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17.57J / 21H.467J Soviet Politics and Society, 1917-1991
Spring 2003

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Spring 2008
TR, 1-2:30

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21H 467J/ 17.601J

Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society, 1917 to the Present

At its greatest extent the former Soviet Union encompassed a geographical area that covered one-sixth of the Earth's land mass. It spanned 11 time zones and contained over 100 distinct nationalities, 22 of which numbered over one million in population. In the 74 years from the October Revolution in 1917 to the fall of Communism in 1991, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, its leaders and its people, had to face a number of challenges: the overthrow of the Tsarist autocracy, the establishment of a new state, four years of civil war, a famine, transition to a mixed economy, political strife after Lenin's death, industrialization, collectivization, a second famine, political show trials, World War II, post-war reconstruction and repression, the "Thaw" after Stalin's death, Khrushchev's experimentation, and Brezhnev's decline. This was then followed by Gorbachev's perestroika, Yeltsin's social and economic engineering, and Putin's recentralization.

Students will write three papers over the course of the semester (due **February 26**, **March 20**, and **April 24**), totaling twenty pages in length. Grading in the course will be determined as follows: 20% for attendance, participation and performance on small quizzes; 60% for the three papers (20% each); and 20% for the final examination.

Texts Available for Purchase at the M.I.T. Bookstore

- Gennady Andreev-Khomiakov, Bitter Waters: Life and Work in Stalin's Russia (1998)
- Sheila Fitzpatrick, The Russian Revolution (Oxford, 1994)
- Andrew Jack, Inside Putin's Russia (Oxford, 2004, 2006)
- Michael Kort, The Soviet Colossus: History and Aftermath (M.E. Sharpe, 2001)
- Richard Sakwa, The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Union, 1917-1991 (Routledge, 1999)
- Elena Zubkova, Russia After the War (M.E. Sharpe, 1998)

* indicates materials available on e-reserves on the course website

Tues. Feb. 5- Introduction to the Course

Thurs. Feb. 7 - Geography [40 pages]

Michael Kort, Soviet Colossus, "Prologue," pp. 3-7

*Mark Bassin, "Russia between Europe and Asia: The Ideological Construction of Geographical Space," Slavic Review 50, 1 (1991): 1-17

*Allen C. Lynch, Roots of Russia's Economic Dilemmas: Liberal Economics and Illiberal Geography *Europe-Asia Studies*, 54, 1 (Jan. 2002): 31-49

Stable URL: [http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0966-](http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0966-8136%28200201%2954%3A1%3C31%3AAROREDL%3E2.0.CO%3B2-C)

[8136%28200201%2954%3A1%3C31%3AAROREDL%3E2.0.CO%3B2-C](http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0966-8136%28200201%2954%3A1%3C31%3AAROREDL%3E2.0.CO%3B2-C)

*Maps from Martin Gilbert, Routledge Atlas of Russian History in your on-line sourcepak- print all and look closely at any geographical patterns that may emerge also recommended:

Russia Engages the World: 1453-1825. A multimedia exhibit at the New York Public Library <http://russia.nypl.org/>, especially the maps

Photographs at www.loc.gov/exhibits/empire/

Key Terms: Eurasia, steppe, tundra, taiga, Ural Mountains

Note: “Evraziistvo” in Bassin [pp. 13-14] means “Eurasianism,” which in turn means an interest in the interrelation between European and Asian influences in Russia

Geography: I expect you to know the basic size and extent of the Soviet Union, its 15 republics, most important nationalities, religions, boundaries,

Discussion Topics: What can you tell about Russian geography and its influence on events? From what you have learned so far about Russian geography, what might have been some of the challenges for any government? What about challengers to that government, i.e., movements for social change, how might geography have influenced their efforts?

Tues. Feb. 12- The Autocratic State [36+11= 47]

Kort, pp. 8-44

* “Key Events in Pre-Revolutionary History” (chronology)

* “The October Manifesto of Nicholas II, 1905” from James Cracraft, ed., Major Problems in the History of Imperial Russia, pp.595-96

* Breshkovskaia on the Struggle to Liberate the Peasantry, *ibid.*, pp. 605-612

* Statistics on social estates in 1897 (the last Tsarist census)

* “Mosaic of Peoples” Time Magazine, 3/12/1990 (USSR nationalities in 1990)

Key Terms: autocracy; October Manifesto; Ekaterina Breshkovskaia; Emancipation of the Peasantry (1861); proletariat; intelligentsia; Slavophiles and Westerners; Autocracy

Discussion Topics: How would you define autocracy? What were the principal aspects of autocracy in Russia and how did they evolve? What can you say about Tsar Nicholas II’s views of autocracy and society from reading his October Manifesto? What were the social stresses operating in Russia in the late 19th century? What centripetal and centrifugal forces can you identify in the Russian Empire, i.e., forces that were pushing the Empire apart and forces that were holding it together? Why do you think the intelligentsia was so anxiety ridden about the direction of Russia, whether it should take a “Western” or a non-Western direction?

