

LABOR & DEMOCRACY

Labor Studies and Employment Relations 578:509

Fall 2025

Course is taught asynchronously online.

DRAFT SYLLABUS

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Course Overview:

A central issue of our time is the strength of democracy, especially in light of a variety of economic and social pressures that have made many countries, even in the West, turn to authoritarian parties and governments. This course probes the role that labor movements play for democracy in comparative perspective. Students will be introduced to workers' collective action as a worldwide phenomenon that has been central to the political economic development of capitalist democracies. Grounded in a historical institutionalist approach from political science while drawing broadly from the social sciences, the course emphasizes how countries' unique histories and their institutional contexts have shaped both the political opportunities for workers' evolving collective action and the effects that such social mobilization has had on the relationship between capitalism and democracy.

With reference to two centuries of transatlantic history, the class covers both key political achievements of the working class as well as labor's contemporary challenges. Among the achievements, we focus in particular on the extension of democratic rights and the expansion of welfare states; among the challenges, we probe the needs to accommodate shifting social cleavages, respond to economic globalization, and devise strategies for revitalization.

Learning Objectives: The student is able to...

School of Management and Labor Relations:

- Evaluate the context of workplace issues, public policies, and management decisions (Goal V).
 - Analyze the degree to which forms of human difference shape a person's experience of, and perspectives on work.
 - Analyze issues related to business strategies, organizational structures, and work systems.
 - Analyze issues of social justice related to work both in local and global contexts.

Additional Course Objectives from the Instructor:

- Use the comparative approach to develop a solid understanding of labor movements' origins, nature, and effects.
- Improve professional competencies such as critical thinking and problem solving, verbal and written communication, and interpersonal skills.

Course Requirements (details at the end of the syllabus):

Personal Introduction	5% of the course grade
Academic Integrity Contract	5%
Discussion Forum (5% each)	25%
Self-Recorded Video	5%
Exam	30%
Quiz	10%
Group Project	20%

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Module 1 (Sep 2 - 8): Welcome, Agenda for the Course, and Democracy

Tony Benn. 2005. "Big Ideas that Changed the Word – Democracy," Channel Five, June 21. (37:20 min.)

Melinda Cooper. 2025. "Trump's Antisocial State." *Dissent* (Spring): 71-84.

Nick Serpe. 2025. "Is America a Democracy?" *Dissent*, August 12.

Optional:

John Nichols. 2025. "Tony Benn Taught Us That Every Generation Must Struggle for Radical Democracy." *The Nation*, April 3:

<https://www.thenation.com/article/activism/tony-benn-at-100/>

Assessment: Discussion Forum & Academic Integrity Contract

Module 2 (Sep 9 - 15): What Does Labor Do? Opportunities to Strengthen Democracy Worldwide

The Crisis of Democratic Capitalism (pick one)

Wolfgang Streeck. 2011. "The Crises of Democratic Capitalism." *New Left Review* 71(Sept/Oct), 5-29.

Presentation by Martin Wolf on his 2023 book *The Crisis of Democratic Capitalism* (New York: Penguin).

Elizabeth S. Anderson. 2017. *Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives (and Why We Don't Talk about It)*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, Chapter 2 (37-72).

Unions in the United States

Erik Loomis. 2025. "Trump is Wiping Out Unions. Why are They so Quiet?" *New York Times*, September 1.

Celine McNicholas, Margaret Poydock, Heidi Shierholz, and Hilary Wething. 2025. "Unions aren't just good for workers—they also benefit communities and democracy." Report, Economic Policy Institute, August 20

Optional: Barbara Ransby. 2015. "The Class Politics of Black Lives Matter." *Dissent*, Fall.

Reform Efforts and Strategies across the Globe (pick at least one)

USA: Democracy Now!. 2022. “200 Starbucks & Counting: Barista Jaz Brisack Says Union Busting Can’t Stop Worker solidarity.” Video (6:30 min.)

FRANCE: Jacobin Radio. 2025. Dig: A Conversation w/ Jean-Luc Mélenchon, Podcast, May 10

INDIA: Rina Agarwala. 2008. “Reshaping the Social Contract: Emerging Relations between the State and Informal Labor in India.” *Theory & Society* 37(4): 375-408.

