been required to realize such

a scenario of harnessing the three options together by rendering people's democracy into an authentic, viable alternative short of monolithic Communist power were, alas, to be in short and precarious supply.

The logic of Stalin's conceptual stance and political orientation toward East Central Europe presumably entailed the following sequential considerations: (1) merely denying the area to Germany or any other potential enemy of the Soviet Union would not suffice, for it was too weak to resist future pressure from such an inimical power; (2) hence its regimes must be positively supportive of the Soviet Union, rather than merely uncommitted (let alone unfriendly); (3) such a positive relationship with the Soviet Union could be reliably ensured only through some structural transformations in the "bourgeois" and "feudal" societies of the area, and not through the merely "superstructural" policy promises of even the most benignly inclined local bourgeois politicians (for example, Edvard Beneš); (4) the institutional form of these structural transformations would be people's democracy, a social form transitional between bourgeois democracy (the West) and mature Socialism (the Soviet Union); (5) since the people's democracies of East Central Europe were thus by definition placed in a less advanced historico-developmental niche than the Soviet Union, their subordination to it could be justified on ideological grounds and not merely by reference to raw power considerations; (6) by the same token, since they were also stipulated to be more advanced than the bourgeois systems, any potential backsliding on their part away from the Soviet Union and toward the West could be conveniently vetoed on ideological grounds as ostensibly retrogressive; and (7) though defined a priori as morphologically less mature than the Soviet Union, the people's democracies were to function as suppliers of capital to facilitate the recovery of the war-devastated Soviet economy.<sup>2</sup>

To the extent that this rationale for the people's democracies was intended (among other purposes) to straddle and finesse the triadic dilemma that Harriman had identified, it failed. Its implementation in East Central Europe required methods that were so harsh and so transparently dictated by Moscow as to arouse the alarm of the West, to damage the appeals of Communism elsewhere, to provoke deep resentment among the subject peoples, and eventually even to evoke "national Communist" umbrage within the Communist cadres of the people's democracies themselves against the substance and style of Soviet

exploitation and domination. We now turn to comparing and contrasting this process in the several states of the area.

## 2

Social scientists tend—by and large, validly—to impute the causation of specific political developments to general social and secular trends. Thus they correctly note that wars often precipitate and accelerate profound political changes in the belligerent states. In reference to Poland, however, a note of caution is in order. While the military catastrophe of September 1939 and the subsequent years of destructive occupation and national resistance did open up Poland for deep political transformations away from its interwar system by lacerating its socioeconomic structure and radicalizing public opinion, these wartime changes did not point spontaneously, still less inevitably, toward a Communist solution. To impose themselves on Polish society by seizing and consolidating political power required a tenacious struggle by the Polish Communists and their Soviet patrons.

An inventory of Communist assets and liabilities in this struggle would have to include some variables of ambivalent value. For example, the Communists' identification with Russia—a historical national foe and now officially atheist to boot—was manifestly a drawback in their efforts to win acceptance among the Poles. Yet this same Soviet Russia was the only Great Power that categorically guaranteed Poland's valuable postwar territorial acquisitions from Germany (see Chapter 2, section 2). Somewhat less ambivalent and relatively more a Communist asset was the wartime declination of the prewar gentry class and of the traditional intelligentsia, which drained the whole society's capacity for further civic resistance. Yet the net political benefit of these new social gaps and political openings might more plausibly have accrued to the peasant movement had Soviet power not backed the local Communists. Even the sharp rise in membership in the Polish Workers party (the Communists' formal new name) immediately after the war—from 30,000 to 210,000 between January and December 1945 and then to over 500,000 by January 1947<sup>1</sup>—was rather ambivalent in its political significance; many of the recruits were opportunists and careerists, while many others joined out of a sense of foreclosed fate, a feeling that there was no other alternative to rebuilding Poland. Both types lacked true ideological conviction.

A number of unambiguous liabilities weighed on the Polish Communists in the immediate postwar years. Unlike their Czechoslovak, Hungarian, Yugoslav, or Bulgarian counterparts, they lacked any leaders of genuine popularity or vivid achievement. The leaders that they did have were strangers to one another, some having spent the war years under German occupation, others in Soviet exile. Their major political competitors were free from the taint of collaboration with the Nazi German occupiers and, indeed, had led the major national resistance movement during the war, compared with which the Communists' own efforts had been rather puny.

But the Communists were buoyed by some clear assets that, over the long haul, outbalanced the liabilities and the ambivalent variables. Their Soviet sponsors were militarily and administratively present and active, while their competitors' British and American patrons were distant and inert; indeed, the real *virtù* of the Soviets and their local Communist protégés lay not so much in the sheer presence of Soviet military might as in their appreciation of the political leverage that it conveyed. Through their control of the Ministry of Security, the Communists effectively monopolized the state's instruments of internal force and violence. Through their control of the Ministry for the Regained Territories, they monopolized an extensive patronage apparatus for the distribution of the newly annexed lands, from which most of the German population fled or was expelled, to their nascent clientele. Their control of the extremely rapid and supposedly "spontaneous" process of distributing the lands and assets of large agricultural estates throughout Poland among the peasantry served a similar purpose and helped them to undermine the rival Peasant party, which, as a result of the destruction or neutralization of other potential loci of legal opposition, emerged as the keystone to any possible political resistance to the Communists.

Before turning to this pivotal confrontation between the Communist and Peasant parties, it is necessary to understand the demographic, economic, and domestic political significance of the paired loss of Poland's eastern borderlands to the Soviet Union and gain of western and northern territories from Germany. Allusions to the diplomatic consequences of this westward movement of Poland in terms of its subsequent dependence on Soviet support against eventual German revanchism have already been made.

This pair of territorial shifts and their associated population transfers (together with the wartime extermination of Polish Jews) transformed

Poland from a multinational state, in which one-third of the interwar population had consisted of ethnic and religious minorities, into a nearly homogeneous Polish and Roman Catholic nation-state. They also opened its almost landlocked interwar geographical profile via a new Baltic coastline of approximately 500 kilometers (310 miles) with several good harbors. And they rendered the spatial configuration of the state far more compact by sharply shortening its borders. Though the area gained from Germany (102,985 square kilometers or 39,752 square miles) was substantially smaller than the area lost to the Soviet Union (180,000 square kilometers or 69,480 square miles), it was economically far more valuable, containing the Silesian industrial and mining complex and, on balance, better farmland. Thus the overall bottom line of these territorial and demographic transfers was so manifestly favorable that considerations of sheer patriotism and *raison d'état* linked the Polish nation to the regime that presided over them, resented though that regime was on many other grounds and regretted through its consequent security dependence on the Soviet Union may have been.

The postwar government consisted of a Soviet-sponsored trunk onto which a few "London" Poles had been grafted at British and American insistence at the close of the war (Chapter 2, section 2). The trunk was composed of a Communist core to which were attached Socialist and Peasant party splinters as well as some insignificant minor parties and a nominally nonpartisan but pro-Communist defense minister. The Socialist and Peasant splinters who affiliated themselves with the Communists did so without the apocalyptic enthusiasm that characterized their Czechoslovak analogues (see section 3), but with of a sense of ineffectual fate. Hence their attitude toward their Communist partners was occasionally skittish, though never openly disloyal. The returning "London" Poles were led by a former prime minister of the wartime government-in-exile, the authentic Peasant party leader Stanisław Mikojajczyk.

Apparently hoping that Poland's foreign-policy alignment with the Soviet Union would not necessarily require its internal political or socio-economic transformation based on the Soviet model, Mikojajczyk decided on a vigorous test of strength with the Communists. His hope was rendered superficially plausible by the contemporary example of Finland; but he overlooked the fact that Finland was then only peripheral to Soviet perspectives and expectations, whereas Poland, alas, was central. Mikojajczyk's political mettle was also stoked by his awareness that its genuine popularity with the peasant masses, as well as its

status as the only secular political force authentically independent of the Communists, rendered his Polish Peasant party the natural magnet for all Poles ready to assert their opposition to Communist control of their country. And, indeed, these hopes and expectations were given a brief fillip; by January 1946, six months after Mikojajczyk's return to Poland, his party's membership had swelled to 600,000—outstripping that of the Polish Workers party, which, indeed, had suffered an absolute dip in membership during an interval in mid-1945.<sup>4</sup> The Communists and their associates were sufficiently chastened to postpone repeatedly the early and free elections to which they had supposedly committed themselves before and during the Potsdam Conference as a condition for obtaining British and American endorsement as Poland's government.

Such statistics and such popularity had, however, little true political significance. Though the Communists formally headed only six of the twenty-one ministries, they controlled most of the others through their deputy ministers or their splinter-allies. And through their direction of the security and police agencies as well as supposedly spontaneous worker "actions" and riots, they generated an atmosphere of intense intimidation, forcing the Peasant party, its activists, and its members to hover precariously between legality and illegality, ever vulnerable to the criminal code and even to sheer terrorism. Thus Mikojajczyk's intended test of strength was soon beaten into a rear-guard action, which he conducted with more courage than skill.

This ominous tension within the government between its Communist-dominated trunk and its Peasant branch was snappily as the result of a Socialist overture. On the one hand, acquiescent to the reluctance of their Communist allies to risk early and free elections and, on the other hand, concerned that the government obtain some sort of public ratification (so far, it was only the creature of Big Three fiat), the Socialists proposed a referendum in lieu of elections in which the voters would be asked to endorse the abolition of the interwar Senate, the current distribution of agricultural land to the peasants and the nationalization of heavy industry, and the new Baltic and Oder-Neisse frontiers—that is, the northern and western territorial acquisitions. The Communists endorsed this clever Socialist proposal, and the referendum was scheduled for June 30, 1946.

With the electoral route blocked by his nominal government partners-cum-political enemies, Mikojajczyk seized on the referendum as a device to demonstrate his popularity, his independence, and his

leverage. Though the Peasant party had traditionally opposed parliamentary upper chambers—including the interim Senate—as elitist dilutions of democracy, he now reversed this principled stance and asked his supporters to vote against the first of the three propositions, while joining the other ministers in calling for ratification of the other two. This questionable decision prompted a small but significant secession from his party. Also of dubious tactical wisdom was an Anglo-American decision to try to strengthen Mikolajczyk's hand by suspending credits to Poland during the referendum campaign, ostensibly as a protest against the repeated postponements of the pledged free elections.

It took ten days for the government to publish the official referendum results. It claimed positive endorsement of the three propositions by the following percentages: abolition of the Senate, 68; land distribution and industrial nationalization, 77.2; new frontiers, 91.6. But there exists persuasive evidence that these alleged results are spurious and that, despite blatant chicanery, provocation, and intimidation, a large majority of voters had actually rejected the first proposition—not from any sentimental attachment to the Senate but as a gesture of protest. The other two propositions were, of course, uncontested. Nationalization of industry was a relatively uncontroversial issue in the Polish tradition; in the 1930s, state capitalism had been more extensively developed in Poland than in any other European country except the Soviet Union and, possibly, Sweden. And the third proposition appealed automatically to reflexive patriotism.

Their management of the referendum campaign and its formal results left the Communists and their allies confident that they could now either win or successfully rig parliamentary elections, which were accordingly and at long last scheduled for January 19, 1947. The Peasant party ran against a coalition termed itself the Democratic Bloc and composed of the Communists, the Socialists, and two smaller parties. The Peasant group that had broken with Mikolajczyk six months earlier over the Senate issue in the referendum put up a nominally independent slate, but in effect supported the Democratic Bloc, as did yet another minor party. The campaign was characterized by escalating terror. In ten out of the country's fifty-two electoral districts, which contained about one-quarter of the population and where the Peasant party was traditionally strong, its candidate lists were disqualified. Almost 1 million other voters were disfranchised on the allegation of wartime collaboration with the Nazi German occupiers. Many Peasant party candidates, functionaries, and poll watchers were arrested and/or

beaten. "Voluntary" open voting and fraudulent ballot counting were widespread. British and American protests were ignored.

