

GEOG/INTL 8355: LABOR, CLASS AND POLITICS

Fall Semester 2023

W 1:50 pm-3:50 pm

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OFFICE HOURS: by appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION: Within capitalist societies, the nature of economies and consequently the world of work have undergone a quite remarkable transformation in the past two to three decades. Many elements of work have changed as the workplace has seen the erosion for many of standard, assembly line mass production by full-time “blue-collar” workers and its replacement with “white-collar” service sector jobs and “flexible” production, performed by an increasingly insecure part-time and temporary workforce. At the same time, trade unions, which have been important class organizations representing and defending workers since at least the mid-19th century, have gone into eclipse in many places.

This seminar explores the nature of work, workers, and labor representation in advanced capitalist societies. Given the scope of the subject matter, the 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 course starts by focusing upon how we think about studying matters of work, workers, and class and then proceeds to examine some historical and contemporary questions and issues concerning (amongst others) the nature of work, class and identity, power relations in the workplace, the potential for collective action, and efforts to develop a “green economy” and what this means for the nature of work and for those who do it. This includes questions of comparative industrial relations, globalization, power and work, the role of the state, and different ways in which working people are organizing to protect and further their interests.

The course is run as a seminar in which all of us will discuss and analyze a set of readings for each of the weeks. Students should come to class fully prepared to discuss the assigned readings.

There are five requirements for the class:

- i) attendance, completion of the reading assignments, and participation in class discussions;
- ii) for each class, you should prepare an approximately two-page summary of three important arguments/ observations drawn from the week’s readings and offer an assessment of their validity. You will find this exercise particularly useful when you begin to prepare your written assignments. This will be graded as a S/U option;
- iii) submission of a research paper outline (approx. 2 pages) that is due in class on October 11;
- iv) submission of a research paper. It will be graded on an A-F scale;
- v) presentation of your research topic to the rest of the class.

Research Paper: This may be a more conceptual/ theoretical piece or it may be a more empirical, though nevertheless conceptually situated, piece. The paper should be about 6,000 words in length, excluding bibliography. This should be considered a first draft of a paper that could be sent to a refereed academic journal for publication.

Student presentation of research: Each student will be expected to present a research paper to the rest of the class. You will each have 15 minutes to make your presentation (this is the time you will have at most conferences at which you will present, so it's good practice!). This will be followed by a brief question and answer session. Presentations will take place on November 8 & 15.

A note on Artificial Intelligence: Artificial intelligence-based technologies, such as ChatGPT, must not be used to generate responses for student assignments. Use of artificial intelligence or word-mixing software to complete assignments is considered unauthorized assistance in this course.

REQUIREMENTS:

Class Participation – 20%

Outlines – 10%

Final Paper – 70%

READINGS

Week 1 (8/16): Introduction to the class, expectations, etc.

Week 2 (8/23): Thinking about Labor, Class, and Politics

This week's readings get us to think about how we think about studying work and workers.

Zeitlin, J. (1987) "From labour history to the history of industrial relations." *The Economic History Review* 40.2: 159-184.

Russo, J. and Linkon, S.L. (2005) "What's new about new working-class studies?" In J. Russo and S.L. Linkon (eds.), *New Working-Class Studies*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1-15.

Kessler-Harris, A. (2007) *Gendering Labor History*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, pp. 129-144.

Suddaby, R., and Foster, W. (2017) "History and organizational change." *Journal of Management* 43.1: 19-38.

Godard, J. (2014) "The psychologisation of employment relations?" *Human Resource Management Journal* 24.1: 1-18.

Van der Linden, M. (2012) "The promise and challenges of global labor history." *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 82: 57-76.

Ellem, B. (2022) "Labour, history and labour history: writing from a business school." *Labour History: A Journal of Labour and Social History*, No. 123: 52-59.

Week 3 (8/30): Work, Class, Economy

This week's readings focus upon how we think about the objects of our analysis, such as "the economy" and "the labor process."

