

**POLITICS 219:
WORK, WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONS IN ADVANCED CAPITALISM**

**Chris Howell
Fall 2003**

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Introduction

Within advanced capitalist societies, the world of work has undergone a quite remarkable transformation in the course of the past two decades. Some elements of work itself have changed as the workplace has seen the erosion of standard, assembly line mass production by full-time “blue-collar” workers, and its replacement with “white-collar” and service sector jobs, and “flexible” production, performed by an increasingly insecure part-time and temporary workforce. Workers today are much less likely to be male and white, as women and minorities enter the paid workforce in much larger numbers. And trade unions, which have been the primary class organizations representing and defending workers in the 20th century, have gone into eclipse everywhere. As union membership declines, employers have developed new forms of individual and collective representation for workers, and union themselves have sought new strategies for survival.

This course explores the transformation of work, workers, and trade unions in advanced capitalist societies since the Second World War. Given the scope of the subject-matter, this course is something of a sampler, offering an introduction to a large range of topics, with some left out, and many more only briefly covered. The first third of the semester is broadly theoretical. We begin with a discussion of the nature of work, class and identity, power relations in the workplace, and the potential for collective action. Almost half of the semester involves an examination of comparative industrial relations. We look at Britain, France, Sweden, Germany, Japan and the United States to see the differences in the way in which workers are organized, the relative success workers and unions have achieved, the different role played by the state, and to understand the reasons why particular national models of industrial relations develop. Each country is chosen because it illustrates some distinctive feature, such as Conservative anti-unionism in Britain and co-determination in Germany. In the final part of the semester we examine the main changes in the economic environment -- globalization, flexibility, post-Fordism -- which now face workers, and we look forward, asking how unions are responding to the challenges facing them, and whether we have come to the end of labor's century.

Requirements

The primary requirement is that students do the assigned reading (about 150-200 pages a week) on time and be prepared to discuss it in class. Each student must write comments (anywhere from a paragraph or two to a page or two) on the readings each week. The purpose of the comments is to identify the main issues, questions and criticisms so that we can incorporate them into class discussion. More information on what I want from the written comments is available at the website for this course – see below. The comments are normally due at my office by 2.00pm every Monday (this may be adjusted if the class discussions get out of synch with the readings). Occasionally students will make oral presentations about some of the readings. The written comments, oral presentations and class participation will be worth one-third of the grade. Another one-third of the grade will come from an oral history project that will involve interviewing people about their job, authority relations, experience of collective action, and attitudes towards work, and writing up the interview. The written report is due just before mid-term. The final one-third of the grade will come from a quasi-research paper (about 10-15 pages long), on a topic chosen by the student. This research paper can be one of two types: i) an individual research paper chosen by the student; ii) a collective research paper, involving up to four students, on a topic chosen by the group. I would prefer that the research papers explore topics or countries that we have not had a chance to cover in class. In addition each student or group must hand me a one-page proposal for their research paper (the topic plus a preliminary bibliography) by the first Thursday after fall break. These are all requirements and late work will be penalized for reasons of equity.

Finally, there will inevitably be some changes to the course as the semester progresses – changes in the readings, additional details of assignments, questions for the weekly comments, and so on – which are not included on this syllabus. I will provide weekly updates in the “announcements” section of the *Blackboard* web site for this course: <http://cinfo.oberlin.edu/>. You MUST register for this course in *Blackboard* (which is a separate and additional task to registering for the course itself), and check the *Blackboard* site at least once a week. In the unlikely event that you miss a class, you should always check the web site in case I have announced something of importance.

Course Readings

There are three books to buy (all available from the Oberlin Bookstore):

Michael Yates, *Why Unions Matter* (1998).

Andrew Martin and George Ross, eds., *The Brave New World of European Labor* (1999).

Suzan Erem, *Labor Pains* (2001).

All other readings are available on Electronic Reserve (ERes). The course readings are scanned into Adobe Acrobat and can then be accessed with a password from any computer on the campus network with a web browser. The password is: JoeHill (and it is case-sensitive). You can then read and print this material. When looking for a particular reading from the syllabus on *ERes*, look for the author's name which is highlighted in **bold** on the syllabus. Check page numbers carefully, so that you read the correct section of each reading at the correct time.