The official electoral results were predictable. The Democratic Bloc was declared to have won 80.1 percent of the votes; its two nominally independent minor supporters, 3.5 and 4.7 percent; Mikolajczyk's Peasant party, 10.3 percent; with 1.4 percent of the vote scattered. The Peasant party's claim, based on an early sampling of untampered ballot boxes in 1,300 out of 5,200 constituencies, to have received 60 to 68 percent of the votes was to no avail. It was now relegated to a mere 27 out of 444 seats in the constituent parliament, with the Democratic Bloc allocating 394 to itself, 7 and 12 to its pair of nominally independent supporters, and scattering the remaining 4. Mikolajczyk and his party were excluded from the government and ominously farred with the brush of maintaining contact with the illegal resistance groups that still held out in the forests (see Chapter 2, section 2). Fearing arrest and worse, he fled to the West with the assistance of the American ambassador to Poland on October 21, 1947, to be followed shortly by several colleagues.

In retrospect, it is difficult to decide whether Stalin and the Polish Communists never intended to allow free elections in Poland—their promises before and during the Potsdam Conference having been but dust in the eyes of the British and Americans—or whether the disappointing Communist performance in the relatively free Hungarian parliamentary elections of November 1945 (see section 4) prompted a decision to renege on what may have been initially sincere assurances about Poland. I lean toward the first hypothesis.

With the elimination of the Peasant party as a meaningful political force, the Socialists became a magnet for those Poles wishing to register legal opposition to the Communists. After all, during the interwar decades, the Socialists had been a major party of impeccable Polish patriotic credentials, while the Communists had been a small, illegal coterie generally suspected of being a stalking-horse for Soviet Russia's predatory intentions toward Poland. And immediately after Poland's liberation, many Socialists returning from the West, from concentration camps, and from German prison and labor camps had sought to reassert their party's distinctive identity in relation to, albeit not its former hostility toward, its current Communist allies. Indeed, in the summer of 1946, the Socialist leader Edward Osóbka-Morawski even publicly denied the Communists' claim to being the governing coalition's leading party and demanded more cabinet representation for

his own. And until early 1947, the Socialists had far more members than the Communists (800,000, compared with over 500,000) and stronger trade-union support. Thus what had begun as a dependent splinter had achieved some real popular substance. But all this availed little against the Communists' raw power to set the rules of the postwar political game. They obliged the Socialists first to purge themselves of 150,000 excessively independent members during the first half of 1947, then to yield up 200 recalcitrant middle-level leaders for arrest on the charge of affiliation with the illegal resistance in May and June 1947, then to join in declining America's invitation to Poland to participate in the Marshall Plan aid program to rehabilitate Europe in July 1947, then to withdraw from the Socialist International in March 1948 (after the previous month's Communist coup in Czechoslovakia, see section 3), then to purge themselves again and repudiate their prewar leaders in September 1948, and finally to dissolve their party and merge it with the Communists to form the Polish United Workers party (PZPR) in December 1948. By this date, the Socialists' membership had been truncated to half the Communists' (450,000, compared with 900,000).

In insisting on this coerced organizational merger, the Communists impatiently rejected some interesting final Socialist pleas that even in a people's democracy two working-class parties are desirable to have "reciprocal control" and "to guarantee freedom." Of the eleven members of the merged PZPR's new Politburo, eight were Communists and three former Socialists, while of the restructured cabinet's seventy-four ministers and vice ministers, fifty-three were Communists.

One might reasonably ask why the Socialists had been so blind to the handwriting on the wall as to cooperate unflinchingly in the Communists' destruction of the Peasant party during the first two postwar years, thus leaving themselves morally and politically naked when the Communists eventually turned on them. The answers are multiple, though not necessarily convincing. Many Socialist leaders appear to have persuaded themselves that the choice in the June 1946 referendum and the January 1947 elections was between "reaction" and "working-class solidarity." This belief was rendered ostensibly plausible by the fact that Mikolajczyk's transformation of his party into a catch-all basin had indeed opened it to some reactionary elements. Also, historically no love had ever been lost between the Socialist and the Peasant movements. And the Socialists may have sincerely feared that protecting or even stabilizing Mikolajczyk might provoke direct Soviet intervention. Furthermore, the most experienced and astute of the interwar Social-

ist leaders either had not survived the war or had remained in the West. Finally, and conclusively, the postwar Socialist party apparatus was infiltrated and cowed by the Communists.

Ironically, just as the coerced merger of the Socialist with the Communist party approached its culmination, the latter was passing through a severe inner crisis, one that was heavily predicated on the alienation between those of its leaders who had survived the war years under German occupation in Poland and those who had spent them in the Soviet Union. Superimposed on this fault line were the profound stresses inflicted on all the Communist parties of East Central Europe by the rift between Tito and Stalin in 1948. At the risk of some oversimplification (but not of falsification), one might hazard the following generalization: the wartime "local undergrounds" were concerned to pursue a distinctive national (in this case, Polish) road to so-called Socialism, whereas the "Muscovites" insisted on the closest possible imitation of their Soviet model and the most slavish deference to Soviet signals. This deep crisis, which wracked the entire Communist movement throughout East Central Europe, will be closely analyzed in Chapter 4; suffice it to note here that in Poland, as in most of the area's other countries, the "Muscovites" initially won but, unlike their analogues in the area's other parties, did not execute their defeated "local" rivals or humiliate them at show trials. Perhaps the fact that all Poles, including the Communists and especially those Communists who had sought Soviet asylum during the interwar and war years, had suffered so much at Stalin's hands accounts for the relative leniency of his Polish "Muscovite" satraps in the late 1940s. They were not willing to risk reopening the trap door to renewed intraparty bloodshed, lest some day they be pushed through it.

Until after the Peasant and Socialist parties were eliminated as autonomous political forces, the Communists behaved quite gingerly toward the Roman Catholic church. Indeed, the government and the church had worked in parallel to give a Polish character to the newly acquired ex-German lands, and the Communist chief of state, Boleslaw Bierut, used to attend ecclesiastical ceremonies on special occasions in his official capacity. Though the regime—but not only the regime—regarded Pope Pius XII as having favored the Germans during the war and therefore denounced the Concordat of 1925 on September 16, 1945, it postponed a struggle with the Polish episcopacy until after such struggles had erupted in Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Even after the pope threw down the gauntlet by excommunicating Communists in

general (not specifically mentioning Poland) on July 13, 1949, the Polish regime responded cautiously, albeit palpably. In September 1949, it nationalized the church's network of hospitals; in January 1950, it took the big church welfare organization Caritas under state control; and in March of that year, it confiscated church-owned landed estates, which had been untouched by the postwar land reform. The new Polish primate, Archbishop Stefan Wyszyński, thereupon bid for a truce, which was quickly arranged. On April 14, 1950, he and the government signed an agreement in which the church publicly repudiated the surviving underground resistance (when the Vatican was still recognizing the vestigial government-in-exile in London) and endorsed the regime's lively peace propaganda, while the state reciprocally authorized that religion continue to be taught in its schools and chaplains continue to function in the armed forces, jails, hospitals, and so on.

Pope Pius XII's refusal to regularize canonically the Polish church's administration in the former German lands, and his insistence on appointing only provisional Polish apostolic administrators rather than ordinary bishops there pending a general European peace conference to formally ratify the new borders, embarrassed Wyszyński and gave the Communist government an alibi to renew its pressure on the church.<sup>5</sup> It charged that the refusal of most priests to sign the Soviet-sponsored Stockholm Peace Appeal of June 1950 was a renegeing by the church on the agreement signed in April. During 1953, it decreed that all appointments to ecclesiastical office required its approval, subjected a bishop and several priests to shamming show trials on charges of espionage and economic sabotage, quietly imprisoned many other clergy, and interned Wyszyński (who had been designated a cardinal on January 12) in a monastery, where he languished until the dramatic events of 1956. But it never put him on trial (in contrast to the Hungarian and Yugoslav governments' respective handling of József Cardinal Mindszenty and Archbishop Alojzije Stepinac) and utterly failed to dent, let alone break, Wyszyński's and the church's moral authority with the overwhelmingly Catholic Polish public. The regime's campaign to undermine him and his episcopal hierarchy through a movement of so-called patriotic priests was a derisive failure. On balance, the Polish Catholic church more than recouped its postwar material losses through its flock's renewed fervor. It even gained followers in addition to the traditionally faithful peasantry as other social groups that had been indifferent or even anticlerical gave it their allegiance as a mark of political and spiritual protest against Stalinist trends. Even Communist party members

would regularly, if surreptitiously, participate in the church's liturgy and sacraments. It thus became the only national institution that managed to checkmate its attempted subordination by the Communist regime and to retain a strong autonomous role in public life.

The armed forces were yet another structured institution to be subjected to severe pressure and purges in the course of the Communist takeover. But in this case the initiative appears to have been directly Soviet and was so heavy-handed as to embarrass Poland's own Communists. It will be recalled that the bulk of the old Polish officer cadre that survived the September 1939 catastrophe remained loyal to the government-in-exile in London and continued to fight the Germans on various western fronts and in the underground Home Army. After 1943, the Soviet Union's Polish Communist protégés were thus obliged to sculpt a Polish army from the Kościuszko Division, various Communist partisan bands, and some coerced or voluntary recruits from the prewar cadres (see Chapter 2, section 2). At the end of the war, many of the Soviet officers who had been seconded to this Soviet-sponsored Polish army between 1943 and 1945 were recalled into the Soviet army and replaced by Communist-screened, and hence presumably reliable, Polish officers.

But with the formation of NATO on April 4, 1949, and of the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) on September 7, 1949, Moscow apparently decided that even this Communist-controlled and Communist-commissaried Polish army was insufficiently reliable. On November 6 of that year, Marshal Konstantin K. Rokossovsky—one of the most talented wartime commanders of the Soviet army and a man of partly Polish genealogy—was suddenly imposed on Poland as defense minister and commander in chief of the armed forces, followed soon by many other Soviet officers. On May 10, 1950, Rokossovsky even became a member of the Politburo of the PZPR, which suggests the extent to which his responsibilities included political supervision as well as military professionalization in Poland. He replaced the armed forces' few prewar holdovers with Soviet officers and subjected several of the former to demeaning show trials, expanded the army and modernized its equipment, imposed universal conscription, and developed new mechanisms (for example, the Feliks Dzierżyński Academy) to ensure the reliable political indoctrination of the armed forces. Quite apart from these activities and policies, Rokossovsky was already anathema to the Poles as the wartime commander of the Soviet Army Group that had stood by passively as the *Wehrmacht* suppressed the Warsaw insurrection in the

summer of 1944. Though he had obviously been following orders during that tragedy and though he now delicately retained traditional Polish uniform cuts, anthems, and other such symbols, Rokossovsky's very presence, let alone his current role, in Poland in the 1950s was universally resented. It reflected obtuse Russian insensitivity to Polish—even Polish Communist—national sensibilities and, superimposed as it was on the "Muscovites'" purge of the "local undergrounders" within the Communist party, indicated Stalin's definitive rejection of distinctive national roads to Socialism.

## 3

Both the differences and the similarities between Poland and Czechoslovakia in the matter of the Communist assumption of power are significant. In Czech and Slovak, unlike Polish, collective memories, Russia was perceived as a historical friend, and the Soviet Union was not regarded as an accessory to Nazi Germany's destruction of the interwar state and occupation of the country. At war's end, the Czechoslovak government-in-exile, unlike the Polish one, was able to return to its capital from London, albeit via Moscow and with heavy Communist representation. Furthermore, just as the interwar Czechoslovak Communist party had been a major, legal, respectable, and indigenous one that consistently drew over 10 percent of the popular vote in free parliamentary elections, whereas its Polish counterpart had been small, intermittently outlawed, and widely viewed as a subversive agent for an external predator, so the postwar public response to Communist pre-eminence in the government was quite different in Czechoslovakia, where this new pattern was widely deemed to be legitimate even if regrettable, than it was in Poland. Also, while postwar Poland was constitutionally a centralized state, the political energies released by wartime Slovak independence and especially by the impressive Slovak uprising in the autumn of 1944 (see Chapter 2, section 3) exacted a semifederalist restructuring of the Czechoslovak state, with a certain degree of autonomy for Slovakia. This situation proved to be a tactical asset to the Communists in their competition with other political parties, though an unanticipated liability to their own internal cohesion. Finally, whereas in postwar Poland's early years, the Socialists enjoyed significant support in the trade-union movement, the Czechoslovak unions were always under Communist direction.

