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GVPT 459 R
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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.

Requirements

Students are required to read the assigned readings before each class period. In addition, students are expected to read one newspaper on a daily basis (either Washington Post or New York Times). Participation in class discussions is strongly encouraged. Grades will be based on a final take home exam, two unannounced quizzes and class participation. Extra credit

can be earned by preparing a short class presentation on a relevant topic; the time and details must first be approved by the teaching assistant. and the professor.

There will be an announced in class quiz, an in class mid-term, and a take-home final exam. The final paper (exam) will count as the main criterion for the final grade, as well as class participation.

Note: Please keep in mind that this week-by-week syllabus is subject to modification, in connection to extended class discussions on certain topics, ongoing events in the former Soviet bloc, film presentation, etc. The syllabus is meant to give students a structural view of the topics approached in this course.

Readings

1. Vladimir Tismaneanu, Reinventing Politics (paper)
2. Arthur Koestler, Darkness at Noon (paper)
3. Martin Malia, The Soviet Tragedy (paper)
4. Archie Brown, The Rise and Fall of Communism (paper)
5. Marx and Engels, The Communist Manifesto, Yale UP, 2012 (paper)
6. Richard H. Crossman, The God that Failed (paper)

Recommended

1. Richard Pipes, Communism: A Concise History (paper)
2. Adam Michnik, Letters from Prison (paper)
3. Robert Service, Stalin: A Biography (paper)

Week 1: 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.

Readings: Malia, Chapter 1
Marx: Communist Manifesto (complete)

Week 2: Class discussion, "Communist Manifesto". Second International, evolutionary versus revolutionary Marxism. Western versus Russian Marxism. From Marx to Lenin. The idea of Communism.

Malia, Chapter 2
Brown, Chapters 1-4

Week 3: 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, Chapters 3 and 4
Brown, Chapters 4-6

Recommended reading: Pipes

Week 4: 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, Chapters 5, 6, 7
Brown, Chapters 7-9
Koestler Darkness at Noon
Crossman

Week 5: 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.

Brown, Chapters 7-10

Week 6: World War II and the road to the Cold War. Conclusions on Stalinism.

Malia, Chapter 8

Tismaneanu, Chapters 1-4

Brown, Chapters 10-12

Possible film presentation: the Russian film "The Thief" (special screening)

Week 7: 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).

Brown/ 11 and 12

Malia, Chapter 8

Tismaneanu, Chapter 5

Possible film: "Confession" by Costa Gavras.

Week 8: 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, Chapter 9

Tismaneanu, Chapter 6

Brown, Chapter 13

Weeks 9-10: Ideological erosion, political decay and economic crisis of Soviet-style regimes (Brezhnev's period of "stagnation"). 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.

Brown, Chapters 14-20

Malia, Chapter 10

Tismaneanu

Week 11: 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. 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, Conclusions and Epilogue

Brown, Chapters 21-27

Malia, Chapters 11 and 12

Week 12: 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? 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.

Malia, Chapter 13 and Epilogue

Brown, Chapter 21-30

NOTE: These topics will be addressed in lectures and class attendance is absolutely critical for keeping pace with the sweeping changes in the post-communist world.