Course title: The Rise and Fall of Central European Totalitarianism
Course code: POLI 3003 PRAG
Programs offering course: Central European Studies, Communication, New Media, and Journalism
Language of instruction: English
U.S. semester credits: 3.00
Contact hours: 45.00
Term: Fall 2020

Course Description

Liberal democracy seems to be the obvious winner of the ideological struggle of the twentieth century. It is therefore hard to understand why the two main alternatives to liberal democracy – Nazism and Communism – exercised such a power over the lives and minds of people of Central Europe throughout the larger part of the twentieth century. This interdisciplinary course aims to examine this conundrum through systematic study of totalitarian practices. Following a basic theoretical outline and criticism of the term “totalitarianism”, the course analyses the ideologies of the “Totalitarian Twins”, Communism and Nazism, which both grew from a perceived crisis of liberal democracy. The main focus of the course is on the methods the two regimes used to rule over their citizens, going beyond the obvious themes of fear and terror and looking at the role of economic policy, propaganda, leader’s cult, and media and art in securing the conformity of the citizens. By studying these methods the course touches upon the challenges liberal democracy faces in the current political situation. The course also includes the often overlooked issue of environmental destruction especially under communism, and the consequent rise of the environmental consciousness and movements, which contributed significantly to the eventual fall of communism. The course presents a "Prague perspective," examining the experience of the Czechs in the twentieth century as an example of a nation dealing with the two dictatorships.

Although the Nazi and Communist dictatorships are over, their residues remain in the collective memory, which influences everyday life. As mentality can only be explained against the historical backdrop, students undertake a journey into the minds of people who lived in these two destructive dictatorships and try to understand them.

Learning Objectives

By completing this course, students will:

- Critically define totalitarianism, discuss how it “rises” in society and becomes an omnipresent reality, through an examination of the historical context;
- Analyze the core texts of Communism and Nazism, The Communist Manifesto and Mein Kampf, and assess the methods of the propaganda as the regimes’ principle tool facilitating a popular appeal among people;
- Critically discuss the social and political power of terror within totalitarian systems, presenting specific examples and their effect on the society;
- Compare and contrast the economic policies of Communism and Nazism, their effects on the society and “achievements” of the regimes.

Course Prerequisites

None

Methods of Instruction

This course requires active participation of the students and discussion is encouraged. In terms of structure, the course will consist of lectures (accompanied by a PowerPoint) and seminars (usually based around a worksheet). Also, it is necessary to do the reading for each class.

Possible Trips and Excursions:

Strahov Stadium, Prague

Students will visit the stadium used for mass gymnastics events during the interwar period and Communist period.
Goal: Understand the goals of mass gymnastics events

**Archive of Security Services, Prague**

Students will visit the most important archive for studying the totalitarian past in the Czech Republic.

Goal: Show the archive and archive materials; discussion with Czech historians.

**Communist Prague**

Students will be shown the most important places from the Communist past in Prague

Goal: Learn about the places which play an important role in Czech mentality and remembrance; explain the role of place in the commemoration.

**Department of Communist Party Czech and Moravia (KSČM), Prague**

Students will meet the representatives of the contemporary Communist Party, who will provide information about the Party’s history and about contemporary politics.

Goal: Discussion about the narrative of representatives of KSČM.

**Assessment and Final Grade**

1. Research Paper 20%
2. Take-home midterm assessment 15%
3. Group Presentations 20%
4. Final Exam 25%
5. Class Participation 20%

**TOTAL** 100%

**Course Requirements**

**Research Paper**

Students are required to complete an eight-page paper on one of the questions listed below (submission via email).

**Research paper topics**

1. Critically discuss the concept of totalitarianism. Why is it a complicated and controversial idea?
2. What were the conditions under which totalitarianism emerged? And in what ways did these conditions facilitate extreme regimes? Pick an example of either Germany or Russia.
3. In the preface to Origins of Totalitarianism, Hannah Arendt states the following when describing the Nazis and the Soviets: ‘...the curious contradiction between the totalitarian movements’ avowed cynical “realism” and their conspicuous disdain of the whole texture of reality’. Analyze this quote, and give relevant historical examples from either the Nazi Party or the Soviet system to substantiate your perspective.
4. According to Marxism, capitalism was doomed. Why? This response should entail an analytic discussion of The Communist Manifesto and at least one other relevant contemporary source.
5. How does historical antisemitism in Central Europe contribute to the theories of Hitler’s Mein Kampf?
6. ‘War was inevitable for Nazi Germany’. Agree or disagree, and provide supporting evidence.
7. Compare and contrast the social policies of Hitler and Stalin.
8. Critically analyze the term ‘banality of evil’, including stating what Arendt meant by this and why it remains controversial.
9. How does George Orwell in 1984 describe the workings of the propaganda machine? Compare with at least two examples from either Soviet Russia, Nazi Germany, or communist Czechoslovakia.
10. Film analysis: compare and contrast the propaganda methods and aims of Triumph of the Will and Battleship Potemkin. What is the ideological message of each one?
11. Why, historically speaking, has it been important to legally define the term genocide? How have totalitarian regimes in the 20th century facilitated genocide?

