

## **REVOLUTIONS AND CONTENTIOUS POLITICS (Current Global and Development Challenges and Solutions – elective)**

**Semester:** Spring 2026

**ECTS:** 10

**Programme(s):** Global and Development Studies / International Politics and Governance / Public Administration (elective specialization course)

**Course Description:** This specialization course introduces students to the history and theory of revolutions and contentious politics, with emphasis on both comparative-historical analysis and revolutions as social formations. The course surveys major schools of revolutionary theory and examines selected revolutionary episodes, including the French, Russian, Haitian, and Palestinian revolutions, alongside contemporary uprisings and protest movements. Students will develop analytical tools for understanding how societies mobilize for radical social change, how revolutionary events unfold, and how revolutions relate to colonialism, state formation, ideology, and global political transformation.

Teaching combines lectures, seminar discussion, student preparation, and independent research beyond the compulsory texts. Two practice-oriented sessions provide insight into research, documentation, art, and advocacy connected to revolutionary politics.

### **Overall Objective:**

- Be able to explain and evaluate, using relevant terminology, the advantages and disadvantages of various theories/theory lines within the aspect of a subject area that is dealt with in the specialisation course
- Be able to confidently and independently evaluate, select and apply relevant theories in relation to an issue
- Be able to reflect critically on the relevance of the topic to the subject matter of the course
- Carry out analyses on a scientific basis and deal in a creative and solution-oriented manner with central issues within the course theme
- Communicate knowledge in language that is technically precise, well-structured and well-argued.

**Learning Outcomes:** by the end of the course, students should be able to:

- explain and evaluate, using relevant terminology, the advantages and disadvantages of different theories and theory traditions in the study of revolutions and contentious politics;

- independently select and apply relevant theories to concrete analytical problems;
- reflect critically on the relevance of revolutionary politics to broader questions in global and development studies;
- conduct analyses on a scientific basis and address central course themes in a creative and solution-oriented way;
- communicate knowledge in technically precise, well-structured, and well-argued language.

**Teaching and Learning Activities:** the course consists of:

- lectures and seminar-style discussion;
- guided reading of mandatory and recommended literature;
- student-led preparation and short research tasks;
- one museum/archive excursion;
- one film-based discussion session with invited practitioner participation.

### **Assessment**

Individual oral exam based on a written product.

The character limit of the written product is 2,400-3,600 characters, including spaces.

The character limits include the cover, table of contents, bibliography, figures and other illustrations, but exclude any appendices.

Time allowed for exam including time used for assessment: 25 minutes.

The assessment is an overall assessment of the written product(s) and the subsequent oral examination.

Permitted support and preparation materials for the oral exam: Course material and own notes.

Assessment: 7-point grading scale.

Moderation: Internal co-assessor.

Welcome to the course on Revolutions and Contentious Politics! It surveys history and theory of revolutions with an emphasis on the French Revolution and beyond. The aim of the course is to be able to analyze revolutions at different levels: both as comparative historical phenomena, and as social formations. The course will give you theoretical and analytical tools to understand how societies mobilize for radical social change, and how revolutions can develop. We will discuss schools of thought on this large topic; contemporary examples of revolutions and uprisings; and go in-depth with some of the most iconic revolutions in history, including the French, the Russian, the Haitian, and the Palestinian. Classes will be a combination of lectures and discussions, requiring students to read and prepare – and often read and research outside of the compulsory texts. Two excursions provide practical experiences of what it is like to work with revolutions in research, documentation, art, and advocacy.

It is no requirement to have any prior knowledge of the topic. If you would like to read a brief overview of the topic, Jack Goldstone's *Revolutions: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford UP 2023) is recommended.

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## Course Schedule and Reading Plan

### **Lecture 1. Introduction to Revolutions and Contentious Politics**

This lecture will introduce course aims and course requirements, including exam requirements. A written question (to be handed in by the end of the course) will be handed out and explained. The lecture will provide a broad introduction to the question of revolution, and the pivotal role of revolutions in modernity. Via the text of Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow we will also gain a common language for talking about “contentious politics”. To understand the relation between modernity, revolution, colonialism, and state formation, we will read a text from, and another text about *Black Jacobins*, C. L. R. James’ famous 1938 book about the Haitian revolution. As a part of this introduction, we will briefly look at the different examples of revolutions in modern history, and what is often identified as generations of revolution theory. This overview of theory will continue in next session. Before this class, please read the mandatory texts carefully and familiarize yourselves with the Haitian revolution. It would be advisable to read the text by Laurent Dubois before reading C. L. R. James.

