

REAL EXISTING SOCIALISM
Socialist Societies in 19th and 20th Century Europe

Spring 2023

Classroom: Lasch Seminar Room/RRL305

Tuesdays: 940-1220pm

LAST REVISED 1-17-23

Instructor: Prof. Fleischman

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 10-12pm

Office: RRL 460

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This course examines the diverse history of socialist ideology as lived-experience across Europe. It begins with the first theorists of socialism—like Robert Owen, Henri de Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier—and places their ideas in the context of a rapidly industrializing Europe in Germany, France, and Great Britain. Along the way we consider the way in which mid-19th century thinkers like Marx & Engels, Michael Bakunin, and Pierre Proudhon challenged and/or adapted early socialism with their own varieties—like anarchism, communism, and scientific Marxism. Socialist thought, however, cannot be understood without being placed alongside central political events of the 19th century, like 1848 and the Paris Commune, or the massive economic transformations wrought by an emerging global economy. To that end, we will also consider conservative alternatives to the perceived threats of political socialism, industrialization, and sharpening class divides.

In the second half of the course we will explore the more enduring socialist societies of the 20th century that attempted to put socialist theories into practice, like the Soviet Union, but also the countries of the eastern bloc. Through historical monographs, films, and novels we will examine the surprising varieties of state socialism that emerged during the Cold War and debate the issue of their so-called alternative modernity. This course asks students to consider: how were these societies ruled and why did they fail? To what extent were they influenced by the political philosophies of the 19th century? To what extent were they a product of geo-political conflicts and the failures of capitalism in the 20th? How did socialist leaders and citizens imagine the future of socialist development? What was the every-day lived experience of secret police and state force, but also of food, fashion, music, literature, and film?

REQUIREMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS

REQUIRED TEXTS

Kristin Ross, *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune*

Francis Spufford, *Red Plenty*

Kate Brown, *Plutopia*

Kristin Ghodsee, *Red Valkyries*

Kate Evans and Paul Buhle, *Red Rosa: A Graphic Biography of Rosa Luxemburg*

I will provide PDFs on Blackboard for all the non-purchasable readings. Make sure to bring the text we're reading to class to discuss.

The Kelly Family History Book Fund: In 2022, the History Department received an endowed fund to purchase class text books for undergraduate students enrolled in a history course. If you need help acquiring your books, you may apply for funds through this link <https://forms.gle/c2WArDa5g696oKeU6>. Preference will be given to history majors but any student may apply.

PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE: Complete all assigned readings, regularly attend class and participate in discussion. Since there is no textbook for this course, your learning depends upon your participation. **No student with five absences from class will pass the course.** *Only in rare circumstances—illness, family emergency—may you miss class, and then I will need some sort of documentation.* If you plan on missing a class, please notify me in any case. These policies take effect with the first meeting.

PRESENTATIONS AND GOOGLE DOCS: This class is intended to help you hone your skills to think, critique, and argue about historical ideas. And since I'd like our conversations to reflect what interests you in the readings, small groups of two will lead us in discussion every week. Each group will go twice.

During your week, your group will be responsible for reading your fellow classmates' questions, organizing them, and creating thematic prompts to lead discussion. We will use GoogleDocs to do this work.

Your responsibilities as discussion leaders are as follows

1. Create a GoogleDoc for the week's readings and change the settings so that anyone with the link can edit it.
2. Send that link to the rest of the class. The link must be sent by 5pm Friday in advance of the following week's class meeting.
3. By 12pm on Mondays, **everyone in the class**—not just the presenters—**must enter a thoughtful, developed question on the reading (about 100 words)**. This is a part of your overall grade and may not be skipped.
4. Discussion leaders will organize the responses in a way that makes most sense for them, and then develop prompts to lead discussion on these themes. The GoogleDoc will be available for reference during class.

REACTION PAPERS: write two reaction papers (5 pages each), based on the weeks in which you led class discussion.

FINAL RESEARCH PAPER: Write a research paper (3,000-4,000 word) on any topic of your choosing. It must undergo at least one draft of revision.

GRADING DISTRIBUTION

Participation (including discussion questions)	20%
Leading Discussion	15%
Reaction Paper One	15%
Reaction Paper Two	15%
Research Paper, 2 Drafts	35%

COMPUTERS in class are allowed, indeed will be necessary for working with the GoogleDocs. You may enter new ideas/thematic highlights/new questions etc. during class.

PAPERS: you are expected to master the citation style that is common among historians. This style is known as Chicago Style, and is detailed in the volume by Kate Turabian.

