The Making and Unmaking of Communist Ideals
(Learning About Society Through Historiography, Literature, and Film)

In this seminar we will explore the development of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe through historiography, literature, and film. In the first few weeks of the course we will cover the fundamentals of Marxist theory and look at its Leninist application in the Russian historical context. Next, we will explore the background and course of the two Russian revolutions of 1917 through the eyes of one of its main architects and Marxist historians--Leon Trotsky. The main part of the course is devoted to early revolutionary dilemmas, the relationship of intellectuals to the revolution both in Soviet Russia and the West, and the rise of Stalinism. Finally, we will document the process of the gradual disillusionment with Communism in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

Throughout the course we will use historiography, literature and film for conveying sociological ideas and realities. The students are advised to remember that this is a sociology course and that the emphasis, both in their presentations and their research papers, must be on the sociological, not the literary or aesthetic content of the works analyzed. The topic of the research papers will be determined in consultation with the professor. Normally, the topic can be based on the works covered in the seminar but students will be expected to go beyond what was covered in class.

**Course prerequisites.** Two courses in sociology or consent of instructor.

**Course requirements.**

Attendance. class participation, and Blackboard discussion postings;
*Attendance at all films, absolutely no exceptions*;
One in-class presentation during the semester;
One short paper analyzing readings plus a feature film or documentary (5-6 pages)
One 15-page research paper based on the class readings/films.

**Grading.**

Class and film attendance, participation, and Blackboard discussion postings: 25%
Oral presentation in class: 20%
Short paper (5 pages): 20%
Research paper: 35%
Films. All films will be screened in an assigned room in King Building at 8 pm on
Sundays. If you cannot make the screening you can access the film from reserve in Mudd
Library, but you should screen it at the assigned time.

Honor Code

This course and all its assignments are covered by the Oberlin College honor code. This
means, most importantly, that—unless otherwise indicated—you are to produce your own
work and honor the rules and conventions of scholarly quotation, attribution, and citation.
While you are allowed to ask advice and help from librarians and official writing tutors,
you are, in the end, to submit work produced by you. Any case of (suspected) plagiarism
will be reported to the Honors Committee. For more details, see
http://new.oberlin.edu/students/policies/10-Policies-Honor.pdf

Required Books (All books are in the bookstore and on hard copy reserve; additional
copies are available through Ohiolink. All other readings can be found on the Blackboard
course site under “Course documents.”

(ISBN 9780393308693) - Norton

Gladkov Fedor, Cement (ISBN 9780810111608) - Northwestern University Press

Ignazio Silone, Bread and Wine
Bread and Wine (ISBN 9780451529787) - Penguin

Koestler, Arthur, Darkness at Noon* (9780553265958) - Random House

Czeslaw Milosz, The Captive Mind
Captive Mind (ISBN 9780679728566) - Random House

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich (ISBN 9780553247770)
- Random House
COURSE SCHEDULE

Week One. Marxism and Communism (Review)

Tues. 9/4


Week Two. The Imperial Russian Historical Context

*Film Screening:* Sunday, 9/9, 8pm: Documentary Film: *Red Empire*, part one (each tape has 2x20-minute episodes).

Tues. 9/11


Week Three. Marxism, Modernization, and the Leninist party.

*Film Screening:* Sunday, 9/16, 8pm *Red Empire*, part two.

*First Blackboard posting due by midnight Monday 9/17*

Tues. 9/18


Week Four. The February Revolution of 1917.


*Second Blackboard posting due by midnight Monday 9/24*
**Tues. 9/25**


**Week Five. The October Revolution of 1917.**

*Film Screening*: Sunday, 9/30 *Reds*, part two.

*Third Blackboard posting due by midnight Monday 10/1*

**Tues. 10/2**


**Week Six. Early Revolutionary Dilemmas.**

*Film Screening*: Sunday 10/7 Bernardo Bertolucci, *1900* (part one).

*Fourth Blackboard posting due by midnight Monday, 10/8*

**Tues. 10/9**

Fyodor Gladkov, *Cement*.

**Week Seven. Communism and Western Intellectuals**

*Film Screening*: Sunday 10/14: Bernardo Bertolucci, *1900* (part two).

*Fifth Blackboard posting due by midnight, Monday 10/15*

**Tues. 10/16**

Ignazio Silone, *Bread and Wine*.

*Fall break 10/20-10/28*

**Week Eight. From the Rise of Stalin to Collectivization**
Film Screening: Sunday, 10/28 Red Empire, part three.

Short film response paper due on Tuesday, 10/30 in class. No late papers!

Tues. 10/30


Week Nine. The Terror and the Great Purge Trials

Film Screening: Sunday 11/4 Red Empire, part four.

Sixth Blackboard posting due by midnight, 11/5

Tues. 11/6


Transcript of Nikolai Bukharin’s trial in Robert Tucker, The Great Purge Trial, pp.656-668.

Week Ten. The End of the Old Bolsheviks

Film Screening, Sunday 11/11: Nikita Mikhalkov, Burnt by the Sun

Seventh Blackboard posting due by midnight, Monday 11/12

Tues. 11/13

Arthur Koestler, Darkness at Noon.

Week Eleven. Stalinism and Intellectuals in Eastern Europe

Film Screening Sunday 11/18 Red Empire, part six

Eighth Blackboard posting due by midnight, Monday 11/21

Tues. 11/20

Czeslaw Milosz, The Captive Mind.

Week Twelve. Unmasking Stalinism in Soviet Russia

No film
Ninth Blackboard posting due by midnight, Monday 11/26

Tues. 11/27

Excerpts from Khrushchev’s “Secret Speech” (1956) in Robert V. Daniels, A Documentary History of Communism in Russia, pp.254-258.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich

Week Thirteen. Utopia and Its Discontents

Film Screening: Sunday, 12/2 Dušan Makavejev, Mysteries of the Organism

Tues. 12/4


Louis Menand, “Road Warrior” (on Koestler), The New Yorker, December 21&28, 2009.

Week Fourteen. Reckoning with the Stalinist Legacy

Tues. 12/11


Final paper due on Friday, December 21, by 4 p.m.