

## Call for Papers

### *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung 2020*

#### *Yearbook for Historical Research of Communism 2020*

## **It's the Economy, stupid! Or: Does learning from China mean learning to win? How did the Communist states respond to economic and social challenges from the 1970s onward?**

“It's the economy, stupid!” In retrospect, the slogan of Bill Clinton's U.S. presidential campaign in 1992 seems to apply equally well to the continuity or demise of the Communist regimes of the 20th century.

The introduction of “market socialism” in the People's Republic of China starting in 1978 and encompassing economic reform and an opening to the world economy has provided the basis for the rise of the "Middle Kingdom" to the heights of global power. Although the Communist regimes in China, Vietnam, and Laos were able to hold their own, not least because of the economic growth there, the Communist dictatorships of East-Central Europe disappeared in 1989-1991. Unlike in China, the economic stagnation of the Soviet Union and its satellite states in the 1970s and 1980s was followed by a severe recession and a dramatic supply crisis in many places. At the same time, this development was an essential prerequisite for the largely peaceful demise of the Communist regimes of East-Central Europe at the end of the decade.

The Yearbook for Historical Research of Communism (JHK) invites historians from Germany and abroad to a conference on 22-24 November 2018 to discuss the economic and (social-)political responses of the Communist states to economic and political crisis phenomena since the 1970s from a transnational perspective. The organizers of the conference, whose contributions are documented in the 2020 edition of the JHK, are the Federal Foundation for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship, the Chair for Modern China Studies at the University of Cologne, and The Berlin Center for Cold War Studies. The occasion of the project is the notable coincidence of three anniversaries in 2018 that together bring out the history of intra-Communist reform efforts in the last three decades of the 20th century in a global perspective: 2018 is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Soviet-led suppression of the Prague Spring liberalization in Czechoslovakia;

the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of China's economic reforms and opening to the world economy; and the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the peak of perestroika and glasnost in the Soviet Union. In dealing with all these anniversaries, the conference also thematically leads to the final failure of European Communism in 1989, which will receive renewed public attention in 2019.

Already in the 1960s, some party cadres and economists in Eastern Europe began to doubt the economic superiority of the central planned economy over Western capitalism. However, the economic reforms initiated in this decade, in particular in Czechoslovakia and the German Democratic Republic (GDR), aimed at making the planned economy more efficient and supplementing it with market-based components, did not last long. Throughout the Eastern Bloc with the exception of Hungary, the suppression of the Prague Spring in August 1968 marked the provisional end of economic and political reform experiments. At the same time, many party and state leaders attempted to gain political stability by providing social benefits, housing, and increased production of consumer goods. The funding for these policies came at the expense of much-needed investment (the shortage of which caused industries to languish) and through a steady buildup of public debt to governments and banks in Western countries. Although party and state leaders in Beijing began in 1978 to eliminate the “iron rice bowl” and to give farm households the opportunity to sell their own surplus crops, rival factions in Moscow continued for a long time to shy away from the consequences of increased economic competition. The economic reforms associated with the “perestroika” initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev in the second half of the 1980s contributed to aggravating rather than solving the economic problems (or at least that is how it was perceived at the time). In the USSR, as in the other Eastern-bloc countries, economic decline was accompanied by growing dissatisfaction in society, which paved the way for the great upheaval of 1989.

The JHK and its partners invite historians from Germany and abroad to submit essays that deal with the different economic and (social-)political responses of the Communist states to economic and political crisis phenomena in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Particularly welcome are contributions that refer to the following topics and questions, taking transnational perspectives where possible:

