State Planning and Private Entrepreneurship in the
20th Century Conference
November 10-11, 2023
AGENDA

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2023
(399 Ruehl Family Room, Julis Romo Rabinowitz Building)

1.00 pm - 2:15 pm  The Past and Future of Planning (Public Panel Discussion)
Bill Janeway, University of Cambridge
Liz Chatterjee, University of Chicago
Harold James, Princeton University
Yakov Feygin, Berggruen Institute

2.15 pm – 2:30 pm  Break

2:30 – 4:00 pm  East Asia
Xiao Sun, Princeton University: Owning A Factory in Mao’s China, Nationalizing the Cotton Textile Industry (1949-1958)

Peilun Hao, Princeton University: Rescuing the “Bloated” Mills: Shanghai’s Flour Industry and the State, 1946-1956

Yujie Li, University of Chicago/ UMD: "(Un)Planning the muscle-powered transportation: How mule carts defied the statistical regime of People’s Republic of China"

Chair/Discussant: Elizabeth Chatterjee

4.00 – 4:15 pm  Break

4:15 – 5:45 pm  Northern Eurasia
Véronique Mickisch, NYU: Friedrich Pollock: From the German revolution and Soviet planning to the New Deal, 1918-1938

Adam Leeds, Columbia University: Accounting for Socialism: Yegor Gaidar, Reform Thinking Before Transition, and Plannedness without the Plan

Friedrich Asschenfeldt, Princeton University: Planning Agriculture in the USSR and international market coordination during the Great Depression
Chair/Discussant: tbd.

6:30 pm  
**Dinner**  
Mediterra Restaurant & Taverna | 29 Hulfish Street

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**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 2023**  
(399 Ruehl Family Room, Julis Romo Rabinowitz Building)

9.00 – 9:30 am  
**Breakfast**

9:30 – 11:00 am –  
**South and Southeast Asia**
James Evans, Harvard University/GWU: *Malaysian Maoism and Anti-Red Planning: Development as Defense in Southeast Asia*

Michael Mandelkorn, Princeton University: *To Make or Break the Village: Competing Visions of Rurality and Colonial Legacy in Postcolonial Burma*

Neel Thakkar, Princeton University: *Theorizing the National Economy at the End of Colonialism: India’s National Planning Committee and the Meaning of Economic Sovereignty*

Adhitya Dhanapal, Princeton University, Handloom Weavers  
Mobilization in 1952-3: *The limits of Planning in Democratic India*

Chair/Discussant: Yujie Lie

11:00 – 11:15 am  
**Break**

11:15 am – 12:45 pm  
**America**
Casey Eilbert, Princeton University: *Public and Private Administration in the 20th Century United States*

Renny Hahamovitch, University of Michigan: *Planning for Collapse: NASA, Futurology, and the Loss of the Long-Term in the Apollo Era*

Julia Marino, Princeton University: *Strategic Visions: Tracing the Evolution of American Industrial Policy in the Late Twentieth Century*

Haris Durrani, Princeton University: *Invention, Invented, 1959–1973*
Conference: State Planning and Private Entrepreneurship in the 20th Century
Nov. 10-11, 2023

Chair/Discussant: Yakov Feygin

12:45 – 1:30 pm  Program Close
                 Boxed lunches
1. Yujie Li, Assistant Professor, University of Maryland

(Un)Planning the muscle-powered transportation: How mule carts defied the statistical regime of People’s Republic of China

Central planning in former Communist countries focused primarily on the industrial sector, especially the heavy industries. What happened in their planning of non-mechanized production? How much did the plan reflect the real economy? How did the plan—based on the modernistic ideal of rationalization—reconcile that goal with the premodern technological conditions? This article examines the attempt to plan the scattered shipping forces supported by animal and human labor in the early 1950s China. Throughout the Maoist years, the transportation sector was not a priority for state investment. With limited development of high-standard roads and investment in automobiles, road transportation relied heavily on “backward” muscle-powered transportation technologies such as wheelbarrows and mule carts in the 1950s. This reliance posed great challenges to the planning of transportation.

