

**Bruno Kamiński, University of Łódź (Poland):
The Trial of Laszlo Rajk as a Prelude to the Propaganda Onslaught on Tito on
the Basis of "Trybuna Ludów" and Local Press Accounts.**

Abstract

The political trials in the states of the Soviet bloc were a perfect opportunity to propagandistic manipulation aimed at establishing a desired image of reality in the citizens' consciousness. The trial of the Hungarian Republic's former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Laszlo Rajk, which was conducted in September 1949, may be seen as a classic example for the use of one political actor in order to direct the burden of accusations against another political figure from outside the inner circle. In practice, the trial of Rajk and his „accomplices“ indicated the beginning of the propaganda onslaught on the alleged instigator of the whole group's plot – the leader of Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito. This trial was organized in accordance with the most elaborated Soviet patterns. Bringing Yugoslavia into discredit was a necessary second step after excluding it from the Kominform due to its ideological and political shifts away from Moscow's Marxist-Leninist line since 1947. The important element of the trial was its proper highlighting in mass media. For this reason the Hungarian authorities invited many journalists from socialist states and Western countries to report from the trial. They were supposed to be observers of the professional competence of the socialist judiciary. In reality, the journalists gathered in a courtroom were fed lies, which were professionally integrated into the bill of indictment of Rajk and which referred to the „crimes“ of Tito. The biased accounts in the socialist press were a continuation of the manipulations taking place in the courtroom. Seemingly they provided a honest and detailed picture of the situation, in fact they were supposed to smuggle an upside-down image of reality. The articles concerning Rajk's trial, which were published in "Trybuna Ludów", the official press organ of the PZPR (Polish United Workers' Party) constitute the perfect example of this tendency. In these accounts, the messages embedded in the text were highlighted by special positioning and gaudy typography in order to attract the attention of the reader. The manipulative and propagandist nature of the journalists' reports of the process is beyond doubt. This article offers a semantic-pragmatic analysis of the material from "Trybuna Ludów", assesses the range of the press distortions, the extent to which the press complied with Moscow's directives. It deals with one of the most important and still puzzling splits within the Communist bloc at the verge of its existence.

It goes without saying that the press of the People's Republic of Poland, like of any other communist state, served first and foremost as a tool of indoctrination and as such was carefully controlled by the censorship and propaganda machine. Although the literature concerning Soviet propaganda appears to be quite extensive, it still leaves many interesting issues for future analyses¹. Press articles published in the communist bloc from the very beginning had a foreordained target to achieve, which was to be obtained through appropriate rhetorical figures. In the article this tendency will be shown by taking the example of press accounts from the trial, which took place in 1949 in Hungary. These press accounts and detailed reports from subsequent revelations in court rooms aimed at instilling into readership a very clear interpretation of political reality of the time. We will see the aims of the publications, the scope and direction of press distortions and, most importantly, we shall see the ways in which the authors tried to manipulate public opinion.

¹ See, for instance, D. Wedgwood, *Persuasion and Soviet politics*, Oxford, New York 1989; *Politics and the Soviet system: essays in honour of Frederick C. Barghoorn*, red. Thomas F. Remington, Basingstoke 1989; *Cold-War propaganda in the 1950s*, red. Gary D. Rawnsley, Basingstoke 1999; M. Mazur, *Propagandowy obraz świata. Polityczne kampanie prasowe w PRL 1956-1980*, Warszawa 2003; M. Lenoe, *Closer to the masses: Stalinist culture, social revolution, and Soviet newspapers*, Cambridge 2004.

