

## International Conference “Crisis and Mobilization since 1789” International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, February 22-24, 2013

organized by the  
International Scholars’ Network “History of Societies and Socialisms” (HOSAS)/H-Socialisms

The 2nd HOSAS conference, to be held in Amsterdam in February of 2013, is dedicated to the theme “Crisis and Mobilization since 1789.” The political Left—mainstream socialists above all, but also anarchists, communists, feminists, and others—has played a central role throughout modern history in giving **access to democracy** and its benefits to ever widening portions of society. Socialists—especially those organized in Marxist-oriented European social democratic parties—proved adept at mobilizing popular support during political, economic, and other crises to push forward agendas aiming to combat the social inequalities created by industrial capitalism, to broaden citizenly enfranchisement in order to include formerly excluded groups (for example, wage-earning workers and women), and to pursue many other reformist or revolutionary goals. Geoff Eley’s landmark study *Forging Democracy* (2002), is among the strongest recent arguments for the importance of the socialist Left in shaping and democratizing modern European history, particularly through its capacity for mobilizing in response to crisis. We are pleased that Eley will be present at the conference to give a key-note address and engage in a discussion of his theses.

Alongside impressive successes, resounding defeats and setbacks have characterized socialism’s record in modern Europe and around the world. But until the late 1960s, conventional socialist or social democratic parties stood at the center of this drama and self-consciously led the European Left, while more revolutionary variants held sway in the “developing” world. Since the late 1960s, however, the socialist Left has declined in **influence** due to the rise of identity and one-issue movements (for example, feminist and environmentalist movements), the changing geographies and modalities of the global economy and labor, the concomitant weakening of trade unions that had constituted socialism’s traditional base of support in many countries, the final discrediting and collapse of Soviet-style “real existing socialism” in Eastern Europe, the growing power of **neo-liberalism** as the ideology of the political mainstream, and other structural and contingent changes. These developments have challenged conventional socialist politics’ claims to leadership of the political Left and have led many to question socialism’s very relevance.

Since the 2008 onset of the current **economic crisis**, critiques of capitalism—many of them invoking Marx and/or the socialist mobilizations of previous eras—have re-entered mainstream political debates in Europe and around the world. Scholarly discussions about this legacy and its contemporary relevance have also profited from a surge in interest. Not least, socialist parties have won some significant electoral contests, as they recently did in France. Yet in many places, conventional socialist or Leftist political parties still remain on the defensive and some of the most recent popular **mobilizations** that challenge the political and economic status quo (for instance, the Occupy Movement) generally reject alliances or identification with established socialist politics.

In this climate, we think it timely to consider the **historical trajectory of socialism**—in all its diverse forms—through crisis and mobilization. We understand crisis in the broadest sense of the word, encompassing not just economic downturns, but also political, social, cultural, and environmental crises as well as war, famine, natural disasters, and other disruptions. Crises vary in scale too, from the global or continental level down to the local. By bringing together scholars from multiple disciplines who specialize in various time periods and places across the globe, and by opening broad temporal, comparative, and transnational vistas, we hope to update and enrich the scholarly conversation about socialism(s).

The conference participants include both younger scholars (PhDs) and senior colleagues, thus we hope that the workshop atmosphere will contribute to lively discussions and new networks. This is the second conference of the HOSAS-network. On the first one, please refer to the conference report at: <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/tagungsberichte/id=3623>