

The Legacy and Memory of Communism in Europe

**Workshop organised by EURHISTXX
European Network on Contemporary History
Réseau européen d'histoire du temps présent
(GDRE - CNRS)**

17 December 2007

Institut d'histoire du temps présent (CNRS)

According to a current trend in social sciences, in politics, in arts and literature, contemporary societies live in an "age of memory", an "era of the witness". They have developed a deep "culture of remembrance". Public consciousness focuses on the memories of the main traumas on recent history. Oblivion, amnesia, official repressing or "taboos" over the past are more and more denounced. In narratives, the "figure of the victim" replaces progressively the figure of the hero.

But, is it true for all the major historical episodes of the 20th century ? Have we reached such a high level of an "homogenized" memory all over Europe ? Can we notice an equivalent attention to the legacy of all totalitarian regimes or to all mass crimes and major assaults on human rights in recent European history ? Does the economic and political European integration mean a common European memory and a share of all the sequels of the "Dark Continent" ?

Probably not if we look at the memory and the legacy of Communism in Europe, especially after 1989. There is obviously a difference between the tremendous and necessary attention brought to the memory of Fascism and Nazism as major breaks in recent history, or to the memory of the Holocaust, a central issue in European contemporary culture, and the attention brought to the communist experiences. There is no consensus neither on the "criminal dimension" of the Soviet power, its real balance, nor on the way we must analyse the Communist system, some historians emphasizing the great differences in time and space, others focusing on its structural unity.

This workshop would like to propose a discussion on how to evaluate what remains alive, what has been forgotten or ignored about this central experience of the 20th century, in European politics and societies. It focuses less on the history of Communism as such than on its memory and legacy within European societies since 1989. It will analyze the split between Eastern and Western perceptions about Communism as a historical process or the differences inside each former "block". It doesn't want to pay attention only to the traumatic memories, but to all the form of remembering and representation of the past, including nostalgia, silences, form of revisionism or denying, etc.

The workshop addresses not only to specialists of Communism but to all social scientists who wish to discuss the current place of Communist experience(s) in European recent history. It is organized by EURHISTXX, a new network and *Groupe de recherche européen* (GDRE-CNRS) dedicated to the Europeanization of contemporary history, and currently conducting an international project of the history of post-war periods (1918-1945-1989).

Version # 2 - 15 Octobre, 2007

Provisional Program
(Papers are delivered in English)

Morning Session : 9:15 - 12:30

CHAIR : Dariusz Sztola (Poland)

Welcome of the participants

Henry Rousso (France) : Introduction

Paweł Machcewicz (Poland): "On the Polish way of coming to terms with the legacy of the Communism"

Peter Apor (Hungary) : "Eurocommunism. Commemorating Communism in Contemporary Eastern Europe"

Thomas Lindenberger (Germany) : "(N)ostalgia and the Search for Reconciliation: About Germany's Cinematic Ways to Memorialize Communism" [+ questions]

Philippe Buton (France), "The Memory of Communism in France"

Afternoon Session: 14:30 - 17:30

CHAIR & MODERATOR: Pieter Lagrou (Belgium)

14:30 - 15:00:

Tzvetan Todorov (France), "On Relativizing evil? The memory of the two Totalitarianisms in the 1990s." ? (title and presence to be confirmed)

15:00 - 17:00: General Discussion

17:00 - 17:20: John Horne (Ireland), Conclusion