

SOVIET POLITICS, 1917-91

Fall 2004

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Why study "Soviet politics," when the Soviet Union came to an end over a decade ago? The simplest answer might be that the fall of the USSR is so recent, in historical terms, that the USSR is not yet the province of history alone. Over its life of 73 years, the Soviet state grew into a global military superpower, the main adversary of the USA and the West--a state with a political "clout" that was quite real, despite its internal economic weaknesses. How the Soviet system was established, functioned and ultimately failed are important issues in understanding yesterday's problems, and today's.

There was nothing inevitable about the birth of the Soviet state. Lenin might have lost his bid for power in 1917. Nor was there anything inevitable about its collapse in 1991. A different leader, a less ambitious strategy of internal reform, a different array US and NATO leaders and policies in the 1980s, could have allowed the USSR to survive, problems and all, into the 21st century.

The major actors in today's post-Soviet politics, in Russia and in 14 other ex-republics, were formed --or deformed-- in the Soviet system. The USSR inherited the territorial base of the old Russian Empire. It rejected both monarchy and democracy in politics, and built an economic system not only non-, but explicitly anti-market, creating thus a unique type of industrial civilization. Today, those actors--those popularly elected in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania (all now NATO and EU members), those self-perpetuating in the five Central Asian "-stans," are faced with managing the consequences of the old system's collapse. For them, the issues are hardly "only" historical.

Studying the structures, processes and personalities of Soviet politics illuminates broader issues in totalitarian/authoritarian politics, and also helps one to understand the complicated politics of Russia and the other post-Soviet states today: topics dealt with, in the second semester, in CAS PO/IR 364 - **The Politics of Post-Communist Russia**).

REQUIREMENTS/READINGS:

Four books, listed below, are required for student purchase.

Marshall I. GOLDMAN, What Went Wrong with Perestroika

Jerry HOUGH, Democratization and Revolution in the USSR, 1985-91

Martin MALIA, The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917-1991

Richard SAKWA, Soviet Politics in Perspective

Of all four, Malia's SOVIET TRAGEDY is the most "eloquent," and most like a well-done history text. It repays even a "light" reading, but does NOT cover a good deal of the necessary "nuts and bolts." NONE of these books, you should understand, is a political science "textbook" dealing with the USSR as a going concern. Once there were many such--now they are all, not surprisingly, out of print. Sakwa's SOVIET POLITICS comes closest to a text-type treatment. Goldman's WHAT WENT WRONG... captures some of the drama of the final economic crises while Hough's DEMOCRATIZATION is a comprehensive look at the political infighting and failed attempts at reform that brought on the dissolution of the USSR.

It is a substantial amount of reading, but it is also a very substantial topic: one of the great dramas of the century just past. You will also be receiving handouts to supplement lectures on the structures (Politburo, Central Committee, Council of Ministers, etc.) of the Soviet political system as it existed before Gorbachev.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

-regular class attendance (the Dean's Office and I are in agreement that being in the classroom to hear the lectures and participate in discussion helps the learning process, however informative you find the readings)

-a one-hour MIDTERM examination, Tues. Oct. 26, counting for about 1/3 of the final grade

-a two-hour FINAL examination counting for about 2/3 of the final grade, Fri. Dec. 17, 3-5 pm
(make your vacation plans accordingly)

CAS PO/IR 363--F/2004 Class Schedule and Readings:

- I. 9/7-9 INTRODUCTION
- II. 9/14-16 SYSTEMIC ROOTS: BACKWARDNESS AND IDEOLOGY
Malia, chs. 1-2, Sakwa, ch. 1
- III. 9/21-23 CRUCIAL DECISIONS AND REVERSALS: 1917-27
Malia, chs. 3-5, Sakwa, ch. 2, and 29-32
- IV. 9/28-30 STALINISM: BUILDING THE "COMMAND ECONOMY"
Malia, ch. 6, Sakwa, 32-40
- V. 10/5-7 STALINISM: BUILDING THE TOTALITARIAN POLITY
Malia, chs. 7-8; Sakwa 40-49, 83-103, 106-119
- VI. 10/12-14 KHRUSHCHEV, 1953-64: "NORMALIZING" STALINISM
Malia, ch. 9, Sakwa, ch. 4 (MT covers to 10/14)
- VII. 10/19-21 BREZHNEV, 1964-82: GLOBAL POWER,, DOMESTIC ROT
Malia, ch. 10; Goldman, chs. 2-3; Hough, chs. 1-2,
Sakwa, ch. 8, and 66-72 (recc: Sakwa, ch.10)
- VIII. 10/26-28 **TUESDAY: MIDTERM-- 1 hr.**
THURSDAY: BREZHNEV: THE FINAL STAGNATION
- IX. 11/2-4 "ONE CANNOT GO ON LIKE THIS": GORBACHEV,
POLITICS, AND THE COMING OF REFORM
Hough, ch. 3, Goldman, ch. 4, Sakwa, 72-79
recc. Sakwa, ch. 13)
- X. 11/9 REFORM, PHASE I: PERESTROIKA AND DEMOCRATIZATION
IN A MULTINATIONAL STATE, 1985-1989
Malia, ch. 11; Hough, chs. 4-5 7; Goldman, ch.5,
Sakwa, ch. 14
- XI. 11/16-18 REFORM, PHASE II: POLITICAL UPHEAVAL
Hough, chs. 8-10
- XII. 11/23 REFORM, PHASE III: ECONOMIC COLLAPSE
Goldman, chs. 6-8, Hough, ch. 11
- XIII. 11/30-12/2 ETHNOPOLITICS: CRISIS OF THE FEDERAL STATE
Hough, ch. 12, Sakwa, ch. 15
- XIV. 12/7-9 RUSSIA RISES--THE COUP FAILS--THE USSR DIES
Hough, chs. 13-15; Malia, chs. 12-13; Sakwa,
chs. 17-18