Taking the 1950s Beijing transportation as a case study, this article describes the municipal transportation authority’s effort to control the dispersed, privately-owned, muscle-powered transportations in and out of the city, in order to establish a state monopoly, fix transportation costs, and make the transportation sector plannable. Through triangulating planning policies, statistical documents, and institutional archives describing daily administration, it shows that despite the indispensable role that muscle-powered transportation played in the economy, the plan and the statistical regime upholding it failed to incorporate it. This failure could only be partially explained by the accounting difficulty caused by the dispersed nature of muscle-powered technologies. Also important was the conflation of the plan and the reality. In this case, the prescribed linear development of technology resulted in a “planned” decrease in the use of muscle-powered transportation for which the real economy was far from ready. The inability to plan for the pre-industrial sector eventually contributed to PRC’s divergence from the Soviet model and its pursuit of a Maoist developmental path.

2. Casey Eilbert, Princeton University

Public and Private Administration in the 20th Century United States

This paper considers how efforts at state planning were transformed in the postwar United States as “public administration” faced a crisis of legitimacy and incorporated private sector models of governance. In the prewar United States, scholars of public administration advanced Weberian notions of bureaucracy – neutral, depersonalized, and rule-governed hierarchies – as both efficient and democratic. They legitimated the administrative state on the premise that it rational and politically neutral, thus ensuring its efficiency and adherence to popular will. After World War II, this vision came under scrutiny. The example of the Nazi and Soviet states, and the revival of Weberian theory that came along with it, made public administrators – and the American public generally – wary of “neutral” bureaucracies and acutely aware that an organization’s administrative means – including hierarchy and centralization – could defeat its ends, leading to the creation of an unelected “bureaucratic caste” and a rule-bound rigidity that threatened efficiency. In response, they sought a new
philosophy of public administration, taking the private sector as a model. Postwar management theorists proffered decentralized and personalized management as both democratic and efficient, claiming that it better stimulated individual will and thus organizational productivity. Public administrators took note, aspiring to make government more “business-like” and the bureaucrat more entrepreneurial. The result was near-continuous administrative reform that aspired to make government function “like a business” and brought an influx of “human relations” initiatives, decentralization programs, and perhaps most significantly, the contracting of state functions. By the 1980s, it seemed that public administration’s efforts to adopt private sector models had only further undermined its legitimacy. Some observers warned of “the end of public administration” as it lost its identity and ceded territory to privatization, raising questions as to the ambiguous relationship between the two spheres and its meaning for American governance.

3. James Evans, Harvard University

Malaysian Maoism and Anti-Red Planning: Development as Defense in Southeast Asia

Marxism-Leninism and its Chinese equivalent, Maoism, presented an ideological and existential threat for non-socialist states in Southeast Asia at the height of the Cold War. The region’s close geographical, historical, cultural, linguistic, and economic ties with China heightened both the attraction of Maoism to ethnically (Han), overseas Chinese and state suspicions of these populations’ national loyalties. For states like Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia, Maoism was not an abstract ideology but a very real threat in the form of sustained insurgencies that inflicted widespread violence and undermined the fragile political legitimacy of their postcolonial governments. State-led efforts to counter domestic Maoist sympathies, however, faced multiple questions: Who “counted” as a Maoist and how could they be exposed? Why did individuals join these insurgencies? What solutions provided the most effective strategy to eliminate insurgent violence?

This paper examines how Malaysia and Thailand attempted to counter Maoist-inspired rebellions by launching a joint state development program that aimed to raise living standards and, they hoped, therefore deter individuals from joining or abetting Maoist “terrorists” in their shared border regions. By associating Maoism with a perceived lack of development, this project, named KESBAN, explicitly fused development and security across the Thai-Malay border. In doing so, this transnational project redirected massive state resources from both governments towards agricultural, infrastructure, and industrial projects—often with the assistance of foreign expertise—that aimed to combat Maoism in Southeast Asia.