One politically consequential similarity between the two countries was that both had been liberated from the German occupation by the Soviet army (except, ephemeraly, a narrow strip of western Czechoslovakia where the Americans appeared before the Soviets in April 1945). And their own armed forces were directed by defense ministers who, though nominally nonpartisan, were in the pockets of the Communists. Similarly, the internal-security (police) apparatus in both states was tightly monopolized by the Communists. Although Czechoslovakia did not gain new territory from Germany, as did Poland, it acquired much German property, thanks to the expulsion after the war of about 3 million ethnic Germans. And as in Poland, the Communists took care to control the extensive patronage apparatus accruing from the distribution of the expellees' farms and property to Czech and Slovak beneficiaries, and to depict the Soviet Union as henceforth the only reliable Great Power guarantor of these gains against eventual German revanchism. Finally, in both Poland and Czechoslovakia, the catastrophic events of 1938 and 1939 and then the experience of wartime occupation had sullied the prestige of the interwar parties and systems and the authority of their surviving leaders. Although this change in the moral climate of public life did not automatically give political strength to the Communists, it did erode the stamina and the self-confidence of their domestic competitors.

The government with which President Edward Beneš returned to Prague in May 1945 had been sculpted in Moscow two months earlier. Its premier was Beneš's wartime ambassador to the Soviet Union, Zdenek Fierlinger, whose party affiliation was Social Democratic but who soon revealed himself to be a reflexive enthusiast for zombie-like coordination with the Communists and the Soviet Union. His party had two additional ministerial assignments. The non-Marxist National Socialists (who bore no ideological relation to their German namesake and were simply a progressive, bourgeois, anticlerical reform party) and the Czech Populists (Catholic) each had three; the Communists, four. The defense and foreign affairs portfolios were assigned to nonparty professionals, with a Communist being designated deputy minister of foreign affairs so that he could monitor his chief, and the defense minister being a general with warm "brotherhood-of-arms" feelings toward the Soviet armed forces, at whose side he had fought in the war. The semiautonomous regional subgovernment of Slovakia was shared between the Slovak Communists (who had absorbed the local Social Democrats



in 1944) and the Slovak Democrats (an amalgam of all the other non-Communist members of the Slovak National Council, which had authorized the uprising of 1944). These five governmental parties—with the Communists appearing in their dual guises of “Czechoslovak” and “Slovak”—constituted themselves as the National Front, proscribed all other interwar and wartime parties as having compromised themselves by treason and collaboration, and permitted no institutionalized opposition.<sup>6</sup> Though the four non-Communist parties had conceded much and the relative Communist weight in the government was to prove heavier than the numerical distribution of portfolios suggested, the National Front of 1945 was still a government of agreed compromise rather than a veiled seizure of power, as was its Polish counterpart.

The initial moderation of the Communists in the distribution of portfolios was matched by a moderation in policy matters. Their calls for alignment with the Soviet Union were not out of line with those of their coalition partners and were, after all, anticipated by Beneš's own treaty with Stalin in December 1943 (see Chapter 2, section 3). In domestic policy, they demanded no radical socioeconomic transformations beyond the collective commitment of all the National Front parties to the nationalization of banks, heavy industry, and large factories and to the distribution of large landed estates to peasants; they expressed respect for private property and Christian values (even tolerating parochial schools) and were quite sparing in their recourse to Marxist-Leninist rhetoric. Nor did they initially abuse their control of the police apparatus and of other instruments of intimidation in anything like the manner of their comrades in other people's democracies. Thus the Czechoslovak Communists nourished a widespread impression, shared by Beneš, that they were different from other Communists, patriots first and foremost, evolutionary reformers, and reliable partners in the national coalition government. Accordingly, all the parties of the coalition set about recruiting mass memberships and developing their organizations. Soon 40 percent of adult Czechoslovaks were members of political parties. Such a high degree of politicization not only was probably unhealthy in a general sense, but also advantaged the Communists specifically—not so much because their membership was the largest of the five parties, but because it was the most tightly organized and firmly disciplined, and hence most capable of infiltrating and eventually manipulating the extrapartisan institutions and mass organizations of public and collective life, such as trade unions, “peasants' commis-

sions,” professional bodies, grass-roots “action committees,” and local governments.

Nevertheless, for more than two years after the end of World War II, the Czechoslovak Communists refrained from any extravagant flexing of their political muscles. As long as the French and Italian Communist parties were still participating in their respective governments, and while Czechoslovakia was being widely viewed in the West as a test case of the possibility of preserving the wartime Big Three alliance into the postwar era, it made sense for Stalin to try to sustain the viability of the first and third options of Harriman's suggestive triad (see section 1). And his disciples in Prague were powerfully tempted to reach for the enormous prestige that would accrue to them should they achieve a legal, electoral, peaceful conquest of power in their relatively advanced industrialized country.

From this last perspective, the results of the first (and last) free parliamentary elections of the postwar era, on May 26, 1946, were ambiguous.<sup>7</sup> The Communists (Czech and Slovak combined) won 38 percent of the votes throughout the country; the Social Democrats, 13 percent; the National Socialists, 18 percent; the Czech Populists, 16 percent; and the Slovak Democrats, 14 percent. Within semiautonomous Slovakia, the Slovak Democrats won 62 percent; the Communists, 30 percent; and two new minor parties received 4 and 3 percent each. The Communists' performance (40 percent in the Czech lands, 30 percent in Slovakia, and 38 percent in the state as a whole) was impressive, though it seems to have fallen short of their expectations. Their Social Democratic allies were the biggest losers and had to yield the premiership to the Communist Klement Gottwald. Yet as the holder of the balance between the Communists and the non-Marxist parties within the National Front, the Social Democrats became its most courted, solicited, and cajoled member party.

The Communists quickly demonstrated their resiliency, skill, and tenacity. Deeming unacceptable the prospect of losing political control of the Slovak administrative apparatus to the Slovak Democrats, they coaxed the other Czech parties into joining them in passing legislation a month after the elections that sharply limited the autonomy of Slovakia, reducing it to little more than a regional administrative unit of the Prague-centered government. Though it achieved its immediate intentions and was enacted legally and peacefully, this measure reimposed a chronic strain on Czech-Slovak relations that was later to yield a bitter harvest in the “spring year” of 1968. Compounding this source

of bitterness was the treason trial during the winter of 1946/47 and the hanging on April 18, 1947, of Monsignor Jozef Tiso, the president of the Axis puppet state of Slovakia. Though they had co-joined the 1944 uprising against Tiso, the Slovak Democrats now vainly recommended commutation of his death sentence to life imprisonment, for they grudgingly appreciated that the six years of formal Slovak independence over which he had presided during the war had been symbolically gratifying to the Slovak nation. They were seconded in this clemency recommendation only by the Czech Populists, who balked at hanging a priest, but were overruled by the other Czech parties.

Apart from these tensions between Czechs and Slovaks, the year following the elections of May 1946 was relatively harmonious and constructive. The harvest was good; industrial production leaped; and foreign trade soared, albeit mainly with Czechoslovakia's traditional Western trading partners and scarcely at all with the Soviet Union. The Communists maintained their posture of moderation, and the other parties, which had feared that the Communists might indeed achieve an electoral majority, were relieved and took heart. The National Socialists and the Czech Populists enrolled many new members.

Alas, a combination of foreign and domestic developments brutally crushed this rosy scenario from mid-1947 onward. In May, the French and Italian Communist parties were dropped from their respective national coalition governments; in June, the United States initiated the Marshall Plan for European recovery, and in early July, Stalin insisted that the Czechoslovak government reverse its initially unanimous decision (that is, including the Communists) to participate in it; in September, the Czechoslovak Communists were berated for their relative moderation—their failure to “resolve the question of power”—by the Soviet delegates to the founding session of the Cominform, a session at which the formerly acceptable doctrine of separate national paths to Socialism was condemned and the people's democracies were ordered to coordinate their systems and their policies with those of the Soviet model. Domestically, a severe drought blighted the 1947 harvest, leading to food shortages, a black market, blatantly unjust food distribution, and much anger at the Communists, who headed the most relevant ministries of Agriculture, Internal Trade, Social Welfare, and Finance.

The Communists sought to divert this public resentment by radicalizing the situation with such demagogic proposals as a “millionaires' tax,” another round of land distribution, more nationalization of enterprises, and forced bank mergers—only to be surprisingly blocked by

their coalition partners in the cabinet and the parliament. In November 1947 came an even more unsettling pair of developments as the Communists' hitherto automatic Social Democratic echoers replaced Fierlinger, their fellow-traveling chairman (and former premier), with the reputedly less compliant Bohumil Laušman, and as the Communists' attempt to seize total control of the Slovak subcabinet through an administrative coup was at least parried, though not roundly defeated.

But with Moscow's recent scoldings for alleged softness still ringing in their ears, the Czechoslovak Communists could not afford to yield or retreat, even had they been so inclined (which was not the case). They redoubled their efforts to augment their own power by intimidating and paralyzing the other parties, whose leaders' blunders played into their hands.

Aware that several public-opinion polls projected a sharp decline in its prospective electoral fortunes and unwilling to accept such a humiliation, the Communist party launched a strident campaign that the next parliamentary elections, scheduled for May 1948, be based on a single-ticket list, to be composed in advance by the member parties of the National Front and then ratified by the electorate by plebiscite. The Communist minister of the interior also aborted the investigation of a mysterious provocation entailing the mailing of parcels containing bombs to several non-Communist ministers, and proceeded to purge the police apparatus of its few remaining non-Communist officials. In mid-February 1948, the majority of the non-Communist cabinet ministers, including the Social Democrats, instructed the minister of the interior to reverse this purge. On February 20, after he (backed by his party) deliberately ignored this cabinet resolution, the ministers representing the National Socialist, Czech Populist, and Slovak Democratic parties resigned, hoping (but failing to ensure in advance) that they would be joined by the Social Democrats (which would have entailed the fall of the cabinet) or, failing this, that President Beneš would function as their safety net by refusing to accept their resignations. But they had made no serious plans for complementary or follow-up measures of their own beyond this rather weak act of resignation, with which they precipitated a crisis that immediately overwhelmed them.<sup>8</sup>

Alas for those who resigned, they had miscalculated on virtually all counts—arithmetic, psychological, and political. They numbered only twelve in a cabinet of twenty-six, thus leaving the Gottwald government legally still in office. The Social Democrats retreated from their recent shows of independence and succumbed to Communist pressure and

tributes to remain in their ministerial chairs. And the Communists, determined not to permit a replay of the French and Italian scenarios of May 1947, efficiently mobilized the mass organizations that they had earlier penetrated (and improvised new ones, such as "people's militias") to take over the streets, media, workplaces, public buildings, and utilities, and thus to generate a really pre-revolutionary atmosphere. In the face of this pressure (reinforced by the nominally nonpartisan defense minister), President Beneš, who was constitutionally required to be politically neutral and on whom the resigning ministers had imposed an unreasonable burden by expecting him to spare them the consequences of their political amateurishness through a legal formality, accepted the twelve resignations on February 25, 1948.<sup>9</sup> The Communist premier easily replaced them with tame (and probably suborned) members of their own parties. "The question of power" in Czechoslovakia was thus resolved—not quite in the manner that the Communists had planned, but as the result of their deft exploitation of a simmering crisis that their enemies had brought to a boil.

