

## SOCIOLOGY OF LABOR AND LABOR MOVEMENTS

Designed as an introduction to the sociological literature on labor and labor movements (as well as selected literature in allied disciplines), participants in this seminar will study key texts – a mix of classic and contemporary, theoretical and empirical works – regarding the conditions under which workers in capitalist societies organize collectively on the basis of class. The course materials focus primarily on the case of the USA, past and present, but also include some comparative perspectives. Questions to be explored include: What is “class” and what is a “working class”? How have labor movements emerged historically, and how do processes of class formation vary across societies and over time? What is “class consciousness”? What forms of collective organization (labor unions, other formal worker associations, labor-oriented political parties) have working classes adopted and how do these vary over time and space? What types of collective action have workers and their various organizations undertaken? How do inequalities among workers (skill, race, gender, citizenship, migrant status) affect workers’ collective organizations? What is the significance of variation in union organizational types (craft/occupational unions, industrial unions, unions of “producers,” etc.)? How do unions and other forms of labor organizations draw boundaries of inclusion/exclusion? How do they deal with issues of democracy, bureaucracy, and “the iron law of oligarchy”? Are unions “obsolete” in post-industrial capitalist societies?

This is a reading course, in which all students will be required to submit written reactions to the assigned course texts. These short papers will be limited to 300 words and circulated 24 hours before each class meeting. Other requirements include active participation in class discussion and additional written work (to be discussed in class and in individual consultations with the instructor).

The books by Silver, Tomlins, Glenn, Cohen, Fantasia, Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin, Lopez, Ganz, Gordon, Seidman and Lee should be obtained directly by students. Other readings will be made available in electronic form (arrangements to be discussed in class).

### Schedule of Class Meetings and Readings

#### **Week 1** (February 3) *Introduction*

This initial class meeting will include an overview of basic issues in the sociological literature on labor and labor movements as well as a discussion of the course structure and logistics.

**Week 2** (February 10) *Labor in Comparative-Historical Perspective*

This week will be devoted to discussion of the Silver book and the questions it poses about the structural sources and dynamics of labor unrest in a variety of capitalist societies over the past 150 years, and the conditions under which labor movements are most likely to be successful. This influential text will be a reference point throughout the course.

Required Reading: Beverly Silver, *FORCES OF LABOR* (2003)

**Week 3** (February 17) *Working-Class Formation in the U.S. and Europe*

This week we will look at some of the classic questions about the formation of working classes in the U.S. and Western Europe in the course of capitalist development. The distinction between working-class consciousness (in its various forms) and collective action will be one key theme. We will also begin to explore the extent to which the U.S. is a distinctive or “exceptional” case in comparison to the U.K. and Western Europe.

Required Reading: Michael Mann, *CONSCIOUSNESS AND ACTION IN THE WESTERN WORKING CLASS* (1973), Selig Perlman, “Labor and Capitalism in America” (1928) and Martin Shefter, “Trade Unions and Political Machines” (in Katznelson and Zolberg, eds., *Working-Class Formation*, 1986)

**Week 4** (February 24) *The State and the Role of Labor Law*

This week will focus on the role of the state and the ways in which labor law shapes the possibilities and limits of union action. Tomlins’ book is one of many influential texts which argues that the New Deal legal framework is fundamental to the logic of labor relations in the twentieth-century U.S.

Required Reading: Christopher Tomlins, *THE STATE AND THE UNIONS: LABOR RELATIONS, LAW AND THE ORGANIZED LABOR MOVEMENT IN AMERICA, 1880-1960* (1985)

**Week 5** (March 3) *Immigration, Gender and the Labor Movement*

Immigration and gender are two critical issues in U.S. working-class formation, and both are widely discussed in relation to contemporary labor movements. This week, we will explore those issues through an historical lens, looking at the labor movement in the U.S. a century ago, with a view to comparing the past and present.

Required Reading: Susan Glenn, *DAUGHTERS OF THE SHUTTLE* (1990)

**Week 6** (March 10) *Race, Ethnicity and the Rise of Industrial Unionism*

The greatest labor upsurge in U.S. history took place in the 1930s and 1940s, and involved the rise of industrial unions, many of them committed to building inter-racial solidarity. Second generation immigrants were also central to the industrial union movement; ironically unionization also became a vehicle for Americanization and upward mobility. This week, we will explore those dynamics, again with a view to the contemporary resonance of these trends.