#### **Mandatory readings**

- Dubois, Laurent. “Reading *The Black Jacobins*, Seven Decades Later.” *NACLA Report on the Americas* 42, no. 2 (2009): 38-42.
- James, C. L. R. *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. Any standard edition. Read chap. 22, “The Bourgeoisie Prepares to Restore Slavery.”
- Tilly, Charles, and Sidney Tarrow. *Contentious Politics*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2007. Preface and chap. 1, “Making Claims.”

#### **Additional readings**

- Arendt, Hannah. *On Revolution*. London: Faber and Faber, 1963.
- Forsdick, Charles, and Christian Høgsbjerg, eds. *The Black Jacobins Reader*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017.
- Lawson, George. *Anatomies of Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.
- Negri, Antonio. *Time for Revolution*. London: Continuum, 2004.

### **Lecture 2. Generations of Revolution Theory**

The study of revolutions has gone through several "generations" of scholarship. This lecture provides an overview of those generations with a focus on what can be broadly defined as structural theories (such as Skocpol, whom we read) which traditionally have put much emphasis on states and state structures, or other variables that seem to influence and perhaps determine

where and when revolutions occur. More recent approaches, drawing on anthropology of revolutions, focus more on the behavioral patterns of revolutionaries, and on the often quite unpredictable patterns of mobilization and violence during an event. The aim of the class is to provide some useful typologies for this enormous literature. At the end of the class, we will do an exercise to test some of the theories on current and recent revolutions. Prepare by reading the mandatory texts and take notes on a recent revolution or uprising that interests you.

### **Mandatory readings**

- Lawson, George. "Within and Beyond the 'Fourth Generation' of Revolutionary Theory." *Sociological Theory* 34, no. 2 (2016): 106-27.
- Skocpol, Theda. *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979. Introduction and chap. 1.
- Thomassen, Bjørn. "Notes towards an Anthropology of Political Revolutions." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54, no. 3 (2012): 679-706.

### **Additional readings**

- Brinton, Crane. *The Anatomy of Revolution*. New York: Vintage, 1965.
- Moore, Barrington, Jr. *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1966.

### **Lecture 3. The History of the Idea of Revolution**

The fourth generation of theories of revolution have highlighted the importance of ideas to revolutions, but what about the idea of revolution itself? This lecture traces the historical emergence and development of the modern idea of revolution. We start by reconstructing classical ideas of civil strife and constitutional change, and then trace how the concept of *revolutio* migrated from astronomy into early modern political language, where it initially denoted restoration rather than novelty. We then examine the major semantic and political shifts that occurred in the late eighteenth century, whereby revolution came to refer to a deliberate and fundamental transformation of society. Finally, we trace how the idea of revolution continued to develop within the Marxist tradition, setting the stage for the twentieth century's dominant script of revolutionary politics.

### **Mandatory readings**

- Arendt, Hannah. "The Meaning of Revolution." In *On Revolution*, 11-48. New York: Penguin Books, 2006.
- Edelstein, Dan. "Introduction: Come the Revolution." In *The Revolution to Come: A History of an Idea from Thucydides to Lenin*, 1-26. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2025.

- Koselleck, Reinhart. “Historical Criteria of the Modern Concept of Revolution.” In *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, 43-57. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.
- Kumar, Krishan. “Revolution.” In *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, edited by Maryanne Cline Horowitz, 5:2112-21. Detroit: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 2005.

#### **Additional readings**

- Koselleck, Reinhart, Neithard Bulst, Jörg Fisch, and Christian Meier. “Revolution, Rebellion, Aufruhr, Bürgerkrieg.” In *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, edited by Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck, 653-788. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1984.
- Rosenstock-Huessy, Eugen. “Revolution as a Political Concept.” In *Revolutions: Finished and Unfinished, From Primal to Final*, edited by Paul Caringella, Wayne Cristaudo, and Glenn Hughes, 1-7. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012.

