

SOC498H1 S
Revolutions

LOGISTICS

Term: Winter 2026

Seminar time: Every Monday, from 5 January to 30 March 2026, at 1:10-3pm

Instructor: Professor Simeon J. Newman

Contact: simeon.newman@utoronto.ca

Office hours: Wednesdays, 10am-12pm, in the Sociology Department

DESCRIPTION

This is an intensive reading and discussion-based seminar examining the category of “revolution” through several theoretical perspectives and a series of in-depth case studies. Revolutions exceed social movements in that they precipitate a change in the form of power. After exploring the origins of revolution in the French and Haitian revolutions, this course focuses on revolutionary dynamics in the 20th century, the era of global capitalism. The course examines two types of revolution. First, it examines revolutions in which worker and peasant mobilization takes place in the absence of liberal-democratic institutions, leading to the establishment of a new government which breaks with capitalism to pursue socialist reforms. Second, it examines revolutions in which worker and peasant mobilization take place amid liberal-democratic institutions, which divides the left into parliamentary and extra-parliamentary factions, weakening it and allowing the petty bourgeoisie to form an alliance with the remnants of the old regime and carry out a counterrevolution. The course also surveys theories of revolution in general, of socialist revolution, and of anticommunist counterrevolution, and touches on explicitly comparative research.

Concretely, the course examines:

- 1) *Theories and methods* for the study of revolutions.
- 2) The *origins of modern revolution*, namely the French revolution and the Haitian revolution. This was the crucible of the principle of popular sovereignty, soon leading to the spread of republicanism and nationalism amalgamating with slave revolt and decolonization.
- 3) The Russian, Chinese, and Cuban revolutions, cases of *socialist revolution*, resulting from successful worker and/or peasant insurrections, in the absence of liberal democracy, led by professional revolutionary intellectuals. Socialist revolutions precipitated a wholesale replacement of the political elite and thus allowed the new revolutionary regime to carry out thoroughgoing reform, fundamentally altering capitalist property relations and ultimately establishing a state socialist economy.
- 4) The rise of German Nazism (i.e., well before 1939 and 1943) and the Chilean Pinochet regime, cases of *anticommunist counterrevolution*. In such cases, the petty bourgeois middle classes benefitted from liberal democratic institutions which divided the left. They reacted to a socialist movement, allied with parts of the traditional conservative elite, and used reactionary mobilization as a pretext to install an anticommunist government which brutally repressed worker (and sometimes peasant) initiatives. Counterrevolutions protected existing property relations, preserving capitalism.
- 5) *Comparisons* of late-20th century revolutions in Central America and Asia, and cases of *failed revolutions* in the 21st century.

Prerequisites: The prerequisite to take SOC498H1 S is 1.0 SOC at the 300-level. Students without the prerequisite will be removed without notice.

REQUIREMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS

The course is based on reading a lot and engaging in discussion (this is *not* a lecture course); students should be prepared to read an average of 100 pages per week and to participate in discussion (online and in-class).

Attendance structure

Each student is expected to attend all sessions except one of the “optional” ones of their choosing: either the 8th or the 10th session. You must tell the professor during the end of the 1st session which one you will skip.

Requirements (and grade weightings)

1) *Written participation for ten (10) weeks (10% of grade)*

Each student must write a response to the text(s) for ten (10) weeks. Written participation must be completed prior to class and posted to the week’s discussion forum on Quercus. You should make critical comments about the arguments advanced in the assigned reading, or pose questions inspired by the reading. Comments should not summarize the assigned texts but instead respond to them. Responses should be less than 500 words in length. (Shorter is usually better.)

2) *In-class participation (10% of grade)*

Each student is expected to contribute to the discussion every week. This involves weighing in on the arguments put forth in the assigned text(s). It may also involve referencing topics you or others introduce into the discussion forum on Quercus. You should interject in the in-class discussion *every* time you attend seminar, *multiple* times per session. (There is no penalty for the one session the attendance structure allows you to skip.)

