

# PS393 Labor Movements and Public Policy

Seminar Leader: Dave Braneck

Course Times: Wednesdays and Fridays, 9:00-10:30

Email: d.branec@berlin.bard.edu

Office Hours: by appointment

## Course Description

This course will look at the labor movement in the United States, using organized labor as a lens through which to analyze the convergence of the state, shifting institutional frameworks, and social movements. Students will be able to assess the role of organized labor within US politics generally, grappling with the opportunities and limits of labor as a means for enacting change, as well as how labor fits into, shapes, and is affected by institutional arrangements. A historic perspective will be taken in order to mark developments within the state and how this context has affected and been affected by organized labor. Students will be tasked with employing and sharpening existing understanding of state and policy structures while gaining critical knowledge and analytical skills that they will be able to apply to analysis of the state and other actors.

## Requirements

### Reading Material

- Class Reader (available at library)

### Class Preparation

Please come to class fully prepared. This means thoroughly reading and engaging with the assigned texts/content. Take notes and address any questions raised in class pertaining to the texts. Do your best to prepare questions of your own about the strength and validity of the author's argument, how they chose to make their case, and how their argumentations fits with what else we've read and discussed in class.

### Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

### Attendance

Attendance at ALL classes is expected. There will be an attendance sheet for every session. Each absence beyond two (that is more than two absences from two sessions of 90 minutes) will lead to the subtraction of 1 point from the overall final grade. Late arrival counts as an absence. If you miss more than 30 percent of the class you cannot pass.

Please consult the Student Handbook for regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence.

### Assignments and Grading Breakdown

#### **Classroom Participation: 30%**

This course is built on thoughtful and engaged discussion from all participants. This includes coming prepared to course and actively participating in group and class-wide discussions and in-class projects. Students should feel comfortable voicing their views, but please be mindful and respectful of other course members while doing so. A respectful decorum is necessary, and if it feels like this is lacking at any point please do not hesitate to discuss this with the seminar leader.

#### **Response Papers: 35%**

Each student is required to write 10 single-page response papers (350-400 words, 1.5-spaced, 12 pt., Times New Roman) on sessions of their choice. One paper must be written in the introduction block of the course (weeks 1-5), while 3 are to be written during weeks of the students choosing during each of the 3 main blocks of the course. Response papers should consist of an abstract on one of the primary texts' core components and arguments and pose 2 critical questions of the text to be used in the following week's discussion.

Response papers MUST be submitted in print at the beginning of class.

#### **Final Paper: 35%**

There will be a final writing assignment (2,000-2,500 words) due at the end of the course. You will receive further information about this writing assignment during class.

### Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). After four weeks of the deadline the essay cannot receive a grade higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

## Schedule

### INTRODUCTION (1 response paper due in this portion of course)

#### Week 1: What is Work (Wed 29.01)

- David Graeber: On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs: A Work Rant, 2013.  
<https://www.strike.coop/bullshit-jobs/>
- Andrea Komlosy: Work: The Last 1,000 Years, 2017 (Chapter 4)
- Celeste Murillo: Producing and Reproducing: Capitalism's Dual Oppression of Women, 2018.  
<https://www.leftvoice.org/on-reproductive-labor-wage-slavery-and-the-new-working-class>

#### Week 2: What is Organized Labor (Fri 31.01)

- Nelson Lichtenstein: State of the Union: A Century of American Labor, 2003. (Introduction)
- Eric Levitz: Democracy Dies When Labor Unions Do, 2019.

<http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2019/09/democracy-dies-when-labor-unions-do.html>

**Week 3: American Exceptionalism (Wed 05.02)**

- Eric Foner: Why is there no Socialism in the United States? 1984.
- Louis Hartz: Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution, 1955. (Chapter 1).

**Week 4: Institutional Regimes and the Working Class as Actor (Fri 07.02)**

- Carlota Perez: Techno-economic Paradigm Shifts, 2018.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhNd3tVR1hI>
- Tamara Draut: Is this your Image of the Working Class? You Need to Update it, 2018  
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/may/09/american-working-class-what-it-looks-like-today>
- Gabriel Winant: Hurrah for the Time Man! 2019  
<https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/hurrah-for-the-time-man>

**Week 5: States, Institutions and Power (Wed 12.02)**

- Craig Calhoun: Dictionary of Social Sciences, 2002.
- Bob Jessop: Handbook of Politics: State and Society in Global Perspective, 2010.
- Michael Mann: The Autonomous Power of the State, 1984.