Thurs. Feb. 14- The Collapse of Tsarism [41+7+4+12= 64]

Kort, pp. 47-88

Sakwa, pp. 5-12 (docs. 1.4-1.7)

* “Father Gapon’s Petition” from Dmytryshyn, pp. 409-13

Sakwa, pp.12-15, 16-17 (bottom), 23-24, 27-31 (docs 1.8-1.9, 1.11, 1.17, 1.21-1.22)

Key Terms: Russian Social Democratic Workers’ Party (RSDWP), also known as Social Democrats (SDs); Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs); “What is to be Done?”; professional revolutionaries; trade union consciousness vs. Social-Democratic consciousness; Bolsheviks; Mensheviks; Rosa Luxemburg; ultra centralism; Leon Trotsky; political substitution; permanent revolution; democratic centralism; national self-determination; imperialism; Russo-Japanese War, Father Gapon, Bloody Sunday; 1905 Revolution; Duma; Stolypin reforms; peasant mir (commune) and urban soviet; Nicholas II, Sergei Witte, Peter Stolypin

Marxism: class struggle; dictatorship of the proletariat; state capitalism

Discussion Topics: Why were Russians of all political views ambivalent about capitalism? What were some of the different tactics revolutionaries tried? What were some of the early criticisms of Lenin and his followers? Why was 1905 a key turning point? What kind of a revolution was this? Why was the proletariat supposed to be pivotal in any Russian Revolution? Why did nationalism present a problem for Marxist revolutionaries? Why did Lenin view World War I as imperialist?

Tues. Feb. 19 – No class (*Monday schedule of classes*)

Thurs. Feb. 21 -The Revolutions of 1917 [21+23+10=54]

Kort, 91-112

Sakwa, pp. 32-45, 47-51, 54-56 (docs 2.1-2.9, 2.11-2.13, 2.15-2.16)

*Boris Kolonitskii, "Antibourgeois Propaganda and Anti-*Burzhu*i Consciousness in 1917," in Suny, Structures, pp. 22-32

Key Terms: dual power; Provisional Government; Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies; Order No. 1; Lenin's April Theses; defensism and defeatism; July Days; Alexander Kerensky; Kornilov; Constituent Assembly; Military Revolutionary Committee;

Discussion Topics: What were the causes of the February and October Revolutions? What were the problems facing the Provisional Government and the Soviet in the months between February and October? What can you say about the "deepening" of the revolution? How united were the Bolsheviks? What were Lenin's views (esp. in his April Theses and State and Revolution)? Why do you think his views were increasingly holding sway? Why were his comments at the First Congress of Soviets in June 1917 so crucial? Can you see how his views were evolving? Why did others resist his views sometimes?

Note: When Kerensky speaks of "1792 and 1905," he means 1792 in the French Revolution and the 1905 revolution in Russia. In 1792 the National Assembly deposed the king and formed the National Convention, thus ending the Constitutional Monarchy and beginning the period of revolutionary rule. Also, on pp. 47-48 in Sakwa, *syndicates* are trade unions.

Tues. Feb. 26- First paper due in class

** "Fallacies in Reasoning," Arguing in Communities, pp. 173-77

Thurs. Feb. 28– Establishing a New Government and plunging into Civil War

[27+17+11= 55]

Kort, pp. 113-40

*Trotsky, "The Train," in My Life, pp. 411-22

Sakwa: pp. 56-60, 74-77, 81, 83-85, 88-91, 102-4 (docs. 2.17-2.20, 3.1-3.3, 3.8, 3.10, 3.12-3.13, 3.19-3.20)

Key Terms: the dustbin of history; Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom); Left SRs; revolutionary tribunals; Cheka; VSNKh (Vesenkha); Brest-Litovsk; War Communism; state capitalism; Democratic Centralists

Discussion Topics: As the Bolsheviks took up the reins of power, what issues did they need to solve and how did they solve them? How “Marxist” do you think their solutions were? And how consistent with their own principles? What do you think the new Bolshevik leadership thought about entering a civil war? What factors contributed to the victory of the Reds over the Whites? What kind of leadership do you see in Trotsky’s memoir article “The Train” and in his Sakwa piece (p. 81)? What was War Communism and how did the practices of WC compare with the earlier ideals of the Bolshevik leaders? In general, how and why do you think the Bolsheviks were able to take power throughout the country? Why were their critics not able to be effective?