This paper argues that Maoism is an understudied motivator for large-scale development initiatives despite its central role in motivating state decision making outside China during the Cold War. First, the case of global Maoism contradicts theories claiming that states are motivated by revenue optimization and the prioritization of state sovereignty. By jointly spending vast resources and agreeing to share economic assets and security and legal jurisdiction across national boundaries, KESBAN highlights how Maoism motivated the Malay and Thai governments to adapt ideas of development and sovereignty for localized conditions in the Global South. Second, KESBAN served as a mechanism by which to racialize development so that it benefitted certain ethnic groups (Malays in Malaysia, Thais in Thailand) over others (Han Chinese, Thai Muslims). In doing so, the plan aimed to not only combat Maoism, but also to reshape the populations—and therefore the voters—of both
states to favor majority ethnic, religious, and cultural groups that continue to shape contemporary legacies across Southeast Asia.

4. Peilun Hao, Princeton University

**Rescuing the “Bloated” Mills: Shanghai’s Flour Industry and the State, 1946-1956**

Introduced in the 1950s as a hallmark of the new socialist China, the Chinese planned economy encompassed not only agricultural collectivization and development of heavy industry, but also a radical reorganization and eventual nationalization of existing industries and private enterprises. This paper explores the gradual nationalization of Shanghai’s privately owned flour mills under the banner of “public-private mixed ownership” (gongsi heying) and argues that the communist takeover of the industry was the culmination of pre-1949 economic and political trends that rendered the mills deeply indebted and fundamentally unsustainable. Three intertwined chains of events were responsible for financial woes that plagued Shanghai’s once flourishing flour mills: the Japanese invasion in 1937 and the subsequent Chinese Civil War devastated interregional trade and deprived Shanghai mills of both their raw material and market. As a result, flour mills were increasingly dependent on government orders for revenue at a time when the state’s role in the economy expanded dramatically. Finally, chaotic management of the mills, which essentially were traditional Chinese family businesses, convinced the communist state of the need to introduce expertise and planning in the form of a top-down state-managed enterprise. This paper concludes with a discussion on continuities and changes in Chinese political economy from the Great Depression to the early socialist period.

5. Renny Hahamovitch, University of Michigan

**Planning for Collapse: NASA, Futurology, and the Loss of the Long-Term in the Apollo Era**

Early on, NASA leaders set out to conquer the future itself. A vague but powerful long-term dream of colonizing the stars shaped the agency’s plans for technological development, determining everything from missions to rocket fuel. NASA graphs projecting the future, from technological sophistication to social impact, all pointed sharply up. A future of rapid and endless Space Age progress seemed certain, cradled within what seemed like an infinite period of economic growth.

But this prophecy was false. NASA’s funding collapsed during the Apollo program, shrinking drastically beginning in 1966. The moon landing was less triumphant victory than final heave over the finish line. Today, the Space Age, rather than an unending horizon, is referred to in the past tense.

I will follow the history of NASA planning from its first budgetary struggles in the mid-60’s (when it commissioned various corporate-run futurology studies), to the beginning of its funding plateau in 1975 (when it attempted to synthesize those forecasts into an actionable plan). As its long-term utopian future declined, a new, more pragmatic future took hold of NASA, one dedicated to the short-term and to profit. A Space Age premised on *capitalizing on* economic growth became dedicated to *ensuring* economic growth. Though NASA conceived of this future shift with the help of its publicly funded corporate partners and though short-term profits might seem like a conventional corporate interest, ironically this transition was largely seen as a concession to a pessimistic, overly empowered American public against the interests of the space industry. Subsequently, a growing tendency has come to identify corporate
authoritarianism over planning as the only way to return to a long-term space future. To ensure a stable long-term space investment, this new position held that public funding had to be subordinated to private planning. I will reflect on this history within the broader context of the collapse of the New Deal order and the rise of neoliberalism, the crisis of the Soviet space program (a key influence on NASA), and the so-called “death of the future.”

