

## A Period of Global Revolutions

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Revolutions have traditionally been integral parts of national historical master narratives. Consequently, most research on the 'Period of Global Revolutions' from mid-1900s to mid-1920s has focused on regional and local aspects of revolutions. However, the transnational dimension of revolutions during that time span was neglected.

To reconsider the transnational aspects of revolutions, an international conference was held at Bielefeld University and the Institute for Social Movements in Bochum, funded by the Institute for Social Movements, the German Research Foundation and the Collaborative Research Center SFB 1288. International scholars spent three days discussing long term social and cultural changes connected to revolutions. In addition, they debated definitions and narratives of revolutions, and outlined the roles of competing social movements and practices of comparing in revolutionary moments. The contributions focused on Europe, Russia, South Africa, Mexico, Australia, the USA, as well as translocal and transnational transfers between these entities. The revised papers will be published in a special issue of a peer-reviewed historical journal.

The organizers of the conference, STEFAN BERGER (Bochum) and KLAUS WEINHAUER (Bielefeld) offered guiding questions as framework for the discussion of the conference papers, which had been distributed beforehand: Did the time span under scrutiny mark a culmination point as well as an endpoint for political hopes, fears, and utopias, which were related to a proletarian revolution and rooted in the 19th century? Or was this period the beginning of revolutionary struggles, that were part and parcel of the global Cold War and the anti-colonial struggles of the second half of the 20th century? To what

extent did the revolutionary movements face competition of other culturally and politically diverse social movements? Did transnational or translocal connections matter in their respective settings?

WALTER ERHARD (Bielefeld), co-speaker of the SFB 1288, opened the conference by welcoming the participants to Bielefeld University, and by highlighting the important role of comparisons in revolutions.

The United States did not experience a revolution from mid-1900s to mid-1920s. Nevertheless, SHELTON STROMQUIST (Iowa City) outlined three 'revolutionary waves' occurring between 1892 and 1922: first, the mass strikes and the populist revolt 1892-1896, second the laborer's revolt and socialists' advance 1909-1914, and third the wartime labor mobilization and postwar upheaval 1917-1922. Convincingly, Stromquist identified three 'breakwaters', on which the 'revolutionary waves' crashed upon. Consisting of employers' mobilization and working-class disfranchisement, 'progressive' reforms, wartime state repression and local class reckonings, these 'breakwaters' impeded the dynamics of revolutionary moments in the United States.

MATT KERRY (Durham) discussed the Asturian October of 1934. So far, the historiography of the event mainly focused on the question, whether the '*Asturian October*' was an 'offensive' or a 'defensive' insurrection, and whether it was a revolution at all. Arguing for a revolutionary nature of the *Asturian October*, Kerry showed that it brought a period of revolution to a close and at the same time initiated a particular wave of activism, defined as antifascism. Therefore, Kerry argued, the *Asturian October* resists easy categorization, as it is influenced by the Russian revolutionary insurrection of 1917 as well as an antifascist culture of the late 1930s.

Klaus Weinhauer and Stefan Berger presented their contribution on social movements, transnational and translocal transfers, as well as narratives of revolution of the German Revolution. They showed that the German Revolution was not a planned, top-down revolution of the social democratic party, but a result of the breakdown of the German army and the German Reich, as well as the more

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general erosion of trust in the state. Only in the later stages of the revolution, the Majority Social Democrats put themselves at the helm of the revolutionary movement, channeling it into quieter waters, and isolating a vaguely defined German Bolshevism. Furthermore, Weinbauer and Berger highlighted the importance of explicitly local, urban social movements of disaffected workers and consumers in the early stages of the revolution. The actions of these movements aimed mostly at establishing and securing localized patterns of order.

On Friday the conference continued at the Institute for Social Movement in Bochum. Adding a transnational and intellectual historical perspective on the relationship of exile and revolution, BEDROSS DER MATOSSIAN (Lincoln) addressed the impact of revolutionary waves in Eurasia on the Young Turk Movement and the Young Turk Revolution of 1908. He focused especially on the impact of the Russian Revolution of 1905 and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911. By looking at private and public publications of exiled Young Turks, Der Matossian showed that Young Turks drew similarities between the Russian and the Ottoman society and hoped for the revolution of 1905 to spread to the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, they compared the Iranian Constitutional Revolution 1906-1911 to the situation in the Ottoman Empire, appropriating the use of religion as a means of mass mobilization and justification for a constitution.

Concerning the Russian Revolution 1905 - 1921, too, GEOFFREY SWAIN (Glasgow) added an interesting perspective on the intertwining of rural spaces, rural population and revolutionary movements. He showed how the Bolsheviks lost the workers' sympathy during the revolutionary process, only to win over the peasantry through land reforms, patriotism and control. With its close connections to the peasantry, the Russian Revolution of 1905 - 1921 inspired subsequent communist revolutions in the twentieth century.

