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Constitution-Making in the Informal Soviet Empire in Eastern Europe, East Asia, and Inner Asia, 1945–1955¹

Ivan Sablin

Heidelberg University

Abstract

This chapter provides an overview of dependent constitution-making under one-party regimes in Albania, Bulgaria, China, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, North Korea, Mongolia, Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia during the first decade after the Second World War. Employing and further developing the concept of the informal Soviet empire, it discusses the structural adjustments in law and governance in the Soviet dependencies. The chapter outlines the development of the concepts of “people’s republic” and “people’s democracy” and discusses the process of adoption and the authorship of the constitutions. It then compares their texts with attention to sovereignty and political subjectivity, supreme state institutions, and the mentions of the Soviet Union, socialism, and ruling parties. Finally, it surveys the role of nonconstitutional institutions in political practices and their reflection in propaganda. The process of constitution-making followed the imperial logic of hierarchical yet heterogeneous governance, with multiple vernacular and Soviet actors partaking in drafting and adopting the constitutions. The texts ascribed sovereignty and political subjectivity to the people, the toilers, classes, nationalities, and regions, often in different combinations. Most of the constitutions established a parliamentary body as the supreme institution, disregarding separation of powers, and introduced a standing body to perform the supreme functions, including legislation, between parliamentary sessions, which became a key element in the legal adjustment. Some constitutions mentioned socialism, the Soviet Union, and the ruling parties. The standardization of governance in the informal Soviet empire manifested itself in the constitutional documents only partially. Propaganda and archival documents revealed the prominence of nonconstitutional institutions, parties and leaders, as well the involvement of Soviet representatives in state-building. Domestic parties and leaders in the Soviet dependencies were also presented as subordinate to their Soviet counterparts in propaganda.

Keywords: constitution, state socialism, empire, Soviet, one-party regime

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Introduction

During the first decade after the Second World War, all Soviet dependencies in Europe and Asia adopted new constitutions or introduced substantial amendments to the existing ones. The Soviet Constitution of 1936 was the main reference for most of the constitutions, while Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin personally amended some of the texts. Despite the similarity of many provisions and direct borrowings from the Soviet Constitution, there were major differences between the constitutions of Albania (1946), Bulgaria (1947), China (1954), Czechoslovakia (1948), East Germany (1949), Hungary (1949), North Korea (1948), Mongolia (1940), Poland (1947¹ and 1952), Romania (1948 and 1952), and Yugoslavia (1946). They varied in the sources of sovereignty and the discussions of political subjectivity, established different supreme state institutions, and did not necessarily mention the ruling party, the Soviet Union, or socialism. There were in fact no clear guidelines for the constitutions of Soviet dependencies until 1957 (Hazard 1974, 988). Although their adoption was often directed or supervised by Moscow, the authorship of the constitutions was heterogeneous, with the participation of domestic and Soviet leaders, jurists, and officials. Variable forms of dependency, from military occupation to ideological and pragmatic allegiance, as well as the ad hoc solutions in individual contexts contributed to the variety of constitutional norms.

This lack of uniformity attested to the imperial character of Soviet governance in Eurasia (Burbank and Cooper 2010, 11–12). In 1985, ahead of the imperial turn in Russian and Soviet history (Sunderland 2016), the economist Charles Wolf conceptualized the informal (external) Soviet empire. It excluded the internal empire, that is the Soviet Union proper, and had several distinguishing features: partial contiguity, the variety in the forms of domination (satellites, allies, or cooperating regimes), and the special role of the ruling parties, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU)² as the primary agent of imperial power and the associated parties in the dependent polities (Wolf 1985, 997–98). Although Wolf wrote about the 1980s, the main characteristics of the informal Soviet empire consolidated already in 1945–1955.

This chapter focuses on the constitutional and nonconstitutional government architectures, which together with the establishment of state socialist economies became an important part of the structural adjustments (Duara 2007) within the informal Soviet empire. Structural adjustments did not necessarily occur through coercion. Allegiance was also ensured through ideological commitment to building socialism, which made the informal Soviet empire also a hegemonic formation (Morozov 2021), and pragmatic interest in Soviet assistance (Li 2001, 29–31). The Soviet–Yugoslav split in 1948, as well as the later Albanian–

Soviet and Sino-Soviet splits, demonstrated that structural adjustments did not predetermine subordination and were reversible.

Formal integration of parties and states also took shape during the first decade after the Second World War but the respective organizations did not cover the whole informal empire. Whereas the integration through the Communist International (Comintern, 1919–1943) included parties from the whole world, postwar organizations were confined to Europe. The Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers' Parties (Cominform, 1947–1956), the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (1949–1991), and the Warsaw Treaty Organization (1955–1991) only included European members in the 1940s and the 1950s.

The discussion of the adoption of the constitutions and their authorship was based on secondary literature and archival documents, predominantly those published by Tat'iana Viktorovna Volokitina and her colleagues (Volokitina, Islamov, and Murashko 1997; 1998; Volokitina 1999; 2002). The provisions of the constitutions, pertaining to sovereignty, political subjectivity, supreme state institutions, and dependency, were compared in their Russian translations. The survey of nonconstitutional institutions and their representation relied on archival documents, secondary literature, and illustrated propaganda magazines. These magazines were modelled after the journal *SSSR na stroike* ("USSR in Construction"), known as *Sovetskii Soiuz* ("Soviet Union") since 1950, and were usually published in the respective states and in multiple languages. No magazines were available for Mongolia and Yugoslavia.

Constitution-making was not a one-sided adoption of the supposed model of people's democracy³ and followed the nuanced imperial logic. Multiple actors, including domestic party leaders and legal scholars, Soviet advisors, the leaders and functionaries of the VKP(b)/CPSU, partook in drafting the constitutions. The Yugoslav Constitution of 1946, for instance, was drafted by Yugoslav Communists in contact with the Soviet Ambassador, while the North Korean Constitution of 1948 was practically written at Stalin's dacha (country house). The heterogeneous authorship and the ad hoc political solutions contributed to the major differences in the texts.

Sovereignty and political subjectivity were ascribed to the people, the toilers, classes, nationalities, and regions, often in combination. Most of the constitutions proclaimed parliaments supreme bodies of state power, rejecting thereby separation of powers, and introduced standing bodies with broad competence, acting between parliamentary sessions. Several constitutions were more restrictive than their Soviet counterpart, barring different groups from elections. The ruling parties were rarely mentioned. The goal of building socialism

and the special relation to the Soviet Union were mentioned more frequently but were also not ubiquitous.

The standardization of governance in Soviet dependencies also pertained to nonconstitutional (in most cases) institutions of parties and leaders. The ruling parties were presented as the main agents of societal change and de facto governments and were treated as such by Moscow. A special role was also ascribed to leaders, most of whom headed the parties but not the states. Parties and leaders were presented as subordinate to the VKP(b)/CPSU and the Soviet leader. The predominance of the Soviet Union as a state was also evident both in propaganda and archival documents.

Background

The Bolsheviks, whose Party was the center of the Soviet empire (Suny and Martin 2001), had been involved in constitution-making in the Soviet dependencies since the 1920s. The concepts of “people’s republic” and “people’s democracy” played an important role in describing pro-Soviet regimes since the 1920s and the 1940s, respectively, but neither of them meant complete uniformity.

The concept of people’s republic was introduced by the non-Bolshevik socialists of the Ukrainian Central Rada, who proclaimed such a republic in November 1917 in response to the Bolshevik-led coup in Petrograd. The 1918 Constitution of the Ukrainian People’s Republic specified that sovereignty belonged to “the people, that is, to all citizens” and was exercised through the universally elected People’s Assembly, which was called the “supreme body of power” and granted supreme legislative power. The Council of Minister and the General Court were granted supreme executive and legislative power, respectively. The Constitution also introduced autonomy for non-Ukrainian nationalities (Pryliuk and Ianevs’kyi 1992).

Although the Ukrainian Central Rada opposed the Bolsheviks, the latter appropriated the concept of people’s republic. Most of Soviet Russia’s dependencies which later joined the unified state were called socialist soviet republics, but the Far Eastern Republic (1920–1922), the Khorezm People’s Soviet Republic (1920–1923), the Bukharan People’s Soviet Republic (1920–1924), and the People’s Republic of Tannu-Tuva (1921–1944) were not. Neither was the Mongolian People’s Republic (1924–1991), which remained formally independent and became “prototype” for modern satellite states (Lattimore 1956, 39).

The 1921 Constitution of the Far Eastern Republic was an important milestone in the legal development of the informal Soviet empire. Unlike the 1918 Soviet Constitution, which

ascribed sovereignty and political subjectivity to classes, the toilers, and nationalities, the Constitution of the Far Eastern Republic stated that all power in the republic belonged to the people, although it also established autonomies for non-Russian nationalities. It also did not mention goal of building socialism, unlike the 1918 Soviet Constitution, but still transferred natural resources to state property and granted the toilers special rights and protection. The Constitution of the Far Eastern Republic introduced universal elections, unlike in the USSR. It granted People's Assembly legislative power, but the Administration of seven people also received broad competence, including the right to adopt provisional laws between parliamentary sessions. This meant that the system of the Far Eastern Republic had similarities to that of Soviet Russia, where supreme authority between the All-Russian Congresses of Soviets belonged to the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and its standing Presidium (Dal'nevostochnaia respublika 1921, 7, 10, 28–31; Vyshinskii 1938, 423–26). The potent Administration facilitated the control of the Bolshevik Party over the Far Eastern Republic, but the Party also relied on nonconstitutional measures (Sablin 2018, 182–85).

The Constitution of the Far Eastern Republic granted some preferences to Soviet Russian citizens, but the 1921 Constitution of Tannu-Tuva was the first one to formally proclaim dependency on Soviet Russia in foreign relations (Dal'nevostochnaia respublika 1921, 32; Dubrovskii and Serdobov 1957, 295). The five constitutions of Tuva are exemplary of constitutional variability. The 1926 Constitution of the Tuvan People's Republic glorified the October Revolution in its preamble but still spoke of people's power. The 1930 Constitution of the Tuvan Arats' [Herders'] Republic declared adherence to a non-capitalist way to socialism and "the dictatorship of the toiling arat masses". The 1941 Constitution of the Tuvan People's Republic called it "a state of the toilers" and reaffirmed the non-capitalist way (Dubrovskii and Serdobov 1958, 281–82, 286–87, 293). Irrespective of their constitutions, Mongolia and Tuva were run by the respective parties and, through them, by the Bolshevik Party. Their populations experienced violence and mass purges similar to those in the USSR (Kaplonski 2014; Rupen 1965, 612).

The Soviet Constitution of 1936, which was called the "Stalin Constitution" and was adopted following a "popular discussion" (Lomb 2017; Velikanova 2018), vested sovereignty with two classes, the toilers, and the constituent republics. It also referenced multiple political subjects. The Constitution declared the USSR a "socialist state of workers and peasants," stated that "all power in the USSR" belonged "to the urban and rural toilers," but also granted "all citizens," with the exception of "insane persons" and those who were disenfranchised by court, passive and active voting rights, eliminating the previous restrictions. The Constitution also

defined the USSR as a union state, founded through the “voluntary unification” of republics which retained partial sovereignty and had the right to secession. Finally, it called the VKP(b) “the vanguard of the toilers” and “the leading core of all organizations of toilers, both civic and state” (Trainin 1940, 179–81, 188–89).

The institutional design was also self-contradictory. Whereas “all power” of the toilers was vested with the soviets of toilers’ deputies, the Constitution also introduced the Supreme Soviet as “the supreme body of state power,” while the soviets of toilers’ deputies were defined as local bodies of state power. The Supreme Soviet had two equal chambers, the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities, and was called the only legislative authority. At the same time, the standing Presidium of the Supreme Soviet had broad competence between the sessions of the assembly, including the right to issue decrees. Several other institutions had the word “supreme” in their description. The Council of People’s Commissars (the Council of Ministers since 1946) was the “supreme executive and administrative body,” while the Supreme Court was the “supreme judicial body.” The Prosecutor (the Prosecutor General since 1946) was responsible for “supreme” legal supervision. The overall “supreme” status of the Supreme Soviet and the subordination of all other bodies to it meant that there was no balance between the branches of power (Trainin 1940, 179, 182–87).

