

TEACHING DOSSIER

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McMaster University
Faculty of Social Science – Department of Labour Studies

Working Precariously: Labour Strategies, Labour Renewal
LABR 4H03E
Fall 2014

Class Time and Location:

Wednesdays, 7-10 pm
MDCL 1016

Instructor:

Konstantin Kilibarda
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Course Description

Precarious work is commonly associated with low wage, low skill, temporary and casual work. Yet in the neoliberal era precarity has become widespread across all sectors, occupations and professions, and income levels. In the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis, both nation states and transnational corporations have justified the attack on standard employment by claiming that lower wages, reduced benefits, and greater worker flexibility are key to restoring competitiveness, balancing budgets, and spurring economic recovery. To confront the paradigmatic shift to non-standard employment, unions worldwide have engaged in a range of strategies to rebuild not only power and density but also relevance, particularly among groups once considered peripheral to the organized workforce. This course will examine the response by unions and their allies to the growing crisis of precarity within the broader context of renewal. Topics will include strategies for labour renewal, new forms of unionism, innovative workplace tactics, growing linkages between labour and social movements, and new political initiatives in Canada and globally. Students will consider these responses by critically assessing and presenting case studies of emerging forms of precarity.

Required Texts

1. Course Kit
2. Online Articles

Evaluation

Weekly Summary (Week 2 – Week 12)	- 10%
Film Review (October 8)	- 20%
Participation (whole term)	- 20%
Group presentations (Week 5 – Week 11)	- 20%
Final Paper (November 5) (December 3)	- 30%

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COURSE CALENDAR AND REQUIRED READINGS

SECTION 1

PRECARITY, LABOUR RENEWAL AND INTERSECTIONALITY

WEEK 1

COURSE INTRODUCTION

- Course overview, including assignments, readings, group presentations, and key themes.
- Group work and discussion questions based on in-class video *Setting the Stage for Union Renewal: Changing Demographics in the Workforce* (CLC 2014).

WEEK 2

UNDERSTANDING THE FOUNDATIONS OF 'PRECARITY' IN THE 21ST CENTURY

WSQ: How does neoliberal precarity impact trade unions' ability to organize workers?

- Guy Standing. 2011. "Ch1: The precariat" in *The Precariat*. pp. 1-25.
- Jennifer Silva. 2013. "Coming of Age in the Risk Society" pp. 3-25.
- Emily Martin. 1994. "Educating and Training at Work" in *Flexible Bodies*. 207-226.
- United Way and McMaster University. (2013). "It's More than Poverty: Employment Precarity And Household Well Being" (report summary). PEPSO.

WEEK 3

UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMICS OF 'LABOUR RENEWAL'

WSQ: What is meant by 'labour renewal'? What are the main challenges and opportunities for union organizing in the current era of neoliberalism?

- Ruth Milkman and Kim Voss. 2004. "Introduction" to *Rebuilding Labour*.
- Ross and Savage. 2012. "Rethinking the Politics of Labour in Canada" in *Rethinking the Politics of Labour in Canada* (Fernwood Publishing).
- Andrew Loewen. 2013. Canadian union round-table "From the Ground up" (Part I) & "The Unmaking of the Canadian Working Class" (Part II) in *Jacobin Magazine*.
- *Community Organizing Handbook* (University of Denver 2014 - selected passages, pg. 6-11, 19-35) + the Community Organizing Toolkit (*interactive game*).
- Five Ways Unions Are Trying To Get Their Mojo Back (Think Progress 2014).

WEEK 4

RETHINKING INTERSECTIONS OF CLASS AND IDENTITY

WSQ: How has greater attention to the intersectionality of race, class and gender in the workplace contributed to union renewal? What are the challenges of this approach?

- Jan Kainer. 2009. "Gendering Union Renewal: Women's Contributions to Labour Movement Revitalization."
- Miriam Edelson. 2009. "Confronting Racism in the Canadian Labour Movement" in *Unions, Equity and the Path to Renewal*.
- "Labour Power Among the Rank and File" (RankAndFile.ca 2014) | "CLC: New Leader, Same Challenges" (RankandFile.ca 2014) | "The Experience of One Young Worker at the CLC Convention" (RankandFile.ca 2014) | "Interview: Jessica Burnie, New CLC Rep for Workers with Disabilities" (RankandFile.ca 2014).
- Walia, Harsha. 2013. "Waves of Resistance" in *Undoing Border Imperialism*. pp. 205-220.