BRAZIL: Andre Pagliarini. 2025. “Lula's Unfinished Democracy.” *Dissent*, Fall, 15-24.

GLOBAL: Mark Stuart, Vera Trappmann, Loulia Bessa, Simon Joyce, Denis Neumann, and Charles Umney. 2023. “Labor Unrest and the Future of Work: Global Strategies Against Food Delivery Platforms.” *Labor Studies Journal* 48(3): 287-297.

Assessment: Discussion Forum

SECTION 2: BASIC TOOLS FOR ANALYZING LABOR MOVEMENTS

Module 3 (Sep 16 – 22): Labor as a Social Movement – Strategies and Inner Workings

The California Farm Worker Movement

Cletus E. Daniel. 1987. “Cesar Chavez and the Unionization of California Farm Workers.” In Melvyn Dubofsky and Warren Van Tine, eds. *Labor Leaders in America*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, only read pages 350-373; remaining pages of the chapter are recommended but not required.

PBS. 1996. “Chicano! Episode 2: The Struggle in the Fields.” Documentary (55:16 min.)

The Dynamics of Building Social Movements

Sidney G. Tarrow. 2011. *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (3rd Ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1-15 (Introduction).

Assessment: Discussion Forum

Module 4 (Sep 23 – 29): The Institutional Embeddedness of Workers’ Collective Action

Labor in Germany

Tobias Schulze-Cleven. 2017. “German Labor Relations in International Perspective: A Model Reconsidered.” *German Politics & Society* 35(4): 46-76.

Berndt K. Keller and Anja Kirsch. 2020. “Employment Relations in Germany.” In Russel D. Lansbury, Greg J. Lansbury, Nick Wailes and Chris F. Wright, eds. *International & Comparative Employment Relations: National Regulation, Global Changes*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 179-207.

Context Shapes Social Action

Sidney G. Tarrow. 1998. *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (2nd Ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 71-73 (part of Chapter 5).

Optional on German Labor:

Mike Elkby. 2013. "VW Isn't Fighting Unionization—But Leaked Docs Show Right-Wing Groups Are." *Bill Moyers & Company*, November 14.

Joel Rogers and Wolfgang Streeck. 1994. "Workplace Representation Overseas: The Works Councils Story." In Richard Freeman, ed. *Working under Different Rules*, New York: Russell Sage Foundation, only read pages 97-117.

Assessment: Discussion Forum

SECTION 3: CAPITALISM, DEMOCRACY, WELFARE STATES & AUTHORITARIANISM IN CROSS-NATIONAL HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Module 5 (Sep 30 – Oct 6): Social Democracy and Class Coalitions in Interwar Sweden

Establishing the Primacy of Politics

Sheri Berman. 2009. "The Primacy of Economics versus the Primacy of Politics: Understanding the Ideological Dynamics of the Twentieth Century." *Perspectives on Politics* 7(3): 561-575.

The Swedish Path to Social Democracy

Sheri Berman. 2006. *The Primacy of Politics: Social Democracy and the Making of Europe's Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 162-176 (Chapter 7: "The Swedish Exception").

Optional on Scandinavian Social Democracy Today:

Alana Semuels. 2017. "What If Getting Laid Off Wasn't Something to Be Afraid Of?" *The Atlantic*, October 25

David Leonhardt. 2025. "In an Age of Right-Wing Populism, Why are Denmark's Liberals Winning?" *New York Times*, February 24.

Assessment: Discussion Forum

Module 6 (Oct 7 – 13) Ideological Competition, Welfare Achievements, and the Turn to Fascism in Germany's Weimar Republic

The German Path to National Socialism

Sheri Berman. 2006. *The Primacy of Politics: Social Democracy and the Making of Europe's Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 125-151 (Chapter 6: "The Rise of Fascism and National Socialism").

Theorizing the Class Bases of Interwar Regimes Outcomes

Gregory Luebbert. 1991. *Liberalism, Fascism, or Social Democracy: Social Classes and the Political Origins of Regimes in Interwar Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1-14 (Introduction). – Try to get the basic ideas.

