

OSHER LIFE-LONG LEARNING INSTITUTE, UC BERKELEY, WINTER 2025

“TWELVE CONTROVERSIES ABOUT COMMUNISM, PAST AND PRESENT”

WEDNESDAYS, 10AM TO NOON

INSTRUCTOR: GEORGE BRESLAUER. UCB PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

The rise and fall of world communism was one of the great dramas of the 20th century, born in wars (World War I, World II), offering an alternative modernity to that of the capitalist world, and ultimately succumbing to the pressures of Cold War, capitalist globalization, and popular disaffection. The result was either systemic collapse (the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe) or a fundamental alteration of key features of the communist economic system (China, Vietnam, Laos). Beyond these three, two unreformed communist regimes remain: North Korea, mired in Stalinism; and Cuba, mired in a brittle, oligarchic regime.

Past versions of this OLLI course presented a historical overview of this drama. The 2025 version of this course will instead address controversial questions about the domestic and foreign policies of communist states.

SIX WEEKS, TWELVE LECTURES + Q&A

Lecture 1: Was Lenin a Marxist?

Lecture 2: Was November 1917 a “Great Proletarian Socialist Revolution”?

Lecture 3: Was Stalinism a Logical Continuation---or a Betrayal---of Leninism?

Lecture 4: Is Mass Murder Intrinsic to Communist Regimes? Reflections on Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot (Cambodia), Kim (North Korea), Hoxha (Albania), and others.

Lecture 5: Was the Cold War avoidable?

Lecture 6: Was the Sino-Soviet schism avoidable?

Lecture 7: Are communist regimes reformable? (Reflections on the collapse of European communism)

Lecture 8: Why did Asian and Caribbean communism NOT collapse?

Lecture 9: The new, revised “Strategic Triangle”: Russia, China, and the United States in the 2020’s: *déjà vu* all over again? War between the US and China?

Lecture 10: North Korea: does this regime have a future? How likely is war between the United States and North Korea?

Lecture 11: Vietnam: a stable communist regime for the foreseeable future?

Lecture 12: W(h)ither Cuba?

Enrollees who seek greater background about the history of world communism might consult my book, *The Rise and Demise of World Communism* (Oxford University Press, 2021).