DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

SOCI 501: Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy
Winter Semester 2020

Meeting Times:
Tuesdays 8:35-10:25
Location: Leacock 819

Professor: Barry Eidlin
(barry.eidlin@mcgill.ca)
Office: Leacock 820
Office Hours: Tue. 10:45-12:45

COURSE OBJECTIVES

While this course has only recently come to McGill, it arrives with a storied history. It was originally developed in the early 20th century at the University of Wisconsin–Madison by the pioneering labour economist John R. Commons, who passed it down to his student Selig Perlman, also a labour economist of considerable renown. After World War II, the famous German emigré sociologist Hans Gerth, known for his translations of the works of Max Weber, took it over. Perlman’s lectures for this course have been published as Selig Perlman’s Lectures on Capitalism and Socialism (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976).

The course was originally designed to explore the distinctive, some would say “exceptional,” U.S. political and economic landscape, and how it came to be that way. While it is a landscape that has fostered historically unprecedented levels of economic growth and prosperity for some, it has also led to levels of poverty and inequality that are unmatched among comparable countries. In this redesigned version of the course, we will be enriching this analysis of American exceptionalism by comparing the U.S. with Canada. While both countries are similar in many ways, they have important differences when it comes to politics and social policy. Exploring and explaining why those differences exist can help us better understand both countries.

To do this, the course will trace the historical development of the conflict between labor and capital in the U.S. and Canada over the meaning and content of democracy, and how that conflict has shaped politics and social policy in both countries. The course is organized chronologically, moving from the mid-nineteenth century to today. Along the way we will study the struggles of labor and agrarian populists against “the interests” of the 19th century; the upheavals of the Great Depression and World War II and how they shaped the postwar period; the crises of the 1970s and the rise of neoliberalism; up to the current challenges and conflicts in the wake of the crisis of 2008. In the process, we will address questions that lie at the heart of political economy, including: Who really rules? Are capitalism and democracy compatible? Why does the U.S. have so much poverty, and why does Canada have less? Why has there been no significant socialist movement or labor party in the U.S., but there has been in Canada? Is the U.S. state weak or strong? Is Canada an economic dependency, or a global economic power?
CLASS CULTURE AND STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOR

Grappling with the questions we will be dealing with in this course will require effort on your part. This is not a course where you can just come to class and hope to absorb something. Below I lay out my expectations of you over the course of this semester.

**Reading:** Students are required to read more than 100 pages per week on average. **If you are unable or unwilling to do this much reading consistently, you should drop the course now.** You must come to class prepared to discuss the readings. To help you prepare for class, I will require you to prepare short written responses to the week’s readings at least nine times over the course of the semester.

**Attendance:** Class time will be devoted to a combination of lecturing and discussion. Attendance at all class sessions is mandatory. That said, you should absolutely not attend class if you are sick – doing so is detrimental to both your health and the health of those around you. Because of this, you may miss a total of 2 class sessions without any penalty to your grade. If you need to miss more than a total of two days during the semester because of a family or health emergency, please notify me and we will discuss your options. Please note that I will take attendance at the beginning of every session; thus, if you are late, you run the risk of being marked absent.

**Participation:** Beyond simply attending class, you are expected to participate in class discussions based on the readings. The required reading responses will help ensure you come to class prepared to participate. Participation includes contributing to discussion and raising questions. However, participation does not necessarily mean taking up classroom airtime. Your participation grade will not increase the more you talk. Sometimes, taking time to really listen is participating. Sometimes, helping another student draw out their point with a relevant question is participating. Sometimes, knowing when to hold back and let others speak is participating.

Most importantly, we must all work together to foster a respectful environment where everyone can voice diverse opinions and create a critical but constructive dialogue. Please be open-minded with your classmates and with me. This class deals with politically charged subject matter, and I want this class to be a safe and stimulating forum for discussion for all students.

