SOCIOLOGY 9191A
Social Science in the Marxian Tradition
Fall 2020

DRAFT

Class times and location
Wednesday 10:30am -12:30pm
Virtual synchronous

Instructor: David Calnitsky
Office Hours by appointment
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Technical Requirements:

- Stable internet connection
- Laptop or computer
- Working microphone
- Working webcam

“The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways.
The point, however, is to change it.”
– Karl Marx

That is the point, it’s true—but not in this course. This quote, indirectly, hints at a deep tension in Marxism. If we want to change the world we need to understand it. But the desire to change something can infect our understanding of it. This is a pervasive dynamic in the history of Marxism and the first step is to admit there is a problem. This means acknowledging the presence of wishful thinking, without letting it induce paralysis. On the other hand, if there are pitfalls in being upfront in your desire to change the world there are also virtues. The normative
goal of social change helps to avoid common trappings of academia, in particular, the laser focus on irrelevant questions. Plus, in having a set of value commitments, stated clearly, you avoid the false pretense that values don’t enter in the backdoor in social science, which they often do if you’re paying attention.

With this caveat in place, Marxian social science really does have a lot to offer in understanding the world and that’s what we’ll analyze in this course.

The goal is to look at the different hypotheses that broadly emerge out of the Marxian tradition and see the extent to which they can be supported both theoretically and empirically. And we should in principle be open minded enough to toss out the dross and keep what can withstand the scrutiny of contemporary social science.

Apart from this sorting exercise, the purpose of this course is to introduce students to major theoretical and empirical debates in Marxian research. It approaches Marxian social analysis as a theoretical tradition and a program for social scientific research—not a unified paradigm with preset answers for all questions. For that reason we focus little on Marx’s own writings and the classical literature, and more on core themes, theoretical problems, and substantive areas of analysis developed within the Marxian tradition. Readings are selected on the basis of clarity of exposition rather than their position within the canon; they focus on what I take to be the questions at the heart of the Marxian research project, but are not always consistent with Marx’s own ideas. Some of the readings are attempts to empirically test ideas rooted in the Marxist tradition; they serve as exemplars for those interested in pursuing similar lines of research.

I take the following questions to form the core of Marxian research:

(1) How are resources allocated in capitalist economies?;
(2) How does this allocation affect political power?; and,
(3) How does this allocation affect social change and social stability?

The first question is about class analysis per se, the second is about classes and states, and the third is about classes and historical dynamics. All of these questions are centrally about social class, which, depending on the topic, serves as the independent and dependent variable of Marxian social science. When we study the causal impact of class on ideology or states or gender or race, we’re doing independent variable Marxism; when we study the historic development of class structures or class formations themselves, we’re doing dependent variable Marxism.

The course begins with the examination of class structure and capital accumulation. We then examine the centrality of class at the core of Marxian research and analyze differences between Marxian and non-Marxian perspectives. We move onto the relationship between class and gender, and class and race. The final section delves into a variety of theoretical problems in Marxian class analysis including the question of how classes form as collective actors, how class compromises are forged, the relationship between class and the state, and finally, the dynamics between class and historical change. We close by examining classic Marxian arguments for the emergence of socialism and more recent attempts to re-imagine these formulations. We will read these historical, political, and economic contributions from a Marxian framework, and assess their strengths and weakness.
**Structure of the course:** Each class will be divided into the first hour where I will lecture for about 20-30 minutes on the topic, and the remainder of the hour will be devoted to “stupid questions” where we will cover the basic ideas again, and people will ask stupid questions like, “Can you repeat that” and “What’s the definition of…” and “Wait, how does that argument work?”

Over the second hour we’ll go through student memos on the weekly reading. You will have a chance to elaborate on your memo comments in class. Wait, what are memos?

Each week everyone will prepare short written memos, 150-300 words long, engaging some theme or problem in the reading. These should not be summaries or exegeses of the texts, nor mini-essays with extended commentaries on the readings. The point is to pose focused questions that will serve as the basis for the seminar discussion. As you do the readings each week, think about an issue that you really want discussed and clarified, and then formulate your comments to set up that discussion. While you’ll describe what you see as the issues in play in the question, you do not need to stake out a position (although you can if you want). The key is to pose a clear question that you want to discuss. It is entirely appropriate for questions to focus on ideas, arguments, or passages, which you do not understand. So you should come to class prepared both to talk about your memo and also to pose a “stupid question” or two.

