Seminar in Comparative Politics Developed. Poli 524.
Democracy in Western Europe: Issues and Controversies
Winter 2020

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Office: Leacock 518
Office Hours: Wed. 1:00-2:00pm
& by appointment

NB: The reading load will be heavy. The good news? The reading material is truly fascinating.

The seminar is designed to help students gain a deeper understanding of contemporary political issues and controversies in West(ern) Europe, without falling into the trap of either “instant analysis” or broad generalizations, dear to journalists and media commentators. The people of Western Europe have offered much (both good and bad) to the language and grammar of politics -- ranging from the theory and practice of state, sovereignty, citizenship, diplomacy, totalitarianism, to human tragedies like the Holocaust, terrorism, the rule of law, anarchy, liberal democracy, socialism, and arguably the long-term, if tumultuous, movement of replacing nationalism and protectionism with more inclusive and complex visions of a common humanity that fits the nascent European community, Brexit aside (and that is a big aside).

The post-1945 period ushered in the cold war but also a new era of peace, politics and political economy, including the so-called German and Italian miracles and Western Communism. The Faustian bargains that created the postwar ways of doing politics has been successfully challenged internally (through various efforts of social, local and regional movements aimed at centering the state and challenging party monopoly) and externally and transnationally (through waves of migration, the nascent European Union and monetary crises). Hence several questions: what has replaced or is replacing the collapse of certainty? What are the new ways of doing politics and providing public services? Can human beings across Western Europe reap the benefits of new forms of collective action while avoiding their often deleterious unintended consequences?

The seminar explores these issues and questions along different and overlapping dimensions:
1) the political and intellectual context of postwar Europe. We will then turn to several themes that challenge the status quo:
2) representative government vs res publica (or for those familiar with James Scott’s work and Vincent Ostrom, thinking like a state vs thinking like a citizen)
3) the administrative state vs democratic administration
4) from the factory to smaller-scale economies
5) myth and reality of EU.

A major prerequisite of the course is curiosity.

The following texts are available for you to purchase at the McGill University Bookstore:


A course pack will also be available which includes other readings: articles and selections from books.

The writing component of the course can be satisfied in two ways:

[1] Three 8-10 page papers, one of which is a review essay of Eatwell and Godwin, National Populism. The revolt against liberal democracy. The other two papers will deal with themes we cover.

[2] One 10-page review essay of Eatwell and Goodwin and a 20 page paper which can be a more research-oriented paper. More will be said in the first seminar meeting.

Written work will account for 75% of your grade [25% per paper under option 1, or 25% and 50% under option 2. Papers can be handed in during the semester. The first paper on national populism, is due no later than February 27, 2020; the other papers are due in the last day of classes.

The remaining 25% of the your final grade will depend on a seminar presentation and seminar participation. The presentation will be tied to seminar readings. Each participant is expected to distribute the presentation notes to the class. More details on presentations in our first meeting.

Meeting # 1. The Lure of Western Europe
Meetings # 2 and #3. The political and intellectual context of postwar Europe

W. Bagehot, the English Constitution
The Constitutions of the France, Germany and Italy (available on internet).

Meetings # 4 and #5. What does Self-Government stand for? Liberal Democracy, Populism and Res publica:

Meeting # 6 and # 7. Public Services and Administration Conceptual Issues
[Optional readings below:]
The Experience
Will make available to class, diagrams French administrative organization and evolution of ideological political families in French politics.

Meetings # 8, # 9. Extending the Public Service Industry: health care, education and welfare in Europe and the USA
The Welfare State
Mental Health, from Trieste to San Francisco
”A Tale of Two Cities: the Exploration of the Trieste Public Psychiatry Model in San Francisco.” Culture Medicine and Psychiatry 39 no. 4. 2015. Highlights the innovative work of a mental health specialist Franco Basaglia in Trieste that revolutionized mental health services from the bottom up.
Tensions: Universalism vs Hierarchy vs Meritocracy?
M. Young, 2008 ed. The Rise of Meritocracy. Classic all the more coming from a Labour intellectual.
Recall Lilla and Tocqueville.

Meeting # 10, # 11.
Political Economy: From the Factory to Human-Scale: is Mondragon the future? Or Germany? Or Marx?

**Polycentric Governance in Political Economy, Germany and Beyond**

**Meeting # 12 . The European Union: Ideals and Realities**

**Meeting # 13. Looking to the Past to anticipate the Future: What, if anything, can we learn from the Past for a Future Europe?**
The Significance of Venice