#### **Lecture 4. Popular Sovereignty and Constituent Power**

This lecture follows the historical formation of the idea of popular sovereignty and the claim that legitimate political authority originates with “the people,” which has accompanied and animated all modern revolutions. We start from Roman conceptions of the *populus* and later medieval (mis-)interpretations of Roman law, proceeding to examine arguments about the people’s authority were reworked in early modern theories of sovereignty and resistance. These debates crystallize in the revolutionary period, where the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Abbé Emmanuel Sieyès articulated the idea of popular sovereignty and constituent power, understood as the capacity to found a constitution and authorize a new political order.

#### **Mandatory readings**

- Agamben, Giorgio. “What Is a People?” In *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, 29-35. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- Flohr, Mikkel. “Reconceptualizing Populism: A Genealogy of the Concept(s) of the People and Popular Sovereignty.” Unpublished working paper, course text.
- Kalyvas, Andreas. “Constituent Power.” In *Political Concepts: A Critical Lexicon*, edited by J. M. Bernstein, 87-117. New York: Fordham University Press, 2018.

#### **Additional readings**

- Canovan, Margaret. “‘The People’ and Its Past.” In *The People*, 10-39. Cambridge: Polity, 2005.
- Cassin, Barbara, Marc Crépon, and Claudia Moatti. “People/Race/Nation.” In *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, edited by Barbara Cassin, 751-63. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014.

- Hardt, Michael. "Foreword: Three Keys to Understanding Constituent Power." In Antonio Negri, *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State*, vii-xiii. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

### **Lecture 5. The French Revolution**

The French Revolution is the paradigmatic revolution; it has been a reference point for revolutionaries and reactionaries alike, fixated on the sequence of its key events and its central figures and their dynamics; inspired or horrified by the language of popular sovereignty and "liberty, equality, and fraternity." This lecture examines the crisis and conflicts that led to 1789, the revolutionary sequence itself, and the unstable passage from constitutional refounding to civil war, terror, military dictatorship, and the Napoleonic wars. Building on the previous session's discussion of popular sovereignty, we focus on how "the people" became a political actor in practice, and how revolutionary agency and ideas helped drive the revolution as much as structural conditions did. Sewell's event-centred analyses guide our attention to shifting meanings, mobilization, and the formation of new collective loyalties in the making of revolutionary outcomes.

#### **Mandatory readings**

- Doyle, William. *The French Revolution: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019, 17-64.
- Sewell, William H., Jr. "Collective Violence and Collective Loyalties in France: Why the French Revolution Made a Difference." *Politics & Society* 18, no. 4 (1990): 527-52.
- Sewell, William H., Jr. "Ideologies and Social Revolutions: Reflections on the French Case." In *Social Revolutions in the Modern World*, edited by Theda Skocpol, 169-98. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

#### **Additional readings**

- Gauchet, Marcel. "Rights of Man." In *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, edited by François Furet and Mona Ozouf, 818-28. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989.
- Ozouf, Mona. "Revolution." In *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, edited by François Furet and Mona Ozouf, 806-17. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989.

### **Lecture 6. The Russian Revolution/s**

The Russian Revolution was not just a single revolution, but a series of discrete but interrelated revolutions: the failed revolution of 1905, the popular uprising in February of 1917 that toppled the Tsar and produced two competing governments, and the October Revolution that resolved the tension between them by overthrowing the Provisional Government. Together these events constituted the first successful socialist revolution and its effects reverberated across the world,

shaping political imaginaries, institutions, and conflicts far beyond Russia. Yet its history has also been heavily distorted by the ideological projections from both sides of the Cold War. This lecture aims to retrace the revolution's social and political dynamics and pays particular attention to the the question of "dual power." We conclude by confronting the revolution's tragic conclusion in the form of civil war and Stalinism without treating these outcomes as preordained.

### **Mandatory readings**

- Fitzpatrick, Sheila. *The Russian Revolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 15-67.
- Smirnov, Nikolai. "The Soviets." In *Critical Companion to the Russian Revolution, 1914-1921*, edited by Edward Acton, Vladimir Cherniaev, and William G. Rosenberg, 429-37. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.

