

Conference – University of Fribourg, October 31 – November 1, 2011

Transnational Dimensions of Cold War Anticommunism: Actions, Networks, Transfers

Call for Papers

Against the background of potential nuclear devastation and the confrontation between two ideologies and world powers, an unrestrained psychological war was fought by the two camps using modern means of communication (radio, cinema, covert action, etc). In the West the Cold War was marked by widespread and intense forms of anti-communism. Generally this was antitotalitarian in nature and dramatic in tone.

In response to the USSR and its Communist Party acolytes gaining power, and in reaction to important historical events (Czech Coup, Berlin Blockade, the purges, Korea War, Cuba Crisis, decolonisation, Vietnam War, etc.), various forms of anti-communist struggle, discourse and representation arose. While some anti-communist endeavours built on earlier initiatives, others took on new forms, such as the large-scale institutionalisation of clandestine operations by the United States after 1947-48. Although anti-communist partisans have spoken of the struggle against communism in terms of a “crusade” (implying the idea of collective action and a sanctified mission) in retaliation to a threat globally orchestrated from Moscow, critics have accused the U.S. of illegal intervention around the world, either militarily or subversively via the CIA. In recent years there has also been growing interest in importance and impact of propaganda and public diplomacy conducted in particular by the US and its allies.

When it comes to assessing these developments, the key question of the “transnationality” of anti-communism has rarely been raised. This conference looks to explore this field in breadth and depth through the following questions:

To what extent was “anti-communism” actually planned, coordinated, and structured at the transnational level?

What kinds of interactions and interdependences can be observed in the different types of organised anti-communism on the transatlantic and European levels?

What were some of the dynamics in the transfer of practices, ideas and methods?

What types of networks were created in the struggle against the “red peril”?

In comparison to the interwar period, to what extent were these developments new, or merely a continuation of previous activities?

What were the motivations and goals of these individuals and groups?

How did covert and overt activities link up, and how did their interests sometimes clash?

The conference will examine the transnational dimensions of Cold War anti-communism by bringing together perspectives on the various connections, involvements, exchanges, relationships and transfers between societies. This will look in detail at the notion of Western “anti-communist solidarity” and help to disclose the limits, failures and shifting

phases of this solidarity across the public and private spheres (“state-private networks”). Since the dominant narrative of Cold War anti-communism is US-centric, reflecting the greater resources and leadership role of that nation, it is the aim to build a more complex picture of this phenomenon by looking at European initiatives operating separate from (or aligned with) US interests.

In order to explore these issues, the conference aims to bring together an international group of historians together with scholars from other disciplines such as sociology, political science, literature, and film studies. Paper proposals can adopt a comparative or single country approach as long as a transnational perspective is present in the analysis. The conference will be divided into three broad research areas: the “political” area (actions), the “social” area (networks), and the “cultural” area (transfers, representations, receptions, political cultures).

This two-day conference will take place at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland on October 31 and November 1, 2011. The organisers, Luc van Dongen, Claude Hauser, Stéphanie Roulin and Damir Skenderovic, are affiliated with the Contemporary History Section in the Department of Historical Sciences at the University of Fribourg. Support from the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) and the Institute of Swiss Contemporary History (ISCH). Also with the collaboration of Giles Scott-Smith (Leiden University, Netherlands).

The organisers will cover accommodation costs in Fribourg during the conference. If necessary, funding will be available for covering travel costs.

Paper proposals should consist of a title and an abstract of max 4,000 characters, together with a brief CV. Please send proposals to Luc van Dongen (luc.vandongen@unifr.ch) by September 1, 2010.

Since the University of Fribourg is a bilingual university (French and German), the participants are kindly invited to present their paper in one of the two languages. However, papers in English are also welcome, as far as a substantial abstract in German and/or French is available for the audience.