- Herod, A. (2011) "Class." In J. Agnew and J. Duncan (eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Human Geography*, pp. 415-425. Wiley-Blackwell: Chichester, UK.
- Burawoy, M. (1985) *The Politics of Production: Factory Regimes Under Capitalism and Socialism*, pp. 5-84. Verso: London.
- Taylor, R.F. (2004) "Extending conceptual boundaries: Work, voluntary work and employment." *Work, Employment and Society* 18.1: 29-49.
- Mitchell, T. (1998) "Fixing the economy." *Cultural Studies* 12.1: 82-101.
- Cameron, J. and Gibson-Graham, J.K. (2003) "Feminising the economy: metaphors, strategies, politics." *Gender, Place and Culture* 10.2: 145-157.

Week 4 (9/6): Thinking Geographically About Workers

This week's readings challenge us to think about work, workers, and the economy from an explicitly geographical perspective and to ponder how space is actively engaged with by social actors. In turn, this requires us to think about how spatiality and our need to engage with it transforms models of social understanding.

- Herod, A. (2003) "Workers, space, and labor geography." *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 64 (Fall): 112-138.
- Ward, K. (2007) "Thinking geographically about work, employment and society." *Work, Employment and Society* 21.2: 265-276.
- Wills, J. (1998) "Space, place and tradition in working-class organization." In A. Herod (ed.), *Organizing the Landscape: Geographical Perspectives on Labor Unionism*, 129-158. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Berman, L. (1998) "In your face, in your space: Spatial strategies in organizing clericals at Yale." In A. Herod (ed.), *Organizing the Landscape: Geographical Perspectives on Labor Unionism*, 203-224. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Ellem, B. (2016) "Geographies of the labour process: automation and the spatiality of mining." *Work, Employment & Society* 30.6: 932-948.
- Oberdeck, K.J. (2010) "Competing geographies of welfare capitalism and its workers: Kohler Village and the spatial politics of planned company towns." In S. McGrath- Champ, A. Herod, and A. Rainnie (eds.), *Handbook of Employment and Society: Working Space*, pp. 179-196. Chichester: Edward Elgar.

Week 5 (9/13): Theorizing Globalization

Globalization became a watchword in the 1990s. This week's readings all consider how we theorize globalization and what this means for how we understand it.

- Harvey, D. (1985) "The geopolitics of capitalism." In D. Gregory and J. Urry (eds.), *Social Relations and Spatial Structures*, pp. 128-163. St. Martin's Press: New York.
- Dicken, P., Peck, J., and Tickell, A. (1997) "Unpacking the global." In R. Lee and J. Wills (eds.) *Geographies of Economies*, pp. 158-166. Arnold: London.

- Herod, A. (2009) "Talking globalization." In A. Herod, *Geographies of Globalization*, pp. 82-110. Blackwell-Wiley: Oxford.
- Jessop, B. (2010) "Globalization and the state". In S. McGrath-Champ, A. Herod, and A. Rainnie (eds.), *Handbook of Employment and Society: Working Space*, pp. 19-34. Edward Elgar: Chichester.
- Thelen, K., and van Wijnbergen, C. (2003) "The paradox of globalization: Labor relations in Germany and beyond." *Comparative Political Studies* 36.8: 859-880.

Week 6 (9/20): Global Production Networks, Commodities, and Global Destruction Networks

A central element of globalization has been the growth of planetary-wide production networks. Equally, capital accumulation has increasingly come to rely upon the planned obsolescence of commodities, raising questions as to how they might shift from being "waste" to becoming inputs into new commodities as part of a "circular economy." This week's readings therefore focus upon understanding how commodities are put together and how they are taken apart in some of these space-transcending networks.

- Gereffi, G., Korzeniewicz, M. & Korzeniewicz, R.P. (1994) "Introduction: Global Commodity Chains." In: G. Gereffi and M. Korzeniewicz (eds.), *Commodity Chains and Global Capitalism*, pp. 1-14. Greenwood Press: Westport, CT.
- Cumbers, A., Nativel, C., and Routledge, P. (2008) "Labour agency and union positionalities in global production networks." *Journal of Economic Geography*, 8(3): 369-387.
- Selwyn, B. (2012) "Beyond firm-centrism: re-integrating labour and capitalism into global commodity chain analysis." *Journal of Economic Geography*, 12: 205-226.
- Herod, A. (2000) "Implications of Just-in-Time production for union strategy: Lessons from the 1998 General Motors-United Auto Workers dispute." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 90.3: 521-547.
- Herod, A., Pickren, G., Rainnie, A., and McGrath-Champ, S. (2016) "Innovation, development and Global Destruction Networks." In H. Bathelt, P. Cohendet, S. Henn, and L. Simon (eds.), *The Elgar Companion to Innovation and Knowledge Creation*, pp. 752-770. Edward Elgar: Cheltenham, UK.

