

Working Class Politics in Capitalist Democracies
York University AS\POLS 4470.03A
Time: 2:30-5:30 Wednesday SC 302 Winter 2003

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What kinds of vision, spirit and strategies might transcend the prevailing pessimism of the left and rekindle socialist imagination? Socialist renewal and working class politics remains inextricably linked for the foreseeable future. This is an unfashionable position today. More than a few words have been written over the last decade on the left of the penetration of capital across the globe and the triumphs of the neoliberal project of the ruling classes of the world. And from the Chiapas uprising of the 1990s to the 'Battle of Seattle' of the year past, significant debate has been devoted to the emergence of a so-called 'international civil society' in opposition to capitalist globalisation -- an opposition that can be heartily supported. These views, however, have too often veered toward determinism and defeatism in accepting capitalist markets as the necessary organizing principle of modern economic and political life, or been unduly speculative and reformist in propounding ways that capitalist markets might be managed, through taxes on financial speculation or international labour standards for example, to serve egalitarian ends. Such a truncation of political horizons was, perhaps, inevitable after the ignominious collapse of communism and the sordid embrace of 'Third Wayism' by social democracy. The seeming closure of the socialist project, at least in the political forms that the working classes have historically been organized over the past century, was bound to scatter progressive opinion and movements in all directions.

Against these prevailing intellectual and political currents, it seems important to re-assess working class politics and the state of the global proletariat. What should guide our thinking in this respect is the necessity for any serious reconstruction of the socialist movement to confront the realignment of the class structure and the impasse of working class politics over the last quarter of the twentieth century. Class analysis as a mode of intellectual discourse and social class as the pivotal axis of political mobilization have both suffered marginalization, although certainly not complete collapse, in the face of the casualization of work, trade union decline and the fracturing of socialist political formations, not to mention the impact of neo-liberal and post-modernist ideas. This has undoubtedly been the case in the advanced capitalist countries, and it is hard to avoid drawing similar conclusions for other parts of the world as well.

Yet, the social inequalities 'growing directly out of capitalist production itself', as Marx phrased it, have equally characterized this period, a point that even the international agencies and states leading the pro-globalisation brigades have conceded. And as the capitalist market has penetrated more thoroughly the globe than at any time in the past, drawing in more zones of the world and a growing portion of the population directly into capitalist social relations, the absolute number of proletarians, and indeed workers formed into unions as one of the elemental levels of working class formation, has probably never been greater. As a set of social relations, then, 'class' is as central to understanding the dynamics of contemporary capitalism as it ever has been.

But 'class' as a political relation -- in the sense, again from Marx and Engels, of workers consciously 'forming a class insofar as they engage in a common battle against another class' --

remains deep in crisis in terms of socialist agencies advancing political and economic alternatives to neoliberalism and capitalism.

At this historical juncture, it would seem a central task of socialists to undertake a measured register of the state of the global proletariat. One dimension of this is certainly to respond to the theoretical challenges that have been re-posed to Marxist class analysis since the 1970s by the Weberian analysis of the post-industrial worker, put forward by writers such as Gosta Esping-Anderson and Manuel Castells, to the multiple exploitations' class mappings proffered by Erik Olin-Wright and John Roemer, and, of course, to the more general critique that has gone under the rubric of post-modernism. **In Part 1 of the course we take up some of these theoretical concerns.** A second dimension is to attempt to assess the varied experiences of the contemporary working classes. This would include not only experience at work (e.g. casualisation and/or intensification of labour, new forms of work such as teleworking, struggles over reduced worktime). But it also should cover 'ways of living' (e.g. changes in family and communal relations, or patterns of consumption, transportation, entertainment, communication), identifying where possible trends that are common throughout global capitalism and trends that have a more specific resonance for particular groups of workers, and for particular parts of the global system. This also would take up a serious examination of working class organisation, identity formation and politics in various zones of the world. **In Part 2 of the course we address these current realities of working class politics.** A third dimension is to assess where working class politics has been, where it is and where it might be going as we confront the mounting contradictions of global capitalism and attempt to reconstruct socialist politics. This last point is a theme that should also engage our strategic imaginations: in what ways and through which struggles, local, national and international, can the self-emancipation of the working class be furthered? This would have to include careful and sober reflection on the promise and limitations of various forms of struggle, including corporate campaigns and boycotts, as well as international trade unionism and new and old working class parties. **In Part 3 in covering strategies of transformation we canvas some of these new strategies for labour internationalism and developing the project of socialism.**

Course Requirements

Seminar Participation.....	25%
Seminar Presentation (about 3-4 pages.....)	25%
Research Paper (about 20 pages).....	50%

Texts

Rosemary Crompton, Class and Stratification: An Introduction to Current Debates, Second Edition (Oxford: Polity, 1998).

Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, eds., Socialist Register 2001: Working Classes, Global Realities (London: Merlin Press, 2001).

Peter Waterman, Globalization Social Movements, and the New Internationalisms (New York: Continuum, 2001).

***** Course Syllabus*****

Part 1 Theoretical Perspectives

1. Working Class Politics: History and Impasses

Waterman, Globalization Social Movements, and the New Internationalisms, Chs. 1-2

Panitch and Leys, eds., Working Classes, Global Realities, essay by Bernstein.

2. The Working Classes and Class Analysis

Crompton, Class and Stratification, Chs. 1-2.

E. Wood, Democracy Against Capitalism, Ch. 3.

3. Mapping the Class Structure

Crompton, Class and Stratification, Chs. 3-5.

G. Carchedi, 'Classes and Class Analysis,' in E. Wright, ed., The Debate on Classes.

4. Class Struggle and Working Class Formation

A. Przeworski, Capitalism and Social Democracy, Ch. 2.

D. Sassoon, A Hundred Years of Socialism, Chs. 1 and 22-24.

Part 2 Current Realities

5. Class Formation Today 1: The New Proletariat

Panitch and Leys, eds., Working Classes, Global Realities, essays by Huws and Kwong..

Crompton, Class and Stratification, Ch. 7.

6. Class Formation Today 2: Feminization

Waterman, Globalization Social Movements, and the New Internationalisms, Ch. 6.

Panitch and Leys, eds., Working Classes, Global Realities, essays by Warskett and Young.

7. Class Struggles in the North and East

Panitch and Leys, eds., Working Classes, Global Realities, essays by Jefferys, Mandel..

Crompton, Class and Stratification, Chs. 5-6.

8. Class Struggles in the South

Panitch and Leys, eds., Working Classes, Global Realities, essays by Bond et al., Harriss-White and Goptu, Moghissi and Rahnema, and Beynon and Ramalho.

Part 3 Strategies for Transformation

9. Working Class Emancipation: Dreams and Struggles for Socialism

K. Marx and F. Engels, The Communist Manifesto.

L. Panitch, 'Capitalism, Socialism and Revolution' in The Socialist Register 1989.

R. Miliband, Socialism for a Sceptical Age, Ch. 2.

10. New Strategies for Organizing

Panitch and Leys, eds., Working Classes, Global Realities, essays by Greenfield, Mann, Hensman.

11. New Internationalisms

Waterman, Globalization Social Movements, and the New Internationalisms, Chs. 3 and 5.

Panitch and Leys, eds., Working Classes, Global Realities, essay by Arrighi and Silver.

12. New Solidarities

Waterman, Globalization Social Movements, and the New Internationalisms, Ch. 7.

Panitch and Leys, eds., Working Classes, Global Realities, essays by Panitch, Paulson and Hellman.