

Whatever happened to the USSR?

Christopher Binns

It is now twenty years since the Soviet 'empire' in Eastern Europe collapsed, followed by the collapse of the Soviet Union itself in 1991. All this seems 'inevitable' now, but was it really so, and what have been the consequences of the collapse of this country which had such a huge impact on the 20th century, both for the post-Soviet area and the rest of the world? In broad terms the lectures will cover the following themes.

- (1) What was the Soviet system and what problems did it face in the 1980s? Were the problems insoluble?
- (2) Gorbachev's reforms and the dissolution of the USSR: was Gorbachev's project realistic? What actually brought about the collapse of the state?
- (3) The emergence of the Russian Federation: Yeltsin's early years: The realities of power, the impact of 'shock therapy' in economic transition, relations with the West after the 'end of the Cold War';.
- (4) The pattern of independence in the non-Russian republics: a survey of the different responses in the non-Russian republics to the problems of independence (the Baltic, the Slavic republics, Central Asia and the Caucasus).
- (5) From Yeltsin to Putin: Russia's new role in the world: the revival of quasi-Soviet authoritarian governance and Russia's new economic strength and political assertiveness.

In each lecture we will look both at internal events and at their international context and implications.

Christopher Binns has forty years experience as a specialist on the politics and culture of Russia and eastern Europe, having lectured on the politics and modern history of this region at the universities of Manchester, the London School of Economics and Political Science and the European University (Budapest). He is a fluent Russian speaker and has visited Russia many times.

Suggested Reading

Michael Waller, *Russian Politics Today*, Manchester University Press, 2005

Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, Oxford University Press, 1996

Stephen White, *Gorbachev and After*, Cambridge University Press (various eds.)

Jerry Hough, *Democratization and Revolution in the USSR 1985-1991*, Washington DC, Brookings Institution, 1997

Stephen White, *Russia's New Politics*, Cambridge University Press, 2000

Stephen White et. al. (eds.), *Developments in Russian Politics* (6), Palgrave Macmillan, 2005

G. Schoepflin, *Politics in Eastern Europe*, Blackwell, 1993.