Course Overview

Between 1917 and 1991, Russia and its former empire were ruled by one of the most brutal dictatorships of the twentieth century, while undergoing a series of political, social, and cultural transformations without precedent in world history. This course will examine the history of the Soviet Union from the October Revolution until its sudden collapse in 1991, with particular attention to the country’s political and social history.

More specifically, we will look at the ways that the ideology of the Bolshevik Party was transformed into reality over 75 years of history. From the moment that the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917 until the present day, historians have debated the meaning—and the causes—of the October Revolution; in every period of Soviet history, the country’s leaders claimed to be following the true path of Communism, while denouncing their rivals (and often their predecessors) for straying from socialism. This class will therefore examine how the nature of the Soviet Union was redefined by each successive generation and will seek to relate each part of the Soviet experience to the larger trajectory of the country’s history. Was Stalinism a departure from the revolution’s original ideology, or the purest expression of the meaning of 1917? Was the Khrushchev era an unprecedented liberalization of Soviet government policy, or an attempt to return to the country’s Leninist roots? We will not only seek to answer questions like these, but to examine the ways that everyday citizens experienced Communist rule and to understand how the revolutionary enthusiasm that at times dominated the country’s political discourse ultimately gave way to the cynicism and corruption of the USSR’s final days.

Course Readings

The following books are all on sale at the college bookstore and on course reserve at Burling Library:

Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Heart of a Dog*
Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s*
Yoram Gorlizki and Oleg Khlevniuk, *Cold Peace: Stalin and the Soviet Ruling Circle, 1945-1953*
David Remnick, *Lenin’s Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire*
Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States*

Other readings (marked “[Pioneerweb]” in the outline below) will be available on the course’s Blackboard site.
Assignments and Grading

Your grade in this class will be based on the following requirements. Note that you must hand in every written assignment listed below in order to pass the class, and that if your grades improve steadily over the course of the semester, I will take that into consideration in determining your final grade:

**Four 4-to-5-page writing assignments** (worth 40% of your grade). Over the course of the semester, you will write four papers of 4-5 pages each. The first three will all be based on materials you have read for class and will require no outside reading. The fourth assignment will be an analysis of the oral history interviews of the Harvard Project, asking you to use those interviews to analyze Stalinist everyday life. Your papers will be due on February 13, February 27, April 17, and May 8.

**A mid-term exam** (10% of your grade.) This exam will have two sections: an identification section (in which you explain the significance of several people, places, things, or concepts from the first half of the course) and an essay section (in which you will answer one of two essay questions offered to you). The mid-term exam will take place in class on Monday, March 15.

**A final exam** (25% of your grade.) This exam will have roughly the same format as the mid-term and will take place on Tuesday, May 18, at 9:00 AM. The ID section will only cover material from the second half of the course; there will be two essay sections, one focusing on the course’s second half and the other covering broader themes in Soviet history.

**Class participation** (25% of your grade). The final requirement for this course is active and informed participation in classroom discussions. I will base this part of your grade on several criteria, including attendance, frequency of participation, and the insightfulness of your classroom comments. Although I hope that everyone will participate regularly, note that I’m more interested in the quality than in the quantity of your participation. Note also that your participation grade will suffer if you have more than two unexcused absences, and that you run the risk of a participation grade of F (or even zero) if you have six or more unexcused absences.

**Extension policy**

Each student in the class can have one (and, under normal circumstances, only one) 48-hour extension on a writing assignment over the course of the semester. To claim this extension, send me a brief email asking for extra time before the assignment’s deadline; I will grant this extension automatically, so there is no need for you to explain why you need extra time. (Keep in mind, however, that once you’ve received an extension on one assignment, I will not give you an extension on another except in the case of a documented emergency.) In the absence of an extension, late assignments will be penalized one third of a letter grade per day: that is, a paper that would have earned an A if handed in on time will instead earn a B+ if handed in two days late.
Paper rewrite policy

Each student in the class will also have the opportunity to revise one of his or her first three papers and to hand it in again for re-grading; if you choose to exercise this option, your final grade for the assignment will be the average of your original grade and the grade for your revised paper. (In other words, if you at first receive a grade of B– and you’re given a grade of B+ for the rewrite, you will earn a B on the paper overall.) Students who want to rewrite a paper will be required to meet with me ahead of time to discuss their revision strategies, and will only be allowed to hand in a rewrite once over the course of the semester. When I return the original assignment, I’ll also announce a deadline for students to hand in a rewritten version of that paper.

