

HC 434H: WHAT IS SOCIALISM ANYWAY? A EUROPEAN VIEW

University of Oregon – Fall 2021– CRN [12968](#)

Instructor: Prof. Ian F. McNeely (imcneely@uoregon.edu)

Meeting times: TR 10:00-11:50 in Chapman 301

Office hours: sign up at bit.ly/2Uyi8Em then meet on Zoom (991 157 8553) or in Friendly 114

Canvas: canvas.uoregon.edu/courses/186125

Course description

We hear a lot about “socialism” in today’s politics, from Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez on the left to countless hostile critics on the right. But what does socialism actually mean? Free health care, child care, and college, plus a job with lavish pension benefits? A society committed to fairness and solidarity rather than cutthroat individualism? Or high taxes, a stifling of freedom and entrepreneurship, oppression by uncaring and inefficient bureaucracies, and hostility toward traditional values? As the U.S. government prepares to spend trillions of dollars to reboot the economy, fight racism and poverty, deal with climate change, and “build back better,” it is a critical time to ask whether socialism has something to teach us.

This course focuses *not* on the U.S. but on Western European democracies. We include the welfare states of Britain, Scandinavia, Germany, and France, plus the European Union as a whole. Focusing on the period since 1945, we cover a spectrum of alternatives from left to right, mainly social democracy and (neo)liberalism, but also conservative and Green politics. While we will take pains to distinguish democratic socialism from totalitarian communism in Eastern Europe, that does not mean we will adopt an uncritically celebratory approach either. Rather, we will also explore how socialism is embattled in Europe due to some of the same challenges we also face in the U.S., including escalating income inequality, global competition, the politics of immigration, multiculturalism and populism, and the existential threat of climate change.

Objectives

- Understand the various forms of postwar Western European socialism, and their critics.
- Compare and contrast the various US and European welfare states and political cultures.
- Improve skills in analytical reading and writing, and independent research.
- Practice respectful listening and civil conversation about controversial topics.
- Articulate and refine a personal political viewpoint based on facts, values, and dialogue.

Requirements

- Six 800-word (ca. 3-page) “op-eds,” each on a choice of suggested weekly topics, due on Canvas no later than 5pm on Fridays except 9/30, 11/12, 11/19, and 11/26 (15% each*)
- Independent research project of 4,000 words (ca. 15 pp.) *or equivalent* (see below)
 - 500-600 word (ca. 2-page) prospectus due 11/2 (5%)
 - One small-group roundtable debate, on 11/9, 11/16, 11/18, or 11/23 (5%)
 - Automated laptop slideshow exhibit in class on 12/2 (5%)
 - Final submission due 12/9 at noon (25%)

Op-eds

An op-ed is a pithy, opinionated—but also evidence-based and well-researched—essay that appears in newspapers and magazines like the ones described on the next page. You should use these exercises to articulate and refine your personal political viewpoints on socialism. But you *must* do so by deeply engaging the readings and using evidence to justify those viewpoints.

When grading, I look for signs that you have built your op-ed on evidence from the readings:

- C Not an op-ed, but an organized list of pertinent quotations and good notes toward one
- B An op-ed built on evidence; well-argued but with some superficiality or other flaws
- A An op-ed whose superior evidence, logic, and style might persuade a political opponent
- D Superficial, wrong, and/or lacking pertinent evidence, even if competently written

Class participation may add a + or – to your op-ed grade for the week. I value both the quality and quantity of your remarks, and especially respectful listening and civil conversation.

*You get two free passes. (1) I will drop the lowest grade. (2) You may submit one C-level paper without lowering your grade. Otherwise, only your top four op-eds count ($15\% \times 4 = 60\%$ total).

Independent research project

The format of the independent research project is up to you. It can a conventional argumentative paper, or it can be a podcast, a video, an interactive website, or anything else you come up with, so long as you clear it with me. We'll brainstorm ideas in class collectively. What I require of *all* projects, regardless of medium, is a deep engagement with *words*, whether written or spoken.

