

Call for Papers

6th Hermann Weber Conference on Historical Research on Communism (2024): "From the International to Friendship of Peoples? Communism and Transnationality in the 20th Century"

*Organisers: Dr. Marcel Bois (Research Centre for Contemporary History, Hamburg), Dr. Christian Dietrich (associate professor at the European University Viadrina, Frankfurt/ Oder, Institute for Regional History, Halle/ Saale), Rhena Stürmer, MA (European University Viadrina, Frankfurt/ Oder). The conference is organised in cooperation with the *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung* (Yearbook for Historical Research on Communism) and funded by the Gerda and Hermann Weber Foundation within the framework of the Federal Foundation for Reappraisal (Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung).*

Venue: European University Viadrina, Frankfurt/ Oder

Date: 12 to 14 June 2024

Transnational and global perspectives have been of key importance to the communist movement from the outset. With the rise of global history and postcolonial studies, they are also receiving greater attention within the field of historical research on communism. The 6th Hermann Weber Conference on Historical Communism Research is devoted to global connections, transnationally active actors and transnational practices. Founded in revolutionary Russia in 1919 with the aim of promoting world revolution, the Communist International or Comintern built up a globally active apparatus. Its functionaries moved across political and geographical borders as a matter of course. As historian Brigitte Studer has recently noted: "The 20th century probably saw no other organisation or social movement that was as international in its rhetoric, as transnational in its practices and as global in its objectives." During the years immediately following the First World War, "world revolution" was considered a realistic short-term goal. This changed during the mid-1920s. Stalin's slogan of "building socialism in one country" did not see the Comintern abandoning the watchword of "world revolution", though its actions in this regard assumed an increasingly folkloristic character. The Comintern now largely catered to the national interests of the Soviet Union.

Transnationality nevertheless remained a tangible practice for many communists in the decades to come. During the interwar period, they not only congregated at conferences or in the metropolises of political exile; there was also the struggle of the International Brigades in Spain, which had a clear transnational dimension. The dissolution of the Comintern in 1943 and the confrontation of political and economic systems following the Second World War altered the nature of transnational contacts. Although some communists moved to the new "real socialist" states, Western European comrades often only visited there, as delegates at official events or to attend seminars at party universities. On the one hand, such meetings provided an opportunity to gain first-hand familiarity with communist regimes and meet like-minded people from other Western countries. On the other hand, meeting communists on the other side of the "Iron Curtain" was also a potentially subversive act. Detlef Siegfried has recently drawn attention to this tension. The Free German Youth College "Wilhelm Pieck", examined by Siegfried, was a site of "alternative globalisation", though efforts were also made to prevent close, spontaneous contact between the international guests and the population of the host country. The conference addresses the transformation of transnationality and transnational interdependence in communist movements and regimes during the "short 20th century" (1917–1989/90). Its guiding hypothesis is that an initial supranational cooperation yielded over time to international relations based on ethnically self-contained entities. Friendship between peoples replaced the International.

The focus will be on the following questions:

(1) Cultural practice. What view did people develop of their "host countries"? Did they record their experiences? How did they perceive habitual differences and differences of political culture, e.g. between Western European activists who were critical of the state and oppositional on the one hand and state-supporting functionaries from real socialist countries on the other? Did these experiences influence people's attitudes? Did encounters with like-minded people from other countries change the further course of their political lives? If so, in what way?

(2) Structure building. How did cooperation across national borders develop? What conflicts developed? To what extent were political concepts or practices adopted from other countries?

How was cooperation institutionalised on the international level? Can "transnational" structural factors be identified? How did people deal with language barriers, for example?

(3) Spaces. In which concrete places did transnational encounters and interactions occur? Did the contacts and networks that developed there have long-term consequences? What significance did diasporic hubs or spaces of Stalinist persecution acquire for transnational history?

(4) Stereotyping. What approach was taken, after 1945, to persons who had been active in transnational networks? How were foreign cadres viewed in the countries of the so-called Eastern Bloc? Was the concept of friendship between peoples associated with the spread of nationalist stereotypes? How did the notion of revolutionary patriotism affect transnational exchange?

(5) Method. What transnational questions and methods that can be productively applied to the history of the communist parties and their actors has historical scholarship developed?

Please send a proposal (1,500 to 2,000 characters) and a short CV (German or English) to chdietrich@europa-uni.de **by 1 July 2023**. Contributions on dissident actors within communism and on currents associated with China, Yugoslavia, Albania or the national liberation movements of Asia, Latin America and Africa are welcome. Notification of selection will be made by mid-August.

The 6th Hermann Weber Conference will take place from 12 to 14 June 2024 at the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt/ Oder. Travel and accommodation costs will be reimbursed. The conference languages are German and English. Papers are expected to be completed four weeks before the start of the conference so that they can be made available to participants in advance. Selected papers will be published, in revised form and in German, in the *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung* (funds for translation are available). Application implies the willingness to submit a paper to this publication for peer review.