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**GOVT 119a: Socialism, Marxism, Communism**

TuTh 3:00 – 4:15 p.m., Amador Hall 260

**Course description**

Socialism, communism, and Marxism were among the most influential political ideologies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Socialist thinkers were at the heart of intense intellectual and political debates, both with their adversaries and among themselves, and they inspired millions to become involved in political movements around the world. Some advocated reforming capitalism in various ways, while others called for revolutionary transformations in economics, politics, and culture. Throughout the Cold War, much political debate revolved around disputes between and among communists and anti-communists (and anti-anti-communists). Then with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, many assumed that socialism had been vanquished for good. It seemed to many than at an “end of ideology” had arrived. In recent years, however, we have seen renewed interest in the socialist tradition. Public concern about social and economic inequality, the 2008 financial crisis, and the presidential campaign of democratic socialist Bernie Sanders have led many people to ask, “What exactly is socialism anyway?”

In this course students will critically examine various socialist authors and ideas from the nineteenth century to today. We begin with Danny Katch’s lively overview of the socialist case against capitalism and the history and prospects of socialist politics. Then we dive into the difficult writings of three key socialist thinkers: Karl Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, and Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. We will examine these authors both within the context of their times and with regard to their potential relevance for today. In the next section of the course we will examine the relation of socialism to other social movements, exploring the implications of gender, race, and the environment for socialist concerns. In the final section we will draw on Erik Olin Wright’s *Envisioning Real Utopias* to review the socialist critique of capitalism, examine various alternatives, and explore feasible strategies of transformation.

It is worth noting that we will take a critical and analytical approach to all the material in this course. The assigned reading does not include authors who entirely reject socialist ideas, but students are of course free to do so. Students will be asked to *understand* the history and arguments of socialism, not accept or embrace them.

**Learning objectives**

Students who successfully complete this course will have:

* learned about the key ideas and political contexts of selected authors in the socialist tradition;
* learned about the value, purpose, and limits of political theory;
* improved their ability to read, discuss, and write about politics and political theory;
* improved their capacity to analyze and evaluate difficult texts in both writing and discussion.

**Required Texts**

The below books are available at the campus bookstore and from online booksellers. Additional readings and videos are posted on SacCT.

Danny Katch, *Socialism . . . Seriously: A Brief Guide to Human Liberation* (Haymarket Books, 2015). ISBN: 9781608465156

V.I. Lenin, *State and Revolution*. Annotated and Introduced by Todd Chretien. (Haymarket Books, 2014. ISBN: 9781608464982

Rosa Luxemburg, *The Essential Rosa Luxemburg*. Edited by Helen Scott (Haymarket Books, 2008). ISBN: 9781931859363

Karl Marx, *Selected Writings*. Edited by Lawrence H. Simon (Hackett, 1994). ISBN: 9780872202184

Erik Olin Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias* (Verso, 2010). ISBN: 9781844676170

**Recommended Reading**

For a democratic-socialist perspective on current events, check out the following publications:

*Dissent:* <https://www.dissentmagazine.org>

*Jacobin:* <https://www.jacobinmag.com>

*The Nation:* <https://www.thenation.com>

*Socialist Worker:* <https://socialistworker.org>

For general overviews of the history of Marxism, socialism, and communism, check out the following (among many others) in our campus library:

Stephen Eric Bronner, *Socialism Unbound* (New York: Routledge, 1990). HX 73 .B76

Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the United States: Remapping the History of the American Left* (London: Verso, 1987). HX 83 .B825 1987

Michael Harrington, *Socialism* (New York, Saturday Review Press, 1972). HX 36 .H36

Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978). HX 36 .K61813

**Requirements and Grading**

Attendance and Participation (100 points): Much of the reading assigned in this course is very difficult, so you will need to take an active approach to understanding the texts. I expect students to attend class having read (and sometimes re-read) all of the assigned reading, prepared to *ask questions* and engage in discussion. You should prepare written questions about the reading and bring them to class. For most students, taking careful notes on paper or on a computer works better than the “highlighter” method. Because we will often look up specific passages in the course texts during class, please bring the appropriate text to every class. Students will occasionally be divided into discussion groups for in-class exercises that will contribute to your grade. Participation grades will be based on the extent to which students: a) offer thoughtful questions or comments about assigned readings; b) thoughtfully listen and respond to the instructor and to other students; c) actively participate in group work and other exercises during class. Twice during the semester, I will post your participation grade on SacCT.