6. Xiao Sun, Princeton University

**Owning A Factory in Mao’s China**

**Nationalizing the Cotton Textile Industry (1949-1958)**

The literature on economic organization in Mao-era China is almost exclusively focused on heavy industry. The existing scholarship tends to assume the inevitability of the nationalization of all industries under a communist regime and offers broad-stroke accounts of the process. While historians have recently emphasized how the economic policies of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the realm of heavy industry expanded on central administration of defense-related industries by the Guomindang (GMD), this model fits awkwardly for other sectors of the economy. The cotton textile industry, which produced both military supplies and consumer goods, was dominated by private operations before the proclamation of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. The case of the textile industry thus invites further consideration of why the CCP leadership was so determined to also nationalize the cotton textile industry and how it managed to nationalize the industry that was so closely related to the national economy and the people’s livelihood.

The proposed paper examines the (re)organization of the cotton textile industry during the first decade of the PRC – the initial phase of the “socialist transformation” (shehui zhuyi gaizao) of China’s industry launched by the communist leadership. Divided into two sections, the first section of the paper analyzes the motivations behind Beijing’s efforts to nationalize the cotton textile industry. Analysis in this section considers both the objectives of the PRC’s economic architects, such as Chen Yun, as well as contingent factors, including China’s involvement in the Korean War. The second section of the paper traces how an industry dominated by private entities was nationalized in practice. Based on files on the textile industry from archives in Shanghai and Xi’an, the paper argues that there was already a strong state presence in private textile mill operation in as early as 1950 in spite of private entrepreneurs remaining in place as shareholders and managers of their textile mills until the mid-1960s. The paper shows how the operation of these mills – from the purchase of raw materials to sales of products – had become subject to state control since the very beginning of the 1950s. The analysis thus illustrates the evolving meaning of “the state” (gong), “the private” (si), and economic nationalization in early PRC.

7. Antoine Jourdain, EHESS (Paris)

**Lost in “Concertation”: Planning French Agricultural Production (1948 – 1962)**

This paper uses the agricultural sector as a case study to present the unique planning mechanisms that grew out of the reconstruction and modernization period of post-war France. First, this research examines how agriculture configured into broader economic planning efforts. Using sources from the General Planning Commission (Commissariat général du Plan), it demonstrates how the sector was progressively given a pivotal role in sustaining a macroeconomic equilibrium, as it was tasked with
obtaining a trade surplus to compensate for the industrial sector's trade deficit. Farmers and their representatives organized within planning bureaus and Parliament forced policymakers to organize markets in such a way that guaranteed both stable prices and increased sales. This contributes to a body of literature exploring the organizational aspects of French planning (Cohen, 1977; Monnet, 2018; Quennouëlle-Corre, 2000). Second and more broadly, this research offers an overview of the complex and hitherto uncharted process by which annual agriculture investment plans were co-established by civil servants, experts, credit institutions, as well as farmers and rural representatives. In addition to its intervention in the current body of literature about the mechanisms of French agricultural planning in practice (Bompard & Postel-Vinay, 1981; Loveluck, 2021; Milward et al., 1995), this study of the agricultural sector serves as an example of concerted planning “à la française”. Private actors, as well as financial institutions, participated in and shaped a multi-levelled, bottom-up planning process. In doing so, this paper identifies where decisional authority resided regarding technical, political, and financial matters, thereby showing how an array of actors with often diverging interests cooperated to elaborate annual investment plans. To conclude, the paper identifies three shortcomings in the process and the resulting lessons that should be kept in mind in future planning endeavors, especially with regards to climate imperatives in the twenty-first century.