In the article we will analyze the political show trial of László Rajk², activist of the Hungarian Communist Party (Magyar Kommunista Párt, MKP) and former Minister of Internal and Foreign Affairs. According to his official dossier, Rajk joined the illegal Communist Party in 1931. Between 1937 and 1939 he took part in the Spanish Civil War, where he fought for the Republic as a political commissar of a Hungarian volunteer battalion. In 1941 he was imprisoned by the Hungarian police. After being released in September 1944, Rajk became Secretary of the MKP Central Committee, and from this position he organized the anti-Hitler resistance. He was then arrested for the second time by the Germans in December 1944, but succeeded to escape from the transport of prisoners in May 1945 and came back to Budapest, where he was appointed to be the capital's secretary of MKP. In the same year, László Rajk became a deputy of Hungarian parliament. In 1946 he entered the Executive Committee of the MKP as the party's general secretary depute. In the Hungarian government he was in charge of the internal affairs' department (from March 1946 to August 1948) and of the secret political police (Államrendőrség Államvédelmi Osztálya, AVO).³ In 1947 he succeeded to weaken and then to marginalize the Independent Smallholders, Agrarian Workers and Civic Party, the strongest political opponent of MKP.⁴ In 1948 he was dismissed from the Ministry of the Interior in favour of János Kádár⁵ and reassigned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (August 1948 - May 1949). Most likely, this alteration was decided by the MKP's secretary general, Mátyás Rákosi⁶, who was anxious about Rajk's growing popularity and, seeing him as a threat to his position, started to relegate him from real influence on Hungarian politics⁷. An independent observer would not guess that an activist so keenly devoted to work for socialism in Hungary could prove to be a traitor of his own nation. However, in September 1949, the Hungarians (and soon the whole world) got to know the 'real face' of Rajk. The alleged plot of a coup against Rákosi's government was 'prevented' during summer of 1949, and soon after a communiqué was issued informing about the exposure of a 'Titoist network of spies'. Rajk was accused of being the brain of the whole intrigue.

To understand the content of this communiqué thoroughly, one should naturally think back to the events of 1948 when Yugoslavia was expelled from the Kominform as a result of Josip Broz Tito's differences with Joseph Stalin. The reasons for the split have been widely discussed by historians, yet all interpretations remain indefinite⁸. For many years it was believed that its main reason lied in the different conceptions of the path to socialism both leaders chose. The Kominform, established in 1947, aimed at the integration of the socialist camp in alignment to the USSR⁹. Through the principle of collectively working out the

² *Historical Dictionary of Hungary*, ed. S. Bela Vardy, London 1997, pp. 575-576.

³ AVO – *Hungarian Secret Police*.

⁴ *Historical Dictionary of Hungary*, p. 576.

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 409-411.

⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 581-582.

⁷ J. Kochanowski, *Węgry. Od ugody do ugody 1876-1990*, Warszawa 1997, p. 131-132; J. R. Nowak, *Węgry 1939-1974*, Warszawa 1975, pp. 159-160.

⁸ See, for instance, A. Kadic, *The Tito Conflict as Reflected in Literature*, pp. 91-106 [in:] "Slavic Review", Vol. 37, Number 1, March 1978; E.R.Terzuolo, *Soviet-Yugoslav Conflict and the Origins of Yugoslavia's Self-Management System*, pp. 195-218 [in:] "War and Society in East Central Europe" (At the Brink of War and Peace: the Tito-Stalin Split in a Historic Perspective) ed. W.S. Vucinich, Vol. X, New York 1982; J. Perović, *The Tito-Stalin Split. A Reassessment in Light of New Evidence*, pp. 37-38 [in:] "Journal of Cold War Studies", Vol. 9, No. 2, Spring 2007.

⁹ W. Walkiewicz, *Jugosławia. Byt stały i rozpad [later: Jugosławia]*, Warszawa 2000, p. 173; M.J. Zacharias, *Komunizm federacja nacjonalizm. System władzy w Jugosławii 1943 -1991.Powstanie, przekształcenie, rozkład*, Warszawa 2004, p. 98.

socialist camp's crucial problems, Moscow sought secure the final word in taking all important decisions. At the same time, any critique against Stalin's ideas was treated as a betrayal of the interests of communism¹⁰. This kind of a peculiar communist fundamentalism left no space for tolerating particularisms of the individual satellite states, which were supposed to be normalized according to the Soviet ideal. However, the Yugoslav policy left a lot to be desired with regard to these principles. On the one hand, concerning many general issues like economy, collectivization of agriculture or even the constitution of the state, it followed the Soviet example more accurately than the rest of the satellite republics¹¹. The strong economic ties to the USSR were forced by Yugoslavia's backwardness, eventhough the one-sidedness of this cooperation started to raise doubts in Belgrade at a very early stage. On the other hand, concerning ideological issues, Belgrade strived to reconcile Stalinist orthodoxy with a certain degree of political autonomy, a fact that was unacceptable for Moscow¹². Independent Yugoslav negotiations with Bulgaria, which later turned into a political agreement, belonged to the most contentious issues¹³, but even that was not comparable to the Soviet opposition towards Tito's Albanian policy¹⁴. Already during the war, just as after its end, Tito was making plans for a future incorporation of Albania into Yugoslavia. In the following months, he included Tirana into the Yugoslav economic system by a series of bilateral agreements as well as by sending about one thousand specialists to Albania¹⁵. Moscow perceived all these actions as steps to the creation of a new Balkan Federation by Belgrade, and remained highly critical about this idea¹⁶.