You may miss two classes without penalty. Each additional absence, unless excused, will reduce your participation grade by one-third grade. I will only excuse absences for serious and non-work-related reasons (e.g., doctor visit, family emergency, military duty, jury duty, religious holiday), and only with documentation. *Please do not email me about your absence*. If you want me to excuse an absence, then when you return to class, please give me a written statement with the date(s) of your absence, the reason, and documentation. *In most cases, more than six unexcused absences will result automatically in a failing grade.* Repeated tardiness will affect your grade, but if you arrive late please enter quietly and take a seat.

Six critical reflection papers (200 points): On the dates indicated in the syllabus, students are to *submit in class* a one-page paper (about 300 words) on the reading assigned during the previous 2-3 weeks. Reflection papers should include two paragraphs: (1) concisely and clearly *summarize* several (not all) key points from the assigned reading; (2) comment on the *significance* of those points for either theory or practice. Reflection papers must also include at least *one direct quote with page number* from the relevant text(s) to substantiate your claims. The best reflection papers will indicate detailed and thoughtful engagement with multiple assigned readings. Reflection papers will not be accepted late, nor via email, except in cases of an excused absence. Your lowest grade will not be counted.

One analytical essay (250 points). Students will analyze and evaluate key issues from the course in one 5-page essay (1250-1500 words, double-spaced, 1 inch margins, 12-point font). The essay is due on SacCT on the date indicated in the syllabus. After I grade your essay, you may submit a rewrite, in which case your final essay grade will be the average of the original and the rewrite. Rewrites must be submitted within two weeks of the essay due date, and they must be accompanied by a detailed explanation of how you revised the essay. Late essays will be marked down one letter grade for the first day, and two letter grades after that. Even if your essay is extremely late, you should still submit it, because you cannot pass the class without completing the essay and both exams.

Midterm and Final Exam (200 points, 250 points). The exams will ask students to demonstrate a clear understanding of key ideas and concepts from the course. They will be closed-book exams, consisting of both short-answer and essay questions. The questions will be based on a list of key concepts. You will need a small blue-book for both exams. The final exam will cover the entire course.

Extra Credit: Socialist Song Presentation (25 points). Socialism has a rich musical tradition. Students who wish may choose a song from the list on SacCT and prepare a 10-minute presentation with three parts: 1) distribute a handout with lyrics, 2) play the song (you can send me a link or file to play on my laptop), 3) discuss the song’s history and meaning. Students may also choose their own song that reflects socialist ideas, subject to my approval.

Extra Credit: Film or Video Review (10 points each, three max). Several films and videos on socialist themes are listed in the syllabus with links on SacCT. Reviews should be about 500 words and should discuss the film’s relevance to both the course texts and current political issues. Reviews must be submitted by the deadline on the SacCT assignment link.

Grades: Students will receive a percentage of the possible points for each assignment, according to the following scale: A+ (98-100%), A (95%), A- (92%), B+ (88%), B (85%), B- (82%), C+ (78%), C (75%), C- (72%), etc. Final course grades will be calculated as follows:

930 points or more: A

900-929 points: A-

870-899 points: B+

830-869 points: B

800-829 points: B-

770-799 points: C+

730-769 points: C

700-729 points: C-

670-699 points: D+

630-669 points: D

600-629 points: D-

600 points or less: F

**Wireless Devices**

Some students like to use a laptop, tablet, or smart phone to take notes during class or to read course material. But in a classroom, wireless devices can be extremely distracting, not only for the person using the device but also for other students and the instructor. Several studies have shown that wireless devices may reduce student learning. The general policy of this course is that *wireless devices may be used to take notes, but the wireless receiver must be turned off.* Cell phones must be turned off or set to mute. I will also ask students to close or put away wireless devices at specific times, such as during class discussions or when students are working in small groups. And of course students may not use wireless devices at any time for surfing, texting, checking email, or any other activities not directly related to the course. Violations of this policy will affect your grade. If you require special accommodation in this regard, please let me know.