8. Haris Durrani, Princeton University

**Invention, Invented, 1959–1973**

The synchronous communications satellite, the model for the first generation of commercial communications satellites, was marketed as a project of globalization. But the story of its invention remains local, a conflict between the state and private enterprise. In most accounts, the satellite was invented by a handful of engineers at Hughes Aircraft Company from 1959 to 1961. That year, the story goes, Hughes effectively sold a completed invention when it became the sole-source contractor for Syncom, a NASA program. The story pits corporate innovation and individual genius against government bureaucracy, private freedom against public power. The effect is to omit the extraterritorial nature of operations from July to August 1963 which placed the first communications satellite in synchronous orbit. Not only was the satellite, Syncom II, in outer space, but it was also directed, controlled, and monitored by NASA, military, and Hughes technicians at stations around the world, from MD and NJ to Nigeria and South Africa.

Since two Hughes engineers filed the first patent application related to Syncom in 1959, company and NASA lawyers, engineers, managers, and executives debated stories of invention. While private freedom and public power were at stake, their meanings were constructed through the minutiae of the Patent Office and courts. These processes addressed more specific issues, including the relationship between the invention and its possible extraterritorial elements. In these disputes, how and to what ends were stories of invention constructed—and what exactly did extraterritoriality have to do with it?

I argue that the public or private ownership of the early patents depended on how lawyers and engineers weighed technological practices outside what was considered the U.S. The relationship between public and private was not a dyad but a matrix. NASA, military, and Hughes personnel sought to arrange public and private resources in their best interests. These resources included technologies beyond the continental U.S.

9. Adam Leeds, Assistant Professor, Columbia University
Accounting for Socialism: Yegor Gaidar, Reform Thinking Before Transition, and Plannedness without the Plan

Yegor Gaidar came to world attention when he was appointed First Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation in 1991, and over thirteen months managed the collapse of the Soviet economy from to one that, if not liberal, was clearly capitalist. As I will show, Gaidar was no "Chicago (or Harvard) Boy," as he is often labeled. He was in fact neither a Westernized economist, nor even a mathematical economist; neither a neoliberal, nor even a liberal. He was not a theorist ignorant of practice or historical experience, nor a market romantic who saw it as a universal panacea. He believed in the need for radical restructuring, but this was a widely shared view, and he was not sanguine about how easy it would be. First and foremost, Gaidar was a specialist in the accounting practices of socialist enterprises. I follow Gaidar’s career from his undergraduate training until he left the Academy of Sciences in 1987, ending his academic career and becoming a journalist. Gaidar was trained in what I will call Soviet industrial institutionalism. His work was rooted in the most concrete economic abstractions: how best to construct accounting “indicators” for value added and “normatives” tying wages to that value added. The correct accounting frameworks were the means by which incentives would be aligned to make planning possible and effective. By the late 1980s, the final complement to his reform vision was a new understanding of the functioning of the Soviet economy as one that in fact was no longer centrally planned at all. Introducing markets would therefore be not the end of planning, but the very possibility of (re)introducing plannedness to a system that lacked all systematicity, a bureaucratic hierarchy that had become an amorphous morass.

10. Neel Thakkar, Princeton University

Theorizing the National Economy at the End of Colonialism: India’s National Planning Committee and the Meaning of Economic Sovereignty

The National Planning Committee (1938-1949) was the first systematic, synthetic attempt to think through the economic structure of a sovereign India. It included a wide range of nationalist elites, including representatives of large-scale business, leading scientists, and activists and politicians. Scholarship on colonial-era planning has portrayed it as a struggle between the agents of different classes, competing over a few key questions, such as the nature of land reform, the division between public and private sectors, and the order of investment priorities. While such ideological conflicts generated the most archival paper, these debates already presumed an economic relation between the nation and the world. Namely, there was wide consensus within and outside the nationalist movement that the nation-to-be would seek to detach itself from the world market and from a free-trade ideology. This paper examines the NPC in its function as a consensus-forming exercise to understand how this view of detachment from the world market came to be accepted as a key component of the economic dimension of decolonization. It analyzes the distinct genealogies of this idea, including the communist, socialist, Gandhian, and liberal. The paper argues that the post-colonial rejection of international trade was seen by many contemporary actors as an ethical choice -- part of what genuine decolonization meant -- as much as one of developmental strategy (i.e. import-substitution industrialization). The paper further shows how this choice led to thinking about planning the economy as remapping a ‘world’ of commodity linkages into the space of the nation. This idea is explored through an analysis of the concept of regional development, which was how Indian planners theorized the spatialization of industry (and its division into public and private spheres), and thereby transformed the abstract notion of ‘development’ into a discrete and physical project.
To Make or Break the Village: Competing Visions of Rurality and Colonial Legacy in Postcolonial Burma