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SECTION 2

LABOUR RENEWAL CAMPAIGNS IN AN AGE OF PRECARIETY

WEEK 5

CASE STUDY 1: JUSTICE FOR JANITORS (J4J) AND THE NEW COMMUNITY UNIONISM

Your film review of *Bread and Roses* (2000) is due in class.

- *Telling the Story of Justice for Janitors* (video compilation) and J4J resources on the SEIU website (About Us | History | The J4J Difference).
- Preston Rudy. 2004. “‘Justice for Janitors,’ not ‘Compensation for Custodians’: The Political Context and Organizing” in *Rebuilding Labour: Organizing and Organizers in the New Union Movement*.
- “Yes we Can! Miami’s Janitors Struggle for Justice” in *Beyond the Fields*. Pp. 97-120.
- Working Women Center’s “Scouring City, Brushing Sky” (Toronto-based community art project – this [website](#) and view photos at this [website](#)).

WEEK 6

CASE STUDY 2: UNIONIZING SERVICES AND FIGHTING FOR A LIVING WAGE

WSQ: Based on the readings, what are the main challenges of organizing low-wage service workers? How have campaigns like OUR Walmart, FastFood Forward, the #FightFor15 and \$14NOW campaigns overcome these obstacles?

- “Selling in Minnesota” from *Nickel and Dimed* (2010).
- “The Life of a Fast Food Striker” in *The New Yorker* (2013).
- The other NRA: Ensuring poverty wages (Salon 2013) | Exclusive: Private documents reveal how restaurant lobby monitors fast food protests (Salon 2014) | Restaurant lobby blocks living wage for fast food workers (Al Jazeera America 2014).
- Websites: OUR Walmart (website) | FastFood Forward (website) | Restaurant Opportunities Centre (website) | FightFor15 (website) | Fair Wages Now (website).

WEEK 7

CASE STUDY 3: WORKER ACTION CENTERS AND ORGANIZING THE UNORGANIZED

WSQ: What purpose do WACs serve? How have they contributed to the renewal of trade unionism in North America? What limitations do they face on their organizing?

- Janice Ruth Fine. 2006. “Origins and Characteristics of Worker Centres” in *Worker Centers: Organizing at the Edge of the Dream*. Cornell University Press.
- Peck and Theodore. 2001. “Contingent Chicago: Restructuring the Spaces of Temporary Labour” in *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*.
- Aziz Choudry and Mostafa Henaway. 2014. “Temporary Agency Worker Organizing in an Era of Contingent Employment” in *Global Labour Journal*.
- Worker Action Center. 2011. “Unpaid Wages, Unprotected Workers: A Survey of Employment Standards Violations”
- Related websites: WAC-Toronto (website) | IWC-Montreal (website).

WEEK 8

CASE STUDY 4: EMERGING ECONOMIES AND NEW INDUSTRIAL WORKFORCES

WSQ: What are some of the main challenges to organizing throughout the global South? How have unions across the global South responded to neoliberal globalization?

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- John Bellamy Foster, Robert W. McChesney and R. Jamil Jonna. 2011. “The Global Reserve Army of Labor and the New Imperialism” *New Left Review*.
- Tim Pringle and Simon Clarke. 2010. “The Challenge of Worker Activism” in *The Challenge of Transition: Trade Unions in Russia, China and Vietnam*. Palgrave.
- Frederic C. Deyo. 2012. “Political Tensions of Reform: Labour Opposition and Public Disorder” in *Reforming Asian Labour Systems: Economic Tensions and Worker Dissent*.
- “China in Revolt” by Eli Friedman in *Jacobin* (2012) | “South Korea Rail Workers Strike against Privatization” in *Labor Notes* (2014).
- In class film (excerpts from): *Maquilapolis* (2006).

