

Capitalism and Socialism in Russia: The Soviet and Post-Soviet Experience Revisited

30 years after its collapse in 1991, the Soviet Union continues to provide pundits on the left and right with a tale about the missed opportunities or false promises of socialism and the purported virtues or vices of capitalism. But was the Soviet Union really a socialist country? And is post-Soviet Russia a capitalist country? Regardless of where one stands on these issues, these questions illustrate the relevance of the study of Russia and the Soviet Union as a site for exploring the uses of the categories Capitalism and Socialism, which remain foundational to much of the social sciences and political discourse. Drawing on perspectives from the disciplines of Sociology, Political Science and History, our seminar will investigate the contestation between Capitalism and Socialism through the prism of Russian and Soviet History. We focus on the following three episodes: the industrialization of the Soviet Union in the First Five Year Plan (“building socialism”) under Joseph Stalin, the collapse of the socialist order in 1989-91, and the socio-economic transformation of Russia under the rule of Vladimir Putin. We will discuss the ideologies underpinning these transformations and the domestic and international political economy enabling them. By investigating socialism and capitalism in their historical context and dynamics, we will attempt to subject the use of “capitalism” and “socialism” in the study of Russia and the Soviet Union to a critical, multi-disciplinary revision. Finally, the seminar seeks to enrich ongoing conversations on the futures of capitalism and socialism that have gained momentum in the wake of the Financial Crisis of 2008/9 and the economic fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic.

We encourage the participation of students from a diverse range of disciplines. Reading proficiency in English is required. Accommodations can be made for student presentations, class discussions and seminar papers for those who feel more comfortable with German.

Key texts:

Holquist, Peter. *Making War, Forging Revolution. Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914-1922*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.

Kotkin, Stephen. *Magnetic Mountain. Stalinism as a Civilization*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995.

Shlapentokh, Vladimir. *A Normal Totalitarian Society*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2001.

Sanchez-Sibony, Oscar. *Red Globalization : The Political Economy of the Soviet Cold War from Stalin to Khrushchev*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.