What happens when plans are made and implemented by nonstate organizations? What happens when those plans are in direct opposition to state-made plans? In 1948, Burma emerged as an independent state already plagued by multiple insurrections. Only in 1952 did the central Burmese state begin to reassert its authority over the countryside. To capitalize on this moment, Prime Minister U Nu launched a sweeping revolutionary agenda meant to reshape Burma into a country of peace, prosperity, and rule of law. He called this the Pyidawtha (‘Happy Land’) plan. Advised by Soviet and American experts, U Nu’s cabinet designed Pyidawtha as a bundle of 10 five-year plans targeting key government sectors. While each plan differed in focus, all plans shared one commonality: they all fixated on ‘improving’ the village. By focusing reform efforts on rural life, Pyidawtha placed the village at the center of a raging political debate over development and historical legacy. U Nu understood the Burmese village as a postcolonial link to an imagined precolonial past, while his detractors – namely ideologues within the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) – viewed the village as a colonial construct that had to be ‘smashed’ before Burma could escape its colonial past. Throughout the 1950s, the Burmese state and the CPB published competing plans for village reform, and even implemented projects in their respective territories. After a socialist military junta deposed U Nu in 1962, the ‘planning war’ between the state and the CPB only grew hotter. In this paper, drawing on Burmese state planning documents, foreign expert memoirs, intelligence reports, and Communist Party archives, I examine Burma’s peculiar patchwork of postcolonial village reform through the lens of competing village imaginaries. I then bring this case study into global conversations on rurality and development by reading in examples from Nehru’s India and Nyerere’s Tanzania.

Handloom Weavers Mobilization in 1952-3: The limits of Planning in Democratic India

During the 1940s, as Indian independence loomed in the political horizon, political activists, business leaders and economists alike drew up new plans for the reconstruction and development of India’s economy. The choice of technique to increase productivity whilst ensuring adequate employment to India’s large and predominantly, agrarian population was a much-heated topic of debate. The conventional narrative on economic planning pits the Gandhians, with their advocacy of village-based, non-commercial cottage industries against Nehru’s vision of an urban and heavy-industry based economy.

In this paper, I shift the focus away from intellectuals and technocrats and shed light on the handloom weavers of Madras and their vision of economic justice in the wake of Decolonization. I look at the nature and impact of large-scale political mobilization amongst the handloom workers in Madras Presidency in 1952-53. Under the leadership of C. N. Annadurai, the leader of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), handloom weavers across Madras came out on the streets and protested in solidarity with the anti-Hindi agitation. The political protests urged the national government to revisit
its planning diktats and institute economic policies that protected the interests of small-scale textile producers over (the north Indian) capitalist cotton mills. The sustained agitations of the handloom workers resulted in the New Textile Policy of 1954 that guaranteed the exclusive rights of handloom (and power loom) producers to manufacture certain items of clothing.