**Additional Matters**

I expect students to arrive on time and stay for the entire class. If you need to leave early, please sit near the door and let me know before class starts. If you have a disability and require accommodations, please let me know. You will need to provide disability documentation to the CSUS Office of Services to Students with Disabilities (SSWD), Lassen Hall 1008, (916) 278-6955. Your feedback on the course readings, classroom discussions, and any other aspect of the course is always welcome. *If you are having trouble with any aspect of the course, or if you would just like to talk over the material, please stop by during my office hours or make an appointment to see me. Don't wait until the end of the semester!* To protect yourself against computer crashes and lost assignments, be sure keep an electronic or paper copy of every assignment you submit. Please also keep all your returned assignments until you receive your final course grade for the semester. If one of your assignments gets lost, for whatever reason, you are responsible for providing a copy.

Finally, it should go without saying that plagiarism—that is, presenting someone else's work as your own—is a serious violation of academic integrity and university policy, not to mention basic honesty. Plagiarism will be punished in proportion to the severity of the case, but any plagiarism is likely to result in a failing grade for the course and may lead to additional administrative penalties, including expulsion from the University. If you are not sure what plagiarism is, please ask me or consult the library plagiarism information website at <http://library.csus.edu/content2.asp?pageID=353>.

**Course Schedule:** Assignments marked with an asterisk (\*) are available on SacCT.

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| 1 | Jan. 24  Jan. 26 | **Introduction**  Course overview  Katch, *Socialism*, Intro. and chap. 1-2. |
| 2 | Jan. 31  Feb. 2 | Katch, *Socialism*, chap. 3-5.  Katch, *Socialism*, chap. 6-9.  \*Joseph M. Schwartz, “Bringing Socialism Back: How Bernie Sanders is Reviving an American Tradition,” *In These Times,* December 14, 2015.  REFLECTION PAPER #1 |
| 3 | Feb. 7  Feb. 9 | **Marx and Philosophy**  Marx, “Toward a Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right:* Introduction,” pp. 27-29, 34-39.  Marx, Excerpt Notes of 1844, pp. 40-53.  Marx and Engels, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, esp. pp. 58-68.  Marx, *The German Ideology*, esp. pp. 102-125.  Marx, Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, esp. pp. 211-213.  \*Video: “Marx in Soho” |
| 4 | Feb. 14  Feb. 16 | **Marx’s Economic Theory**  Marx, *Capital*, chap. 1., pp. 214-243.  Marx, *Capital*, chap. 7, 26, 32, pp. 274-300 |
| 5 | Feb. 21  Feb. 23 | **Marx and Revolutionary Politics**  Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, pp. 157-186.  Marx, *The Civil War in France,* esp. pp. 301-309.  Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Program,” esp. pp. 320-330.  REFLECTION PAPER #2  \*Video: Intelligence Squared Debate: “Karl Marx Was Right” |
| 6 | Feb. 28  Mar. 2 | **Luxemburg, Lenin, and Co.**  Scott, Introduction, in *The Essential Rosa Luxemburg,* pp. 1-30.  Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution*, esp. pp. 41-47, 66-104.  \*Film: “Rosa Luxemburg” (1986) |
| 7 | Mar. 7  Mar. 9 | Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike,* esp. pp. 111-119, 140-150, 156-181.  Chretien, Introduction, in Lenin, *State and Revolution*, pp. 1-34.  Lenin, *State and Revolution,* chap. 1, pp. 41-58.  REFLECTION PAPER #3 |
