

**Nationalism and Communism,
International Workshop at the University
of Amsterdam**

Veranstalter: Martin Mevius, University of Amsterdam; Balázs Apor, University of Debrecen; Jan C. Behrends, Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin; Ragnheiður Kristjánsdóttir, University of Iceland; Árpád von Klimó, Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung Potsdam
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On Friday 25 and Saturday 26 April more than twenty academics from all over Europe gathered in Amsterdam to discuss the interrelation between communism and nationalism. Eleven presenters gave papers on various topics relating to the subject that covered Eastern and Western Europe as well as the Soviet Union. Also present were the organizing committee and several academics from the University of Amsterdam.

At the beginning of the conference organizers MARTIN MEVIUS (University of Amsterdam) and JAN C. BEHREND (Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin) gave introductory talks that outlined the overall significance and the theoretical implications of the subject. In the second panel several papers discussed the national strategies of the communist movements that did not hold power: Comintern policy and nationalism (BERNHARD BAYERLEIN, Mannheim University), the communist 'invention of tradition' in Franco's Spain (JOSE M. FARALDO, Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung, Potsdam), the impact of nationalism on the colonial question for Portuguese communists (JOSE M. NEVES, U. of Lisbon), and wartime steps to the formation a communist Polish national identity (ANITA PRAZMOWSKA, London School of Economics). The papers of the second panel emphasized the attempts of the communist parties to establish themselves within the political culture of different countries. While the Spanish communists successfully adopted some of the national and Catholic images of Spain, Polish communists struggled to overcome the mistrust

of the Polish public which perceived them as agents of Moscow. Jose M Neves explained the ambiguous relationship of Portuguese communists to the colonial empire of their country. Contributors to the third and fourth panels examined the „socialist patriotism“ of the communist party-states: the early national communism of Gheorghiu Dej in Romania (DRAGOS PETRESCU, University of Bucharest), Lithuanian identity and the Soviet State (MALTE ROLF, University of Hannover), and the case of Bulgarian nation-building under communist rule (MARKUS WIEN, American University Sofia and MILENA BORDEN, University of Reading). Malte Rolf could show how Lithuanian national identity could develop within the framework of the Soviet empire, and the papers on Bulgaria underlined the inherent successes of nation-building under communist rule. PÉTER ÁPOR (Central European University, Budapest) used the Hungarian example to highlight some of the contradictions that shaped the discourses of national communism. Finally, with a focus on the German Democratic Republic, communist conflicts over national issues (PIERRE WEBER, l'Université Paris III-Sorbonne Nouvelle) and the lack of success of national propaganda (JAN KIEPE, University of Erfurt) were discussed. Although the GDR was not a nation-state, the question of its relationship to German nationalism remained significant. Overall, the contributions demonstrated that nationalistic discourses and the process of nation-building is essential to a comparative understanding of European communism.

All participants agreed the workshop had been successful as a first meeting of minds, and that a continuation of the project is desirable. It is amazing that you can find similarities between such diverse countries as Iceland, Portugal and Bulgaria,' said organiser Ragnheiður Kristjánsdóttir (University of Iceland). As national parties, the movement at large, the USSR and the communist party-states attempted to reconcile nationalism with communism, there is substantial material for a larger conference, and a publication. Several angles in particular emerged as worthy of further research and discussion:

1. National narratives of communist parties

and Communist National Policies.

This concerns the communist 'Invention of Tradition', i.e. national symbols, statues, street names, anthems, the veneration of martyrs, the leader cult, historical narratives, popular and high culture under communism. Further comparative research should also be fostered about domestic and national policies pursued by communist parties, or policies that were defended by communists in national and patriotic terms.

2. National and Ethnic Conflicts under Communist Rule.

Communist states frequently clashed with other states over minorities, borders and economic interest or suppressed ethnic groups. How serious were these conflicts? How did the pursuit of national interests relate to communist internationalism, i.e. the membership of Comintern/ Cominform/ Comecon and the relationship with the USSR?