The Communist leadership appeared to have considered contested elections (Getty 1991, 18), but did not introduce them until 1988. All candidates were pre-appointed by the Party, and the so-called “bloc of Communists and non-party members” always won all of the seats. All major decisions were made in the Central Committee of the Party and unanimously ratified either by the Supreme Soviet or its Presidium (Juviler 1960, 3). By the time the Constitution of 1936 was adopted, the initial oligarchic collective leadership of the Bolshevik Politbiuro had already given way to Stalin’s dictatorship, which achieved its full powers with the onset of the Great Terror (1937–1938). The apparatuses of the Bolshevik Central Committee and the Council of People’s Commissars, which Stalin chaired since 1941, became the two main institutions of the state. They drafted resolutions to be approved by Stalin as the *de facto* supreme institution (Oleg V. Khlevniuk 2008, xiv–xvi, xix–xxi). The Constitution of 1936 also bolstered the personality cult of Stalin, who was presented as the supreme leader (*vozhd’*) in all areas of Soviet life (Gill 2011, 117–21, 138).

The adoption of the Soviet Constitution of 1936 was connected to domestic and international developments. The Soviet leadership hoped for social stability and reconciliation with at least some of the groups who had been persecuted in the previous years. In July 1935, Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin, who participated in drafting the new Constitution, published an

article celebrating the emergence of a unified Soviet people through the cohesion of classes and nationalities. International considerations also played a role, as a “democratic” Soviet Union was supposed to facilitate the shift of politics in foreign states to the left and the struggle against fascism (O. V. Khlevniuk 1996, 156–57; Whittington 2019, 147).

By late 1935, at least three different understandings of people’s democracy consolidated in the international communist discourse. In the context of anti-colonialism, it was evoked already in 1926, when the Korean Communist Party, under the auspices of the Comintern’s Executive Committee, proclaimed the slogan of a “people’s democratic republic” as a means of struggle against Japan. Such a republic would have a universally elected parliament as its supreme body, would be allied to the USSR, and protect workers’ and peasants’ interests (Vada et al. 2007, 386–88). In 1936, Wang Ming of the Chinese Communist Party spoke of the need to create a “people’s democratic republic” in China, reaffirming the need for a universally elected parliament and a government of national defense against Japan.⁴ In 1935–1936, the notion of “people’s democracy” was used in relation to the regime of the new Soviet Constitution.⁵ It also became strongly associated with the tactics of a united or popular front and anti-fascism.

In 1935, the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern supported the tactics of a united front “of the proletariat” and “of all toilers” against capital, fascism, and war on national and the international level, but at the same time reaffirmed the need to win most of the working class over to communism. It also resolved to turn the national communist parties into mass parties.⁶ Following the Congress, Nikos Zachariadis, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Greece, spoke of the “parties of people’s democracy” when discussing an anti-fascist united front in December 1935.⁷ After the victory of the Popular Front in the Spanish legislative election in February 1936, Jesús Hernández Tomás of the Spanish Communist Party called for advancing the “people’s democratic” revolution in Spain.⁸ At the onset of the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), in September 1936, Georgi Dimitrov, who then headed the Comintern’s Executive Committee, argued that if the Republicans won, a republic of a new type would be established, “a state with genuine people’s democracy.” Such a state would not yet be “soviet,” but it would be an “antifascist, left state, with the participation of the genuine left part of the bourgeoisie” (Dam’e et al. 1999, 36).⁹ In 1937, Spanish Communists reaffirmed the understanding of “people’s democracy” as “a democratic parliamentary republic of a new type” (Pozharskaia and Saplin 2001, 299). After the Spanish Civil War, in 1941, émigré participants of the Popular Front highlighted the nationality aspect of people’s democracy when discussing freedom for Catalonia and the Basque Country.¹⁰

The introduction of universal elections in the USSR did not affect the situation in the two informal Soviet dependencies. Although the 1940 Mongolian Constitution and the 1941 Constitution of Tuva had significant borrowings from the Soviet Constitution of 1936, non-universal, unequal, and indirect elections were retained in both countries. The 1941 Tuvan Constitution also granted Soviet citizens in Tuva active and passive voting rights. Both constitutions reaffirmed the non-capitalist way to socialism and included provisions on the special role of their respective ruling parties, the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party and the Tuvan People's Revolutionary Party. By analogy with the "Stalin Constitution," its Mongolian counterpart was called the "Choibalsan Constitution" after Khorloogiin Choibalsan, Mongolia's leader (Dubrovskii and Serdobov 1958, 295, 300–301; Iaskina 2007, 112; Mongolian People's Republic 1947, 36, 46–47). Tuva was annexed to Soviet Russia in 1944, like Western Belarus and Western Ukraine (Eastern Poland), Bessarabia (Moldova), Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania a few years before (Naimark 2017, 63–64).

No other immediate Sovietizations followed. In 1943, Moscow rejected the idea of the Polish Workers' Party, which took place of the Communist Party of Poland, disbanded in 1938, to establish workers' and peasants' power in the country. Instead, it supported the slogans of national freedom and people's democratic power along with the united front tactics (Kemp-Welch 2008, 18–19). Immediately after the war, Stalin also urged German Communists against a violent revolution, stressing the need to take the electoral path to power, if necessary, in coalition with other parties in the context of broader support for socialism across Europe (Slaveski 2013, 117).

The Axis powers were defeated in Yugoslavia and Albania by own communist-led partisan forces. In the rest of Eastern Europe, in North Korea, and in Manchuria, they were defeated by the Red Army. The Red Army remained a major factor in most of Eastern Europe, with the exception of Yugoslavia, Albania, and Czechoslovakia (from which it withdrew in December 1945), North Korea, and Mongolia. The Soviet secret police detachments in the occupied territories and Soviet advisors also played a role (Békés et al. 2015, 18; Volokitina, Murashko, and Noskova 1993, 5).

In Eastern Europe, the Soviet takeover of the economies and defense establishments and the creation of dependent space went on since the closing stages of the war and was especially swift in the former Axis powers, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania. In Austria the attempts to penetrate the economy failed due to Anglo–American pressure. As early as February 9, 1946, Stalin publicly acknowledged the persistent global division into two camps despite the shared victory, marking the start of the Cold War. Although Moscow's guidelines were

incomprehensive and despite the predominance of coalitional arrangements, domestic communist parties took dominant positions of power in the police, foreign relations, local governments, the army, and economic bodies across the region in 1945–1946. Non-communist parties were pushed away through a variety of tactics, including arrests and infiltration by clandestine communists. When constitutional means did not work, the communists turned to mass mobilization and political violence. All this allowed for gradual establishment of communist monopolies in all countries of the region, irrespective of the appearances of the regimes (Békés et al. 2015, 9–15; Naimark 2017, 66–67; Sakwa 1999, 280).

Competitive elections were held in 1946–1947 in Czechoslovakia, Romania, Poland, and Hungary, but in all four cases communists admitted to rigging them (Volokitina, Islamov, and Murashko 1997, 1: 1944–1948:12–13, 15, 379). During the establishment of the Cominform in September 1947, Andrei Aleksandrovich Zhdanov, a prominent Bolshevik, reaffirmed Stalin’s argument that the world was divided and urged communist parties to assert control. Forcible incorporation of social democratic parties followed, major industries were completely nationalized, and first efforts at collectivization of agriculture were made. Secret police operations, often overseen by Soviet representatives, helped to finish the opposition. The Cominform, like the Comintern in its later stages, was used to ensure Soviet control of the Eastern European parties, which was one of the reasons for the Soviet–Yugoslav split in 1948. Following the split, the most direct Sovietization took place between 1949–1950 and 1953–1956 (Naimark 2017, 68–70).

Authorship and adoption

Multiple actors participated in drafting the constitutions of Soviet dependencies. Domestic communist leaders and jurists played an important role in most cases. In some cases, Soviet jurists and diplomats played a role. Direct involvement of the VKP(b)/CPSU leadership in writing the texts was rare and was documented in the cases of North Korea, Poland, and Romania. Yugoslav Communists contributed to the Albanian Constitution, while non-communist politicians initially participated in drafting in Czechoslovak Constitution. Most of the constitutions were adopted by assemblies after a “public discussion,” like in the USSR. In several cases, non-communists had the opportunity to expressed their opposition to the texts.

The first postwar people’s republics run by a single party were formed in Yugoslavia and Albania, where the communists became dominant forces without Soviet military involvement. Despite initial coalitional arrangements in Yugoslavia, Communist Party of Yugoslavia under

Josip Broz Tito quickly established control over the key spheres of the reestablished state. Prominent non-communists left the government in October 1945, but could not consolidate the opposition. The Communist-led People's Front won all seats at the Constituent Assembly on November 11, 1945. Western powers recognized the election as legitimate (Volokitina, Murashko, and Noskova 1993, 13–16, 97–99, 103). The first draft of the constitution was prepared by Yugoslav jurists under the Communist leaders Edvard Kardelj and Moša Pijade and was a close translation of the Soviet Constitution of 1936, but Tito introduced significant changes to the draft. Soviet Ambassador Ivan Vasil'evich Sadchikov gave some advice, but the Yugoslav authors did not follow seem to have followed it strictly (Chernilovskii 1947, 56; Volokitina, Islamov, and Murashko 1997, 1: 1944–1948:328).

Like in the USSR, the draft was published for a “popular discussion.” The similarities between the draft and the Soviet Constitution prompted some non-communists to claim that it was dictated by Moscow and that it would make Yugoslavia a simple vassal of the USSR, akin to Mongolia. Other critics argued that even though the Yugoslav system was more democratic, it established a concealed one-party system, and rebuked the one-sided pro-Soviet orientation. No major changes were introduced, and the Constitution of the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia was adopted on January 31, 1946 (Volokitina, Murashko, and Noskova 1993, 106–7; Volokitina, Islamov, and Murashko 1997, 1: 1944–1948:325–26, 329, 333). In 1953, the Constitution was subject to major amendments, supervised by the Central Committee of the Party (which was renamed into the League of Communists of Yugoslavia in 1952). Kardelj and Pijade were responsible for the amendments (Nikiforov 2011, 607–8).

The Communist Party of Albania also adopted the tactics of a Democratic Front in the context of local armed opposition. On December 2, 1945, the Democratic Front won all seats at the Constituent Assembly. With the exception of several independents, there was no contest from organized opposition. In Northern Albania, the election featured numerous violations, but Western observers concluded that it reflected the broad support for the Democratic Front. On January 11, 1946, the Constituent Assembly declared Albania a people's republic. The Provisional Democratic Government under Enver Hoxha, the First Secretary of the Communist Party, presented draft constitution, which was prepared with the assistance of the Yugoslav Communist advisors. Following a “popular discussion,” the Constituent Assembly adopted the Constitution of the People's Republic of Albania on March 14, 1946, the Constituent Assembly adopted the Constitution of the People's Republic of Albania (Smirnova 2003, 265–68; Volokitina, Murashko, and Noskova 1993, 17, 111–13). Following the Soviet–Yugoslav split, the Communist Party of Albania was reformed into the Party of Labor of Albania in 1948, and

in 1950 substantial amendments were introduced to the Constitution, making it closer to the Soviet Constitution of 1936 (Kuprits 1951, x–xi; Smirnova 2003, 303).

In Bulgaria, Soviet involvement was more prominent, but the process was also more contested. Initially, the Fatherland Front, which came to power in 1944, was a broad coalition, but it became dominated by the Bulgarian Workers' Party (Communists). The Front won 88 percent of votes in the parliamentary election in November 1945. In September 1946, a referendum supported the proclamation of a people's republic, and the election to the Sixth Grand National Assembly, which was to adopt a new constitution, took place on October 27, 1946. Despite numerous violations, the Fatherland Front won only about 70 percent of votes, and the parliament included members of the opposition who were ready for political struggle (Brunnbauer 2008, 52; Volokitina 1999, 1: 1944–1948:356; Znepolski et al. 2018, 77).