The abovementioned factors brought about the escalation of the conflict between Moscow and Belgrade. It coincided with the beginning of a sovietization process in all spheres of life in the whole Eastern Bloc, which was initiated by the Kremlin under the pretext of defense against the gradual expansion of capitalism. The next step of this policy was pointing at an 'internal traitor'. The case of Tito served as a kind of catalyst for the process which left behind several high-ranking activists as casualties in all states of the Bloc¹⁷. In March 1948, USSR withdrew military advisers and civil specialists from Yugoslavia and accused the local government of creating an anti-Soviet atmosphere and departing from the guidelines of Marxism-Leninism¹⁸. It is a well-known fact that, on 28th of June, 1948, as a result of pressure from Moscow, Yugoslavia was excluded from the Kominform. The respective resolution ('Situation of the Yugoslavian Communist Party') condemned the Yugoslavian leaders for a fundamental retreat from the Marxist-Leninist line in both internal and foreign policy¹⁹. This event started the process of Yugoslavia gradually regaining independence from the Soviet bloc. At the same time it brought about the beginning of negative propaganda which soon assumed an astonishing scale. Not only Yugoslavia, but even more the individual figure of Josip Broz Tito received harshest criticism. The state leader was accused of betraying socialism in favor of capitalism and imperialism. From that moment on, even the

¹⁰ *Jugosławia*, p. 173; *Komuniści przeciwko komunistom – z Andrzejem Paczkowskim i Robertem Spałkiem rozmawia Barbara Polak* [later: *Komuniści*] [In:] "Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej", No. 1-2(48-49), I-II 2006, p. 4.

¹¹ M.J. Zacharias, *op. cit.*, p. 91; J. Perović, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-38.

¹² *Jugosławia*, p. 175.

¹³ W. Walkiewicz, *Stosunki bułgarsko – jugosłowiańskie 1941-1948. Uwarunkowania i implikacje*, Warszawa 1988, pp. 100-101, 115, 128

¹⁴ J. Perović, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-53.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 44.

¹⁶ *Jugosławia*, pp. 116-117; Z. Rutyna, *Jugosławia na arenie międzynarodowej*, Warszawa 1981, pp.348, 351.

¹⁷ *Komuniści*, pp. 17-18.

¹⁸ *Jugosławia*, pp. 175-177.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 32, 35.

smallest particularism of the satellites' 'path to socialism' contained the immediate danger for the given state to be accused of favouring 'Titoism'²⁰. The exemplary punishment of 'traitors' coincided with the peak of the campaign against Tito²¹. Because of the country's geographical position, but mostly due to the far reaching faithfulness to the Soviet Union, the Hungarian leaders were entrusted with the task of organizing a show trial. In this case, the secretary general of the MKP, Rákosi, chose László Rajk as a scapegoat of the affair, and by doing so he could, at the same time, dispose of his political competitor with the full sanction of the law. Rajk was arrested several weeks after the parliamentary elections of May 1949, in which the Hungarian National Front for Independence, being under full control of the communists, obtained a decisive victory. Consequently, the party did not need the popularity of Rajk anymore, and its secretary general ordered to crush the inconvenient minister.

A great number of foreign journalists was accredited for the trial, which took place in Budapest in September 1949. Among them were forty-two reporters from the Eastern Bloc as well as numerous representatives of Western media²². On the one hand, the trial was supposed to show the efficiency and rigidity of Soviet justice, while on the other, it served as a perfect instructional material for numerous secret service officers representing numerous communist countries²³. Among them were high-ranking officials from the Ministry of Public Security of Poland: Roman Romkowski and Józef Światło²⁴ (deputy director of 10th Department²⁵).

These officers were supposed to provide detailed reports of the trial, which would serve for conducting similar trials in the other states of the Bloc, but even more importantly, they were sent there to gather material necessary to formulate indictments against other 'nationalists', alleged titoist spies and traitors, among them Traicho Kostov (Bulgaria), Rudolf Slánský (Czechoslovakia)²⁶ and Władysław Gomułka and Marian Spychalski (Poland)²⁷.