A trio of interpretive addenda to this narrative is in order. It will be recalled that the Communists had craved a legal, electoral, peaceful conquest of power in this industrially most advanced of the people's democracies. The way in which it occurred in February 1948 was formally quite legal but not electoral; and although the takeover had indeed been bloodless and free from overt violence, the latent threat of force by the Communist-controlled police, army, and "people's militias" was surely decisive. Thus the Communist seizure of power in Czechoslovakia was both constitutional and revolutionary. This brings us to the second point. Many analyses of these events have stressed the presence of Valerian A. Zorin, the Soviet deputy minister of foreign affairs, in Prague during the crisis, as though this proves not only that the Soviets had masterminded the entire Communist performance, but also that only the specter of their possible direct intervention decided the issue.<sup>10</sup> But this interpretation underestimates Gottwald and his comrades. Though the Soviets undoubtedly would not have tolerated the expulsion of their protégés from the Czechoslovak government and that country's slippage into the Western orbit, the local Communists proved quite capable of managing the crisis on their own. The third point is that none of the participants in this conflict—the Communists, their foes, the fence-sitters, the president—considered appealing to parliament for a vote of confidence or censure. This was in keeping with the interwar Czechoslovak *pětka* tradition, by which all political decisions and so-

lutions were taken and brokered by party leaders off the floor of the legislature, which was then expected to rubber-stamp them.<sup>11</sup>

The Communists' mopping up after their breakthrough of February 20 to 25, 1948, was efficient. Anti-Communist newspapers and periodicals were closed and non-Communist ones purged during the next few days, followed shortly by universities, professional bodies, sports clubs, the publishing industry, and the civil and military services. In April came the nationalization of all enterprises employing more than fifty workers and all engaged in foreign or wholesale trade, as well as breweries, bakeries, and dairies—thus ending the embarrassing spectacle of establishments left in private hands after the initial nationalizations of 1945 prospering to the shame of the less productive state-owned ones. The nationalization of industry and commerce was paralleled by a necessarily slower but nevertheless relentless drive to socialize agriculture, a drive that by 1960 had collectivized over 90 percent of the land. A typically Stalinist five-year plan was launched on January 1, 1949, with the announced purpose of "eliminating all traces of capitalism" from Czechoslovakia's economy. It deemphasized the light industries that had traditionally produced goods for export to the West and stressed heavy industry and coordination with the economies of the Soviet Union and the people's democracies. Thus whereas before World War II, only one-tenth of Czechoslovakia's foreign trade had been with its eastern neighbors, by 1954 it was four-fifths. In 1951, the five-year plan was revised to reinforce the industrialization of Slovakia.

On the narrower political front, the Communists' brisk mopping up after February 1948 included the extension of their purge to Slovakia in March, the redaction of all other parties into boggy window dressing in April,<sup>12</sup> the adoption of the new Communist-tailored constitution accompanied by single-list ratification elections in May, the enforced merger of the self-castrated Social Democratic party with the Communist party in June, and the introduction of the ominous notion of "subjective guilt" into judicial procedure, together with the unleashing of police terror, in October.

The Communists' shift from cooperating with the Roman Catholic church to seeking to subdue it began promptly that same autumn of 1948—much earlier than in Poland. The assault was also more successful than in Poland in the sense that—after several humiliating trials of churchmen, the banishment of Archbishop Josef Beran of Prague to a provincial monastery,<sup>13</sup> extensive confiscations of ecclesiastical properties, and other devastating fiscal and administrative pressures

(mixed with rewards for collaborating priests)—the vast majority of the lower clergy and nine of the thirteen functioning bishops yielded by swearing oaths of loyalty to the people's democratic regime (not simply to the Czechoslovak republic) by the spring of 1951. And although the fundamental commitment of the masses to Roman Catholicism appeared to remain intact, especially among the Slovaks, a regime-sponsored movement of so-called patriotic priests purporting to represent a synthesis of Christianity and Marxism resonated more deeply in Czechoslovakia than in Poland.

Thus the Czechoslovak Communists, who had seemed to be the "softest" in East Central Europe—with their initial postwar stance toward democratic institutions, competing parties, and the West—were to emerge during the 1950s as the area's arguably most Stalinist party—with their combination of repressiveness, rigidity, xenophobia, and ferocity of internal "anti-Titoist" purges (see Chapter 4, section 3).

## 4

In contrast to both Poland (where Stalin flatly deemed his claims to Soviet hegemonic control to be nonnegotiable) and Czechoslovakia (where for an extended interval he attenuated his other imperatives in order to maintain a bridge to the West), Soviet postwar policy in Hungary was initially rather fitful, as though Stalin was not quite certain whether that country could be permanently subsumed into the Soviet and Communist political orbit. Indeed, had Regent Miklós Horthy succeeded in his clumsy and, in the event, abortive maneuvers to negotiate an armistice and switch sides in the autumn of 1944, Stalin would have been content to leave him in office rather than work with the small and historically rather discredited Communist party. And in mid-October 1944, Stalin recommended to Churchill that British and American forces open a new front on the northern Adriatic littoral and press into Central Europe from there, thus suggesting a readiness to share the liberation of Hungary with them. Furthermore, in the provisional Hungarian government that the Soviets finally unveiled on December 23, 1944, the Communist representation was still minuscule compared with what it was in the Soviet-sponsored Polish and Czechoslovak governments. And this provisional government's program was strikingly moderate, its only socioeconomic innovation being the reform of a landed estate system that was more or less universally acknowledged to

be structurally primitive, unproductive, and notoriously inequalitarian. Even the behavior of the Soviet military administration in Hungary between the autumn of 1944 and the summer of 1945, characterized by indiscriminate requisitioning, dismantling, and removal of stocks, assets, equipment, and facilities, hints that the Soviets did not expect to stay long.

This hesitancy and ambivalence of the Soviet and Hungarian Communists toward taking power persisted for some time after the end of the war. That it was indeed ambivalence rather than fine-tuned subtlety is indicated by its improvisational and spasmodic quality. On the one hand, the Soviet administrators of the Allied Control Commission insisted on having enormously extensive executive, monitoring, and interdicting jurisdictions. On the other hand, they frequently forbore to exercise them, as when they let József Cardinal Mindszenty, the newly appointed (September 1945) Roman Catholic primate of Hungary, condemn the Marxist parties and the provisional government's socioeconomic legislation (including the land reform), express sympathy for the vanquished Horthyites, and even compare the country's recent liberation by the Soviet armies with its thirteenth-century ravaging by the Tatars. Similarly enigmatic was a remark made by the Soviet chairman of the Allied Control Commission—no less a figure than Politburo member Marshal Kliment Ye. Voroshilov—to the effect that the Soviet Union wished to rely on the catch-all Smallholder party as its fulcrum in Hungary. The Soviets and the local Communists also permitted the revolutionary "national committees" and "people's courts" that they had initially sponsored and controlled in the winter of 1944/45 to be emasculated and absorbed into Hungary's traditional municipal and ministerial structures. By June 1945, 80 percent of the Horthyite bureaucrats were still or again in office, and no effective purge of that bureaucracy was to occur for another two years. The Soviet and local Communists were also deferential toward non-Communist political parties, which were treated far more gingerly than their objective strength warranted and than they would have been had Stalin by then decided to absorb Hungary into his orbit. When the Social Democrats objected to a Communist plan to restructure the trade unions along "industrial" rather than "craft" lines, the Communists yielded in February 1945 and subsequently tolerated a substantial reassertion of Social Democratic influence in the union movement. And on such tangible workers' issues as strikes, wage increases, the functions of "factory committees," and nationalization, the Communists took a less friendly and less rhetorically

revolutionary stance than did the Social Democrats. On balance, the Communists' political program in 1944 and 1945 was remarkably self-effacing and self-abnegating. It called for the rule of law, free culture, free intellectual inquiry, free political dialogue, a free press, free enterprise, and free elections.<sup>14</sup>

But when such free elections were held, the results indicated that this political forbearance had earned the Communists neither credit nor popularity. The municipal elections of October 7, 1945, in Budapest—the country's capital and its leading industrial (working-class) and intellectual center—gave to a Communist-Social Democratic list only 42.8 percent of the votes, with 50.5 percent going to the Smallholders, 2 percent to the National Peasants, and 3.8 and 0.9 percent, respectively, to two bourgeois liberal parties styled the Citizen Democrats and the Radicals. Thereupon, the Social Democrats slipped from their Communist electoral albatross and ran independently in the national parliamentary elections of November 4, 1945—the freest ever held in Hungary. This time, the Smallholders won 57 percent of the votes; the Social Democrats, 17.4 percent; the Communists, 17 percent; the National Peasants, 6.9 percent; the Citizen Democrats, 1.6 percent; and the Radicals, 0.1 percent. The potential damage to the Communists was limited by a preelection agreement of the parties composing the National Independence Front to maintain their coalition government intact no matter what the electoral outcome, an agreement that now prevented the Smallholders from capitalizing on their absolute majority to form a one-party government. Nevertheless, the elections' results were sufficiently disconcerting to prompt a Communist reassessment, both in Budapest and in Moscow, of the past year's self-restraint, which had entailed so much fiftful and inconsistent behavior. Mátyás Rákosi, the leader of the Hungarian Communists, was summoned to Moscow to review his party's performance.

The outcome of that reassessment was, however, still quite modest in comparison with the political orientation then prevailing in Poland, Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Albania. The Hungarian Communists still did not decide to seize political power. Rather, like their Czechoslovak comrades, they retained their authentic coalition strategy but henceforth prosecuted it less waywardly and with more sustained, albeit still only incremental, pressure on their partners. They insured themselves against the haunting specter of a possible special suballiance within the National Independence Front of the Smallholders and the Social Democrats, two parties that had drawn close dur-

ing the war. When Zoltán Tildy, the Smallholder leader, was elevated to the presidency of the newly proclaimed republic on February 1, 1946, the Communists maneuvered to ensure that he would be succeeded as the leader of that party and as prime minister of the government by the more malleable Ferenc Nagy rather than by his tougher competitor, Dezső Sulyok. The next month, they successfully pressured Nagy and Tildy into purging Sulyok (together with twenty-one other Smallholder parliamentary deputies) from his party, ostensibly because he was spoiling Hungary's relations with supposedly fraternal Czechoslovakia by his protests over the latter's hard treatment of its remaining Magyar minority, but in fact because he was deemed recalcitrant to Communist leverage, and hence "reactionary." Furthermore, in Nagy's new government, the Ministry of the Interior, with its critically important control of the police, surveillance, and security apparatus, was for the first time assigned to the Communists—never thereafter to be relinquished. Interestingly, the Hungarian Communists had initially reconciled themselves to this portfolio going to the Smallholders, but that arrangement was overruled by the Soviets.<sup>15</sup> And when Marshal Voroshilov subsequently demanded the dissolution of some religio-social and youth organizations, Nagy again complied, despite considerable restlessness among members of his party. An important reason for the obsequious behavior of the leaders of the majority Smallholders toward the Soviets and the Communists during these months is that they hoped (vainly, as events were to show) thereby to persuade Moscow to lighten Hungary's reparations burden<sup>16</sup> and to favor its claims for the retrocession of at least part of Transylvania from Romania at the forthcoming European peace conference, scheduled to open in July 1946. Conversely, the still relative Communist moderation of this period was partly predicated on a reluctance to provoke the British and Americans in advance of that peace conference. Indeed, Rákosi even joined Nagy on a ministerial delegation that visited Washington and London in May 1946 to solicit support for Hungary's case. Stalin permitted no other country that had been liberated by his army to make such an open political overture to the West.

Once the peace treaty with the Allies had been signed on February 10, 1947, the confrontation in Hungary sharpened. The Smallholders, disappointed in their hopes of obtaining Soviet support through propitiation, now stiffened and rejected a Communist demand that they repudiate their executive secretary, Béla Kovács (as they had purged Sulyok the previous year), whereupon the Soviet authorities (not the

Hungarian police) simply arrested him on February 25, in violation of formal Hungarian sovereignty. The Americans and the British protested, to no avail. In May 1947, the Soviets announced that Kovács's interrogation had incriminated Prime Minister Nagy as participating in a conspiracy against the republic. Nagy, then on vacation in Switzerland and fearing arrest were he to return home, resigned in exchange for the release of his four-year-old son and remained in exile. In July, Hungary was obliged by the Soviet Union to join its neighbors in declining to participate in the American-sponsored Marshall Plan for European economic recovery. Instead, on August 1, a three-year plan providing for a state-directed economy (but not yet for steep Stalin-type capital investments, which awaited the five-year plan of 1950) went into effect. By this time, also, the civil bureaucracy had been purged and politicized to the point where the staffs of governmental agencies and offices that were headed by non-Communist ministers were no longer responsive to their nominal chiefs without Communist assent.