Tues. Mar. 4 - The Shift to NEP [28+27+15=70]

Kort, pp. 141-69

*Avrich, "Crisis of War Communism," Kronstadt 1921, 7-34

Sakwa, pp. 107-14, 118-22, 127-31 (docs. 3.22-3.24, 3.27-28, 4.1-4.3)

Key Terms: Kronstadt; NEP; tax in kind; commanding heights; Gosplan; Nepmen; Workers’ Opposition; bureaucratic degeneration; appointmentalism; soviets without Bolsheviks; Tenth Party Congress; “On Party Unity”; “On the Syndicalist and Anarchist Deviation in Our Party”; purge [chistka]; Secretariat; Orgburo; Politburo; General Secretary; Zhenotdel; Komsomol; agitprop; Comintern; Rabkrin; Lenin’s Testament

Note: “There can be no self-activity” [Sakwa, 111] means there could be no worker-sponsored and worker-directed activism.

Discussion Topics: Why did War Communism end up in crisis? How were the NEP decrees intended to head off further crisis? How do these latter relate to the stated values of the Bolshevik Party? What kinds of organizations was the Party establishing at this time? What were some of Lenin’s doubts towards the end of his life?

Thurs. Mar. 6- The Politics and Economics of the NEP Years [23 + 22= 45]

Kort, pp. 173-96

Sakwa, pp. 140-49, 153-56, 161-62, 167-75 (docs. 4.9-4.13, 4.16, 4.20, 4.24-4.29)

Key Terms: the industrialization debate; the USSR;

Discussion Topics: How do you explain Stalin’s rise to power? What can you say about Lenin’s legacy? What was the industrialization debate and why was it so contentious? Why do you think NEP reached what Kort calls “a dead end” by the late 1920s?

Tues. Mar. 11- The Great Break: Collectivization & Industrialization [29+18+3=50]

Kort, pp. 197-226

Sakwa, 179-97 (docs. 5.3-5.10, 5.14)

*Stalin’s Letters to Molotov, pp. 168-69, 175

Key Terms: collectivization; Urals-Siberian method; 25,000ers; “Dizzy with Success”; dekulakization; famine; Machine Tractor Stations (MTS); industrialization; shock methods; Stakhanovites; show trials; Shakhty Trial; GULAG; Lysenko; wage equalization; socialist realism;

Discussion Topics: Why did the Left win out in the struggle over collectivization? What were the main goals of collectivization? Were they achieved? Why might Stalin have issued his “Dizzy with Success” speech? What did the word “Bolshevik” mean to Stalin and probably to much of the top leadership? What were Stalin’s most important credos in this period? What can we say about his psychology from his speeches?

Thurs. Mar. 13- Economic Life [79]

Gennady Andreev-Khomiakov, *Bitter Waters*, ix-xxi, 185-188, 1-13, 22-25, 39-55, 69-85, 105-122

Notes: “defitsitny” [pp. xix, 23, 70] means an item that is in short supply; “organized recruitment of labor” [p. 5] meant that everyone was assigned a job and everyone had a workbook showing all their previous jobs; “blat” [14] means influence or pull; “kombinatsii” [73-74] - making deals. Be sure to look at the footnotes for other terms you don’t understand.

Discussion Topics: What does Andreev-Khomiakov tell us about how the economy worked in actual practice? How does this differ from what you might expect based on the Marxist/socialist theory of the day?

Tues. Mar. 18- Purge and Terror [17+16+21=54]

Kort, pp. 226-43

Sakwa, pp. 199-205, 211-19, 231-33 (docs. 5.17-5.20, 5.23-5.26, 5.32)

**J. Arch Getty, “Samokritika Rituals in the Stalinist Central Committee, 1933-38,”

Russian Review, 58, 1 (Jan., 1999): 49-70

Stable URL: <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0036-0341%28199901%2958%3A1%3C49%3ASRITSC%3E2.0.CO%3B2-N>

Key terms: Ryutin, the Congress of Victors (17th Party Congress, 1934), Terror; Sergei Kirov; OGPU, NKVD; Solzhenitsyn, Yezhov; Anna Akhmatova

Discussion topics: The Terror is one of the most debated topics in Soviet history - why did it happen? Were there structural causes as well as Stalin’s paranoia? If Stalin’s paranoia was the principal driving force, why wasn’t there resistance from other quarters in state and society? Why do you think Joseph Davies, the American Ambassador to the USSR, believed that the trials were real? What do you think? What was Trotsky’s interpretation of what has gone wrong?