In September 1946, Stalin advised Dimitrov, who in November 1946 became Bulgaria's first Communist Prime Minister, that country should adopt "a people's constitution," which would be "more to the right than the Yugoslav one" (Rieber 2009, 116). The Fatherland Front's draft was prepared by the Bulgarian Communists with the assistance of Soviet advisors Il'ia Pavlovich Trainin (a legal scholar), Vsevolod Nikolaevich Durdenevskii (a legal scholar), Konstantin Petrovich Gorshenin (Prosecutor General of the USSR), Aleksandr Fedorovich Gorkin (Secretary of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet), and Petr Nikolaevich Fedoseev (a Marxist-Leninist philosopher). The opposition came up with their own drafts, but the "popular discussion" of the Front's draft began in May 1947. In April–May 1947, all oppositional newspapers were shut down in Bulgaria, and the anti-communists in the parliament decried the lack of outlets to properly discuss the draft. Fearing the discussion of the situation at the United Nations Security Council, the Communists allowed some debates, which revolved around separation of powers, private property, and political and civil liberties. The Front's draft did not receive a two-thirds majority in the Grand National Assembly but passed the first reading on June 20. On December 4, 1947, the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, which became known as the "Dimitrov Constitution," was adopted (Lazarev 1952, 7; Volokitina, Islamov, and Murashko 1997, 1: 1944–1948:630–31, 742; Znepolski et al. 2018, 78–79).

In Romania, King Michael I formally led the coup, which established the government of the National Democratic Bloc, including the Romanian Communist Party, in 1944. Under the pressure from Andrei Ianuar'evich Vyshinskii, who was the Soviet negotiator in peace talks, the King made the Communist Petru Groza Prime Minister in 1945. Ahead of the election to the Grand National Assembly on November 19, 1946, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, the Secretary

General of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, informed a Soviet representative that his party planned to ensure its own majority with the help of “special ‘technical’ means.” The Communist-led Bloc of Democratic Parties won around 70 percent of votes, but there were numerous violations and the results were falsified. Romanian Communists then used the Soviet military presence to eliminate political opposition and prompt Michael I to abdicate on December 30, 1947, with the creation of the Romanian People’s Republic. In February 1948 Romania signed a treaty of friendship, cooperation, and mutual assistance with the Soviet Union, becoming the first Eastern European dependency to do so. The same month, the Communists merged their party with the Social Democratic Party, forming the Romanian Workers’ Party. In the new election to the Grand National Assembly on March 28, 1948, the Communist-led Popular Democratic Front won 405 out of 414 seats. On April 13, 1948, the Grand National Assembly unanimously adopted the provisional Constitution of the Romanian People’s Republic. No concrete information is available on the authorship of this constitution,¹¹ but it was most certainly supervised by the Party leadership, and the draft had been published before the discussion in the parliament (Deletant 2018, 66; Focseneanu 1998, 116–17; Leustean 2007, 306–7; Tismaneanu 2003, 94; Van de Grift 2011, 49; Volokitina, Murashko, and Noskova 1993, 28, 182–84; Volokitina 1999, 1: 1944–1948:370, 375–76).

The Soviet leadership was directly involved in drafting the second postwar constitution. In 1951, Gheorghiu-Dej asked for Soviet assistance, to which Stalin agreed. After the commission under Gheorghiu-Dej (**Figure 6.1**) provided the draft, it was edited by Vyshinskii, Vagan Grigor’evich Grigor’ian (who chaired the VKP(b) Central Committee’s Foreign Policy Commission), and Gorshenin in 1952. On June 25, 1952, Viacheslav Mikhailovich Molotov submitted the draft recommendations to Stalin who apparently rejected them and on July 6, 1952, new ones were submitted and approved two days later. In Romania, the amended draft was put to a “popular discussion.” On September 23, 1952, Gheorghiu-Dej presented the draft to the Grand National Assembly, and on September 27, 1952, it was adopted (Volokitina, Islamov, and Murashko 1998, 2: 1949–1953:582, 771, 796, 804–5; Volokitina 2002, 2: 1949–1953:632–35).

Figure 6.1. A meeting of the Constitutional Commission under the presidency of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej during the Thirteenth Session of the Grand National Assembly, Bucharest, between September 22 and 24, 1952 (*Fototeca online a comunismului românesc*, Photograph #IA172, 172/1952)

In Czechoslovakia, the drafting was especially contested. The government-in-exile under Edvard Beneš, the prewar President, and the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia under Klement Gottwald agreed to form the coalitional National (People's) Front in 1943. The Communists found themselves in a contested landscape, with Beneš resuming his presidency in 1945 and the Soviet troops withdrawing later the same year. Ahead of the election to the Constituent National Assembly, which took place on May 26, 1946, the Czechoslovak Communist leaders Rudolf Slánský and Gottwald informed the Soviet side that they intended to limit the participating parties to those in the National Front and rush with the election date due to the disagreements among the Front's members. The election did not result in a Communist plurality or majority (Mar'ina 2005, 2:49; Volokitina, Islamov, and Murashko 1997, 1: 1944–1948:379, 575–76).

The parliament's constitutional commission, chaired by the Social Democrat Oldřich John included members of different parties and involved fierce debates (Gronský 2006, 2:329).

The VKP(b) Department of Foreign Policy reported in September 1947 that the opposition attempted to remove the basics of the “people’s democratic order” from the text, while Slovak politicians sought to “have their separatist proposals passed.” It also criticized the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia for not using “nonparliamentary forms of struggle” and decried the weakness of the Communist Party of Slovakia. During the crisis of February 1948, caused by the tensions between the Communists and non-Communists in the government, Valerian Aleksandrovich Zorin, the Soviet Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, who was then in Prague, instructed Gottwald and the rest of the Czechoslovak Communist leaders to take a firmer stance. According to Zorin, Gottwald was afraid to go against Beneš, feared American involvement, and asked the Soviets to move their troops in Germany and Austria around Czechoslovakia, which Moscow did not support (Mar’ina 2005, 2:74; Volokitina 1999, 1: 1944–1948:498–99, 551–52).

The crisis ended with the Communist coup on February 21–25, 1948, and they also established control over the Constituent National Assembly.¹² On April 14, 1948, the National Front, then under Communist control, approved the draft of the new constitution and it was put to a short “popular discussion.” Beneš refused to support the undemocratic constitution and the undemocratic elections, which would include one list of candidates. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia nevertheless resolved to submit the draft to the parliament on May 4, and on May 9, 1948, the Constituent National Assembly adopted the new Constitution of the Czechoslovak Republic. Edward Taborsky, a former secretary of Beneš, called the text a “hybrid” of Western parliamentarism and the Soviet system. Beneš agreed to resign after the adoption of the Constitution and the new election, which gave the absolute majority to the National Front. On June 9, 1948, Gottwald signed the Constitution as Prime Minister and acting President, and on June 14, he was elected President (Abrams 2009, 358; Dobeš 2010, 357–68; Mar’ina 2005, 2:80–81; Volokitina, Islamov, and Murashko 1997, 1: 1944–1948:868–70; Volokitina 1999, 1: 1944–1948:612).

The constitution-making in North Korea was fully controlled by the Soviet side. According to Nobuo Shimotomai, all important political documents were most likely written by Soviet advisors under the supervision of the Soviet general in charge of North Korea, Terentii Fomich Shtykov, Nikolai Georgievich Lebedev, and Andrei Alekseevich Romanenko. In February 1947, the Communist-dominated congress of people’s committees formed the People’s Assembly and approved Kim Il-song’s government, which was active since February 1946. In November 1947, at the third session of the People’s Assembly Kim Tu-bong, the first Chairman of the Workers’ Party of North Korea, reported on the plan to draft a provisional

constitution. The session created a commission of the members of the Communist-led Democratic Front for the Reunification of Korea, which prepared a draft with the assistance of Boris Vasil'evich Shchetinin, a Soviet legal scholar. Following the recommendation of the Bolshevik Politbiuro, the draft was put to a "popular discussion" in February–April 1948 (Simotomai 2009, 73, 78, 82; Vanin 2016, 131).

According to Shtykov, however, the proper discussion of the draft took place at Stalin's dacha on April 24, 1948. This meeting, which apart from Stalin and Shtykov included Molotov and Zhdanov, amended the draft and decided to make the constitution permanent. It was to be enacted in South Korea as well, while the new government was to include its representatives. On April 28–29, 1948, the extraordinary session of the People's Assembly in Pyongyang pre-approved the draft to be adopted by the future all-Korean legislature. On July 9–10, 1948, the People's Assembly enacted the Constitution and set the election to the Supreme People's Assembly. The election was held on August 25, 1948, in the North and illegally in two stages in the South. The new assembly included 360 deputies from the South and 212 from the North. On September 8, 1948, the first session of the Supreme People's Assembly of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea approved the Constitution and declared independence of the country on September 9. Moscow withdrew its troops in 1949. According to Nobuo Shimotomai, Lebedev was the one who proposed the name of the country, but it repeated the 1926 slogan of the Korean Communists (Simotomai 2009, 82–87; Vanin 2016, 132, 138–40).

In Hungary, the Soviet occupation did not prevent competitive parliamentary election in November 1945, in which the Hungarian Communist Party won only 17 percent. Mátyás Rákosi, its leader, nevertheless noted that elections did not matter much, given the domination of the Communists in the army, the police, the secret police, local government, and the judiciary. The parliament did not play a significant role, as the Communists also passed laws through the Supreme National Council, for instance, on the Soviet–Hungarian Economic Agreement of 1945. In May 1946, after meeting Stalin, Rákosi revealed to the Party's top functionaries that proletarian dictatorship was on the agenda as soon as peace treaties were signed and the elections in Western Europe were over (Békés et al. 2015, 10, 19).

Ahead of the second postwar parliamentary election, which was on August 31, 1947, the leaders of the Communists and the Social Democrats agreed to disenfranchise some 300,000 "reactionaries" and omit some people from voters' lists. Despite the use of intimidation and fraud, the Communists won only 22 percent of the votes, which irritated the Bolshevik Foreign Policy Department. Ahead of the third election on May 15, 1949, the Communists forced the Social Democrats to merge the two parties into the Hungarian Working People's Party in 1948.

The new Party joined the Hungarian Popular Front of Independence, which ran uncontested and won the absolute majority of seats, effectively finalizing the establishment of a one-party regime (Volokitina, Islamov, and Murashko 1997, 1: 1944–1948:571; Volokitina 1999, 1: 1944–1948:593; 2002, 2: 1949–1953:279; Fekete 2019, 196–97).

Before the election, Rákosi informed Mikhail Andreevich Suslov, who headed the Bolshevik Foreign Policy Commission, that his party planned to adopt a new constitution after the election (Volokitina, Islamov, and Murashko 1998, 2: 1949–1953:71). The draft of the new constitution was prepared by a commission, formed by the Council of Ministers and chaired by Rákosi. Two Hungarian jurists, Imre Szabó and János Beér, played an important role in drafting the text. Beér maintained that the presence of the Soviet troops was a revolutionary factor, the teachings of Stalin were the main inspiration, and the Soviet Constitution of 1936 were as the example for the new Hungarian constitution. The draft was put to a brief “popular discussion” on August 5–10, 1949, which resulted in some revisions. On August 17, 1949, the revised draft was submitted to the parliament, where it was unanimously adopted as Act XX on August 20, 1949 (Fekete 2019, 198, 201–2).