3. The Reception of Nationalistic Propaganda

To what extent did national-communist propaganda legitimate the party-states? Who believed in national-communist self-representation? How did the producers of communist national imagery – functionaries, artists and intellectuals – approach the topic? How did „socialist patriotism“ shape the identity of party members themselves?

4. Communism, Internationalism and Empire ('the imperial turn')

This is particularly relevant in the cases of multinational states such as Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, or empires such as the USSR and its satellites and China, but for states that had a colonial empire such as Portugal. How did communist empires function? How did the nationalism of the nation-states clash with the imperial ambitions of the centre? How did the communist parties deal with the own nation's imperial legacy and ambition?

5. Communism and Nation Building

There were longstanding and successful attempts by communist rulers to construct socialist nations. Indeed, one may argue that some modern nations were only shaped under communist rule. What role did the agents of nationalization (army, education) play? To what extent was this comparable to earlier nation building in Western Europe? Did

communism 'europeanize' Eastern Europe?

6. National Communism and theories of Nationalism

How do we define national communism? How does it fit into the existing theories of nationalism (e.g. those of Eric Hobsbawm, Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson and others) and how does it relate to 19th century nationalism? Can socialist patriotism be seen as a form of nationalism in its own right? Is 'Eurocommunism' the western variant of the socialist nation building that happened in the East?

7. Nationalism and the downfall of communism.

Nationalism played a role both in the evolution and legitimization of communist power and its eventual downfall. What is the relationship between pre-1989 communist nationalism and post-1989 nationalism? How large were the contributions of national movements and sentiments to the European revolutions of 1989 and the fall of the Soviet empire?

As far as methodology is concerned several participants warned for a trend to greater specialization, a focus on country studies and a lack of interest in the 'bigger picture'. Communism was an international movement and future work on its relationship to nationalism should be of comparative nature. Individual case studies will have to pay attention to the cultural contexts of the country in question as well as the broader context of the communist movement and the relations to neighboring countries.

The exact scope of future research and international co-operation is still an open question. It was proposed to include significant Western European parties (KPD, PCI, PCF) in the comparative framework. It was also argued that the communist countries of Asia (China, Cambodia, North Korea) and their nationalism should be included in the broader picture. Another interesting case study would be Cuba where nationalism and anti-Americanism contributed to the legitimacy of the revolution.

The participants agreed to set up of a network on nationalism and communism, to acquire funding for a larger international conference and to begin conceptualizing a publication

on the still under-researched relationship between nationalism and communism. The organizing committee will continue to co-operate and plans to hold an international conference next year.

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Conference Overview:

I. Socialist Patriotism or Communist Nationalism? Chair: Árpád von Klimó

Reappraising Nationalism and Communism – Martin Mevius

Between Theories of Nationalism, Totalitarianism and the Imperial Turn. Challenges to a Comparative History of Communist Nationalism – Jan C Behrends

II. The Communist Movement. Chair: Ragnheiður Kristjánsdóttir

Nationalization and Diversification in International Communist Politics, 1935-1941 – Bernhard Bayerlein.

Spanish Communists and Nationalism. Civil War, Regionalisms, Dissidences (1936-1964) Jose M. Faraldo

Imagining Communist Portugal - Jose M Neves

III. The Socialist State (I). Chair: Balázs Apor

The Polish Workers' Party in Search of an Identity, 1942-1947 - Anita Prazmowska

Returning to the Ethnic Nation: A Study in Early Romanian National-Communism, 1956-1968 - Dragos Petrescu

Nationalizing the Soviet Empire – Malte Rolf

IV. Socialist State (II). Chair: Jan C. Behrends

The Dilemmas of Communist Nationalism - Peter Apor

Nationalism in Communist Bulgaria- Markus Wien

Nations and Nationalism“ under Bulgarian Communism - Milena Borden

V. The GDR: a special case? Chair: Martin Mevius

Poland and the GDR: communist brotherhood and national interests - Pierre Weber

„Nationalism as a Heavy Mortgage. SED's Cadres Action between Demand and Reality“ – Jan Kiepe

VI. Final Discussion and Future Plans for the Project

Tagungsbericht *Nationalism and Communism*,