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Physical Violence and State Legitimacy in Late Socialism – Final Conference. Centre for Contemporary History (ZZF), Potsdam, 27.02.2014-01.03.2014.

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As the recent events in Ukraine have shown, the legacies of socialism, especially its connection to violence and questions of state legitimacy still haunt former Bloc countries. These highly topical issues were the subject of a recent conference organised by the Centre for Contemporary History (ZZF), Potsdam and held at the Humboldt University in Berlin.

The conference marked the end of an international research project funded by the Leibniz Association and organised by the ZZF, in cooperation with the Institute for East and Southeast European Studies in Regensburg and the European University Institute in Florence. The focus of the conference was the role physical violence played in late socialist society and in the legitimisation of the state after Nikita Khrushchev criticised the excessive use of force under Stalin in 1956. The papers centred on public order, "socialist legalism" and the definition of violence. To explore this topic, the participants of the project drew from the methodologies associated with the "New Research on Violence", which has experienced increasing popularity since the 1990s.

The questions raised by the "New Research on Violence" were the focus of the keynote speech of JAN PHILIPP REEMTSMA (Hamburg). After a welcome address by Thomas Lindenberger (Potsdam), who along with Jan C. Behrends (Potsdam/Berlin) and Pavel Kolář (Florence) headed the research group, Reemtsma set the stage for the conference, arguing that violence should be described and analysed – rather than explained. Reemtsma interpreted the historian's desire to explain, prevailing since Hegel, as a kind of theodicy: after a transcendental instance which had endowed history with meaning had been lost, it was the historian's duty to make sense of history by means of identifying cause-effect relationships, rather than speaking of chance and arbitrariness or, in modern terms, contingency. To this purpose, historians as well as sociologists had used models of "onstage" and "backstage", according to which historical protagonists acted in compliance with a logic situated "behind the scenes". But as it had become more and more difficult to bring empirical findings in line with that model, Reemtsma argued that historians should abandon the explanatory mode in favour of analysing what actually happened. Regarding physical violence, this meant interpreting it as a way of life, rather than as a tool for reaching certain objectives, which could be regarded as the "true causes" of violence.

The following day, the first two panels focused on the notion of "public order". Each paper highlighted how this concept was politicised under socialism, as violent acts of "disorder" were used by the state to legitimise socialist rule and exercise further control over citizens. In her presentation about Soviet efforts to reduce the violent behaviour of militia men in the post-Stalinist Lithuanian SSR, RASA BALOČKAITĖ (Kaunas) con-

cluded that a relative absence of violence had been achieved through the increased use of propaganda, educational measures, and a stricter surveillance of the media. Since the use of violence by militia men was thought to be contradictory to socialism, it was defined as resulting from individual deviance, rather than societal causes. At the same time, CĂLIN MORAR-VULCU (Cluj-Napoca) noted that violence amongst industrial workers in socialist Romania was politicised over the course of the 1970s and early 1980s as it came to be associated with strikes and unrest. The authorities consequently decreed draconian penalties in order to prevent further violence. Like in the case of the Lithuanian SSR, violent behaviour was put down to individual causes. Through the act of defining violence and its causes, both states were able to justify further repression in the name of maintaining socialist public order.

The ambivalence of the concept of "public order" became clear in RADINA VUČETIĆ's (Belgrade) contribution. According to her paper, the Yugoslav authorities promoted public expressions of solidarity with the Viet Cong by sponsoring protests and depicting the US as a fascist power. At the same time, the state reacted violently to the escalation of anti-war protests. This twofold strategy allowed Yugoslavia to preserve its status as a non-aligned socialist country, while at the same time maintaining good relations with the US.

Violence at public protests was also the focus of the second panel on "public order". In his presentation on "hooligans" in East Germany, MATĚJ KOTALÍK (Potsdam) noted a change in policing practices of the 1970s. During this period, instead of using outright violence, the police would use "soft measures", where violence was made less visible to the public. According to Kotalík this new strategy was part of a negotiation between the state and its citizens on the use of force, as the police faced criticisms from both opponents to the regime and hardliners who favoured drastic measures against protesters. A similar negotiation is also to be found during the same period in Yugoslavia: SABINE RUTAR (Regensburg) examined workers' protests in the Italo-Yugoslav border region. After strikes in Koper and Rijeka had turned violent between 1969 and 1971, the authorities decided not to suppress, but to legalise them by means of the Law on Associated Labour in 1976. The aim was to integrate the workers into a more autonomous management of enterprises; however, the law instead led to an increase of bureaucracy at the cost of efficiency.