Thurs. Mar. 20- Second paper due

March 24–28 – No class; spring vacation

Tues. Apr. 1– World War II [15+28+19=62]

Kort, pp. 244-59

Sakwa, pp. 235-36, 238-39, 240-45, 247-48, 249-51, 252-55, 257-61, 264-67, 274-77, 287-88 (docs 6.1, 6.3-6.4, 6.6-6.7, 6.9, 6.11, 6.13-6.17, 6.19-6.21, 6.24-6.26, 6.30-6.32, 6.39)

Zubkova, *Russia After the War*, chs. 1-2, pp. 11-30

Key terms: Munich Conference (Sept. 1938); appeasement; Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (August 1939); German invasion of Poland (Sept. 1939); German Invasion of the USSR (June 1941); Katyn massacre; Stalingrad; Victory Day (May 9, 1945)

Discussion topics: Why do you think the Soviet authorities signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact in August 1939? Why were they caught unawares in June 1941 when the Nazis invaded? How did the tenor of Soviet propaganda and practice change (and not change) during the war years?

Thurs. Apr. 3– The Aftermath of the War and High Stalinism [56+13+6=75]

Zubkova, chs. 3-4, 6, 11-13, pp. 31-50, 59-67, 109-38

Sakwa, pp. 277-84, 289-302, 309-12 (docs. 6.33-6.36, 7.1- 7.8, 7.13-7.14)

*The Novikov Telegram, pp. 3, 8, 12-16

Key terms: percentages agreement; Yalta; Zhdanov, Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, Doctors' Plot, Khrushchev, Malenkov

Discussion topics: What do you see as the origins of the Cold War and when would you date them to? What kinds of factors contributed to the intensification of the Cold War over time? What were the effects of the post-war settlements for Eastern Europe? Why? Why do you think anti-Semitism was growing exponentially in the post-war years? What forms did the renewed political orthodoxy of the post-war years take?

Tues. Apr. 8– The Khrushchev Era: Thaw and Social Change [53+17=70]

Zubkova, chs. 15-Conclusion, pp. 151-204

Sakwa, pp. 315-28, 329-330, 347-50 (docs 8.3-8.8, 8.10-8.11, 8.18-8.21)

**"Khrushchev - Key Events" (chronology)

Key terms: collective leadership, Thaw, de-Stalinization, Twentieth and Twenty-Second Party Congresses, Khrushchev's Secret Speech; Anti-Party group; Cuban Missile Crisis;

Discussion topics: Stalin died on March 3, 1953; how much do you think his legacy continued and how much do you think his heirs were able to begin again with a fresh slate? How complete do you think Khrushchev's deStalinization turned out to be? What do you think were his intentions? Be prepared to analyze his 20th Party Congress speech in depth (Saka, 8.4). What were some consequences (both intended and unintended) of his speech? In 1961 the CPSU claimed that the national question had indeed been "solved" - what do you think? In 1962 the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. faced one of the worst crises of the Cold War era, the Cuban Missile Crisis. What do you think was going on? What do you think of Khrushchev's and Kennedy's strategies in this situation? In 1964 Khrushchev was ousted - what was significant about this?

Thurs. Apr. 10 -The Brezhnev Era: Politics and Society [30+9+25+11= 75]

Kort, pp. 311-14, 318-26, 329-32, 335-38, 339-51

Sakwa, pp. 351-56, 359, 363-65 (docs. 9.1-9.3, 9.5, 9.8-9.10)

*Timothy Colton, "Brezhnev's Ambiguous Legacy," in The Dilemma of Reform in the Soviet Union, pp. 6-31

**Fedor Burlatskii, "Brezhnev and the End of the Thaw: Reflections on the Nature of Political Leadership," in Ronald Grigor Suny, ed., The Structure of Soviet History, pp. 379-85

***"Was the Prague Invasion Justified?" in ibid., pp. 388-93

Key terms: Leonid Brezhnev, Aleksei Kosygin, Yuri Andropov, Konstantin Chernenko, gerontocracy; de-Khrushchevization; detente; 1973 Helsinki Accords; 1977 Constitution; invasion of Afghanistan; period of stagnation; samizdat, tamizdat; developed socialism

Discussion topics: How did Brezhnev come to power? How did he differentiate himself from his predecessor? The Brezhnev years witnessed the birth of the dissident movement. Where did it come from? How effective do you think it was? What different kinds of dissidents were there? The Soviet Union had three constitutions in its history (1918, 1924, 1936, and 1977) - how effective were they in protecting people's rights? Why do you think the regime created such constitutions? With hindsight, the Brezhnev years became known as the years of stagnation. How accurate is that characterization?

