CIEE Prague, Czech Republic

Course Name: The Rise and Fall of Central European Totalitarianism
Course Number: POLI 3003 PRAG
Programs offering course: CES, CNMJ
Language of instruction: English
U.S. Semester Credits: 3
Contact Hours: 45
Term: Spring 2020

Course Description
Today 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 at explaining this conundrum through systematic study of totalitarian practices. First, it will provide a basic theoretical outline and criticism of the term “totalitarianism”. This will be followed by analysis of the ideologies of the “Totalitarian Twins”, i.e. Communism and Nazism, which both grew from a perceived crisis of liberal democracy. The main focus of the course will be on methods by which the two regimes ruled 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 ahead for liberal democracy in the current political situation. The course will also study the often overlooked issue of environmental destruction especially under communism and the consequent rise in the environmental consciousness and movements, which contributed significantly to the eventual fall of communism. The course will use a “Prague perspective”, i.e., it will study 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. It is possible to understand the mentality only with a historical background. During this course we will undergo the journey to the minds of people who lived in these two destructive dictatorships and try to understand them.
Learning Objectives
The main objective of the course overall is to develop an understanding of how totalitarianism ‘rises’ in society and becomes a part of something other than just the political system. This goal should be achieved by doing the following:
• Critically defining totalitarianism
• Examining Communism (Marxism, Leninist-Marxist theory, etc) and Nazism through their core texts: The Communist Manifesto (1848) and Mein Kampf (1925)
• Grasping the historical context that led to the rise of Nazism in Germany and Communism in both Russia and post-WWII Czechoslovakia
• Analyzing the popular appeal of totalitarian regimes by delving into propaganda and its usefulness as a principle tool
• Understanding the socio-political role of terror within totalitarian systems
• Comparing and contrasting the economic policies of Nazism and Communism
• Creating an understanding of totalitarianism’s effects on daily life in Germany, Russia, and Czechoslovakia

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 as well
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.

There are a series of course requirements which, when added together, will make up the final grade:
1. Research paper: 20%
2. Take-home midterm assessment: 15%
3. Group presentations: 20%
4. Final exam: 25%
5. Class participation: 20%

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.

**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.

**Midterm take-home 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.

**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.

**Participation**
Assessment of students’ participation in class is an inherent component of the course grade. Students are required to actively, meaningfully and thoughtfully contribute to class discussions and all types of in-class activities throughout the duration of the class. Students are responsible for following the course content and are expected to ask clarification questions if they cannot follow the instructor’s or other students’ line of thought or argumentation.
The use of electronic devices is only allowed for computer-based in-class tests, assignments and other tasks specifically assigned by the course instructor. Students are expected to take notes by hand unless the student is entitled to the use of computer due to his/her academic accommodations. In such cases the student is required to submit an official letter issued by his/her home institution specifying the extent of academic accommodations.

Class participation also includes students’ active participation in Canvas discussions and other additional tasks related to the course content as specified by the instructor. If missing a class, the student is expected to catch up on the class content and to submit well-reflected and in-depth contributions to Canvas discussions on the particular topic or reflections to the instructor to ensure that his/her absence from the class will not significantly affect his/her participation grade.

Students will receive a partial participation grade every three weeks.

**CIEE Prague Attendance Policy**

Regular class attendance is required throughout the program, and all absences are treated equally regardless of reason for any affected CIEE course. Attendance policies also apply to any required co-curricular class excursions or events, as well as Internship.

Students who transfer from one CIEE class to another during the add/drop period will not be considered absent from the first session(s) of their new class, provided they were marked present for the first session(s) of their original class. Otherwise, the absence(s) from the original class carry over to the new class and count against the grade in that class.

**Missing classes** will lead to the following penalties:

**90-minute semester classes:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of 90-minute classes</th>
<th>Equivalent percentage of the total course hours missed</th>
<th>Minimum penalty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>one to two 90-minute classes</td>
<td>up to 10%</td>
<td>no penalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>three 90-minute classes</td>
<td>10.1–15%</td>
<td>reduction of the final grade by 3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>four 90-minute classes</td>
<td>15.1–17%</td>
<td>reduction of the final grade by 5%; <strong>written warning</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>five 90-minute classes</td>
<td>17.1–20%</td>
<td>reduction of the final grade by 7%; <strong>written warning</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
six and more 90-minute classes | more than 20% | automatic course failure and possible expulsion

180-minute semester classes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of 180-minute classes</th>
<th>Equivalent percentage of the total course hours missed</th>
<th>Minimum penalty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>one 180-minute class</td>
<td>up to 10%</td>
<td>no penalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>two 180-minute classes</td>
<td>10.1–20%</td>
<td>reduction of the final grade by 5%; written warning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>three and more 180-minute classes</td>
<td>more than 20%</td>
<td>automatic course failure and possible expulsion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Persistent absenteeism (students approaching 20% of the total course hours missed, or violating the attendance policy in more than one class) will result in a written warning, a notification to the student’s home school, and possibly a dismissal from the program.

Missing more than 20% of the total class hours will lead to a course failure, and potential program dismissal. This is a CIEE rule that applies to all CIEE courses and is in line with the Participant Contract that each CIEE student signs before arriving on-site.

Late arrival to class will be considered a partial (up to 15 minutes late) or full (15 or more minutes late) absence. Three partial absences due to late arrivals will be regarded as one full class absence.

Students must notify their professor and Program Coordinators (PC) beforehand if they are going to miss class for any reason and are responsible for any material covered in class in their absence.