CLASS SCHEDULE:

September 2, 4, & 9 **Work, Class, and Working Class Identity**

Chris **Tilly** and Charles Tilly, *Work Under Capitalism*, chapters 1, 2 & 4 (pages 2-35 & 70-93).

Erik Olin **Wright**, *Class Counts*, chapter 1 (pages 1-37).

Jack **Metzgar**, "Politics and the American Class Vernacular" (pages 49-80), in *WorkingUSA* [2003].

Michele **Lamont**, *The Dignity of Working Men*, introduction and chapters 1, 2, 3, and 6 (pages 1-148 and 215-240). **[Sections to be assigned.]**

Michael **Parenti**, *Inventing Reality*, chapter 6 (pages 83-94).

September 11, 16, & 18 **Industrial Relations, Trade Unions and Collective Action**

Michael Yates, *Why Unions Matter*, chapters 1-4 (pages 8-80).

Jonathan **Zeitlin**, "From Labour History to the History of Industrial Relations," (pages 159-179) in *Economic History Review* [1987].

Richard **Freeman and James Medoff**, *What Do Unions Do?*, chapter 1 (pages 3-19).

Richard **Hyman**, *The Political Economy of Industrial Relations*, chapters 1 & 2 (pages 3-53).

Jill **Rubery and Colette Fagan**, "Comparative Industrial Relations Research: Towards Reversing the Gender Bias" (pages 209-236) in *British Journal of Industrial Relations* [June 1995].

Mancur **Olson**, *The Logic of Collective Action*, chapter 3 (pages 66-97).

Claus **Offe**, *Disorganized Capitalism*, chapter 7 (pages 170-220).

September 23 & 25 **Power at Work**

Harry **Braverman**, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, chapters 1, 4, 5 & 20 (pages 45-58, 85-138 & 424-449).

Michael **Burawoy**, *The Politics of Production*, chapter 1 (pages 21-84).

Michael **Burawoy**, "Thirty Years of Making Out," (pages 190-209) in R.E. Pahl, ed., *On Work*.

Andy **Friedman**, "Responsible Autonomy Versus Direct Control Over the Labour Process," (pages 43-57) in *Capital & Class* [1977].

Paul **Thompson**, *The Nature of Work*, chapter 7 (pages 180-209).

September 30 & October 2 **British and French Industrial Relations**

Chris Howell, "Unforgiven: British Trade Unionism in Crisis," (pages 26-74) in Andrew Martin and George Ross, eds., *The Brave New World of European Labor*.

Chris **Howell**, "Is There a Third Way for Industrial Relations?" (all), forthcoming in *British Journal of Industrial Relations* [2004].

Tony Daley, "The Hollowing Out of French Unions," (pages 167-216) in Andrew Martin and George Ross, eds., *The Brave New World of European Labor*.

Laura Levine **Frader**, "Women and French Unions" (pages 23-36) in *French Politics & Society* [Fall 1996].

Steve **Jefferys**, "France 1995: The Backward March of Labour Halted?" (Pages 7-21) in *Capital & Class* [Summer 1996].

October 7 & 9 **Swedish Industrial Relations**

Leo **Panitch**, *Working Class Politics in Crisis*, chapter 5 (pages 132-159).

Rianne Mahon, "Yesterdays Modern Times are no Longer Modern," (pages 125-166) in Andrew Martin and George Ross, eds., *The Brave New World of European Labor*.

Andrew **Martin**, "Wage Bargaining and Swedish Politics" (pages 1-43), *Center for European Studies Working Paper #36* [1991].

Chris **Howell** and Rianne Mahon, Editorial Introduction to special issue on "Strategies for Union Renewal: Women Wage Earners as the New Exemplar?" (Pages 499-509) in *Economic and Industrial Democracy* [1996].

Jane **Jenson and Rianne Mahon**, "Representing Solidarity: Class, Gender and the Crisis in Social-Democratic Sweden" (pages 76-100) in *New Left Review* [1993].

October 14 & 16 **German Industrial Relations**

Wolfgang **Streeck**, *Social Institutions and Economic Performance*, chapter 5 (pages 137-168).

