

## Econ 375: Marxian Economics

Spring 2002 in Morrison 88 Tuesday and Thursday 1:30-2:50

**Professor Marie Christine Duggan**, Rhodes 265, 358-2628, [mduggan@keene.edu](mailto:mduggan@keene.edu). Office hours Monday and Wednesday 3-4:30.

Marx considered understanding the economy was the key to political conflicts in the modern world, and he devoted the remainder of his life to studying the “laws of motion of capital.” However, most people who read Marx still focus on his political and philosophic writings. We will read volume I of Marx’s *Capital*, where his economic analysis is most clear. We will also read two books of commentary on Marx. Harry Braverman was a machinist and political activist, and he focuses on Marx’s analysis of the actual production process and human relations. Duncan Foley is an academic economist, and he uses mathematics to analyze exploitation and competition from a Marxist perspective.

Required books:

Karl Marx, **Capital: A Critique of Political Economy (Volume I)**. Penguin edition. Originally published in 1867.

Harry Braverman, **Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the 20th Century**. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975.

Duncan K. Foley, **Understanding Capital: Marx’s Economic Theory**. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986.

**Warning: heavy reading ahead!** This class is going to require some pro-active reading—not just doing it because I assign it, but also because you are interested. The only way to make up your own mind about Marxian ideas is to actually read the original guy himself, so that is what we are going to do. Some consolation: after a while, his 19<sup>th</sup> century language and style becomes familiar to you, and it gets a bit easier.

Weekly writing assignments are two pages long, they require you to read Marx and/or a commentator on Marx, and you must write up the two pages before we have discussed them in class. I expect evidence that you did the reading and re-read the parts that were difficult, and attempted to understand them. If there are parts that you do not understand, discuss this in the two pages. Be specific about what you do not understand.

Grading: 10% attendance based on spot checks. 60% weekly assignments. 30% final.

### Schedule

Tuesday, January 22: Outline course, biographical notes on Marx.

Thursday, January 24: Outline of Chapters 1,2,3, of Marx’s *Capital*.  
Reading Chapters 1,2,3 is optional, bring your book to class.

Tuesday, January 29: Read by today Marx, Chapter 4: The General Formula for Capital  
*Assignment Due*: Answer the following question: Marx begins his discussion of money functioning as capital by contrasting the role of money in the formula for simple commodity circulation, C-M-C, with the role of money in the inverse formula M-C-M. How is the role of money in M-C-M different from its role in simple commodity circulation? Why is money necessarily the starting-point of the

general formula for the capital circuit M-C-M'? By introducing the concept of capital in this way, is Marx saying that the categories of simple commodity circulation are inadequate to the task of understanding capital?

Thursday, January 31: Read by today Marx, Chapter 5. Merchant's Capital vs. Industrial Capital.

Tuesday, February 5: Read by today Marx, Chapter 6: The Sale and Purchase of Labor Power. This is a classic and fascinating chapter, give yourself time.

*Assignment Due:* What are the "freedoms" required for human beings' capacity for labor to become a commodity? Why are these necessary preconditions of labor-power's existence as a commodity? In light of your answer distinguish between labor and labor-power; why is this distinction important? Why is it important that this commodity exists in the "physical form" and "living personality" of human beings? How does labor-power differ from other commodities (e.g., in the determination of its value) and how is it the same? How does this relate to Marx's conception of free labor? Does the reproduction of labor-power (i.e., of human beings "free" in both senses) fall within the horizon of Marx's analysis at this point? Should it?

Thursday, February 7. More discussion of the purchase and sale of labor power.

Tuesday, February 12: Read Marx, Chapter 7: The Labour Process and the Valorization process, and also read Braverman Chapter 1. Labor and Labor Power, p. 45-58.

*Assignment due:* Marx begins his discussion of the production of surplus-value with a consideration of the labor-process as a process of production of use-values, "independent...of any specific social formation." (Vintage edition, p. 283). What are the "simple elements" of the labor process and what two "characteristic phenomena" distinguish the *capitalist* labor-process? What aspects of Marx's discussion does Braverman emphasize?

Tuesday, Feb. 19: Read Marx Chapter 8. Constant Capital and Variable Capital  
Lecture to introduce  $l$  = living labor.

Thursday, February 21: Read Marx, Chapter 9 and Foley, Chapter 3. *Assignment due:* 1) According to Marx, the valorization process comprises two necessary aspects: it is a process in which value is preserved, and at the same time created. How is value preserved in the production process? How are the concepts of concrete labor and abstract labor necessary to understanding capitalist production as a simultaneous process of value preservation and value creation? In your answer, explain the connection of the categories of constant capital, variable capital, and surplus value to the distinction between dead and living labor. 2) What is the problem posed in the discussion of "Senior's Last Hour"? How is the problem resolved if we consider Marx's distinction between necessary labor-time and surplus labor-time and the representation of the different components of the value added by labor by a) fractions of the working day, and b) fractions of the product?