3) *Serve as discussant for two weeks (20% of grade for both)*

Each student must guide the discussion for two seminar meetings (whether alone or as part of a small group), dates to be assigned during the second week of classes. (One date must be before the reading week.) This will involve reading the week’s assigned text(s) carefully and well in advance of the seminar meeting, summarizing the main points, conferring about them with any other discussants for the week, drafting a handout which summarizes the main points of the text(s) and outlines 3-6 questions, emailing a draft 2-page handout to the professor by the end of the Friday prior to the class meeting in question (this *must* be in his email inbox by Saturday morning or you will not receive credit), revising as necessary in light of his response, and bringing 15 hard copies of the 2-page handout (printed on a single sheet of paper) for the other members of the class by the beginning of the class meeting on Monday. During the class meeting, it will involve summarizing the key points, opening the floor to a broader discussion, and answering some of your classmates’ questions. (Use of the projector is not necessary.)

4) *Topic statement (10% of grade)*

A statement specifying what you will focus on in your term paper. The topic statement should be 1-page long and is due in class on 23 February 2025 (hard copy only). In it you should select a revolution, counterrevolution, or passive revolution you’re interested in, specify your focus, and indicate several relevant pieces of scholarly literature. Precise instructions will be circulated in advance.

5) *Annotated bibliography (10% of grade)*

A list of literature with short descriptions of each text’s relevance for your topic and/or thesis. The annotated bibliography should discuss at least five books or scholarly articles. It is due in class on 16 March 2026 (hard copy only). Precise instructions will be circulated in advance.

5) Term paper (40% of grade)

One 10- to 12-page (double spaced) argumentative term paper on a topic having to do with revolution, counterrevolution, passive revolution, or some related topic. It must incorporate the professor's feedback on the topic statement and annotated bibliography. The term paper is due 13 April 2026 and should be submitted electronically via Quercus. There is a 1-week grace period for the papers. (You can have a 1-week extension to the deadline. You do not even need to ask.) After that, papers will not be accepted under any circumstances.

Expectations

Attendance: Responsibility for being aware of what the professor says in seminar (including administrative announcements) rests with students.

Electronic devices in the classroom: Laptops are not permitted during seminar meetings except in cases of special need. Texting, photography, cellphone use, and audio or video recording are forbidden. Offenders will be asked to leave the classroom.

Emailing: Correspondence should be sent from your utoronto email account. Be sure to mention the course number/title in the subject line of any emails sent. Emails with questions pertaining to matters explained in the syllabus will not receive a response.

Deadlines: Work is due at the start of class on each due date.

Evaluation of written work: The main criteria for evaluating your paper and other written work are: clarity of the argument; originality of the argument; adequacy of evidence used to support the argument; appropriate use of sources; coherence of ideas (concise expression, smooth transitions, logical organization); engaging style (tone, stance toward audience, level of formality); and correct grammar, punctuation, and citation form. The order of these criteria does not necessarily reflect their importance for good writing or their weight in calculating your grade: each of them matters.

Avoid plagiarism: Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with University of Toronto's plagiarism policy. See the *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* (<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm>). Especially relevant is the passage noting that it is an offence for a student knowingly "to represent as one's own any idea or expression of an idea or work of another in any academic examination or term test or in connection with any other form of academic work, i.e., to commit plagiarism." Plagiarism is considered unacceptable and very severe sanctions often result.

Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. The terms that apply to the University's use of the Turnitin service is described on the Turnitin web site.

Assignments not submitted through Turnitin will receive a grade of zero (0%), unless a student instead provides, along with their paper, sufficient secondary material (e.g., reading notes, outlines of the paper, rough drafts of the final draft, etc.) to establish that the paper they submit is truly their own. The alternative (not submitting via Turnitin) is in place because, strictly speaking, using Turnitin is voluntary for students at the University of Toronto.

Missed deadlines and tests: Students who miss a paper deadline or a test will receive a mark of zero for that paper or test unless the reason is a circumstance beyond their control. Within three days of missing a paper deadline or test, students must send the instructor a request for consideration. Students must document their request with one of the following:

- Absence declaration via ACORN (can only be used once during the semester)
- U of T Verification of Illness or Injury Form
- College Registrar's letter (e.g., in case of personal/family crisis or emergency)
- Letter of Academic Accommodation from Accessibility Services

Students who miss the test or are late in submitting an assignment for other reasons, such as family or other personal reasons, should request their College Registrar to email the instructor.