Although it is often discussed as a special case, the Soviet Occupation Zone in East Germany also underwent a quick transformation into a one-party state (Connelly 2009, 170–71). The Communist Party of Germany and the Social Democratic Party of Germany were forced to merge into a new party, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, already in April 1946. Like in the case of Korea, Moscow envisioned a constitution for the whole country and encouraged the convocation of the First People’s Council for Unity and a Just Peace, which included nominees from parties and other organizations, in December 1947. Members of the Socialist Unity Party and the West German Communists had around 72 percent of seats. The Second People’s Congress convened in March 1948 and elected the People’s Council of 300 members from the East and 100 members from the West. The People’s Council formed a commission to draft a constitution for Germany. Although it included members from West Germany, their participation was deemed by the West German authorities in the context of the rising tensions, which culminated in the start of the Berlin Blockade in June 1948 (Markovits 2008, 1314–15).

The constitution was drafted under the supervision of the Socialist Unity Party leadership. Otto Grotewohl, a Social Democrat before the merger, chaired the commission. The Party’s First Secretary Walter Ulbricht and the jurist Karl Polak, both of whom had returned from the Soviet Union, played a key role in the process. Moscow supported a text which would be suitable for the whole country, and until the adoption of the Basic Law in West Germany

on May 8, 1949, Grotewohl hoped that a compromise was possible. Although the Socialist Unity Party had a majority, there were debates in the commission. After the formal creation of the Federal Republic of Germany in the West, the East German leadership proceeded with constituting a separate state. On October 7, 1949, the People's Council approved the Constitution of the German Democratic Republic (Markovits 2008, 1314, 1316–17; for a detailed account, see Amos 2005).

In Poland, the Democratic Bloc, led by the Polish Workers' Party and the Polish Socialist Party won the election to the Legislative (Constituent) Sejm in January 1947, in the context of violence against the opposition. Although the opposition had the opportunity to voice their concern in the Sejm and declared the election fraudulent, rejecting therefore the parliament's constituent status, it adopted the provisional Small Constitution on February 19, 1947. The document, which amended the Constitution of 1921, pertained to the competence of the main government bodies and introduced the State Council, a new institution, and national councils. The opposition interpreted the Small Constitution as a step toward the Soviet system. The Sejm also elected the Communist Bolesław Bierut President. After the practical elimination of the Polish People's Party, the Communist-led Democratic Bloc remained the only organized political force, although the Catholic Church remained an important independent actor (Kemp-Welch 2008, 47; Kersten 1991, 346–48, 350, 352; Volokitina, Islamov, and Murashko 1997, 1: 1944–1948:554–55). In December 1948, the Polish Workers' Party and the Polish Socialist Party were merged into the Polish United Workers' Party. The parties, which were formally “allied” to it, had little independence. Furthermore, the Communists controlled the secret police, which had Soviet advisors. In November 1949, the Soviet Marshal Konstantin Konstantinovich Rokossovskii took over the command of the Polish Army. The Communist leadership under Bierut was in constant contact with the VKP(b) leadership and Soviet diplomatic representatives (Noskova 2012, 565–69).

In May 1951, the Sejm created a commission for drafting a new constitution. The Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party prepared the draft, which was then edited by Stalin. The draft was put to a “popular discussion” in January 1952. The opponents of the draft claimed that it was the same as the Soviet Constitution of 1936 and demanded to eliminate the provision of liquidating “exploiter” classes. The separation of church and state was especially contested. Catholic activists opposed it, arguing that the Polish people needed a Polish Constitution and not a Stalinist one. The Communist leadership, however, did not actively suppress them. They informed Moscow that in view of adopting the constitution, the new election, and general religiosity of the population, they did not want to strain relations with the

Episcopate. Indeed, the Episcopate did not obstruct the promulgation of the Constitution by the Sejm on July 22, 1952, and the subsequent parliamentary election (Kemp-Welch 2008, 47; Noskova 2012, 579; Volokitina, Islamov, and Murashko 1998, 2: 1949–1953:691, 730; Volokitina 2002, 2: 1949–1953:627).

There was no Soviet military presence in China after their withdrawal from Manchuria in 1946. Stalin nevertheless advised Mao Zedong, the Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, on the design of the Chinese political system since April 1948. Mao initially planned to exclude all other parties from politics, but Stalin urged the Chinese Communist Party to cooperate with them, to which Mao agreed. In 1949, Stalin supported the formation of “a people’s democratic dictatorship” instead of “a proletarian dictatorship” after the Communist victory in the Chinese Civil War (1927–1936, 1945–1949). Shortly before the proclamation of the People’s Republic of China on October 1, 1949, the first Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, representing the Communist-dominated United Front, approved the Common Program, which laid out the basics of the state system. It relied on the concept of “democratic dictatorship of the people,” which was defined as the power of the United Front of the “working class, peasants, petty bourgeoisie, and national bourgeoisie, led by the working class.” The Common Program envisioned the convocation of a parliamentary body, the National People’s Congress (Li 2001, 32–35, 38–39; Tikhvinskii and Galenovich 2017, 8: *Kitaiskaia Narodnaia Respublika* (1949–1976):21–23, 25).

In 1949, Stalin argued that the Chinese constitution, to be adopted by 1954, was supposed to reflect the pre-socialist stage. Mao by contrast wanted to postpone the constitution until after socialism was built. In the fall of 1952, Stalin reaffirmed his previous position, and Mao conceded (Li 2001, 39–41). In February 1953, the Chinese government introduced a law for unequal, indirect, and non-universal elections to the National People’s Congress, similar to the Soviet elections before 1936. The entire process was controlled by the Communist Party. The elections continued for over a year between May 1953 and July 1954. In January 1954, the government formed a constitutional commission under Mao, who proceeded with the plan despite Stalin’s death in March 1953. Among the other top leaders only Liu Shaoqi worked on the text. The initial draft was prepared by Mao and his aides Chen Boda, Hu Qiaomu, and Tian Jiaying. It was then revised by the members of the Politbiuro of the Chinese Communist Party and by the senior members of the official drafting commission. In April 1954, the draft was put to a “popular discussion” (**Figure 6.2**), which added a few minor revisions. The Government Administration Council pre-approved the draft on September 9, 1954, and the first session of the National People’s Congress unanimously adopted the Constitution on September 20, 1954.

(Diamant and Feng 2015, 22–24; Li 2001, 29, 42–45; Sudarikov 1955, 82–90; Tikhvinskii and Galenovich 2017, 8: *Kitaiskaia Narodnaia Respublika* (1949–1976):55–57).

Figure 6.2. “Housewives of Shanghai joyfully welcomed the publication of the draft constitution of the PRC,” 1954 (*Kitai*, No. 7, 1954, p. 3)

The Mongolian Constitution of 1940 was amended several times, in 1944, 1949, and 1952. In 1946, Mongolia’s independence was recognized by the Guomindang’s government of China, and in October 1949 the Mongolian and Chinese People’s Republics established relations (Iaskina 2007, 177–78, 186).

Sovereignty and political subjectivity

The most popular sources of sovereignty and collective bearers of political subjectivity in the constitutions of the Soviet dependencies were the “people,” the “toilers,” and the classes of workers and toiling peasants, which were at times mentioned simultaneously. Several constitutions mentioned multiple peoples or nationalities, while the East German Constitution also spoke of regions (lands).

The “people,” which could mean the whole nation or imply the social category of the working people, was the most frequent source of sovereignty and political subject. All Soviet dependencies, except East Germany and Czechoslovakia, had the words “people’s republic” in their official names. “People’s democracy” was explicitly mentioned in the constitutions of China, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania (1952), and Poland (1952). Only the 1952 Romanian Constitution defined “people’s Democracy,” calling it the power of toilers (Durdenevskii 1948a, 50; Israelian 1954, 27; Karev 1953, 6–7; Kotok 1954, 36; Sudarikov 1955, 29). With the exception of the Small Constitution of Poland, universal elections¹³ were mentioned in all constitutions, although several groups of the population were disenfranchised in China,¹⁴ Hungary,¹⁵ and Romania,¹⁶ making the legislation there more restrictive than in the USSR. Like in the Soviet text, the expression “all citizens” was mentioned in Most of the constitutions, even if the “people” was not discussed as the source of sovereignty (Chernilovskii 1947, 37; Demidov 1952, 52; Durdenevskii 1948a, 51; 1948c, 88; Israelian 1954, 46; Karev 1953, 26; Kuprits 1951, 13; Mongolian People’s Republic 1947, 50; Lazarev 1952, 25; People’s Republic of Albania 1947, 56; Sobinov 1953, 39; Sudarikov 1955, 82; Tavrov 1952, 55; Trainin 1940, 189).

The people as the source of sovereignty was explicitly mentioned in the constitutions of Albania, Bulgaria, China, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, North Korea, Poland (1947 and 1952), Romania (1948 and 1952), and Yugoslavia. The Constitution of Albania initially stated that “all power originated in the people and belonged to the people.” The amendments of 1950 changed this provision, but the constitution still mentioned “sovereignty of the people and the state” and the universally elected representatives of the people (Kuprits 1951, 3, 7, 13; People’s Republic of Albania 1947, 51, 56). The Bulgarian Constitution claimed that the People’s Republic emerged from the heroic struggle of the “Bulgarian people” and stated that all power originated in the people and belonged to the people (Lazarev 1952, 25). The Czechoslovak Constitution stated that the people were “the only source of power in the state” (Durdenevskii 1948a, 51). The Hungarian Constitution mentioned “the sovereignty of

the people” but excluded the “enemies of the toiling people” from the franchise (Israelian 1954, 30, 46). The East German Constitution spoke of the German people (Sobinov 1953, 27). The North Korean Constitution vested the power in the people (Tavrov 1952, 55). In Romania, the Constitution of 1948 stated that “all state power originates in the people and belongs to the people” (Durdenevskii 1948c, 87). The Constitution of 1952 did not include such a provision but still mentioned national independence, sovereignty of the Romanian people, and the interests of the “popular masses” (Kotok 1954, 31–32). Yugoslavia was defined as a people’s state, in which “all power originates in the people and belongs to the people” (Chernilovskii 1947, 35–36). According to Sadchikov, Tito removed the statement that all power belonged to “urban and rural toilers,” like in the Soviet Union, from the original draft (Volokitina, Islamov, and Murashko 1997, 1: 1944–1948:328).

The national meaning of the people was especially strong in the Chinese and Polish cases, even though the social aspect was also there. The Chinese Constitution located all power with the people and, by including the overseas Chinese into the franchise, made the national meaning of the people prominent. At the same time, it specified the ethnic heterogeneity and implied the social understanding of the people, stating that there were enemies of the people inside each nationality (Sudarikov 1955, 29–31, 35). The Small Constitution of 1947 spoke of the Polish people or nation as the main actor (Republic of Poland 1947). The Polish Constitution of 1952 mentioned the progressive “traditions of the Polish people,” the struggle against “national slavery” against Prussian, Austrian, and Russian colonizers, and national revival in its preamble, while the Sejm officially embodied the sovereign rights of the people (Karev 1953, 5, 11). Stalin made the national rather than class aspects of the draft more prominent, removing, for instance, the direct mention of Soviet leadership from the preamble (Noskova 2012, 579).

The toilers as the source of sovereignty and a bearer of political subjectivity were mentioned in the constitutions of Albania (after the amendments of 1950), Hungary, Mongolia, Poland (1952), and Romania (1952). Similar to the Soviet Constitution of 1936, in most cases this made the texts self-contradictory, with both the inclusionary people and the exclusionary toilers serving as competing sources of sovereignty. The statement that all power belonged to the “urban and rural toilers” was copied from the respective article of the Soviet Constitution, while “the socialist state of workers and peasants” transformed into the state of toilers. The constitutions of Albania (before the amendments of 1950), East Germany, Romania (1948), and Yugoslavia granted the toilers or the toiling people assistance or special care (Chernilovskii 1947, 40; Demidov 1952, 37; Durdenevskii 1948c, 87; Israelian 1954, 28; Karev 1953, 5, 7;

Kotok 1954, 31–33; Kuprits 1951, 3; Mongolian People’s Republic 1947, 36; People’s Republic of Albania 1947, 52; Sobinov 1953, 31; Trainin 1940, 179). Only the Mongolian Constitution provided an exhaustive definition of the toilers as the “arat herders, workers, and intelligentsia” (Demidov 1952, 37; Mongolian People’s Republic 1947, 36).