**BLOCK 1: INDUSTRIALISM: 1870 - 1920 (3 response papers due in this portion of course)**

**Week 6: Regulating Industrialism: The Transforming American State (Fri 14.02)**

- Stephen Skowronek: Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877-1920, 1982. (Chapter 5)

**Week 7: Industrialism's Impact on Workers (Wed 19.02)**

- Melvyn Dubofsky: We Shall be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World, 1969. (Chapter 1)
- Alice Kessler-Harris: Women Have Always Worked, 2018. (Chapter 3)

**Week 8: Industrial Flashpoints on the National Scale: Rail and Coal (Fri 21.02)**

- Jeremy Brecher: Strike! Revised and Expanded, 2014. (Chapter 1)
- Timothy Mitchell: Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil, 2011. (Chapter 1)

**Week 9: Ideology and Action: The IWW (Wed 26.02)**

- Melvyn Dubofsky: We Shall be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World, 1969. (Chapters 4 and 7)

**Week 10: State Repression (Fri 28.02)**

- James Green: Death at the Haymarket: A Story of Chicago, the First Labor Movement, and the Bombing that Divided Gilded Age America, 2006. (Prologue)
- Olivia Waxman: A Century Before Trump's ICE Raids, the U.S. Government Rounded Up Thousands of Immigrants. Here's What Happened, 2019: <https://time.com/5625012/palmer-raids/>
- Felix Frankfurter: The Case of Sacco and Vanzetti, 1927.  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1927/03/the-case-of-sacco-and->

[vanzetti/306625/](#)

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**Week 11: Progressive Reform and its Limits (Wed 04.03)**

- Elizabeth Cobbs-Hoffman, et. al: Major Problems in American History, Volume II, 2012. (Chapter 5)
- Melvyn Dubofsky: When Socialism was Popular in the United States, 2016: <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2016/03/29/when-socialism-was-popular-in-the-united-states/>

**BLOCK 2: FORDISM 1920 - 1970 (3 response papers due in this portion of course)**

**Week 12: Embedding Liberalism: the State's Response to the Great Depression (Fri 06.03)**

- Mark Blyth: Great Transformations: Economic Ideas and Institutional Change in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, 2002. (Chapter 3)

**Week 13: Labor in the Great Depression (Wed 11.03)**

- Howard Kester: Revolt Among the Sharecroppers, 1997. (Introduction)
- Julian Guerrero: The Flint Militants, 2018: <https://jacobinmag.com/2017/10/flint-sit-down-strike-anniversary-autoworkers>

**Week 14: Workplace Democracy: Unions in Relative Power (Fri 13.03)**

- Nelson Lichtenstein: State of the Union: A Century of American Labor, 2003. (Chapter 2)

**Week 15: Post WW2: A Labor and Capital Accord? (Wed 18.03)**

- Stanley Aronowitz: Death and Life of American Labor: Towards a New Workers Movement, 2014. (Chapters 3 and 4)
- Timothy Mitchell: Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil, 2011. (Chapter 1)
- Robert Reich: Supercapitalism: the transformation of business, democracy, and everyday life, 2007. (Chapter 1)

**Week 16: Red Scare Repression and Institutional Constraints on Labor (Fri 20.03)**

- Colin Gordon: The Legacy of Taft-Hartley, 2017. <https://jacobinmag.com/2017/12/taft-hartley-unions-right-to-work>
- Susan Roth Breitzer: Loved Labor's Losses: The CIO and the Effects of McCarthyism, 2009. [https://www.academia.edu/25655662/Loved\\_Labor\\_s\\_Losses\\_The\\_Congress\\_of\\_Industrial\\_Organizations\\_and\\_the\\_Effects\\_of\\_McCarthyism](https://www.academia.edu/25655662/Loved_Labor_s_Losses_The_Congress_of_Industrial_Organizations_and_the_Effects_of_McCarthyism)

**Week 17: Social Movements and an Evolving Left (Wed 25.03)**

- Vanessa Tait: Poor Worker's Unions: Rebuilding Labor from Below, 2016. (Chapter 1)
- The Black Panther Party Platform, 1966.
- Bayard Rustin: The Failure of Black Separatism, 1970.
- The Combahee River Collective Statement, 1979.
- Joseph Nevins: Lessons of the Chicano Movement Today, 2018. <https://nacla.org/blog/2018/09/07/lessons-chicano-movement-today>

**BLOCK 3: POSTINDUSTRIALISM 1970 - Present (3 response papers due in this portion of course)**

**Week 18: Fordist Dreams and Postfordist Realities (Fri 27.03)**

- John Maynard Keynes: Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren, 1930.
- Documentary Film: Harlan County, USA, 1976.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2aPy\\_XVZ4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2aPy_XVZ4)

