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Dissertation project

The Socialist World System - an alternative Globalisation?

After the Second World War, with the occupation of Eastern Europe by Soviet troops and the formation of socialist governments in different East and Central European countries, a system of socialist states, a Socialist World System emerged. A Socialist World System of a potentially global span began to form with the revolutions in Asia, Southeast Asia and Latin America.

As the terminology of the Socialist World System implies, the socialist States maintained relations and engaged in exchange. Albeit scientific socialism understanding itself as characterised by internationalism ever since its foundation by Marx and Engels, the proclaimed socialist internationalism and the international proletarian solidarity did not prescribe the regulation of relationships between socialist states. The Marxian analysis was transnational, it analysed the internationalisation of the productive forces and the social relations and their expression in the political order. The dissolution of statehood was the endpoint of the projected historical development and the predicted world revolution.

Within the given framework of a state system, characterised by the politics of nominally sovereign entities and under the ideological propositions and maxims of socialism, the concepts and norms and the organisations that were to regulate the Socialist World System had to be newly developed after the Second World War. Despite being developed within the dogmatic framework of socialism, the Socialist World system as a concept, the question of its geographic extent, its structure, its working and the processes it brought about as well as its institutionalisation remained subject to continuous reinterpretations, debates and change up to the dissolution of the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) in 1991.

Great Intellectual effort went into the theorising of the Socialist World System. Institutions and organisations that had the task to analyse the Socialist World System were set up. Concurrent to the post World War II processes of free market economic, political and cultural exchange, an alternative international sphere between the socialist countries and an alternative narrative of globalisation was developed by the socialist states, academies but also by the institutes and organisations of the CMEA, set up originally in 1949 to provide the institutional framework and organise the inter-socialist relations. Building on their distinct social and political set up, the Socialist states attempted to build a sometimes radically different international order.

Drawing on the methodology of global history and intellectual history, this project aims to analyse the international socialist order as it was conceptualised and theorised, mainly in the 1950s to the 1970s. Secondly it aims to illustrate the practices of exchange that took place between the socialist states and socialist societies. On a third level it will analyse the Socialist World System as life experience. It is intended that the Socialist World system will be analysed as an intellectual construct, as interstate and transnational practice but also as a factor impacting on the personal experiences of individuals.

Very little attention has been paid to the socialist world system by social scientists and historians after 1989. The project aims to provide an account of this international project of an

alternative globalisation and the processes of international and transnational exchanges that took place within the frameworks it provided.