Political Sociology

This course is intended as an introduction to a major sub-field of sociology, the sociology of politics. We will begin with an examination of basic concepts such as power, traditional authority relations, the birth of the modern state, and citizenship in the Western world. We will then explore such problems as the social conditions of democracy, class conflict and the Marxist theory of the state, bureaucratization, the elitist critique of democracy, the weakness of American socialism, and the nature of class/elite power in the United States. In the concluding part of the course we will concentrate on the rise of fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany in an attempt to isolate some of the factors which can lead to democratic breakdown.

Course Requirements and Grading

There will be two quizzes, two papers (7 pages each), and a final exam. The quizzes will consist of 6 short definitions of concepts and will be in class (45 minutes). The final exam will consist of 6 definitions on the mid-term pattern plus an essay question. The two essay topics will be determined by the instructor and will require students to synthesize course material (no additional reading required).

- 2 Quizzes: 10% each = 20%
- 2 Essays (6-7 pages): 20% each = 40%
- Final Exam: 25%
- Class Attendance and Participation: 15%

Attendance will be taken as of the third week of class: more than two unexcused absences will negatively affect the participation portion of the grade. Late papers will be penalized and extensions will be given only under exceptional circumstances.

Other requirements: Film screenings (mandatory)

*The Leopard* by Luchino Visconti
*The Conformist* by Bernardo Bertolucci
*Triumph of the Will* by Leni Riefenstahl
Honor Code

This course and all its assignments are covered by the Oberlin College honor code. This means, most importantly, that—unless otherwise indicated—you are to produce your own work and honor the rules and conventions of scholarly quotation, attribution, and citation. While you are allowed to ask advice and help from librarians and official writing tutors, you are, in the end, to submit work produced by you. Some assignments may be collaborative in nature; those will be clearly identified as such. Any case of (suspected) plagiarism will be reported to the Honors Committee. For more details, see http://new.oberlin.edu/students/policies/10-Policies-Honor.pdf

Required Books (also on hard copy reserve at the reference desk in the library).


*All other readings can be found on the Blackboard site for the class under “Course Documents.” You are welcome to print them out or download them (for personal use only). Readings for every week should be done in advance.*

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week One. Introduction to the Field of Political Sociology

Tues. 2/8  What is Political Sociology? Power and Legitimacy in Social Context


Thurs. 2/10  Types of Legitimate Authority. Traditional, Legal-Rational, Charismatic

Max Weber “Politics as a Vocation,” and “Charismatic Authority,” in Gerth and

**Week Two. The Evolution of the State and Modern Politics in the West**

**Tues. 2/15** The Rise of the State. Professional Politicians and Political Parties

Weber, “Politics as a Vocation” pp.82-114 (to the end of the first full paragraph).

**Thurs. 2/17** Politics as a Vocation. Political Power, Classes, and Status Groups


**Week Three (September 14-21). From Traditional Authority Relations to Modern Citizenship**

**Tues. 2/22** The Absolutist State and Pre-Modern Social Rebellion. The End of Paternalism.


**Thurs. 2/24** Civil, Political, and Social Rights. The Political Emancipation of the Lower Classes.


**Week Four. Social Class, Class Conflict, and Politics**

**Tues. 3/1** Marx’s Historical Materialism. Society and Ideology


“Marx on the History of His Opinions,” pp. 3-7;

**Thurs. 3/3** Class Conflict and Political Change


**Week Five. The Marxist Theory of the State.**

**Tues. 3/8** Bonapartism. Social Classes, State Autonomy, and the Marxist Theory of the State

Robert Tucker, ed., The Marx-Engels Reader:


Thurs. 3/10 1st quiz in class (45 minutes)

Film. The Leopard by Luchino Visconti.


Seymour Martin Lipset, Political Man, pp. 25-86.

Thurs. 3/17 Social Cleavages, Democracy, and Voting

Lipset, Political Man, pp. 230-278; 303-331.


Week Seven. The Social Conditions of Democracy Revisited. Bureaucracy and Democracy

Tues. 3/22 Lipset and His Critics. Historical Developments and Theoretical Revisions.


Thurs. 3/24 What is a Bureaucracy?


First paper due Thursday, 3/24 in class (hard copy)

*****Spring Break*****

Week Eight. Elite Theory, Bureaucracy, and Democracy

Tues. 4/5 The Iron Law of Oligarchy Formulated

Michels, Political Parties, pp.3-114.

Thurs. 4/7 Masses, Leaders, and Party Oligarchies


Week Nine. The Pacification of Class Struggle: American Exceptionalism?

Tues. 4/12 The American Myth, Capitalism, and Socialism

Werner Sombart, Why is There no Socialism in the United States?

Thurs. 4/14 2nd Quiz in class (45 minutes)

Week Ten. Power in American Society: A Class-Elite Critique of Pluralism

Tues. 4/19 Elite and/or Ruling Class? Theoretical Controversies and Empirical Research


Thurs. 4/21 Elites, Coalitions, and American Electoral Politics


Week Eleven. Types of Dictatorship. The Social Basis of Authoritarian Politics

Tues. 4/26 Types of Dictatorship Defined

Thurs. 4/28 Fascism as Middle-Class Extremism

Lipset, “Fascism--Left, Right, Center,” in *Political Man*, pp.127-179.

**Film. The Conformist by Bernardo Bertolucci**

**Week Twelve. Authoritarianism and Fascism in the European Context**

Tues. 5/3 Fascism as an Ideology and Movement in the European Context


**Second paper due Tuesday, 5/3 in class (hard copy)**

Thurs. 5/5 Fascism and Its Social Base: The Case of Italy


**Film. Triumph of the Will by Leni Riefenstahl**

**Week Thirteen. Nazism as a Social Movement**

Tues. 5/10 Nazism and Its Social Base

Mann, *Fascists*, pp.139-206.

Thurs. 5/12 Concluding Thoughts on Dictatorship and Fascism

Mann, *Fascists*, 353-375.

**Final Exam Friday, May 20, 7-9 p.m.**