### **Additional readings**

- Fitzpatrick, Sheila. "What's Left? The Russian Revolution." *London Review of Books* 39, no. 7 (March 30, 2017).
- Miéville, China. *October: The Story of the Russian Revolution*. London: Verso, 2017.
- Rabinowitch, Alexander. *The Bolsheviks Come to Power: The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd*. New ed. London: Pluto Press, 2017.
- Reed, John. *Ten Days That Shook the World*. Middlesex: Penguin, 1985.

## **Lecture 7. Internationalism and Third Worldism**

This lecture traces internationalism as a central but variable set of political principles and movements across revolutionary history and, particularly, the revolutionary movements of the twentieth century. We start from Perry Anderson's overview and analysis of the major historical configurations of nationalism and internationalism, we examine why revolutions so often claim universal significance, and how that universalism has been organized through shifting institutions, doctrines, and solidarities across time. The lecture then turns to the post-1945 conjuncture of Cold War and decolonization across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, which gave rise to third worldism and the Tricontinental project.

### **Mandatory readings**

- Anderson, Perry. "Internationalism: A Breviary." *New Left Review* II, no. 14 (March-April 2002): 5-25.
- Parrott, R. Joseph. "Tricontinentalism and the Anti-Imperial Project." In *The Tricontinental Revolution: Third World Radicalism and the Cold War*, edited by R. Joseph Parrott and Mark Atwood Lawrence, 1-39. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022.
- [Course dossier of excerpts from Marx and Engels, the Second International, Lenin, Frantz Fanon, and Ernesto "Che" Guevara.]

### **Additional readings**

- Young, Robert J. C. "Postcolonialism: From Bandung to the Tricontinental." *Historien* 5 (2006): 11-21.

### **Lecture 8. Excursion: Arbejdermuseet (Workers' Museum), Copenhagen**

For this excursion we will be visiting Arbejdermuseet [the Workers' Museum] in Copenhagen (very close to Nørreport Station). We will meet at 14:15 outside of the museum at Rømersgade 22 1362 København K. Jesper Jørgensen will give us an introduction to the museum and its archive with a focus on contentious politics in Danish labour politics based on his PhD dissertation "Left-Wing Activism of the Short 20th Century – Resource Mobilization, Intelligence Activities, and Life Histories." Please read the attached two-page summary underneath and revisit the chapters by Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow assigned for the first lecture. Also consider reading the two attached articles from his dissertation.

### **Mandatory readings**

- Jørgensen, Jesper. "Left-Wing Activism of the Short 20th Century – Resource Mobilization, Intelligence Activities, and Life Histories," 6-7. PhD diss., University of Southern Denmark, 2025.
- Tilly, Charles, and Sidney Tarrow. *Contentious Politics*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2007. Preface and chapter 1, "Making Claims."

### **Additional readings**

- Jørgensen, Jesper. "Mass Labor Protest and Trade Union Activism in Early Post-War Copenhagen." In *Trade Union Activism in the Nordic Countries since 1900*, edited by Jesper Jørgensen and Flemming Mikkelsen, 155-77. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023.
- Jørgensen, Jesper. "'October' as a Marker of Radicalisation: Commemorations of the October Revolution in Denmark during the Cold War Period." *Twentieth Century Communism*, no. 13 (2017): 41-66.

### **Lecture 9. Ideologies of Resistance and Revolution**

Contentious politics co-exists with institutional politics in liberal democracies as well as other political systems. What happens when they develop into revolutionary forms of mobilization? Which ideas shape a social movement as it transitions from protests to revolutionary schemes? This lecture looks at the particular roles of ideas behind revolutions, and the importance of ideology in revolutions. We will discuss examples from the French revolution, from "the global 1968," and from the Arab Uprisings. Before the class, read the mandatory texts well and consider the role of ideology in the revolution(s) you are most familiar with.

### **Mandatory readings**

- Berman, Paul. “The Dream of a New Society.” In *A Tale of Two Utopias: The Political Journey of the Generation of 1968*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1996.
- Haugbolle, Sune. “Reflections on Ideology After the Arab Uprisings.” *Jadaliyya*, March 21, 2012.
- Hunt, Lynn. “The Rhetoric of Revolution.” In *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, 19-51. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

### **Additional readings**

- Haugbolle, Sune. “Anthropology and Political Ideology.” In *Handbook of Political Anthropology*, edited by Harald Wydra and Bjørn Thomassen. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2018.
- Young, Robert J. C. “Postcolonialism: From Bandung to the Tricontinental.” *Historein* 5 (2006): 11-21.