First mentions concerning the case of László Rajk and his collaborators (90 people at a rough estimate) were revealed in the Polish press in September 1949. The very arrest of Rajk (in June) and the preparational stage of the trial were left silent by the Polish press. The first article which referred to Rajk's case was published at the pages of "People's Tribune" ("Trybuna Ludowa") on 11th September, 1949, entitled by the Polish Press Agency (PAP)

²⁰ The notion 'Titoism' was used here so far in inverted commas to underline the constructed character of Stalin's designation of distinct understandings of socialism. However, being aware of its origins, we may agree on more essentialist usage of the term, which became quickly an independent notion. See: A.B. Ulam, *Tito-titoism* [in:] *Marxism, communism and western society. A comparative encyclopedia*, Maidenhead 1972, pp. 181-188.

²¹ J. Kochanowski, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

²² *Laszlo Rajk i jego wspólnicy przed Trybunałem Ludowym*, Warszawa 1949, pp. 340-342; "People's Tribune" [later: PT] 256 (1949), p. 1.

²³ M. Bechowska, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

²⁴ Józef Światło (1915-1975) was deputy director of the 10th Department of the Polish Ministry of Public Security (Ministerstwo Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego, MBP). After the death of Stalin and the arrest of Lavrentiy Beria in December 1953 he decided to defect to the West. He was taken over by the CIA and used for propaganda purposes. Due to this event, the structure of MBP was deeply reformed and in 1956 splitted into the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Committee of Public Security.

²⁵ 10th Department of MBP – created between 1949 and 1950 to counter 'nationalist and Trotskyist tendencies' in the Polish United Workers Party, mainly to fight against Titoism. See also: Z. Błażyński, *Mówi Józef Światło. Za kulisami bezpieki i partii 1940-1955*, Warszawa 2003, pp. 258-259; J. Topyło, *Departament X MBP w latach 1949-1954*, Toruń 2006.

²⁶ J. Kochanowski, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

²⁷ Z. Błażyński, *op. cit.*, pp. 258-259; J. Perović, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

'The traitor of the Hungarian nation, Rajk, will appear before a court in Budapest'²⁸. There is no doubt about the guilt of Rajk. Despite the fact that the article formally just informed about bringing an indictment against Rajk, its reflections were very far-reaching. The article formed the headline of the newspaper's Sunday edition and contained a tendentious summary of the bill of indictment against Rajk. The underlined titles of the paragraphs effectively emphasized the weight of the accusations: 'Shameful past of Rajk', 'Titoist spies at American service'²⁹, 'Tito – the traitor and principal of Rajk', 'Planned attempts and crimes'³⁰. Despite the fact that the trial did not start yet, the reader was confronted with a doubtless guilt of Rajk. This was very significant, since the merciless accusations contrasted with the positive image of Rajk as respected Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs. At the moment of the trial, respect was replaced by invectives and insulting comments. At the same day, "The Lodz Daily" ("Dziennik Łódzki") published an article entitled 'Betrayal carried out on Tito's order'³¹.

Two days later, "People's Tribune" published another news item³². This time, the official press organ of the Polish United Worker's Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, PZPR) reprinted from the Hungarian press the full text of the bill of indictment against László Rajk and his nine alleged collaborators: György Pálffy, general-lieutenant Lazar Brankov (attaché of the Yugoslavian embassy in Budapest), Dr. Tibor Szöny and Pal Justus (members of the National Assembly), András Szalai and Milan Ognienovicz (government employees), and Béla Korondy (a police lieutenant)³³. This article, just like the previous one, included many effective paragraph titles and specified, in accordance with the layout of the bill of indictment, the culpability of each member of the 'spy network'. The tone of the publication was underlined with the typography and content of its long subtitle: 'Instigators, agents of Gestapo, of English and American intelligence, fascists, trotskists at the orders of Tito and the imperialists organized an intrigue against the Hungarians and other countries of people's democracy'³⁴. The article presented an overwhelming picture of treason and vile, which could be, according to the authors, attributed to each of the accused. On the same day, "The Lodz Daily"³⁵ and "The Life of Warsaw" ("Życie Warszawy")³⁶ published extensive articles with long and telling titles: 'At American service and under Tito's directives, Rajk and his seven agents betrayed Hungary' and 'Tito covered Hungary with a network of spies and saboteurs following imperialists' orders'.