Apart from restricting the voting rights, the Chinese, Hungarian, and Romanian (1952) constitutions granted some other rights only to the “toilers” or the “toiling citizens” rather than simply the “citizens” (Fekete 2019, 202; Israelian 1954, 42–46; Kotok 1954, 52; Sudarikov 1955, 51; Trainin 1940, 187–89). The Polish Constitution of 1952 claimed that the People’s Republic defended the toilers from the forces which were “hostile to the people” and contained a self-contradictory paragraph, claiming that the Sejm represented the will of the toilers and manifested the sovereign rights of the people (Karev 1953, 7, 11). When there was no explicit tension between the people and the toilers, it was implied. The Yugoslav Constitution specified, “Every citizen is obliged to work according to his abilities: whoever does not give to society cannot receive from it” (Chernilovskii 1947, 44). During the discussion of the draft Sadchikov claimed that “popular sovereignty” made Yugoslavia akin to “bourgeois democratic republics,” but also mentioned that a base for future class differentiation was present, citing the assistance to the toilers and the abovementioned clause. According to Sadchikov, Kardelj informed him that the clause would be used to crush the bourgeoisie (Volokitina, Islamov, and Murashko 1997, 1: 1944–1948:326–27).

Class sovereignty and subjectivity was articulated in the Albanian, Chinese, Hungarian, Polish (1952), and Romanian (1948 and 1952) constitutions. After the amendments of 1950, Albania was defined as “a state of workers and toiling peasants” (Kuprits 1951, 3). The Chinese Constitution specified that the state was “led by the working class and based on the union of workers and peasants” (Sudarikov 1955, 31). The Romanian Constitution of 1948 maintained that the state emerged as a result of the people’s struggle under the leadership of the working class (Durdenevskii 1948c, 87), while the Constitution of 1952 spoke of the “toilers” led by the “working class” and mentioned its union with toiling peasants, again specifying the leading role of the working class (Kotok 1954, 31–32). In the Hungarian Constitution, the state of “workers and toiling peasants” was also based on the union of two classes under the leadership of the former (Israelian 1954, 27–28). The Polish Constitution of 1952 ascribed state-building to the “heroic working class” and the union of workers and peasants under the former as the most “advanced class” of the society. It also mentioned the liquidation of the exploiter classes as the objective of the People’s Republic (Karev 1953, 5–7).

Nationalities as the sources of sovereignty, political subjects, or bearers of special rights were mentioned in the cases of China, Czechoslovakia, North Korea, Romania, and Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia was constituted as a federation, like the USSR, but unlike a union of equal republics (Trainin 1940, 180), Yugoslavia was a union of equal peoples based on self-determination. Like the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia also included territorial autonomies within union republics (Chernilovskii 1947, 35). The biggest difference between the two federations was the lack of the right to secession in Yugoslavia. According to Sadchikov, Tito and Kardelj argued that, unlike in the USSR, there were no deep “national differences” in Yugoslavia since all peoples were Slavic. They also argued that the peoples were not numerous enough to function as sovereign (Volokitina, Islamov, and Murashko 1997, 1: 1944–1948:326). In the 1940s, there were discussions of larger Eastern European federations in the Yugoslav and Soviet leadership, including the possible merger of Bulgaria and Albania with Yugoslavia (Perović 2007). The Yugoslav Communists also criticized the Bulgarian draft constitution for hampering the self-determination of Macedonians (Volokitina 1999, 1: 1944–1948:393).

In 1945–1955, no Soviet dependency other than Yugoslavia was constituted as a federation. The Czechoslovak Constitution established a state “of two equal Slavic peoples, the Czechs and the Slovaks,” with the latter getting their own national bodies (Durdenevskii 1948a, 51). This political community was exclusionary in the ethnic sense. Already the electoral law of April 1948 disenfranchised the Hungarians and the Germans. In May 1948, the exclusion of the Hungarians from the Constitution led to a conflict between the Hungarian Communist Party and the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. The Bolsheviks criticized the absence of national minority rights from the Czechoslovak Constitution but also rebuked the existence of separate bodies for the Slovaks, which ostensibly made the Czechs unequal to them. In June 1948, after the Constitution was adopted, the Czechoslovak leadership assured Molotov that ensuring the legal equality of the Hungarians with the Czechs and the Slovaks was a priority for the cabinet (Volokitina, Islamov, and Murashko 1997, 1: 1944–1948:874, 912; Volokitina 1999, 1: 1944–1948:615–16, 620).

The Constitution of China stated that different nationalities untied into “one great family of free and equal peoples” and established a “unitary multinational state” with autonomy for territories where particular national minorities predominated (Sudarikov 1955, 30–31). Both Romanian constitutions included the rights of national minorities, while the 1952 one established a territorial autonomy for the Hungarians, the Magyar (Hungarian) Autonomous Region (Durdenevskii 1948c, 88; Kotok 1954, 32, 37–38). During the “popular discussion,” the Hungarian Autonomous Region evoked many questions pertaining to possible travel

restrictions between it and other regions, to the official language, and to electoral rights for the Romanians there (Volokitina, Islamov, and Murashko 1998, 2: 1949–1953:804). The North Korean Constitution specified that national minorities had the right to use their language and develop national culture (Tavrov 1952, 61). The Constitution of East Germany was the only one to include the subjectivity of regions (lands) (Sobinov 1953, 44, 51).

Supreme state institutions

The constitutions of Soviet dependencies established different structures of government, although there were some shared aspects. Most of them did not introduce separation of powers, declaring parliaments supreme, similar to the Soviet Constitution of 1936. Furthermore, with the exception of East Germany, standing bodies with legislative authority between parliamentary sessions had been established in all Soviet dependencies by 1955. Several constitutions also borrowed the contradiction between the locally organized councils, which ostensibly had all power, and the “supreme” parliaments from the Soviet system.

Following the Soviet example, most of the constitutions proclaimed a universally elected parliament the supreme body of state power, which meant that there was no separation of powers. The only exceptions were the Small Constitution of Poland and the Constitution of Czechoslovakia, which called the Legislative Sejm and the National Assembly, respectively, the supreme *legislative* bodies. In the case of Czechoslovakia, there was also a separate legislative body in Slovakia, the Slovak National Council. Most of the constitutions, with the exception of the East German, Hungarian, Polish, and Yugoslav ones, specified that the parliament was the sole legislative authority. In the case of East Germany, the universally elected People’s Chamber was declared the “supreme state body,” but there was also the second chamber, the Chamber of Lands, which was formed by the parliaments of the lands. The Hungarian Constitution simply stated that the State Assembly had legislative rights. Parliamentary elections were indirect in East Germany (to the Chamber of Lands), Mongolia (before 1949), and China. The Chinese Constitution did not introduce a universal franchise and made urban votes more important than rural ones, which made it similar to the Soviet Constitution of 1918, although there were fewer voting restrictions in the Chinese case. The Chinese Constitution also established a fixed number of seats for national minorities and for the overseas Chinese in the National People’s Congress (Chernilovskii 1947, 50–51, 62; Demidov 1952, 41, 52; Durdenevskii 1948a, 51; 1948b, 64; 1948c, 89; Iaskina 2007, 186; Israeliian 1954, 30–31; Karev 1953, 7, 10; Kotok 1954, 33, 38; Kuprits 1951, 13; Lazarev 1952,

28; Mongolian People's Republic 1947, 39, 42–43, 45–46; People's Republic of Albania 1947, 56; Sobinov 1953, 44; Sudarikov 1955, 35, 82, 86–87; Tavrov 1952, 55, 62; Trainin 1940, 182; Republic of Poland 1947; Vyshinskii 1938, 427, 431–32, 436).

In Yugoslavia, the Federal Council and the Council of Nationalities, the two chambers whose names and design were adapted from the Supreme Soviet, were established as directly elected and equal. The whole People's Assembly was proclaimed the supreme body of state power at the federal level, while the individual republics had their own people's assemblies. The departure from the Soviet example in 1953 included the absorption of the Council of Nationalities into the Federal Council and the creation of a new chamber, the Council of Producers, consisting of delegates from workers' councils and other economic organizations. Direct universal elections were partially kept only for the Federal Council (Chernilovskii 1947, 50–51, 62; Nikiforov 2011, 608–10).

All constitutions (except the Small Constitution of Poland) established standing bodies which were active between parliamentary sessions. In most cases they were the presidiums of the parliaments, modelled on the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet. According to the Small Constitution of Poland, the Sejm could grant legislative authority to the Cabinet between the parliamentary sessions. The Polish Constitution of 1952 made the State Council, which the Small Constitution established as an executive body separate from the Sejm, similar to the standing bodies in other Soviet dependencies. The State Council, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress in China, and the presidiums¹⁷ elsewhere had broad competence, including the right to issue decrees, and in most cases were the collective heads of state. In Czechoslovakia, the Presidium of the National Assembly had limited competence, and the provisional legislation, adopted between parliamentary sessions, had to be supported by the President and the Prime Minister and approved by the National Assembly upon its convocation. East Germany remained the only Soviet dependency where such a potent standing body had not been created by 1955, but the People's Chamber still formed three standing commissions, on general matters, on economic and financial matters, and on foreign affairs. In Yugoslavia, the competence of the Presidium of the People's Assembly was narrower than that of its Soviet counterpart, and in 1953 it was abolished completely. Instead, the President and the Federal Executive Council, led by the former, were to be elected by the People's Assembly (Chernilovskii 1947, 55–57; Demidov 1952, 43–44; Durdenevskii 1948a, 58; 1948c, 89; Iaskina 2007, 186; Israelian 1954, 33–34; Karev 1953, 12–14; Kotok 1954, 41–42; Kuprits 1951, 16–17; Lazarev 1952, 31–32; Neal 1954, 233–34; People's Republic of Albania 1947,

57; Sobinov 1953, 40; Sudarikov 1955, 37–39; Tavrov 1952, 65–66; Trainin 1940, 182–83; Republic of Poland 1947; Volokitina, Islamov, and Murashko 1997, 1: 1944–1948:327–28).

Soviet officials rebuked the amendments to the Yugoslav Constitution, known as the Yugoslav Constitutional Act of 1953. In particular, they decried the introduction of the office of the President, claiming that it gave one man the “supreme legislative, executive, and military power” and negated the democratic achievements of the Yugoslav people (Volokitina, Islamov, and Murashko 1998, 2: 1949–1953:907). There were, however, presidents in Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Poland (until 1952) as well. In Czechoslovakia, the President, also elected by the parliament, had broad competence (Durdenevskii 1948a, 51, 59). In East Germany, the President, elected by the two chambers, had mostly representative functions but could also issue orders, which needed to be approved by the Prime Minister or the responsible minister (Sobinov 1953, 41, 50). The Small Constitution of Poland retained the President, elected by the Sejm, as part of the executive branch, but the 1952 Constitution abolished the office and made the State Council the collective head of state (Republic of Poland 1921; Karev 1953, 13; Republic of Poland 1947). The Chinese Constitution gave broad executive and military competence to the Chairman of the Chinese People’s Republic, elected by the National People’s Congress (Sudarikov 1955, 40–42).

Most of the constitutions established locally formed bodies, most frequently called “councils,” which followed the example of the soviets in the USSR. Two of them also borrowed the key contradiction between the clause which made parliament the supreme body of state power and the clause which gave all power to the soviets (Trainin 1940, 179, 182, 186). In 1950, the statement that “All power in the People’s Republic of Albania belongs to the urban and rural toilers as represented by the people’s councils” was added to the Albanian Constitution (Kuprits 1951, 3; People’s Republic of Albania 1947, 51). In a similar manner, the Mongolian Constitution stated that “All power in the Mongolian People’s Republic belongs to the urban and *khudon* toilers as represented by the *khurals* [assemblies]” of the toilers. Like in the Soviet case, the Great People’s Khural and the territorial *khurals* of toiler’s deputies were different institutions, since the latter were explicitly called “local bodies of state power” (Demidov 1952, 37, 41, 46; Mongolian People’s Republic 1947, 36).

