GRADUATE READING SEMINAR ON SOVIET HISTORY

Tuesday 1:30 - 4:30

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“There was not and there could not have been any ‘socialism’ in the Soviet Union.”
Moshe Lewin

“There is no such thing as socialism, and the Soviet Union built it.”
Martin Malia

This seminar is devoted to intensive analysis of recent works of history ranging across the entire Soviet era. Topics include the 1917 revolution and its afterlife, the construction of the world’s first socialist economy, everyday life in a revolutionary society, the “Soviet subjectivity” debate, Soviet nationhood, war and society, communism and globalization, “developed” socialism, and the system’s unexpected collapse.

Starting in Week 2, we will operate according to “Australian Rules” (thanks to Peter Sahlins), as described below. These rules require collaborative work in advance of seminar meetings, short weekly writing assignments, and a high degree of engagement. An historiographical essay, on a topic to be chosen in consultation with the instructor, is due at the end of the term. This 20- to 25-page essay may include, but should not be limited to, readings assigned in the course.

Australian Rules

This seminar format seeks to:
1. encourage active presentations
2. cultivate a common vocabulary and set of problems by the beginning of class each week so that class time is spent exploring the week’s issues in depth
3. make writing an essential part of intellectual dialogue
4. develop skills in identifying and engaging key arguments
5. create an atmosphere of collegial participation and cooperation as the foundation of intellectual inquiry and exchange

The seminar is divided into three groups. In our first week of operation, group A will meet several days before class and develop a set of three or four written questions based on the readings. These questions, generally a short paragraph each, can treat the substance of the readings and/or problems of historical method and reasoning. They should be interpretive, rather than factual; that is, concerned not only with what authors say but
how they frame or construct their major arguments. In general, interpretive questions are phrased in ways that do not invite simple yes-or-no answers. They tend to favor “how,” “why,” “in what sense,” “what is at stake in...” and other gestures that stimulate conversation. Questions must be posted to our Canvas site by **6pm on Friday**, and should be labelled “Questions for Week X,” where "X" is the coming week on the syllabus.

Group B, after discussing Group A’s questions, will respond in written form, devoting no more than 500 words to each one. Responses should address questions directly, but can also critique the questions and move beyond them, according to the collective judgment of Group B. Responses must be posted to the Canvas site by **6pm on Sunday**.

Group C meets Sunday evening or Monday during the day to develop a commentary on the questions and responses. Group C will need to rehearse its positions - which may include issues raised in the week’s readings but not addressed by the original questions and responses - and to divide speaking responsibilities. Group C’s main goal should be to launch a stimulating discussion, using the work of Groups A and B as a platform. The idea is to make useful connections and distinctions, suggest areas in need of clarification, pose follow-up questions, and offer Group C’s own take on what it considers the largest and most interesting issues.

The following week, people migrate: those who were in Group A become Group B, those who were in Group B become Group C, and those who were in Group C become Group A. The week after that, people migrate again, so that everyone has a chance to work in all three modes. After each three-week cycle, the composition of the groups will be scrambled.

Needless to say, the success of this format depends upon getting the readings done well in advance and sticking to deadlines.

**Readings**

Unless otherwise indicated, assigned articles are available on-line through JSTOR or other databases. Articles and individual book chapters unavailable on-line will be posted on the course Canvas site (C). Copies of the following books can be purchased at the Penn Book Center (34th and Sansom) and are also available in Rosengarten Reserve at Van Pelt Library:


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### Calendar

**Week 1. Sept. 2**  **SETTING THE STAGE(S)**


Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 1-39


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### Week 2. Sept. 9  **WARS AND REVOLUTIONS**


Andrl, *A Social History of Twentieth-Century Russia*, 74-85, 120-42 [C]


Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution*, 1-205, 241-88


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**Recommended:**


Week 3. Sept. 16  BUILDING SOCIALISM


Recommended:

Week 4. Sept. 23  STALINISM AND SOCIAL HISTORY

Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 149-72
Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* [feel free to skim or skip Chapters 3 and 7 but read as many of the substantive endnotes as possible]

Recommended:

Week 5. Sept. 30  SOVIET SUBJECTIVITIES

Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin* (feel free to skip or skim Chapter 7)


Recommended:

Igal Halfin, *Terror in My Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2003); on-line version available via Franklin


Week 6. Oct. 7     **EMPIRE AND ETHNOS**


Recommended:


Week 7. Oct. 14  TOWARD A SOVIET AESTHETIC

Katerina Clark, *Petersburg, Crucible of Cultural Revolution*, ix-xii, 1-34

*Recommended:*

Week 8. Oct. 21  CATACLYSM

Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (feel free to skip or skim pp. 187-312)

*Recommended:*

Week 9. Oct. 28  COMMUNISM AND GLOBALIZATION

David Priestland, *The Red Flag* (feel free to skip or skim pp. 61-102, 132-81, 273-303, 315-330, 339-50, 446-469, 532-41)
Week 10. Nov. 4  SECOND-GENERATION SOCIALISM

Vladislav Zubok, Zhivago’s Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia (feel free to skim or skip pp. 121-140, 163-192, 321-362)


Александр Даниэль; “История самиздата,” в книге Госбезопасность и литература: на опыте России и Германии (СССР и ГДР) под редакцией Т. В. Громовы и Е. В. Шукины (Москва: Рудомина; 1994): 93-104 [C]


Recommended:

Anke Stephan, Von der Küche auf den Roten Platz: Lebenswege sowjetischer Dissidentinnen (Zürich: Pano Verlag, 2005)

Week 11. Nov. 11  GENERATION «Я»

Alexei Yurchak, Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation, 1-206, 273-298

Kevin Platt and Benjamin Nathans, “Socialist in Form, Indeterminate in Content: The Ins and Outs of Late Soviet Culture,” Ab Imperio no.2 (2011): 301-324


Allen, Farm to Factory, 189-211

Recommended:

**Week 12. Nov. 18 ** IMPLSION


**Recommended:**
Archie Brown, *Seven Years that Changed the World: Perestroika in Perspective* (New York: Oxford UP, 2007)

**Week 13. Nov. 25 ** NO CLASS (Thanksgiving week schedule)

**Week 14. Dec. 2 ** RETROSPECTACLE (final class)


**Week 15. Dec. 9 ** no class