**No laptops are allowed in class** unless you have a legitimate, OSD-documented reason and have received explicit permission from me. (I know I couldn’t resist surfing the web, emailing my friends, etc., during class, so I’m removing the temptation!) Plus, recent research shows that taking notes on laptops is detrimental to learning because it results in shallower information processing (Mueller and Oppenheimer, *Psychological Science* 2014 – see article abstract at [http://pss.sagepub.com/content/25/6/1159](http://pss.sagepub.com/content/25/6/1159)). You can also read a summary of other research on classroom electronics in this piece by a professor of Media Studies (i.e. someone whose job it is to study the internet and electronic communication), explaining why he does not allow electronics in class:
Cell phones must be switched off (not just set to vibrate) unless you have a legitimate need (e.g., your spouse is about to have a baby or a liver transplant) that you have told me about.

**Evaluation and Assignments**

In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Conformément à la Charte des droits de l’étudiant de l’Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l’un des objets est la maîtrise d’une langue).

In addition to course participation, you will have four main assignments over the course of the semester. These will test your ability to grapple with the central questions of the course over the course of the semester. They will include:

1. Nine structured one-page reading responses, addressing one or more of the week's readings;
2. A research proposal, using theories discussed in class to analyze in greater depth a problem we examine in class, due on MyCourses by 11:59 p.m. on **FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 14**;
3. A first draft of your research paper (10 pages maximum, longer for graduate students), due on MyCourses by 11:59 p.m. on **FRIDAY, MARCH 13**.
4. A final draft of your research paper (8-10 pages maximum, longer for graduate students), due on MyCourses by 11:59 p.m. on **FRIDAY, APRIL 17**.

You have considerable leeway in determining what you write about for your paper. However, there are certain rules. Most importantly, the paper must have a *clearly-articulated problem*, which you should discuss with me beforehand. Additionally, it should be well organized, engage at least *two* assigned authors (along with other scholarly sources), and be printed and double-spaced, using 1” margins and Times New Roman font. Please format your paper references using the ASA Style Guide ([http://www.asanet.org/students/Quick%20Style%20guide.pdf](http://www.asanet.org/students/Quick%20Style%20guide.pdf)).

I am giving you time to think about and develop your ideas for your paper over the course of the semester, and will provide you with feedback at each step. Beyond the feedback you get on your assignments, I encourage you to speak with me about your ideas before you write your proposals and submit your papers.

There will be no in-class examinations in this class.
Extra Credit: I never offer extra credit. The way to succeed in this course is to do all of the assignments as best you can and come see me in office hours if your best effort is not earning you the grade you want.

Academic honesty

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/).

Grading

Your final grade will be based on the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation (attendance 5%, preparedness 5%, discussion of material 10%)</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Throughout semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytical Reading Responses</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Throughout semester (9 total)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research proposal</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>February 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First draft of research paper</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>March 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final draft of research paper</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>April 17</td>
</tr>
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Graduate and honors students will also be responsible for preparing notes and leading discussion for one class of your choice, which will count as part of your participation grade.

According to McGill policies, course assignments will be graded as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>Grade Points</th>
<th>Numerical Scale of Grades</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>85 – 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>80 – 84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>75 – 79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>70 – 74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>65 – 69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>60 – 64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>55 – 59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>50 – 54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F (Fail)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 – 49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If you are taking the course for honors or graduate credit, please see the instructor regarding special requirements.

Also, related to grading: this course has both undergraduate and graduate students enrolled. Given that these two groups are in different types of academic programs and at different stages of their education, they will be evaluated based on different sets of standards. Undergraduates will not be compared to graduate students.

**Accommodations**

If you require special accommodations for this class, please let me know as soon as possible. You are never required to tell me personal information; however, if you are having problems that affect your ability to attend, participate, or keep up with the workload in this class, please don’t wait until right before the exams to ask for help, and don’t just disappear. I may be able to help you or direct you to someone else who can help you.

The McGill Office for Students With Disabilities (514-398-6009, [https://www.mcgill.ca/osd/office-students-disabilities](https://www.mcgill.ca/osd/office-students-disabilities)) provides resources for students with disabilities. You will need to provide documentation of disability to them in order to receive official university services and accommodations.

**Absences**

If you are absent, you are still responsible for the course materials you missed. You should get the notes from someone in the class, review those notes, and come see me in office hours if you have any questions. I do not deviate from the syllabus, and if I do, I will email the class, so you can assume that what is on the syllabus is what we covered in class. Please do not email me to ask if you “missed anything important,” as that implies that every class is not important.