Optional on Complexities of Labor in Weimar Germany:

Peter Fritzsche. 1996. “Did Weimar Fail?” *The Journal of Modern History* 68(3): 629-656.

Richard J. Evans. 1986. “Review of *Von der Revolution zur Stabilisierung: Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung in der Weimarer Republik, 1918 bis 1924* by Heinrich August Winkler. *The Journal of Modern History* 58(2): 572-574.

Heinrich August Winkler. 1990. “Choosing the Lesser Evil: The German Social Democrats and the Fall of the Weimar Republic.” *Journal of Contemporary History* 25(2/3): 205-227.

Assessment: Student-Recorded Video

Module 7 (Oct 14 – 20): The New Deal and Institutionalizing Racism in the United States

The American Labor Movement and the New Deal

Sean Farhang and Ira Katznelson. 2005. “The Southern Imposition: Congress and Labor in the New Deal and Fair Deal.” *Studies in American Political Development* 19(1): 1-30.

Duncan Kelly. 2013. “Beyond the Politics of Fear (Review of Ira Katznelson’s book *Fear Itself*).” *Financial Times*, May 11/12.

Franklin D. Roosevelt. 1936. Address at Madison Square Garden, New York City. October 31.

Optional Extension:

Omer Aziz. 2019 “America Through Nazi Eyes.” *Dissent*, Winter.

Trevor E. Brown and Suzanne Mettler. 2024. “Sequential Polarization: The Development of the Rural-Urban Political Divide, 1976–2020.” *Perspectives on Politics* 22(3): 630-658.

Assessment: Discussion Forum

Module 8 (Oct 21 – 27): Consolidating Social Democracy After World War II

Bringing in the Middle Class

Peter Baldwin. 1990. *The Politics of Social Solidarity. Class Bases of the European Welfare State 1875-1975*. Cambridge: CUP, pages 107-133 only (Chapter 2: “The Triumph of the Solidaristic Welfare State: Britain and Scandinavia”).

J. Bradford DeLong. 2024. Vox (The Gray Area) Podcast on his 2023 *Book Slouching Toward Utopia: An Economic History of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Basic Books).

Jason Jackson and Ayan Meer. 2023. “Labor Studies: Who and Where? A Global Perspective on the Future of Work(ers).” *Labor Studies Journal* 48(3): 276-286.

Optional on the account provided by J. Bradford DeLong:

Simone A. Wegge, ed. 2024. Symposium on *Slouching towards Utopia. An Economic History of the Twentieth Century* by J. Bradford DeLong. *Social Science History* 48: 571-592.

No Assessment (Material Will be Part of Exam in Module 10)

Module 9 (Oct 28 – Nov 3): Authoritarian Breakthroughs in the 21st Century

Structural Explanations and Historical Parallels

Peter A. Hall. 2020. “The Electoral Politics of Growth Regimes.” *Perspectives on Politics* 18(1): 185–199.

Sheri Berman. 2019. “Populism is a Symptom Rather than a Cause: Democratic Disconnect, the Decline of the Center-Left, and the Rise of Populism in Western Europe.” *Polity* 51(4): 654-667.

Peter Fritzsche. 2024. “Voters elected Hitler because they liked his fascist promise. Trump’s reelection repeats that history.”. *Forward*, November 12.

Peter Fritzsche. 2025. “I wrote the book on Hitler’s first 100 days. Here’s how Trump’s compare.” *Forward*, April 28.

Optional Global Extension:

Julia Gavarrete. 2025. “A Permanent State of Exception in El Salvador.” *Dissent* (Fall): 51-56.

Asli İğzisz. 2025 “The Strongman Illusion.” *Dissent* (Fall): 41-50

We will attempt to schedule two optional virtual "meet your professor and classmates" live Zoom sessions.

No Assessment (Material Will be Part of Exam in Module 10)

Module 10 (Nov 4 – 10): Exam

Please review the material of the course to date. For those of you who seek further inspiration, I recommend the videos in the free “Labor History” course offered through the online academy of the Global Labour University.

SECTION 4: HISTORICAL LESSONS FOR CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

Module 11 (Nov 11 – 17) Intersectionality & Alliances through a Gender Lens

Mobilizing for Gender Equality: The British Case

Watch the movie “Made in Dagenham” (2010). The movie can be streamed via various online platforms for \$3.99.

