THEORIES OF POLITICAL ECONOMY

Course Overview

This course examines contemporary and historical theoretical perspectives on capitalism, the modern state and changing relations of power at the global, the national and the local levels. Contending views of the dynamics governing economic, political and cultural changes in the modern era, and of modernity itself, will be explored. What light do these theories shed on processes of socio-economic change and on the complex relationship between the economic, the cultural and the political? How do various theorists identify the collective actors engaged in making these changes, the sites of their interaction, and the processes through which collective identities are constituted? Were classes important, and are they still? What of gender, “race” and other bases of oppression (and identity formation)? Does the nation-state still constitute one of the central organising principles of the world system or does it make more sense to “think local and global” and forget the national? Does neo-liberal globalisation involve governance by the logic of capitalist markets or are we witnessing a revival and deepening of imperialism?

The course takes a doubly historical approach to these questions. We will listen to voices from the past as well as examining contemporary efforts to understand the historical roots of the present (dis-)order. This approach gives us a chance to reflect on the elements of change and continuity that mark the modern era. It also provides us an opportunity to reflect on the contributions of the “founding fathers” of political economy. The latter have indeed left a rich intellectual legacy, on which subsequent generations of political economists have drawn - and continue to draw. Yet the nature of the legacy is by no means simple. Old ideas are lost, rediscovered and reinterpreted as new generations attempt to grapple with the challenges of their times and places.

Required Readings:

Required readings have been placed on reserve at the main library or are available online through the library or a special course posting. Those not available online have been compiled for a course pack.

Assignments and Grading:

You are required to write two essays. The first is a brief essay in which you address the question of why (or why not) contemporary students of political economy should be exposed to the work of classical theorists like Karl Marx, Max Weber, Antonio Gramsci, Joseph Schumpeter and Karl Polanyi. This essay is to be no more than 2000 words in length (including notes, but excluding bibliography) and is due on 27 October. It will be worth 30% of your final grade. The
second essay, of approximately 4,000 words, must deal with some aspect of the theoretical debates examined in this course. This does not mean that you must pick one of the topics identified in the course outline. In fact, I would encourage you to use the opportunity to begin to formulate the research question you hope to explore in your Master’s thesis or research essay. I would be glad to help you in this. The earlier you come to see me, the more opportunity I have to assist you. The essay is due 14 December 2009. It is worth **50 percent** of the final grade. **Neither essay can be submitted by email.**

The remaining **20 percent** of your grade will be awarded for seminar participation. You are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the required readings. No one will be penalised for being quiet, but informed participation on a regular basis could help to raise your final grade. At some time between 21 October and the end of term, you, along with at least one other student, will be expected to take responsibility for animating the week’s discussion. This does not mean reading aloud long précis of the week’s required readings. Rather, I want you to help us to see how the debate embedded in that week’s readings, enriches our understanding of the core concerns that run through the course. You should come to class on **23 September** prepared to indicate your preferred topic/week. If you want to substitute certain readings for some of those that I have assigned, please consult with me in advance.

A grade of B or B+ normally indicates that you have shown an adequate understanding of, and some ability to work with, the theory and concepts you have chosen. A grade of A - to A normally is given on papers in which students have demonstrated an ability to begin really to use concepts to develop their own analyses. A grade of A+ suggests that you have produced a virtually publishable piece of work. At the graduate level, a grade of less than B- is a failure. It is given when the paper reflects a poor grasp of theory, an inability to develop a basic argument and/or poor research skills. The University has a policy on instructional offences, such as plagiarism. For details, consult the 2002-2003 Graduate Calendar.

**Course Schedule**

**Week 1 - Introduction (16 September)**

**Part A - Voices from the Past**

**Week 2 - Initial Theorisations: Classical Political Economy (23 September)**

- Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* ([www.bartleby.com/144/index.html](http://www.bartleby.com/144/index.html)) chapters 2 and 3
Fred Block and Margaret Somers, “In the Shadow of Speenhamland: Social Policy and the Old Poor Law” *Politics and society* 31:2 2003

Giovanni Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing* Verso 2008, see especially chapter 3

**Week 3**  
**Founding Fathers: Marx (30 September)**

Sheila Rowbotham, David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (Basil Blackwell, 1982)  
Derek Sayer, *Marx’s Method: Science and Critique in Capital* (Harvester, 1979)  

**Week 4**  
**Founding Fathers: Weber (7 October)**
- H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (Oxford University Press, 1958). Read only Politics as a Vocation, pages 77-128, Class, Status, Party 180-197 and from the section on bureaucracy, pages 196-204; 209-211; 221-228; 230-235 (E)

Derek Sayer, *Capitalism and Modernity: An Excursus on Marx and Weber*  
Philip Abram, *Historical Sociology*  
Charles Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes and Huge Comparisons* (Sage, 1984)
Week 5  Reflections on the Foundations: The Rise of Capitalism and the Birth of Modernity (14 October)

- Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Pantheon, 1977)
  Read Part Three, chapters two and three (E)

Week 6 - Wars, Crises and Reconstruction (21 October)

  Read only chapters 6, 7, 8 and 11-14. (E)

Week 7 - Markets and Polyarchies: Postwar Debates (26 October)

- Friedrich Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (University of Chicago Press, 1944) Read Forward and chapters 3-5 (E)

Week 8 - Modern Capitalism, Modern Culture in Ferment (4 November)

- Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Bantam, 1961) Read only Introduction to Book One and chapter XXV. CUT this and replace with conclusion http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/de-beauvoir/2nd-sex/index.htm
● Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Grove Press, 1968) **Read** Concerning Violence. *(E)*

● Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (Beacon, 1964) **Read only** Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2 *(E)*

**Week 9 - The “Rediscovery” of Marxism and Feminism (11 November)**


● Rianne Mahon, "Canadian public policy: the unequal structure of representation" in *The Canadian State*

● Mary McIntosh, "The State and the Oppression of Women" in *Feminism and Materialism* ed. A. Kuhn and A. Wolpe (Routledge, Kegan, Paul, 1978)

● Jane Jenson, “Gender and Reproduction or Babies and the State” *Studies in Political Economy* 1986

**Week 10 - Neo-Foucaultian political economy, Varieties of Capitalism and Political Economy of Space (18 November)**

● Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose, "Governing economic life" *Economy and Society* 19:1 1990


● Wolfgang Streeck, "Introduction: Explorations into the origins of non-liberal capitalism in Germany and Japan" *Origins of non-liberal capitalism: Germany and Japan in comparison*, W. Streeck and Kozo Yamamura, eds. Cornell 2001


**Week 11 - Post-Colonialism (25 November)**


**Week 12 Political Economy in an era of Globalisation (2 December)**


• Janet Conway, “Geographies of Transnational Feminisms: The Politics of Place and Scale in the World march of Women” *Social Politics* 15:2 2008