

# FURTHER REVISION OF PURGES LIKELY

## Rajk Trial Was First of Many Thought Planned by Stalin in His Later Years

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Rehabilitation of the reputation of Laszlo Rajk, executed Hungarian Foreign Minister, appears to open the way for the rewriting of the plots and purges that marked the final years of the Stalin epoch.

Before the process is finished, the inside story of the Kremlin "doctors' plot" may be told and an answer may have been given to the biggest question of all: How did Stalin die?

It will take some time before the Soviet leaders can revise the whole record, but the clearing of the record of Mr. Rajk is an essential first step.

The background for the action in the Rajk case was established in Moscow by Nikita S. Khrushchev, Soviet party chief, in his speech on Stalin made last month to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist party.

In his address Mr. Khrushchev confirmed what foreign observers had long suspected: that Stalin had suffered from a "plot psychosis" and from phobias of conspiracy. Mr. Khrushchev asserted that Stalin was "not himself" in his later years.

Mr. Khrushchev also confirmed another fact long known to foreigners: that in the course of the periodic "plots" and purges that marked the Stalin regime the lives of thousands of innocent victims were sacrificed.

### Rajk in First Case

Mr. Rajk was executed in Hungary in October, 1949. His trial was the first of a series of show trials of Communist leaders in the Soviet satellite countries. Quiet purges were under way in the Soviet Union itself.

In the opinion of students of Soviet affairs the stage for the Rajk trial was cleared by two events in 1948.

The first was the break between President Tito of Yugoslavia and Stalin, leading to the expulsion of the Yugoslavs from the Cominform, a group of Soviet-dominated Communist parties.

The second event was the death of Andrei A. Zhdanov, an important Soviet Politburo member and frequently mentioned as a possible successor to Stalin.

About a month after Mr. Zhdanov's death, Stalin and Lavrenti P. Beria, the Soviet police chief who was executed by Stalin's successors in December, 1953, went to the Crimea for a long vacation. This was in October, 1948. It was one of the longest stays out of Moscow that Stalin had made since the end of World War II.

In the opinion of specialists in Soviet matters, the initial outline of the following purges took shape during that vacation.

The results followed quickly, first in the Soviet Union and then in the satellites.

In the Soviet Union, a quiet purge struck followers of Mr. Zhdanov. Nikolai A. Voznesensky, Soviet state planner, member of the Politburo and a close associate of Mr. Zhdanov, was arrested in February or March of 1949.

A number of Leningrad Communist leaders, also associated with Mr. Zhdanov, were arrested. All were eventually shot, probably in 1950, after a Soviet law forbidding capital punishment in such cases was revised.

There was an anti-Semitic campaign in the Soviet Union, starting late in 1948 and continuing into 1949. Yiddish cultural institutions were closed. Prominent Jews were arrested and some eventually executed possibly in the summer of 1952.

The Rajk case opened in the spring of 1949. Mr. Rajk, a loyal Communist of long standing, was accused with a group of colleagues of conspiring with Marshal Tito and the United States intelligence services. His case set the pattern for those that followed.

The next was that of Traicho Kostov, second-ranking Communist of Bulgaria. His trial and execution occurred late in 1949. The charges against him were an echo of those against Mr. Rajk.

The campaign spread to Poland where Wladyslaw Gomulka, Deputy Premier and long-term party chief, was arrested and imprisoned.

The final case in the satellite series was that of Rudolf Slansky in Czechoslovakia. M. Slansky, a Deputy Premier; Foreign Minister Vladimir Klementis and others were tried and executed in late 1952.

M. Slansky and his comrades were accused of conspiracy not only with Marshal Tito, United States intelligence agents, Trotskyites and bourgeois nationalists but with Zionist representatives as well.

### The 'Doctors' Plot'

What proved to be the final chapter in the whole series of events opened in Moscow in January, 1953. The Kremlin announced that a plot had been uncovered, involving a group of physicians, many of them Jews.

The doctors were charged with having conspired with Zionist agents and United States intelligence to murder a number of high Soviet leaders, including military figures.

As the details unfolded, it became evident that many if not all the present leaders of the Soviet Government were potential victims, not of the doctors, but in the sense that groundwork was being laid for charges that they had conspired with the doctors against the Kremlin.

It seemed plain to many in Moscow that the Kremlin was laying the basis for fatal charges against men like Mr. Khrushchev, Marshal Nikolai A. Bulganin, Anastas I. Mikoyan, Vyacheslav M. Molotov and others.

On March 5 Stalin died, according to the official announcement, as a result of a cerebral hemorrhage. Stalin's death just at the moment when his associates' lives appeared to be in jeopardy as a result of the "doctors' plot," has long caused speculation.

Was the death a coincidence? Or did the present Soviet leaders have a hand in it? Once the record of the plots and purges has been set straight by the new Soviet leadership, perhaps the answer to this final question may be given.