Memos must be posted in our Google doc each Monday at 3pm – late memos will receive no marks.

**Reading:** All readings (except for the supplementary/background ones) mentioned in the syllabus are mandatory, and they should be completed before class. The supplementary/background reading material is meant as introduction or guide to further research in specific areas and may be useful in writing your papers.

**Grading:** Your final grade for this course, on a scale from A to F, will be based on:

i) Attendance and participation in class (25%)

ii) Weekly memos (25%)

iii) Final paper (50%)

**Academic Honesty:** If you are unclear how to cite properly, please consult me or a tutor at the writing center. Plagiarism carries severe consequences including, but not limited to, failure from the course.

**General background reading:** This course does not require background in Marxist ideas, but if you feel the need to brush up and get a broader understanding of the theoretical context I would recommend one or more of the following. In particular, the Wolff book is an excellent and very short summary of the relevant literature:


**Required Texts:**

Erik Olin Wright. *Marxist Social Science*. Unpublished Manuscript [Note: Called MSS below, please do not share or cite this manuscript]

**Recommended Texts:**

Erik Olin Wright. *Class Counts: Comparative Studies in Class Analysis*. Cambridge University Press, 1997. [Note: Student version from 2000 omits most of the technical discussions and data analysis; students interested in the statistical discussions might prefer the 1997 edition]


1. Sept 16 – Organizational session

2. Sept 23 – The Marxian tradition, social science, and the role of class

Required:

Background:


Supplementary:

- EO Wright, “Marxism after Communism,” in *Interrogating Inequality*, Ch. 11.
- Ernest Mandel, *The Formation of the Thought of Karl Marx*, selections
- Maurice Dobb, *Theories of Value and Distribution since Adam Smith*, ch. 6, “Karl Marx”, pp. 137-166
- Clarke, S. *Marx, Marginalism, and Modern Sociology*, ch. 4 & 9.

3. Sept 30 – Capitalism

Required:


Background:

• Karl Marx, “Wage, Labor, and Capital” and “Value, Price, and Profit”, selections.

Supplementary:

• Karl Marx. *Capital*, V.1, selections


Howard, M. C., & King, J. E. 1995. The political economy of Marx. NYU Press.


4. Oct 7 – Marxist class analysis and its alternatives

Required:


Background:


• Parkin, F. Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique, selections.
Supplementary:

- Wood, E.M. “History or Teleology? Marx versus Weber”, ch. 5 in *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing historical materialism*

5. Oct 14 – Class and Gender

Required:

• Wright, E. O. “Conceptualizing the interaction of class and gender”, ch.6 and “The noneffects of class on the gendered division of labor in the home”, ch.8 in Class Counts

Background:

• Brenner, J. and Ramas, M. “Rethinking Women’s Oppression” in New Left Review, pp. 33-71
• Heidi Hartman, “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: towards a more progressive union”, in Women and Revolution, ed by L Sargent (Boston: South End, 1981), pp. 1-42

Supplementary:

• Angela Davis. 1981. Women, Race, & Class, selections.
• Clement, W & Myles, J – “Household Relations Power Divisions and Domestic Labour” and “Bringing In Gender: Postindustrialism and Patriarchy”, from The Relations of Ruling: Class and Gender in Postindustrial Societies, p. 123-141; 142-175
• Stevi Jackson, “Marxism and Feminism”, ch. 2 in Gamble, et. al, Marxism and social science (University of Illinois Press, 1999).
• Seccombe, W. Weathering the Storm: Working-class families from the industrial revolution to the fertility decline, Verso, ch. 6
• Fine, B. 2012, Women's Employment and the Capitalist Family, Ch. 1 & Appendix.
• J. Humphries, “Class Struggle and the persistence of the working class family”, Cambridge J of Econ, 1:3, 1977, pp.241-258
• Engels, F. “The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State”, especially the sections on the family.