Yet in the parliamentary elections of August 31, 1947—which were less free than those of two years earlier due to considerable intimidation and fraud, but nevertheless still competitive and more free than those in Hungary's Balkan neighbors—the Communists received only 22.3 percent of the votes; the Social Democrats, 14.9 percent; the now-lacerated Smallholders, 15.4 percent; the National Peasants, 8.3 percent; the Citizen Democrats, 1 percent; and the Radicals, 1.7 percent. Four new parties ran in declared opposition to the National Independence Front, but since they, in effect, drew votes away from the Smallholders, their appearance was quite welcome to the Communists: the conservative, nationalist Independence party polled 13.4 percent; the more progressive Democratic Populists (Catholic), 16.4 percent; a list headed by the priest-politician István Balogh, a former Smallholder and an accomplished intriguer, 5.2 percent; and the Christian Women's League, 1.4 percent. At a minimum, these elections indicated that the public had not yet been cowed into helpless acquiescence.

But the Communists, though embarrassed, were not stopped by their poor electoral performance. On November 15, 1947, the new parliament was pressured into delegating its powers to the government and protoging itself for over a year. That same month, the Independence party was dissolved and its leader forced to flee abroad. Slightly more than a year later, a similar fate was inflicted on the Democratic Populists. Meanwhile, in March 1948, the Social Democrats were compelled to withdraw from the Socialist International and, in June, to

purge, dissolve, and merge themselves with the Communists into the latter's formally renamed Hungarian Workers party. Then on July 30, 1948, Tildy, a Smallholder, was obliged to resign the presidency of the republic in favor of the chairman of the Workers party. A third cycle of parliamentary elections was held on May 15, 1949. This time there was to be no pretense of democratic procedures. The secret ballot was reduced to a farce, and a single "Government List" drafted by the Communists, was proclaimed to have been endorsed by 95.6 percent of the voters. The new parliament promptly adopted a Soviet-emulating constitution under which Hungary was officially designated a people's democracy. With exquisite irony, it went into effect on August 20, 1949—the traditional national feast day of Hungary's patron saint and first king, Stephen (István).

As the process of bending, breaking, and coordinating the secular political institutions was approaching its denouement, the Communists turned on Hungary's ecclesiastical bodies. Like postwar Poland, Hungary was by now a well-nigh homogeneous country from an ethnological perspective; but unlike Poland, it was religiously pluralistic, with approximately two-thirds of the population Roman Catholic; one-quarter, Calvinist; and very small fractions, Lutheran and Jewish.<sup>17</sup> As the Catholic church was historically identified with the imported Habsburg dynasty and as its prelates were often Magyarized former Slovaks and Schwabs, the Calvinists, who were concentrated in the eastern part of the country, tended to view themselves as purer Magyars than the Catholics. This attitudinal distance between the two denominations, though not wide enough to be deemed a profound alienation, provided an opening for anticlerical political leverage. Thus whereas Cardinal Mindszenty, rather anachronistically called for a Habsburg restoration and emphatically opposed the postwar land reform, the Calvinist ministry endorsed the republic and welcomed the land reform as both necessary and overdue.

In the realm of culture and pedagogy, both these churches entered the postwar era still enjoying very extensive institutionalized public authority. Two-thirds of all primary schools were confessional, and religion was obligatorily taught even in the state primary schools. One-half of the boys' and four-fifths of the girls' secondary schools were Catholic. In addition, the Catholic church had been very wealthy until the 1945 land reform.

The postwar governments initially adopted a rather cautious attitude toward the churches, favoring them with priority allocations for

the reconstruction of their wrecked or damaged places of worship and with generous annual budgetary grants. But the deeply conservative, obstinate, vehement, and courageous Cardinal Mindszenty was negative and combative from the start—in contrast to Poland's socioeconomically more progressive and politically more sophisticated Primate Wyszyński. When in 1947 the state schools introduced new textbooks for secular subjects, which the Calvinist schools also adopted, Mindszenty forbade their use in Catholic schools. When in June 1948 the two confessional primary-school systems were nationalized, albeit with the retention of religious instruction, he excommunicated the Catholic governmental officers who supported this law and instructed the teaching priests and nuns to withdraw from the schools. Over 4,500 did so initially, but later returned because they were obviously needed to teach the ongoing religious lessons that most parents ostentatiously requested even though they were now optional.

As in Czechoslovakia, so in Hungary, 1948 was a year of belated and therefore accelerated Communist monopolization of power. Precisely therefore, Mindszenty—whose unbending rejection of virtually all postwar socioeconomic and political developments had seemed quixotic in 1945—had become something of a vindicated hero in popular opinion, and the Communists deemed it necessary to discredit him publicly. Arrested the day after Christmas 1948 and tried in early February 1949 on charges of currency speculation, espionage on behalf of imperialists, and treason against the Hungarian republic, he proved to be a surprisingly abject defendant, pleading guilty to most charges and confessing that his previous attitude had been wrong.<sup>18</sup> But the regime's potential domestic propaganda success was outweighed by the international revision provoked by the sinister ambivalence of this trial. Mindszenty was sentenced to life imprisonment (ameliorated to house arrest in 1955). Then most monastic orders were dissolved, and the monks and nuns evicted from their cloisters. (In Czechoslovakia, too, the religious orders were suppressed, whereas in Poland they functioned freely.) On August 30, 1950, the Catholic church yielded significant political concessions in return for the restoration of a mere 8 (out of more than 3,000) of its nationalized schools and the stabilization of the state's financial subsidies to its clergy. It promised to support the five-year economic plan, the collectivization of agriculture, and the Soviet-sponsored Stockholm Peace Appeal; to disavow subversion; and to pledge allegiance to the people's republic. Nevertheless, some arrests and trials of clergy con-

tinued. In 1952, the Calvinist ministry was also purged and obliged to yield its last remaining high schools to the state.

Meanwhile, as in the other people's democracies, a severe inner crisis wracked the Hungarian Communists precisely at the culmination of their victory over the country's other parties and political forces. As this crisis was an integral aspect of the rift between Tito and Stalin, which wrenched the Communist movement throughout East Central Europe in the years after 1948, it will be analyzed in Chapter 4. Suffice it to note here that in Hungary, the crisis turned on the issue of the "correct" or "erroneous" quality of the earlier phase of Communist restraint and moderation and of responsibility for that "fine." That earlier Communist and Soviet stance in Hungary—which was not merely restrained and moderate, but also contradictory and even capricious—has also been viewed in this book as a puzzle to which several possible solutions have been tangentially suggested. The most probable is that the stance was an outgrowth of Stalin's general uncertainty about his postwar relations with the United States and Great Britain. On the one hand, he hoped to maintain the wartime alliance; on the other hand, he feared that if and when it came to an end, the Americans would press him sharply. Specifically, he was bracing himself for the possibility that he might have to release Hungary from his political orbit in return for a free hand in Poland, which had a far higher priority for him. When the spirit of the wartime alliance finally did give way to the Cold War in 1947, Stalin was both rendered anxious and relieved that the Americans sought only to "contain," not to "roll back," Soviet power in East Central Europe. Thus he was not, after all, subjected to the anticipated pressure to trade Hungary for Poland and could unleash his Communist protégés in the Danubian state for their belated rapid seizure of power after 1947.<sup>19</sup>

## 5

In Yugoslavia, the Communist seizure and even consolidation of power had occurred during World War II, which was there a civil war and a revolutionary war as well as a war of national liberation. Indeed, postwar Yugoslavia leaptfrogged over the phase of multiparty coalition, which in the other people's democracies had at first a substantive reality of variable duration and then a nominal continuity. The Yugoslav People's Front was instead defined from the start as a "Bloc of Communists

and nonparty sympathizers"<sup>20</sup> and used as a bludgeon to smash other political parties and loyalties. Hence in the elections held on November 11, 1945, for a two-chamber constituent and legislative assembly, the choice was simply between endorsing the Communist People's Front or visibly putting one's ballot into a residual "opposition urn." Predictably, the results were as follows: Federal Chamber—88.7 percent of the eligible voters cast ballots, of whom 90.5 percent endorsed the People's Front and 9.5 percent opposed it; Chamber of the Nationalities—88.4 percent of the eligible electorate voted, of whom 88.7 percent endorsed and 11.3 percent opposed the People's Front. Formally, symbolically, and substantively, the two-chamber assembly, the elections for it, and the republican, federal constitution that it adopted on January 31, 1946, imitated the Soviet pattern much more closely than did analogous institutions and procedures in other people's democracies at this early date. Yet it would be erroneous to impute these lopsided election results purely to intimidation and to overlook the deep reservoir of authentic popularity, prestige, and legitimacy that Tito, his Partisan movement, and his Communist party had amassed during the war. It would also be a mistake to underestimate the Titoist system's extensive generosity toward the distinctive cultural, linguistic, and educational aspirations, but not the centrifugal political orientations, of Yugoslavia's several component ethnolations. For example, the decision to again designate the federation's constituent republics by their ethnolational names, which the interwar royal government had abolished and suppressed in 1929, was important and gratifying.<sup>21</sup>

The symbolic coda to this essentially wartime Communist seizure of power was the execution on July 17, 1946, of Tito's only comparable competitor of those years, the Cetnik leader General Draža Mihajlović, who had been hunted down in Bosnia in March. As this execution aroused some murmuring among Serbs, Tito's regime evened the domestic ethnolational score, as it were, on October 11, 1946, by sentencing Alojzije Stepinac, the Croatian Roman Catholic archbishop of Zagreb, to sixteen years of imprisonment at hard labor for war crimes and collaboration with the Axis occupiers. Stepinac's wartime behavior had been ambiguous and subject to contrasting interpretations. Because he had not publicly intervened to halt the forcible conversion of Orthodox Serbs to Catholicism (and the massacres of those who refused) by Ustaša bands, he had become a symbol of genocidal enmity to the Serbs. But to Croats, even those who had distanced themselves from the Ustaša, his sentence seemed an act of ethnolational spite. As the

Tito government was then pursuing a hyper-radical, ultrarevolutionary line in both its domestic and its foreign policies, the trials of Mihajlović and Stepinac were orchestrated in order to implicate and discredit the West.<sup>22</sup>

The Communists' capture of political power and of the Yugoslav state having been coterminous with the war, their postwar revolution was immediately prosecuted in the economic and sociocultural realms. This entailed not only centralized direction of the economy as well as heavy investment and extensive nationalization in the industrial, commercial, and credit sectors—a formidable challenge for a country that was underdeveloped to begin with and had been devastated by the war—but also a fierce drive to transform the so-called petit-bourgeois outlook of the peasantry through the collectivization of its land—a drive that the peasants resisted as stubbornly as the regime prosecuted. Calling for the reinvestment of between one-quarter and one-third of the national income, the regime's economic plan was clearly overambitious and was plagued by low productivity and a shortage of skilled labor and personnel; it was soon in serious trouble.

Nevertheless, precisely to justify their claims to ideological purity and to refute the Soviet accusations of "revisionism" and "capitulation to capitalism" during the incubation of the Tito-Stalin rift in 1947 and 1948, the Yugoslav Communist leaders initially redoubled their investment, development, and collectivization drives in the late 1940s, even though the Soviet Union and the other people's democracies were compounding Yugoslavia's economic crisis by renegeing on their trade commitments to it. By the turn of the decade, a greater proportion of industry, commerce, and agriculture had been "socialized" in Yugoslavia than in any other people's democracy. But the entire economy was exhausted and nearing collapse. Ominously, peasant riots erupted in 1950 in some of the regions that had first backed the Partisans during the war. But though economically irrational, the ideological superiority of those years performed the political function of enabling the Yugoslav Communists to survive Stalin's onslaught with their revolutionary self-respect and their organizational self-confidence intact. Having served this purpose during a period of acute crisis, it could be relaxed and succeeded by greater economic realism after 1952. Trade was then expanded with the West; investment goals were moderated; and peasants were permitted to withdraw themselves and their land from collective farms (decree of March 30, 1953). Only 1,000 out of almost 7,000 collective farms survived, and by 1954 over 80 percent of



the agricultural land was back in private ownership. Other structural, socioeconomic, and political changes soon followed as Yugoslavia transformed itself into a unique type of Communist-controlled but not Soviet-modeled society—a process to be analyzed in later chapters.