Others, however, managed to avoid this contradiction. In Romania, the Constitution of 1948 simply defined the people’s councils as the local bodies of state power (Durdenevskii 1948c, 92), as did the constitutions of Bulgaria and Hungary (Israelian 1954, 38; Lazarev 1952, 35). The Albanian (before the amendments of 1950), Chinese, North Korean, Romanian (1952), Polish (1952), and Yugoslav constitutions also defined such bodies as local bodies of

state power but connected them to the larger system. The Yugoslav Constitution stated that the people realized their power through the “representative bodies,” which included both the people’s committees and the parliament at the republican and federal levels (Chernilovskii 1947, 36, 66). The same approach was used in the Albanian Constitution before the amendments (People’s Republic of Albania 1947, 51, 60). The Romanian Constitution of 1952 stated that the power belonging to the “urban and rural toilers” was realized through the Great National Assembly and people’s councils (Kotok 1954, 33, 46). In a similar manner, the Polish Constitution of 1952 stated that the toilers acted through their representatives in the Sejm and in the “people’s councils,” which were already mentioned in the Small Constitution (Karev 1953, 7, 14, 16; Republic of Poland 1947). The Chinese Constitution stated that “All power in the Chinese People’s Republic belongs to the people as represented by the National People’s Congress and local people’s congresses” (Sudarikov 1955, 31, 44). The North Korean Constitution stated the people’s committees assisted the Supreme National Assembly (Tavrov 1952, 55, 71). The Czechoslovak and East German constitutions did not use the concept of local bodies of state power. The former still described the territorial people’s (national) committees as part of the unified public administration (Durdenevskii 1948b, 67). The latter established a system of local self-government (Sobinov 1953, 57–58).

Most of the constitutions used the word “supreme” in relation to the cabinets, courts, and prosecutors, but only the Small Constitution of Poland clearly established the separation of legislative (the Legislative Sejm), executive (the President, the State Council, and the Cabinet), and judicial (independent courts) power (Republic of Poland 1947). The constitutions of Albania, Bulgaria, China, Mongolia, Poland (1952), Romania, and Yugoslavia followed the Soviet Constitution of 1936, which made the Council of People’s Commissars the “supreme executive and administrative body” (Trainin 1940, 184), when discussing the cabinets (Chernilovskii 1947, 58; Demidov 1952, 44; Durdenevskii 1948c, 91; Karev 1953, 14; Kotok 1954, 43; Kuprits 1951, 17; Lazarev 1952, 32; Mongolian People’s Republic 1947, 41; People’s Republic of Albania 1947, 58; Sudarikov 1955, 42). The North Korean Constitution stated the Cabinet of Ministers had “supreme executive” power (Tavrov 1952, 66). The Hungarian Constitution defined the Council of Ministers as the “supreme body of state administration” (Israelian 1954, 35). In the cases of Czechoslovakia and East Germany, supreme executive authority as a concept was not mentioned. The Czechoslovak Constitution divided the central executive authority between the President and the Cabinet, while Slovakia also had its own cabinet (Durdenevskii 1948a, 60; 1948b, 62–63). The East German

Constitution did not include the word executive at all when discussing the Cabinet (Sobinov 1953, 47).

Following the Soviet example (Trainin 1940, 187), supreme courts as supreme judicial bodies were introduced in Albania (after the 1950 amendments), China (as the Supreme People's Court), Mongolia, North Korea, and Poland (1952) (Demidov 1952, 50; Karev 1953, 19; Kuprits 1951, 23; Mongolian People's Republic 1947, 44; Sudarikov 1955, 49; Tavrov 1952, 75). Supreme courts were also established by the constitution of Albania (prior to the amendments), Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Romania (1948), and Yugoslavia but the notion of supreme judicial authority was not articulated (Chernilovskii 1947, 68; Durdenevskii 1948b, 68; 1948c, 92; Israelian 1954, 40; Kotok 1954, 49; Lazarev 1952, 37; People's Republic of Albania 1947, 61; Sobinov 1953, 55).

With the exception of Czechoslovakia, the office of prosecutor general and the respective agency were established in all Soviet dependencies. The Soviet notion of "supreme" legal supervision was used in relation to such an office in the constitutions of Bulgaria (where it was called the Chief Prosecutor), Mongolia, and Romania (1952) (Demidov 1952, 50–51; Kotok 1954, 50; Lazarev 1952, 376; Mongolian People's Republic 1947, 44; Trainin 1940, 187). The Chinese Constitution established the Supreme People's Prosecutor's Office and the position of the Prosecutor General (Sudarikov 1955, 50). The office of the Supreme Prosecutor was also established in Hungary (Israelian 1954, 41). The constitutions of North Korea and Poland (1952) did not use the word "supreme" when discussing the competence of the Prosecutor General (Karev 1953, 19; Tavrov 1952, 75–76). The Romanian Constitution of 1948 limited the Prosecutor General's supervisory functions to criminal law (Durdenevskii 1948c, 93). In the constitutions of Yugoslavia and Albania, the prosecutor's office was defined as a body of the parliament (Chernilovskii 1947, 70–71; Kuprits 1951, 23; People's Republic of Albania 1947, 61–62). The East German Constitution, the Prosecutor General was mentioned but the office's competence was not specified (Sobinov 1953, 55).

Dependency

Some of the constitutions made the dependency on the USSR, the socialist ideology, and the special role of the ruling parties explicit. The USSR was presented as the liberator, as an example, and as an ally in several texts. Some constitutions also mentioned or implied the goal of building socialism. The ruling parties were mentioned only in several cases.

The constitutions of China, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Romania (1952) mentioned the Soviet Union. The Czechoslovak Constitution cited the Great October Revolution as the inspiration and the “Russian workers and peasants” as the example for the Czechs and the Slovaks. It also mentioned the country’s liberation with the help of the Allies, the USSR in the first place. The USSR was called “the great Slavic power” which strengthened the nationalist aspects of the Constitution (Durdenevskii 1948a, 50–51). The Hungarian Constitution mentioned the liberation by the “great Soviet Union” and its “selfless support” for rebuilding the country (Israelian 1954, 27). The Polish Constitution of 1952 referenced the liberation through the Soviet victory and claimed that the Polish working class relied on the Soviet experience of socialist construction (Karev 1953, 5–6). The 1952 Constitution of Romania claimed that the formation of the People’s Republic resulted from the Soviet victory over German fascism and Romania’s liberation by the Soviet Army. The Constitution also mentioned the friendship and alliance with the USSR and its “selfless brotherly support and aid.” The friendship and union with the countries of people’s democracy were also included into the formulation of the state’s foreign policy in the Constitution (Kotok 1954, 31–33). The Chinese Constitution also spoke of the “unbreakable friendship” with the “great” USSR and the “countries of people’s democracy” (Sudarikov 1955, 30–31).

Socialism was mentioned in the constitutions of Albania (after the amendments of 1950), China, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Mongolia, Poland, and Romania. The Mongolian Constitution stated that the country was following the “non-capitalist way of development” for “further transition to socialism” (Demidov 1952, 37; Mongolian People’s Republic 1947, 36). The amended Albanian Constitution stated that the foundations of socialism had already been built in the country (Kuprits 1951, 3; People’s Republic of Albania 1947, 51). The Czechoslovak Constitution mentioned the peaceful way to socialism (Durdenevskii 1948a, 50). The Hungarian Constitution stated that the country was on its way to socialism and cited Soviet assistance in building its foundations (Israelian 1954, 27–28). The 1952 constitutions of Poland and Romania included the goal of building socialism (Karev 1953, 6; Kotok 1954, 32). The Chinese Constitution also set the goal of building “prosperous and happy socialist society” (Sudarikov 1955, 29). The East German Constitution did not mention socialism but spoke of social justice and state economic plans (Sobinov 1953, 27, 32–33).

Parties were mentioned only in the cases of Albania, China, and Romania. The Communist Party of Albania was reformed into the Party of Labor of Albania in 1948, and in 1950 its special role was included in the Constitution. Like in the Soviet case, it was mentioned in the clause on the right to association: “conscientious citizens from the ranks of the working

class and other strata of the working people are united in the Party of Labor of Albania” (Kuprits 1951, 8; Smirnova 2003, 303; Trainin 1940, 188). A similar passage on the Romanian Workers’ Party was included into the Romanian Constitution of 1952. The text also referenced the leadership of the Romanian Communist Party in the creation of the state twice (Kotok 1954, 31, 33, 54). The Chinese Constitution stated that the Chinese Communist Party led the Chinese people to its victory (Sudarikov 1955, 29–30).

Nonconstitutional institutions

Similar to the USSR, the parties, which were at best only briefly mentioned in the constitutions, and the leaders, whose authority derived from their position in the party, dominated in the political systems of the Soviet dependencies. The central bodies of the ruling parties became the *de facto* supreme government agencies. The leaders performed as the heads of state irrespective of their government offices. The VKP(b)/CPSU, the Soviet government, and the Soviet leader were often presented as external sources of authority, even if the respective states did not have Soviet military presence.

The monopolization of the political and social life by the communist parties, irrespective of their official names and nominal popular front arrangements, happened before the adoption of the constitutions in most cases. The Yugoslav Communist Boris Zihlerl acknowledged the formation of a one-party regime as early as January 1946. “The word ‘party’ in Yugoslavia has the same meaning as in the USSR: the people mean exclusively the Communist Party by it” (Voloikitina 1999, 1: 1944–1948:271). The individual communist parties became known as the “Party” in all Soviet dependencies, and their control of the government was not concealed. This was an intentional policy. When the Soviet–Yugoslav conflict developed in 1948, Stalin rebuked the lack of public presence from the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and its semi-legal status, claiming that “according to the theory of Marxism, the party has to control all state bodies of the country.”¹⁸ Within the parties themselves, small ruling circles became the main governing bodies, with one or several persons having the final say. The nominal character of popular fronts was also not concealed (Mar’ina 2005, 2:91–92; Noskova 2012, 576–77). The coverage of the third congress of the Bulgarian Fatherland Front in 1952, for instance, claimed that the program and the main goals of the Communist Party and the Fatherland Front were the same.¹⁹

The leadership of the ruling parties in people’s democratic state-building, building socialism, and developing the country was affirmed in propaganda.²⁰ East Germany, for

instance, ostensibly owed all of its achievements to the Party.²¹ The “correct policy of the Workers’ Party of Korea” was deemed the source of inspiration for the “Korean people” in the Korean War (1950–1953).²² The people and the toilers were occasionally said to “love” their respective party.²³ Propaganda outlets presented party congresses (**Figure 6.3**) and conferences (**Figure 6.4**) as events of great importance. The plenums of central committees were treated as the main decision-making bodies.²⁴

Figure 6.3. The Second National Congress of the Party of Labor of Albania, Tirana, April 10–14, 1950 (*Novaia Albaniia*, No. 32–33, April–May 1950, front matter)

Even though the decisions were made in small circles, it was indeed at these gatherings, and not, for instance, in the parliaments, where the most important policies were announced. Ulbricht, for instance, declared the objective of building socialism in East Germany at the Second Party Conference of the Socialist Unity Party in 1952 (**Figure 6.4**), and “thousands” of people ostensibly promised the Conference to engage on “socialist competition” in order to implement it.²⁵ A report on the Tenth Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in 1954 presented the Party as the inspiration for “all honest citizens of Czechoslovakia” and as their educator. “Faith in the Party, in the truth of its teachings, in the correctness of its path, kindled a flame in the hearts and minds of people.” The report attached features of a parliament

to the Congress, arguing that it brought together representatives of all “spheres of our national life and all regions of our republic,” the “genuine representatives of the Party and the Czechoslovak people.”²⁶

Figure 6.4. The Second Party Conference of the Socialist Unity Party, Berlin, July 10, 1952. Front row, left to right: Walter Ulbricht, Wilhelm Pieck, and Otto Grotewohl (Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-15410-0097 / CC-BY-SA 3.0)

Although the achievements of the people were mentioned, especially prominently in Poland,²⁷ the propaganda outlets tended to present the people not as the political subjects but as the followers of the ruling party and the implementers of its tasks. The election results, which usually reported victories of the respective fronts with over 99 percent of votes, were presented as the unity of the whole people and its affirmation of the tasks, set by the Party, the cabinet, or the leader. The support for the Party was often presented as unanimous.²⁸ The notion of “the moral-political unity” of the people under the Party’s leadership as, for instance, articulated in

the North Korean propaganda,²⁹ was borrowed directly from the Soviet discourse (Gill 2011, 105).