In the middle of September, "The Lodz Daily" informed about the beginning of the trial and cited a commentary from the French communist press ("L'Humanité"), which declared Rajk's trial to be Tito's trial. A similar account was published by "The Life of Warsaw"³⁷ and a day later by "People's Tribune" in the article 'Rajk, the traitor of the Hungarian people...' with the triumphant subtitle: 'On the first day of the trial, the defendant acknowledges his guilt'³⁸. Articles based on the same Polish Press Agency (PAP) dispatch were published in other

²⁸ PT 250 (1949), pp. 1-2.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 1.

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 2.

³¹ "The Lodz Daily" [later: LD] 250 (1949), pp.1-2.

³² PT 252 (1949), pp. 3-4.

³³ LD 253 (1949), p.1.

³⁴ PT 252 (1949), p. 3.

³⁵ LD 253 (1949), pp.1-2.

³⁶ „The Life of Warsaw” [later: LW] 252 (1949), pp. 1-2.

³⁷ LW 255 (1949), p. 1.

³⁸ PT 256 (1949), pp. 1-2.

Polish dailies too³⁹. The article from 'Tribune' focuses its attention on the alleged immense public interest in the issue. It mentions approx. 200 correspondents of Hungarian and foreign press as well as many diplomats being present. Moreover, it reconstructs the first day of the trial in the form of a dialogue between the chairman of the People's Tribunal, Peter Janko, and László Rajk⁴⁰. The dialogue seems to be a scene directed beforehand, in which a judge asks standard questions whereas the defendant pleads guilty. According to these accounts, Rajk spoke about his collaboration with Horthy's police and about denunciation of many communist activists⁴¹, about his shameful wartime past and finally, about his contacts with Yugoslav spies and direct collaboration with Tito⁴². The next day's court session was covered, among other newspapers, by "The Life of Warsaw" and was summarized by the title: 'In accordance to American imperialists' directives, Tito's government strived to intervene in the states of people's democracy'⁴³.

In issue 256 of "People's Tribune" we find the account by the special envoy of the daily, the editor Roman Juryś. His report was supposed to complement the articles published under the auspices of the PAP, which in fact were patterned after the dispatches of the Soviet Union's news agency, TASS. It is interesting to discover that Juryś was the first and the only Polish journalist at the trial who signed his articles with his proper name. All the other Polish reporters who were accredited in Budapest, among them Józef Cywiak (Worker's Agency), Mieczysław Bibrowski (PAP), Henryk Werner (API Agency), Maksymilian Vergesslich (PAP), did not sign their articles, even not by their initials⁴⁴. It hints towards the fact that most likely all these texts which were signed by PAP were accurate copies of Soviet correspondences. Not until the end of the trial, Cywiak together with Juryś published the pamphlet 'Rajk, Tito, Wall Street. The Trial in Budapest'⁴⁵. There is only little difference between this publication and the other biased press commentaries.

Originally, Juryś's account was supposed to present the personal impressions of a journalist, who went to Budapest with the goal of providing the Polish readership with the atmosphere of these events. However, it was visible from the beginning that the personal impressions of the reporter did not differ much from these which were presented in the main press reports on the trial. The summary of the first days of the process was highly emotional. The focal point of the report was the spy activity of Rajk and his espionage circle. The editor cited Rajk's confession: 'I have been an instigator and spy since I was born'. In another part of the account, Juryś wrote: 'The first day already has shown to the fullest that this gang intended to transform Hungary into an American colony, into a spy base against world peace, against the countries of people's democracy and the USSR. It intended to achieve this aim with the help of provocation, espionage, treacherous murders and with the assistance of foreign powers.'⁴⁶ Further on the correspondent drew the scope of a net created by several hundreds of trotskyist spies, who were trained by, among others, Rajk and who, as it was stated, infiltrated the intelligence services of Germany, USA, France and the Vatican during World War II. Successive phone accounts of Juryś were published in the next three issues of "People's Tribune". In the consecutive number of this newspaper, an article from the Soviet daily

³⁹ LD 256 (1949), pp.1-2; LW 256 (1949), pp. 1-2.

⁴⁰ PT 256 (1949), p. 1; M. Bechowska, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

⁴¹ PT, Number 256 (1949), p. 1.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 2.

⁴³ LW 257 (1949), pp. 1-2.

