

Political Trials in the 50's - Karel Vaš

The main intention behind this master thesis was to provide a general overview over the historical phenomenon of political trials that took place in the era of early years of communist regime in Czechoslovakia and to put together a life story of the communist prosecutor and the judge Karel Vaš within this grim mosaic. The thesis encompasses the broader historical background and regional frame, the development of related legislation and the apparatus of the state and the communist party involved in political trials. There is also great concern in types and directions of judicial and other persecution, the theme of the rehabilitation of victims and the prosecution of persons involved in making these trials.

The thesis consists of five chapters. The first chapter gives a brief description of the situation in Czechoslovakia after the Second World War. It covers the most important events that led to communists taking over the absolute power in the state and carrying out political trials in the 50's as means for the stabilization of the society.

The second chapter is dedicated directly to political trials themselves. This chapter is divided into four subchapters. The first subchapter is about the context, the definition of the term and historical origin of the political trials and show trials in Soviet Union in 1930's. The second subchapter is devoted to the analysis of related legislation. The third subchapter analyzes particular types of political trials depending on victims and reasons for their unlawful prosecution. The fourth subchapter deals with rehabilitation attempts of the communist regime before the era of Normalization.

The third chapter aims at the institutional basis and the mechanism of political trials. The chapter is compartmentalized into five subchapters. The first is mapping bodies of the communist party of Czechoslovakia that were involved in the preparation phase of trials. The second subchapter pursues the role of the State Security which served as a secret political police and an intelligence agency and was active in the investigative phase. The third subchapter is devoted to defense counterintelligence agency that had similar position as the State Security regarding political trials against members of the

Czechoslovak army. The fourth subchapter examines the influence of Soviet consultants and the fifth deals with judicial authorities, courts and prosecutors, involved in the final phase of realizing the political trial itself.

The fourth chapter looks into the historical resonance of political trials of the 1950's up to the present day and age. It is divided into two subchapters. The first is concerned with the side of victims of trials and their rehabilitation after the fall of the communist regime. The second subchapter provides a disturbing view on the lack of criminal prosecution of former judges and prosecutors that were behind political trials.

The fifth and final chapter is dedicated to the life story of Karel Vaš who acquired his infamous reputation as the military prosecutor and the judge in the late 40's and early 50's. It is split into three subchapters. The first subchapter covers the youth and adolescence of Karel Vaš – most notably him joining the communist party while still attending highschool, graduating from law school, his involvement in pre-war communist politics and his role in the Second World War. The second and the most extensive subchapter revolves around the professional life of Karel Vaš as the prosecutor, the judge and the government official after communists seized the absolute power in the country in February 1948. It also contains details concerning his persecution by the regime and political criminal trial against him. Because of the comprehensive content the second subchapter is further divided into seven parts. The third and the last subchapter summarizes up the life of Karel Vaš after the fall of communist regime till the day of his death. There is an intense overview of criminal proceedings against Vaš as he was charged in the late 1990's with the judicial murder of general Heliodor Píka. In the early 2000's all charges against Karel Vaš were dropped on grounds of applying limitation period for criminal prosecution and he remained living free until the rest of his days.