### **Lecture 10. The Palestinian Revolution**

In this lecture and the following, we delve deeply into the Palestinian liberation movement, which at least until 1982 conceived of itself as a revolution allied with other revolutionary movements around the world. To situate the movement's development and goals, we read a political program from 1969, engage with a recent collection of historical sources, and discuss an academic article and a book review on the topic. Before the lecture, look through the webpage for the Oxford University “Palestinian Revolution” project (<https://learnpalestine.qeh.ox.ac.uk/>) and select one source or set of sources that you will be prepared to present and discuss in class. Find the sources under “Learn the Revolution” section – but also have a look at the “Teach the revolution” sections.

### **Mandatory readings**

- Hafez, Mohammed M. Review of *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949-1993*, by Yezid Sayigh, and *The PLO and Israel: From Armed Conflict to Political Solution, 1964-1994*, edited by Avraham Sela and Moshe Ma'oz. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 27, no. 3 (1998).
- Haugbølle, Sune. “The ‘Ends’ of the Palestinian Revolution in the Fakhani Republic.” In *The Fate of Third Worldism in the Middle East: Iran, Palestine and Beyond*, edited by Rasmus C. Elling and Sune Haugbølle, 268-89. London: Oneworld, 2024.
- Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. “Resistance Until Victory.” Political program, 1969. Read pp. 1-14 and skim remainder.

### **Further readings**

- Chamberlin, Paul Thomas. *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

- Erekat, Noura. *Justice for Some: Law and the Question of Palestine*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019.
- Khalili, Laleh. *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: The Politics of National Commemoration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Sayigh, Rosemary. *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries: A People's History*. London: Zed Books, 1979.

### **Lecture 11. Film Screening and Discussion with Guest**

For this session, we will watch two documentary films about Palestine solidarity protests. The first *An Oppressed People is Always Right* is by the Danish filmmaker Nils Vest and was produced in 1975. The second *Rafah Garden* is by the Italian documentary filmmaker Arturo Fabbro, who will join us for this lecture. It is from 2025 and documents the Palestine protests in Denmark in relations to Gaza. After the film, we will discuss representation of revolution and war with Arturo Fabbro. As preparation for this lecture, please read the introduction to the book *Shooting the Revolution* and reflect on how revolutions have been / can be represented in cultural production, and how such representations as documentary films can be used as sources in academic studies.

Note that this lecture takes place in room 04.2.047.

### **Mandatory reading**

- Della Ratta, Donatella. "Introduction." In *Shooting a Revolution: Visual Media and Warfare in Syria*. London: Pluto Press, 2018.

### **Screenings**

- Fabbro, Arturo, dir. *Rafah Garden*. 2025. Documentary film.
- Vest, Nils, dir. *An Oppressed People Is Always Right*. 1975. Documentary film.

### **Lecture 12. The End (and Future) of Revolutions**

This class looks at how revolutions end and how that might contribute to the formation of new political systems (transition), to conflict (civil war), or other outcomes. We also engage with literature that has argued for and against the 'end of revolutions' after 1989. Is it true that world-altering revolutions are a thing of the past and that they have been replaced by 'refolutions' with less clear ideological purpose and military organisation? If so, what might be the future of revolutions in the 21st century?

### **Mandatory readings**

- Bayat, Asef. "The Arab Spring and Revolutionary Theory: An Intervention in a Debate." *Journal of Historical Sociology* 34, no. 2 (2021): 393-400.

- Grinin, Leonid, and Andrey Korotayev. “The Future of Revolutions in the 21st Century and the World System Reconfiguration.” *World Futures* 79, no. 1 (2023): 69-90.
- Haugbølle, Sune, and Andreas Bandak. “The Ends of Revolution: Rethinking Ideology and Time in the Arab Uprisings.” *Middle East Critique* 26, no. 3 (2017): 191-204.

**Further reading**

- Suleyman, Mustafa. *The Coming Wave: Technology, Power, and the Twenty-First Century's Greatest Dilemma*. New York: Crown, 2023.