

Call for Papers

The End of the Soviet Union? Origins and Legacies of 1991

Workshop

Research Center for East European Studies at the University of Bremen 19th-21st May, 2011

During the last two decades, the hitherto unimaginable collapse of the Soviet Union was seen both as a definite break with the Soviet past and the onset of a phase of 'transition' to a democratic future. From both Eastern and Western standpoints, the year 1991 appeared as a definite epochal border.

Almost a generation later, the Soviet hymn has made its way back into official state symbols glorifying Russia's Greatness akin to Soviet tradition, Soviet leaders are praised for their leadership and management skills, the loss of Soviet ideals is lamented in public and official discourse alike. Two decades after 'The End of History', the emphasis is placed on continuities rather than fissures - history is back and the clear delineation represented by '1991' seems to evaporate in the face of this renewed, if ambivalent affirmation of the Soviet past.

These new trends in Russia's post-(post-)Soviet self-representations raise questions as to the origins, legacies and transmutations of politics, social relations and cultural codes linked to the Soviet past. Scholars increasingly deal with the roots and determinants of a cultural system that seemingly exhausted itself in the 1970s, came under fire in the 1980s and disintegrated in 1991, but whose ruins are not only resurrected in new splendor, but matter to a larger portion of Russia's population today.

How can both collapse and the symbolic resurrection of the Soviet Union be understood across the time span of a generation? How did social networks and cultural codes make sense before and after 1991? How are and were politicians and party members, dissidents as well as conformists, young and old codependent on a system that was brought on by state socialism and transformed by both popular and official discourse? How could official party discourses be seized by nonconformists, how could they use it as a weapon against the state? How come that "believers" turned into mere "performers" of everyday rituals of Soviet life? And how and for what ends did and do different groups envision the past, the present and the future?

The Forschungsstelle Osteuropa invites historians, anthropologists, philologists as well as social scientists interested in these and related questions to an interdisciplinary workshop in May 2011. We welcome paper proposals for the following, but not necessarily exclusive, topics:

- Chiefs and Clans. Personal Networks and Leadership
- Generations. Shared Pasts, Diverse Presents, Uncertain Futures
- Soviet Citizens Between Consent and Dissent
- Cultural Codes. The (Post)Soviet Empire of Signs
- Soviet Legacies. Between Memory and Everyday Life

Format

Paper proposals of approx. 500 words should be sent to mlehmann@uni-bremen.de by April 30th, 2010. The workshop will be based on papers of approx. 10.000-25.000 words to be distributed among active workshop participants in advance. At the workshop, every presenter has 15 minutes to summarize the main argument for discussion.