| 8 | Mar. 14  Mar. 16 | Lenin, *State and Revolution,* chap. 2-3, 5, pp. 59-94, 121-142.  \*Film: “Reds” (1981)  MIDTERM EXAM |
|  |  | Spring Break |
| 9 | Mar. 28  Mar. 30 | **Class, Gender, Race**  \*Erik Olin Wright, “The Class Analysis of Poverty,” in *Interrogating Inequality*: *Essays on Class Analysis, Socialism and Marxism* (Verso, 1994).  \*Erik Olin Wright, “Understanding Class: Toward an Integrated Analytical Approach,” *New Left Review* 60 (2009): 101-116.  \*Erik Olin Wright, “Explanation and Emancipation in Marxism and Feminism,” *Interrogating Inequality* (1994), pp. 211-233.  \*Ellen Meiksens Woods, “Capitalism and Human Emancipation: Race, Gender, and Democracy,” *Democracy against Capitalism* (1995), pp. 264-283.  \*Valerie Bryson, “Marxism and Feminism: Can the “Unhappy Marriage” Be Saved?” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9:1 (2004): 13-30.  \*Nicole M. Aschoff, “Feminism against Capitalism,” *Jacobin,* February 29, 2016. |
| 10 | Apr. 4  Apr. 6 | \*Sven Beckert, “[Slavery and Capitalism](http://www.chronicle.com/article/SlaveryCapitalism/150787?cid=rcsidebar),” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 12, 1014.  \*Paul D’Amato, “[Race and the U.S. Socialist Tradition](https://socialistworker.org/2010/11/18/race-and-us-socialist-tradition),” *Socialist Worker,* November 18, 2010.  \*Robin Carter, “Marxism and Theories of Racism.” In *The* *Critical Companion to Contemporary Marxism*, ed. Jacques Bidet and Stathis Kouvelakis (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 431-451.  \*Jennifer Roesch, “[Taking Racism Seriously](http://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/08/black-lives-matter-racism-marxism-capitalism/),” *Jacobin*, August 8, 2015.  \*Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, “[What about Racism?](https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/03/black-lives-matter-slavery-discrimination-socialism/)” *Jacobin*, March 16, 2016.  REFLECTION PAPER #4 |
| 11 | Apr. 11  Apr. 13 | **Socialism and the Environment**  \*John Bellamy Foster, “[Marxism and Ecology: Common Fonts on a Great Transition](http://monthlyreview.org/2015/12/01/marxism-and-ecology/" \t "_blank),”Monthly Review 67:7 (2015): pp. 1-13.  \*Alyssa Battistoni, “Wouldn’t a More Democratic World Just Mean a Bigger Environmental Crisis?” in *ABCs of Socialism,* pp. 94-102.  \*Naomi Klein, “Capitalism vs. the Climate,” *The Nation*, November 28 (2011): 11-21.  \*Video: Naomi Klein, “[Capitalism and the Climate.”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a5LuIAJEFUc) |
| 12 | Apr. 18  Apr. 20 | **Democratic Socialism Today**  Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias,* chap. 2-3.  Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias,* chap. 4.  REFLECTION PAPER #5 |
| 13 | Apr. 25  Apr. 27 | Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias*, chap. 5  Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias*, chap. 6-7.  ANALTICAL ESSAY DUE |
| 14 | May 2  May 4 | Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias*, 8-9.  Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias*, 10-11.  Wright, “[How to be an Anticapitalist Today](https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/12/erik-olin-wright-real-utopias-anticapitalism-democracy/)” *Jacobin*, December 12, 2015.  REFLECTION PAPER #6  \* Video: Richard Wolf |
| 15 | May 9  May 11 | Student presentations  Course review and exam prep |
|  | May 16 | 3:00 – 5:00 PM  FINAL EXAM |