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**COMMUNIST
POWER IN
EUROPE
1944-1949**

— EDITED BY —
MARTIN McCAULEY

Communist Power in Europe 1944–1949

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Edited by
MARTIN McCAULEY

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For
Jimmy, Jean and Rosemary Lennon

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Preface

The Russian revolution of October 1917 gave birth to the first State which claimed that it was putting into practice the precepts of Marx and Engels. It also called into existence a plethora of Communist or Workers' Parties modelled on the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. These parties, tied closely to the U.S.S.R. in the Third International or Comintern, were overtly and covertly to pursue policies which enhanced the position of the first Workers' and Peasants' State and promoted the cause of revolutionary Socialism at home. Several attempts, some successful as in Hungary and Bavaria, were made to emulate the victory of Lenin in the Soviet Union. Their success, however, was short-lived. Germany held out hopes for revolutionary change, in the aftermath of war and defeat. The unsuccessful uprising of October 1923 marked the end of the dream of a Socialist Germany becoming the fulcrum of European and then world revolution. The rise of National Socialism set the adrenalin flowing once again in Moscow. Stalin misread the theory and practice of Fascism and indirectly aided Hitler's accession to power in Germany in January 1933. The Soviet Union realised her mistake a short time later, and at the VIIth Congress of the Comintern in August 1935 launched the popular front strategy. Fascism was regarded as a very dangerous phenomenon. Consequently Communists were to offer their hand to all political forces willing to take part in the struggle to contain the new and most dangerous threat to the Soviet Union since the end of Allied intervention in 1920. Germany and Italy found many imitators in Europe, and the risk was increasing daily that they might find common cause and attack the Soviet Union. The Soviets had read and taken note of *Mein Kampf* even if others had not.

Stalin's policy, given the military might of Germany and the uncertain quality of the Red Army, especially after the purges, was to hold the National Socialist threat at arm's length. The Soviet Union was suspicious of British and French efforts to entangle her in an anti-German alliance. What if Britain and France refused to fight when the moment of truth arrived? Stalin reasoned that the Soviet Union's interests would be better served by coming to an agreement with Fascist Germany. That way the Wehrmacht could become embroiled in a general European war, round two of the 1914–18 struggle, the only difference being that this time the U.S.S.R. would be on the sidelines, able to intervene when she thought it most advantageous to do so. By taking this decision Stalin made war in Europe inevitable in late 1939. He must have considered the prospects of the Wehrmacht routing all opposition very slim indeed, since he must have

been aware that if Germany were victorious, thereby becoming an even greater threat to the Soviet Union, she was bound if not in the short term then in the long term to move against the Soviet Union. He could buttress his confidence that he had made the right decision by pointing to the plums that had fallen into his lap as a result of his pact with Germany on 23 August 1939. These were, the Baltic States; the opportunity of moving against Finland while Germany was engaged in the west; the incorporation of those parts of Poland (and a bit more besides) which had belonged to imperial Russia before 1917; the re-occupation of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina (also never held by imperial Russia); and the inviting prospect of picking up the pieces as Europe disintegrated under the strain of fratricidal strife. Surely the Wehrmacht could not go one step better and achieve what the imperial German army had failed to do between 1914 and 1918.

What of the Communists, what role were they to play in this grand military design? Very small indeed; they were as bemused and bewildered in August 1939 as the rest of the world when Stalin, the paragon of virtue in Communist eyes, joined hands with the apotheosis of evil, Hitler. Some comrades never recovered from the shock of being ordered to combat anti-German propaganda in their own countries and to attack the Western Democracies for starting the Second World War. Most, however, did, fortified no doubt by the belief that Comrade Stalin, coming to sup with the devil, had brought with him the longest spoon yet devised by man, the product of Socialist planning, of course. But the best-laid schemes of mice and men are liable to go a-gley. The unthinkable happened and the Soviet Union found herself enveloped in a war with an aggressor whose teeth had been sharpened in France, the Low Countries and elsewhere, secure in the knowledge that her rear would not be attacked by the Soviet Union. A much stronger and more confident Wehrmacht now turned against the U.S.S.R., not bothering first to finish off the Anglo-Saxons behind their fortress of water.

Stalin was stunned, and provided no leadership during the first days of the war. Such was the all-consuming nature of the struggle that there was no time to think out resistance strategies in occupied Europe before the battle of Moscow had been won. This victory afforded the Soviet Union a breathing space, but, more important, a measure of self-confidence was restored. The entry of the U.S.A. into the struggle held out the promise that Germany and Japan could be contained. Soviet tactics towards German prisoners-of-war in 1942 and 1943 were designed to encourage the Wehrmacht to return to Germany's pre-war frontier. A National Committee for a Free Germany (N.K.F.D.) was set up in 1943 to promote this goal.