### 6. Oct 21 – Class and Race

**Required:**


**Background:**


**Supplementary:**

• Robert Carter, “Marxism and Theories of Racism” in *Critical Companion to Contemporary Marxism*
• Meiksens Woods, E. 1995. “Capitalism and Human Emancipation: Race, Gender, and Democracy.” In *Democracy against Capitalism*.
• Rex, J. “Race” in *The Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, T. Bottomore.
• Reed Jr., Adolph and M Chowkwanyun. 2012. “Race, Class, Crisis: The Discourse of Racial Disparity and its Analytical Discontents” Socialist Register, 48, pp. 149-175.

7. Oct 28 – Problems in Class Analysis (1) – Class Formation
Required:

- Wright, E.O. “Class Formation” in MSS, p. 210-244.
- Wright, E.O. “A General Framework for Studying Class Consciousness and Class Formation”, ch. 10 in Class Counts

Background:


Supplementary:

- Olson, M. (1965), The Logic of Collective Action, selections
- Przeworski, A. “Proletariat into a Class: the process of class formation from Kautsky’s The Class Struggle to recent contributions”, Chapter 2, Capitalism and Social Democracy (Cambridge University Press, 1985) pp.47-97

8. Nov 4 – Reading week

9. Nov 11 – Problems in Class Analysis (2) – Class Compromise

Required:

• Wright, E.O. “Class Formation” 6.5, “The material bases of class compromise” in MSS, p. 245-256.

Supplementary:

• Alexander Hicks and Lane Kenworthy, "Cooperation and Political Economic Performance in Affluent Democratic Capitalism" American Journal of Sociology, 103(6), 1998, pp. 1631-72
• Korpi, W. 1981. The Working Class in Welfare Capitalism, selections
• Korpi, W. 1983. The Democratic Class Struggle, selections

10. Nov 18 – Classes and the State Debate

Required:


Supplementary:

• Mayer, T. “The State” in *Analytical Marxism*, Ch. 6
• David Gold, Clarence Lo and Erik Olin Wright, 1975, “Recent Developments on Marxist Theories of the State”, Monthly Review.

**11. Nov 25 – Historical Materialism**

Required:


Supplementary:

- Marx, K., “Preface” to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*.
- Carling, A. *Social Division*, selections.
• Van Parijs, P. “Marxism’s Central Puzzle” in Terrance Ball and James Farr (eds) *After Marx* (Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 88-104

12. Dec 2 – Ideology as mystification or subjectivity formation

Required:

• Erik Olin Wright. 1997. “Ch. 11 - Class consciousness and class formation in Sweden, the United States and Japan” in *Class Counts*, p. 216-248
Supplementary:


13. Dec 9 – Rethinking Socialism

Required:


Supplementary:
• Sweezy, P. *The Theory of Capitalist Development*, selections.
• Marx, K. *The Critique of Gotha Programme*, selections
• Wright, E.O. “Why something like socialism is necessary for the transition to something like communism.” Theory and Society 15, no. 5 (1986): 657-672.

SUPPLEMENTARY TOPICS

Class Interests and the Labor Process

Required:

• Braverman, H. 1979. Labor and Monopoly Capital, selections.

Supplementary:

• Ruth Milkman. (1997), *Farewell to the Factory: Auto Workers in the Late Twentieth Century*, selections

Theories of Crisis

Required:


Supplementary:

• Sweezy, P. *The Theory of Capitalist Development*, selections
• Meek, R. 1967. “The Falling Rate of Profit” in *Economics and Ideology and Other Essays*, London: Chapman and Hall,
• Brenner, R. 2006. *The Economics of Global Turbulence*, selections

**More on the labour theory of value**


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**Class and imperialism**

**Required:**

• Erik Olin Wright. “Imperialism” in MSS, p. 121-150.


**Supplementary:**


• V.I.Lenin, *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism*
• Charles Barone, *Marxist Thought on Imperialism*, (M.E. Sharpe, 1985)
• Anthony Brewer, *Marxist Theories of Imperialism*, (Routledge, 1999)

**Methodological debates**

**Required:**

• Blaug, M. (1992). “What you always wanted to know about the philosophy of science but were afraid to ask” in *The methodology of economics: Or, how economists explain*. Cambridge University Press. p 3-50.

**Supplementary:**

• Berger, Johannes, and Claus Offe. "Functionalism vs. rational choice?." *Theory

- Stinchcombe, A. Constructing Social Theories (Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1968).