

SITES OF MEMORY OF SOCIALISM AND COMMUNISM IN EUROPE



International workshop-conference organised
by the Universities of Basel and Bern
September 3-6, 2015

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Conference Venue
Hotel "Schloss Münchenwiler" (near Bern, Switzerland)

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UNIVERSITÄT
BERN

Twenty-five years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the history of socialism and communism still presents itself as one of the most polarizing and controversial themes in Europe's culture of memory. While some countries of the former Eastern Bloc utilise their socialist past in the formation of national identities, others tend to construct nostalgic memories of their lived experiences in socialist times. And while some governments advocate the legal and historical investigation of communist rule after the fall of the Iron Curtain, others confront their recent past with denial or idealisation. Finally, some Western and Central European societies seem to have forgotten the extent to which their own nineteenth and twentieth century history has been influenced and formed by communist ideas and the socialist movement. European states and societies still have a long way to go in constructing a common culture of memory of the history of socialism and communism.

This international postgraduate conference will discuss Europe's diverging cultures of memory of socialism and communism from the late nineteenth until the early twenty-first century in a comparative perspective. It will analyse "realms" or "sites of memory" (in the sense of Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire*) in Western and Eastern Europe as symbolic representations of the memory of socialism and communism. Such sites include geographic or topographic localities (for instance Karl Marx' birth place in Trier or his grave in London) just as well as man-made sites of memory and commemoration (as, for example, Lenin statues), history museums (the "House of Terror" in Budapest) or metaphoric "places" in a symbolic space (the October Revolution, the "Red Flag" , "The Internationale" or the "1st of May"). Central to our analysis shall be the diverging narratives of history and memory of different social groups, processes of appropriation and denial as well as social practices of memorial culture in various European societies. Furthermore, we seek to discuss the general description of socialism and communism as "Bolshevism", "Stalinism", and "Real

Socialism” – notions which are often used interchangeably and synonymously. We wish to examine how societies at various times have dealt (and deal) with “their” socialist historical past and how they have charged respective sites of memory with symbolical meaning. Processes, narratives, and practices of commemoration shall be analysed as well as strategies of social oblivion and denial or forms of commercialization.

The conference is inspired by the centenary of the “Zimmerwald Conference” in September 2015. One hundred years ago, more than thirty well-known representatives of the Second Socialist Internationale (among them Vladimir Lenin, Leon Trotsky, Grigorii Zinoviev, and Robert Grimm) met conspirationally at Zimmerwald, a small village in the proximity of Bern, in order to consult about strategies to end the First World War and to feed revolutionary upheaval in Europe. While the “Zimmerwald Manifesto” and the “Zimmerwald Left” advanced to major sites of memory in the international socialist movement after 1917, the population in Zimmerwald could hardly accept the 1915 conference, an event of worldwide historical significance, as part of their own local history. For the centenary, however, an official ceremony of commemoration is planned, which we will attend at the end of the conference.

We invite doctoral and postdoctoral students from all countries, in particular from Western and Eastern Europe, to present their research on one or several sites of memory of socialism and communism in Europe. We seek submissions from early career academics working in diverse fields of research (history, political science, sociology, cultural studies, anthropology, and related disciplines). Our intent is to initiate and promote a transnational and interdisciplinary scholarly dialogue. Renowned specialists will give keynote-lectures and commentaries and will debate and reflect on the papers.

The workshop will take place from September 3-6, 2015 at the charming conference hotel “Schloss Münchenwiler” near Bern (www.schloss-muenchenwiler.ch). The conference language is English. Costs for travel, accommodation and meals are paid for by the conference organisers. The number of participants is limited to twenty. A publication of the conference contributions is planned.

Proposals for papers (20 minutes) are welcome. Please send abstracts of approximately two pages, a curriculum vitae and (in case of doctoral students) a reference from your advisor via email to: Sandrine Mayoraz: sandrine.mayoraz@unibas.ch.

Please send your application by no later than **January 31, 2015**.

Conference organizers:

Prof. Dr. Frithjof Benjamin Schenk (University of Basel, Department of History)

PD Dr. Julia Richers (University of Bern, Department of History)