In the parliaments, the hierarchy did not change, as there was no deliberation on the preset goals and plans. The coverage of parliamentary sessions included references to the “objectives” and “directives,” set by party and the leader, which the people were striving to fulfil, and often stressed the unanimity of decisions.³⁰ A report on the session of the Grand National Assembly in Romania, for instance, stressed the commitment to fight for the implementation of the first Five-Year Plan which rank-and-file deputies made “on behalf of the workers, engineers, and technicians.”³¹ In North Korea, the Supreme People’s Assembly was said to have adopted the budget in order to implement the policies of the Workers’ Party of Korea and the Cabinet.³² The linkage between the party authorities and the populace, political and ideological education and socialization, and the integration of diverse social groups within one state were in fact the primary tasks of the state socialist parliaments, given that they did not engage in deliberative legislation (Nelson 1982, 4, 7–9, 11; for a discussion of the Czechoslovak case, see Gjuricová 2019).

In Albania, the complete subordination of the People’s Assembly to the Party was openly acknowledged.

The strength of the Albanian state, of the people’s democratic system lies in the strength of the Party and the full provision of its leading and controlling role in the entire work of the state apparatus. Therefore, the first session of the Third People’s Assembly, unanimously expressing the will of the people, revealed love and unbreakable loyalty to the Party and its Central Committee, unanimously approving the program of the new Cabinet, which in turn undertook, like all previous people’s Cabinets, to unswervingly implement the Party line.³³

The exact status of individual leaders differed across the informal Soviet empire, but there was always one or several people who were treated as the *de facto* head(s) of the respective state. Within their states, the power of some of the leaders was comparable to that of Stalin in the Soviet Union, and many of them modelled their behavior and images on Stalin (Naimark 2017, 70). This applied in particular to Hoxha in Albania, Valko Chervenkov in Bulgaria, Mao in China, Rákosi in Hungary, Choibalsan in Mongolia, Kim in North Korea, and Gheorghiu-Dej in Romania (after the purges of other leaders in 1952). They usually were prime ministers and first or general secretaries³⁴ of the respective ruling parties. With the

exception of the presidents Gottwald and Beirut, most of the leaders were not formally heads of state, but they were nevertheless presented as the leaders (often “great” and “beloved”) of the people or the toiling people in the propaganda outlets. The leaders of the people in Soviet dependencies were mutually recognized as such.³⁵ Hoxha was, for instance, called “the organizer of our victories,” the “leader of the Albanian people,” the “founder and organizer” of the Albanian state.³⁶ Vernacular personality cults involved broad circulation of the leaders’ images and statements, public celebrations of their birthdays, and publication of their works³⁷ (Iaskina 2007, 187; Mar’ina 2005, 2:92). There were also cults of the deceased leaders, which were modelled after that of Lenin in the USSR, and included Dimitrov in Bulgaria, Sun Yat-sen in China, and Gottwald in Czechoslovakia.³⁸

Several regimes had collective leadership. In East Germany, where the recent history of Nazism made a single leader problematic, Wilhelm Pieck (President), Grotewohl (Prime Minister), Ulbricht (First Secretary of the Party) were all celebrated in the propaganda outlets (**Figure 6.4**), while the Party was defined as “Leader of the Nation.”³⁹ The notion of the Party as the “genuine leader, inspirator, and teacher of the people” was also used in Czechoslovakia. Although Antonín Zápotocký succeeded Gottwald as the President and was prominently featured in propaganda,⁴⁰ Antonín Novotný headed the Party. Until Stalin’s death, the German case was an exception. In Poland, where Bolesław Bierut, Jakub Berman, and Hilary Minc ruled as a group, Moscow still considered Bierut as the leader of the Party and hence its primary contact in Poland, and he was celebrated as such in the propaganda outlets.⁴¹ Individuals also consolidated their positions through the purges, which were initiated or sanctioned by Moscow, as was the case in Romania. With the exception of Ana Pauker,⁴² who was purged by Gheorghiu-Dej in 1952, all leaders were men (Hodos 1987, 94; Mar’ina 2005, 2:107, 136; Noskova 2012, 569).

Although only the “Choibalsan Constitution” in Mongolia and the “Dimitrov Constitution” followed the example of the “Stalin Constitution” of the USSR, the propaganda outlets still presented some of the leaders as the key actors in drafting the constitutions (**Figure 6.1**), presenting the drafts, and voting on them⁴³ (**Figure 6.5**).

Figure 6.5. Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej (center) and Petru Groza (left) voting for the Constitution of Romania at the Thirteenth Session of the Grand National Assembly, September 24, 1952 (*Fototeca online a comunismului românesc*, Photograph #IA174, 174/1952)

The leaders were also featured in the implementation of the constitutions. There were numerous reports and photographs of the leaders campaigning, voting in elections (**Figure 6.6**), being nominated and elected as deputies to local and central bodies, speaking in parliaments and other assemblies, or being appointed to offices by them.⁴⁴ Gheorghiu-Dej was, for instance, called “the best son of the Romanian people” and “the first candidate,”⁴⁵ while Chervenkov was celebrated as the “first deputy of the toilers.”⁴⁶ In Romania, Gheorghiu-Dej was often shown voting in the parliament.⁴⁷ In a similar manner, the leaders were featured in the coverage of party assemblies.⁴⁸

Figure 6.6. Mátyás Rákosi and his wife Fenia Fedorovna Kornilova voting in the local council election, Budapest, October 22, 1950 (Fortepan #126963 / Bauer Sándor, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Soviet representatives participated in state-building across the informal empire, often at the formal request of the respective leaders. In 1949, for instance, Gottwald asked Stalin to send advisors to assist in establishing bodies of state security and border control. Although initially these advisors were considered temporary, in 1950 they were already treated as permanent both in Moscow and in Prague (Vолоkitina, Islamov, and Murashko 1998, 2: 1949–1953:382). In 1951–1952, numerous Soviet advisors came to Czechoslovakia, and there was even a request to send a “chief advisor” to work in the government, which Moscow denied (Mar’ina 2005, 2:102). Whereas terror, coercion, anti-religious campaigns, and mass purges were perpetuated by domestic authorities most of the time, the Soviets also occasionally intervened, as was the case when they suppressed the East German uprising in 1953 (Naimark 2017, 72–76).

Soviet representatives often criticized the policies of the dependent regimes, sometimes citing the constitutions. In 1948, for instance, Zorin criticized the restrictive religious law in

Bulgaria, fearing that it could ignite the opposition among the clergy and believers in the country and cause a reaction abroad. Moscow then advised the Bulgarian Communists to change the law so that it would follow the Constitution (Volokitina 1999, 1: 1944–1948:643, 645–46). In 1950, a Soviet secret police advisor informed Rákosi that the existing police courts were unconstitutional, and Rákosi agreed to form people’s courts instead (Volokitina 2002, 2: 1949–1953:271). In 1953, Soviet representatives described the state subventions to the Catholic Church and religious education in Poland as unconstitutional (Volokitina 2002, 2: 1949–1953:861).

The propaganda outlets often cited the supremacy of the VKP(b)/CPSU, the Soviet Union, and their leaders. The cult of Stalin spread across the whole informal empire (Naimark 2017, 70). Photos of Stalin were displayed in domestic public settings (**Figure 6.2**), including polling stations (**Figure 6.7**). Almost 13 million copies of the works of Stalin and Lenin had been, for instance, printed in Romanian by the end of 1954 (Deletant 2018, 67). Numerous places were named after Stalin and Lenin. Domestic events were often accompanied by the portraits of Soviet leaders (**Figure 6.3** and **Figure 6.4**). The respective peoples and parties were said to “love” the USSR, its people, and Stalin, who was often called a “genius.” Domestic communist parties were said to learn and get inspiration from the VKP(b) and the USSR. The anniversaries of the October Revolution and the XIX Congress of the VKP(b)/CPSU were widely celebrated.⁴⁹ The Bulgarian propaganda, for instance, referred to the Soviet Union as the “double liberator and selfless patron,”⁵⁰ while the Romanian propaganda deemed Stalin “the genius teacher of the toilers of the whole world.”⁵¹ In a similar manner, the report on the Second Party Congress in Albania stated, that “The Congress clearly revealed the boundless love and loyalty of the Party of Labor and the entire Albanian people to the Bolshevik Party, the Soviet Union, and the genius leader of all humanity, Comrade Stalin.”⁵²

Figure 6.7. Elections to the People's Assembly and district people's councils of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, December 18, 1949 (State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia (GTsMSIR) 27126/163)

Bilateral meetings and events, including the visits of ensembles and circus troupes, within the informal Soviet empire were accompanied by the portraits of the leaders of the two sides and those of Soviet leaders, even if the Soviet side was not involved (**Figure 6.8**). After Stalin's death, the portraits of Georgii Maksimilianovich Malenkov and Nikolai Aleksandrovich Bulganin were displayed as those of the current leaders. Given that the influence of the two within the USSR was far from that of Stalin, this meant that the Soviet leader as an institution, rather than Stalin personally, had symbolic importance.⁵³

Figure 6.8. Czechoslovak Ambassador to China František Komzala giving a speech before the performance of the Czechoslovak circus troupe, Beijing, December 1953. Portraits, left to right: Georgii Maksimilianovich Malenkov, Antonín Zápotocký, and Mao Zedong (*Kitai*, No. 1, 1954, p. 39)

The visits of Soviet specialists, the signing of treaties with the Soviet Union, Soviet aid, and the events known as the “Month of Friendship” with the Soviet Union contributed to the cohesion of the Soviet informal empire and was extensively covered in the propaganda outlets.⁵⁴ In 1955, the signing of the Warsaw Treaty was a further major step towards the formal integration of the informal empire, although it was still confined to Europe. Hoxha, for instance, stressed the honor of joining the treaty and promised that the Albanian people would protect the interests of the “camp of socialism.”⁵⁵ Soviet dependencies supported the Soviet international initiatives, including its “struggle for peace” campaign (Johnston 2008). As part of the effort, the Supreme Soviet issued a declaration in 1955, calling parliaments of the world to join efforts in ensuring peace,⁵⁶ and the USSR and its dependencies began regular exchanges in parliamentary delegations (**Figure 6.9**).

Figure 6.9. Delegation of the USSR Supreme Soviet at the session of the State Assembly of the Hungarian People's Republic, November 1955. Mátyás Rákosi is in the front on the right (GTsMSIR 31111/15)

Apart from the further integration of the informal empire, the regimes in the USSR and its dependencies gained significant legitimacy in 1955. The Supreme Soviet joined the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), which meant that it became widely recognized as a parliament (Juviler 1961, 25). The same year, Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania were admitted to the United Nations, joining Czechoslovakia and Poland, its original members ("Member States" n.d.), which boosted the Soviet positions in the organization.

Conclusion

The constitution-making in the informal Soviet empire in 1945–1955 continued the Bolshevik practice, started in the 1920s. The concepts of "people's republic," borrowed from

the Ukrainian socialists, and “people’s democracy,” developed in the Comintern, contributed to the idea of a Soviet satellite in the general sense. At the same time, there was no coherent blueprint on how a “people’s republic” was to be constituted. Multiple actors joined the practical implementation of the idea in each particular context and, having adapted different elements from the Soviet Constitution of 1936, came up with different legal architectures. The sources of sovereignty, political subjectivity, the supreme state institutions, and the indications of dependency on the USSR and the domestic communist party varied across the constitutions of the Soviet dependencies. Whereas there were considerable similarities between some of the texts or their parts, only the establishment of a standing legislative body became the most prominent albeit also not ubiquitous feature of the dependent regimes in this period.