- Crisis perception and management: How and at what levels have economic crisis phenomena been registered and interpreted in the Communist states since the 1970s; which strategies for remedying these problems have been discussed; and how successfully have these remedies been implemented? How did the Communist states respond to the challenges of the “post-industrial revolution” and why were they unable to carry out the same? Was there a global mutual perception of acute economic and social problems as well as related reform efforts within the Communist bloc? To what extent did such perceptions influence the different national crisis management or reform strategies? Were there debates within the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance? How did the Chinese reformers perceive economic reforms in the Soviet bloc from the 1970s on, and how did the Soviet-bloc countries try to take account of Chinese reform policies?
- Internal conditions of Communist reform policies: Which supporting or inhibiting effects did contemporary framework conditions, national particularities, experiences and cultural imprints and associated ideological interpretations have on the willingness to reform or on the form and success of concrete reform efforts? To what extent have political factors been considered in reforms aimed at increasing participation and the material interests of economic actors as well as employees, and to what extent have such steps required political reforms? How did the Communist regimes handle the tension between economic and political freedom? What impact did the economic situation or economic reforms have on living conditions and on citizens’ interactions with the state?
- External conditions of Communist reform policies: What influence did the world economy and in particular its crises (e.g., the oil crisis of 1973-1974) have on the economies of the Communist states? What part did the West play in the success or failure of economic reform and consolidation efforts in the Communist states? How did the East-West arms competition and periods of détente affect the Communist economies? Did the West favor the Chinese reform efforts to deepen the rift between Moscow and Beijing? With what success did the West use its political and economic power to weaken or even stabilize individual states of the Communist camp? What effects did the Sino-Soviet conflict have on the economies of China and the Eastern bloc? What effects did the economic development of the Eastern bloc and China have on their alliances and foreign policy vis-à-vis Third World countries and, in particular, on their allies? To

what extent and with what success have reform concepts been transferred to these states? How did reforms in certain Communist countries affect reforms in other countries?

- Consequences: What conclusions did the surviving Communist regimes draw after 1989 from the collapse of the Soviet bloc? How has the development of the Communist states been analyzed and interpreted since the 1970s, especially with regard to economic history in China today, in the remaining Communist states and in other (post) Communist discourses? What remains “socialist” after 40 years of reforms to the economic system of the People's Republic of China? How is the reform and opening policy remembered and evaluated in different social classes and generations today? Why has the image of Mao Zedong in the party leadership and population fluctuated over time?

Please submit your proposed essay for the JHK 2020 to the editorial office by 19 February 2018 in the form of a short synopsis (2000 characters), in which you outline your topic, explain your sources and methods, and provide information on your current work.

In the JHK, essays of up to 40,000 characters (including footnotes and spaces) can be published in German. Translations from English will be arranged if required. Compensation for the essays is unfortunately not possible. If your proposal is accepted, you must submit your complete manuscript by 10 November 2018. The conference held on 22-24 November 2018 will replace the usual review process of the JHK. Therefore, the participation of the authors in the conference is expressly desired. Travel and accommodation costs will be reimbursed for those who send their essays on time to the organizers. Unless otherwise agreed, the texts will be revised after the conference and sent in final form to the editors of the yearbook by 8 January 2019. The contributions will be edited there and, if necessary, translated into German. Essays that are not presented at the conference must also be sent to the editors by 8 January 2019 at the latest. These texts undergo a review process before adoption.

*Assumption of travel and accommodation costs:* The conference will start on Thursday evening, 22 November 2018 and end on Saturday, 24 November 2018 at noon. The hotel rooms will be booked and paid for by the organizers. For speakers from Europe, hotel costs for two nights will be covered. For speakers arriving from outside Europe, up to four nights are possible. The arrival and departure must be booked by the speakers. For arrivals from Germany and neighboring

states, travel costs up to a maximum of 200 euros will be covered upon presentation of receipts. For arrivals from all other European states, travel costs up to 300 euros will be covered. Costs for travel to the conference from North or South America and Asia will be reimbursed up to 1,000 euros (up to 800 euros for arrivals from Beijing, Shanghai or New York or similar). Taxi costs cannot be reimbursed. For speakers arriving from other regions of the world, similar arrangements will be agreed separately. The assumption of travel and accommodation costs will be made only if the draft text is sent by the deadline indicated above. The organizers recommend that you make your booking well ahead of time and include travel cancellation insurance.

Further information on the Yearbook for Historical Communism Research can be found at [www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/jahrbuch](http://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/jahrbuch). The editions for 2002 to 2015 of the JHK are available electronically on the website [www.kommunismusgeschichte.de](http://www.kommunismusgeschichte.de)

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