THE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF WESTERN EUROPE

Why do some nations manage to secure and consolidate democracy while others slide into dictatorship or fascism? What factors and ideas conditioned the development of the modern state? How do nations manage the political challenges generated by rapid economic development? These are major issues facing many nations today but also ones that the countries of Western Europe confronted in past centuries. The object of this course is to consider what can be learned about democratization and processes of political change from the historical experience of four European nations, Britain, France, Germany and Italy. It concentrates on the character of each nation’s response to the common problems associated with the transition from feudalism, the democratic revolutions, industrialization, and the arrival of mass politics. The course provides an overview of modern European history, useful as background for further work on Europe or in social and political theory, covers analytical issues in political development, and explores the construction of modern politics.

Course Requirements

Two 8 page papers on a topic handed out one week before the paper is due and based entirely on required readings already assigned for class (25% and 35% of the grade). The first topic will probably be handed on Oct 13th for return on Oct 21st and the second handed out on Nov 12th for return on Nov 20th.

A final examination. (30% of the grade).

Participation in weekly discussion sections (10% of the grade).

The course surveys a great deal of European history rapidly. It assumes no prior historical knowledge. Each week combines readings from A History of Modern Europe by John Merriman with essays that explore the analytical issues of the course. Further sources are listed for each week’s topics but they are for those who wish to follow up specific topics and not required reading for the course.

Course Outline and Required Readings

I. (3-8 Sept) INTRODUCTION
   i. The Problematic of the Course
   ii. Feudalism and the Medieval Age

II. (10-15 Sept) THE FORMATION OF MODERN STATES
   i. The Military Revolution and the Making of Modern States
   ii. Explaining Variations in Modern States


Further Sources

III. (17-22 Sept) FROM ABSOLUTISM TO DEMOCRACY: ONE APPROACH
   i. The Commercialization of Agriculture
   ii. Alternative Approaches to Democratization


Further Sources

IV. (24-29 Sept) SOCIAL FORCES IN THE ENGLISH REVOLUTION OF THE 1640s
   i. The Background to Revolution
   ii. Revolution, Civil War or Reform Process? Alternative Approaches


Further Sources

V. (1 Oct-6 Oct) **STRUCTURES AND IDEAS IN THE FRENCH REVOLUTION OF 1789**

i. Four Revolutions in One  
   ii. Causes and Consequences: Competing Theories


*Further Sources*

VI. (8-13 Oct) **MAKING MARKETS: THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION**

i. The Political Preconditions for Industrialization  
   ii. Alternative Paths toward Industrial Society


*Further Sources*

VII. (15-20 Oct) **GRADUAL DEMOCRATIZATION: 19TH CENTURY BRITAIN**

i. The Reform Acts  
   ii. Consolidating Democracy


*Further Sources*
VIII. (22-27 Oct) TURBULENT DEMOCRATIZATION: 19TH CENTURY FRANCE

  i. The Political Regimes of 19th Century France
  ii. Democracy and the IIIrd Republic


Further Sources

IX. (29 Oct-3 Nov) IS THERE A ‘SONDERWEG’? 19TH CENTURY GERMANY

  i. The Achievement of German Unification
  ii. The Political Synthesis of the Second Reich


Further Sources

X. (5-10 Nov) THE LIMITS OF LIBERALISM: 19TH CENTURY ITALY

  i. The Process of Italian Unification
  ii. The Politics of Trasformismo


Further Sources

XI. (12-17 Nov) **DEMOCRACY'S COLLAPSE: GERMANY AND ITALY**

i. The Challenges of Mass Politics
   ii. The Rise of Fascism


Further Sources


XII. (19-24 Nov) **HISTORICAL LEGACIES AND POST-WAR PARTY POLITICS**

i. The Origins of Party Systems
   ii. The Challenges to Party Systems


Further Sources


XIII. (1-3 Dec) **POST-WAR POLITICS: A POST-MODERN ERA?**

i. The Shift in Policy Systems
ii. The Post-Modern Politics of the European Union


Further Sources