

HISTORY 362-01
HISTORY OF THE USSR
Spring, 2011
PROFESSOR WEISENSEL
MAIN 307
OFFICE HOURS: MWF 2:30-4:00
X6570

This course presents a survey of the history of the USSR from the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, through to the Revolution of 1991. This field, like all scholarship, is alive and filled with controversies. Arguments and disagreements identify our field, and our course will emphasize those controversies. The course then will be a survey of the events of Soviet history and the controversies surrounding the interpretation of those events.

“High” politics (i.e., the personalities and personal acts of Nicholas II, Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Gorbachev) will generally not be the focus of the course. Rather we will emphasize:

1. The question of context or origin. What was the world and domestic context that impacted Soviet leaders and influenced their decisions? Is knowing the context important?
2. The question of people’s motivations. Did people obey because they were forced (state control), or because they wanted to (voluntary loyalty)?
3. The citizen-government relationship. How responsive to the needs and wants of the public was the single-party system?
4. Was the USSR a “normal” or “abnormal” state?

We all are aware how the American media would answer the questions above, especially the last three. We however will try to rise above the pressures of our cultural assumptions about right and wrong, and normal and abnormal, and deal with the Soviets/Russians on their own terms and in their own context.

Each student will be expected to come to class and to read the assigned materials. The class meets three times per week, MWF, 10:50-11:50. There will be required two short essays (4 pp. each), two in-class quizzes and one research paper. They are spaced throughout the course and are indicated in the syllabus. The research paper (10-12 pp.) will be on a topic of your choice. For this third essay all I ask is that you begin with the premise, “Soviet history is frequently reinterpreted.” For the two short essays I will turn out the questions far ahead of the deadlines. The readings we do together in class will provide you with ideas and materials for the two essays (i.e., there will be no extra readings required for them). I will comment on drafts of essays before the deadlines, but the version you turn it at the deadline will be the one to get the grade. An important part of your grade (20%) will come from your class participation/attendance. An in-class oral report (on a subject we don’t have time to discuss or read about together) as well as attendance and regular and quality contribution to the class discussion will constitute this part of your grade.

Late papers are strongly discouraged. Please note that incompletes will not be considered for this class except under extraordinary circumstances. Class attendance is required. If you are absent more than a couple of times, it will adversely affect your grade.

Your grade will be determined as follows:

- a. 2 essays- 30%;
- b. 2 quizzes- 20%
- c. Research paper- 30%
- b. class participation and attendance- 20%

READINGS (At the Macalester Bookstore, Lambert Building):

1. Suny, ed., The Structure of Soviet History. Oxford paperback;
2. Andreev-Khomiakov, Bitter Waters. Westview paperback;
3. Brooks, Thank You, Comrade Stalin! Princeton hardback;
4. (Recommended Only!) Suny, The Soviet Experiment. Oxford U. Press paperback;
5. Readings will also include articles, chapters and documents from journals and other books. They are all available on the Moodle site for this course (indicated as “Moodle”).

1. Week of Jan. 24-28.

Course Introduction. Influence of the Pre-Soviet (Tsarist) Past? World War I and 1917.

- a. Zile, documents (Moodle);
- b. Mironov, “Peasant Popular Culture and the Origins of Soviet Totalitarianism” in Frank and Steinberg, eds. Cultures in Flux (Princeton, 1994), pp. 54-73 (Moodle).

2. Week of Jan. 31-Feb. 4.

The People and the Two Revolutions of 1917.

What was the relationship between the Bolshevik Party and the Russian masses in 1917? Was the Bolshevik Revolution just an elite-led coup d’etat? Or, did ordinary people have something to do with it? If so, what?

- a. Kolonitskii, “Antibourgeois propaganda...”, in Suny, The Structure of Soviet History (hand-out in class);
- b. Selected documents (from pp. 32-47), Suny, Structure (hand-out in class).
- c. Suny, “Toward a Social History of the October Revolution, in Suny, Structure, pp. 6-22 (hand-out in class).

3. Week of Feb. 7-11.

First quiz, Feb. 11th (c. 15 minutes).

The People in the Russian Civil War and “War Communism”, 1918-21.

Did “conditions”(“context”) cause the brutalities of the Russian Civil War? Or, were these brutalities only a logical extension of Lenin’s elitist philosophy (do whatever is necessary to establish the perfect communist world, communism, no matter how people suffer)?

- a. Holquist, “Information is the Alpha and Omega...,” in Suny, Structure, pp. 50-62;
- b. Suny, Structure, Ch. 2, selected documents (especially pp. 73-86);
- c. Channon, “The Bolsheviks and the Peasantry...,” in Waldron, The Soviet Union (2007), pp. 73-104 (Moodle)

4. Week of Feb. 14-18.

NEP (The “New Economic Policy”), 1921-28. Nationality and the Creation of the USSR.

Was NEP a “road not traveled?” That is, did it have intrinsic merits (its support by the populace?, its advantages over confrontation as the *modus vivendi* in foreign relations?, etc.) that could have been the permanent basis of Soviet economic life? Or, was it a merely a “resting place” along the road to complete forced communism?

