

CALL FOR PAPERS

Communist Regimes and the Global Economy since the 1970s

9th Hermann Weber Conference on Historical Research on Communism (2027)

University of Regensburg, April 22 and 23, 2027

Organizers: Prof. Dr. Timothy Nunan, University of Regensburg, and Prof. Dr. Ulf Brunnbauer, Leibniz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies (IOS), Regensburg, in cooperation with the *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung* (Yearbook for Historical Research on Communism), sponsored by the Gerda and Hermann Weber Foundation at the Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of the SED Dictatorship

Application deadline: February 24, 2026

Entitled “**Communist Regimes and the Global Economy since the 1970s,**” the **9th Hermann Weber Conference** will take place on April 22 and 23, 2027, at the University of Regensburg. We are looking for contributions that examine how communist states, parties, and economic actors have dealt with the challenges and dynamics of the global economy since the 1970s. Empirical case studies on individual countries, sectors, or institutions are welcome, as are comparative or transnational analyses that examine communism in the context of global economic interdependencies, geopolitical interests, and ideological transfers. Selected contributions will be published in revised form in the 2029 *Yearbook for Historical Communist Studies (Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung)*.

Communist regimes of various kinds were committed to overcoming capitalism, but they operated in the context of a dynamically changing (capitalist) global economy. This was particularly true for the period from the early 1970s to the collapse of state socialism in Eastern Europe and the USSR between 1989 and 1991. With this conference, we want to take a comparative look at the consequences of this tension and the connection between the transformation of the global economy and that of the state socialist countries. We are particularly interested in the question of how the different forms of communist systems – from the Soviet to the Chinese and Yugoslavian to the Cuban models – shaped their respective interactions with the global economy.

The focus is on the period since the 1970s, but we also welcome contributions that take a longer perspective or aim to make a temporal comparison. The 1970s were marked by profound upheavals in the global economy and its governance, in particular by the end of the Bretton Woods system and the oil price shock. The age of financial globalization began – and even the state socialist countries were not unaffected. As a result, the governments in East Berlin, Warsaw, Prague, Belgrade, Budapest, Bucharest, and Sofia turned to Western banks for loans to import Western technology and stabilize living standards. When the US Federal Reserve raised interest rates massively in 1980 in the fight against high inflation, communist countries were confronted with significantly rising costs for financing their foreign debts. Only the People’s Republic of China benefited from these crises: after Mao’s death in 1976, Beijing took advantage of American companies’ efforts to relocate their production to countries with low labor costs and set up special economic zones for this purpose.

Today, many historians see the economic changes of the 1970s as the starting point for the transformation processes that reached their political climax in 1989. What has been missing, however, is a scientific historical comparison of communist economic systems and their relationship to the global economy.

A thorough examination of this topic must take into account both the perspective of the communist regimes and that of their Western creditors. Only when both sides are included – from a transregional comparative as well as a local perspective – can a comprehensive history of the transformation of communism be written. Such an approach places “real

existing socialism” in new temporal and spatial contexts; emphasizing the interplay between economic globalization and communist politics opens up space for a more intensive exchange between research on communism and research on global and economic history. In addition, a comparative view allows for a better explanation of the adaptability – or *inability* to adapt – of the various state socialisms.

To this end, we want to bring together an international group of leading scholars to examine both the experiences in different regions and their diverse interconnections. The focus will be on economic links, institutional adaptations, and their long-term consequences:

1. Knowledge and economic expertise

How did communist regimes acquire knowledge about the global economy, financial markets, and international trading systems? How did the training and influence of experts from the world of economics and finance change in the face of growing global interconnectedness?

2. Financial relations and debt

How did Western banks and international financial institutions assess the creditworthiness of communist states? What consequences did borrowing, rising interest rates, and debt policy have for economic policy options? To what extent did the strategies and dependencies of individual countries differ, and what lessons were learned from this?

3. Trade, raw materials, and technology transfer

How important were raw material exports for foreign exchange procurement and economic stability? Through which channels did technology transfer take place, and how did socialist states respond to Western export controls?

4. Industrial cooperation, joint ventures, and Western markets

To what extent did socialist companies produce for Western clients (“extended workbench”)? What standards, pricing strategies, and legal conflicts – for example, in the case of licensed production or patents – characterized these collaborations? How important were joint ventures and mixed-economy projects for technology transfer and the opening up of the system? Particular attention should be paid to parastatal foreign exchange procurement agencies such as the GDR’s “KoKo” and comparable institutions in other countries, which operated at the interface between the state, foreign trade, and the gray economy and contributed to international integration. How did Western consumer goods imports and Intershops affect the foreign exchange economy and social expectations?

5. Internal reforms and adaptation strategies

To what extent did foreign exchange shortages and export pressure lead to reforms in planning, pricing, and corporate autonomy? What debates about market-oriented elements shaped the economic policy discussion of the 1970s and 1980s?

6. Ideology, institutions, and international relations

How did communist elites balance economic pragmatism and ideological imperatives? What function did the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) fulfill after the crises of the 1970s – as a countermodel or complement to the capitalist world economy? What role did non-aligned and “developing” countries play in foreign exchange procurement and spheres of influence?

7. Transformation and aftermath

Did international integration before 1989 facilitate the transition to a market economy after the collapse of the system? Which actors and companies benefited from earlier trade and cooperation relationships?

How did existing networks contribute to the rapid expansion of Western companies in Central and Eastern Europe? What lessons did the governments in Eastern and Southeastern

Europe learn from their dealings with Western capital markets and international financial institutions in the 1970s and 1980s? What conclusions did the Communist Party of China draw from the indebtedness and collapse of the communist regimes in Europe? Is there a connection between the strategies of the former socialist countries in dealing with the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank and their previous experiences with debt and limited economic sovereignty? And finally, did these experiences contribute to an anti-Western attitude?

We welcome concrete case studies as well as syntheses and comparative contributions on these and other relevant questions. Please send your topic proposal (max. 300 words) in German or English, along with a short CV, **in a single file by February 24, 2026**, to the following email addresses:

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Selected contributors will be notified by mid-April 2026.

The 9th Hermann Weber Conference on Historical Communist Studies will take place on April 22 and 23, 2027, at the University of Regensburg. Drafts of the contributions should be submitted by February 24, 2027. They will be presented and discussed during the conference. Selected conference contributions will be published in revised form in German in the *Yearbook for Historical Research on Communism* (translation funds are available; the contributions will be edited). By applying to participate in the conference, applicants are expected to be willing to submit a contribution for review for this publication.

Travel and accommodation costs will be covered by the organizers after consultation. The conference language is expected to be English. The conference will take place in person in Regensburg. The conference is sponsored by the Gerda and Hermann Weber Foundation in the Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of the SED Dictatorship.

Organizers and guest editors of the 2029 yearbook

Prof. Dr. Timothy Nunan, University of Regensburg

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