**Week 19: Work and the Working Class in Deindustrialization (Wed 01.04)**

- Kim Moody: On New Terrain: How Capital is Reshaping the Battleground of Class War, 2017. (Chapters 1 and 2)
- WNYC Radio Interview on PATCO Strike, 2011:  
<https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/takeaway/segments/164690-strike-changed-american-labor>

**Week 20: Neoliberalism and Expanding Scales of Production and Circulation through Dispossession (Fri 03.04)**

- David Harvey: A Brief History of Neoliberalism, 2005. (Introduction and chapter 6)
- Nick Dyer-Witheford: Cyber-Proletariat: Global Labour in the Digital Vortex, 2015. (Chapter 5)

*No class on 08.04 and 10.04 due to Spring Break (Mon, 06.04 – Mon, 13.04)*

**Week 21: The Economic Geography of Globalization (Wed 15.04)**

- David Harvey: Globalization and 'the Spatial Fix', 2001.
- Bonacich and Wilson: Getting the Goods: Ports, Labor, and the Logistics Revolution, 2008. (Chapter 1)
- Deborah Cowen: Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in Global Trade, 2014. (Chapter 1)

**Week 22: The Crisis of Care and Surplus Labor (Fri 17.04)**

- Loïc Wacquant: From Slavery to Mass Incarceration, Rethinking the 'race question' in the US, 2002.
- Nancy Fraser: Contradictions of Capital and Care, 2016.
- Ruth Wilson Gilmore on Prisons and Class Warfare, 2018.  
<http://www.historicalmaterialism.org/index.php/interviews/prisons-and-class-warfare>

**Week 23: Labor's Self Preservation and New Deal Legal Framework as Double-Edged Sword (Wed 22.04)**

- Steve Fraser: Age of Acquiescence: The Life and Death of Organized Resistance to American Wealth and Power, 2015. (Chapter 12)
- Stanley Aronowitz: Death and Life of American Labor: Towards a New Workers Movement, 2014. (Chapter 3)
- Dylan Matthews: The Supreme Court decision gutting public sector unions, explained, 2018.  
<https://www.vox.com/2018/6/14/17437832/janus-afscme-supreme-court-union-teacher-police-public-sector>
- Richard Kahlenberg and Moshe Marvit: The Ugly Racial History of 'right to work', 2012.  
[https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online\\_articles/the-ugly-racial-history-of-right-to-work](https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/the-ugly-racial-history-of-right-to-work)

**LABOR'S PRESENT AND (POTENTIAL) FUTURE**

**Week 24: The Future of Work in an Increasingly-Monopolistic Gig Economy (Fri 24.04)**

- Philipp Staab and Oliver Nachtwey: Market and Labour Control in Digital Capitalism, 2016.
- Sarah Jaffe, Nationalize Amazon, 2018. <https://theoutline.com/post/6587/nationalize-amazon-make-bezos-our-bitch?zd=3&zi=o3zh6wp3>
- Neil Irwin: Maybe We're Not All Going to be Gig Economy Workers After All, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/15/upshot/gig-economy-limits-labor-market-uber-california.html>
- Bureau of Labor Statistics, Fastest Growing Occupations, 2018-2028. <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/fastest-growing.htm>

**Week 25: Today's Union Movement (Wed 29.04)**

- Mark Dudzic and Adolph Reed Jr.: The Crisis of Labor and the Left in the United States, 2015.
- Caleb Crain: State of the Unions: What Happened to America's Labor Movement, 2019. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/08/26/state-of-the-unions>

**No class due to Federal Holiday (Fri 01.05)**

**Week 26: Hope and Despair on Labor's Horizon? (Wed 06.05)**

- Eric Blanc: Red State Revolt: The Teacher's Strike Wave and Working Class Politics, 2019. (Introduction)
- Katrina vanden Heuvel: The Fight for 15 has created a Roadmap for Change, 2019. <https://www.thenation.com/article/the-fight-for-15-has-created-a-road-map-for-change/>
- Lauren Gambino: 'We're Here to Win': US Democratic Socialists Move to Center Stage, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/aug/06/democratic-socialists-us-alexandria-ocasio-cortez-bernie-sanders>.
- McNicholas, Poydock, Rhinehart: Unprecedented: The Trump NLRB Attack on Workers' Rights, 2019. <https://www.epi.org/publication/unprecedented-the-trump-nlrbs-attack-on-workers-rights/>
- Coppola and Wallender: VW Tennessee Workers Reject Union, Dealing Blow to UAW, 2019. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-06-15/volkswagen-tennessee-workers-reject-union-dealing-blow-to-uaw>
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**No class due to Federal Holiday (Fri 08.05)**