Week 7 (9/27): The i4.0 Revolution, Platform Capitalism, and the Rise of Gig Work

Recent years have seen the rise of what is called "platform capitalism" and the growth of gig work. Much of this has been presented in some literature as marking the emergence of a Fourth Industrial Revolution, one in which everything is becoming digitalized and such digitalization is reshaping the nature of production and consumption. This week's readings explore some of the arguments concerning digitalization and automation in the economy and how we think about these developments.

- Rainnie, A., Herod, A., and McGrath-Champ, S. (2024) "From GVCs to GPNs, i4.0, and beyond." In Rainnie, A., Herod, A., and McGrath-Champ, S. *The Fourth Industrial Revolution and the Future of Work*. Edward Elgar: Cheltenham, UK.
- Vallas, S., and Schor, J.B. (2020) "What do platforms do? Understanding the gig economy". *Annual Review of Sociology* 46: 273-294.

- Stanford, J. (2017), 'The resurgence of gig work: historical and theoretical perspectives', *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*, **28** (3): 382-401.
- Rainnie, A., and Dean, M. (2020) "Industry 4.0 and the future of quality work in the global digital economy." *Labour & Industry: A Journal of the Social and Economic Relations of Work* 30(1): 16-33.
- Del Casino Jr., V. and Lynch, C. (2024) "Robots, robotic technologies and labour geographies." In A. Herod (ed.), *Handbook of Labour Geography*, Edward Elgar: Chichester, UK.
- Graham, M., I. Hjorth and V. Lehdonvirta (2017), 'Digital labour and development: impacts of the global digital labour platforms and the gig economy on worker livelihoods', *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research*, 23(2): 135-162.

Week 8 (10/4): Neoliberalism, Contingent Workers, and the Laboring Body

This week's readings examine the impact that neoliberalism has had upon the nature of labor markets and upon workers' bodies.

- Herod, A. and Lambert, R. (2016) "Neoliberalism, precarious work and remaking the geography of global capitalism." In R. Lambert and A. Herod (eds), *Neoliberal Capitalism and Precarious Work: Ethnographies of Accommodation and Resistance*, pp. 1-35. Edward Elgar: Cheltenham, UK.
- Tomic, P., Trumper, R., and Hidalgo, R. (2006) "Manufacturing modernity: Cleaning, dirt, and neoliberalism in Chile." *Antipode* 38.3: 579-602.
- Garvey, B., and Barreto, M.J. (2016) "At the cutting edge: Precarious work in Brazil's sugar and ethanol industry." In R. Lambert and A. Herod (eds), *Neoliberal Capitalism and Precarious Work: Ethnographies of Accommodation and Resistance*, pp. 166-195. Edward Elgar: Cheltenham, UK.
- James, A. (2024) "Gendered labour geographies in the cloud." In A. Herod (ed.), *Handbook of Labour Geography*, Edward Elgar: Chichester, UK.
- Sonnentag, S., Unger, D., and Rothe, E. (2016) "Recovery and the work-family interface." In T.D. Allen and L.T. Eby (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Work and Family*, pp. 95-108. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

Week 9 (10/11): Power at Work

This week's readings consider questions of power in the workplace, especially how workers exercise that power and/or perhaps create alternative models of work organization.

- Malleson, T. (2014) "Worker cooperatives in practice." In: Malleson, T. *After Occupy: Economic Democracy for the 21st Century*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, pp. 54-90.
- Spicer, J. (2020) "Worker and community ownership as an economic development strategy: innovative rebirth or tired retread of a failed idea?" *Economic Development Quarterly* 34.4: 325-342.
- Selwyn, B. (2007) "Labour process and workers' bargaining power in export grape production, North East Brazil." *Journal of Agrarian Change* 7.4: 526-553.
- Price, R. (2016) "Controlling routine front line service workers: an Australian retail supermarket case." *Work, Employment & Society* 30.6: 915-931.

