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Forum:

Editor's Introduction

Fred Halliday, *Revolution and World Politics: The Rise and Fall of the Sixth Great Power* (London: Macmillan 1999).

In an age which seems anything but revolutionary it is essential to recall how much the international politics of the last two centuries has been shaped by the fear—real and imagined—of the revolutionary overthrow of the existing order. It all began of course in France, continued with the Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917, and then persisted in one form or another for the entire duration of the two post-war periods. Certainly, understanding the Cold War without understanding that fear is almost impossible. And while one might not like the idea of revolutions as such, one is surely compelled to agree with Halliday, that they have, as much as war and nationalism, determined the development of world politics since the end of the late eighteenth century. Equally, revolutions have been—in cause, ideology and consequence—quintessential international events of such importance that they merit the label of 'sixth great power'. And as Halliday reminds us, in an age where revolutions appear to be events of another time, it has to be remembered why millions of people fought, struggled and died for the cause of radical change. In the words of Edward Thompson, we need to rescue revolution 'from the immense condescension of posterity'. We hope the debate occasioned by Halliday's study helps in that rescue mission.

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