ANNE
APPLEBAUM

AUTHOR OF
GULAG

WINNER OF
THE
PULITZER
PRIZE

IRON
CURTAIN

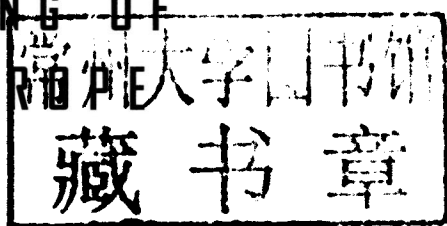THE CRUSHING OF
EASTERN EUROPE

1944-1956

IRON CURTAIN

THE CRUSHING OF
EASTERN EUROPE
1944–1956

ANNE APPLEBAUM

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IRON
CURTAIN

Also by Anne Applebaum

Gulag: A History

Between East and West:
Across the Borderlands of Europe

The loss of freedom, tyranny, abuse, hunger would all have been easier to bear if not for the compulsion to call them freedom, justice, the good of the people . . . Lies, by their very nature partial and ephemeral, are revealed as lies when confronted with language's striving for truth. But here all the means of disclosure had been permanently confiscated by the police.

—Aleksander Wat, My Century

Individuals need not believe all these mystifications, but they must behave as though they did, or they must at least tolerate them in silence, or get along well with those who work with them. For this reason, however, they must live within a lie.
—Vaclav Havel, "The Power of the Powerless"

This book is dedicated to those Eastern Europeans who refused to live within a lie.

A NOTE ABOUT ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Abbreviations and acronyms were widely used to describe many different kinds of political organizations in the era described in this book—the Soviet Union had a kind of mania for them—but they can be very confusing for the general reader, particularly as they changed quite often. I have therefore avoided them as much as possible, often using "communist party" in place of "Polish United Workers' Party," for example, or "communist youth group" instead of FDJ or ZMP. Still, it was impossible to avoid them altogether, and they are often used in other history books and memoirs. This is a list of the most important.

GERMAN

CDU   Christlich Demokratische Union: Christian Democratic Party

DDR   Deutsche Demokratische Republik: German Democratic Republic, also called GDR or East Germany

FDJ   Freie Deutsche Jugend: Free German Youth, the communist youth party, activated in 1946

FDP   Freie Demokratische Partei: Free Democratic Party, sometimes referred to as the Liberal Party

KPD   Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands: German Communist Party, founded in 1919, dissolved in the Soviet zone of Germany in 1946

SED   Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands: German Socialist Unity Party, the name of the German Communist Party after its unification with the Social Democratic Party in 1946

SMAD   Sowjetische Militäradministration in Deutschland: German name for the Soviet Administration in Germany, 1945–49

SPD   Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands: German Social Democratic Party, refounded in 1945, dissolved in the Soviet zone of Germany in 1946

SVAG   Sovietskaia Voennaia Administratsia v Germanii: Russian name for the Soviet Administration in Germany, 1945–59

HUNGARIAN

ÁVH   Államvédelmi Hatóság: State Protection Authority, the secret police from 1950 to 1956

ÁVO   Államvédelmi Osztály: State Security Agency, the secret police from 1945 to 1950

DISZ   Dolgozó Ifjúság Szövetsége: League of Working Youth, the communist youth movement, 1950–56

Kalot   Katolikus Agrárifjúsági Legényegyesületek Országos Testülete: National Secretariat of Catholic Agricultural Youth Clubs, Catholic youth organization, 1935–47

Madisz   Magyar Demokratikus Ifjúsági Szövetség: Hungarian Democratic Youth Alliance, the communist-backed "umbrella" youth movement, 1944–50

MDP   Magyar Dolgozók Pártja: Hungarian Workers' Party, 1948–56, the Communist Party after unification with the Hungarian Social Democrats