Theodore, N. and Gutelius, B (2024) “Organizing the care economy: shifting spatial strategies of domestic worker activism.” In A. Herod (ed.), *Handbook of Labour Geography*, Edward Elgar: Chichester, UK.

Week 10 (10/18): Labor Agency and Working-Class Consciousness

This week’s readings follow on from last week’s to explore how workers have creatively used space in the pursuit of their goals.

- Herod, A. (2007) “Labour organizing in the new economy: Examples from the USA and beyond.” In P. Daniels, A. Leyshon, M. Bradshaw, and J. Beaverstock (eds.), *Geographies of the New Economy: Critical Reflections*, pp. 132-150. Routledge: London.
- Wills, J. (2008) “Making class politics possible: Organizing contract cleaners in London.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 32.2: 305-324.
- Johns, R. and Vural, L. (2000) “Class, geography, and the consumerist turn: UNITE and the Stop Sweatshops Campaign.” *Environment and Planning A* 32: 1193-1213.
- Mayes, R. (2024) “A matter of choice: fly-in, fly-out labour geographies of work and family.” In A. Herod (ed.), *Handbook of Labour Geography*, Edward Elgar: Chichester, UK.
- Tattersall, A. (2018) “How do we build power in coalition? Rethinking union-community coalition types 12 years on.” *Labour and Industry* 28.1: 68-81.

Week 11 (10/25): Child Labor

This week’s readings all focus upon issues of child labor, especially how it is conceptualized and how it relates as a practice to the broader economy.

- Herndon, R.W., and Murray, J.E. (2009) “‘A proper and instructive education’: Raising children in pauper apprenticeship.” In R.W. Herndon and J.E. Murray (eds.) *Children Bound to Labor: The Pauper Apprentice System in Early America*, pp. 3-18. Cornell University Press: Ithaca.
- Abebe, T. (2009) “Child labour in the Global South: A review and critical commentary.” *Barn/ Nordic Journal of Child Research* 27.3-4: 11-28.
- Nieuwenhuys, O. (2007) “Embedding the global womb: Global child labour and the new policy agenda.” *Children’s Geographies* 5.1-2: 149-163.
- Veloso, L (2012) “Child street labor in Brazil: Licit and illicit economies in the eyes of marginalized youth.” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 111.4: 663-679.
- Aitken, S., Estrada, S.L., Jennings, J., and Aguirre, L.M. (2006) “Reproducing life and labor: Global processes and working children in Tijuana, Mexico.” *Childhood* 13.3: 365-387.

Week 12 (11/1): Labor and the “Green economy”

Climate change is one of the most important challenges that we face today. Often, actions to limit environmental destruction have frequently been counterposed against narratives about job loss should these actions be acted upon. This week’s readings consider some of the ways in which workers and their organizations have attempted to undermine this narrative and some of the challenges they face in trying to implement policies designed to facilitate a transition to a “green(er) economy.”

- Uzzell, D., and Räthzel, N. (2013) "Mending the breach between labour and nature: A case for environmental labour studies." In N. Räthzel and D. Uzzell (eds.), *Trade Unions in the Green Economy: Working for the Environment*, pp. 1-12. Routledge: London.
- Cock, J., and Lambert, R. (2016) "Nature and insecurity in South Africa." In R. Lambert and A. Herod (eds), *Neoliberal Capitalism and Precarious Work: Ethnographies of Accommodation and Resistance*, pp. 148-165. Edward Elgar: Cheltenham, UK.
- Goods, C. (2011) "Labour unions, the environment and 'green jobs'." *Journal of Australian Political Economy* 67: 47-67.
- Felli, R. (2014) "An alternative socio-ecological strategy? International trade unions' engagement with climate change." *Review of International Political Economy* 21.2: 372- 398.
- Kojola, E. (2024) "Spatial and place dynamics of labour in extractive industries: challenges for just transitions," In A. Herod (ed.), *Handbook of Labour Geography*, Edward Elgar: Chichester, UK.

Week 13 (11/8): Paper Presentations.

Week 14 (11/15): Paper Presentations.

Week 15 (11/29): Turn in your papers.