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Martin Mevius. *Agents of Moscow: The Hungarian Communist Party and the Origins of Socialist Patriotism 1941-1953.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005. 296 S. $99.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-927461-1.

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Hungarian Nationalism to Sell Socialism: Caveat Emptor

Given the unpopularity of communism in Hungary–as witnessed by the collapse of the Republic of Councils under Bela Kun in August 1919–how was the Hungarian Communist Party under Matyas Rakosi able to survive after World War II? Did it rely completely on Soviet military support? How did the party change from a vehement critic of national imagery to the "progenitor of a national cult of its own"? In *Agents of Moscow*, Martin Mevius (Editor, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands) answers these questions, citing primary party and government documents to show how Hungarian communists deliberately constructed a nationalist policy in order to achieve political supremacy. Despite these efforts, however, the Hungarian communists failed to remove completely the stigma of being "agents of Moscow."

The book consists of eleven concise chapters, four of which focus on the 1944-45 period, and three others on the years 1945-47. Chapter 10 covers the 1947-49 period, while the final chapter examines events from 1949 to 1953. In the first chapter, "Communism and Nationalism, 1848-1941," Mevius explains *inter alia* how Soviet leader Joseph Stalin influenced the Hungarian communists' national line. Not only did Stalin instruct Georgi Dimitrov, the Bulgarian secretary-general of the Comintern, to follow a national line, but Stalin's own identity as a Georgian and his experience in the 1920s and 1930s as Commissar of Nationalities taught him that the national minorities needed a degree of self-determination, and communist parties needed to be national in form in order to succeed. One sees this pro-nationalist, anti-class logic in the Popular Front policy of 1935, in the emphasis on Russian nationalism to fight Hitler in World War II, and in the dissolution of the Cominform in 1943.

Chapter 2 traces the Hungarian communist leaders' activities in the Soviet Union during World War II, which contributed to the later popular image of them as "agents of Moscow." Chapters 3 through 5 discuss, respectively, the Soviet Union's involvement in the Hungarian policy of "national unity"; the legacy of the 1919 regime and left-wing radicalism; and the Hungarian communists' deliberate portrayals of themselves as "heirs" of nationalist heroes like Lajos Kossuth and Sandor Petofi.

In chapters 6 though 9, Mevius outlines the two main parts of the Hungarian nationalist policy and specific issues within each. The Hungarian Communist Party (Magyar Kommunista Part, or MKP) strove to portray itself as both the "heir to national traditions" and "defender of national interests" (p. 134). Its members retained street names and kept intact certain monuments built before World War II that honored nationalist heroes like Kossuth, Petofi, Istvan Szechenyi, and Ferenc Rakoczi. Hungarian communist leaders (e.g. Matyas Rakosi, Jozsef Revai, Mihaly Farkas, Erno Gero) also appropriated national holidays such as March 15 and October 6 (p. 191). In addition, they constructed what Mevius terms a "cult of martyrs"?"a conscious attempt to glorify such "heroes of the class struggle" as the victims of "white terror" in 1919 and the Horthy regime, the Hungarian casualties in the Spanish civil war, and the communist dead of World War II (p. 192). The MKP also exploited specific issues to prove to the Hungarian people that it was guarding national interests, namely, the expulsion of the German minority (Swabians) from Hungary, repatriation of Hungarian prisoners of war, and show trials against such "Trotskyite traitors" as Cardinal Jozsef Mindszenty and the former Minister of Interior Laszlo Rajk.

The MKP used the question of the Swabians in several ways. First, by dint of being German, the Swabians were painted as Hitler's erstwhile supporters, *Volksbund* members, and traitors to Hungary. Pressing for their expulsion showed the MKP to be Hungary's defender. Secondly, in allowing the National Peasant Party to lead the anti-Swabian campaign and win support from the peasantry, the MKP was also slowly eliminating its main political rival, the Smallholder Party (pp. 116, 136).

Thirdly, Rakosi urged the Central Committee to exploit the Swabian expulsions by linking them explicitly to land reform, thus–Mevius argues–adding an element of ethnic conflict. The total amount of land finally appropriated from the Swabians was "about an eighth of the total 3.2 million hold of land distributed among the Hungarian peasantry" (p. 117).

