

History 242: The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Union
Fall 2014: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, 10:00-11:00

Edward Cohn
Mears 316 (X3107)

cohned@grinnell.edu
Office hours: Mon 3:00-4:00;
Wed. 1:15-2:00;
Thurs. 9:00-10:00

Course Overview

The history of the Soviet Union has always been a story of great contrasts. In October 1917, when the tsarist regime fell, Russia became one of the most chaotic, dynamic, and first revolutionary societies in all of history; by the time the USSR collapsed in December 1991, it was a stagnant bureaucratic regime led by a corrupt and entrenched elite. The leaders of the Soviet Union claimed that they had liberated their country from centuries of tsarist oppression, but they ended up unleashing mass repression and state-sponsored violence on a nearly unprecedented scale. The Soviet regime could claim great successes like the dramatic growth of literacy and the launching of the first man-made satellite in history, but it never lived up to the grand rhetoric of its leaders and became one of the world's most repressive states.

This course will examine the history of the Soviet Union from the October Revolution of 1917 until the regime's sudden collapse at the end of 1991, focusing in particular on the country's social and political history. From the moment that the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917 until the present day, historians have debated the meaning and the legacy of the October Revolution; in every period of Soviet history, the country's leaders claimed to be following the true path of Communism, while denouncing their rivals (and often their predecessors) as straying from socialism. This class will therefore examine how the nature of the Soviet Union was redefined by each successive generation and will seek to relate each part of the Soviet experience to the larger trajectory of the country's history. Was Stalinism a departure from the revolution's original ideology, or the inevitable result of 1917? Was the Khrushchev era an unprecedented liberalization of the regime's policies, or was it a return to the original ideology?

Important notes

Grinnell College makes reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. If you have any special needs, please provide documentation of those needs to the Dean for Student Success and Academic Advising, Joyce Stern, whose office is located on the third floor of the Rosenfield Center. Students should then bring me paperwork from Joyce Stern's office within the first few days of class.

Students should also be aware of Grinnell's policy on academic honesty. Plagiarism, it goes without saying, will not be tolerated in this course.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Friday, August 29: Introduction to the Course

Reading: Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, intro and ch. 1

Monday, September 1: Prelude to Revolution

Reading: Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, ch. 1 [Pioneerweb]
Semen Kanatchikov, *A Radical Worker in Tsarist Russia*, excerpts [Pioneerweb]

Wednesday, September 3 Red October

Reading: Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, ch. 2
Boris Kolonitskii, "Anti-Bourgeois Propaganda and Anti

Friday, September 26: Collectivization and DeKulakization

Reading:

Monday, December 1: Dissent in the 1960s and 1970s

Reading: "Trial of a Young Poet: The Case of Joseph Brodsky" [Pioneerweb]
"The Case of Boris Kochubiyevsky" [Suny]
"Letter from Vladimir Vysotskii to Petr Dimichev" [Suny]

Wednesday, December 3 Life under Brezhnev

Film showing: The Irony of Fate (Eldar Riazanov, dir.) (available online)

Friday, December 5 The Final Years of the USSR

Reading: Ronald Grigor Suny, The Soviet Experiment, pp. 479-514 [Pioneerweb]
Stephen Kotkin, Armageddon Averted, excerpts [Pioneerweb]
excerpt from Mikhail Gorbachev's memoirs [Suny]

Monday, December 8: Experiencing Reform

Film showing: My Perestroika (Robin Hess, dir.) (available online; showing TBA)
Reading: Nina Andreeva, "I Cannot Give Up My Principles" [Suny]

Wednesday, December 10 Gorbachev's Cold War

Reading: Zubok, chapters 9-10

Friday, December 12 The End of the USSR

Reading: Zubok, epilogue
Alexander Dallin, "Causes of the Collapse of the USSR" [Suny]
"The August Coup" [Suny]
Mikhail Gorbachev, "Speech of Resignation" [Suny]

Assignment: if you choose to revise one of your papers, the rewrite is due today at 5 PM

FINAL EXAM: Friday, December 19, at 9:00 AM