Important notes

Grinnell College makes reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Students need to provide documentation identifying any special needs to the Dean for Student Academic Support and Advising, Joyce Stern, whose office is located on the third floor of the Rosenfield Center. Students should then notify me within the first few days of class.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Monday, January 25: Introduction to the Course

Reading: Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, ch. 1

Wednesday, January 27: Prelude to Revolution

Reading: Orlando Figes, *A People’s Tragedy*, ch. 1 [Pioneerweb]
Semen Kanatchikov, *A Radical Worker in Tsarist Russia*, excerpts [Pioneerweb]

Friday, January 29: The Bolshevik Movement and the Two Revolutions

Reading: excerpts from the writings of V. I. Lenin [Pioneerweb]
Suny, pp. 35-55, 96-120

Monday, February 1: Revolution!

Reading: Ronald Grigor Suny, “Toward a Social History of the Bolshevik Revolution” [Pioneerweb]
document packet on the revolution [Pioneerweb]

Wednesday, February 3: Remembering the Revolution

Film: *October* (Sergei Eisenstein, dir.) (time TBA)

Friday, February 5: Civil War!

Reading: Suny, pp. 56-94; *The ABC of Communism*, excerpts [Pioneerweb]
Monday, February 8: Revolution and Civil War in Context

Reading: Peter Holquist, “‘Information is the Alpha and Omega of Our Work’: Bolshevik Surveillance in its Pan-European Perspective” [Pioneerweb]

Wednesday, February 10: Faction-Fighting and the Rise of the Dictatorship

Reading: Suny, pp. 121-169
Aleksandra Kollontai, “The Workers’ Opposition” [Pioneerweb]
Resolutions of the Tenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party [Pioneerweb]

Friday, February 12: Russian Society during NEP

Reading: Suny, pp. 170-194
Sheila Fitzpatrick, “The Problem of Class Identity in NEP Society” [Pioneerweb]
Alan Ball, “Private Trade and Traders during NEP” [Pioneerweb]

Saturday, February 13: FIRST WRITING ASSIGNMENT IS DUE AT 5:00 PM

Monday, February 15: The Contradictions of NEP

Reading: Eric Naiman, “The Case of Chubarov Alley” [Pioneerweb]
Suny, pp. 195-214

Wednesday, February 17: Culture of the NEP Era

Reading: Mikhail Bulgakov, The Heart of a Dog (entire)

Friday, February 19: An Overview of Stalinism

Reading: Suny, pp. 217-268

Monday, February 22: The Stalin Dictatorship

Reading: Simon Sebag Montefiore, Stalin: In the Court of the Red Tsar, pp. 1-57, 93-101 [Pioneerweb]
Oleg Khlevniuk, “Stalin as Dictator: The Personalisation of Power” [Pioneerweb]

Wednesday, February 24: Stalin’s Personality Cult

Reading: Sarah Davies, “Stalin and the Making of the Leader Cult in the 1930s” [Pioneerweb]
Sarah Davies, “The Leader Cult in Official Discourse” [Pioneerweb]
David Brandenberger, “Stalin as Symbol: A Case Study of the Personality Cult” [Pioneerweb]
Friday, February 26: Collectivization and De-Kulakization

Reading: Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*, excerpts [Pioneerweb]

**Saturday, February 27:** SECOND WRITING ASSIGNMENT IS DUE AT 5:00

Monday, March 1: Everyday Life and the Communist Party

Reading: Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, pp. 1-66

Wednesday, March 3: A New Society?

Reading: Fitzpatrick, pp. 67-114

Friday, March 5: Ostracized Citizens and Broken Families

Reading: Fitzpatrick, pp. 115-189, 218-228

Monday, March 8: The Internalization of Soviet Values?

Reading: Stephen Kotkin, “Speaking Bolshevik” [Pioneerweb]

Wednesday, March 10: A Woman of the 1930s

Reading: excerpts from the diary of Galina Shtange [Pioneerweb]

Friday, March 12: Nationalism in the USSR

Reading: Terry Martin, “An Affirmative Action Empire: The Soviet Union as the Highest Form of Imperialism” [Pioneerweb]
Terry Martin, “Modernization or Neotraditionalism? Ascribed Nationality and Soviet Primordialism” [Pioneerweb]

Monday, March 15: MID-TERM EXAM

Wednesday, March 17: The Purges

Reading: Fitzpatrick, pp. 190-217
James Harris, “The Purging of Local Cliques in the Urals Region, 1936-7” [Pioneerweb]
review Suny, pp. 261-268

Friday, March 19: A Memoir of the Purges

Readings: Eugenia Ginzburg, *Journey into the Whirlwind*, excerpts [Pioneerweb]
SPRING BREAK: MARCH 20 – APRIL 4

Monday, April 5: The War and After

Reading: Suny, pp. 309-335, 363-384

Wednesday, April 7: Reconstructing Stalinist Politics

Reading: Yoram Gorlizki and Oleg Khlevniuk, *Cold Peace*, pp. 3-65

Friday, April 9: NO CLASS!!!

Monday, April 12: The Late Stalinist Shift

Reading: Gorlizki and Khlevniuk, pp. 69-120

Wednesday, April 14: Stalin’s Political Legacy

Reading: Gorlizki and Khlevniuk, pp. 123-171

Friday, April 16: Stalinist Values after the War

Reading: Vera Dunham, “The Big Deal” [Pioneerweb]
Cynthia Hooper, “A Darker ‘Big Deal’” [Pioneerweb]

Saturday, April 17: 5-PAGE PAPER IS DUE AT 5:00 PM

Monday, April 19: The Death of Stalin

Reading: Miriam Dobson, “1953: ‘The Most Painful Year’” [Pioneerweb]
Emil Draitser, *Shush!*, excerpts [Pioneerweb]

Wednesday, April 21: Khrushchev’s Rise to Power

Reading: Suny, pp. 387-420
Nikita Khrushchev’s Secret Speech [Pioneerweb]

Friday, April 23: Khrushchev’s Politics of the Past

Monday, April 26: Khrushchev’s Thaw

Reading: Ilya Ehrenburg, *The Thaw* (entire) [Pioneerweb]

Wednesday, April 28: Family Life after Stalin

Deborah Field, “Irreconcilable Differences: Divorce and Conceptions of Private Life in the Khrushchev Era” [Pioneerweb]

Friday, April 30: The Brezhnev Era

Reading: Suny, pp. 421-446
John Bushnell, “The ‘New Soviet Man’ Turns Pessimist” [Pioneerweb]
James R. Millar, “The Little Deal: Brezhnev’s Contribution to Acquisitive Socialism” [Pioneerweb]

Monday, May 3: Life under Brezhnev

Film: *The Irony of Fate* (Eldar Riazanov, dir.) (time TBA)

Wednesday, May 5: The End of the USSR

Reading: Suny, pp. 447-485

Friday, May 7: History’s Revenge

Reading: David Remnick, *Lenin’s Tomb*, preface and pp. 1-70

Saturday, May 8: 5-PAGE PAPER IS DUE AT 5:00 PM

Monday, May 10: An Old Communist Speaks Out

Reading: Remnick, pp. 70-140
Nina Andreeva, “I Cannot Give Up My Principles” [Pioneerweb]

Wednesday, May 12: Glasnost and Political Change under Gorbachev

Reading: Remnick, pp. 162-197, 216-247

Friday, May 14: The End of the USSR

Reading: Remnick, pp. 431-530