Required Reading: Lizabeth Cohen, MAKING A NEW DEAL (1990); chapter 11 of George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American* (1993)

**Week 7** (March 17) *Union Democracy, Union Bureaucracy and Left-wing Politics*

Another central theme in U.S. labor history and in the historical sociology of labor and labor movements is the complicated saga of left-wing union activism, most importantly the fate of Communists in the CIO unions during the 1935-1955 period. An overlapping debate concerns the conditions under which unions can function as organizations with true internal democracy. This week we will explore these issues through a recent study of the largest U.S. union in the mid-twentieth century, the UAW, and the role Communists played within it.

Required Reading: Judith Stepan-Norris and Maurice Zeitlin, LEFT OUT: REDS AND AMERICA'S INDUSTRIAL UNIONS (2003)

**Week 8** (March 24) *The Microsociology of Labor Solidarity*

Turning our attention to the post-World War II years, this week will focus on a classic work in the sociology of labor that examines the micro-foundations of labor organizing.

Required Reading: Rick Fantasia, CULTURES OF SOLIDARITY (1988)

NO CLASS MARCH 31 – SPRING BREAK

**Week 9** (April 7) *Macrosociological Theories of Trade Unionism*

Turning from micro- to macro-sociological perspectives, this week we will read a few classic and contemporary articles in the sociological literature on labor movements, written from a variety of theoretical perspectives.

Seymour Martin Lipset, "The Political Process in Trade-unions," in his POLITICAL MAN (1960), pp. 387-436.

Claus Offe and Helmut Wiesenthal, "Two Logics of Collective Action," *Political Power and Social Theory* (1980)

Richard B. Freeman and James L. Medoff, "The Two Faces of Unionism," *The Public Interest*, Vol. 57, (Fall 1979), pp. 69-93

Kim Voss and Rachel Sherman, "Breaking the Iron Law of Oligarchy: Union Revitalization in the American Labor Movement." *American Journal of Sociology* (2000) 106: 303–49.

**Week 10** (April 14) *The Role of Leadership and Strategic Capacity*

Unlike many structurally oriented theories of labor movements, some recent studies stress the role of human agency and leadership. Ganz's recent book offers a powerful example of this type of theoretical perspective as well as an important historical case study.

Required Reading: Marshall Ganz, WHY DAVID SOMETIMES WINS: LEADERSHIP, ORGANIZATION AND STRATEGY IN THE CALIFORNIA FARM WORKER MOVEMENT (2009)

**Week 11** (April 21) *De-unionization and Labor Revitalization in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century*

This week focuses on unionism in the current era, examining both the crises of union decline in the neoliberal period and the ways in which labor movements have begun to overcome those crises.

Required Reading: Steven Lopez, REORGANIZING THE RUSTBELT (2005), Michael Piore and Sean Safford, "Changing Regimes of Workplace Governance," *Industrial Relations* (2006) 45: 299-325 and Jennifer Jihye Chen, "Public Dramas and the Politics of Justice," *Work and Occupations* (2005) 32: 486-503.

**Week 12** (April 28) *Alternatives to Traditional Unionism: Low-Wage Workers and Worker Centers*

This week we examine the emergence in the 1990s and early 21<sup>st</sup> century of non-union, community-based organizational forms like worker centers, with particular emphasis on historical parallels to types of worker organizations that existed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Required Reading: Jennifer Gordon, SUBURBAN SWEATSHOPS (2005) and Janice Fine, "Community Unions and the Revival of the American Labor Movement," *Politics & Society* (2005), 33: 1.

**Week 13** (May 5) *Globalization and Transnational Labor Activism*

Many scholars have been concerned with how labor can best respond to the last few decades of economic globalization. One popular approach is cross-border organizing; another involves monitoring of global corporations and holding them accountable to stakeholders. This week's readings explore such approaches.

Required Reading: Gay Seidman, BEYOND THE BOYCOTT (2007) and Mark Anner and Peter Evans, "Building Bridges Across a Double Divide: Alliances between U.S. and Latin American Labor and NGOs," *Development in Practice* (2004) 14: 1 & 2.

**Week 14** (May 12) *Contemporary Labor in Comparative Perspective*

This week we return to themes with which the course began, exploring contemporary labor in comparative perspective, focusing on the critical case of contemporary China.

Required Reading: Ching Kwan Lee, AGAINST THE LAW (2007)