

First Annual Conference

Physical Violence in Late Socialism: (Dis-)Entangling Statehood, Labor, and the Nation

Institute for East and South East European Studies (IOS)

Landshuter Str. 4, 93047 Regensburg

19–21 April 2012

CALL FOR PAPERS

The international joint research project “Physical Violence and State Legitimacy in Late Socialism” was launched in April 2011 (see www.physicalviolence.eu, online in October). The project, which is coordinated by the Center for Contemporary History (ZZF) in Potsdam, focuses on physical violence in the late socialist societies of Eastern and Southeastern Europe and on the state's response to and practice of physical violence. The Südost-Institut, as one of the partner institutions, calls for proposals for the project's first annual conference, to be held on 19 – 21 April 2012 at the newly-founded Institute for East and South East European Studies (IOS) in Regensburg (formerly Südost-Institut and Osteuropa-Institut).

By stressing the notion of physical violence and its significance for state legitimacy, the project seeks to contribute to the general discussion of late socialist societies. The first annual conference will explore physical violence within two core fields related to the legitimacy strategies and discourses of communist statehood: the social and the national. By contextualizing physical violence within these highly ambiguous fields, we aim to contribute to the dismantling of powerful stereotypical narrations and images of state socialism; for example, the remnants of binary mental maps coined by the Cold War or interpretations that have emerged on the grounds of post-socialist nation-(re)building.

1. Violence in Labor and Social Relations

Communist regimes used violence to shape social relations, and violence was also part and parcel of revolutionary rhetoric. One of the pertinent aims of communist societal policies was the creation of a socialist working class. Yet, labor relations were highly ambiguous, and workers also constituted a potentially subversive force. What role did violence play in coming to terms with these ambivalences? How did violence (re-)shape social relations, in particular with regard to workers? Which practices of violence exercised by workers can be identified, and how did the state relate to them? Which forms of violence did the late socialist state apply, in order to influence and forge social relations according to its needs and visions?

2. The National Factor in Shaping Violence

The national, as a world of meaning, continued to be interwoven into state legitimacy practices as well as into processes of group-building during the Communist period. We look for contributions that conceptualize the nation as a process, an institutionalized form, a practical category, a contingent, and a context dependent event, and discuss the role of violence for shaping the national. Proposals should seek to identify ethnic biases inherent in the violence exercised by the state and by social actors, including questions like the following: Did police violence look different (quicker, harsher, more lenient), depending on the ethnic background of who was involved? Can ethnic prejudice be detected in the treatment of soldiers? Was judicial punishment conditioned by ethnicity? How did state institutions and social actors refer to the nation when violence occurred, for example in managing border regimes, in reacting to xenophobia, to violence against ethnic minorities? Given that the party collapsed upon the demise of state socialism, while the (nation-)states prevailed or were (re-)established, proposals are invited to seek lines of continuity between the Communist era and both the pre- and post-socialist periods, exploring the systemic interconnectivities of nationally motivated violence.

We invite proposals striving for a situational and contextualised “thick description” of practices, experiences, and representations of physical violence from the perspective of the historical actors, both in terms of subversive strategies and the expression of state authority. Violence is to be approached through a quadruple lens as exercised, suffered, observed and/or imagined.

The conference language is English.

Proposals should be no longer than 300 words. Please also include a short biographic note and your institutional affiliation, as well as your contact details.

Deadline: 31 October, 2011.

Contact:

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