## 6

It was widely expected that the Romanian royal coup and attendant switch from the Axis to the Allies, executed on August 23 to 25, 1944, would be vigorously contested by the Germans. Hence it was deemed appropriate—apparently also by the Soviets—that the first postcoup Romanian government consist primarily of military men, with the relatively ornamental addition of four civilian leaders of the National-Peasant, Liberal, Social Democratic, and Communist parties as ministers without portfolio. The only civilian politician assigned a portfolio, that of Justice, was the hitherto “local underground” Communist Lucrăciu Pătrășcanu, who also doubled as one of the four ministers of state.<sup>23</sup> Two months earlier, in June, these four parties, formally still illegal, had formed themselves into an ad hoc coalition to press for Romania’s leaving Hitler’s war—a goal to which they had now been anticipated by the king’s action. The prime minister of the new government was General Constantin Sănătescu, marshal of the royal court and the link between King Michael and the army in the recent coup. One of his first acts was to restore the constitution of 1923, which King Carol had suspended in 1938, thereby relegating political parties and political life.

By early November 1944, it was clear that the *Wehrmacht*, though indeed fighting tenaciously to hold Hungary, was no longer capable of a thrust into Romania. Hence the addition of civilians to the Sănătescu government was now deemed feasible. Though the general remained prime minister and became acting war minister, he was henceforth the cabinet’s only military member, all other portfolios going either to non-party civilian specialists or to members of the four coalition parties. Interestingly, the two new Communists holding portfolios, Gheorghe Cheorghiu-Dej (Transportation and Communications) and Vladescu Răkcaș (Minorities) were, like Pătrășcanu (who retained Justice), “locals.” The top “Muscovite” Communists of that time, freshly returned from Soviet asylum—Emil Bodnăraș, Vasile Luca, and Ana Parker—did not yet assume governmental posts and instead devoted themselves

to rebuilding the weak and depleted party apparatus and its paramilitary organs. Parker would later concede that at this time the Communists, emerging from two decades underground, numbered fewer than 1,000 members.

A genuine coalition cabinet, the second Sănătescu government lasted only a month because the Communists objected to its minister of the interior (a hostile National-Peasant) and the Soviets charged it with being dilatory in fulfilling Romania’s armistice obligations. To signal his displeasure, Stalin delayed transferring the administration of northern Transylvania to Romanian responsibility while a small-scale guerrilla war raged there between Hungarian and Romanian bands. Taking the hint, King Michael replaced Sănătescu on December 6 with another general, Nicolae Rădescu, who was presumed to have credit with Moscow thanks to having been interned during the war for his anti-German attitude. Rădescu took over the interior portfolio (with a “local” Communist as undersecretary) as well as the premiership and replaced the Communist minister for minorities with a nonparty specialist, but otherwise made no politically significant changes in the cabinet that he inherited from Sănătescu.

The initial expectation that the Rădescu government would prove stable was undermined early in the new year when the “local” Communist Cheorghiu-Dej and the recently returned “Muscovite” Parker visited Moscow and were either directed or permitted to bid for power. The instrument through which they did this was the so-called National Democratic Front, formed in October 1944 and composed of the Communist party, the Social Democratic party, the Plowmen’s Front (an independent radical peasant party in the 1930s that had been heavily infiltrated by the Communists and by now was virtually their rural arm), the Union of Patriots (a Communist front among the intelligentsia and the professional and business classes), and the trade unions. In mid-January 1945, the National Democratic Front began to agitate for radical land reform, a purge of “reactionaries” and “war criminals,” and the “democratization” of the army, and to present itself as alone capable of persuading the Soviet Union to transfer northern Transylvania to Romanian control. Its campaign was ominously seconded by a resumption of Soviet allegations that the current Romanian government, like its predecessor, was lax in discharging its armistice obligations. Marked by increasingly violent street demonstrations, strikes, and land seizures that, in turn, were lubricated by the Communist undersecretary of the interior’s sabotaging the instructions of his nominal chief,

General Rădescu, and facilitated by the absence of most of the army from the country at the front (see Chapter 2, section 6), this bid for power by the National Democratic Front (actually by the Communists) provoked the exasperated Rădescu into an intemperate radio speech on February 24 in which he denounced some Communist leaders by name as "venal foreign beasts." (As their names indicate, several of these leaders were indeed of ethnically Jewish, Magyar, or Ukrainian descent.) Three days later, Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Ya. Vyshinsky flew into Bucharest, where Soviet troops simultaneously occupied the army headquarters and other government buildings, and browbeat King Michael into dismissing Rădescu. The monarch balked for another week at meeting Vyshinsky's supplementary demand that Petru Groza, the leader of the Plowmen's Front, be designated the new premier. But on March 6, 1945, this, too, was done. Groza's new government was nominally a coalition in which Communists headed only three ministries (but had undersecretaries in several others), while two dissident Liberals from outside the National Democratic Front were assigned the prestigious portfolios of Foreign Affairs and Finance, but it was altogether subservient to the Soviet Union and responsive to Communist pressure.<sup>24</sup> Its immediate reward was Stalin's permission, given on March 9, to extend the Romanian administration to northern Transylvania. This enabled the Romanian Communists to capitalize on nationalist sentiment while the Hungarian Communists were reduced in later years to arguing (unconvincingly) that Stalin's verdict would have fallen the other way had Hungary been less laggard in the pace of its "democratization." It should be noted, finally, that this early and quite decisive Romanian crisis of January to March 1945 bracketed the Big Three's Yalta Conference, held from February 4 to 11, 1945, and seriously disturbed American policy makers about Soviet intentions. Thus, ironically, just as Romania had in 1940 been the first bone of contention in the alliance of 1939 between Hitler and Stalin, so it now occasioned the first open rift between Roosevelt and Stalin as the Americans flatly refused to recognize the Soviet-imposed Groza government. The British followed the American lead only reluctantly, for Churchill believed that he owed Stalin a quid pro quo for having turned a blind eye to the suppression of the ELAS-Communist revolt against the royal Greek government three months earlier.

Conventionally depicted as merely an opportunist, a puppet, and a buffoon, Groza, albeit eccentric, was a more serious political figure than this caricature suggests. He was a prosperous Transylvanian landowner,

industrialist, and lawyer; had been educated in Budapest and was fluent in Magyar as well as Romanian; occasionally served as a minister in Romanian cabinets since 1920, and had founded the Plowmen's Front in 1933. Groza was now committed to three major political propositions: (1) carrying out land reform for the benefit of the rural proletariat and smallholders; (2) burying the traditional feud with Hungary as pointless and mutually harmful; and (3) accepting that geopolitical factors required Romanian accommodation to Soviet policy, not for sentimental or ideological reasons (which were operative for the true Communists) but simply as rational *raison d'état*. All of them were controversial, two were unpopular, none was unreasonable, and, in the long run, all were abortive.

Accordingly, a land-reform program, which Rădescu had wanted to postpone until after war's end and demobilization, was decreed by the Groza government on March 20, 1945, two weeks after its tumultuous installation. The brusque and hectic atmosphere in which the redistribution was effected, the political slanting that characterized its official statistical accounting, and the fact that it was presently superseded by enforced collectivization render any assessment of its effectiveness highly problematic. All that can be said with assurance is that its magnitude, in terms of both acreage distributed and peasant recipients, was less than that of the big "bourgeois" Romanian land reform of 1918 to 1921 and that it, like the earlier reform, failed to transform the Romanian village into a society of prosperous smallholders. Neither of these land reforms, nor both of them cumulatively, solved the problems of rural overpopulation, low agricultural productivity, strip farming, and accelerating fragmentation of holdings. But each did neutralize (not satisfy) the peasantry at a critical political moment in Romanian history.

As for Groza's wish for reconciliation with Hungary, his government initiated an authentic effort to end the traditional reciprocal jingoisms by granting generous ethnocultural minority rights, funding a Magyar university, and establishing an autonomous Magyar administrative region in northern Transylvania. Alas, these potentially productive innovations did not survive the revival of militant Romanian nationalism in the 1960s after Groza had passed from the political scene. (He died in 1958.) And, finally, Groza's commitment to Romania's coordination with the Soviet Union as a dispassionate act of state policy was also eventually superseded, first by Stalin's quite profound structural and ideological requirements in and from the people's democracies (see section I)

and second, ironically, by the Romanian Communists' sponsorship of anti-Soviet nationalism after the 1960s.

Meanwhile, in the 1940s, Groza's government consolidated itself in roughly three phases. First, in the autumn of 1945, it faced down an effort by King Michael to exploit the refusal of Great Britain and the United States to recognize it as leverage to replace it with a more acceptable alternative. Assured of Soviet support, Groza simply ignored the royal request to resign, whereupon the king withdrew to his country estate and declined to sign state documents. On November 8, truckloads of the Communist party's militia and troops of a special Soviet-trained army division fired on and broke up a Bucharest crowd celebrating the king's birthday. Yet oddly, neither the royal court nor the Groza government openly denounced each other, both denying that this anomalous situation (including the piquant spectacle of a king on strike in a Communist-dominated country) amounted to a rupture. Indeed, at the Moscow Conference of the Big Three's foreign ministers, held from December 16 to 26, 1945, a face-saving formula was worked out, whereby a pair of authentic (not fellow-traveling) National Peasant and Liberal ministers was to be added to the government, which would thereupon receive British and American recognition (duly extended on February 4 and 5, 1946) and then conduct free elections open to all democratic parties. In retrospect, it appears that the American and British negotiators at the Moscow Conference were naive, hypocritical, or remiss in agreeing to extend recognition before the promised elections, which, when held belatedly on November 19, 1946, were (predictably) quite other than free and open, as an old Romanian tradition of ballot falsification was compounded by newer Communist techniques of intimidation.

The year-long delay before holding the elections was required by the National Democratic Front's (that is, the Communist party's) need to sap the prospective opposition. It delineates the second phase of the Groza government's consolidation. The two new ministers, supposedly appointed to broaden the cabinet, were left without portfolios and simply ignored by their colleagues, and their parties were harassed. In March 1946, the Social Democrats split over the issue of running on a joint list with the Communists, the demoralized majority agreeing to do so. In April, Tătărescu's dissident Liberals likewise jumped on this bandwagon. During the summer, various decrees and laws were issued abolishing the senate, authorizing pre-election censorship and discrimination, and otherwise fine-tuning and manipulating the electoral

process to ensure the victory of the National Democratic Front, now consisting of the Communists, the purged Social Democrats, the Plowmen's Front, the National Populists (the renamed successor to the Union of Patriots), and the dissident Liberals. In the final count, this bloc was declared to have received 4,766,000 votes, entitling it to 348 parliamentary seats, while the opposition National Peasants and Liberals were relegated, respectively, to 880,000 votes for 32 seats and 289,000 votes for 3 seats. About 1 million other ballots were distributed among nominally unaffiliated but actually tame Magyar, Democratic, and splinter parties, accounting for the unicameral legislature's 31 remaining seats. The two authentic opposition ministers who had been added to the cabinet at the beginning of the year now resigned, and their National Peasant and Liberal party colleagues likewise refused to take their parliamentary seats in protest against the elections' irregularities. The American and British governments plausibly denounced the process as violating the commitments of the Moscow Conference, but did not withdraw their diplomatic recognition and went on to sign the peace treaty with Groza's freshly purged Romanian government on February 10, 1947.