**Aims of the research paper**

Students should provide a critical analysis of the question they have chosen, along with evaluating historiography (scholarly sources) in a relevant manner. Formulating a substantiated and cohesive argument is another important aspect, along with including accurate historical context.
**Take-home midterm assessment**

This will be assigned before mid-term week, the due date will be specified in the semester-specific syllabus. The assessment includes answering a series of questions in short-essay format – and an emphasis is placed on critical analysis within the response.

**Group Presentations**

Students will be responsible for one ten-minute (minimum time) group presentation, which will be on either a feature film or documentary dealing with totalitarian regimes. The presentations will begin during Week 5. The form of the presentation should briefly outline the plot, followed by placing the film in a wider historical and theoretical framework. The conclusion of the presentation should include why the selection is relevant to the course.

*Presentation goals*: to analyze the given source critically, to discuss the relevant contexts, and to engage in group work.

**Final Exam**

The format will be five (out of ten) short-answer questions which engage not only with the recollection of factual information but also with the ability to contextualize the answer, followed by an essay portion (one out of at least four). Additionally, the questions that might appear on the exam that are part of the seminars will be emphasized in each class so please pay attention. Guidelines will be provided one week before the exam and there will be a short revision session.

**Class Participation**

Participation is valued as meaningful contribution in the digital and tangible classroom, utilizing the resources and materials presented to students as part of the course. Meaningful contribution requires students to be prepared in advance of each class session and to have regular attendance. Students must clearly demonstrate they have engaged with the materials as directed, for example, through classroom discussions, online discussion boards, peer-to-peer feedback (after presentations), interaction with guest speakers, and attentiveness on co-curricular and outside-of-classroom activities.

**Attendance**

Regular class attendance is required throughout the program.

If you will miss a class for any reason, notify the Program Coordinator and your instructor beforehand via Canvas. You are responsible for any materials covered in class during your absence, and except in the specific cases listed below, credit will not be granted for missed assessments.

Excessive absences will result in a notification letter, and finally a warning letter, sent to you and your home school, based on the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of course hours missed</th>
<th>Number of CIEE classes</th>
<th>Minimum penalty</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to 10%</td>
<td>One to Three 90-min. classes; or One 180-min. class</td>
<td>No penalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10% - 20%</td>
<td>Four 90-min. classes</td>
<td>Written notification* to the student, followed by a warning letter to the student and home school; 3% reduction in the final grade</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Five 90-min. classes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Two 180-min. classes</td>
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<tr>
<td>More than 20%</td>
<td>Six 90-min. classes; or Three 180-min. classes</td>
<td>Automatic course failure, and possible expulsion with notification to the home school</td>
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* The notification letters are intended to ensure that you are well advised in advance of any potential for failure or dismissal, so that you can take steps to avoid this.

As the table shows, **missing more than 20% of any class (e.g., due to undocumented illness, travel delays, flight cancellations, over-sleeping, etc.) results in automatic failure of the course.**

If you miss an assessment in class due to an absence, you will be able to make it up in the following instances:

- You provide a relevant doctor’s note from a local medical professional to your Program Coordinator within 24
hours of your absence (a scan or photograph sent via e-mail are acceptable)

- A CIEE staff member verifies that you were too ill to attend class.
- You provide evidence of a family emergency to your Program Coordinator.
- You have an approved absence related to the observance of a religious holiday from the Academic Director based on a request submitted before you arrived onsite.

**Please note:** Absences incurred due to documented illness, documented family emergency or the observance of a religious holiday approved before arrival onsite do not count towards the total of absences. Students may self-certify one absence due to illness without providing a doctor’s note as long as they notify the Program Coordinator within 24 hours of their absence by e-mail or a text message.

**Other attendance-related policies**

If you transfer from one CIEE class to another during the Add/Drop period, you will not be considered absent from the first session(s) of the new class provided you were marked present for the first session(s) of the original class.

If you are over 15 minutes late for a class, the instructor is required to mark you absent.

In case of class conflicts (irregularities in the class schedule, including field trips and make-up classes), always contact the Academic Department to decide the appropriate course of action.

Please remember to track your attendance on the Canvas Course Sites and report any errors in the record to the Academic Department within one week of the discrepancy date, as later claims may not be considered.

These attendance rules also apply to any required co-curricular excursion, activity, or event, and to for-credit internships.

CIEE staff does not manage absences at partner institutions providing direct enrollment classes (FAMU, ECES and FSV), but they have similar attendance policies and attendance is monitored there. Grade penalties may result from excessive absences.

*N.B. Course schedule is subject to change due to study tours, excursions, or local holidays. Final schedules will be included in the final syllabus provided to students on site.*

**Weekly Schedule**

**Week 1**

Class: 1.1  The Theory of Totalitarianism and the Road(s) to Revolution

**Course introduction** - please read through the course syllabus in preparation for the first class.

Class: 1.2  Theory and critique of totalitarianism

We will be looking at different interpretations of the theory of totalitarianism and analyzing some of the complexities of the term.