The independent research project will be graded on a *contract* basis. This means that I will tell *you* what you need to do to earn an A, B, or C after I have read your project prospectus, due 11/2. Students may have different contracts depending on the nature of their specific projects, but everyone will be held to the same standards of academic quality. I will issue contracts by 11/9.

During most of November, we will devote the last 45 minutes of class to roundtable debates. I will form roundtables of about five students based on shared interests and then one will lead the other four while the rest of the class listens and asks questions. On the last day of class, you will present your projects as automated laptop slideshows while we browse, mingle, and converse.

Readings

Books to purchase

Garland, David. *The Welfare State: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. ISBN: 978-0199672660.

Hanley, Lynsey, *Estates: An Intimate History*. London: Granta Books, 2012. ISBN: 978-1862079854.

Judis, John B. *The Socialist Awakening: What's Different Now About the Left*. New York: Columbia Global Reports, 2020. ISBN: 978-1734420708.

Piketty, Thomas. *Time for Socialism: Dispatches from a World on Fire, 2016-2021*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021. ISBN: 978-0300259667.

- These can all be ordered at the [UO Duckstore](#).

Articles

- Go to [Canvas> Files](#), download the “- ARTICLES IN ONE BIG ZIP” file, and unzip it. (Individual PDFs are posted there too.) See below for full bibliographic citations.

Newspapers, magazines, and podcasts

I encourage you to read U.S. and European newspapers and periodicals to acquaint yourself with contemporary politics, culture, and ideas. European newspapers are more avowedly ideological than “objective” mainstream U.S. newspapers. In English, you can sample U.K. papers (both [broadsheet](#) and [tabloid](#)) and [magazines](#) from across the political spectrum. Perhaps choose one to follow, or compare multiple publications on the same issue(s) to discern their political spins. Consider this a chance to study the op-ed as a genre, and feel free to imitate what you like.

Among left to center-left publications in the U.K., I recommend [The Guardian](#), the [London Review of Books](#), the [New Statesman](#), and the [New Left Review](#). [The Guardian](#) also has a “This is Europe” weekly email digest, focusing on the Continent, that you can subscribe to. Among U.S. newspapers, I read the [New York Times](#), the [Washington Post](#), and the [The Atlantic](#), all center-left, every day. As for left-wing U.S. publications, I personally find [Jacobin](#) more interesting than the venerable [The Nation](#). If you know a European language like German or French, tell me and I can make some recommendations (for fun TV too!). [Eurozine.com](#) is an interesting digest of articles translated into English from boutique cultural magazines from all over Europe.

Podcasts are a superb way to learn about politics and ideas. The best are models of eloquence and civil discourse. Some of my favorite politics-and-policy-oriented podcasts include [The Ezra Klein Show](#), [Talking Politics](#), and [Vox](#) podcasts like [Vox Conversations](#) and the [The Weeds](#).

General guides to postwar Europe

[Wikipedia](#) is a go-to source for basic information (events, people, concepts, etc.), and a better overall reference than any short textbook on recent European history that I might assign. For two very long but also very well-written treatments of the period, see these two books:

Judt, Tony, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006).

Sassoon, Donald, *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014).

SCHEDULE

* = on these dates below, we will devote the last 45 minutes to roundtable debates.

red indicates the name of a PDF posted at [Canvas > Files](#).

Part I Europe and the U.S.

- Why has European-style socialism become so attractive to many left-leaning (and especially younger) Americans?
- Why has the word “socialism” become so threatening to many right-leaning Americans?

9/28 E.J. **Dionne**, “We Are Living in a New Social Democratic Moment,” *Washington Post*, July 18, 2021. Read before class.

Peter **Baldwin**, *The Narcissism of Minor Differences: How America and Europe Are Alike* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), figs. 51, 54, 58, 60, 69, 91, 92, 94, 95, 115-118, 164-66, 191-94. We will examine and discuss these in class.

9/30 John B. Judis, *The Socialist Awakening: What’s Different Now About the Left* (New York: Columbia Global Reports, 2020). Read entire, but skim chap. 1.

