

Abstract

Title: Comparison of the Czechoslovak and German prison systems following World War II

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After World War II, countries that fell into the Soviet sphere of influence experienced major social, political and economic changes in a process which is in literature usually referred to as “Sovietization”. This dissertation analyzes this process in the particular case of prison systems in Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Occupation Zone which later became the German Democratic Republic. Its main focus lies on the way the Soviet model was applied in both countries, what kinds of similarities or differences can be traced in its development and what were the factors and reasons causing them. The main argument of the dissertation is that Sovietization, even though it produced similar results, was carried out in different ways in the individual countries, depending not only on previous development, but also on the geopolitical position and specific features of the country as well as on the will of the local communist establishment to adopt the Soviet model. It should be also noted that the Soviet model was not uniformly defined, but subject to constant change. On many different levels, both Czechoslovakia and the GDR had to seek balance and adapt their system to the established local prison policy as well as the country’s political, economic and social conditions; another complication was the fact that accurate information about the Soviet prison model was not always available. The dissertation shows that the Sovietization of Czechoslovak and East German prison systems did not mean simply the acceptance of a stereotyped Soviet model, inevitably leading to the same results, but was instead a complex blending of domestic and Soviet influences which in each country resulted in a specifically national version of a Sovietized prison system.

Keywords: Sovietization, prison system, Czechoslovakia, Soviet Occupation Zone / German Democratic Republic