The years 1947 and 1948 marked the third phase in the government's consolidation, in which the Communists exposed their power ever more openly while retaining Groza as head (until June 2, 1952). The spring of 1947 saw a wave of nocturnal, unexplained, and thus deliberately terrifying arrests of opponents. In July, a number of National Peasant leaders were apprehended while attempting to flee the country, whereupon that party was outlawed. In October and November, its two top leaders, Iuliu Mannu and Ion Mihalache, were subjected to show trials on charges—not unfounded, albeit vastly exaggerated—of conspiracy with British and American intelligence agents and were sentenced to solitary imprisonment for life. By November, Tătărescu and his fellow dissident Liberal minister had exhausted their usefulness and were dropped from the cabinet, to be succeeded by "Muscovite" Communists who for the first time openly assumed ministerial portfolios: Pauker at Foreign Affairs, Luca at Finance, and Bodnăraș at Defense. On the year's penultimate day, December 30, the still anomalously reigning King Michael was obliged to abdicate shortly after his return from attending the wedding of Britain's Princess Elizabeth and his announcement of his engagement to Princess Anne of Bourbon-Parma. Romania now officially became a people's democracy and received a corresponding new constitution on April 13, 1948 (to be followed by

two more constitutions on September 24, 1952 and August 21, 1965, of which the latter was "Socialist" rather than "people's democratic").

Politically, 1948 was a year of mopping up and of internal Communist purge. In February, the rump Social Democrats were forced to merge with the Communist party (formally styled the Romanian Workers party between 1948 and 1965), and the dissident National Peasants with the Plowmen's Front. These two "united" parties, together with the National Populist party (which a year later declared itself sociohistorically superfluous and dissolved) and the tame Magyar party, thereupon presented themselves as the Democratic Popular Front in elections held on March 28 for a parliament to ratify the people's democratic constitution. Predictably, this bloc received 405 seats, ostensibly for 6,959,000 votes. The surviving Liberals and Democrats, running as a spurious and in fact collaborating opposition, were respectively allocated 7 and 2 seats, supposedly for 213,500 and 51,000 votes. Yet this series of affirmations of Communist power did not signal tranquility. The year was marked by many silent arrests of past and potential opponents as well as by a long series of show trials of yet more National Peasants, Liberals, military personnel, industrialists, students, clergy, and Zionists. It also saw the purge of the veteran Justice Minister (since the royal coup of August 1944) Pătrășcanu and other "local" Communists by the high-riding "Muscovites."<sup>25</sup>

Structurally, 1948 marked (1) the residual nationalization of mining, banking, insurance, transportation, and the principal industries, (2) the extension into wider fields of joint Soviet-Romanian corporations (initiated in 1945), controlling important sectors of the Romanian economy under direct Soviet administration,<sup>26</sup> (3) the organization of state farms and machine tractor stations, signaling the next year's launching of the drive to collectivize agriculture, (4) the beginning of "state planning" for the entire economy, and (5) the standardization of the armed forces to the Soviet model.

Finally, 1948 was also the year in which Romania became the symbolic administrative center of European Communism, as the headquarters of the Cominform were transferred from Belgrade to Bucharest in the aftermath of the rift between Tito and Stalin. It remains now to make a comment on the British and American—especially the American—role in the political developments of 1944 to 1948. The American stance, of repeatedly calling for a Romanian government that would be freely elected and truly representative as well as friendly to the Soviet Union, was really a political contradiction, for

these two qualifications were simply incompatible. Stalin, in his bluff fashion, was more candid and consistent when he stated, "A freely elected government in any of these countries would be anti-Soviet, and that we cannot allow."<sup>27</sup> And the American political contradiction also entailed a grave moral responsibility, for it falsely encouraged some anti-Communist leaders to believe that their continued resistance would have solid American support. Had the United States government honestly conceded that it had no intention of incurring risks and sacrifices to challenge Soviet hegemony over Romania, some of these anti-Communist might have been able to save themselves, at least physically if not politically, while there was still time. Much has been written about alleged British perfidy toward the "London" Poles during and immediately after the war; but at least Churchill repeatedly (albeit vainly) urged his Polish allies to come to terms with Stalin before it was too late. This may not have been a particularly glorious page in British diplomatic history, but it was morally less culpable than the American posture in Romania and, as we shall see in the following section, Bulgaria of misleadingly exposing its protégés to very severe reprisals by fostering false hopes.

## 7

Whereas the Czechoslovak, Yugoslav, and Albanian Communist movements emerged from World War II far stronger than they had been during the interwar era, and the Polish, Hungarian, and Romanian Communist parties emerged intrinsically still as weak as they had been and utterly the creatures of their Soviet patrons, the Bulgarian Communists—uniquely in East Central Europe—emerged debilitated, a mere shadow of the powerful force that they had been in the interwar decades.<sup>28</sup> Some reasons for this enfeeblement were noted in Chapter 2. And their first political assignment from their Soviet protectors after the Fatherland Front *Putsch* of September 9, 1944—to popularize Bulgaria's belated military participation in the Soviet drive to clear the *Wehrmacht* out of southeastern Europe—only compounded the Communists' difficulties. The Bulgarian public, recalling that in April 1941 the Macedonian and Thracian irredentas had been redeemed cost-free under Axis sponsorship, now found it difficult to appreciate why it should sacrifice 32,000 dead soldiers and pay enormous costs to maintain a "fraternal" Soviet occupation army for the privilege of returning

these acquisitions (which it perceived as rightful) to Yugoslavia and Greece—and without even gaining Allied cobelligerent status at the peace table for its pains. Soviet permission to retain Southern Dobruja, annexed from Romania in 1940, seemed poor compensation for these sacrifices of 1944. At least Romania's belated association with the Soviet armies had regained it northern Transylvania. Bulgaria, however, perceived itself to be a deep loser, and all the Communists' efforts to gild this bitter lily were in vain.

But though weak relative to their own erstwhile historical strength, the postwar Bulgarian Communists were stronger than any of their competitors, all of which were internally divided and none of which enjoyed equivalently sustained Great Power patronage. These competitors consisted of the minority sectors of the Agrarian and Social Democratic parties and the Zveno group of intellectuals and reserve officers—the Communists' three partners in the Fatherland Front—as well as two urban bourgeois parties: the Democratic, which had opposed the country's wartime affiliation with the Axis but had remained aloof from the Fatherland Front, and the Radical, which, though not in the wartime governments, had believed in German victory and thus could be all the more easily blackmailed by the Communists into deserting the opposition at a suitable moment.<sup>29</sup> The majority wings of the Agrarian and Social Democratic parties, which had declined to enter the wartime Fatherland Front, were now organizationally banned, as were all other parties of the old center and right.

It may plausibly be argued that it was precisely due to these real and perceived weaknesses of all the domestic players in the postwar Bulgarian political game that it was played with such extraordinary ferocity—even by conventional Balkan standards. The Communists' purge of their competitors started very early, was particularly violent, and was especially comprehensive, while the political courage of their outstanding opponents was also remarkably audacious and persistent. This struggle proceeded through five chronologically overlapping, yet analytically discrete, phases: (1) the destruction of the institutional and political pillars of the royal regime, (2) the emasculation of the non-Communist partners within the Fatherland Front, (3) the liquidation of the hitherto formally tolerated opposition to the Communists, (4) the internal purge of the Communist leadership cadres, and (5) full Stalinization.

Immediately following September 9, 1944, Fatherland Front committees, working with a new militia and with the political-police appar-

atus of the Interior Ministry (both dominated by Communists), proceeded to purge and monitor the formal governmental structure. This process was accompanied by mass trials and executions of several thousand real and alleged fascists-cum-war criminals, in the course of which many personal and political scores were arbitrarily settled as the victims ranged from the wartime regents, ministers, and parliamentary deputies down to village mayors, policemen, and tax collectors. Rumor estimated the number summarily executed at between 20,000 and 100,000.<sup>30</sup> Even allowing for exaggeration at the upper margin of these rumors, the entire process was so brutal and exaggerated as to provoke a deep anti-Communist revulsion, leading to reconciliations in the divided Agrarian and Social Democratic movements and hence to the emergence of a more or less coordinated anti-Communist opposition within and without the Fatherland Front.

In a maneuver resembling (albeit preceding) the Hungarian Communists' intervention to ensure that the Smallholder party's leader be the more pliable Ferenc Nagy rather than the stouter Dezso Sulyok (see section 4), the Soviet deputy chairman of the Allied Control Commission for Bulgaria, General Sergei S. Biryuzov, forced Georgi M. Dimitrov to relinquish the leadership of the Bulgarian Agrarian Union to Nikola Petkov in January 1945. Dimitrov (conventionally nicknamed "Gemetó" after his initials and to distinguish him from a Communist leader with the same given name) had spent the war years under British protection in the Middle East and hence was suspect as too pro-Western. But in Bulgaria, in contrast to the Hungarian scenario, the maneuver backfired because Petkov, contrary to expectations, grew into a tenacious adversary of the Communists' drive to power, first inside the Fatherland Front and then, following his expulsion from it after a spurious, Communist-arranged palace coup in his own Agrarian Union in May 1945, outside it. A similar manipulated self-mutilation was inflicted on the Social Democrats shortly thereafter. Thus already by the autumn of 1945, the originally authentic wartime Fatherland Front coalition had been rendered bogus.

Precisely because he was a genuine radical and a true believer in Bulgarian-Russian friendship, Petkov's resistance to the Communists carried great moral authority. And because both his father and his older brother had been the victims of political assassinations, he appeared to be imbued with an almost fatalistic fearlessness. As his popularity and the readership of his independent newspaper soared and Communist morale correspondingly faltered in the autumn of 1945, Moscow felt

constrained to intercede. First, the internationally renowned veteran Bulgarian Communists Georgi Dimitrov and Vasil Kolarov, who for over two decades had made their careers in the Soviet Union and the Comintern apparatus, were dispatched back home to dim Petkov's horer. Then, Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Vyshinsky spent January 9 to 12, 1946, in Sofia, pleading with Petkov and his independent Socialist Democratic colleague Kosta Lulchev to reenter the Fatherland Front government and thereby reburish its tarnished legitimacy. It will be recalled that a similar broadening of the Groya government in Romania was arranged at this time, following the Moscow Conference of the Big Three foreign ministers, but in time proved merely cosmetic (see section 6). Petkov and Lulchev were made of sterner stuff than their Romanian counterparts, countering Vyshinsky's petition with demands for (1) the retroactive cancellation of parliamentary elections held the previous November 18, which they had declared to be rigged and had boycotted, and which the Fatherland Front declared itself to have won with 88 percent of the ballots, and (2) the surrender by the Communists of the ministries of Interior and Justice, the key bureaucratic instruments of control and purge. The Bulgarian Communists were by now so shaken by the public backlash to their manipulations and excesses that they were prepared to meet the opposition halfway, reluctantly agreeing to yield to it the Justice portfolio and to let it designate two undersecretaries in the Interior Ministry. But Moscow, perhaps concerned that such concessions would prove contagious to Communist morale elsewhere in East Central Europe, vetoed this tentative compromise in March 1946.

As Petkov and Lulchev were emphatically supported and encouraged by the American political representative in Bulgaria, Maynard B. Barnes, their harassment eased temporarily, and the Communists concentrated during the spring and summer of 1946 on purging their Zveno allies and the army officer corps. The Zveno war minister was dismissed on the pretext of his prewar professional contacts with the Yugoslav Draža Miličević, who was being prepared for trial by the Tito regime in Belgrade, and his functions were transferred to the cabinet as a whole. But he was gently reassigned to be envoy to Switzerland. The Zveno prime minister was downgraded to vice premier and foreign minister, yet also physically spared. As long as the peace treaty was not signed and Western diplomatic recognition had not been granted, prudence suggested that the British and Americans not be gratuitously irritated by a resumption of brutality. And Zveno recip-

rocated by never defying the Communists, as had the Agrarians and the Social Democrats.