⁴⁴ M. Bechowska, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

⁴⁵ J. Cywiak, R. Juryś, *Rajk, Tito, Wallstreet. Proces w Budapeszcie*, Warszawa 1949.

⁴⁶ PT, Number 256 (1949), p. 2.

"Pravda", 'The revelation of Titoist lackeys' betrayal thwarted plans of imperialists', was reprinted with additional editorial commentary. The author of the article triumphantly underlined the successful suppression of the sinister plot, the authors of which – 'imperialist ringleaders' – intended to 'detach Hungary and later also other states of the people's democracy from the democratic camp representing peace'. The author took the opportunity to comment on Rajk's trial in order to present accusations towards Yugoslavia, which, obedient to America and Britain, allegedly directed the Hungarian intrigue from the very beginning.⁴⁷ Apart from the clear messages conveyed by the article, one should pay attention to the fact that "Pravda" material was often enough republished in the Polish press without further comment. The decision to present the articles as reprints from the Soviet press was taken in order to present the former ones as independent, and to acquaint the reader with seemingly different points of view ("Pravda", "Izvestija"). On the other hand, similar conclusions of Polish and Soviet journalism seemingly proved the credibility of both.

Finally, a broader context of the Hungarian events was presented to the reader. The following trial accounts contained mainly summaries of the defendants' testimonies. "The Lodz Daily" (18 September) published large pieces of György Pálffy's testimony under the title 'Roech rather than Rajk. Titoist provocateur turned out to be a German'. The defendant allegedly described himself as a 'declared fascist'. The account questioned the Hungarian nationality of László Rajk and presented his plans to stir riots in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Albania⁴⁸. In another article, the newspaper quoted a list of prominent Hungarian communists who were, according to Pálffy, supposed to be eliminated by Rajk's group in order to pave the way for a coup d'état. The list included Mátyás Rákosi, Mihály Farkas and Ernő Gerő⁴⁹.

In the course of time, the Polish reader received meticulous reports covering testimonies of Lazar Brankov⁵⁰, Tibor Szönyi⁵¹, András Szalai, Milan Ognjenović, Béla Korondy⁵² and Pal Justus⁵³. According to PAP dispatches, all defendants pled guilty and indicated László Rajk as head of the plot. The speeches of the defence were not mentioned, even though the court appointed an individual lawyer to each defendant⁵⁴. Instead, "People's Tribune" (no. 261) published excerpts from testimonies of witnesses who 'confirmed the crimes of Rajk and his gang'⁵⁵. In the article 'Titoist renegades in USA service carried out actions against the USSR', testimonies of Rajk's brother-in-law were published, together with testimonies of thirteen other witnesses who provided information about the alleged recruitment of Rajk by Horthy's police in 1931. These people had complemented the portrait of Rajk as a spy with details from his past. In his report, the special correspondent of "People's Tribune" precisely divided the witnesses speaking in the trial into three groups: 'old snitches from Tito's criminal underworld', 'American spies' and 'Tito's diplomats' ("The Lodz Daily" among other newspapers used almost the same classification in its article of the same day)⁵⁶.

⁴⁷ PT 257 (1949), p. 1.

⁴⁸ LD 257 (1949), pp.1-2.

⁴⁹ LD 258 (1949), pp.1-2.

⁵⁰ LD 259 (1949), pp.1-2.

⁵¹ PT 259 (1949), p. 2.

⁵² LD 260 (1949), p.1.

⁵³ PT 260 (1949), p. 2.

⁵⁴ M. Bechowska, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

⁵⁵ PT 261 (1949), p. 2.

⁵⁶ LD 261 (1949), pp.1-2

Apart from this 'independent article', the tribune reprinted a text from "Izvestija" entitled 'Malicious agents of imperialism caught red-handed', in which the Soviet newspaper referred to the announcement under the title 'The forgers of the history' by the Soviet Information Bureau from 1948. The author of the article stated that the trial revealed the similarity of Rajk's plans with the views of Allan Dulles (OSS envoy in Europe) who as early as in 1943 had articulated plans aiming at the creation of a Balkan Federation after the war. The article in "Izvestia" proudly emphasized the fact that the 'hopeless strivings of imperialists to hold back the development of history' had turned into a fiasco. The same motive of the alleged American preparations to create a Balkan Federation and of Tito's participation in this initiative was mentioned in "The Life of Warsaw", together with a detailed description of the role which Rajk's group was ment to play in the realization of this project⁵⁷.