13. Friedrich Asschenfeldt, Princeton University

Planning Agriculture in the USSR and international market coordination during the Great Depression

To finance its industrialization effort during the First Five Year plan, the Soviet Union relied on the export of grain produced by peasants in “collectivized” farms. This paper discusses the neglected international dimension of Stalin’s drive to finance industrialization with agricultural exports – how the declining terms of trade for agricultural exporters impacted the USSR’s ability to fund imports of machinery and how the rise of trade barriers across the world affected its ability to sell its produce. In the West, the depression raised concerns that the Soviet Union was “dumping” its agricultural produce on world markets in the face of famine and malnutrition at home, further increasing the stakes of Soviet grain exports to the West. The paper presents the Stalinist response to the Great Depression as a stark outlier compared to the emerging mechanisms of surplus commodities’ control that were introduced in the wake of the great depression in other agricultural countries – such as the price support offered through the Canadian Wheat Board or Roosevelt’s Agricultural Adjustment Act: Whereas other producers of grain voluntarily limited production and indemnified farmers for it, the Stalinist Soviet Union sought to expand exports at any costs.

14. Julia Marino, Princeton University

Strategic Visions: Tracing the Evolution of American Industrial Policy in the Late Twentieth Century

This paper examines two significant episodes that shed light on the evolving terrain of American industrial policy during the 1980s and 1990s. Each instance illustrates a different dimension of the dynamic relationship between state intervention and business lobbyists amidst late-Cold War economic reorganization and technological change, demonstrating how eventually, even Republicans endorsed targeted governmental intervention.

The Harvard Conference on Competitiveness in 1980 serves as a representative example of public and private sector collaboration with a goal to bolster industrial competitiveness. At this gathering, one hundred and fifty participants from diverse sectors suggested a unified plan for “reindustrialization” to counter economic downturn in comparison to Japan. The recommended strategies, such as trade reform, deregulation, and amplified government R&D investment, aimed to rejuvenate “smokestack”
industries (including auto and steel) and foster nascent “sunrise” industries (like semiconductors).

Findings of the Harvard Conference participants were published in several leading newspapers, suggesting strategies like trade reform, deregulation, and amplified government R&D investment for broad industrial sector support. In the early 1980s, Republicans firmly rejected such proposals, arguing that “industrial policy” symbolized excessive government intervention.

Next, I delve into how business lobbying entities along with the Departments of Defense and Commerce unveiled parallel lists of “critical technologies” in the early 1990s. These lists spotlighted and prioritized technologies supposedly essential for national security and competitiveness. Defense interests and Republicans (including President George Bush) aligned with Democrats to advocate heightened federal investment in these twenty-three technologies, which encompassed areas like micro- and nanofabrication, ceramics, and software, among others. I argue that “critical technologies” symbolized a rebranding of earlier industrial policy proposals. Interest groups reframed their objectives in terms of exciting technological advancements and claimed that the technologies’ applications spanned a broad array of industries, thereby circumventing prior critiques of free-market intervention.

15. Véronique Mickisch (PhD candidate, New York University)

Friedrich Pollock: From the German revolution and Soviet planning to the New Deal, 1918-1938

This paper examines the evolution of the economic thought and practice of Friedrich Pollock, one of the founders and most prominent economists of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, in the inter-war period. Like many of his generation, Pollock was attracted to socialism in the wake of World War I and became fascinated with the Soviet planning experiment. As the author of one of the most substantive contemporary studies of Soviet planning (1929), he was in touch with many of the leading Soviet economists who helped develop the First Five Year Plan. Though never a member of the Communist party, Pollock shared key conceptions that had motivated Soviet economic planners, including the conviction that economic planning was possible on an autarkic basis. In 1932, Pollock was involved in an initiative, led by the Communist International, to unite far-right German intellectuals and left-wing economists on the basis of their admiration for Soviet state planning. Yet by 1934, his economic thinking and activities had shifted toward advancing state regulation of the American economy as a member of the National Planning Board of the Roosevelt administration. Thus, from ideas for a radical overhaul of the economy from below, Pollock arrived, within the space of just a few years, at a conception of economic planning as something that was managed exclusively from the top and confined to the capitalist framework. Notwithstanding this radical shift, which mirrored the disenchantment of a broader layer of left-wing intellectuals with the prospect of social revolution, I argue that there was one element in his economic thinking that remained consistent throughout this period: the conviction that the planned restructuring of the economy could and should evolve within the framework of the nation state.