

REVOLUTIONS



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Revolutions: A Worldwide Introduction to Political and Social Change
Stephen K. Sanderson (2005)

REVOLUTIONS
A WORLDWIDE INTRODUCTION
TO POLITICAL AND
SOCIAL CHANGE

Stephen K. Sanderson



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For Gunder





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Preface and Acknowledgments

THIS BOOK BEGAN LIFE as a chapter in a proposed textbook on social change. In 1994 I signed a contract, along with two co-authors—one a sociologist and the other an anthropologist—to write a social change text that emphasized a long-term evolutionary perspective. I thought that the book needed a chapter on revolutions and state breakdowns, and my co-authors agreed. None of us specialized in that dimension of social change, but I had long wanted to read the most important literature in this area so I agreed to bite the bullet and write the chapter. This I did after spending five months reading the pertinent literature. For some reason, once I finished the chapter I had the feeling that my co-authors were not as enthusiastic about the book as I was and that they might take awhile to get their chapters written. I sent them my chapter with a note stating that when their chapters were completed I would then finish my other three. Frankly, I wasn't sure they were ever going to write anything, and it turns out that my suspicions were correct: They didn't. As a result, the chapter I'd written languished in my computer for years. It eventually became clear that our textbook was never going to see the light of day. But I had invested a lot of time and energy putting my chapter together, and I didn't want to "waste" it. I therefore hit upon the idea of investing a few more months' work and expanding the chapter into a short book.

I am very happy that I took the trouble to delve into the literature on revolutions and state breakdowns and write the chapter and the book, because I find this literature fascinating. Moreover, it represents some of the best scholarship that my own discipline, sociology, has to offer. Sociologists of revolution are among the most intellectually sophisticated of all sociologists, and one can point to their work with great pride in the knowledge that we are members of the same discipline.

The plan of the book is as follows. Chapter One discusses the nature of revolutions and addresses some important background concepts and assumptions essential to the study of large-scale social and political change. Chapter Two looks at the three most prominent historical revolutions of the past two centuries, what have been called the Great Revolutions (Skocpol, 1979): the French Revolution of 1789, the Bolshevik or Russian Revolution of 1917, and the Chinese Revolution of 1911–1949. Chapter Three follows by examining several examples of much more recent revolutions in the less-developed parts of the world, especially the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and the Nicaraguan and Iranian Revolutions of 1979.

This leads to what is really the heart of the book—a discussion of some of the most prominent explanations of revolution that social scientists have proposed. Chapters Four and Five take up this discussion. Whereas social disorder and rebellion are common and frequent, actual revolutions are relatively rare, and most attempts at revolution are abortive. The various theories attempting to explain why this is so are reviewed and critically assessed.

Chapter Six examines the state breakdowns that occurred in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in 1989 and 1991, respectively; it also tries to explain why they happened, and explores whether they were genuine examples of revolutions. The issue of the outcomes of revolution is a critical one as well. Do revolutions generally lead to the results desired and fought for by revolutionaries, or are their outcomes more modest? These outcomes are the subject of Chapter Seven. Given the massive forces of globalization and worldwide evolutionary change, are revolutions likely to occur in the future, or are they a thing of the past? An epilogue considers this question about the future of revolutions, while an appendix presents short biographical and autobiographical sketches of ten leading students of revolution.

I have written this book as both a contribution to scholarship and as a work suitable for the classroom. I hope instructors will find it useful not only for specialized courses in revolutions but also for courses in political sociology, comparative/historical sociology, macrosociology, social change, sociology of development, Third World studies, and the like. I have tried to make the writing highly accessible to undergraduates; if responses to my previous books are any indication, I think I have succeeded.

I am delighted that Dean Birkenkamp wanted to publish this book as part of the launching of his new company, Paradigm Publishers. I

would follow Dean anywhere. He has been a successful editor wherever he has gone and has first-rate editorial judgment and great editorial integrity. Dean is also the nicest person I have ever met in the publishing industry. Dean wants to publish books because of their scholarly value. He knows, of course, that you have to make money in order to stay in business, but he strives to balance scholarly value and need with the bottom line. There is also a nice little irony in the fact that he is publishing this book. He was the very editor in charge of the ill-fated social change text that contained my revolutions chapter in 1994, having signed it for Westview Press. He left Westview shortly thereafter for Rowman and Littlefield, where, I am happy to say, he published two of my books. Now the full revolutions book has circled back to him for his own new company. What a delightful *dénouement!*

I dedicate this book to the memory of my longtime friend and epistolary colleague Andre Gunder Frank, who died on April 23, 2005. I first met Gunder at the annual meeting of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations, at Berkeley, in 1989. I presented a paper that was fairly critical of his latest work postulating the existence of a 5,000-year world economy, and he objected strenuously. (For those who know Gunder, this will not come as a surprise!) The rest of the day, over dinner, drinks, and maneuvering around Berkeley, he launched objection after objection. I countered them all, but Gunder was undaunted and irrepressible and refused to give up. At the time I thought he was pushing a set of ideas that could not possibly be correct. However, as I studied his developing work in the years to come, I gradually came to accept much of his thinking, and even cited some of it quite favorably in later works of my own. (I came to accept about half of his arguments, considerably more than the big fat zero percent I accepted at the beginning, but then well short of the 100 percent that Gunder thought was necessary!) Gunder and I eventually came to gain a great deal of mutual admiration and personal liking. I have valued his friendship and collegiality enormously. He is truly one of the most brilliant social scientists I have ever met, and, although often gruff on the exterior, inside he is a real softie! He is also incredibly bold and imaginative in his thinking, not at all afraid to challenge entrenched ideas, and also not reticent to change his mind, and to say so publicly, when he encounters new arguments or new evidence suggesting that a formerly held position is no longer valid. (For example, although one of the two major founders of radical dependency theory, in time Gunder came to acknowledge that

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the socialist alternative did not work and that there is probably no real-world alternative to capitalism.) It has been my privilege to know this extraordinary man and to know that he has thought highly of my abilities and of much of my work. (It came as an extremely pleasant surprise to me that Gunder even liked and accepted much of my more recent Darwinian thinking [Sanderson, 2001], quite something for a radical from the sixties!) This one's for you, Gunder—*reposes en paix*.

*Stephen K. Sanderson
Indiana, Pennsylvania*