During the afternoon attention turned to those bodies – the military, police and security forces – imbued with the legal right to wield violence. JAN C. BEHRENDS (Potsdam/Berlin) and ALENA MAKLAK (Potsdam) both examined violent practices within the Soviet/Russian army. While Behrends placed the development of specific violent practices through the experiences of warfare in Afghanistan and Chechnya – conflicts that saw the use of extreme violence against civilians – Maklak's research studied initiation rites and "barrack violence" within the Soviet army. Despite focusing on different eras both papers underlined the communicative function of violence: whereas the violence Maklak studied was used to teach young soldiers the hierarchy of the barracks and instil discipline, the violence of warfare in Afghanistan and Chechnya spoke of revenge and worked to enforce divisions, whether between conqueror and conquered, or along ethnic and racial lines.

Behrends' paper illuminated the violent logic created by war, a thread picked up by ROBERT LUČIĆ (Potsdam), who re-examined the use of local militias by the Yugoslav People's Army during the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. Lučić shifted attention away from ethnic reasons for the collaboration of pro-Serbian armed groups with the Yugoslav army, and instead focused on the role the exigencies of warfare played in diffusing the state's monopoly on the use of force. As ISABEL STRÖHLE (Regensburg) highlighted, the monopoly of force was key to the negotiations of late

socialism, a time when state legitimacy was increasingly based in the legal and court systems. By studying the trial of Vujo Vojvodić, a member of the Yugoslav State Security Service accused of excessive violence, Ströhle demonstrated the important role that legitimising certain acts of violence played in the shift to "socialist legality". Although all actors involved in the trial agreed that violence was necessary to the defence of socialism in Yugoslavia, negotiations revolved around the extent to which violence could be legitimised in the face of the enemy or disloyalty, revealing the very real stakes at play in the transition to late socialism.

"Socialist legality" took centre stage in the closing panel of the day. MICHAL KOPEČEK (Prague) not only saw it as an important element in the shift away from Stalinism, but also as a key to negotiations taking place during the peaceful revolutions of 1989 in Czechoslovakia and Poland. Drawing evidence from two criminal trials, Kopeček aptly showed the way dissidents in the late 1970s and 1980s were able to critique socialist regimes and expose its repressiveness by drawing attention to legal and procedural failings. The discursive struggle between dissidents and the state to name and define violence was an important site for the shifting fate of the regime. The peaceful revolutions of 1989 also framed JENS GIESEKE's (Potsdam) paper as he followed the inner workings of the Stasi throughout the life of the German Democratic Republic. Echoing the research by Kotalík, Gieseke showed how de-Stalinization led to a reduction in "visible" violence. For Gieseke, the invisibility of violence resulted in a subtle erosion of the Stasi's ability to use force. Despite that, MICHAL PULLMANN (Prague) argued that the late socialist idealisation of the "quiet life" in Czechoslovakia led to a removal of public forms of physical violence, and a rise in new forms of repression. This new persecution was aimed at removing criminality from the public eye – including prostitution, the black market and rowdies.

The last day of the conference took up these questions of visibility, by examining forms of violence that are often closeted from the public eye. These panels used the Foucauldian framework of "biopolitics" to examine the way socialist states regulated bodies through control and violence. PÉTER APOR (Budapest) and JENNIFER RASELL (Potsdam) both examined children's experience of violence in Hungary, focusing on the institutions constructed to guide children's socialist education. Apor's paper focused on sexual abuse of children and the role of legal and medical organisations tasked with protecting the (hetero)sexuality of children. He noted a move away from moralising ideology towards professionalised and expert-based arguments in favour of state intervention in children's sexual development during late socialism. Drawing from anthropological literature Rasell closely analysed an oral interview with a former resident of a Hungarian children's home. Rasell highlighted the dissonance between how slaps and canings, markers of abuse for the interviewer, were understood by the interview subject as a form of "caring", revealing how the examination of subjectivities may challenge historical analysis of violence under socialism, and drawing attention to the discursive significance of defining violence.

BARBARA KLICH-KLUCZEWSKA (Krakow) turned attention to issues of gender, examining domestic violence in socialist Poland. Echoing the arguments of Apor, Klich-Kluczewska underscored a change in the 1970s as legal and medical experts became increasingly interested in violence against women. This concern, however, was not directed at the female victim, but rather at the structural difficulties facing the abusive man, an approach that reinforced gender norms and expectations. Issues of gender were also taken up by MURIEL BLAIVE (Prague) in a comparison of childbirth practices in the US and Czechoslovakia.

By comparing East and West, Blaive was able to highlight different turning points: she argued that 1968, not 1989 (or the communist takeover in 1948) marked the division for child birthing practices in America and Czechoslovakia. At that time, women in America began to call for a mother-centred approach to childbirth, leading to a change in American maternity wards that did not take place in Czechoslovakia.