The nonconstitutional structural adjustments in governance were, however, much more profound. Similar to the VKP(b)/CPSU and Stalin in the USSR, the domestic communist parties and the leaders came to dominate the political systems of the Soviet dependencies. The fusion of parties and governments was openly admitted and in fact celebrated in the propaganda outlets. So were the leaders, few of whom were the constitutional heads of state. Propaganda and political practice also demonstrated that the VKP(b)/CPSU, the Soviet government, and the Soviet leader played an explicit role of external sources of authority. The launch of de-Stalinization in 1956 threatened this nonconstitutional architecture, which is one of the reasons for its mixed reception in the Soviet dependencies (A. R. 1956, 492–93) and the eventual splits with Albania and China. The same year, however, the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution demonstrated that Moscow was ready to use military measures for preserving its informal empire if the ideological and practical considerations stopped working (Borhi 2004, 3).

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¹ Major amendments to the 1921 Polish Constitution, which became known as the Small Constitution of 1947, predated the adoption of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Poland in 1952.

² The party was called the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) or the VKP(b) in 1925–1952.

³ Propaganda usually presented the community of Soviet dependencies in a differentiated manner, as the countries of people's democracy, the People's Republic of China, and the German Democratic Republic (*Bolgariia*, No. 7, 1951, p. 3), but the notion of the "countries of people's democracy in Europe and Asia" was also present (*Germanskaia Demokraticheskaia Respublika na stroike*, No. 3, 1954, p. 1).

⁴ *Kommunisticheskii internatsional*, No. 14, 1936, p. 93.

⁵ *Kommunisticheskii internatsional*, No. 23–24, 1935, p. 90; No. 16, 1936, p. 9.

⁶ *Kommunisticheskii internatsional*, No. 22, 1935, pp. 3, 5.

⁷ *Kommunisticheskii internatsional*, No. 18, 1936, p. 104; No. 5–6, 1936, p. 74.

⁸ *Kommunisticheskii internatsional*, No. 11–12, 1936, p. 52–53.

⁹ The author is grateful to Aleksandr Shubin for his comment on the matter.

¹⁰ *Kommunisticheskii internatsional*, No. 5, 1941, p. 98.

¹¹ The author is grateful to Cristian Vasile for his clarification on the matter.

¹² The author is grateful to Adéla Gjuričová for her advice on the matter.

¹³ In 1944, universal elections were introduced in Mongolia (Mongolian People's Republic 1947, 50).

¹⁴ In China, the Constitution claimed that the elections were universal, with the exception of insane persons and those who were disenfranchised by law. The election law of 1953 specified that landowners, who had not yet "changed their class affiliation according to law," "counterrevolutionary" elements and other individuals, who were disenfranchised by court, did not have active or passive voting rights (Sudarikov 1955, 51, 83).

¹⁵ In Hungary, the "enemies of the toiling people" were disenfranchised (Israelian 1954, 46).

¹⁶ In Romania, voting rights to people's councils were limited in 1950, with former industrialists, bankers, and other "representatives of large bourgeoisie," as well as kulaks (prosperous peasants) being disenfranchised (*Narodno-demokraticheskaia Rumyniia*, No. 5, 1950, p. 6; No. 6, 1950, p. 9). The Constitution of 1952 stated that only "toiling citizens" had voting rights. The elections were still called "universal" in the election law of 1952, but it reaffirmed the disenfranchised categories: "former landowners, former industrialists, former bankers, former large businessmen, kulaks, owners of private trade companies and small non-nationalized companies, based on the exploitation of hired labor," and those who were sentenced for war crimes and crimes against peace and humanity, in addition to the standard exclusions of insane persons and those disenfranchised by the court (Kotok 1954, 56, 65).

¹⁷ In Mongolia, its functions were performed by the Small Khural and its Presidium (Mongolian People's Republic 1947, 39–40). In 1949, the Small Khural was abolished, with the Presidium of the Great People's Khural taking over its functions (Iaskina 2007, 186).

¹⁸ RGASPI (Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History), f. 558, op. 11, d. 398, l. 29 (To Comrade Tito and other members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia from Molotov and Stalin on behalf of the VKP(b) Central Committee, March 27, 1948).

¹⁹ *Bolgariia*, No. 5, 1952, p. 31.

²⁰ *Kitai*, No. 5, 1954, p. 3; *Narodno-demokraticheskaia Rumyniia*, No. 4, 1951, p. 2; *Novaia Albaniia*, No. 11, 1951; *Novaia Koreia*, No. 6, 1954, p. 8; *Vengerskii biulleten'*, No. 52, 1952, cover, p. 5.

²¹ *Germanskaia Demokraticheskaia Respublika na stroike*, No. 3, 1954, p. 1.

²² *Novaia Koreia*, No. 2, 1955, p. 3.

²³ *Chekhoslovakiia*, No. 7, 1954, p. 1; *Narodno-demokraticheskaia Rumyniia*, No. 4–5, 1952, p. 4; *Novaia Albaniia*, No. 32–33, 1950.

²⁴ *Bolgariia*, No. 2, 1954, p. 1; *Germanskaia Demokraticheskaia Respublika na stroike*, No. 1, 1951; *Novaia Albaniia*, No. 7, 1954; *Novaia Koreia*, No. 2, 1955, p. 4; *Vengerskii biulleten'*, No. 29, 1951, p. 1.

²⁵ *Germanskaia Demokraticheskaia Respublika na stroike*, No. 5, 1952, p. 1.

²⁶ *Chekhoslovakiia*, No. 7, 1954, p. 1.

²⁷ *Narodnaia Pol'sha*, July 1953.

²⁸ *Bolgariia*, No. 1, 1954, p. 2–3; *Narodnaia Rumyniia*, No. 12, 1955, p. 2; *Novaia Albaniia*, No. 5, 1954; No. 6, 1954; No. 8, 1954; *Vengerskii biulleten'*, No. 141, 1953, p. 6.

²⁹ *Novaia Koreia*, No. 9, 1954, p. 5.

³⁰ *Bolgariia*, No. 3, 1955, p. 31; No. 5, 1955, p. 5; *Vengerskii biulleten'*, No. 52, 1952, cover, p. 5.

³¹ *Narodno-demokraticheskaia Rumyniia*, No. 8, 1950, p. 4.

³² *Novaia Koreia*, No. 6, 1954, p. 5; No. 4, 1955, p. 8.

³³ *Novaia Albaniia*, No. 8, 1954.

³⁴ In the VKP(b)/CPSU, there was no formal leader in 1934–1953.

- ³⁵ *Kitai*, No. 1, 1952, p. 2; No. 1, 1954, p. 2; No. 7, 1955, pp. 8–9; *Narodnaia Pol'sha*, December 1953; *Narodno-demokratičeskaja Rumyniia*, No. 5, 1950, p. 6; No. 10–11, 1951, p. 8; No. 6, 1952, p. 2; *Novaia Koreia*, No. 6, 1954, p. 8; *Vengerskii biulleten'*, No. 52, 1952, cover, p. 1.
- ³⁶ *Novaia Albaniia*, No. 11, 1951.
- ³⁷ *Germanskaia Demokratičeskaja Respublika na stroike*, No. 1, 1951; *Kitai*, No. 11, 1951; No. 1, 1952, pp. 2–3; *Narodnaia Pol'sha*, July 1953; *Narodno-demokratičeskaja Rumyniia*, No. 3, 1950, p. 1; No. 5, 1951, p. 1; No. 10–11, 1951, pp. 8, 26; *Vengerskii biulleten'*, No. 52, 1952, cover.
- ³⁸ *Bolgariia*, No. 1, 1951, pp. 37–39; No. 2, 1951, p. 1; *Chekhoslovakiia*, No. 4, 1954, p. 2; No. 7, 1954, p. 2; *Kitai*, No. 11, 1951; No. 4, 1955, p. 3.
- ³⁹ *Germanskaia Demokratičeskaja Respublika na stroike*, No. 3–4, 1953, p. 2; No. 3, 1954, pp. 1–2.
- ⁴⁰ *Chekhoslovakiia*, No. 4, 1954, p. 1–2; No. 7, 1954, p. 1.
- ⁴¹ *Narodnaia Pol'sha*, December 1955.
- ⁴² *Narodno-demokratičeskaja Rumyniia*, No. 2, 1950, p. 24; No. 4, 1951, p. 7.
- ⁴³ *Kitai*, No. 4, 1954, p. 1; No. 7, 1954, p. 1; *Vengerskii biulleten'*, No. 52, 1952, front matter.
- ⁴⁴ *Bolgariia*, No. 1, 1954, p. 1; No. 4, 1951, p. 1; No. 2, 1953, p. 30; *Germanskaia Demokratičeskaja Respublika na stroike*, No. 2, 1951; No. 3, 1952, p. 4; No. 1, 1954, p. 1; No. 5, 1955, p. 5; *Kitai*, No. 9, 1954, p. 1; No. 10, 1954, p. 6; *Narodno-demokratičeskaja Rumyniia*, No. 5, 1950, p. 6; No. 6, 1950, pp. 12–13; No. 11, 1952, p. 15; No. 12, 1952, p. 15; No. 1, 1953, p. 7; *Narodnaia Pol'sha*, March–April 1953; *Narodnaia Rumyniia*, No. 3, 1955, p. 4; *Novaia Albaniia*, No. 21–22, 1949, p. 8; No. 6, 1955; *Vengerskii biulleten'*, No. 142, 1953, cover; No. 143, 1953, front matter.
- ⁴⁵ *Narodno-demokratičeskaja Rumyniia*, No. 6, 1950, p. 13; No. 4, 1951, p. 2; No. 12, 1952, p. 15.
- ⁴⁶ *Bolgariia*, No. 1, 1953, 1.
- ⁴⁷ *Narodno-demokratičeskaja Rumyniia*, No. 8, 1950, p. 5; No. 4, 1951, p. 3; No. 3, 1952, p. 3.
- ⁴⁸ *Bolgariia*, No. 2, 1954, p. 1; *Germanskaia Demokratičeskaja Respublika na stroike*, No. 3, 1954, front matter; *Kitai*, No. 4, 1955, p. 1; *Kitai*, No. 11, 1955, p. 2; *Narodnaia Pol'sha*, December 1953; *Novaia Albaniia*, No. 17, 1949, pp. 2–11, 18; *Novaia Albaniia*, No. 32–33, 1950; *Novaia Albaniia*, No. 4–5, 1952; *Vengerskii biulleten'*, No. 69, 1952, front matter.
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- ⁵⁰ *Bolgariia*, No. 6, 1951, p. 6.
- ⁵¹ *Narodno-demokratičeskaja Rumyniia*, No. 7, 1950, p. 6.
- ⁵² *Novaia Albaniia*, No. 32–33, April–May 1950.
- ⁵³ *Bolgariia*, No. 8, 1954, p. 31; *Germanskaia Demokratičeskaja Respublika na stroike*, No. 3, 1952, p. 20; *Kitai*, No. 4, 1954, p. 2; No. 9, 1954, p. 39; No. 3, 1955, p. 2; No. 5, 1955, p. 37; *Novaia Albaniia*, No. 12, 1954; *Vengerskii biulleten'*, No. 73, 1953, cover.
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- ⁵⁵ *Novaia Albaniia*, No. 6, 1955.
- ⁵⁶ *Chekhoslovakiia*, No. 11, 1955, p. 24; *Narodnaia Rumyniia*, No. 3, 1955, p. 5; *Novaia Albaniia*, No. 4, 1955; *Novaia Koreia*, No. 4, 1955, p. 1.