

**Cold Politics in Premodern Europe**  
**Workshop**  
**Birkbeck College, University of London**

**Friday 4 March 2016**  
**10 am - 6 pm**

**Université de Toulouse/LabEx SMS - Birkbeck College/University of London**

Dreyfus Room, Entrance at 26 Russell Square, Birkbeck, University of London

**Organisation**

John Arnold (Birkbeck College, University of London)

Tom Johnson (University of York)

Claire Judde de Larivière (University of Toulouse, Labex SMS)

**Popular action and Cold Politics**

The concept of “Cold politics” invites reflections on, and analysis of the construction of the political order by the ordinary people, instead of a focus on the occasions on which they acted against it.

Studying the political actions of common people, medievalists have tended to consider popular revolts and dissent. Since the 1950s, research into the way that ordinary people got involved in political life in medieval Europe has often have focussed upon violent outbursts and actions: the Jacquerie, peasant protests, fiscal rebellions, the discourses of revolt, etc. James Scott’s ideas of “hidden transcripts” and “the weapons of the weak” have added some nuances to these major themes; nonetheless it has entailed continuing to approach the idea of common politics through the lens of ‘resistance’.

Moreover, outside of these violent actions, or other means of resistance to domination, commoners have been mainly presented as a passive public to the politics of the elite: quiet subjects of lords and kings, recipients of discourses and domination, mere onlookers for the complex religious or political rituals that we now understand to have been central to pre-modern political culture.

Our workshop would like to propose a third way, focusing on moments and forms of “cold politics”: moments of ordinary management of collective and public life by common people themselves. We want to study how ordinary people were involved in everyday practices that were identified as “political” at that time, or that we historians can identify as such. Studying “cold politics” means putting to one side the question of revolt, violence, dissent, protest, resistance. Instead, our focus will be on the routine and (generally) nonviolent collective or individual actions, within or outside organised institutions, conducted by people who may or may not represent a public authority.

How did ordinary people pursue the common good? How did they help to build the community, defend collective interests, create and structure institutions? Did they develop distinctive political actions? Which discourses were most important to them? What were their aims when they took part in political life?

A key objective is to understand better what premodern politics was: who it included, what it could achieve, and how it was separate (or not) from other spheres of action. We wish to understand how the social order was held together through a combination of elite actions in government, and the ordinary people in charge of smaller and lesser institutions which acted in other places and at other levels. Our final aim is to contribute to a definition of politics in the Middle Ages, considered from a less restrictive point of view, including actors that had not been traditionally considered; to offer a more comprehensive definition of politics and political action.

### **Programme**

#### **10:00-10:30, Introduction**

John Arnold, Tom Johnson, Claire Judde

#### **10:30-11:30, Paper Session 1 - Cities**

Alma Poloni (Pisa)

Eliza Hartrich (Oxford)

Christopher Fletcher (CNRS)

#### **11:45-12.45, Paper Session 2 – Smaller Communities**

Laure Verdon (Aix-Marseille)

Richard Goddard (Nottingham)

Beat Kümin (Warwick)

#### **2:00-3:30, Roundtable 1 - Ideas**

Discussant: Christian Liddy (Durham)

Moderator: Tom Johnson (York)

#### **3:45-5:00, Roundtable 2 - Praxis**

Discussant : Brodie Waddell (Birkbeck)

Moderator: Claire Judde de Larivière (Toulouse)

#### **5:00-6:00, Roundtable 3 - Conclusions**

Christopher Dyer (Leicester) and John Arnold (Birkbeck)