

Historiography of Central European Communism Reconsidered: Patterns of Interpretation and Writing Strategies

Prague, 21-22 September 2017

Venue: Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, Evropská 2590/33 C, Entrance C, third floor, 160 00 Prague 6

Tram stop: Hadovka, lines 20 and 26 (two stations from Dejvická)

Organizers: Muriel Blaive, Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, Anna Muller, Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes

This conference's aim is to articulate a historiographical analysis of the popular attitudes towards communism in power. Before communism's fall, it was difficult for historians to study society and "popular opinion" (Paul Corner) as little societal data was available, the archives were closed, research was supervised and history was politicised. This is without even considering the difficulty, for obvious methodological reasons, of accounting for the relationship between rulers and ruled under a dictatorial regime. After 1989, methodological and practical concerns (policies of archive opening, politico-historical narratives suiting the post-communist state, retribution or compensation policies addressing persecutors and victims, etc.), took centre stage in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. But how has the history of each communist regime been written in relation to their respective societies? How is communism presented in historical works and textbooks today? What is society's role as potential supporter, opponent or indifferent actor of the communist regime? What part, if any, is devoted to the regime's intentions concerning the population?

We want to analyze how the history of communism in Central Europe was written in the past and how it is being written today. Our particular focus is on the relationship between rulers and ruled; this will help us evaluate why the totalitarianism paradigm remains important. How present is society in the dominant historiographical analysis? Can we identify ways to restructure this historiography? Our aim is to overcome the duality between a political history centred on the repressive apparatus on the basis of party and secret police archives, and a social and cultural history inspired by mass organisations, factory archives, local or private archives, oral history or even arts and literature. Accounts and interpretations of the population's response to communist policies in Central and Eastern Europe will be mapped out in local and Western historiographies before and after 1989, in order to deconstruct this historiography's master narratives and their evolution over time.

This international workshop is the second of three conferences to be held in the frame of the research project Rulers and Ruled in Poland and Czechoslovakia (1945-1968): Practical and Methodological Challenges in the Historicization of a Complex Relationship, financed by the Grant Academy of the Czech Republic.

Workshop Program

Thursday 21 September

Chair: Benjamin Frommer

14:00 Muriel Blaive: Welcome and Introduction to the Workshop

First session: The Former Yugoslavia and Romania

14:10–14:30 Christian Axboe Nielsen: Between Condemnation and Nostalgia: The Recent Historiography of Communism in Croatia and Serbia

14:30–15:00 Discussion

15:00–15:20 Cristina Petrescu: The Totalitarian Origin of an Anti-Totalitarian Narrative. Past Accounts on Romanian Communism, Their Present Limitations and Future Prospects

15:20–15:50 Discussion

15:50–16:10 Coffee break

Second session: Czech Republic

16:10–16:30 Marián Lóži: L'historien oublié. The Historical Work of Paul Barton and Its Place in Czech Historiography of the 1950s

16:30–17:00 Discussion

17:00–17:20 Muriel Blaive: Totalitarianism: The Blackhole in Czech Historiography of Communism

17:20–17:50 Discussion

Friday 22 September

Chair: Dragos Petrescu

Third Session: Poland

9:30–9:50 Anna Muller: Writing Władysław Gomułka's Life

9:50–10:20 Discussion

10:20–10:40 Valentin Behr: Communism Reconsidered? Rulers and Ruled in the Historiography of the Polish People's Republic

10:40–11:10 Discussion

11:10–11:30 Coffee break

Fourth session: Hungary

11:30–11:50 Réka Krizmanics: Popular History in Late-Socialist and Post-Transition Hungary: A Case Study

11:50–12:20 Discussion

12:20–12:30 Andrea Petö: Writing the History of Women During Communism

12:30–13:00 Discussion

Participants:

- Christian Axboe Nielsen is Associate Professor of Southeast European Studies at Aarhus University, Denmark.
- Valentin Behr just completed a PhD thesis in political science at the University of Strasbourg entitled *The Past as a Source of Political Legitimacy. The Instrumentalization of History in Poland Since 1945*.
- Muriel Blaive is Advisor to the Director for Research and Methodology at the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (Prague) and Principal Investigator of the research project *Rulers and Ruled in Poland and Czechoslovakia (1945-1968): Practical and Methodological Challenges in the Historicization of a Complex Relationship*.
- Benjamin Frommer is Charles Deering McCormick Professor of Teaching Excellence (Associate Professor) at Northwestern University.
- Réka Krizmanics is completing her PhD at CEU Budapest.
- Marián Lóži is completing his PhD at Charles University, Prague, and researcher at the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, Prague.
- Anna Muller is Assistant Professor at the Department of Social Sciences, University of Michigan-Dearborn, and co-researcher in the project *Rulers and Ruled in Poland and Czechoslovakia (1945-1968): Practical and Methodological Challenges in the Historicization of a Complex Relationship*.
- Veronika Pehe, is Research Associate at the Institute of Contemporary History, Prague.
- Andrea Petö is Professor at the Department of Gender Studies at CEU Budapest.
- Cristina Petrescu is Associate Professor of Modern European History at the Faculty of Political Science, University of Bucharest.
- Dragos Petrescu is Chairman of the Board of the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives, Romania and Professor of Comparative Politics at the Faculty of Political Science, University of Bucharest.