WEEK 9

CASE STUDY 5: THE CARCERAL ECONOMY AND ORGANIZING PRISON LABOUR

WSQ: What is the role of prisons in regulating the working class under neoliberalism? What are some responses that prisoners themselves have undertaken to challenge these conditions?

- Loic Wacquant. 2012. “Three Steps to a Historical Anthropology of Actually Existing Neoliberalism” in *Journal of Social Anthropology*.
- Genevieve LeBaron. 2012. “Rethinking Prison Labor: Social Discipline and the State in Historical Perspective” in *The Journal of Labour and Society*. pp. 327-351.
- Legal Scholar: Jim Crow Still Exists In America (NPR 2012) | “Prison to Table: The Other Side of the Whole Foods Experience” (Dissent Magazine 2014) | “The Dirty South: GA Prisoners on Lockdown for Liberty” The Crunk Feminist Collective (2010) | “Georgia Prisoners End Protest but Continue Demands” (ColorLines 2010) | “Georgia Prison Strike: A Hidden Labour Force Resists” (In These Times 2010).

WEEK 10

CASE STUDY 6: BEYOND THE ‘CREATIVE CLASS,’ CULTURAL WORKERS ORGANIZE

WSQ: Is cultural work different from other forms of work? How have cultural workers sought to build solidarities with other types of workers in recent years?

- Rosalind Gill and Andy Pratt. 2008. “In the Social Factory? Immaterial Labour, Precariousness and Cultural Work” in *Theory, Culture & Society*.
- Greig de Peuter. 2014. “Beyond the Model Worker: Surveying the Creative Precariat” in *Culture Unbound: The Journal of Current Cultural Research*.
- “Frieze sits down with New York labour unions” (The Art Newspaper 2014) | “Solidarity Wins! Frieze New York Goes Union” (Arts & Labor, 2014) | “Working the Global Art Market” (LeftEast 2014) | “Protestors Urge Guggenheim to Aid Abu Dhabi Workers” (NYT 2014) | Mass Arrival Art Action Challenges Racism & Refugee Laws (Canadian Art 2013).
- Websites: Arts & Labor (website) | GulfLabor (website) | Cultural Workers Organize (website)

WEEK 11

CASE STUDY 7: ORGANIZING WORKERS AT GLOBAL SPORTING EVENTS

WSQ: What is the role of global sporting events in deepening neoliberal austerity? What are the conditions confronting workers at these events and what have been some grassroots responses?

- Dave Zirin. 2014. “Neoliberal Trojan Horses and Sporting Shock Doctrines” in *Brazil’s Dance with the Devil: The World Cup, the Olympics and the Fight for Democracy*.
- Human Rights Watch. 2013. “Race to the Bottom: Exploitation of Migrant Workers Ahead of Russia’s 2014 Winter Olympic Games.” pp. 1-9, 21-46.
- A World Cup for all – introducing the Poor People’s World Cup (War on Want 2010) | VIDEO: ‘The World Cup is Nothing to Me’ (The Guardian 2010) | VIDEO: World Cup 2014: Who Wins the

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Match? | Brazil: Dangerous brew of police abuses and impunity threatens to mar World Cup (Amnesty International 2014) | Eva Hershaw. “Homeless Families in São Paulo Are Occupying the World Cup” (Vice News 2014) | Paula Dalbert. “Brazil's evicted 'won't celebrate World Cup’” (Al Jazeera 2014) | Hadley Freeman. “How Brazil’s World Cup has sold its people short in the Amazon” (The Guardian 2014) | Priyanka Motaparthy. “It’s Like Jail Here: Watching the World Cup Finals in the Labor Camps of Qatar” (Foreign Policy 2014).

SECTION 3

THE FUTURE OF LABOUR UNIONS

WEEK 12

A GLOBAL TRADE UNION MOVEMENT? BIG IDEAS FOR 21ST CENTURY LABOUR

WSQ: What are some of the ‘big ideas’ animating global labour activism? In your opinion do any of these campaigns have the potential of creating a truly global working class movement?