Part II European welfare states ascendant

- What were the major forms of Western European democratic socialism, social democracy, and welfare states to arise after World War II?
- How did postwar welfare states compare and contrast in their policies toward jobs, pensions, unemployment, health care, child care, housing, education, public services, culture, taxation, and other bread-and-butter issues?
- How do politics, economics, demographics, gender, religion, culture, and history help to explain the similarities and differences among welfare states?
- Do socialist parties deserve credit for building European welfare states?

The British model

10/5 David Garland, *The Welfare State: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1-12, 13-44 (skim), 45-58.

Ronan **Burtenshaw**, “Summoning the Future,” *Jacobin*, Feb. 26, 2018.

T.H. **Marshall**, *Citizenship and Social Class*, ed. by Tom Bottomore (London: Pluto Press, 1987 [1950]), 8, 18, 21, 27-28, 33, 38-40, 45.

Michael Apted and Paul Almond, *Seven Up!* (1964 film, 40 mins). Consider watching one sequel a week, and by week 10, you’ll be caught up at *63 Up*. Streamable on [Amazon Prime \(BritBox\)](#); other streaming options TBA.

10/7 Margaret **Jones** and Rodney Lowe, *From Beveridge to Blair: The First Fifty Years of Britain’s Welfare State 1948-98* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 48-50 (“The Appointed Day”).

William **Beveridge**, *Social Insurance and Allied Services: Report* (London, H.M. Stationery Office, 1945), 6-11.

Aneurin **Bevan**, *In Place of Fear* (London: Heinemann, 1952), 73-75.

Anthony **Croslan**, *The Future of Socialism* (London: J. Cape, 1956), 521-29.

The Nordic model

10/12 Garland, *Welfare State*, 59-71, 71-80 (skim).

Nicholas **Kristof**, “McDonald’s Workers in Denmark Pity Us,” *New York Times*, May 8, 2020.

Rudolf **Meidner**, ‘Why Did the Swedish Model Fail?’, *Socialist Register*, 29 (1993), 211-28 (focus on 211-221).

Henry **Milner**, *Sweden: Social Democracy in Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 73-85, 189 (very bottom)-96.

10/14 Lars **Trägårdh**, “Statist Individualism: On the Culturality of the Nordic Welfare State,” in Bo Stråth and Øystein Sørensen (eds.), *The Cultural Construction of Norden* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1997), 253-85.

Helena **Mattsson**, “Designing the Reasonable Consumer: Standardisation and Personalisation in Swedish Functionalism,” in Helena Mattsson and Sven-Olov Wallenstein (eds.), *Swedish Modernism: Architecture, Consumption and the Welfare State* (London: Black Dog, 2010), 74-99 (skim 86-97 first). Also read at least pp. 53-54 and 60 from the “Pippi Longstocking” essay in the same volume.

The Continental model

10/19 “Basic Programme of the Social Democratic Party of Germany [= **Godesberg Program**],” in Jan Goldstein and John W. Boyer (eds.), *Twentieth-Century Europe, Readings in Western Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), vol. 9, 5-17, 20-22.

Tamar **Jacoby**, “Why Germany Is So Much Better at Training Its Workers,” *The Atlantic*, Oct. 16, 2014.

Hubert **Ertl** and David Phillips, “The Enduring Nature of the Tripartite System of Secondary Schooling in Germany: Some Explanations,” *British Journal of Educational Studies* 48 no. 4 (Dec. 2000): 391-412.

10/21 Anne **Chemin**, “France’s Baby Boom Secret: Get Women into Work and Ditch Rigid Family Norms,” *The Guardian*, Mar. 20, 2015.

Kimberly J. **Morgan**, “The Politics of Mothers’ Employment: France in Comparative Perspective,” *World Politics* 55 no. 2 (Jan. 2003): 259-89.

Jeanne **Fagnani**, “Family Policies in France and Germany: Sisters or Distant Cousins?,” *Community, Work & Family* 10 no. 1 (Feb. 2007), 39-56.