The Lens of Reproductive Labor

Emily Callaci. 2018. “Seizing the Means of Reproduction.” *Dissent* (Summer): 128-131.
Dorothy Sue Cobble. 2009. “It’s Time for New Deal Feminism.” *Washington Post*, December 13.

No Assessment (Material Will be Part of Quiz in Module 12)

Module 12 (Nov 18 – 24): Intersectionality & Alliances through a Racial Lens

Racial Differences and the Challenges of Post-Industrialism

Enobong Hannah Branch and Caroline Hanley. 2022. *Work in Black and White: Striving for the American Dream*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation (Introduction, 1-18)

Optional: Video presentation (Start at 11 minutes; stop at 48 minutes but encouraged to watch longer)

Organized Labor, Democracy, and Race in the United States

William P. Jones. 2013. “The Forgotten Radical History of the March on Washington.” *Dissent*, Spring.

Assessment: Quiz

Module 13 (Nov 25 – Dec 1): Building the Future, Part 1

Tony Judt. 2009. “What is Living and What is Dead in Social Democracy?” *New York Review of Books*, December 17.

Cedric de Leon. 2023. “Creative Destruction in the Afterlife of Slavery: A Comment on Revaluing Work(ers): Toward a Democratic and Sustainable Future.” *Labor Studies Journal* 48(3): 251-257

Optional:

Michael A. McCarthy. 2025. “The False Choice Between Identity Politics and Economic Populism.” *Hammer & Hope: A Magazine of Black Politics and Culture* 7(5)

Jordan Ecker. 2025. “The Pandemic Welfare State.” *Dissent*, Spring.

David Marchese. 2025. The Interview: Rutgers Breman Wants to Save Elites from Their Wasted Lives. *New York Times*, May 17.

Videos in the free “Labor History” course offered through the online academy of the Global Labour University.

International Research Group on Authoritarianism and Counter-Strategies, ed. 2022. *Global Authoritarianism: Perspectives and Contestation from the South*. Bielefeld: Transcript.

No Assessment (Material Will be Part of Group Project in Module 14)

Module 14 (Dec 2 – 8): Building the Future, Part 2

Appendix:

COMMUNICATION

Students are expected to check their Rutgers email accounts regularly for class announcements. Students are responsible for all information communicated to them via email by the instructor. Feel free to contact the instructor via email with questions or concerns about the course. I will do my best to get back to you within 24 hours. When emailing the instructor, always include “Labor & Democracy” in the subject line of your email.

INTELLECUAL PROPERTY

Lectures and materials utilized in this course, including but not limited to videocasts, podcasts, visual presentations, assessments, and assignments, are protected by United States copyright laws as well as Rutgers University policy. As the instructor of this course, I possess sole copyright ownership. You are permitted to take notes for personal use or to provide to a classmate also currently enrolled in this course. Under no other circumstances is distribution of recorded or written materials associated with this course permitted to any internet site or similar information-sharing platform without my express written consent. Doing so is a violation of the university’s [Academic Integrity Policy](#).

As the instructor for this course, I have the responsibility to protect students’ right to privacy. Classroom recordings of students will therefore be treated as educational records under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the U.S. federal law that governs access to educational information and records. Instructors and students must provide notification if any part of sessions are to be recorded, and such recordings cannot be circulated outside the course.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Students are expected to generate and submit original, personally composed tasks for each assignment. The use of Artificial Intelligence to create and submit work under the guise of original work is not acceptable. Students feeling the need to consult an Artificial Intelligence site to generate ideas or to suggest alternative wording may do so by emailing the professor before submitting the work and explaining how and why the AI will be used. The student will then insert a footer to the assignment containing a statement noting the degree to which AI was used in the completion of the task.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

While I encourage students to work together to understand theories and concepts, all written work must be your own. If you cite an author or use his/her ideas, please cite properly. Plagiarized assignments or evidence of cheating will result in a failing grade in the assignment and possibly in the course. Moreover, plagiarism may result in disciplinary action by the university.

DISABILITY STATEMENT

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation.

If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

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