Communism and Intellectuals

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 requirements.

Attendance and class participation;
*Attendance at all films, absolutely no exceptions*;
One in-class presentation during the semester;
One paper analyzing a feature film or documentary and readings (6-7 pages);
One 12-15-page research paper based on the class readings/films.

Grading.

Class and film attendance, participation: 25%
Oral presentation in class: 20%
Short paper (6-7 pages): 20%
Final paper: (12-15 pages) 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 978081011160-8

Ignazio Silone, Bread and Wine
Bread and Wine Signet Classics, 2005.


Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich, Bantham Classic, 2005.
(ISBN 978055324777-8)

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week One. Introduction to the Course: Basics of Communism and Russian History.

Tues. 2/3

Week Two. The Imperial Russian Historical Context

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

Tue. 2/10


Nicholas Berdyaev, The Origins of Russian Communism, pp.7-94.


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

Film Screening Sunday, 2/15, 8 p.m. Red Empire, part two.

Tue. 2/17

Berdyaev, The Origins of Russian Communism, pp. 94-114.


Week Four. The February Revolution of 1917.

Film Screening Sunday 2/22, 8 p.m. Warren Beatty, Reds, part one.

Tue. 2/24


Week Five. The October Revolution of 1917.

Film Screening Sunday 3/1, 8 p.m., Reds, part two.

Tue. 3/3
Discussion of Reds


Week Six. Early Revolutionary Dilemmas.

*Film Screening*: Sunday 3/8, 8. p.m. Bernardo Bertolucci, *1900* (part one).

**Tue. 3/10**

Fyodor Gladkov, *Cement*.

Week Seven. Intellectuals, Peasants, Fascism, and Communism: The Case of Italy


**Tue. 3/17**


*Ignazio Silone, Bread and Wine*.

Discussion of *1900* and distribution of film response paper guidelines.

****SPRING BREAK, March 21-29****

Week Eight. From the Rise of Stalin to Collectivization

*Film response paper due Monday 3/30 by midnight*

**Tues. 3/31.**


Week Nine. The Terror and the Great Purge Trials

Film Screening: Sunday 4/5, 8 p.m. Red Empire, parts three and four.

Tues. 4/7


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 4/12, 8 p.m. Nikita Mikhalkov, Burnt by the Sun

Tues. 4/14

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

Arthur Koestler, Darkness at Noon.

Week Eleven. Stalinism and Intellectuals in Eastern Europe

Film Screening, Sunday 4/19. Istvan Szabo, Mephisto.

Tues. 4/21


Czeslaw Milosz, The Captive Mind.

Week Twelve. Unmasking Stalinism in Soviet Russia

Film Screening, Sunday 4/26 Red Empire part 6

Tues. 4/28

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

Alexander Solzhenitsyn, One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich.

Week Thirteen. Utopia and Its Discontents

Film Screening: Sunday, 5/3. Dušan Makavejev, Mysteries of the Organism

Tues. 5/5


Final paper due on Sunday, May 17 by 11. A.m.