

Winter Term Course Offering
PECO 5502/PSCI 5502/SOCI 5505
A Political Economy of Class: Contemporary Debates and Challenges

Fridays, 11:30-2:30

Brief Description:

Class and class politics are two of political economy's central concepts but since the earliest 19th century writings in political economy, there has been little agreement about how they are best understood or mobilised. In the current period, despite growing wealth inequality, in public discussions, class is typically ignored, denied, or collapsed into a notion of a global "middle class". What does political economy have to offer the current debates?

Detailed Description:

Political economy's analyses of class and class politics have been seriously challenged in two different ways. The global power of neoliberalism fosters claims that class and class struggle are no longer relevant. Mobilisations of indigenous, anti-racist and feminist movements, especially in the global south, have insisted that class and class politics must be rethought. The central questions of the course are how political economy has responded to such challenges and what understandings of class and class politics are most relevant in today's situation.

The course begins with a brief review of classical political economy theories of class and class politics and with an overview of the contributions of Canadian political economy. It then examines recent debates that rethink class in the light of neoliberal capitalist globalisation, including arguments that class is no longer relevant. It explores several recent popular initiatives to politicize class such as the Occupy Movement in Canada, post-Apartheid community movements in South Africa, and solidarity movements in Venezuela asking what their struggles offer. Finally, it draws on indigenous engagements with political economy and on anti-racist and feminist interventions efforts to rethink class by integrating gender and racialisation, asking how class and class politics are understood in the current period.

The course also focuses on ways to improve students' understanding of and comfort with theory. One goal is to improve our ability to identify the theories informing the material we read, to increase our understanding of how theory shapes knowledge production, how the socio-political context shapes theory, and to be more explicit about the theories that shape our own work. The course also deals explicitly with issues related to critical thinking, political engagement and contemplative thought. It encourages students to develop their academic skills, particularly critical reading, research, writing, and presentations.

Students have an opportunity to:

1. become familiar with some of the ways in which political economy has theorised class, with particular attention to the significant contributions of Canadian political economy and selected movements from the global south;
2. investigate how political economy understands the relationships among class, gender and race;
3. develop critiques of current representations of class and class-based movements;
4. learn about what theory is, and to become more comfortable doing theory;
5. improve their academic skills of critical reading, research, writing, and presentations.

Assignments:

1. *Journal of 8 Critical Reading Reviews*: Each of 8 weeks, students write a critical review of the assigned readings that addresses the following questions: what is the main thesis or argument? What are the central concepts and what supporting evidence and/or arguments are developed? How do these readings relate to previous course readings and discussions? At the end of the course, students hand in their journal for grading. 30%

2. *Final Paper*: In consultation with the course director students identify a research question relating to political economy of class. Total: 60% divided as follows:

- i. abstract: submit an abstract identifying the research question and the methodology proposed to conduct the research; 10%
- ii. annotated bibliography: submit an annotated bibliography of 10 items (not included in the required readings for the course); 10%
- iii. conference presentation: present the research to date in the end of term mock Congress 10%
- iv. final paper: submit a journal length paper. 30%

3. *Participation*: A substantial portion of the grade is allocated to participation because a lot of learning occurs in class time; in fact, a class develops continuity, a sense of community and a collective consciousness through the experience of meeting together. The participation grade is not based on the number of times a student speaks, but reflects an assessment of their overall preparation, informed contribution to class discussions (i.e. evidence of having done the readings and of having thought about them before class), and responsiveness to the presentations and comments of other students. This grade recognises work that is not specifically graded, and offers a way to appreciate those students who make a special contribution to building the class as a community. 10%

Selected Bibliography

Allahar, Anton L. (2010). "The Political Economy of 'Race' and Class in Canada's Caribbean Diaspora"

American Review of Political Economy 8:2 (December): 54-86.

Altamirano-Jimenez, Isabel (2013). *Indigenous Encounters with Neoliberalism: Place, Women and the Environment in Canada and Mexico*

Andrew, Caroline (ed) (2003). *Studies in political economy: developments in feminism*

Barchiesi, Franco (2006). "Classes, Multitudes and the Politics of Community Movements in Post-Apartheid South Africa." In *Challenging Hegemony. Social Movements and the Quest for a New Humanism in South Africa*, edited by Nigel Gibson, 161-194.

Boltanski, Luc and Eve Chiapello (2007). *The New Spirit of Capitalism*

Clement, Wallace and John Myles (1994). *Relations of Ruling: Class and Gender in Postindustrial Societies*

Clement, Wallace (ed) (1997). *Understanding Canada Building on the New Canadian Political Economy*

Ford, Lisa and Tim Rowse (eds) (2012). *Between indigenous and settler governance*

Gibson-Graham, J.K. et al (eds) (2001). *Re/representing Class: Essays in Postmodern Marxism*

Jevons, W. Stanley. (1879, 2nd ed.). *The Theory of Political Economy*

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* 1848

Marx, Karl (1887) *Capital* Vol. 1

Petras, James (2013). "Latin America: Class Struggle and Resistance in the Age of Extractive Capitalism" *Center for Research on Globalization* <http://www.globalresearch.ca/latin-america-class-struggle-and-resistance-in-the-age-of-extractive-capitalism/5346919>

Sayer, Derek (1987). *The Violence of Abstraction*

Weingast, Barry R., and Donald Wittman, ed. (2008). *The Oxford Handbook of Political Economy*.