Mefesz   Magyar Egyetemisták és Főiskolai Egyesületek Szövetsége: League of Hungarian University and College Associations, university youth group in existence from 1945 to 1950, revived briefly in 1956

MKP   Magyar Kommunista Párt: Hungarian Communist Party, 1918–48

MSzMP   Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt: Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, the Communist Party, 1956–89

Nékosz   Népi Kollégiumok Országos Szövetsége: National Association of People's Colleges, 1946–49

SZDP   Szociáldemokrata Párt: Hungarian Social Democratic Party, founded in 1890, dissolved into the MPD in 1948 after unification with the communists

POLISH

KPP	Komunistyczna Partia Polski: Polish Communist Party, founded in 1918, dissolved by Stalin in 1938
KRN	Krajowa Rada Narodowa: National Council
PKWN	Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego: Polish Committee of National Liberation
PPR	Polska Partia Robotnicza: Polish Workers' Party, the name of the resurrected Polish Communist Party between 1942 and 1948
PPS	Polska Partia Socjalistyczna: the Polish Socialist Party, founded in 1892, forcibly dissolved into the Polish United Workers' Party in 1948
PRL	Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa: People's Republic of Poland, communist Poland
PSL	Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe: Polish Peasants' Party, founded in 1918, in opposition to the communists from 1944 to 1946, later part of the regime
PZPR	Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza: Polish United Workers' Party, the name of the Polish Communist Party after 1948
SB	Służba Bezpieczeństwa: Polish Secret Police, 1956–90
UB	Urząd Bezpieczeństwa: Polish Secret Police, 1944–56
WiN	Wolność i Niezawisłość: Freedom and Independence, the anti-communist underground from 1945 to about 1950
ZMP	Związek Młodzieży Polskiej: Union of Polish Youth, the communist youth group from 1948 to 1957
ZWM	Związek Walki Młodych: Union of Fighting Youth, the communist youth group from 1943 to 1948

OTHER

OUN	Orhanizatsiya Ukrayins'kykh Natsionalistiv: Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists
StB	Státní bezpečnost: State Security, Czechoslovak secret police
UPA	Ukrayins'ka Povstans'ka Armiya: Ukrainian Insurgent Army

Eastern Europe, 1945

dańsk

POLAND

⊙ **Warsaw**

• Łódź

• Lublin

SOVIET UNION

Rzeszów
•

• Kraków

Debrecen
•

⊙ **Budapest**

HUNGARY

Szeged •

ROMANIA

Belgrade ⊙

Bucharest ⊙

UGOSLAVIA

Black Sea

BULGARIA

⊙ **Sofia**

ALBANIA

TURKEY

SWEDEN

Baltic Sea

ESTONIA

⊙ **Riga**

LATVIA

LITHUANIA

Kaunas

• Wilno

Danzig

GERMANY
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ROMANIA

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Poland, 1939

Poland, 1945

SWEDEN

Baltic Sea

Kaunas

Vilnius

Danzig

POLAND

GERMANY

Berlin

Poznań

Warsaw

Łódź

SOVIET UNION

Lublin

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Kraków

Rzeszów

L'viv

AUSTRIA

HUNGARY

ROMANIA

INTRODUCTION

"From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia, all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and, in many cases, increasing measure of control from Moscow."

—Winston Churchill, speaking in Fulton, Missouri, March 5, 1946

AMONG MANY OTHER things, the year 1945 marked one of the most extraordinary population movements in European history. All across the continent, hundreds of thousands of people were returning from Soviet exile, from forced labor in Germany, from concentration camps and prisoner-of-war camps, from hiding places and refuges of all kinds. The roads, footpaths, tracks, and trains were crammed full of ragged, hungry, dirty people.

The scenes in the railway stations were particularly horrific to behold. Starving mothers, sick children, and sometimes entire families camped on filthy cement floors for days on end, waiting for the next available train.