AMERIGO CARUSO (Padua) and RO-MAIN BONNET (Padua) presented a collaborative paper, in which they tackled an ambitious combination of transnational research with comparative national history. Focus-

ing on armed anti-labor mobilizations, self-defense groups, strikebreaking agencies, and civilian volunteer militias in four different countries (Austria Hungary, Germany, France and Great Britain) from 1905-1914, Caruso and Bonnet showed that the Russian Revolution did have an accelerating impact on a pre-existing current of anti-labor mobilization through transnational networks. Regarding Great Britain and Germany, Caruso and Bonnet argued that the materialized social fears of the Russian Revolution 1905, growing strike movements, and Socialist electoral victories led to the spread of semi-institutionalized anti-labor movements.

MARICA TOLOMELLI (Bologna) discussed the impact of mass-migration on revolutionary movements and transnational activism. Focusing on the Italian context, Tolomelli argued that the rural and industrial Italian proletariat, as a 'non-national' social group, was particularly sensitive to revolutionary ideas. She saw the reasons for that in their weak ties to the nation-state and in increased social conflicts in the 1890s, which brought an atmosphere of contention between class and nation. Once emigrated, members of this 'non-national' social group became global Italian revolutionaries in countries like the United States, where they operated in leading positions of the workers movement. According to Tolomelli, many of the revolutionaries afterwards returned to Italy, bringing new connections and ideas to the country, and thereby effecting its social conflicts.

RAYMOND CRAIB (Cornell) shed a new light on the Mexican Revolution 1910 - early 1920s by rethinking the revolution in a context of global and transnational relationships, focusing on connections to the United States. Craib argued that the phenomenon of landed oligarchies and structural changes of early globalization were closely connected during the Mexican Revolution. The following discussion emphasized that aspects of proletarian, liberalist or anti-colonial revolutions always intermingle in revolutionary moments. Thereby, the Mexican Revolution showcased that revolutions cannot be defined as one 'type of revolution'.

RANA MITTER (Oxford) unfortunately

could not participate in the conference personally. Nevertheless, his paper offered a different approach to the historical research on revolutions. Using an intellectual history approach, Mitter focused on two intellectuals during the era of the Chinese Revolution of 1911: the historian Jiang Tingfu as well as the journalist and political writer Zou Taofen. While providing interesting and fascinating insights into contemporary intellectual views on the Chinese Revolution, it remains to be seen how this approach relates to the other papers, which are primarily concerned with social movements.

The third day of the conference started with a presentation from ARS ALP YENEN (Basel) on the Muslim Revolutionary Movements before and after the First World War. With a focus on cultural repertoires, Yenen aimed at a connected and comparative history approach that goes beyond teleological narratives like 'end of empires' or 'revolt of Islam'. Yenen showed how cultural repertoires of revolution were developed in a colonial setting throughout the long nineteenth century and culminated in a period of revolutions at the beginning of the twentieth century.

LIAM BYRNE (Melbourne) and SEAN SCALMER (Melbourne) contributed the last paper of the conference, focusing on revolutionary moments in Australia. As in Stromquist's US-American case study, there has never been an 'Australian Revolution' in the analyzed time span. The Australian case showed how parliamentary institutions maintained the interests of the majority of the workers in an 'age of revolution', consequently disappointing the expectations of revolutionary movements inside and outside of the continent.

The discussed papers shed new light on diverse revolutionary moments in different parts of the world. Revolutions occurred in empires and nation states alike, sometimes being characterized as proletarian, sometimes as anti-colonial. In certain cases, revolutions materialized out of these moments, in others they were prevented. It became clear that a special issue, deriving from the submitted papers, will indeed outline a 'global age of revolution'.

### Conference Overview:

Walter Erhard (Universität Bielefeld): Welcome Address SFB 1288

Stefan Berger (Bochum), Klaus Weinhauer (Bielefeld): Welcome and Introduction

Shelton Stromquist (Iowa): Revolutionary Waves and Capitalist Breakwaters: the United States in a Period of Global Revolution, 1894-1925

Matt Kerry (Durham): Between Revolution and Antifascism: Asturias, October 1934

Stefan Berger (Bochum), Klaus Weinhauer (Bielefeld): The German Revolution: Social Movements, Transnational / Translocal Transfers, and Narratives of Revolution

Bedross Der Matossian (Lincoln): The Young Turks and the Eurasian Revolutions at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century

Geoffrey Swain (Glasgow): Losing the Workers, Finding the Peasants: the Russian Revolution 1905-1921

Amerigo Caruso (Padua), Romain Bonnet (Padua) et.al.: Industrial Unrest, Revolutionary Fears and Anti-Labor Mobilization in Austria-Hungary, Germany, Great-Britain and France (1905-1920s)

Marica Tolomelli (Bologna): Global vs. National Revolutionaries. The Italian Case from the 'Great Migration' to the 'Fascist Revolution'

Raymond B. Craib (Cornell): Mexico Between Decolonization and Revolution

Rana Mitter (Oxford): The Legacy of 1911: China's Revolutions in a Global Context

Ars Alp Yenen (Basel): Prologue to Decolonization. A Comparative and Connected History of Muslim Revolutionary Movements Before and After the First World War

Sean Scalmer (Melbourne) et. al.: Australia. The Age of Revolution and the Limits of Reform

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