



What was Communism?

Post-Communist Politics

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Communism: Diversity in unity

- countries of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union differed from one another in many significant respects, for example:
- in the intensity, span, and effectiveness of central control,
- in the extent of popular support (pre-WW2 differences mattered)
- in the degree and timing of efforts at reform
- how to understand the communist regimes in their diversity?
- a combination of ultimate **ends** and **operational** principles
- the resemblances among communist countries were more important than their differences

The Soviet Union

- had undergone several phases of communist development:
- the Leninist period
- Stalinism
- The Post-Stalin Period
- Gorbachev - Exit from Communism (1985-1989)



The Leninist State

- for the first time in modern history a movement of the radical left claimed to have the key to absolute wisdom in overriding the principles of popular government
- it was not a conventional authoritarianism or traditional autocracy known from history - this authoritarianism was that of a **revolutionary state**



Stalinism (from Lenin to Stalin)

- Secret Police - enormous power
- Terror, torture supported by law
- A network of informers
- Internal and external espionage
- Prison system including the Gulag
- Trade Unions Destroyed
- No alternative voices other than the Party were allowed
- the state penetrated society, and eliminated all autonomous organizations



Stalinism

- Stalin conducted a policy of purges
- Millions were arrested, executed or sent to labour camps.
- Stalin purged 90% of the army's top officers, every admiral in the navy, 1 million Communist Party members, some 20 million ordinary Russians
- in the 1930s and thereafter the victims would be counted in the millions
- a cult of personality: Propaganda was used to make people aware of the part Stalin was playing in every aspect of life – work, home and leisure

The Post-Stalin Period (1953-1985)

- participation in politics remained devoid of meaningful institutional forms
- popular inputs into policy-making were filtered through the top echelons of a leadership whose members were selected by cooptation from above
- the top priority of public policy was to supply the military with the necessary resources
- a shift away from Europe as an immediate target and towards the Third World

Gorbachev - Exit from Communism (1985-1989)

- the Soviet and the East European economies continued to lag behind the West
- Soviet military spending in this period is estimated to have been 20-25 per cent of Soviet GNP - unsustainable levels
- attempted reforms: perestroika and glasnost
- a goal of softer authoritarianism, to reassure the West while maintaining capability to accomplish the task of dismantling a militarized economic regime
- permit a freer flow of information without full accountability in times of anticipated stress

Countries of Central and Eastern Europe

- in the Stalin period their political formula and institutions closely followed the Soviet model
- there were apparent differences in the extent to which this model was accepted, tolerated, or rejected by the populations of different states
- after Stalin's death, the once uniformly obedient states could be grouped into three distinct categories (Janos 1996):
 - solidary states (Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Bulgaria)
 - states simulating Soviet-bloc solidarity (Hungary, Poland, Romania)
 - states following an independent course (Albania and Yugoslavia)

Solidary States

- East Germany, Czechoslovakia (after 1968), Bulgaria
- large military expenditures
- weapon suppliers, extensive surveillance network organizations (Stasi, StB), foreign intelligence and subversive operations (assassinations)
- extremely dependent on the Soviet support



East Germany (GDR)

- born with a defect: not an established nation-state but a regime occupying a randomly selected territory
- hard-link Communism, any critique of the regime threatened the very existence of the state
- an attractive exit option for its population (fewer pressures in the process of adaptation)



Czechoslovakia

- the only CEE country where the Communist Party enjoyed a strong popular support before the Communist takeover in 1948
- a brief period of Stalinism (1948-1955), meddling through (1955-63), regime liberalization (1963-1968), a frozen post-totalitarian system (Linz and Stepan, 1968-89)
- after the Soviet military invasion (1968), exit strategy of many political activists
- a rigid Communist Party – purges (1/3)– absence of a moderate wing, lack of economic reformers before 1989
- imitation of perestroika, the Communist leadership perceived it as an existential threat

Bulgaria

- in the post-WW2 setting, the Soviet leadership installed a communist government that quickly eliminated all non-communist political players
- non-communist politicians were discredited by their collaboration with Nazi Germany
- after a brief period of Stalinism, Todor Zhivkov took over the party leadership in 1956 and controlled it until 1989
- agrarian country, industrialization and urbanization brought by the Communists
- weak to non-existing opposition, independent initiatives emerged only in the late 1980s

States simulating Soviet-bloc solidarity

- Poland, Hungary, Romania
- simulating solidarity but following an independent political formula
- internally different in the ways they combined political formula and strategies of modernization and economic growth
- some pre-WW2 modernization in Poland and Hungary, very little in Romania
- communist parties installed by the Soviet union in POL and HUN enjoyed little popular support; little meaningful political pluralism in ROM – Soviets helped an early installation of Communist-controlled government

Poland

- Linz and Stepan argue that communism in Poland never reached the fully totalitarian character, because in 1947-1989 there were
- 1. limited societal pluralism (Catholic church, a 10-million strong and united opposition unions)
- 2. strong agricultural sector that was never nationalized
- 3. frequent and highly significant changes to the party leadership
- 1980 – a de facto military coup led by General Jaruzelski (who simultaneously occupied the Communist Party leadership)
- suppression of the opposition that remained strong underground, later attempts to negotiate a power-sharing arrangement



Hungary

- Communist assumed power in 1947 after a series of electoral manipulations and interventions by the Soviet Army/leadership
- after a brief period of Stalinism, reformist leadership of **Imre Nagy** attempted to establish a coalition government and to leave the Soviet Bloc – the 1956 Soviet military intervention
- the Communist Party was reconstructed, a policy of limited economic interactions with the West was pursued , some economic reforms and legalization of private property (semi-market economy)
- “Whoever Is Not Against Us Is for Us”



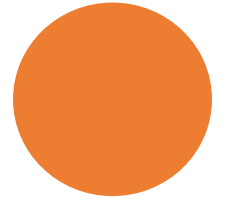
Romania

- Romanian communism is linked with the person of N. Ceausescu, its leading representative between 1965 and 1989
- originally selected as a representative of a collective (anti-Stalinist) leadership, Ceausescu quickly came to fully dominate the party and security apparatus
- through combination of personalism and nationalism, Ceausescu built a “sultanistic regime”: cult of personality, fear, greed, key positions of members of his family
- a degree of independence in foreign policy (the only core country not to take part in the 1968 invasion to Czechoslovakia)



States rejecting the idea of a Soviet Bloc solidarity

- Yugoslavia and Albania
- built around the leaders who enjoyed the status of key personalities (Josip Tito and Enver Hoxha)
- home-grown communisms, independence from Moscow
- **Albania:** the persistence of fully fledged totalitarian institutions, adherence to permanent purges, links with China and subsequent international isolation; death of Hoxha in 1985, one-party state until 1991
- **Yugoslavia:** a strategy of non-alignment, outside Soviet-controlled military and economic structures, an independent way to communism, a combination of central planning and private property/market



Conclusion

- a number of important differences among the communist regimes of Central and Eastern Europe
- sharing common political ends
- pursuing them via divergent operational principles
- all CEE countries and their communist regimes evolved against the backdrop of political changes in the Soviet Union
- both the death of Stalin in 1953 and a decision not to intervene by Gorbachev in 1989 acted like catalysts of divergence