

Many victims of political trials were sent to uranium mines



"Neither I nor other staff who were involved with me in the investigation knew the laws and it was not expected from us to know them (...) what was introduced by the advisers and the Minister's decisions was determinative."

Bohumil Doubek

The chief of investigators of the State Security

"During the long-lasting interrogations in Ružyně and Košice, my imagination broke down and situations that never happened came to my mind. (...) They brought me to the trial physically and mentally fully exhausted and completely intimidated by the threats of the interrogators. They sentenced me to 15 years."

Imrich Staríček

Political prisoner



punishments. The culmination of attacks on the Catholic Church was the trial of Slovak bishops **Ján Vojtaššák**, **Michal Buzalka** and **Pavol Gojdič** (1951). Contacts with post-February emigres led to the trial of **Juraj Dlouhý et al.** (1951) – ending with two capital punishments and four life imprisonments. After the rupture of the USSR with Yugoslavia, the Slovak communists, who ended before the court as members of the so-called Slovak bourgeois nationalist group of **Gustáv Husák et al.** (1954), became targets of repression.

In 1953-1954, once the domestic and international situation changed, the interest to organise large public trials waned; however, political trials remained a solid part of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia until 1989.

POLITICAL TRIALS IN SLOVAKIA IN NUMBERS

Until 1954, approximately 25,000 persons (to 1989 a total of 71,168 persons) were sentenced for political reasons in Slovakia, out of which 45 were sentenced to death (until 1989, a total of 50 persons). The majority were sentenced for economic crimes and they served as a tool for the collectivisation of Slovak agriculture. But the political trials, however, affected all strata of society as well as professional and interest groups.

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POLITICAL TRIALS IN SLOVAKIA (1948-1954)

After February 1948, the communist regime started a deep transformation of Slovak society and it introduced new, often dubious values and reprobate domestic values tested over centuries. The changes were accompanied by interventions in the daily lives of the citizens and influenced their thinking and consciousness. This was met with resistance by individuals and whole groups of citizens, many starting to actively act against the new regime. The response was increased persecution and reprisals and their highest form were political trials.

1st half of 1950s

Bohumil Doubek,
chief of investigators
of State Security (ŠtB)



1st half of 1950s

Josef Urválek, feared
prosecutor



1st half of 1950s

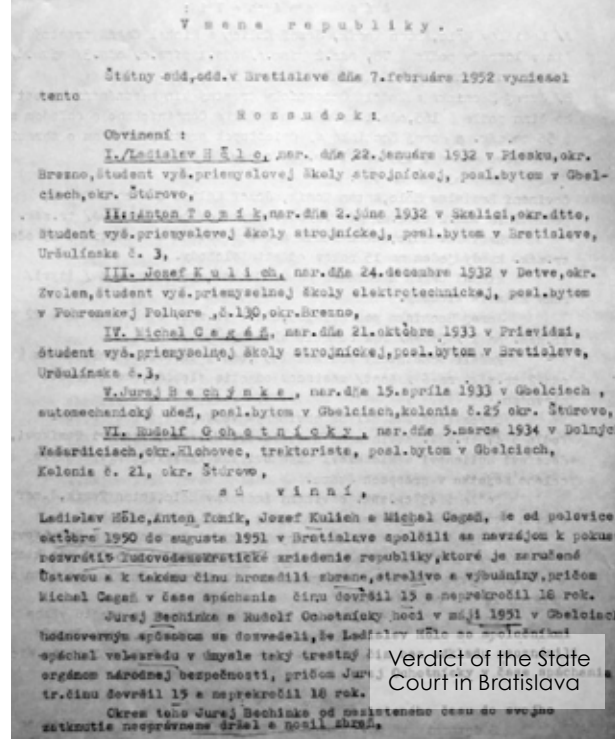
Palace of Justice,
residence of the
State Court in
Bratislava



Former judge
Zdenka Fenclová
after the arrest
by ŠtB



Verdict of the State
Court in Bratislava



CAUSES AND OBJECTIVES

Political trials accompany every totalitarian regime. In 1948-1989 they were also a part of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia in varying intensity, with their most brutal forms taking place in 1948-1954.

Several factors influenced their nature, focus and extent. From the point of view of foreign policy, enforcement of the USSR's interests was decisive. It was expected that communist Czechoslovakia, as a solid part of the Soviet bloc, would be fully obedient and subordinated to Moscow. The escalation of the Cold War started a wave of political trials in the whole Soviet bloc, through which Joseph Stalin enforced unconditional fulfilment of his demands.

From the point of view of domestic politics, the decisive factor was the enforcement of power, as well as the political, economic and cultural objectives of the Czechoslovak communist government. They managed to lay the foundations of the totalitarian regime, built its structure and kept it alive only thanks to illegal political trials. Slovakia, as a result of the victory of the Democratic Party in the 1946 parliamentary elections, was considered a weaker part of the Eastern bloc and many political trials had the specific taste of a fight against alleged Slovak nationalism and separatism.

In 1948-1954, the main objectives of the political trials

included enforcement of the intent of official policy and confirmation of its correctness and punishment and elimination of real or imagined opponents of the regime as well as spreading fear, which had a stabilising effect in society.

"TRIAL" MECHANISM

The term "political trials" means judicial and extra-judicial decisions in which the responsible jurisdiction does not decide independently but is influenced by political power. After 1948, the victims of political trials in Slovakia were tried for acts claimed to be of a political and anti-state nature which, contrary to democratic principles, human rights and freedoms, were defined as criminal acts. At the beginning, it was based on Act No. 50 of 1923, from October 1948 on Act No. 231 and from August 1950 Criminal Code No. 86.

Political trials had their own stylistic mechanism consisting of several parts. The most important were the leading bodies of the Communist Party. They were active particularly at the initial and final phases of the process of the political trials – according to the then-current political situation they approved the court's actions, the overall political concept as well as the level of penalties, which were binding for the court. The second part of the mechanism was the State Security, whose main activity became the production of political trials. They

forced confessions by arrested persons with brutal physical and psychological pressure to the trumped-up or invented crimes and "prepared them" for trials at a later phase. The last part of this mechanism was judicial authorities that entered at the final phase of the political trials. They passed politically-approved sentences, they gave an appearance of legality to the whole unlawful process and made a "theatre" of the whole trial which were expected to "educate the masses". Political trials were organised at all levels of the judiciary but the key role was played by the State Court and the State Prosecutor's Office.

KEY POLITICAL TRIALS

The first political trials started in Slovakia in 1948 and the first targets of the communists were their political opponents. In the trial of Otto Obuch et al. they condemned the former chairman of the Democratic Party, Ján Ursíny, and in the next trial also its two secretaries-general, Miloš Bugár and Ján Kempný. However, a wave of major political trials started in 1949 when three capital punishments were given in the trial of Albert Púčik et al. In 1950, the trial of Bernard Jašek et al. led to two capital punishments and the trial of the Yugoslav vice-consul in Bratislava, Šefik Kevič et al., ended with the same result. Trials of the former partisan commanders included that of Viliam Žingor et al. (1950) with three capital