MISCELLANEOUS

Artificial intelligence

You are allowed to make use of technology, including artificial intelligence tools, to contribute to your understanding of course materials and as learning aids or to help produce assignments. But bear in mind that a college student familiar with the course material is far more insightful than AI. Since assignments will be evaluated for their insight, this implies that a top grade can be achieved without using AI, whereas relying on too much on AI will not have the same result. Regardless of the means you use, you are ultimately responsible for the quality of the work you submit.

Copyright

Course materials prepared by the instructor are considered by the University to be an instructor's intellectual property covered by the Copyright Act, RSC 1985, c C-42. These materials are made available to you for your own study purposes and cannot be shared outside of the class or "published" in any way. Lectures, whether in person or online, cannot be recorded without the instructor's permission. Posting course materials or any recordings you may make to other websites without the express permission of the instructor will constitute copyright infringement.

Accessibility

If you require accommodations or have any accessibility concerns, please visit <https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/departments/accessibility-services/> as soon as possible.

LITERATURE

The course covers compiled texts and large parts of several books.

The compiled texts are available in the form of a hard-copy reader (course pack) available for purchase at Net Plaza Print Shop (267 College St, 2nd Floor). This is the only way they will be made available through the course. You should buy a copy if you will take the course. You expected to bring it to seminar meetings.

All students should also acquire the following books:

Jeff Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). ISBN: 0521629489.

E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution, 1789-1848*. Any edition/ISBN is fine.

Rebecca E. Karl, *China's Revolutions in the Modern World: A Brief Interpretive History* (London: Verso, 2020). ISBN: 9781788735599.

Paul Le Blanc, *October Song: Bolshevik Triumph, Communist Tragedy, 1917-1924* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017). ISBN: 1608468488.

Students should also acquire these books, depending on their attendance structure:

Ramón L. Bonachea and Marta San Martín, *The Cuban Insurrection, 1952-1959* (New York: Routledge, [1974] 2017). ISBN: 9780878555765. [Get the 2017 Routledge edition.](#)

Barbara Stallings, *Class Conflict and Economic Development in Chile, 1958-1973* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978). ISBN: 0804709785.

SCHEDULE

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

1st SESSION (5 January): Getting started

Read the syllabus closely!

Submit attendance structure, preferences for discussant weeks.

How to read history texts (history ≠ theory).

2nd SESSION (12 January): General concepts and theories

Marta Harnecker, *Instruments for Doing Politics* (pamphlet, 2013). [30 pp.]

Charles Tilly, “Revolution and Rebellion,” in *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1978), pp. 189-222. [33 pp.]

W. E. B. Du Bois, selection from “The General Strike,” in *Black Reconstruction in America: Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Free Press, [1935] 1998), pp. 59-67. [9 pp.]

George Lawson, “Revolutionary Dynamics,” in *Anatomies of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 21-47. [26 pp.]

[98 pp.]

3rd SESSION (19 January): The origins of popular sovereignty, part 1: French revolution

E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution, 1789-1848* (London: Abacus, [1962] 1977), chapters 1, 3, and 6 (pp. 19-41, 73-101, 138-63 in this edition). [75 pp.]

4th SESSION (26 January): The origins of popular sovereignty, part 2: Haitian revolution

Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848* (London: Verso, 1988), pp. 161-207, 213-60. [94 pp.]

PART 2: SOCIALIST REVOLUTIONS

5th SESSION (2 February): Conceptualizing socialist revolution

Revolutionary classes and their epochs, according to Marx

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Bourgeois and Proletarians,” in *The Communist Manifesto* [1848]. Republished in *The Marx-Engels reader*, edited by Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), pp. 473-83. [10 pp.]

Karl Marx, selection from *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* [1952]. Republished in *The Marx-Engels reader*, edited by Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978). p. 608. [1 p.]

Revisiting the role of workers

Leon Trotsky, selections from “1789—1848—1905,” “Revolution and the Proletariat,” “The Proletariat in Power and the Peasantry,” and part of “The Prerequisites of Socialism,” in *Results and Prospects* [1906]. Republished in *Permanent Revolution & Results and Prospects* (New York: Merit Publishers and Pathfinder Press, 1969), pp. 52-74, 88-99 (chapters 3-5 and part of chapter 7). [33 pp.]