Promising the return of Hungarian prisoners of war and carrying out that promise was another ploy to bolster the MKP's national image. Understandably, both Rakosi and Stalin initially feared that the release of Hungarian POWs, many of whom were former right-wing Arrow Cross members, would strengthen the "reactionary" parties in Hungary (p. 126). However, according to Mevius, Rakosi decided that the propaganda value of releasing the prisoners of war, and Moscow's willingness to expedite their release, outweighed the negatives. Hungarian officers would be released just before the Hungarian elections, "providing they had not served in the SS, SA, or committed war crimes against Soviet citizens" (p. 127).

War crimes trials and show trials against the Smallholders were still other useful devices the MKP used between 1945 and 1947 to show itself as the guardian of Hungarian national interests. After 1947 two key Stalinist trials were held, "exposing" the allegedly anti-Hungarian, Trotskyite activities of Cardinal Mindszenty and Rajk (p. 237). Clergy members were recruited to accuse Mindszenty of working for American "imperialists" and "warmongers" (p. 238). Rajk, of course, was arrested and charged with being a supporter of Josip Tito of Yugoslavia.

Ironically, Mevius points out, the MKP could exploit only those Hungarian nationalist issues that the Soviet Union explicitly supported. While Moscow backed the MKP on the expulsion of the Swabians, for example, it backed the Czechoslovak Communist Party on the expulsion of the Hungarian minority from Slovakia. For the Czechs and Slovaks, these Hungarians represented a fifth column, as much to blame for the partition of Czechoslovakia as the Sudeten Germans. Slovak authorities closed Hungarian-language schools and stipulated that all Hungarians speak only German and wear the letter "M" for Magyar on their sleeves (p. 120). Originally the Prague government demanded that all Hungarians who had moved to Slovakia after 1938 return immediately to Hungary. Later, all citizens of Hungarian descent were asked to leave, even those who had lived in Slovakia well before that year. The MKP could not officially complain, despite this ongoing harassment of Hungarians as well as the Smallholder party's propaganda on the persecution of these Hungarians that harmed the MKP's popular image and the continual struggle to restrain outraged Hungarian Communists in Slovakia. As MKP leader Erno Gero said, the Czechoslovak party leaders could not be publicly criticized, because it would then look as if Hungary were disobeying the Soviet Union. Instead, Gero suggested that the MKP should "stress the rights of the Hungarians rather than territory, because it was impossible to draw ethnic borders anyway" (p. 119).

Herein lies the Catch-22 paradox to which the book's title alludes, and which the author might have accentuated more for the reader. The Hungarian communists sought to establish nationalist policies to avoid the stigma of being mere "agents of Moscow" and not true Hungarian patriots. Yet they could only exploit those nationalist issues that Moscow supported. Thus, the Kremlin's support both helped and harmed the MKP. Ultimately, the nationalist policy failed, as shown by the Hungarian revolt of 1956. Romanticizing the heroic national freedom struggle of 1848 and promulgating films on partisan warfare against the foreign oppressor led the Hungarian youth to take action in October and November 1956 against the one foreign oppressor they knew best: the Soviet Union.

In the final chapter, the author defines socialist patriotism as "hatred of the West, devotion to the Soviet Union and proletarian internationalism, and loyalty to the new Hungary of workers, peasants, and the progressive intelligentsia" (p. 252). Socialist patriotism could be a more accurate term than "sovietization," since the latter did not mean all-out Russification in Hungary and the other East European satellites (p. 264). In the later period, from 1949 to 1953, Mevius argues, socialist and Soviet symbols in Hungarian propaganda increased following Rajk's trial, as the MKP's power became more entrenched in the country. However, nationalist symbols were not abandoned; they were just "given a socialist meaning." Here the reader would have benefited from some specific examples.

One key strength of this book is its use of documents from the Hungarian National Archive (Magyar Orszagos Leveltar) and the Archive of the Institute of Political History (Politikatorteneti Intezet Leveltara). These include the files of the party's Politburo, Central Committee, Propaganda Department, International Department; personal files of party leaders; and documents from the Foreign Ministry, national Parliament, and Prime Minister's office.

In short, *Agents of Moscow* is a worthy contribution to the growing number of studies on nationalism under

communism, such as Krzysztof Tyszka's *Nacjonalizm w komunizmie: ideologia narodowa w Zwiazku Radzieckim i Polsce Ludowej* (2004), David Brandenberger's *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (2002), and Carol Lilly's *Power and Persuasion: Ideology and Rhetoric in Communist Yugoslavia, 1944-1953* (2001). An extremely well-researched monograph, it will surely enhance both graduate and undergraduate courses on Soviet and East European history and politics.

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