

Wednesday, September 8, 12-1:30 pm • 1636 International Institute, 1080 S. University

***“Modernity Unbound:
Tol’iatti as a Soviet City of the Sixties”***

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What distinguished the Soviet cities of the sixties – not Soviet cities *in* the 1960s but the ones that were conceived more or less *ex nihilo* during that decade? Did everyday life resemble that of other, older cities? Did residents enjoy privileges associated with everything being up-to-date and the product of the scientific-technological revolution then at its (rhetorical) zenith, or was there a darker side to these cities without pasts? This lecture addresses these questions by considering the city of Togliatti, a city reborn twice – once in the 1950s as a result of a major hydroelectric dam across the Volga, and again in the late 1960s after the decision to locate a giant auto factory in the (recently renamed) city. Although much of the reportage about its frenetic construction echoed Magnitogorsk and other hoary urban-industrial projects of the Stalin era, the new Tol’iatti owed its architectural inspiration to more contemporary, modernist designs adapted by Soviet urban planners from Western Europe. In fact, Siegelbaum argues that cities like Tol’iatti concretized the modernist, technocratic dream of trans-systemic convergence. Rather than betraying the promise of the sixties, such monuments to the *dirigisme* of urban planners constituted one of that decade’s less appealing legacies, one with which post-Soviet urban residents are still grappling.

Lewis H. Siegelbaum is professor of Russian history at Michigan State University. He received his D.Phil. from Oxford University in 1976 and taught at La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia until 1983. He is the author of *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935-1941* (1988); *Soviet State and Society between Revolutions, 1918-1929* (1994); *Stalinism as a Way of Life* (2000, co-authored with A. Sokolov); and *Cars for Comrades: The Life of the Soviet Automobile* (2008). In 2007-08 he was a Fellow at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIAS). His work in Soviet history has been animated by an interest in technology, ideology, and material culture, but his new project – on regimes and repertoires of migration in Russian-dominated political space – takes him in a new direction.

