

Call for Papers

Workers in Post-Socialist Transformations

With the collapse of the Soviet Union around 1989/90 and the subsequent transformation of most state-socialist societies, it seemed that capitalism had begun its global triumph. More than 35 years later, however, it is becoming clear that this did not culminate in what Francis Fukuyama called the “end of history”, that is, the final establishment of a liberal world order. Instead, in many of the formerly state-socialist societies, after a phase of unrestrained deregulation and privatization, often accompanied by devastating deindustrialization, there has been the establishment of nationalist-authoritarian regimes, sometimes with revanchist tendencies, as in the case of Russia. Some observers speak of a new model of state capitalism or “political capitalism” (Branko Milanović), which combines neoliberal redistribution with forms of command economy. At the same time, post-socialist transformation did not only mean the dismantling of old state industries, but also the establishment of new production sites, which were integrated into transnational supply chains and could draw on well-educated and cheap labour. The most prominent examples here are certainly the Chinese Special Economic Zones. But countries as diverse as Vietnam, Kazakhstan, or Slovakia are today highly industrialized production sites of global capitalism.

Therefore, the working class in post-socialist societies has by no means disappeared, but is usually considered unorganized, atomized, and passive — especially in comparison with the “Western” welfare states, where trade unions play a greater role. In contrast, scholars repeatedly identify forms of “Eigensinn” (obstinacy/self-will) and often covert practices of everyday resistance in post-socialist societies. An important element here is a form of “moral economy”, which draws from the memory and nostalgic idealization of the socialist past thus forming a contested legacy, which is not only used by ruling elites for their own legitimation in distinction from the “West” within the framework of geopolitical competition, but can also nourish resistant behaviour.

The aim of this special issue is therefore to focus on the experiences of workers during the transformation of post-socialist societies. We seek to provide a global overview. The period under consideration may begin before 1989, if it addresses changes in the subsequent transformation period. Possible topics include:

- The transformation of the world of work, especially in the workplace as the once central site of the socialist “social contract”
- The change in household reproduction under conditions of low wages and the collapse of social security
- The articulation of class conflicts and the role of trade unions
- The role of memory and the socialist legacy, especially regarding self-images, motivations, and actions

- The experience and constitution of workers as a class, both in traditional industrial sectors and in the service sector and agriculture, with particular attention to gender relations, the role of youth, and migrants
- The transformation of social mobility, for example in comparison to the era of state socialism, and the rise of new social strata

Forms and Deadlines

We ask for the submission of **meaningful abstracts by January 15, 2026**, in German or English (other languages are also possible on request), with a length of 2,500 characters, clearly stating the topic, method, and source base of the planned article. Based on the abstracts, we will specifically request contributions. **The deadline for submitting completed articles is June 30, 2026.** All contributions will undergo a multi-stage internal review process before publication. Only after submission and review of the final version will publication be confirmed. We publish only original contributions, except for articles that were not originally published in German. Contributions to “Arbeit – Bewegung – Geschichte” are not remunerated. Please submit manuscripts by e-mail as a docx file. The completed articles should not exceed 50,000 characters including spaces. Please note our guidelines for authors.

Contact and submission: cfp@arbeit-bewegung-geschichte.de

Timeline at a glance:

- Submission of abstracts: January 15, 2026
- Submission of completed articles: June 30, 2026
- Publication of the special issue: Expected January 2027