

## **Rise and Fall of Communism in the 20th Century**

GVPT 459 H

Tyd 1108

*Th 2-4:45 pm*

University of Maryland

Spring 2023

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### **Rise and Fall of Communism in the 20th Century**

In December 1991, the USSR, the first communist state and the West's main rival in the Cold War, ceased to exist. Two years earlier, the Soviet bloc disintegrated as a result of a series of revolutionary upheavals in East and Central Europe. The aftermath of these earth-shattering events has been a new world, one with more liberties, but also one full of unprecedented dangers. This course examines the rise and fall of communism both as a utopian theory and institutional practice in the 20th century. Lectures and class discussions will explore the role of prominent personalities in both the making and dissolution of communist regimes (Who was Marx? Who was Lenin? Who was Trotsky? Who was Mao? Who was Stalin? Who is Fidel Castro?). We will discuss Communism's main ideological sources, key notions, as well as the most significant events in the dynamics of communism: the October Revolution, the establishment of the USSR, Lenin's Bolshevism, Stalinism versus Trotskyism, the interaction between Stalinism and Nazism, the Stalinization of Eastern Europe, Khrushchev and the first reformist wave, the Hungarian revolution, the Prague Spring, the revolutions of 1989, Gorbachev and the end of the Soviet Union. Special attention will be paid to the role of intellectuals in communist movements: partisanship, commitment, faith, and, in many cases, disillusionment. The course will explain the appeals of revolutionary politics and the role of "true believers" in totalitarian mass movements.

### ***The Structure of the Course:***

This class will take place in a seminar format and we will rely on ELMS for announcements. Class readings are a crucial component of this class. I expect you to finish the assigned readings before our class meets. Participation in class discussions is one of the most important components of this class.

At the beginning of the semester, (I will announce it with anticipation) you will choose a topic from a list that I will provide for your short presentation and final paper.

Your final grade will be based on class participation, one midterm consisting of a short presentation (from the list that I provide) and a final paper (based on your presentation).

In addition, occasionally I will post a short, extra credit assignment on ELMS for anyone interested on improving their grade. The final grade reflects the overall class performance. As events unfold in the former communist countries, students are encouraged to read either BBC News, The New York Times or The Washington Post (or both) on a daily base. In addition, students are encouraged to read East European Politics and Societies, Problems of Post-Communism, The Economist, The New York Review of Books and The New Republic (pieces dealing with changes in the former communist bloc).

Please be aware that lectures will introduce and examine other important sources and therefore attendance is critical.

### **Course Requirements**

*The reading assignments are an essential component of this course; it is important that you keep up with the readings to best understand the lectures and engage in class discussion.*

- A) Class Presentation: 40%
- B) Final take home exam—45%
- C) Class Participation—15%

### **Policy on Excused Absences related to COVID-19**

In light of the COVID-19 epidemic, self-certified notes will serve as documentation for COVID-19 related absences or missed course expectations. This means that students do not need a note signed by a doctor or other health professional for COVID-19 related absences.

In the event that students cannot complete the regular course assessments due to COVID-19 related absences, faculty can suggest alternative assignments for students to make up missing work and complete the course. According to university policy, these alternative assignments are permitted and cannot be the basis for an Arbitrary and Capricious grading claim.

***Required Readings:***

1. Vladimir Tismaneanu, *The Devil in History* (paperback)
2. Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon* (paper)
3. Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy* (paper)
5. Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, Yale UP, 2012 (paper)
6. Richard H. Crossman, *The God that Failed* (paper)

***Recommended Readings:***

1. Richard Pipes, *Communism: A Concise History* (paper)
2. Adam Michnik, *Letters from Prison* (paper)
3. Robert Service, *Stalin: A Biography* (paper)
4. Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism* (paper)
5. Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Reinventing Politics* (paper)

**Schedule:****Week 1 (Jan 26)**

Communism and Fascism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; One Hundred Years since Hitler coming to power, seventy years since Stalin's death. Main components of Marxism: revolutionary utopia, class struggle and class consciousness, role of the proletariat. Historical materialism and Marx's dialectics. The First International. The Paris Commune.

- Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, Chapter 1
- Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto* (complete)
- Tismaneanu, *The Devil in History*: Prologue and Ch. 1

**Week 2 ( Feb 2)**

Class discussion, "Communist Manifesto". Second International, evolutionary versus revolutionary Marxism. Western versus Russian Marxism. From Marx to Lenin. The idea of Communism.

- Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, Chapter 2

**Week 3 ( feb 9)**

Revolutionary traditions in Russia: populism, revolutionary terror, Russian intelligentsia's salvationist dreams. Lenin's Marxism: The split with the Mensheviks. The nature and logic of Bolshevism. The October Revolution and the fate of socialism in Russia. The Third (Communist) International – the Comintern: The Soviet Union as the center of a world revolution.

- Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, Chapters 3 and 4
- Tismaneanu, *The Devil in History*, Ch 3
- Recommended reading: Pipes, *Communism a Concise History*

**Week 4 (Feb 16)**

From Leninism to Stalinism. The main features of Stalinism. The struggle for Lenin's mantle. Stalin versus Trotsky. The building of the Stalinist state (industrialization, collectivization, ideological regimentation, police state, cult of the "charismatic" leader). Political purges and the Great Terror. Ideology, power and the rise of the totalitarian state. Stalinism and Fascism: a comparative analysis.

- Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, Chapters 5, 6, 7
- Tismaneanu, *The Devil in History*, Ch 2
- Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*

**Week 5 ( Feb 23)**

Secular religion, search for salvation, and mass totalitarian movements. Class discussions on books by Crossman. Special focus in the Crossman volume on essays by Koestler, Silone, Richard Wight and Louis Fisher. Questions to be addressed: Why did morally driven individuals join communist parties? What did communism offer in terms of psychological comfort in turbulent times? What are the main features of Messianic revolutionary movements? Communism as an opiate for the intellectuals.

- Crossman, *The God that Failed*

**Week 6 ( March 2)**

World War II and the road to the Cold War. Conclusions on Stalinism.

- Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, Chapter 8
- Tismaneanu, *The Devil in History*, Chapter 4.

**Week 7 ( March 9)**

Divisions within world communism: The Communist Information Bureau (Cominform), Josip Broz Tito, the Yugoslav schism, Yugoslavia's excommunication. The formation of the Soviet bloc and the Cold War. Stalinism in East-Central Europe: show trials, purges, repression. Communist takeover in China (Mao and Maoism).

- Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, Chapter 9
- Recommended reading: Tismaneanu, *Reinventing Politics*, Chapter 5

### **Week 8 ( March 16)**

Khrushchev and de-Stalinization; the 20th Party Congress (February 1956) and the disintegration of Stalin's myth. The Hungarian Revolution, Polish reforms, and the role of critical intellectuals. The revisionist illusions.

- Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, Chapter 9
- Recommended reading: Tismaneanu, *Reinventing Politics*, Chapter 6

### **Week 9 ( March 30)**

Ideological erosion, political decay and economic crisis of Soviet-style regimes (Brezhnev's period of "stagnation").

- Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, Chapter 10

### **Week 10 ( April 6)**

Bureaucratic centralism versus socialism with a human face: Dubcek, Prague Spring, the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. Everyday life under Communism in the 1980s. Cuban Communism (Castro, Che Guevara). Cultural Revolution in China.

- Tismaneanu, *The Devil in History*, Ch 5
- Recommended reading: Tismaneanu, *Reinventing Politics*, Chapter 6

### **Week 11 (April 13)**

The independent union Solidarity and the collapse of Polish socialism. Solidarity, Charter 77 and other illustrations of the rise of civil society. Perestroika, glasnost and Soviet reform under Mikhail Gorbachev. Gorbachev's strategy and the causes of its failure.

- Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, Chapters 11 and 12

### **Week 12 (April 20)**

The revolutions of 1989 and the end of the Soviet bloc: causes, meanings, consequences. The demise of the USSR. Nationalism, democracy and civil society in East-Central Europe

- Tismaneanu, *The Devil in History*, Chapter 6
- Recommended reading: Tismaneanu, *Reinventing Politics*, Chapter 7

**Week 13 ( April 27)**

The main problems of post-communism: The Leninist legacies and the search for pluralism. The fateful logic of utopia: Malia's critique of Soviet-style socialism: was socialism Russia's curse, or was the Russian tradition that de-humanized socialism? Is liberalism possible in post-communist countries?

- Malia, The Soviet Tragedy, Chapter 13 and Epilogue

**Week 14 ( April 4)**

Main threats to liberal democracy: populist collectivism, clericalism, ethnic fundamentalism, and imperialist militarism in Russia. Ethnic furies in post-communist societies: the breakdown of Yugoslavia. Vladimir Putin, what is Putinism, Origins, dynamics, effects (VT online articles).

- Tismaneanu, The Devil in History, Conclusions
- Recommended Reading: Tismaneanu, Reinventing Politics, Epilogue

**Week 15: ( April 15)**

Review, Q/A