

CfP: Workshop “Revolutionary Technocracy: The State and Mass Organizations in Socialist Governance since the 1950s” (Ljubljana, June 17, 2025)

The Institute of Contemporary History, Ljubljana, invites paper proposals for the Workshop “Revolutionary Technocracy: The State and Mass Organizations in Socialist Governance since the 1950s,” to be held on June 17, 2025, in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

State socialism, as a political and economic system, was one of the major innovations of the twentieth century and became a global phenomenon in its latter half, with socialist regimes emerging across Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas. State socialism can be understood as a political regime characterized by single-party government, directed modernization under systemic governmentality, and the predominance of state property. From the 1950s onward, socialist governance increasingly embraced the notion that political, economic, and social lives could be organized and governed as closed systems. With the “scientific and technological revolution” integrated into the ideology as a new stage on the path to communism, the accumulation and application of knowledge became a central function of state socialist regimes, while holistic, systemic governmentality turned into a key feature of the ideology. In the 1960s, socialist governance and human existence in modern society became central to socialist social sciences, prompting a search for better planning. This led to the emergence of management studies and the development of theories on socialist post-industrialism, envisioning a communist society with automated production and perfect planning. Cybernetics played a key role in systemic governance, while the arts and humanities became essential in shaping the post-industrial socialist human.

The workshop will focus on the role of the state and “civic” organizations – trade unions, cooperatives, youth and women’s organizations, and other state-controlled associations – in technocratic governance under state socialism. It will investigate the concepts, institutions, and practices central to socialist governance of the state since the 1950s, with a focus on the accumulation and application of scientific knowledge, expertise, and data within the party, government bodies, and research organizations. In particular, the workshop will address technocratic approaches to law, diversity management, self-government, state-related planning and reforms, crisis management, and *nomenklatura* recruitment. The use of cybernetics in state management and the emergence of alternative, non-party approaches to governance rooted in the milieu of scientific and technical intelligentsia are also of special interest. The workshop will also explore how the international positioning of a socialist state shaped its political structures, particularly in countries that split from the Soviet bloc or were never part of it. Finally, it will analyze the transnational, transregional, and global transfer of concepts, institutions, and practices, focusing on how they spread and were adapted in different contexts. This will include examining asymmetric structural adjustments and the relational nature of socialist institutions, often juxtaposed with “bourgeois” ones.

Each contribution should focus on one or more specific state socialist contexts since the 1950s, including contemporary socialist states. Topics of interest may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- The relationship between technocratic approaches and ideology.
- The dynamics between ideological cadres and technical experts in socialist governance.
- The development and application of technocratic understandings of law.
- The design and implementation of schemes for state reforms.
- The role of research institutions in studying the political attitudes of the population.

- The use of opinion polls as a tool for policy-making and governance.
- The contribution of research institutions to the understanding of international relations and world politics.
- The evolution of decision-making processes and the collection of expertise within ruling parties.
- Technocratic ideas about the construction of a national community.
- Strategies and practices of governance in crisis management.
- Alternative technocratic designs for the state, particularly those proposed by the scientific and technical intelligentsia.
- Technocratic approaches to recruiting and managing the *nomenklatura* and advancing meritocracy.
- The application of cybernetics in state management and administration.

The workshop is part of the project *Socialist Management in a Global Context: Technocratic Developments in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, 1955–1991*, sponsored by the Slovenian Research Agency (ARIS). It is part of a series of three workshops, the results of which will be published together in a volume planned for 2027. The selection of papers will, hence, be based on their quality and coherence. Submissions addressing developments outside the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia are explicitly encouraged. Submissions to this workshop should focus on the role of the state in socialist governance. Later workshops will explore socialist technocracy in governing production and distribution as well as life cycles of the population.

Please submit a 300-word abstract and a short biography to PD Dr. Ivan Sablin (ivan.sablin@inz.si) and Dr. Tjaša Konovšek (tjasa.konovsek@inz.si) by February 28, 2025. Notifications of acceptance are expected by the end of March. Invited participants will be expected to submit drafts of up to 7,000 words by June 1, 2025. The organizers will be able to provide accommodation to the participants but cannot cover their travel costs.