Steve Silvia, "Every Which Way but Loose: German Industrial Relations Since 1980," (pages 75-124) in Andrew Martin and George Ross, eds., *The Brave New World of European Labor*.

Anke **Hassel**, "The Erosion of the German System of Industrial Relations," (pages 483-505) in *British Journal of Industrial Relations* [1999].

October 28 & 30

Japanese Industrial Relations

T. J. **Pempel**, *Policy and Politics in Japan*, chapter 3 (pages 90-109).

Larry Carney and Charlotte O'Kelly, "Women's Work and Women's Place in the Japanese Economic Miracle" (pages 113-145), in Kathryn **Ward**, ed., *Women Workers and Global Restructuring*.

Knuth **Dohse**, Ulrich Jurgens and Thomas Malsch, "From "Fordism" to "Toyotism"? The Social Organization of the Labor Process in the Japanese Automobile Industry," (pages 115-146) in *Politics & Society* [1985].

November 4 & 6

United States Industrial Relations

Mike **Davis**, *Prisoners of the American Dream*, chapter 1 (pages 3-51).

Nelson **Lichtenstein**, "American Trade Unions and the 'Labor Question': Past and Present," (pages 59-117) in Report of the Century Foundation, *What's Next for Organized Labor?*

Heidi **Hartmann**, Roberta Spalter-Roth and Nancy Collins, "What do Unions do for Women?" (pages 11-18) in *Challenge* [July-August 1994].

Michael Yates, *Why Unions Matter*, chapter 6 (pages 104-129).

Manning **Marable**, "Black Leadership and the Labor Movement," (pages 199-212) in Fraser and Freeman, eds., *Audacious Democracy*.

Loic **Wacquant**, "From Slavery to Mass Incarceration" (pages 41-60), in *New Left Review* [2002].

Margaret **Levi**, "Organizing Power: The Prospects for an American Labor Movement" (pages 45-68), in *Perspectives on Politics* [2003].

November 11, 13, 18 & 20

The New Political Economy of Work

David **Harvey**, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, chapters 7-11 (pages 121-197).

Paul **Osterman**, *Securing Prosperity*, chapters 2 & 3 (pages 20-89).

John Tomaney, "A New Paradigm of Work Organization and Technology" (pages 157-194) in Ash **Amin**, ed., *Post-Fordism: A Reader*.

Robert **Howard**, *Brave New Workplace*, chapters 1 & 2 (pages 15-67).

Barbara **Ehrenreich**, "Maid to Order" (pages 85-103) in Ehrenreich and Hochschild, eds., *Global Woman* [2003].

Eric **Schlosser**, *Fast Food Nation*, chapters 3, 7, and 8 (pages 59-88 & 149-190).

William Julius **Wilson**, *When Work Disappears*, chapter 5 (pages 111-146).

Martin Jay **Levitt**, *Confessions of a Union Buster*, chapters entitled "Copeland Oaks" and "Bloodletting" (pages 163-225).

November 25, December 2

Organizing Strategies in the New Political Economy

Carola **Frege** and John **Kelly**, "Union Revitalization Strategies in Comparative Perspective" (pages 7-24) in *European Journal of Industrial Relations* [2003].

Richard **Hurd**, Ruth **Milkman** and Lowell **Turner**, "Reviving the American Labour Movement" (pages 99-117), in *European Journal of Industrial Relations* [2003].

Suzan Erem, *Labor Pains: Inside America's New Union Movement*, pages 1-151 and 163-178.

Chapters by Jeremy **Brecher** and Tim **Costello** (pages 9-26) and Jane **Slaughter** (pages 49-60) in Ray Tillman and Michael Cummings, eds., *The Transformation of U.S. Unionism*.

December 4, 9 & 11

Farewell to the Working Class?

Andre **Gorz**, *Farewell to the Working Class*, chapters 1-8 (pages 16-104).

Andre **Gorz**, *Reclaiming Work*, chapter 4 (pages 72-111).

Bob **Black**, "The Abolition of Work" (pages 1-11).

Note: In the course of the semester we will be watching several documentaries about work. These may include: *Fast Food Women*; *Degrees of Shame*; *American Dream*