Epidemics and starvation threatened to engulf them. But in the city of Łódź, in central Poland, a group of women determined to prevent further tragedy. Led by former members of the Liga Kobiet, the Polish Women's League, a charitable and patriotic organization founded in 1913, the women got to work. At the Łódź train station, Women's League activists set up a shelter for women and children, supplying them with hot food, medicine, and blankets, as well as volunteers and nurses.

In the spring of 1945, the motives of these women were the same as they would have been in 1925 or 1935. They were witnesses to a social emergency. They organized themselves in order to help. No one asked them, ordered them, or paid them to do so. Janina Suska-Janakowska, in her late eighties when I met her, told me that she remembered these early efforts in Łódź as completely apolitical: "No one received money for charitable work . . . everyone who had a free minute helped."[1] Beyond aiding desperate travelers, the Łódź Women's League, in its initial incarnation, had no political agenda.

Five years passed. By 1950, the Polish Women's League had become something very different. It had a Warsaw headquarters. It had a centralized, national governing body, which could and did dissolve local branches that failed to follow orders. It had a general secretary, Izolda Kowalska-Kiryluk, who described the league's primary tasks not in charitable, patriotic terms but by using political, ideological language: "We must deepen our organizational work and mobilize a broad group of active women, educating and shaping them into conscious social activists. Every day we must raise the level of women's social consciousness and join the grand assignment of the social reconstruction of People's Poland into Socialist Poland."

The Women's League also held national congresses, like the one in 1951 where Zofia Wasilkowska, then the organization's vice president, openly laid out a political agenda: "The League's main, statutory form of activism is educational, enlightening work . . . increasing women's consciousness to an incomparably higher level and mobilizing women to the most complete realization of the goals of the Six-Year Plan."[2]

By 1950, in other words, the Polish Women's League had effectively become the women's section of the Polish communist party. In this capacity, the league encouraged women to follow the party's line in matters of politics and international relations. It encouraged women to march in May Day parades and to sign petitions denouncing Western imperialism. It employed teams of agitators, who attended courses and learned how to spread the

party's message further. Anyone who objected to any of this—anyone who refused, for example, to march in the May Day parades or attend the celebrations for Stalin's birthday—could be kicked out of the Women's League, and some were. Others resigned. Those who remained were no longer volunteers but bureaucrats, working in the service of the state and the communist party.

Five years had passed. In those five years, the Polish Women's League and countless organizations like it had undergone a total transformation. What had happened? Who had caused the changes? Why did anyone go along with them? The answers to those questions are the subject of this book.

Although it has been most often used to describe Nazi Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union, the word "totalitarian"—*totalitarismo*—was first used in the context of Italian fascism. Invented by one of his critics, the term was adopted with enthusiasm by Benito Mussolini, and in one of his speeches he offered what is still the best definition of the term: "Everything within the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state."[3] Strictly defined, a totalitarian regime is one that bans all institutions apart from those it has officially approved. A totalitarian regime thus has one political party, one educational system, one artistic creed, one centrally planned economy, one unified media, and one moral code. In a totalitarian state there are no independent schools, no private businesses, no grassroots organizations, and no critical thought. Mussolini and his favorite philosopher, Giovanni Gentile, once wrote of a "conception of the State" that is "all-embracing; outside of it no human or spiritual values can exist, much less have value."[4]

From Italian, the word "totalitarianism" spread into all the languages of Europe and the world. After Mussolini's demise the concept had few open advocates, however, and the word eventually came to be defined by its critics, many of whom number among the twentieth century's greatest thinkers.[5] Friedrich Hayek's *Road to Serfdom* is a philosophical response to the challenge of totalitarianism, as is Karl Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies.* George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four* is a dystopian vision of a world entirely dominated by totalitarian regimes.

Probably the greatest student of totalitarian politics was Hannah Arendt, who defined totalitarianism in her 1949 book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, as a "novel form of government" made possible by the onset of modernity. The destruction of traditional societies and ways of life had,