LABOR AND GLOBAL WORKERS’ RIGHTS (LGWR)

LGWR 510: International Labor Law

3 Credits

Seminar exploring international labor law, including its standards, reviewing bodies, procedures, information sources, remedies, and overall strengths and weaknesses. LGWR 510 International Labor Law (3) Because globalized production systems call for globalized rules for workplace rights, a body of international labor law is rapidly developing. Designed principally for global labor activists, this course equips students to evaluate the role that international labor law – its sources, participants, mechanisms, and remedies - plays in the promotion of labor rights in the global economy. A centerpiece of the course looks at the International Labor Organization, whose complex processes introduce students to the generally "soft" rules of international workplace regulation. Beyond the ILO, the course looks at other bodies - some global, others regional or bilateral - that require or encourage compliance with decent working standards. It also addresses how private parties can create either voluntary "codes of conduct" or negotiated framework agreements spelling out labor rights. Across all of these topics, students take up cases covering the broad range of labor struggles (affecting unions, children, women, immigrants, forced laborers, etc.). Critical to the course is the student's gaining familiarity with the surprising variety of information available on working conditions around the globe. As the course progresses, students are asked to formulate opinions on which international labor law forum holds the greatest potential to help with selected worker rights issues in selected countries. Students will review evidence suggesting that labor activists make their best use of international labor law when they link legal action to outreach, education, research, and "on the ground" organizing to enhance chances for success.

LGWR 520: Global Workers’ Rights

3 Credits

This course analyzes struggles to promote workers’ rights across a variety of economic, political, and geographic contexts. The stakes of such efforts are high at a time when worker movements face a barrage of new and old challenges. Political attacks, privatization, capital mobility, and automation have contributed to a decades-long decline in union membership in many of labor’s traditional strongholds. Meanwhile, the vast majority of the world’s workers-particularly women, immigrants, and informal workers-remain unorganized. In this course we will ask, what is the relationship between transformations in global political and economic processes, local labor control regimes and working conditions, and forms of worker resistance? What is the role of such movements in increasing the power of women, people of color, LGTBIQ people, and immigrants? What catalyzes worker organizations to expand their focus from members’ narrow economic interests to broader struggles for social justice, human rights, and democracy? The first unit of this course analyzes classical and contemporary theories of capitalist development, workplace control, and worker resistance. We will develop a sociological approach that understands workers not as free agents, but as actors embedded in economic, political, and cultural structures. In the second unit, we will analyze the history of the U.S. labor movement, paying careful attention to the way that work has been structured by class strata, gender, race, and region, and the implications for workers’ self-organization. The third unit focuses on case studies of worker movements in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America. Cross-national comparisons will provide leverage for analyzing the complex interaction between movement contexts, ideologies, strategies, and outcomes. We will study how worker movements are shaped and constrained by the states within which they are embedded, but also, how they can sometimes transform the state—for example, by pushing for democratic transitions and workers’ rights policies. The fourth unit addresses pressing challenges facing the contemporary global labor movement and potential pathways forward. We will analyze innovative strategies for organizing informal workers, building global labor solidarity, and forging alliances between the labor and climate justice movement.

LGWR 530: Chinese Labor Rel

3 Credits

Since it opened its economy to private investment in 1978, China’s planned economy has been turned into a market-driven economy. Relying heavily on export-oriented industries, China serves as a ‘spatial fix’ for Western capital, which eagerly searches for new sites of investment and business opportunities. As a result, China has become a gigantic manufacturing hub and the second largest economy in the world. The massive inflow of foreign investment, the pro-business developmental strategies of the Chinese state, and weak legal enforcement of workers’ rights have rendered workers victims of economic reform. This course will examine labor relations in post-socialist China. It will cover topics such as the development of China’s economic reform, the employment and working conditions of workers, trade unions and the collective bargaining system, the state’s role in employment relations, the labor law system, and the role of civil society and non-governmental organizations in the country’s labor relations. In addition to China, this course will focus on Vietnam (another post-communist country in Asia), and Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea (three of the four Asian Tigers). It will investigate how these countries are similar to or different from China in terms of socio-economic development and labor relations. Moreover, the course examines labor relations in China and other countries by drawing upon analytical and theoretical concepts on subjects such as the state, the legal system, the economic system, class relations, and civil society.

LGWR 540: Research Methods in labor and Global Workers’ Rights

3 Credits

This course introduces students to social science research methods and writing skills as they relate to workers and labor policy.

LGWR 550: Protest in the Fields: Agricultural Workers and Rural Organizing in a Global Context

3 Credits

The agricultural industry accounts for an enormous share of the global political economy, employing 1 billion people and representing 1 in 3 of all workers. Nonetheless, the organization of agricultural workers is often dismissed as too difficult, given the precariousness, isolation, citizenship status, and technological displacement of these workers. This course provides a broad exploration of these global and national shifts in food production, tracing the transformations in the agricultural sector and the labor conditions of agricultural workers in the United States and across Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Europe. It considers how agricultural workers have developed new and innovative organizing strategies to demand economic and political rights. Drawing on diverse examples from the United Farm Workers to the global farmers’ organization La Via
Campesina (the Peasant Way), we will discuss the struggles for rural unions, environmental rights, land access, and food sovereignty. The goal of the course is to provide students with an overview of how the agricultural sector reproduces racial, economic, gender, and national inequities, while also highlighting the potential power that agricultural workers hold to reshape and reconfigure the global economic system. The first half of the course offers an overview of the political and economic history of the agricultural sector, beginning in the eighteenth century and extending to the current day. This part of the course analyzes the shift from small-family farming to industrial agricultural production, as well as particular issues such as women’s access to land, the role of international agencies that regulate the agricultural sector, and the rise of organic farming. Building on these insights, students will develop an original thesis and write a paper that explores how these changes in agricultural production unfolded in one particular country. The second half of the course analyzes how rural populations have organized for workers’ rights within this shifting industry. This section of the course examines a diverse range of rural organizing efforts, from slave revolts to farmer and farmworker movements to transnational attempts to promote food sovereignty.

LGWR 560: Gender, Race and Labor in Comparative Perspective

3 Credits

This seminar takes a broad approach to gender by placing it into conversation with race and ethnicity, as well as other lines of difference and inequality, including class, nation, and age, thinking through the dynamic relationship between gender, race and labor from a variety of situated and comparative perspectives. The course begins with two orienting, interwoven perspectives: first, feminist efforts to bring women’s experiences, in all their diversity, from the margins to the center of knowledge; and second, the use of gender as a category of analysis in this way, we will understand gender as relational, in order to study and learn from the lives and experiences of men and trans people, as well as women. Lectures, discussions, and readings in this seminar will draw upon ideas from a range of academic disciplines, addressing questions around intersectionality theory, masculinities, the global division of reproductive labor, and gendered labor and the state all within the context of a transnational and always globalizing world, but with a focus on gender and race-taken together as an intersectional, critical lens of analysis for understanding multiple relations of power in which we are all embedded, and which shape our experiences. Though gender is an aspect of all social life, this course pays particular attention to gendered and racialized dynamics in the workplace, in the labor process, and in everyday working lives. This course will examine changes in occupational segregation on the basis of race, gender, and immigration status, with a focus on low-wage workers and the growing informal sector. It will also investigate those workers’ particular sets of challenges for recognition by the state, unions, and worker centers. And through a comparative, critical perspective, this course focuses the study of gender, race and labor across global and transnational spaces.

LGWR 596: Individual Studies

1-9 Credits/Maximum of 9

Creative projects, including nonthesis research, that are supervised on an individual basis and which fall outside the scope of formal courses.