

International Conference

Punitive education

On the relationship between violence, ideology and care
in ‘total institutions’ under communist rule

8. Hermann-Weber-Konferenz zur Historischen
Kommunismusforschung

15 – 17 April 2026

Dresden



Wednesday, 15 April

12:00
noon

Reception

1.00pm

Welcome

Udo Grashoff, Thomas Lindenberger, Klára Pinerová (HAIT)

Jörg Ganzenmüller (HAIT), Adéla Gjuričová (ÚSD), Uljana Sieber (Bautzner Straße Dresden Memorial)

1.30pm

Keynote

Chair: Jörg Ganzenmüller

Steven A. Barnes

Reeducation with a Death Count: Ideological Violence and the Brutal Paradoxes of Humanism in the Soviet Gulag

2.30pm

Break

2.45pm

Panel 1: From “New Man“ to “Socialist Personality”

Chair: Thomas Lindenberger

Anna Grutza

The ‘New Man’ between Systems: Engineering Society and Diagnosing Social Pathologies in (Post-)Imperial and Modern Mass Societies

Stefanie Eisenhuth

Embodying Socialism: Regulated Behavior and Appearance in the GDR

4.00pm

Break

4.15pm

Panel 2a: Communist Prisons and Camps

Chair: Adéla Gjuričová

Brisejda Lala

Mechanisms of Control. The Internment Process in Communist Albania

Arleen Ionescu

The Myth of the New Man behind the Pitești Experiment

Udo Grashoff

Makarenko and Re-education in Juvenile Prisons of the early GDR

6.00pm

Dinner

7.00pm

Chair: Ulrich Mählert

Udo Grashoff

Opening of the exhibition “Jugendstrafvollzug in der DDR”

“Путёвка в жизнь” (Putyovka v zhizn / The Road to Life) USSR 1931

Discussion and Film Screening

Film screening for conference participants only. Not open to the public.

Thursday, 16 April

9.30am

Panel 2b: Communist Prisons and Camps

Chair: Udo Grashoff

Zbigniew Lasocik

Polish Prison System – Paradoxes of Punitiveness

Klára Pinerová

Re-educating the Socialist Citizen: Power, Discipline and Resistance in Czechoslovak Prisons, 1948–1989

Rune Steenberg

The (extra)ordinary Case of China's Mass Re-education Campaign in Xinjiang

10.45am

Break

11.15am

Panel 3: Punitive Education and Psy-Sciences

Chair: Maren Hachmeister

Cringuta Irina Pelea

Diagnosing Dissent: Psychiatric Violence and Political Control in Communist Romania (1965–1989)

Gábor Csikós/Kata Hodász

"The task is to uncover the psychic background of criminality": Special Education on the Borderlands of Pedagogy and Law Enforcement

12.30pm

Lunch buffet

2.30pm

Panel 4a: Children and Youth in State Care

Chair: Agnes Arndt

Anna Schor-Tschudnowskaja

Between Humanism, Revolutionary Experiments, Ideological Idealisation and Popular Cult: the History of the 'Dostoyevsky School' for Homeless Young People in Petrograd

Barbara Klich-Kluczevska

Violence and Work. The Juvenile Detention Centers in Communist Poland, 1945–1970

Constanze Schliwa

Giving a voice to former 'normal home children' of the GDR. Results of the dissertation project Remembering and processing growing up in normal children's homes of the GDR from 1965 to 1989

4.15pm

Break

4.45pm

Birte Meyer

Information on publication in “Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung”

5.00pm

Keynote

Chair: Thomas Lindenberger

Till Kössler

“Black Pedagogy”. The Origins and Transfiguration of Punitive Education since the 18th Century

7.00pm

Dinner

Friday, 17 April

9.30am

Panel 4b: Children and Youth in State Care

Chair: Klára Pinerová

Evgenia Lezina

Profilaktika in Soviet Education: Reeducating Nonconformist Youth and the Intelligentsia in the Post-Stalin Era

Kathleen Beger

Between Reward and Discipline: Constructing the “New Soviet Person” in the Pioneer Camp Artek and the Arkhangelsk Labour Colony

Sandor Horvath

Youth Reloaded: Children of Communism and Youth Revolt in Budapest

11.15am

Break

11.45
noon

Wrap up Discussion

12.45pm

End of Conference

1.00pm

Guided Visit of Stasi Museum Bautzener Straße

About the conference

The communist regimes of the 20th century are often referred to as 'educational dictatorships' as they saw the (re-)education of each individual as the basis for building a socialist society. According to the communist understanding of the historical necessity of transition from capitalism to a communist society, it was not only the power structures and production relations that were to be overturned. At the same time, a 'new man' was to emerge who would leave behind the individualistic and egoistic attitudes of the exploitative society and, thanks to his intellectual and moral abilities, would harmonise with the collectivist principles of Marxism-Leninism out of his own 'insight into necessity'. Only then, according to the communist dogma, would the antagonism of individual and society, as well as the division of society into classes, be finally overcome.

This 'historical necessity' had to be achieved through control and, if necessary, coercion. The 'new man' – later on in the context of the GDR: the 'fully developed socialist personality' - was to be created through targeted intervention in all areas of society with the help of surveillance and punishment. This applied to the party itself, it applied to the centre of society in large companies, mass organisations, education and leisure. This communist educational compulsion was also implemented and experienced in a particularly striking way at the margins of society where individuals branded as 'parasites', 'asocials' or 'insane' did not behave in accordance with social norms or deliberately violated them.

The conference will focus on those institutions and social places where people were particularly exposed to repressive re-education. We are talking about labour colonies, camps, youth work centres, special children's homes, but also regular prisons, in which the idea of re-education through labour and within a collective, often in reference to the Soviet pedagogue Makarenko, was the official guiding principle. For the study of these institutions it is important to pay close attention to the relationship between ideals and norms and practice. According to theory, the logic of revenge and retribution did not inform such re-education. The explicit aim was to reintegrate everyone into socialist society. However, the practices of punitive education in numerous 'total institutions' of real socialism thwarted these self-declared goals and turned them into their opposite. They caused or favoured the development of group dynamics that were characterised by a high degree of violence, humiliation and contempt for humanity, and this systematically and permanently. In consequence, communist rule created and reproduced its own 'asocial' or 'negative' milieu.

This ambivalence of re-education practices in communist dictatorships stands at the center of the conference. Its aim is to develop a differentiated understanding of the Janus-faced nature of the relationship between care, education and repression in communist regimes. Based on the treatment of non-conformists and delinquents in different contexts and regions, communist practices and concepts combining education and repression will be explored. Focusing on generic institutions will also allow comparisons with the rival systems in the West and with precursors of these typically 'modern' institutions. The conference is based on the conviction that the treatment of people in state-enforced custody and care - be it prisoners in prisons and camps, patients in psychiatric wards, children and young people in residential care, or similar - is one indicator of the humanity or inhumanity of the ruling system.

Organizers:

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Venue:

Gedenkstätte Bautzner Straße

Bautzner Straße 112a

01099 Dresden

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**Hermann
Weber** KONFERENZ

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AUFARBEITUNG



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