COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

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Lecture Outline

- Soviet history before 1991 and after.
- Three reactions to 1991
- A new history of the Red Empire
- Themes
- Chronology

- From imperial breakdown to red imperialism
- 1930s: Preparing for war
- A long Second World War
- From warfare to welfare
- Imperial Hangover
Soviet History before 1991: Two main problems

Revolution of 1917: Origin

• Was the revolution legitimate?
• Was it a “revolution” or a ”coup”?
• Was it pre-determined or contingent?
• What was at stake was the origins and legitimacy of Soviet style communism as a radical alternative to liberal capitalism.

Stalinism: Destination

• Was Stalinism the logical outcome of Bolshevism?
• Was it an aberration?
• Were there alternatives?
• Did totalitarianism end with Stalin’s death or did it continue?
• What was at stake was the essence of Bolshevism/communism: was it Stalinism or something else?
After 1991: A New Situation

- Soviet history no longer the history of an existing state, society, and social model.
- Instead, the pre-history of 15 independent states.
Reaction 1: Dissolution of Soviet history
Reaction 2: Neo-imperialist fantasies
Reaction 3: Soviet Union as Empire

(1954; 1964; 1997)

(1998; 2011)

(1993)

(1985; 1992)

(2001)

(2005)
Reaction 3: Soviet Union as Empire

(1954; 1964; 1997)

(1985; 1992)

(1993)

(1998; 2011)

(2001)

(2001)

(2014)
Reaction 3: Soviet Union as Empire

- The Formation of the Soviet Union (1954; 1964; 1997)
- The Soviet Experiment (1998; 2011)
- The Revenge of the Past (1993)
- A State of Nations (2001)
- Empire of Nations (2014)
A New History of the Red Empire: short and updated

Reaction 1: Dissolution of Soviet history
- (2006)
- (2007)
- (2017)

Reaction 3: Soviet Union as Empire
- (1954; 1964; 1997)
- (1985; 1992)
- (1993)
- (1998; 2011)
- (2001)
- (2007)
- (2014)

The Soviet Union
A Short History
MARK EDELE

(2002)
(2007)
(2017)

(Nov. 2018)
Themes:
Warfare, Welfare, Empire

The Soviet Union was a warfare state: It was built during war, its elite was expecting more war, and it was best at organizing society for warfare. The brutality of Stalin’s revolutions from above in the 1930s were motivated by preparation for war.

The Soviet Union was a welfare state: It was run by Marxists who wanted to build a communist society where each would work “according to ability” and receive “according to need.” This aspiration – and the free health care, education, and pension system which resulted from it – was immensely popular.

The Soviet Union was an empire: The state that emerged from war, revolution, and civil war reunited much of the old Tsarist empire under the red flag. Like its predecessor, it was a multi-ethnic empire. Unlike its predecessor it promoted ethnic particularism.
Chronology

Part I: The First Age of Violence
1. Twilight of Empire (1904-1914)
2. Imperial Apocalypse (1914-1918)
3. Re-gathering the Empire (1918-1923)

Part II: The Interwar Years
4. Consolidating the Empire (1921-1928)

Part III: The Second Age of Violence
5. Building the Warfare State (1928-1938)
6. A Long Second World War (1937-1949)

Part IV: From Warfare to Welfare
7. Normalization (1944-1957)

Part V: Imperial Discontent
10. After Empire: Epilogue
Chronology

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Twilight of Empire

- Early 20th century: the Russian empire’s formula (serfdom + service classes + warfare state = empire) was challenged by industrial overseas empires in Europe.
- The attempts to adapt (Great reforms 1860s and 70s, industrialization 1890s) caused additional problems.
- The attempt to continue imperial expansion in Asia brought confrontation with Japan, which led to war and revolution in 1904-5.
- The political innovations of 1905 (Duma and Soviet) did not stabilize the regime, which continued to refuse to react to the rise of mass politics.

The Romanov empire at the eve of World War I. The largest continuous land empire in the world had been formed by an agrarian warfare state which harnessed all human and physical resources to service to the state.
World War I: Economic crisis and territorial losses

War led to an economic boom, which in turn caused serious economic imbalances, including catastrophic inflation. Massive population displacement added to war weariness. In 1917, revolution was the result.

