

Division and realignment in Europe, 1945-1992 | Sample answer

How were communist governments imposed on Eastern Europe between 1945-1956? (2014)

Between 1945 and 1948 the Soviet Union imposed its authority and style of government on all of the Eastern European countries that were liberated by the Red Army in the final year of WW2. this process was known as “socialisation”. By 1948 East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria had become “satellite states” of the Soviet Union. A satellite state is a country which is under the influence of a larger and more powerful neighbouring state. They were known as the “people republics”. The steps that the Soviet government took to take control of these countries were, first occupy the country with the Red Army, delay their elections, form coalition governments which always included the communist party. In these governments, communists were given the job of Ministry of the Interior. Remove key leaders of other parties through arrest and trails, merge the communist party with other socialist parties and lastly when elections were held they were rigged and won by communists. This can be seen in the following states.

In February 1945 Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt met at Yalta to discuss what lands Poland should get ad the Nazis had taken a large amount of theirs during the war. Poland got a lot of “Regained Territories”. The minister in charge of this was communist and ensured that thousands of loyal communist supporters settled in these new regained lands. These new provinces were allocated extra seats, this ensured that the Communists gained an overall majority in the 1947 elections. Leader of the communist party was Gomulka. Poland became a 1-party communist state, with the only real opposition coming from the Catholic Church.

In Romania, Maniu was the leader of the very popular “National Peasants Party” and had the support of the people. Although allied to the Soviet Union during the war he was anti-communist. Stalin persuaded King Michael I to form a coalition government after 1945 elections but to have 3 communists as important ministers despite them only having 16% of the vote. Backed by the presence of a Soviet Army, Communists attacked non-communists members of the government. Many of the Peasants party were accused of being US spies. Some were arrested including Maniu. In December 1947 King Michael I was forced to abdicate. The communist party was now in complete control backed by Moscow and Russian secret police the KGB.

In Czechoslovakia, it seemed at first that things might go well and that all parties could exist within a democracy. Benes returned from exile and became President. Free elections were held on May 1946, Communists won 114 of the 100 seats, which led to a coalition government formed afterwards. They took over the interior and defence ministries. Tensions between democrats and communists came to a head in 1948 when the Czech government applied for funding under Marshall Aid. They were forced to withdraw it under pressure from Moscow. Benes resigned and non-communist ministers in the hope to force a new election. However, Stalin used this as an excuse to replace the ministries with loyal to Moscow leaders. They then arrested their opponents, banned other parties and in 1948 ‘won’ the election in which they were the only candidates.

After the war, Hungary was ruled by an Allied Control Council. Dominated by communists. Because of this there was an election held in 1945 and the Smallholders’ Party won 57% and the communists only won 17% of the vote. Stalin realised that free elections were not the answer so the Soviets forced the Smallholders’ Party to accept them as coalition partners. The communists controlled the police through the Ministry of Interior. The leaders of the Smallholders’ Party were arrested and tried for ‘offences against the state’. The Prime Minister of Hungary, Tildy resigned and this allowed the communists to seize full control of the

government. Their leader, Rákosi imposed a one-party state on the country, any opposition towards him was brutally crushed by the secret police AVH. over 2,000 were executed and 100,000 imprisoned during his reign.

In June 1956 we saw a rebellion against sovietisation in Hungary, for what is known as the Hungarian Uprising. The Hungarian Communist Party members began voicing their opposition towards Rákosi. There was much resentment to his rule among the general public. Rákosi asked the USSR troops to arrest key figures, as he could no longer rely on the army to follow his orders. Khrushchev refused and instead ordered him over to Moscow where he was forced to retire for 'health reasons'. Erno Gero replaced him but this did not placate the people of Hungary. On 22nd October a huge meeting of students and workers was held at a university. The next day, they marched through Budapest to the parliament building. In the main square, the statue of Stalin was pulled down. They outlined their 16 demands to government including; free elections, removal of Soviet troops from the country, the return of Imre Nagy and an end to AVH. the AVH opened fire on the crowd when the Hungarians demanded the student delegation to be released from the national radio building they were being held captive in.

Khrushchev was afraid that a 'domino effect' in Eastern Europe would bring down the entire communist bloc if he didn't control the Hungarian Uprising. So 30,000 Red Army troops were sent into Hungary. On 28th October Nagy was re-appointed in the hope to calm thing down. The demonstrators and Hungarian soldiers formed Revolutionary Committees to fight the Soviets with "Molotov Cocktails" (petrol bombs). Nagy was caught in a difficult position and on 30th October he established which side he was playing for when he gave into the 16 demands of the revolutionaries. The following day he announced that Hungary would be withdrawing from the Warsaw Pact. Khrushchev was unwilling to accept this sent in 4,000 Soviet tanks into Budapest on 3rd October. On 4th, Marshal Zhukov attacked the capital to crush the revolt. After intense fighting, the Soviets regained control over the city. Nagy was arrested and later executed in

1958. Janos Kadar was appointed as head of the new communist government. As a result of the uprising 25,000 people were killed, 300 leaders were executed and 200,000 fled the country.

The Soviet Union used precise and ruthless tactics to gain control of the governments in Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia and Hungary through the years 1945 to 1958. Although successful at the time it proved to be an attentive problem for them in the years that followed. These countries began to demand reforms and threaten or perform revolutionaries if these reforms were not met. The Soviets only response was to use dreadful force to suppress them. Through the changes of leaders in Russia, with each having contrasting views on a communist rule, a breakdown in the regulation of the 'satellite states' saw the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe.