

## CAS PO/IR 363

### SOVIET POLITICS, 1917-91

Spring 2010

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**Why study "Soviet politics,"** when the Soviet Union came to an end 19 years 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 ensemble of US and NATO leaders and policies in the 1980s, could have allowed the USSR to survive, problems and all, into the 21st century.

**Many of 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. Indeed, Russian Prime Minister and ex- [future?] President Vladimir Putin--a junior officer in the old KGB in the later Soviet years has referred to the USSR's dissolution as the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20<sup>th</sup> century". Today, those actors-- popularly elected in "Western" Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania (all now NATO and EU members), ruling in authoritarian ways in the five Central Asian "-stans," precariously balanced in Georgia and Armenia--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 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  
David REMNICK, Lenin's Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire  
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. 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 textbook dealing with the USSR as a going concern. Once there were many such--now they are all, not surprisingly, out of print, as the USSR is out of business. 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 Remnick's LENIN'S TOMB is just about the best "collection of vignettes" account of the final slide of the Soviet state into the abyss (as such, specific chapters are not assigned week by week--rather, you should start reading it as we go into the Gorbachev period. 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: (beyond the obvious-- attending class, taking accurate notes, doing the readings, you face---

-two half-hour exams (semi-midterms) Feb 11, Mar 18

-a FINAL examination - Friday May 7, 9-11 am

**Half-hour exams are made up of objective questions: the two 30 min. together count for about 50%, the final for the other 50% of final grade**

CAS PO/IR 363--Sp/2008 Class Schedule and Readings:

- I. 1/14 INTRODUCTION
- II. 1/19-21 SYSTEMIC ROOTS: BACKWARDNESS AND IDEOLOGY  
Malia, chs. 1-2, Sakwa, ch. 1
- III. 1/26-28 CRUCIAL DECISIONS AND REVERSALS: 1917-27  
Malia, chs. 3-5, Sakwa, ch. 2, and 29-32
- IV. 2/2-4 STALINISM: BUILDING THE "COMMAND ECONOMY"  
Malia, ch. 6, Sakwa, 32-40
- V. 2/9-11 STALINISM: BUILDING THE TOTALITARIAN POLITY  
Malia, chs. 7-8; Sakwa 40-49, 83-103, 106-119  
**Exam 1-Th**)
- VI. 2/18 KHRUSHCHEV, 1953-64: "NORMALIZING" STALINISM  
Malia, ch. 9, Sakwa, ch. 4 (no TUES class)
- VII. 2/23-25 BREZHNEV, 1964-82: GLOBAL POWER,, DOMESTIC ROT  
Malia, ch. 10; Goldman, chs. 2-3;. Sakwa, ch.  
8, and 66-72 (recc:Sakwa, ch.10)
- VIII. 3/2-4 BREZHNEV, ANDROPOV, CHERNENKO: THE FINAL STAGNATION  
\*\*start reading LENIN'S TOMB\*\*\*\*\*
- IX. 3/16-18 "ONE CANNOT GO ON LIKE THIS": GORBACHEV,  
POLITICS, AND THE COMING OF REFORM  
Goldman, ch. 4, Sakwa, 72-79 recc. Sakwa, ch.  
13) (**Exam 2-Th**)
- X. 3/23-25 REFORM PHASE I: PERESTROIKA AND DEMOCRATIZATION  
IN A MULTINATIONAL STATE, 1985-1989  
Malia, ch. 11;; Goldman, ch.5, Sakwa, ch. 14
- XI. 3/30-4/1 REFORM PHASE II: POLITICAL UPHEAVAL 1989---
- XII. 4/6-8 REFORM PHASE III: ECONOMIC COLLAPSE 1990-91  
Goldman, chs. 6-8,
- XIII. 4/13-15 ETHNOPOLITICS: STRUCTURAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC  
CRISES OF A PSEUDO-FEDERAL STATE Sakwa, ch.15
- XIV. 4/20 RUSSIA RISES--THE COUP FAILS--THE USSR DIES  
Malia, chs.12-13; Sakwa, chs.17-18 (no TH class)
- XV. 4/27-29 DATELINE JAN 1. 1992--THE SOVIET "PAST" MEETS  
THE UNDREAMT-OF FUTURE