The conference ended with a study on the death penalty under socialism by PAVEL KOLÁŘ (Florence). Making several comparisons to the American debates and literature on death penalty, Kolář examined the case of Olga Hepnarová, the last woman to be executed in socialist Czechoslovakia, for the ways in which her death linked state execution with notions of sacrificial death. Taking into account the late socialist turn away from the excessive force of the Stalinist era, Kolář argued that there was a striking similarity between the liberal and socialist positions on state killing – under both systems the state attempted to dislodge any notion of sacrifice from killings.

The similarity between East and West/Liberalism and Socialism, addressed explicitly in the final two papers, was a continual theme throughout the conference. What made these discussions about violence and legitimacy specifically socialist? How did experiences or understandings of violence differ between East and West, or even within the Bloc? Further research in this area needs to examine the specificities of socialism and any points of contact or transmission over the Berlin Wall. As underscored by Blaive, not only does examining these questions "de-ideologise" frameworks for understanding the Cold War, but also makes Cold War research less about normative assumptions of life behind the Iron Curtain.

Conference Overview:

Key Note Speech

Thomas Lindenberger (Potsdam), Welcome Address

Jan Philipp Reemtsma (Hamburg), Was ist eigentlich „Gewaltforschung"? Einige systematische Bemerkungen

Moderator: Martin Sabrow (Potsdam/Berlin)

Panel 1: Public Order I

Rasa Baločkaitė (Kaunas), Hidden Violence of Totalitarianism. Policing Soviet Society in Lithuania

Călin Morar-Vulcu (Cluj-Napoca), Arenas of Violence in Late Socialist Romania

Radina Vučetić (Belgrade), The Double Game – Using Violence at the Demonstrations against the War in Vietnam in Socialist Yugoslavia

Commentator: Thomas Lindenberger (Potsdam)

Moderator: Frank Bösch (Potsdam)

Panel 2: Public Order II

Matěj Kotalík (Potsdam), The Interaction of Hooligans, Police and Bystanders in East German 1950s–1970s Public Space

Sabine Rutar (Regensburg), On the Meaning of Violence at a Cold War Border, 1970s–1980s: Public Riots between Trieste and Rijeka

Commentator: Alf Lüdtke (Erfurt)

Moderator: Matěj Spurný (Prague)

Panel 3: Military, the Security Forces and Society

Jan C. Behrends (Potsdam/Berlin), "My byli na etikh voinakh – we served in these wars." Continuities of Violence from Afghanistan to Chechnya

Alena Maklak (Potsdam), The Pursuit of Manliness: Justifying "Barrack Violence" in the Narratives of Former Soviet Army Soldiers

Robert Lučić (Potsdam), Bonded in War – The Yugoslav People's Army and Violent Communities in East Slavonia 1991

Isabel Ströhle (Regensburg), Conflicting Visions of Loyalty, Legitimacy and Legality: The Sto-

ry of a State Security Agent on Trial in Socialist Kosovo (1968)

Commentator: Felix Schnell (Berlin)

Moderator: Annette Vowinckel (Potsdam/ Berlin)

Panel 4: Legitimacy and State Violence

Michal Kopeček (Prague), Law and Order, "Civilised Violence" and the Revolutions of 1989 in East Central Europe

Michal Pullmann (Prague), The State, the (In)Visibility of Violence and Everyday "Normalisation" in Czechoslovakia

Jens Gieseke (Potsdam), The Future of Torture after Stalin. Stasi Discourses on Violent Practices in the Age of "Socialist Legality"

Commentator: Ulf Brunnbauer (Regensburg)

Moderator: Stefano Bottoni (Budapest)

Panel 5: Biopolitics and Education I

Péter Apor (Budapest), Intimate Violence: State Legitimacy, Sexual Violence and Citizenship in Hungary 1960–1989

Jennifer Rasell (Potsdam), (Violent) Care Dynamics in Children's Homes in 1980s Hungary

Barbara Klich-Kluczewska (Krakow), The Culture of Violence, Socialist Modernity and Social Health. Domestic Violence in People's Poland of 1970s and 1980s

Commentator: Franziska Exeler (Florence)

Moderator: Rüdiger Bergien (Potsdam)

Panel 6: Biopolitics and Education II

Muriel Blaive (Prague), Modernity and Violence: Giving Birth East and West from the 1950s to the 1990s

Pavel Kolář (Florence), The Death Penalty and Sacrifice after 1945

Moderator: Thomas Lindenberger (Potsdam)

Concluding Statements

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/

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