Tues. Apr. 15- The Brezhnev Years: Cultural Change

Catriona Kelly, "The Retreat from Dogmatism: Populism under Khrushchev and Brezhnev," in Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd, eds., *Russian Cultural Studies: An Introduction* (1998), pp. 249-73

** "Yuri Feofanov, "The Sinyavsky-Daniel Trial" in Feofanov and Donald D. Barry, eds., Politics and Justice in Russia, pp. 38-49

***Abram Tertz (Sinyavsky), Fantastic Stories (excerpt)

Thurs. Apr. 17 - The Emerging New Generation: Boris Yeltsin and the Soviet System

*Boris Yeltsin, Against the Grain, pp. 43-56, 61-82 [13+21 = 34]

Discussion topics: What kind of memoir is Yeltsin's Against the Grain? Who is the audience? Is there an argument, a principal point or points he is trying to convey? How does his own portrayal of himself compare with Colton's? What does Yeltsin's memoir tell us about how the economy and society were working in the Brezhnev years? What can you say about Yeltsin's management style? How does it compare to Trotsky's in *The Train* and that of the two main characters in Bitter Waters?

Tues. Apr . 22 – no class (Patriots Day)

Thurs. Apr. 24 - Third Paper due in Class

Tues. Apr. 29 -Gorbachev's Political Revolution [46+19=65]

Kort, pp. 355-58, 362-74, 376-407

Sakwa, pp. 425, 440-46, 459-61, 466-69, 474-75, 483-487 (docs. 10.3, 10.10, 10.16-17, 10.20-22, 10.26, 10.29-10.32)

* "Key Developments in Nationality Policy" (chronology)

Key terms: Mikhail Gorbachev, Yegor Likhachev, Alexander Yakovlev; acceleration, perestroika, glasnost', Chernobyl (April 1986), Nina Andreeva letter (1988), Congress of People's Deputies (March 1989 elections, televised May sessions); fall of the Berlin Wall (1989); amendment to Article Six (CPSU's "leading role,"1990); Yeltsin's election as President of the Russian Republic (June 1991)

Discussion topics: Where did Gorbachev come from? How much do you think he was leading events under perestroika and how much was he reacting to events unfolding? How did his style of rule and his priorities change over time? Why was economic restructuring so difficult? What was the relationship between political and economic change - were they linked or separate? What kinds of resistance emerged? Who was Nina Andreeva and why did her letter to the newspaper create such a furor? Why did nationalism arise with such intensity in these years? What forms did it take? How did it evolve? What was Russian nationalism? Why were observers so surprised by it? How did technology (e.g., television) affect consciousness? Why did Gorbachev and Yeltsin have such a stormy relationship? Why did Gorbachev begin to retreat circa 1990? What were the causes and consequences of the August 1991 coup?

Thurs. May 1 - The Yeltsin Years: Riding the Bucking Bronco [34+9= 43]

Kort, pp. 408-442

*Stephen Holmes, "What Russia Teaches Us Now: How Weak States Threaten Freedom," in Ronald Suny, Structure of Soviet History, 564-73

* "The Yeltsin Years" (chronology)

website for October 1993: <http://www.cs.toronto.edu/~mes/russia/period/october93.html>

Key Terms: shock therapy; Gaidar; Chubais; vouchers; Alexander Rutskoi and Ruslan Khasbulatov; Liberal Democratic Party and Zhirinovskiy; red-brown parties; loans for shares; oligarchs; Chechnya

Discussion Topics: Economic reform in early post-Soviet Russia entailed quite a paradox: should capitalism "evolve" or should it be imposed from above? What conditions did it require for takeoff? Why did the Yeltsin administration run up head long against Parliament in 1992-1993? What happened in the aftermath of that standoff? How did the oligarchs enrich themselves in these years?

Tues. May 6 - Putin Centralizes Power

Andrew Jack, pp. 7-87

*Peter Maass, "The Triumph of the Quiet Tycoon," N. Y. Times Magazine, 8/1/ 2004

*Other newspaper clippings, 2004-6

Thurs. May 8- Chechnya and the Media: Two Thorny Issues

Jack, pp. 88-173

Tues. May 13- Putin and the Drive to Centralize

Jack, pp. 174-215, 297-340

Thurs. May 15- Review