Above: money in circulation, thousand million rubles

Before the revolution broke out in Russia, the Kaiser’s armies had occupied Poland, parts of Belarus, and parts of the Baltic provinces. After the revolution, they gobbled up Ukraine, and the rest of Belarus and the Baltics in early 1918.
The “Russian” Revolution(s)

A cluster of revolutions, revolts, wars, and civil wars all taking place on the territory of the Romanov empire in the context of war.

1. Urban revolutions: February/October 1917
2. Rural revolutions
3. Military mutiny
4. Anti-imperial, national revolutions

Petrograd Soviet, 1917

Rural revolution in Finland, 1918

Basmachi in Central Asia
Russian Civil War, 1917-1921

- Phase I: Bolshevik Victory (Oct. 1917-Feb. 1918) – “1917”
- Phase II: Disintegration of empire (Feb.-Nov. 1918) – “1918”
- Phase III: Reds vs. Whites; regathering of much of the empire (Nov. 1918-Spring 1920) –“1919.”
- Phase IV: Bolsheviks against “the democracy”; regathering of empire checked by Poland, but completed in Transcaucasus (1920-21) – “1920.”

Parallel Civil Wars

- Finnish Civil War (1918)
- Baltics 1918
- Civil War in Central Asia 1916-1923/1931
- Soviet-Polish War (April 1920-March 1921)
- Ukraine
- Jews and anti-Semites
- Transcaucasus, 1918-20
National Revolutions

- First category: countries that remain independent
  - Finland
  - Poland

- Second category: countries independent until WWII
  - Estonia
  - Latvia
  - Lithuania

- Third category: countries which are reconquered by Red Army during Civil War:
  - Ukraine
  - Belarus
  - Various “white” territories
  - Central Asia
  - Transcaucasus
Red Empire, 1922-1939

Left: The Constitution of 1924 enshrined the Leninist principle of fake federalism (against the more imperialist stance originally held by Stalin). Lenin thus placed a “time bomb” (V. Putin) under the Soviet Union, which exploded in 1991. The Union would break apart along the lines of the Union republics. The “purely formal feature” of federalism became “one of the most consequential aspects of the formation of the Soviet Union” (R. Pipes, 1954).

Right: Red Empire in 1922 – The Red Army had managed to regather most of the Romanov lands (without Poland, Baltics, Finland).
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10. After Empire: Epilogue
The Soviets inherited a multi-national empire from the Romanovs, an empire where nationalism had become a problem in the 19th century. What was to be done?

“Great Russian chauvinism” of the largest and “most advanced” nation needed to be fought, thought Lenin.

Thus, non-Russian minorities would get their national territories and national cultures, which would be “national in form and socialist in content” (Stalin). This tactic would defeat the nationalist competition to socialism.

A Roma family performing Sovietness for the camera, 1930s. As Brigid O’Keeffe has pointed out in New Soviet Gypsies (2013), the Tsygane, too, were beneficiaries of Soviet affirmative action.
Diaspora nations, in particular those in the borderlands (Poles in the west or Koreans in the east), were subject to special affirmative action policies. The goal was to make minorities into supporters of the regime and to convince their co-nationals across the border that life was better in Soviet lands. In the 1930s, this logic switched into its opposite when Stalin, increasingly nervous about a coming war, resorted to ethnic deportations of these same diaspora nationalities, accused now of loyalties to foreign powers. The first victims were Soviet Korans in 1937, in reaction to outbreak of Sino-Japanese war. During Great Terror (1937-38) diaspora nationals became major victims of shooting operations. Deportations escalated in WWII.
1930s: Preparing for War

Russia “was beaten by the Mongol khans. She was beaten by the Turkish beys. She was beaten by the Swedish feudal lords. She was beaten by the Polish and Lithuanian gentry. She was beaten by the British and French capitalists. She was beaten by the Japanese barons. All beat her – because of her backwardness, because of her military backwardness, cultural backwardness, political backwardness, industrial backwardness, agricultural backwardness. They beat her because to do so was profitable and could be done with impunity... Such is the law of the exploiters – to beat the backward and the weak. It is the jungle law of capitalism....

Do you want our socialist fatherland to be beaten and to lose its independence? If you do not want this, you must put an end to its backwardness in the shortest possible time and develop a genuine Bolshevik tempo in building up its socialist economy...

We are fifty or a hundred years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this distance in ten years. Either we do it, or we shall go under.”

