

COMMUNISTS IN COURT – ON SEVERAL ASPECTS OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA’S POLITICAL TRIALS OF THE EARLY 1950s

Jan Kalous

The trial of representatives of the so-called anti-state conspiratorial centre of Rudolf Slánský came to a conclusion on 27 November 1952. Eleven of the 14 charged received death sentences, which were carried out several days later. It was the largest such trial of Communist Party officials in the Soviet zone of influence at that time. This paper looks at several issues that arise in connection with the trial – anti-Semitism, reverberations from the conflict with Tito’s Yugoslavia, Soviet reality, and the internal problems of both the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and the country itself.

WE’RE DETERMINED TO TAKE CARE OF EVERYBODY, WE’RE AFRAID OF NO ONE – THE TRIAL OF JOSEF PAVEL

Milan Bárta

J. Pavel, who came from a working class family, joined the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. In 1935, he went to study in Moscow, before in 1936 being sent to the international brigades in Spain, where he took part in tough fighting. Following the war he returned to Czechoslovakia and joined the Ministry of the Interior, where he reached the post of deputy minister. In February 1951, he and other leading security officials were arrested. After almost three years in investigative custody, he was sentenced to 25 years in jail. However, in October 1955 he was cleared of wrongdoing during a reinvestigation, and in 1968 he was one of the leading actors in the Prague Spring.

THE TRIALS OF THE ALLEGED HENCHMEN OF THE GREEN INTERNATIONAL

Petr Anev

Trials linked to the Green International (GI) belong to the category of large public show trials and are significant for a number of reasons. Along with the Babice case, they were the largest trials of opponents of collectivisation in Czechoslovakia. The trials of the “hench-

men” of the GI were a kind of right-wing version of the trial of Horáková and Co. and represented an attack on social groups excluded from public life from 1945: farmers, national democrats and committed Roman Catholics. Many important conservatively oriented writers were convicted in the trials of the GI, and the trials are occasionally wrongly identified with them exclusively. At the same time, they were without question an attack on non-socialist culture.

BUT YOU’LL REMEMBER! – DARKNESS (1950) IN THE HISTORICAL MEMORY

Petr Kopal

The 1950/1951 film *Temno* (Darkness), an adaptation of a novel of the same title by Alois Jirásek, was the product of two key propaganda drives of the freshly-installed Communist regime: the so-called Operation Jirásek, and an anti-church campaign. The Communists built on the historical memory of the nation in constructing the legitimacy and continuity of their regime. At the same time, they fundamentally remade it – in particular by means of the most important art. Nevertheless, for the opponents of the regime that “remembering” allowed the anti-church film *Temno* to be actually seen as anti-Communist.

DEFECTOR IN THE FREE WORLD – AN INTERVIEW WITH LADISLAV BITTMAN

Pavel Žáček

Prior to 1968, L. Bittman was an officer of the Czechoslovak Communist intelligence. An expert on disinformation, he settled in the United States after his defection under the name Lawrence Martin and taught at Boston University. In his few published testimonies, he has not gone into much detail about what he went through after his arrival in the US. In his interview, P. Žáček’s discussed that subject and more with Bittman.

I’LL GIVE YOU COMMUNIST JUSTICE – DOCUMENTS IN THE CASE OF JOSEF PAVEL

Milan Bárta, Jan Kalous

J. Pavel – arrested during the large-scale arrests of leading functionaries of the Communist security services in Febru-

ary 1951 – was one of few who resisted mental and physical torture and refused to confess. Following his release, he pointed to the illegal actions undertaken by State Security officers during his investigation (Doc. no.1). One element of the pressure on him was the placing in his prison cell of a State Security collaborator (Doc. no.2). Following his release, Pavel began penning a book about his experiences in the international brigades in Spain and his imprisonment by the Communists, in which he writes about his cellmate, who he didn’t know was a State Security collaborator (Doc. no.3).

THE SOVIET UNION IN COURT IN FRANCE AND CZECH CONNECTIONS

Jaroslav Formánek, Adam Hradilek

An anthology of three texts examining court cases in France at the end of the 1940s that entered the history books as the “Kravchenko Affair” and “David Rousset vs Les Lettres françaises” trials. The hearings contributed greatly to the Western public’s awareness of the Soviet Union’s repressive regime. The authors’ focus of attention is the court battle between D. Rousset and P. Daix, which saw testimony from the Czech lawyer František Polák, a former prisoner at Soviet labour camps in Siberia. Polák’s testimony and an interview with P. Daix, against whom he gave evidence in court, are also included.

THE GREATER THE PRESSURE, THE BETTER YOU CAN RESIST – CARDINAL MILOSLAV VLK IN CONFLICT WITH THE COMMUNIST DICTATORSHIP

Stanislava Vodičková

This study follows Cardinal M. Vlk’s journey as a priest in the period of the Communist regime, when the Roman Catholic Church was regarded as a major ideological enemy. In his story (the regime viewed him as one of the most dangerous priests in the Roman Catholic Church) we can observe means of persecution and instruments of power, as well as concrete mechanisms that the Communist regime at various stages of its development used in an attempt to stamp out religious life in Czechoslovakia. 