



The Many Faces of Late Socialism: The Individual in the “Eastern Bloc,” 1953-1988

Workshop

May 26-28, 2016

University of Cologne, Germany

Call for Papers

How did individuals who grew up under state socialism experience and, in turn, influence what we now call ‘Late Socialism’? Individuals figure prominently in narratives about state socialism’s repressive character and passive or open resistance to “the system.” At the time, persecuted dissidents such as Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Adam Michnik, and Václav Havel represented the ideal of the unfaltering, independent mind. Today people like Jan Palach and the almost 10 million individuals who had joined *Solidarność* by 1981 remain firmly integrated into the narrative of Central Eastern Europe’s return to the fold of the “free world.” However, even though people participated in events that challenged socialist state power, the different versions of state socialism in Eastern Europe remained quiet stable between 1953 and 1988. And despite the whirlwind developments of *perestroika*, the eventual disintegration of state socialism took most people by surprise.

The purpose of this workshop is to gain a better understanding of *both* the stabilizing and the disruptive forces at work during Late Socialism by reexamining individuals’ views, milieus, everyday practices, and self-understandings. A close examination of the concept of the individual and of the lives of different people - such as the men and women who joined *Solidarność* and some of the 30 million Poles who didn’t, party bureaucrats and dissidents, elderly workers and young scholars, and persons with German, Tatar, Jewish and “mixed” roots - might provide an opportunity for a comparative analysis of societies which became increasingly heterogeneous after 1953, an exploration of both the distinctions and the similarities of different versions of Late Socialism, and a reconsideration of established paradigms regarding the “Eastern bloc.”

Contributions may address, but are not limited to, questions of:

- what socialism meant to different individuals;
- how socialist ideas were enacted within and outside of party organizations;

- how individuals accommodated/integrated/confronted socialism with other belief systems;
- how 'self'/'personhood'/'individual' were defined in societies with diverse historical and intellectual legacies but the same ideological imperatives;
- how the role of the individual was (re)negotiated between generations, milieus, or institutions (e.g., the Party, research institutes, religions);
- how language, everyday rules, and practices made individuals part of late-socialist society;
- how and why individuals were excluded by the Party state and by socialist society;
- which trajectories led individuals to reject the Party, socialism and/or late-socialist society;
- how individuals defined Late Socialism by their actions and utterances.

We invite historians, anthropologists, philologists, and social scientists working on any region within the (former) "Eastern Bloc" to submit proposals for papers. The workshop will consist of 10-minute-long presentations of pre-circulated papers of 5,000-7,500 words to be submitted by May 5th, 2016. The workshop's language will be English. Participants will be expected to serve as discussants for interdisciplinary panels. Accommodations and lunches will be covered by the convenors. Travel costs will be partially reimbursed depending on the funding available.

The workshop is part of the research project "The Many Faces of Late Socialism" in the History Department of the University of Cologne and will be complemented by a follow-up workshop in March 2017. We plan to publish selected articles from the workshops as themed issues in peer-reviewed journals and a comprehensive collection of articles based on workshop presentations and of additional submissions in 2018/19.

Please send an abstract of 300-500 words and a short academic biography to m.lehmann@uni-koeln.de by November 6th, 2015.