

SEEDS OF CHANGE

FOOD • CULTURE • WORK

Winter 2007

Political Economy Workshops: An Introduction

Political Economy, as we defined it early in the fall quarter, is *a social science that examines the interplay of politics & economics in the historical development of a society and its social relations, particularly class relations, and that analyzes unequal power in the determination of the production, distribution, consumption and exchange of goods & services*. Recall how we broke it down into the various parts:

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In conversation, I often describe it as a “Peoples’ Toolkit” to understanding *who’s got what and why, how it got this way, how it works and how to change it—if you are so inclined*. And I haven’t met many people who say to me: “No things are just fine the way they are.” I just don’t travel in those circles or get invited to those parties, I guess. In fact as things get worse economically, more polarized, to use a political economy type term, more people I talk with are looking for exactly these kinds of tools and this science to help them make sense of and act effectively in the world.

So, to develop this social science, this toolkit, this quarter, we will be doing a series of workshops that are accompanied by a reader called *Real World Globalization (RWG)*. We’ll build on the foundation we developed last quarter. Students who are new to the program shouldn’t worry at all, but you might ask a couple of classmates what political economy stuff we did last quarter to get a handle on that foundation. The chapter you read in *Sweetness and Power* is one example, and so is Pollan’s chapter on corn.

These workshops will be Tuesday mornings with a few exceptions for guest speakers, field trips, and presentations. That gives us six of them. They will be different in format and content, though there is some overlap that will allow us to build on our knowledge and skills, and enable us to dig deeper into the ideas and concepts. As we explore the three key issues for the quarter (ecology, free vs. fair trade, and immigration) these workshops will support the program’s curriculum, give us a chance to discuss some related political economy issues occurring in the world today, develop some vision for a different way of meeting needs (that’s what an economy is supposed to do, right?), and in some cases to act out the issues. There won’t be any writing assignments for the workshops, but there will be some prep work including reading.

I tried to keep the reading to 30 pages--but failed, though not miserably. The reading actually averages out to be about 33 pages for each workshop. There’s one week where it’s extra long (52 pages), but that happens to fall on a week with no Monday reading, so I figured it would work okay. Because the work-

shops aren't necessarily seminars on RWG but are workshops, we will not spend a lot of time discussing the readings directly. This might lead one to think that one might be able to get away with not doing the reading for the workshop, but it's crucial to read thoroughly. The success of the workshops depends on everyone reading this material. There will also be occasional "pop quizzes" on the reading.

It's also important to take good notes on each article. The reading for each workshop has from four to eight articles, and it can be hard to keep them all ordered in your mind if you don't go into the reading with a scheme to keep them organized. So, I would suggest that you take notes in your notebook (not just in the book) something along the lines below. This will be good practice for the annotated bibliography that you will need to do for the research assignment (more on that later) and the notes will need to be in your portfolio. But what's most important is that you will better retain the information.

Article #: Article Title, Author and Chapter Title

Summary of the main point(s)

Key Political Economy Concepts and brief definitions

Places where you see or have experienced what is being written about

Points for debate or things you want to find out more about

There are also a number of optional readings. If you have time and interest you should feel free to read or review them as they will also be interesting and relevant additions to what we'll be discussing, but you won't be quizzed on them.

Workshop Schedule (Weeks 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 9)

Week 1 • Measuring Globalization; RWG Articles 1-6.

Week 2 • Neoliberalism in the Neighborhood Part I; RWG Articles 15, 20, 21, 28 and optional 7 & 9.

Week 4 • Neoliberalism in the Neighborhood Part II (presentations); RWG Articles 67-74.

Week 6 • SAPlandia; RWG Articles 13, 14, 17, 22, 27, 38, 42 and optional 39.

Week 7 • Alter-Globalization; RWG Articles 31, 32, 34, 60, 65, 66 and optional 51, 61-64.

Week 9 • Strategy Game/Organizing for Change; RWG Articles 43, 44, 46, 47 and optional 48-51.