The acceptance by Stalin at Teheran in November/December 1943 of the Western Allies' call for unconditional surrender made at Casablanca in

January 1943 required the Soviets to change their tactics *vis-à-vis* the Wehrmacht. The policy espoused was to send back deserters and prisoners-of-war behind German lines to encourage German troops to surrender in large numbers, thus hastening the defeat of the German army and of Hitler. Stalin could not be sure that the Soviet army would actually occupy any of Germany or liberate any of the countries under Nazi control. The Yalta Conference, however, accorded the Soviet Union an important role in post-war Germany and Eastern Europe. The percentage agreement between Stalin and Churchill, affecting Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, Yugoslavia and Hungary, strengthened the position of the Soviet Union. The position of the U.S.S.R. changed rapidly between the summer of 1944 and the spring of 1945. The N.K.F.D. originally was geared to influencing events in a post-war Germany without the presence of the Soviet army. During 1944 it became clear that the Soviet Union stood a good chance of establishing a physical presence in a part of post-war Germany. The N.K.F.D. assumed a greater significance because of this, for as the Soviet army advanced and occupied German territory N.K.F.D. front representatives could assume the leading role in re-establishing civilian administration. All the while German and other ex-enemy prisoners-of-war were taking part in courses in special anti-Fascist schools in the U.S.S.R. designed to train them for civil, police and military roles when they returned home after the war.

Communist Party tactics in the occupied parts of the Soviet Union and the rest of Europe were quite simple: use every means available to build up resistance to Nazi rule, and sabotage the German war effort to the maximum degree possible. This resistance was linked to a political offensive. Politically, the Communist Party attempted to lead resistance to Nazi power. Where this was not possible, the tactics of the popular front were applied, and Communists won recognition, even from their opponents, for their deeds of valour in the fight against Fascism. Often Communists in prison and camp lost touch with their Party and its political line, but carried on as they thought fit. This was especially so among German Communists inside Germany. While Communists in occupied Europe were forging plans for a better, inevitably Socialist post-war Europe, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was also drawing up its specification for post-war development. Centred in the Comintern school, each Communist Party, under the aegis of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, had the task of training cadres who would, it was supposed, play a vital role in the transformation of Europe.

Great Britain and the United States also had plans for post-war Europe. They hoped that after the liberation, democracy, understood in its pluralistic form, would be introduced. The ex-enemy countries, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Austria, Germany and Italy, would need an Allied presence to ensure that the remnants of Fascism were eradicated before

democracy could be instituted. These countries would also be expected to pay reparations. The rapid advance of the Soviet army in the summer of 1944 led to a Soviet presence in Bulgaria, Romania, Czechoslovakia and Poland. The Western Allies had to face the prospect that the Soviet Union was going to play an important role in Eastern Europe, if not in all of Europe, after the end of hostilities. Zones of influence had to be agreed. If this was not done before the end of the war, the Soviet Union might occupy large portions of Europe and stay put after the victory over Germany had been won. Churchill, who was especially exercised by the fate of two countries, Poland and Greece, almost to the exclusion of the rest, reached the percentage agreement with Stalin in late 1944 without consulting the Americans. Churchill conceded primacy in Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary to the U.S.S.R., Stalin did the same for Britain's position in Greece and Yugoslavia was split fifty-fifty. This agreement was to last only, until the end of hostilities. No agreement which satisfied both sides could be reached on Poland. The United States did not commit herself to these agreements when she learned of them. The scene was set for a multitude of misunderstandings in the Balkans after 1944. Roosevelt, in the bargain, mentioned to Stalin at Yalta in February 1945 that he envisaged American troops staying in Europe for about two years after the war. Britain was expected to play a leading military role on the Continent after peace had been restored. The Allies agreed that national independence should be restored to liberated and occupied areas alike. However Fascism and militarism had to be eradicated and democracy developed.

Men such as George Kennan and Fitzroy Maclean were quite aware that there was a great difference between what the Soviets understood by the word democracy and what the Western Allies regarded as the meaning of the word. However, in the last year of the war, neither Great Britain nor the U.S.A. expected the Soviet Union to be militarily and economically strong enough to play a leading role in Europe in the immediate post-war epoch. The belief was abroad in the U.S. administration that a lasting agreement could be reached with the U.S.S.R. providing her legitimate defence needs were granted. The Soviet Union, it was believed, only wanted guarantees that no war would be launched against her in the future from East European territory. It was expected in these countries that governments would take office which would be neutral or friendly towards the U.S.S.R. Communist governments were possible in the future but not in the short term. Allied Control Commissions (A.C.Cs.) established themselves in Italy, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania and Finland (which had left the war in September 1944). The A.C.C. in Italy was dominated by the Western Allies and those in Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania and Finland were dominated by the Soviet Union. The situation in Germany and Austria was different. There the States and the capital cities were partitioned among the Allies. Each Ally had free rein in its