

Sociology 202B

Venue: 402 Barrows

Professor: Dylan Riley

Time: M 10-12

CONTEMPORARY SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY:

Marxist Theories of Politics

This course introduces the Marxist tradition of political thought. This might seem like a surprising topic since it is common in academic discussions to dismiss Marxist theories of politics as "reductionist" or "economistic". But as we will see over the course, this is a very misleading interpretation of the tradition. Indeed many fundamental political issues of the modern world such as the nature of the relationship of the state to major social forces, the dynamics of political struggle in capitalist society, and the strategic options available to, and pitfalls facing, social forces aiming to implement radical change, have been most clearly posed and sharply discussed within this tradition.

The course follows a broadly chronological organization. It begins by reviewing the strategic debates within Marxism among such major figures as: Bernstein, Engels, Gramsci, Kautsky, Lenin, Luxemburg, Marx and Trotsky. The class then traces these discussions forward to the high period of neo-Marxist political theorizing in the seventies (Miliband, Poulantzas and Therborn) before examining some more contemporary Marxist strategic discussions (Anderson, Brenner, Przeworski and Wright). Students are expected to have a basic grasp of classical social theory as a pre-requisite for attending the seminar. (Note: texts with an * beside them will be made available as pdf files on the course website.)

Assessment

Participation: 10%

Reading Responses: 10%

Presentation: 20%

Research Proposal: 60%

Participation

You are expected to attend and participate in all class meetings at an appropriate level. This means extensive preparation for each meeting. For each meeting you should strive to formulate three things: a central question that focuses the readings for that session, a set of answers to that question, and a set of empirical and/or theoretical steps in the argument that links the question to the answers.

Reading Responses

For five of the thirteen weeks (not including the presentation week) you need to produce a reading response of one page. This document should concisely pose what you see as the central issue of the reading for that week. I do not want this via e-mail. Instead I would appreciate a hard copy in my box by 3pm on the Wednesday prior to our class meetings.

Presentation

The presentation should be no more than 20 minutes long, and should clearly and concisely explain what you see as the main issues posed by the reading for that week. A written copy of the presentation is due on the Monday prior to the class meeting. This should be written as an analytic essay of no more than 1500 words. **Reading notes are not an acceptable basis for a presentation.** This is your week to lead to the class, and to pose the issues that you see as crucial. That means that you have to achieve mastery of the material for that week.

Research Proposal

The research proposal should be no more than 5000 words. It should pose a central theoretical question derived from the readings. It should then instantiate that theoretical question in a particular empirical puzzle that constitutes a problem for the theoretical tradition that we are exploring here. This instantiation should take the form of a definite question. For example one very broad issue that might come up would be: "What is the connection between imperialism and reformism in developed capitalist countries?" That question then might be instantiated by asking "What is the link (if any) between the collapse of Chartism and the consolidation of the 'New Imperialism' in Britain?" The significance of the question for the theoretical tradition we are exploring together must be clearly explained in the paper. The paper should then develop three different substantive hypotheses about what the answers to that question might be, and should sketch out a research strategy aimed at finding out which might be the most plausible.

Format

All work for the class should be written in 12 point Times New Roman font, be double spaced with 1.25" left and right margins, and 1" top and bottom margins. Please respect this format!

8/29

Course Introduction

Founding Fathers

1/25 -

Marx, Karl. 1996. *Later Political Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 1–30, 31–127.

2/1 -

Marx, Karl. 1996. *Later Political Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 163–207, 208–226.

Second International (Orthodoxy and Revisionism)

2/8 -

Kautsky, Karl. *The Class Struggle*. Pages TBA.

Kautsky, Karl. 1996. *The Road to Power: Political Reflections on Growing into the Revolution*. Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press. Pp. 1–91.

2/15 -

Bernstein, Eduard. 2010. *The Preconditions of Socialism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 1–206.

Revolutionary Marxism and its Critics

2/22 -

Lenin, Vladimir Ilich. 1975. *The Lenin Anthology*. Pp. 11–114, 204–277, 311–398, 461–476 New York: Norton and Company.

Kautsky, Karl. 1964. *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press. (Pp. 1–100 required, entire book preferable).

*Claudín, Fernando. 1977. "Democracy and Dictatorship in Lenin and Kautsky." *New Left Review*. 106: 59-78.

2/29 -

Gramsci, Antonio. 1971. *Selections From the Prison Notebooks*. New York: International Publishers. Pp. 123–318.

3/7 -

Trotsky, Leon. 2007. *Terrorism and Communism: A Reply to Karl Kautsky*. Pp. 9–177. (Try to read Zizek's forward to this edition as well.)

3/14

Luxemburg, Rosa. 2004. *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*. New York: Monthly Review Press. Pp. 128–207, 233–245, 248–310, 312–341.

Neo-Marxism and the Welfare State

3/28

Miliband, Ralph. 1969. *The State in Capitalist Society*. New York: Basic Books. Pp. 1–145, 265–277.

*----- . 1970. "The Capitalist State: Reply to Nicos Poulantzas." *New Left Review*. 59: 53–60.

Poulantzas, Nicos. 1968. *Political Power and Social Classes*. London: Verso Books. Pp. 187–252.

*----- . 1969. "The Problem of the Capitalist State." *New Left Review*. 58: 67–78.

4/4

Therborn, Göran. 2008. *What Does the Ruling Class Do When it Rules?* London: Verso. Pp. 11–282.

*Block, Fred. 1977. "The Ruling Class Does not Rule: Notes on the Marxist Theory of the State." *Socialist Revolution*. 33:6–28.

Marxism and Socialist Strategy in the Postwar Period

4/11

Przeworski, Adam. 1985. *Capitalism and Social Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1, 2 and 4.

4/18

*Anderson, Perry. 1965. "Problems of Socialist Strategy." Pp. 221-290 in *Towards Socialism*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.

*Brenner, Robert. 1985. "The Paradox of Social Democracy: The American Case." Pp. 32–85 in *The Year Left: An American Socialist Yearbook*. London: Verso.

4/25

Wright, Erik Olin. 1979. *Class Crisis and the State*. London: Verso. Pages TBA

Wright, Erik Olin. 2010. *Envisioning Real Utopias*. London: Verso. Pages TBA

Berman, Sheri. 2006. *The Primacy of Politics: Social Democracy and the Making of Europe's Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pages TBA

Research Proposal Due May 9th.