Part III European welfare states under duress

- *Is socialism inimical to prosperity, entrepreneurship, dignity, and freedom, or can it promote these very things?*
- *Does socialism depend on racial, ethnic, and religious homogeneity, or can it promote a multicultural society that is welcoming to immigrants?*
- *Can socialism offer solutions to the challenges of global competition and to the threat that global capitalism poses to democratic self-determination?*
- *Can socialism offer solutions to the challenges of climate change and its threat to the values of equality, solidarity, sustainability, and quality of life?*

Neoliberalism

10/26 Garland, *Welfare State*, 81-114.

Jones and Lowe, *From Beveridge to Blair*, 26-28 (Friedrich Hayek), 30-31 (Keith Joseph), 53-54 (Margaret Thatcher), 93-99 (on the NHS).

Apted, *28 Up* (1984 film, 136 mins). Not required but strongly recommended; focus on attitudes toward Thatcher; we will briefly discuss in class.

Start Hanley (see below).

- 10/28 Lynsey Hanley, *Estates: An Intimate History* (London: Granta Books, 2017).

Multiculturalism

- 11/2 Alberto Alesina, Edward Glaeser, and Bruce Sacerdote, *Why Doesn't the US Have a European-Style Welfare System?*, Discussion Paper Number 1933, Harvard Institute of Economic Research (Nov. 2001), 1-12, 24-39.

Göran Therborn, "Twilight of Swedish Social Democracy," *New Left Review* 113 (Sept./Oct. 2018): 5-26.

Catrin Lundström and Benjamin R. Teitelbaum, "Nordic Whiteness: An Introduction," *Scandinavian Studies* 89 no. 2 (Summer 2017): 151-58.

- 11/4 Deniz Göktürk, David Gramling, and Anton Kaes (eds.), *Germany in Transit: Nation and Migration, 1955-2005* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 156 (very bottom)-73, 371-75, 490-91.

Globalization

- 11/9* Garland, *Welfare State*, 115-38.

Jeremy Cliffe, "Why the EU would prefer a no-deal Brexit to a deal undermining the European social model," *New Statesman*, Dec. 10, 2020.

Daniel Vaughan-Whitehead (ed.), *The European Social Model in Crisis: Is Europe Losing its Soul?* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2015), 1-10.

- 11/11 *Veterans' Day (no class)*

- 11/16* Thomas Piketty, *Time for Socialism: Dispatches from a World on Fire, 2016-2021* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), pages TBA.

Climate change

- 11/18* “The **Umbau** Program: The Transformation of Industrial Society (1986),” in Margit Mayer and John Ely (eds.), *The German Greens: Paradox Between Movement and Party* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 267-93.
- Atle **Midttun** and Lennart Olsson, “Eco-modernity Nordic Style: The Challenge of Aligning Ecological and Socio-economic Sustainability,” in Nina Witoszek and Atle Midttun (eds.), *Sustainable Modernity: The Nordic Model and Beyond* (London: Routledge, 2018), 204-28.
- 11/23* Guest visit via Zoom from Björn Junge at the Technische Universität Chemnitz (Germany). Björn will discuss the September 2021 German elections with particular emphasis on the Greens. As a scholar of political language and rhetoric, he will also comment on the resonance of terms like *Sozialismus*, *Wohlfahrtsstaat*, and *Umwelt* in German politics and culture, which we can then contrast with their English cognates. Short readings TBA.
- 11/25 *Thanksgiving (no class)*
- Part IV** **Beyond capitalism?**
- *Is Western liberal-democratic capitalism undergoing a crisis (whether since 2020, 2016, 2008, or longer) to which socialism offers a plausible remedy?*
 - *Will socialists in fact gain political power in Western democracies in the coming years? What reforms and transformations might they enact if so?*
 - *Reflecting back on this course, what have we learned about the ordinary people for whom socialism is designed, and what lessons does this hold for participatory democracy in the future?*
- 11/30 Read ~10 newspaper or magazine articles and/or listen to ~3 podcasts on socialism with the above questions in mind. I will post and continually update a long list of relevant choices on Canvas and/or you can find your own by consulting the “Publications and podcasts” list above (or comparable venues). Also review your class notes and earlier class readings. Come prepared to discuss.
- 12/2 Automated laptop slideshow exhibit for independent research projects. Food, drink, conversation, mingling, and competition-free solidarity! ☺