Although terrorist excesses might be suspended, the Communists' political drive to power continued apace. Two thousand officers of the royal army were retired in the summer of 1946. On September 8 (the anniversary eve of the Fatherland Front *Putsch* of 1944), a plebiscite replaced the monarchy with a republic, the adolescent Tsar Simeon II being exiled and compensated with a fairly generous gratuity of \$20 million. The official results of this plebiscite were 92.3 percent for a republic, 4.8 percent to retain the monarchy, and 2.9 percent invalid ballots. On October 27, 1946, a constituent assembly was elected to draft a people's democratic republican constitution, which was adopted on December 4, 1947. Of the 465 seats at stake, the Fatherland Front won 366, of which 275 were assigned to the Communist party, and 91 to its subordinate partners. During the next year, however, 27 of the non-Communist Fatherland Front deputies defected to the opposition, which had originally emerged from the elections composed of 89 Petkovist Agrarians, 9 Lulchevist Social Democrats, and 1 independent. In percentage terms, the Fatherland Front had claimed 70 percent of the ballots for itself and conceded 30 percent to the opposition; this was the largest proportion recorded for any real opposition in any postwar East Central European election, and tended to support Petkov's claim that had the balloting been truly free, secret, and accurately counted, he would have won with 60 percent popular support.

Now ensued a shameful Western failure of nerve. Even though as late as November 4, 1946, Washington and London had endorsed Petkov's criticism of the elections' procedural pollution through intimidation, even though he and Lulchev remained undaunted, and even though fissures were now showing in the Fatherland Front as some of the Communists' hitherto tame allies were straddling and deserting, the United States disarmed itself of its only leverage for influencing Bulgarian domestic developments by signing the peace treaty on February 10, the Senate then ratifying it on June 4, 1947. That was all the Communists and the Soviets needed. The day after this American ratification, Petkov was arrested on the floor of the parliament. His newspaper had been shut since April through the sinister device of an ostensible printers' strike. Tried during August in an atmosphere of drummed-up hysteria on charges of criminal conspiracy to overthrow the government, he was found guilty and hanged on September 23, his body relegated to an unmarked grave. Prime Minister and Communist

party leader Georgi Dimitrov, who had been the beneficiary of a worldwide protest movement at the time of his trial in Nazi Germany in 1933 for having been allegedly involved in the burning of the Reichstag, now had the odious taste to announce that, but for "provocative" British and American protest notes, Petkov's death sentence would have been commuted. Hardly was Petkov's body cold in the ground than the Americans extended formal diplomatic recognition and designated an ambassador to Bulgaria on October 1, 1947.

What was disgraceful in this episode was not Washington's decision to draw the "containment" line in this part of the world around Greece and Turkey and to write off Bulgaria. That decision can be defended as, on balance, prudent and rational. But not the failure to signal it in time to Barnes in Sofia and to restrain him from fostering Petkov's belief that his American backing was solid—a belief that lured Petkov into actions forfeiting his life.<sup>31</sup>

The rest was anticlimactic, though ruthless. Petkov's Independent Agrarian Union had been dissolved and its parliamentary mandates canceled immediately after his trial. With impressive pluck, the nine opposition Social Democratic deputies still voted against the Fatherland Front's constitutional draft in December 1947 and against its proposed budget in January 1948. They were arrested in July 1948 (one managing to flee to Turkey) and sentenced to long prison terms in November. In August, the puppet Social Democrats within the Fatherland Front dissolved their nominally autonomous party and merged with the Communist party. The previous month, the puppet Agrarian Union within the Fatherland Front had announced its mutation from a "political" into an "educational" body. In early 1949, Zveno and the Radical party ended their own organizational existences altogether and dissolved themselves into the Fatherland Front as a whole, which soon became simply a mass association encompassing virtually the entire population.

At the end of 1948, over 60 percent of the national income was still in private hands, even after some fairly extensive nationalizations during the two preceding years. This changed with the launching and implementation of two successive five-year plans starting on January 1, 1949. By the close of the 1950s, private ownership in industry and trade had vanished, and agriculture had been completely collectivized. Despite the imposition of ferociously exacting labor discipline, productivity in many economic sectors remained below prewar levels. Yet even during and after the post-Stalin "thaw," the Bulgarian regime made

fewer structural socioeconomic concessions to its peasantry and petite bourgeoisie than did any other people's democracy.

The death of Georgi Dimitrov on July 2, 1949, in Moscow occurred in the midst of a bloody internal purge that devastated Bulgaria's Communist elite and cadres over the next year. This will be analyzed in Chapter 4. By this time, Dimitrov's standing in Stalin's eyes was none too secure, but his opportune demise facilitated the inauguration of a cult-legend to his memory that functioned as both a tool in and a fig leaf over this sanguinary purge.

## 8

In Albania, as in Yugoslavia, the Communist capture of political power had been completed during the war (see Chapter 2, section 8). The collateral structural transformation of this relatively backward society was then pursued in January 1945 with the imposition of a confiscatory "war profits tax" that crippled the small native bourgeoisie and the nationalization of all Italian and German assets, whereby the country's industrial and transportation stocks came into state ownership. The peasantry—the most numerous class—was conciliated, while the powerful landowners were broken with a series of decrees canceling agricultural debts, slashing land rents by three-quarters, and nationalizing water resources. Yet though determined to consolidate their exclusive hold on power, the Albanian Communists at this early stage still craved international, including British and American, recognition and respectability. Among the cosmetic gestures that they arranged to elicit this legitimacy were elections to a constituent assembly, held on December 2, 1945, in which 89.8 percent of the eligible voters participated, of whom 93.2 percent endorsed the uncontested list of the Communist-controlled Democratic Front. As in the previous month's elections in Yugoslavia, particularly bold dissenters had the dubious option of the "opposition urn." On January 11, 1946, this assembly abolished the monarchy of King Zog and proclaimed the people's republic; on March 14, it adopted a constitution copied from the contemporaneous Yugoslav one, minus its federalism.

The triadic interaction within the Albanian Communist movement of (1) the equivocal stabs toward earning recognition and possible aid from Great Britain and the United States, (2) the emphatic linkage, forged during the war, to Tito's Yugoslavia, and (3) domestic politics,

was quite complicated. The West, discounting the formal Albanian gestures as transparently contradicted by the hard political reality of the Communists' heavy hand, sent signals that appeared to endorse ongoing Greek aspirations to annex southern Albania (northern Epirus). The Communists, predictably, now exploited this incipient threat to present themselves as passionate protectors of Albanian national integrity, a pose that was, however, marred by their passive return to the Titoists of the Albanian-populated region of Yugoslavia that the Axis had assigned to Albania in 1941. Compounding this ambiguity was the fact that the Communists were already much weaker among the Geg clans of north-central Albania (Abaz Kupi's base during the war), who had fraternal ties to the Albanians in Yugoslavia, than among the southern Tosk Albanians, who were more threatened by Greek revisionism. In effect, therefore, the Albanian Communists' tight nexus to the Yugoslav Titoists, who were just then in a virtual paroxysm of hypermilitancy and ultraradicalism, was proving to be a double embarrassment, aggravating their international isolation and alienating the northern population.

While the latter embarrassment was, in a sense, "resolved" by the tried and tested techniques of error and propaganda by which the Communists imposed their authority on the north, the former one tore the Communist party apart. One must appreciate that the Yugoslav embrace was so smothering that it isolated Albania even from other Communist-dominated countries, including the Soviet Union (which in May 1946 declined to receive a top-level Albanian governmental delegation), as well as from the West. Only with Yugoslavia did Albania have treaty relations (as of July 9, 1946), and the Yugoslav Communist party even represented the Albanian one at the founding meeting of the Cominform, held from September 22 to 27, 1947. Meanwhile, Yugoslav advisers and specialists were flooding into Albania's administrative and military cadres, while Yugoslav investments, loans, and monetary and customs arrangements virtually annexed the economy. The relationship became ironically reminiscent of the prewar one with Mussolini's Italy. Nevertheless, one wing of the Albanian leadership, led by Koci Xoxe and composed mainly of men of working-class background, had no reservations about this dependence and was even prepared to take Albania into Yugoslavia as a seventh republic. The other wing, consisting primarily of intelligentsia and led by Enver Hoxha and Seifulla Malëshova, wanted to pursue a more independent and broader course, both internationally and domestically. In the winter of 1945/46, Xoxe

liquidated Malëshova, with Hoxha acquiescing but uneasy. Hoxha's opportunity to turn the tables came within the broader setting of Stalin's repudiation of Tito. An early hint of this was a state visit in December 1947 by Hoxha to Sofia, where, with Soviet approval but to Yugoslav chagrin, he broke Albania's diplomatic isolation by signing a treaty with Bulgaria. Then, three days after the publication of Stalin's (formally the Cominform's) repudiation of Tito on June 28, 1948, Hoxha denounced all economic arrangements with Yugoslavia as being incompatible with Albania's sovereignty and ordered the Yugoslav personnel to leave within forty-eight hours. The Soviet Union and several of its satellites promptly compensated Albania for the forfeited Yugoslav aid with generous subsidies. Xoxe and his pro-Tito associates were stripped of their governmental offices in October 1948, expelled from the party in November, and executed for treason on June 11, 1949. (Unlike other purge victims in other people's democracies, he was never posthumously exonerated or rehabilitated.)

Stalin's support thus enabled Hoxha not only to eliminate his personal domestic rivals, but also to gain for Albania a more powerful and more remote patron in exchange for a proximate and directly threatening one. Stalin, reciprocally, gained a direct naval base in the Mediterranean and the utter isolation of Tito within the world Communist movement. Interestingly, the lever that pried open both the Yugoslav-Soviet and the Albanian-Yugoslav rifts was an amalgam of nationalism and the craving of individuals for personal political control.

Hoxha quickly became an adept student of Stalinist techniques of rule. His regime became so oppressive and vindictive—albeit stoutly committed to economic development and modernization—that Western intelligence services assessed that it might be overthrown by subversion. But all their schemes (whose chances of success were, in any event, quite dubious) were betrayed by the Soviet mole in the British Secret Intelligence Service, H. A. R. (Kim) Philby.<sup>32</sup>

Two generalizations—one historical and moral, the other political and analytic—emerge as appropriate conclusions from and to this chapter. The first is that the Communist capture of power, for all its imposition by the Soviets, was greatly facilitated by the fact that, domestically, the



Great Depression and World War II not only had destroyed the old political systems, but also had gravely weakened the old political classes throughout East Central Europe. The Communist cadres that replaced those traditional political classes initially capitalized on a widespread craving for change, but quickly disillusioned, soured, and indeed reversed that very craving. They offended the societies over which they ruled not so much by monopolizing power—after all, rule by “government parties” was quite conventional in this part of the world—but by abusing it beyond traditional or acceptable limits and by putting it at the service of another state and society, the Soviet Union, in which they appeared to place their ultimate loyalty. This impression seemed to be corroborated by the purges of the late 1940s and early 1950s, which will be treated in Chapter 4.

The second generalization is that, except in Yugoslavia and Albania, the first postwar governments in the states of East Central Europe were coalitions, with the Communists formally but one of several partners. Since it is difficult for trained Communists to be members of a coalition without seeking to dominate it, they would defend these coalitions against external critics while subverting them from within. This subversion was facilitated by the fact that all these coalitions were larger than they needed to be for reliable governmental majorities. And it is a truism of political science that an over-size multiparty coalition, in which some members are arithmetically and politically superfluous, will be subject to strains as each member maneuvers to avoid being targeted as redundant and to remain among the surviving partners.<sup>33</sup> Hypothetically, the Communists might have been deemed expendable by smaller, tighter coalitions of peasant, Socialist and/or liberal parties. (In Hungary, indeed, the Smallholders even emerged with an absolute majority from the elections of November 4, 1945.) But this contingency was a priori excluded by Soviet fiat. Given, then, the imposed indispensability of the Communists, each of the other coalition partners tended to insure itself against becoming the extruded party by muting its grievances and postponing its demands, until either the moment was too late or the issue chosen to make a stand was inappropriate. In the process, many of these parties split into collaborating and opposition fragments under the stress of these pressures and maneuvers—all grist for the Communist mills. Finally, since the concepts of a loyal opposition and an open society are alien to the Leninist-Stalinist mindset, it followed that, once they had broken their erstwhile coalition

partners, the Communists would try to preclude any possibility of a freely competitive political system reversing their “historic victory.” They would seek to do this not only by monopolizing political power, but also by transforming the socioeconomic “substructure” in an ideologically stipulated direction.<sup>34</sup>