**Respect**

Please be respectful of yourself, your peers, and me. This means raising your hand before speaking, keeping an open mind, and never chatting while someone else is speaking. Making excessive noise during class (such as by chatting or packing up before class is over) is rude to everyone in the room, as it denies the people around you (and yourself) a chance to learn. If you have a question, please ask me (and not your neighbor). Finally, if you make an office hours appointment with me, please show up. If you cannot come, send me an email letting me know ASAP.
Email

I will be communicating with you via email a lot. Please check your McGill email regularly. I am not always available via email. I will usually be able answer your email within 24 hours (except on weekends). Please do not expect an immediate response to your emails.

Please write your emails to me like you would write an email to your supervisor or other work colleague. Emails should have a proper greeting (Hi, Hello, Dear, Greetings, etc.) followed by my name (you may call me Dr. Eidlin, Professor Eidlin, or Barry. “Mr. Eidlin” is not an appropriate form of address for university professors). The body of your email should be written in complete sentences, using standard English grammar and spelling (i.e. not in “text speak”), and should use a respectful, professional tone. Please be sure to sign your emails with at least your first name. It can be hard to tell who the email is from if you do not sign it.

Questions

You can approach me with questions at any time. My preference is to answer questions in class or in office hours – this format is best for avoiding misunderstandings (which are common via email or when conversations are rushed). I am also available to answer quick questions via email (allow up to 24 hours to respond, longer if on the weekend) and right after or before class. If at any time you feel that what I am doing is not advancing your learning, please let me know (in a respectful manner) – I want each and every one of you to feel safe and to learn, so please let me know if that is not happening.

Reading Assignments

Required reading assignments are compiled in a course reader available from the McGill Bookstore. I have also uploaded PDFs to the course website at myCourses (https://mycourses2.mcgill.ca/d2l/home). At the end of this syllabus I also include a list of optional reading that you might find helpful in putting together your research paper.

I. The Problem Outlined: The Liberal Tradition and its Discontents

Week 1 (January 7): The Working Class and Social Citizenship


Zeitlin, Maurice. “The Four Questions, AKA How to Read” (hand-out)


**Week 2 (January 14): Class and U.S. Political Economy**


**Week 3 (January 21): Class and Canadian Political Economy**


**Week 4 (January 28): The Liberal Tradition in North America**


**Week 5 (February 4): Contesting the Liberal Tradition**


II. Challenges to Liberalism: Populism, Depression, and War, 1890-1945

Week 6 (February 11): Labor and the State at the turn of the 20th Century

Sanders, Roots of Reform: 30-100.

(Research Paper Proposal Due by 11:59 PM on Friday, February 14)

Week 7 (February 18): Farmers and the State at the turn of the 20th Century

Sanders, Roots of Reform: 101-178.

Week 8 (February 25): Great Depression and Labour Policy in North America


Reading Week March 2—March 6

Week 9 (March 10): Labour and Politics in the Great Depression and WWII


(Draft of Research Paper Due by 11:59 PM on Friday, March 13)

III. Shaping the Postwar Period, 1941-1973

Week 10 (March 17): Political Economy and Ideology

Hayek, Friedrich A. 2001 [1944]. The Road to Serfdom (London: Routledge): Ch. 3 (Ch. 5 recommended).
**Week 11 (March 24): Social Democracy and the Welfare State**


**V. Neoliberalism and Crisis, 1973-present**

**Week 12 (March 31): Crisis, Neoliberalism, and Policy Effects**


**Week 13 (April 7): Capitalism, Crisis, and Democracy**


**FINAL PAPER DUE ON MYCOURSES BY FRIDAY, APRIL 17 AT 11:59 PM.**
Supplementary Readings

Below you will find a very non-systematic, non-exhaustive list of additional readings that relate to the course material. These are pieces that would have ended up on the syllabus if we had more time together. You might find them helpful as you put together your final research papers.

Agrarian Populism


American Exceptionalism


Labour


**Left Politics**


New Deal


1970s Crisis/Neoliberalism


Welfare States