Required reading:


**Week 2**

Class: 2.1  The Weimar Republic and ‘the stigma of failure’

The lecture and the seminar discussion will assess the interpretations and the historiography of the Weimar Republic and look at why it’s generally considered to be either a ‘failure’ or simply a prelude to the Nazi Party.

Class: 2.2  Analysis of Hitler and his book Mein Kampf. Ideology of Nazism

we will discuss antisemitism, roots of the race struggle, and various concepts such as *lebensraum*.

Required reading:

- Canning (2010), 567-580.
Week 3
Class: 3.1 Ideology of Communism

The lecture and seminar will explore key ideas of The Communist Manifesto, class struggle, and the notion of a proletariat revolution.

Class: 3.2 Site visit to the Museum of Communism

Topic discussion: historical museums as sites of memory in XXIc Europe.

Required reading:

Week 4
Class: 4.1 Part II: The Mechanics of Nazism and Stalinism

Revolutionary conditions, ideology, and pre-Soviet Russia- we will focus on the road to revolution in tsarist Russia, the heritage of Marxism in turn of the century Europe, Lenin and Marxism.

Class: 4.2 The Bolsheviks and the early foundations of the Soviet state

Required reading:
- Figes (2015), 54-87.

Deadline for submitting assignment on Museum of Communism visit: Monday this week

Week 5
Class: 5.1 The Soviet consolidation of power and the Soviet Terror

The lecture will examine the Gulag system in Soviet Russia. Analysis of the work of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn *The Gulag Archipelago*.

Class: 5.2 .

Analysis of the Great Famine in Ukraine and show trials considering the implications of a society of denunciation.

Required reading:

Week 6
Class: 6.1 Midterm Exam Period

Review for the exam. Please bring any question.

Class: 6.2 Midterm Exam Period

Midterm Exam

Week 7
Class: 7.1 The Mechanisms of Nazism

Focus on the methods used to consolidate power by the Nazis.

Class: 7.2 The Nazi Terror

This lecture will be dedicated to analyzing the purpose of terror and the different mechanisms of
terror used by the SS, in addition to providing a theoretical framework for the term terror itself.

Required reading:

**Week 8**

**Class: 8.1** The Cult of the Leader

In this session we will examine the theoretical concept of charismatic authority (Max Weber).

**Class: 8.2**

Analysis of the speaking to the ‘masses’, engage with critically comparing Hitler and Stalin, and view a few snippets of the Lazy Dictator (Charlie Chaplin).

Required reading:
- Kershaw (2004), 239-54.
- Weber (1949), 212-45.

**Week 9**

**Class: 9.1** The Politics of the Body

The lecture and discussion will cover the symbolism of the human body and its purposes within totalitarian propaganda along with the concept of the human body as the ‘ideal canvas’.

**Class: 9.2** Guest speaker: Marie Janouskova. POST Bellum NGO in the CZ

Required reading:
- Linke (1999), 212-239.
- Roubal (2003), 1-25.

**Week 10**

**Class: 10.1** Part III: Looking at Czechoslovakia during and after the WWII as a case-study

The impact of the meta-events on Czechoslovakia- this lecture session will look at how the propaganda machines of the Third Reich worked against Czechoslovakia’s favour before, during, and after the Munich Agreement.

**Class: 10.2**

Analysis of Life stories during the time of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia under the German occupation (1939-1945)

Required reading:
- Demetz (2009), 3-46.

**Week 11**

**Class: 11.1** Totalitarian Czechoslovakia

After the Communist coup in 1948, certain measures such as show trials were implemented and Czechoslovakia became a hard-line Stalinist state. In this lecture and seminar, we will look at the evolution of a post-war totalitarian Czechoslovakia.

**Class: 11.2**

We will cover the time period from before the Prague Spring (1968) and immediately after, leading to Normalization period and a different kind of oppression functioning within society. Analysis of the meaning of Charta 77.

Required reading:
Week 12

Class: 12.1 1989 Velvet Revolution

Special class on the analysis of the 30th anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the Velvet Revolution.

Defining revolution – Causes of revolutions in Central Europe – Logistics of the revolutions – Opposition movement and opposition demonstrations – Revolutionary power: Civic Forum(s)

Reading:

Class: 12.2 Dealing with the Communist past today

Changing narratives – totalitarianism versus revisionism in the Czech Republic – historians, media and laws as a catalyst of history

Guest lecture: Michal Louč – Law of Anti-Communist resistance and narrative

Reading:
- Švéda (2010).

Week 13

Class: 13.1 Oral Presentations

Class: 13.2 End-of-course discussion

Final Exam and Paper Deadline

Course Materials

Readings

Required:


Švéda, Josef. *Narrative and ideological discourses in representations of the Masářin Brothers*. MPhil(F) thesis, University of Glasgow, 2010 (http://theses.gla.ac.uk/2289/).

Wandycz, Piotr S. *The price of freedom: A history of East Central Europe from the Middle Ages to the present.* (London: Routledge, 1993).

**Required Primary Sources:**


**Recommended:**