If missing a class during which a test, exam, the student’s presentation or other graded class assignments are administered, make-up assignment will only be allowed in approved circumstances, such as serious medical issues. In this case, the student must submit a local doctor’s note within 24 hours of his/her absence to the PC, who will decide whether the student qualifies for a make-up assignment. Doctor’s notes may be submitted via e-mail or phone (a scan or a photograph are acceptable), however the student must ensure that the note is delivered to the PC.

Should a truly extraordinary situation arise, the student must contact the PC immediately concerning permission for a make-up assignment. Make-up assignments are not granted automatically! The PC decides the course of action for all absence cases that are not
straightforward. **Always contact the PC with any inquiry about potential absence(s) and the nature thereof.**

**Personal travel** (including flight delays and cancelled flights), handling passport and other document replacements, interviews, volunteering and other similar situations are not considered justifiable reasons for missing class or getting permission for make-up assignments.

**For class conflicts** (irregularities in the class schedule, including field trips, make-up classes and other instances), **always contact the Academic Assistant** to decide the appropriate course of action.

Course attendance is recorded on individual Canvas Course Sites. **Students are responsible for checking their attendance regularly to ensure the correctness of the records.** In case of discrepancies, students are required to contact the Academic Assistant **within one week of the discrepancy date** to have it corrected. Later claims **will not** be considered.

CIEE staff does not directly manage absences at FAMU and ECES, but they have similar attendance policies and attendance is monitored there. Grade penalties may result from excessive absences.

**CIEE Academic Honesty Policy**

CIEE subscribes to standard U.S. norms requiring that students exhibit the highest standards regarding academic honesty. Cheating and plagiarism in any course assignment or exam will not be tolerated and may result in a student failing the course or being expelled from the program. Standards of honesty and norms governing originality of work differ significantly from country to country. We expect students to adhere to both the American norms and the local norms, and in the case of conflict between the two, the more stringent of the two will preside. Three important principles are considered when defining and demanding academic honesty. These are related to the fundamental tenet that one should not present the work of another person as one’s own.

**The first principle** is that final examinations, quizzes and other tests must be done without assistance from another person, without looking at or otherwise consulting the work of another person, and without access to notes, books, or other pertinent information (unless the professor has explicitly announced that a particular test is to be taken on an “open book” basis).

**The second principle** applies specifically to course work: the same written paper may not be submitted in two classes. Nor may a paper for which you have already received credit at your home institution be submitted to satisfy a paper requirement while studying overseas.

**The third principle** is that any use of the work of another person must be documented in any written papers, oral presentations, or other assignments carried out in connection with a course. This usually is done when quoting directly from another’s work or including information
told to you by another person. The general rule is that if you have to look something up, or if you learned it recently either by reading or hearing something, you have to document it.

The penalty ranges from an F grade on the assignment, failure in the course to dismissal from the program. The Academic Director is consulted and involved in decision making in every case of a possible violation of academic honesty.

**Weekly Schedule**

**Week 1**

**The Theory of Totalitarianism and the Road(s) to Revolution**

**Class 1: Course introduction**- please read through the course syllabus in preparation for the first class.  
**Class 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 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: 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 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 2: Site visit to the Museum of Communism. Topic discussion:** historical museums as sites of memory in XXIc Europe.
Required reading:
  • *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), 31-66.

**Week 4**

**Part II: The Mechanics of Nazism and Stalinism**

**Class 1:** 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 2:** The Bolsheviks and the early foundations of the Soviet state.

Required reading:
  • Figes, (2015), 7-53.
  • Figes (2015), 54-87.

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

**Week 5**

**The Soviet consolidation of power and the Soviet Terror**

**Class 1:** The lecture will examine the Gulag system in Soviet Russia. Analysis of the work of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn *The Gulag Archipelago*.

**Class 2:** Analysis of the Great Famine in Ukrajne and show trials considering the implications of a society of denunciation.

Required reading:
  • Wheatcroft (2007), 20-43.
  • Figes (2015), 190-200.

**Week 6**

**Midterm Exam Period**

**Class 1:** Review for the exam. Please bring any question.

**Class 2:** Midterm Exam

**Week 7**

**Midterm Exam Period**

**Class 1:** *The Mechanisms of Nazism.* Focus on the methods used to consolidate power by the Nazis.

**Class 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:
• Loeffel (2012), 380-393.

**Week 8**

**Class 1: The Cult of the Leader** - in this session we will examine the theoretical concept of charismatic authority (Max Weber).

**Class 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 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 2:** Guest speaker: Marie Janouskova. POST Bellum NGO in the CZ

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

**Week 10**

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

**Class 1:** 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 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**

**Totalitarian Czechoslovakia**

**Class 1:** 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 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:
- Bouska and Pinerova (2009), 7-22.

**Week 12**

**Revolution**

**Class 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 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).

**Final Exam Week**

**Class 1:**
Oral Presentations

**Class 2:**
End-of-course discussion

Final Exam and Paper Deadline
Course Materials

Required Reading


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


**Required Primary Sources**


**Recommended Reading:**


McDermott, Kevin and Matthew Stibbe, eds. Stalinist Terror in Eastern Europe: Elite Purges and Mass Repression (Manchester, 2010).


Rupnik, Jacques. The Other Europe: The Rise And Fall Of Communism In East-Central Europe (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989).


Zamyatin, Yevgeny. We (New York: Modern Library, 2006).