(Stalin in 1931 reformulating the dilemma of the Russian empire).
The Bolsheviks found a new solution to the old problem of the Russian empire. Modern, authoritarian mass politics harnessed the masses, an updated police state dealt with enemies, and the Communist Party mobilized the ambitious and the gifted in a new service class to serve the empire.
A Long Second World War

◆ Phase 1: 21 August 1937 – 1939: Defensive War in Asia

◆ Phase 2: 17 September 1939 – 22 June 1941: Expansion in Europe

◆ Phase 3: 22 June 1941 – February 1943: Defensive war against Germany

◆ Phase 4: February 1943 to September 1945: Offensive war against Germany (until 8-9 May 1945), then against Japan

◆ Phase 5: 1943/September 1945-1949: Consolidation and Pacification

“Glory to the Red Army (1945)”
Chronology

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10. After Empire: Epilogue
31 July 1957: Decree “On the Development of Housing construction within the USSR” started massive house building program. Millions of houses were built in incredible speed. The “Khrushchev houses” (khrushchevk) became soon known as "Khrushchev slums" (khrushcheby).

(Please see the photo below for an example of what the "Khrushchev houses" looked like.)

The line, a central institution of Soviet life. The Soviet economy systematically produced shortages of consumer goods. This economy of scarcity was one of the major weaknesses of the Soviet system and it caused severe everyday problems for ordinary people trying to run their lives. (Above: standing in line for milk in the final years of the Soviet Union)

Movie: Feminism as consumerism: International women’s day, 1964.
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10. After Empire: Epilogue
“...a distinction between ‘being’ an empire and ‘having’ and empire. ... These two types of empire face decolonization in different ways: If you have an empire, you can shed your colonies and preserve the metropolitan core. ... If you are an empire, losing the periphery means total transformation of the state and society.”

(Peter C. Perdue, 2009; who is quoting Charles S. Maier, 2006; who is quoting Geoffrey Hosking, 1995 – who got his idea from Kliuchevskii...)

“Vasilii Osipovich Kliuchevskii (1841-1911) Chair in Russian History, Moscow University (from 1879)"

“The history of Russia is the history of a land that colonises itself (kolonizuetsia)” (Kliuchevskii, Course of Russian History, 1880s, plagiarizing his teacher S. M. Solov’ev (1820-1879): “Ancient Russian history is the history of a land that colonises itself.”
National Revolutions (1): The Western Borderlands

- First category: countries that remain independent
  - Finland
  - Poland

- Second category: countries independent until WWII
  - Estonia
  - Latvia
  - Lithuania

- Third category: countries which are reconquered by Red Army during Civil War:
  - Ukraine
  - Belarus
  - Various “white” territories
National Revolutions (2): Central Asia and Transcaucasia

- The republics in the Transcaucasia and Central Asia belong to the third category: countries reconquered by Red Army during Civil War.
- Cut off initially from Bolshevik Russia during the civil war, in each of them multi-sided ethnic, religious, social and political struggles developed their own bloody dynamic until the Red Army could conquer and “pacify” the regions.
- Both Transcaucasia and Central Asia were integrated into the Soviet Union as formally independent republics with right to secede.
- This formed the basis for independence in 1991.
The paradox of Red Imperialism

• Culture of empire.
• Ideological similarity between imperialism and Marxist internationalism.
• Bridgehead for world revolution.
• The Romanov empire as an economic system.

Above, right: ”The Great Stalin is the banner of the friendship of the peoples of the Soviet Union!” (1950). The Bolsheviks were Marxist anti-imperialists (imperialism, wrote Lenin in 1917, was “the highest stage of capitalism” – see above left). And yet, they re-built the Romanov empire (without capitalists, Romanovs, or nobles) as the Soviet Union – a multi-national empire covering largely the same real estate as its predecessor. How do we explain such ”Red Imperialism”? 
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Re-gathering “Russian” Lands (1939-40)

Border States, 1919-1920

Soviet annexations, 1939-1940
The Greater Soviet Empire, 1939-1991
Having an empire, being an empire.

“...a distinction between ‘being’ an empire and ‘having’ and empire. ... These two types of empire face decolonization in different ways: If you have an empire, you can shed your colonies and preserve the metropolitan core. ... If you are an empire, losing the periphery means total transformation of the state and society.”

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After Empire: Today’s Eurasia

https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=o01nS_M3PQY
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(Peter C. Perdue, 2009)

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