Revisiting the role of peasants

Barrington Moore, Jr., selection from “The Peasants and Revolution,” in *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), pp. 467-80. [13 pp.]

Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, [1961] 2004), pp. 23, 63-66, 80-81, 98-102, 119-20. [14 pp.]

6th SESSION (9 February): The Russian revolution

Sheila Fitzpatrick, selection from “The Setting,” in *The Russian Revolution*, fourth edition (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 32-40. [9 pp.]

Peter Fraunholtz, “Peasants in the Russian Revolution: Adaption, Anxiety, Action,” in *Bloomsbury Handbook of the Russian Revolution*, edited by Geoffrey Swain, Charlotte Alston, Boris Kolonitskii, Michael Hickey and Franziska Schedewie (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), pp. 209-21. [13 pp.]

Paul Le Blanc, *October Song: Bolshevik Triumph, Communist Tragedy, 1917-1924* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017), pp. 35-50, 61-64, 69-107, 119-29, 133-38, 151-61, 189-90, 195-99, 203-05, 214. [98 pp.]

Upgraded index: <https://www.haymarketbooks.org/pdfs/30>

[READING WEEK: 16-20 FEBRUARY]

7th SESSION (23 February): The Chinese revolution

Rebecca E. Karl, *China's Revolutions in the Modern World: A Brief Interpretive History* (London: Verso, 2020), read from the third “interlude” through chap. 6 (exact page range TBA).

TOPIC STATEMENT DUE (HARD COPY)

8th SESSION (2 March): The Cuban revolution

[optional]

Robin Blackburn, selection from “Prologue to the Cuban Revolution.” *New Left Review* (21), 1963, pp. 74-90. [17 pp.]

Ramón L. Bonachea and Marta San Martín, *The Cuban Insurrection, 1952-1959* (New York: Routledge, [1974] 2017), pp. 1-8, 95-103, 108-12, 173-81, 184-89, 293, 304-10, 315-20, 324-28, 333-46, 351-62. [78 pp.]

Louis A. Pérez, Jr., selection from “Revolution,” in *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), pp. 477-97. [21 pp.]

PART 3: COUNTERREVOLUTIONS

9th SESSION (9 March): Conceptualizing counterrevolution

Robert Brenner, “The Problem of Reformism,” *Against the Current* (43), 1993, pp. 42-45. [4 pp.]

Adam Przeworski, selection from “Material Interests, Class Compromise, and the State,” in *Capitalism and Social Democracy* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 171-77. [7 pp.]

Arno J. Mayer, *Dynamics of Counterrevolution in Europe, 1870-1956: An Analytic Framework* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 41-101. [60 pp.]

[DROP DEADLINE: 16 MARCH]

10th SESSION (16 March): Germany, from the Weimar republic to Nazism

E. J. Hobsbawm, selection from “The Fall of Liberalism,” in *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 1994), pp. 116-29. [14 pp.]

David Abraham, *The Collapse of the Weimar Republic: Political Economy and Crisis*, second edition (New York and London: Holms & Meier, 1986), pp. xv-xvi, 8-16, 23, 26-38, 75-85, 220-24, 229-35, 243-57, 264-72, 303-18. [77 pp.]

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE (HARD COPY)

11th SESSION (23 March): Chile, from Allende to Pinochet

[optional]

Barbara Stallings, *Class Conflict and Economic Development in Chile, 1958-1973* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978), pp. 76-84, 88-106, 110-13, 115-119, 122-53. [67 pp.]

Peter Winn, “Living the Chilean Revolution: Industrial Workers in Allende’s Chile,” *Radical History Review* (124):55-66, 2016. [11 pp.]

Naomi Klein, “States of Shock: The Bloody Birth of the Counterrevolution,” in *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007), pp. 75-97. [22 pp.]

PART 4: REVOLUTIONS AND NON-REVOLUTIONS

12th SESSION (30 March)

Jeff Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), page range TBA.

Vincent Bevins, “Reconstructing the Past,” in *If We Burn: The Mass Protest Decade and the Missing Revolution* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2023), pp. 257-79. [33 pp.]

TERM PAPER DUE (VIA QUERCUS)

13 APRIL 2025