- Beverly J. Silver. 2003. “Contemporary Dynamics in World Historical Perspective” in *Forces of Labor: Workers’ Movements and Globalization since 1870*. pp. 168-180.
- Michael Fichter, Markus Helfen, and Katarina Schiedereg. 2013. “Transnational Solidarity and Global Production Networks” in *Transnational Trade Unionism: Building Union Power*.
- Leveques, Hennebert and Fairbrother. 2013. “Futures of Transnational Trade Unionism” in *Transnational Trade Unionism: Building Union Power*.
- ILO. 2013. *Sustainable Development, Decent Work and Green Jobs*. Pp.1-28.
- “Minimum Wage Wars: Time for a global minimum wage?” *The Current*, CBC 2014 (audio file) | Jason Hickel. “It’s Time for a Global Minimum Wage” (*Al Jazeera* 2013) | “What is a Global Basic Income” (GBI Foundation 2014).

WEEK 13

FILM SCREENING AND DISCUSSION

IN CLASS FILM: Vote for one of the following films to be shown in the last class.

Cesar Chavez (2014).

Last Train Home (2009).

Champ of the Camp (2013).

Hands Up / Les Mains en L’Air (2010).

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COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION

WEEKLY SUMMARY QUESTIONS (10%) – Every Week.

Each week has a ‘weekly summary question’ (WSQ). You are to answer the question in 300 (min) to 500 words (max) drawing on the required readings, websites, videos, and interactive guides for the week. Students will be graded for their demonstrated knowledge of the assigned weekly materials and their ability to integrate these into a concise answer to the weekly question. Consider this a useful classroom preparation exercise. All weekly summaries are to be handed in at the beginning of class for that week.

IN CLASS PARTICIPATION (20%) – Every Week

The course will be run seminar style. To derive the maximum benefit and enjoyment from a seminar style course, it is important that you come to class prepared by completing required readings, developing one of two key questions and/or observations about the week’s topic you will raise, and ready to fully participate in all discussions. In seminar style classes, the instructor and students have an equally important contribution to make toward one another’s learning. In this spirit, I would ask that students shut off cell phones and refrain from using computers and tablets during class unless otherwise agreed.

FILM REVIEW ASSIGNMENT (20%) – October 8.

In 1,000 words explain how the film *Bread and Roses* depicts the ‘Justice 4 Janitors’ campaigns of the late-1980s/early-1990s that are described in the Week 5 readings. The film can be found on reserve at the Mills Memorial Library. While watching the movie, ask yourself: what are the similarities and differences between the on-screen portrayal of these struggles and the real campaigns that took place? What were some of the key challenges of organizing custodial staff and how were these overcome (in the film and in real life)? What role did issues like race, gender and class play in the campaign to unionize custodial workers and win a contract for them (in the film and in real life)?

GROUP PRESENTATION ASSIGNMENT (20%) – Week 5 to Week 11.

Students will be formed into groups during the first class. Each group will be responsible to lead the class discussion for one of the seven case studies in the course by reading the required literature on their topic and preparing an hour long participatory presentation using a pre-approved format (i.e. lecture style presentation; arts based presentations such as digital storytelling or photo-story; auto-ethnography; qualitative interviews and/or field observation). During this hour it is expected that you will engage students and provide ample opportunities for classroom participation and discussion (i.e. your presentation is not a monologue, but should respect the seminar format of the class).

FINAL PAPER (30%) – November 5 (proposal) and December 3 (final paper).

Students are expected to hand in a final, 15-page paper by the end of the term. The paper will: (1) compare and contrast two worker organizing drives, (2) assess the main challenges confronted by organizers in each case, (3) explore how these challenges were overcome or failed to be overcome; and, (4) discuss what these cases can tell us about the prospects for labour renewal. Students should hand in a 500-word proposal by November 5, outlining their chosen case studies and an outline of their paper. The final papers are to be at least 3,750 words (15 pages) and should be well researched, persuasively argued, and properly cited. Students will be graded on their ability to integrate core ideas from the course into their paper and on the quality of the research done. Case studies can be drawn from those explored in the course, or from outside the curriculum; however, they should be based on organizing campaigns from the past two decades (i.e. since the mid-1990s).