- a. Martin, “An Affirmative-Action Empire,” in Suny, *Structure*, pp. 93-103.
- b. Suny, *Structure*, Ch. 3 Selected documents (esp. pp. 24-26, 130-37;
- c. Zile, *Ideas and Forces* (Zile #4) (Moodle).

5. Week of Feb. 21-25.

Feb, 21. First essay (4 pp.) due in class.

The Stalin Revolution.

Is the Stalin Revolution the product of a misshapen, totalitarian personality (Stalin’s)? Or, is it a “normal” event for a totalitarian state?

- a. Timasheff, “World Revolution or Russia,” in Suny, *Structure*, pp. 188-198;
- b. Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!* (Princeton, 2000), start.
- c. Andreev-Khomiakov, *Bitter Waters* (Westview, 1997), start.

6. Week of Feb. 28-Mar. 4.

Stalin's Society (I).

Was the Stalin regimentation of society “normal?” Or, was the Stalin regimented state the mark of an “abnormal” state (i.e., immoral, illegitimate)? How do we judge? The Case of Collectivization.

- a. Angelina, “The Most Important Thing,” in Fitzpatrick and Slezkine, *In the Shadow of Revolution* (Princeton, 2000), pp. 305-321;
- b. Kravchenko, “Harvest in Hell,” from *idem.*, *I Chose Freedom* (1946), pp. 110-31. (Moodle);
- c. Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!*, continue.

7. Week of Mar. 7-11.

Stalin's Society (II).

Was the power of Stalin complete? Did people have any recourse at all? Did they protest?

- a. Shlopentokh, “Public Opinion,” from *idem.*, *A Normal Totalitarian State* (2001), 127-52 (Moodle);
- b. Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!*, read through Ch. 6;
- c. Andreev-Khomiakov, *Bitter Waters*, read through Ch. 6.

8. March 12-20. Spring Break.

9. Week of Mar.21-25.

Stalin's Society (III)

The Purges, the "Great Fatherland War," and Soviet Society.
How did World War II effect Soviet "normality?"

- a. Kravchenko, "My First Purge," in idem., I Chose Freedom (1946), pp. 132-47 (Moodle).
- b. Andreev-Khomiakov, Bitter Waters, finish.
- c. Brooks, Thank You, Comrade Stalin!, Chs. 7-8.

10. Week of Mar.28-Apr. 1.

Postwar Recovery then Reform. Khrushchev takes power.
Is Khrushchev the same as Lenin and Stalin?

- a. Field, "Irreconcilable Differences: Divorce and Conceptions of Private Life in the Khrushchev Era," in Suny, Structure, pp. 330-38;
- b. Arbatov, The System, Ch. 3 (Moodle);
- c. Shlapentokh, "An Effective Political Machine," in idem., A Normal Totalitarian Society, pp. 103-126 (Moodle).

11. Week of Apr.4-8.

April 8th. Independent research essay draft (10-12 pp.) due in class.

Oligarchy under Brezhnev. Party over Personality under Brezhnev. The Machine Runs into Trouble.

Is there a connection between Soviet economic (and political) policy and "running down" in the country?

- a. Bushnell, "The New Soviet Man Turns Pessimist," in Suny, Structure, pp. 360-70;
- b. Arbatov, The System, 6-7 (Moodle);
- c. Shlapentokh, "The Economy. Organic Flaws and Achievements," in idem., A Normal Totalitarian Society, pp. 103-26 (Moodle).

12. Week of Apr. 11-15.

Mar. 15. Second essay (4 pp.) due in class.

Brezhnev and Oligarchy. Preparing the Revolution.

- a. Bonnell and Freidin, "Televorot," in Suny, Structure, pp. 406-423;
- b. Matthews, Poverty in the Soviet Union, 2-3;
- c. Zile, Ideas and Forces, selected docs. (Zile #6) (Moodle).

13. Week of Apr. 18-22.

Second Quiz Apr. 18th (15 minutes).

The “Gorbachev Revolution,” and the Reaction of Soviet Society. Does the relationship between law and society change under the “reformer” Gorbachev? Can totalitarian states reform themselves and yet remain themselves?

- a. Suny, Structure, Ch. 8, Selected documents, TBA;
- b. Gooding, “Perestroika as a Revolution from Within,” in Waldron, ed., The Soviet Union, pp. 449-70 (Moodle);
- c. Shlapentokh, “Reforming the System,” in idem., A Normal Totalitarian Society, pp. 179-200 (Moodle).

14. Week of Apr. 25-29.

Gorbachev's Revolution and the End of the USSR.

- a. Dallin, “The Causes of the Collapse of the USSR,” in Suny, Structure, 549-64;
- b. Z, “To the Lenin Mausoleum,” in Suny, Structure, pp. 533-49;
- c. Holmes, “What Russia Teaches Us Now,” in Suny, Structure, pp. 564-73.

15. Week of May 2.

Sum Up.

Final (revised) version of the research paper essay is due in my office by 5 p.m. on May 9th.