The guide is available in the library and online at <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html>

Formatting: All papers must be emailed to me, and **formatted in Word** (.doc or docx) and **saved with your last name first, e.g. “Fleischman Marx Paper.docx.”**

You are expected to master the citation style that is common among historians, known as the Chicago Manual of Style, and is detailed in the volume by Kate Turabian. The guide is available in the library and online at <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html>

Late papers lose 1/3 of a grade per day. E.g., a B paper submitted the morning after it was due, will receive a B-. **Papers more than 72 hours late will receive an F.**

Computers: Obviously our current work is impossible without the internet and computers. We will be staring at screens 100% of the time, which frankly, is a real bummer. That being said, I invited you to use our class time as an opportunity to escape the oppressive, constant drum of the internet and focus on a single subject for an hour of your time every day. I will do my best to vary class activities and discussion. I want to engage you where you are (mentally). So whenever you feel the urge to do something else during class, try to put off that stuff for an hour. Social media, consumer capitalism, and the constant din of “Breaking News” will still be there when we are done for the day. Hopefully by paying attention to something else for a little while, you’ll feel some relief.

Email: I am available via email for questions or concerns about the class. There are types of questions, however, that I don’t generally answer. If you write an email telling me you are going to miss class, I will take note, but won’t write back. If you write with a question about an assignment or reading, and the answer is on the syllabus or assignment sheet, I will not write back. Otherwise I do my best to keep up with your questions, although occasionally an email slips through the cracks. If you don’t hear back within a few days, try me again or come up to me after class.

Disability Services:

The University offers a number of accommodations for students through the Office of Disability Resources, including special testing locations, extra time, and help with note taking. For a full list of services, please visit <https://www.rochester.edu/college/disability/faculty/accommodations-defined.html> and feel free to contact me with additional questions or requests.

Academic honesty: Intellectual integrity is the University’s most fundamental commitment. Plagiarism of any kind will be penalized to the fullest possible extent. There is no mitigating

circumstance, ever, for plagiarism. Please visit the University's official policy on academic honesty here, <http://www.rochester.edu/college/honesty/>.

Whenever you draw upon somebody else's words *or ideas* to make a point, give them credit in a footnote. The most common causes of plagiarism are not deliberate dishonesty. Often it is careless note-taking. Make sure that in your notes you distinguish clearly your thoughts on the reading and the words you have copied from a secondary source. Waiting too long to do the research and the stress and confusion that may result from that rush to finish may produce mistakes that in public represent the most serious violation of academic values. You are, therefore, strongly encouraged to start assignments well in advance of the deadline.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week I – What is Socialism?

Jan. 17

Week II – Marx's Origins, 1848, and Beyond

Jan. 24 - Hunt, *Marx's General*, Preface + Ch. 2-5

Background Podcast: Revolutions with Mike Duncan, Season 7, Ep. 1 “The Volcano”

Week III – Paris Commune, Part I

Jan. 31 - Kristin Ross, *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune*, Intro and Ch. 1-4

Background Podcast: Revolutions with Mike Duncan, Season 10, Ep. 7, “The Paris Commune Revisited” (Stream/download wherever you get podcasts)

Week IV – Rosa Luxemburg

Feb. 7th - Kate Evans, *Red Rosa*, All

Week V – Origins of Socialist Economics

Feb. 14th - Yanni Kotsonis, *States of Obligation*,
Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, excerpt

Week VI – Revolutionary Women and WWI

Feb. 21st - Kristen Ghodsee, *Red Valkyries*, Intro, Ch. 2-4

Week VII – The Great Conjunction of 1917-1921

Feb. 28th – Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, Introduction and Part I, p. 3-58, 190-204

Background Podcast: *Revolutions*, Duncan, Season 10, Ep. 83, “The Great October Socialist Revolution”

SPRING BREAK, MARCH 6-12TH

Week VIII – Stalinism

March 14th

- Karl Schloegel, *Moscow 1937*, excerpt
- Steven Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, excerpts

Week IX – Eastern Bloc and the Cold War

March 21st

- **Quinn Slobodian, Ch.1: “Socialist Chromatism: Race, Racism, and the Racial Rainbow in East Germany, in *Comrades in Color*, ed. Quinn Slobodian
- Karl Brown, “The Extraordinary Career of Feketevago Ur: Wood Theft, Pig-Killing, and Entrepreneurship in Communist Hungary, 1948-56,” in *Communism Unwrapped*, ed. Bren and Neuberger

Week X – Planned Economics

March 28th - Francis Spufford, *Red Plenty*, Excerpts

Week XI – Comparative Modernity

April 4th - Kate Brown, *Plutopia*, Intro, Part I & II

Week XII – The Era of “Real, Existing Socialism”

April 11th

- **Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV*, excerpts
- **Eli Rubin, “Understanding a Car in the Context of a System,” in *Socialist Automobility*, ed. Lewis Sieglebaum

First Draft of Research Paper Due Friday, April 14th @1159 emailed to me and your peer review partner

Week XIII – Peer Review and Socialist Afterlives

April 18th

Peer Review Session (In Class)

- **Kristin Schwenkel, Ch. 11 “Affective Solidarities and East German Reconstruction of Postwar Vietnam,” in *Comrades of Color*

Week XIV – Socialism on Film

April 25th - TBD

Final Draft of Research Paper, Due Exam Day