The evolution of the trial was meticulously reported by "People's Tribune". The article 'The prosecution calls for the death penalty against the traitors of the Hungarian nation' included the full version of the prosecutor's speech which was delivered by Dr. Gyula Alapi⁵⁸. The attorney specified all accusations against each defendant and put the emphasis on the fact that in the course of the trial all felonies had been proved⁵⁹. Following his words, the reader could get the impression that a very elaborate spy network, of which Rajk's intrigue was only a part, had just been revealed, preventing, at the same time, a 'secrete offensive against the USSR'. Several highlighted sections of the article conveyed the clear message that 'the sentence in Rajk's process will be the verdict on Tito's political clique'. Moreover, according to the article Rajk's trial eventually 'opened a curtain, behind which the American heirs of Hitler were forming their plans'. Obviously the rhetoric hinted towards Yugoslavia under Josip Broz Tito as a patron of Rajk and his 'gang', showing the double bottom of this political trial. The attack was thorough, since a reprint from the "Pravda" was released in the same issue of the newspaper. Its correspondent, Boris Polevoj, observed the alleged outrage of Hungarian society, which, after having been confronted with all revealed 'crimes', demanded a severe punishment for the traitors⁶⁰. "The Lodz Daily" also focused on the persecution's speech in its columns, hinting at the 'collaboration between Belgrade and Washington against the USSR' as pivotal fact to understand the essence of Rajk's conspiracy⁶¹.

The only mention of the defense arguments appeared in the press only in late September, when a speech of the defender of Rajk and his codefendants was published on the 26th. However, already the subtitle did not raise any doubt about the guilt of Rajk: 'The attorneys' conscience does not allow them to defend the accused'. The "People's Tribune"'s authors maintained that the only possible line of defense presented Rajk and his collaborators as being like putty in the imperialists' hands.⁶² This suggestion, in the spirit of the show character of the trial, had no influence on the verdict. It goes without saying that the presence of attorneys in this trial, just like in other exemplary Soviet show trials, was a mere formality⁶³. It could not be different, since even the defendants' role in the trial was reduced to confirming the planned scenario,⁶⁴ as their "acknowledgement" of their culpability in the

⁵⁷ LW 258 (1949), pp.1-2.

⁵⁸ PT 262 (1949), pp. 3-4.; M. Bechowska, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

⁵⁹ PT 262 (1949), p. 3.

⁶⁰ *Loc. cit.*

⁶¹ LD 262 (1949), pp.1-2.

⁶² PT 263 (1949), p. 2.

⁶³ M. Bechowska, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-108.

⁶⁴ PT 263 (1949), p. 2.

very beginning of the trial has demonstrated. Archival materials show that László Rajk demanded the death penalty for himself even before the trial had started⁶⁵.

In the end, László Rajk, Dr. Tibor Szönyi and András Szalai were sentenced to death on September 24th and executed on October 15th, 1949⁶⁶. At the same time, the press accounts concerning Rajk mostly came to a halt. On September 26th, "People's Tribune" published a short editorial about the death penalty, followed by excerpts of the verdict⁶⁷. Similar information was published on the next day in "The Lodz Daily"⁶⁸, while "People's Tribune" went further, publishing fragments of the reasons for the judgement⁶⁹. The author chose to draw the readers' attention mostly to the spy activity of the condemned men, and tried to interpret the trial in terms of its universal message. Shortly after, the newspaper published a summary of the article 'After the trial' which originally saw the light in the Hungarian "Szabad Nép", the main press organ of the Hungarian Workers' Party⁷⁰. Most of the texts published afterwards revolved rather around the 'Belgrade renegades' as the patrons of Rajk's intrigue, than around Rajk himself. The essence revolved around the necessity to keep vigilance against the enemy who might be preparing another provocation⁷¹.

Curiously enough, none of the analyzed newspapers did inform about the very final act of the drama, namely the execution of Rajk and his codefendants. One reason for this might be that Rajk and the other defendants were important only as long as the reports from their trial provided the opportunity to present more and more complex interdependencies between them and Tito in order to compromise Yugoslavia.