Tuesday Feb. 26: Read Marx Chapter 10. See <http://www.fortunecity.com/tinpan/parton/2/breadrose.html> and <http://womhist.binghamton.edu/law/doclist.htm> to read about strike that won the 8-hour day in the United States in 1912.

Thursday, Feb. 28: Film about length of working day. Read Marx Chapter 11.

Tuesday, March 5: Paper on Marx Chapter 10 and 11 due. *Assignment due*: Marx writes, “The working day is...capable of being determined, but in and for itself indeterminate.” (Vintage ed., p. 341). He later argues: “The establishment of a normal working day is...the product of a protracted and more or less concealed civil war between the capitalist class and the working class.” (p. 413).  
--How is the working day determined? What limits to the working day does Marx identify? What is the “antinomy of rights” in the determination of the working day, and what does its resolution through force tell us about the limits to the “rights” characteristic of the sphere of exchange (p. 344)?  
--What from the standpoint of the analysis of capital’s laws of motion, is the working day “in and for itself indeterminate”? What, then, is the theoretical status of Marx’s analysis of the determination of the working day?

Thursday, March 7: Read Marx Chapter 12.

Tuesday, March 12: Read Foley Chapter 4. Assignment due on Marx Chapter 12 and Foley Chapter 4. Assignment: How can a change in productivity of labor effect a change in the rate and mass of surplus value? If labor-power is not produced by capital, in what way does capital determine the value of labor power? “Why does the capitalist, whose sole concern is to produce exchange-value, continually strive to bring down the exchange-value of commodities?” (p. 437). What role do competition and the distinction between individual value and social value play in the explication of the riddle?

Thursday, March 14: Read Marx Chapter 13: Cooperation, one of the most famous sections of Marx’s Capital, and one that has continuing relevance.

Tuesday, March 19: Spring Break

Thursday, March 21: Spring Break

Tuesday, March 26: Read Marx, Chapter 13: Cooperation. Read also Braverman, Chapter 2: The Origins of Management, p. 59-69. *Assignment due*: “A large number of workers working together, at the same time, in one place...in order to produce the same sort of commodity under the command of the capitalist, constitutes the starting point of capitalist production.” (Vintage edition, p. 439). Why is cooperation the necessary starting point of capitalist production? What, is anything, is specifically capitalist about cooperation? (i.e., didn’t the Egyptian pharaohs also use it?) Why is capitalist cooperation purely “despotic” in form (Vintage edition, p. 450) and how does that connect to Braverman’s discussion of management? What is the “gift of nature” associated with cooperation? (Vintage edition, p. 451).

Thursday, March 28: intro to Marx, Chapter 14. Read Chapter 14, parts 1,2,3.

Thursday, April 4: Finish Marx Chapter 14, and also Read Braverman, Chapter 3: The Division of Labor, p. 70-83

*Assignment due*: To what extent is manufacture and the division of labor in the workplace as described by Marx prototypical <sup>[1]</sup> capitalist production? How is the production process in

manufacture different from handicraft production? What is significant about the difference? What is Marx's distinction between the social division of labor and the division of labor inside production? What is Marx's distinction between the collective worker and the detail worker in manufacture? What is significant about these two distinctions? How is Marx's discussion different from Braverman's?

Tuesday, April 9: Discuss Chapter 15.

Thursday, April 11: Field Trip.

Tuesday April 16: Finish reading Marx: Chapter 15. Read Braverman, Chapter 4: Scientific Management *Assignment due*: Braverman argues that Schmidt was not stupid, but that Taylor preferred to view him that way. Is there some tendency for modern managers to view workers as stupid, some force pushing them to see workers this way? For Marx, examine the contradiction between the way machines could be used to meet human needs, and the reasons that machines are invented under capitalism in order to make a profit. Keynes argues that the reason that you want to stimulate capitalism is to give people jobs, but Marx doesn't think capitalists are interested in giving people jobs, but rather in what? How is this contradiction manifest in Chapter 15? How does Marx develop his argument that capital is interested in something besides the welfare of human beings? What aspects of Marx's argument did the movie "Modern Times" put into words?

Thursday April 18: No class.

Tuesday, April 23: Introduce Marx's idea of competition; the process. The mathematics of competition. Read Foley, Chapter 6: The Equalization of the Rate of Profit. *Assignment due*: On competition, question to be announced.

Thursday, April 25: Introduce the idea of the reserve army of labor. Read Foley, Chapter 7: Division of Surplus Value. *Assignment due*: On competition, question to be announced.

Tuesday, April 30: Read Foley, Chapter 8: The Falling Rate of Profit. *Assignment due*: On Falling Rate of Profit, question to be announced.

Thursday, May 2: Review for final

<b>Tuesday May 7, 3 pm, take-home final due at Rhodes 265.</b>
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[\[1\]](#) Prototype: the original or model on which something is based or formed; something that serves as an example of its type.