Bearing all this in mind, even based on only three selected newspapers covering Rajk's show trial, it is easy to see the large scale manipulation of the public opinion, which most likely stem from the fact that this was the first show trial against communist functionaries in post-war Europe organized outside the USSR. The immense interest shown in the trial by the world press was not a spontaneous response to the alleged crimes of Rajk, but rather a result of cleverly directing the public opinion's attention on a well-selected high-ranking yet inconvenient politician. When the reader, on the other hand, began to look at an article about the crimes committed by Rajk, Brankov and Szalaj, the conclusions forced upon him every time dealt with the alleged imperialist provocations of Marshal Tito. It is also remarkable that in most cases, the trial reports from Budapest had catchy inflated titles and were highlighted by the layout of the newspaper in order to rivet the attention of the reader. The articles were announced on first pages and usually published on the second or third page without any attempts to save space. These measures were to guarantee the desired effect and prove the extent to which the press was entrusted with a task of moulding public opinion, and that Polish journalists consciously took part in that process.

In this context, the events in Budapest were mainly a result of the aggravation of the Soviet attitude towards the socialist bloc as a whole, aiming at its direct subordination to Moscow. This is why the victim of the trial was sentenced as a politician who violated the principle of

⁶⁵ M. Bechowska, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

⁶⁶ J. Kochanowski, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

⁶⁷ PT 264 (1949), p. 1.

⁶⁸ LD 264 (1949), pp.1-2

⁶⁹ PT 265 (1949), pp. 1-2.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 1.

⁷¹ PT 266 (1949), s. 2; PT 269 (1949), p. 1.

solidarity, who became a spy and advocated independence from Moscow. Therefore, the trial served as a warning for other satellite states and deterrent from subsequent insubordination; on the other hand, it served as an instructional lesson for those who were to conduct similar trials in other socialist countries in the future. As briefly mentioned above, in Poland a trial was being prepared against Władysław Gomułka, the first secretary of the Polish Workers' Party⁷². He was removed from power in 1948 whereas in 1951 he was imprisoned under the charge of "dangerous rightist-nationalist deviations" from the official ideology.

Just like in the case of Rajk, such accusations provided the opportunity to conduct purges within the party and to eliminate opponents of the tightening communist policy forced by Moscow. Historians believe that what held back a number of Central Committee members of the Polish United Workers' Party from organizing the trial of Gomułka was the huge proportion of Moscow's purges in Hungary. Finally Gomułka, unlike Rajk, Slansky or Kostov, survived⁷³ as a result of the fear that the trial of Rajk has sown in Poland.

To realize the importance of the Rajk trial for communist propaganda, a few novels are worth mentioning like D. Kartun's *Spisek Tito przeciwko Europie. Historia sprzysiężenia Rajka*, D. Desanti's *Tito i jego agenci* or R. de Jouvenel's *Tito marszałek zdrajców*⁷⁴. These publications were put in writing to defame both Marshal Tito and his policy. The majority of the accusations against Tito and his ministers presented in these novels was based on the testimonies gathered during the trial of László Rajk. Most of them were quoted directly from the trial's shorthand report, which was officially translated into many languages and published only few weeks after the end of the trial⁷⁵.

According to the MKP's decision, László Rajk was rehabilitated and reburied, accompanied by thousands of silent Hungarians, on October 6th, 1956, less than three weeks before the beginning of the Hungarian Revolution.

⁷² Gomułka wrócił z Moskwy żywy. O październiku 1956r. z Janem Olszewskim i Wojciechem Roszkowskim rozmawia Barbara Polak [In:] "Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej", No. 10(69), X 2006, pp.15-16.

⁷³ Ibidem, p.16.

⁷⁴ See also: See also: Cywiak J., Juryś R., *Rajk, Tito, Wallstreet: proces w Budapeszcie*, Warszawa 1949; Brodzki S., *Titowszczyzna – szturmowy oddział imperializmu*, Warszawa 1950; D. Desanti, *Tito i jego agenci*, Warszawa 1950; *Jugosławia pod terrorem kłiki Tito*, Warszawa 1950; Cordon A., *Zbrodnicza działalność bandy Tito w Jugosławii podczas wojny*, Warszawa 1951; R.de Jouvenel, *Tito marszałek zdrajców*, Warszawa 1951; D. Kartun, *Spisek Tito przeciwko Europie. Historia sprzysiężenia Rajka*, Warszawa 1951.

⁷⁵ Polish edition: *Laszlo Rajk i jego wspólnicy przed trybunałem ludowym*, Warszawa 1949.