

Union for Radical Political Economics (URPE) at the 2011 Left Forum

Pace University, NYC • March 18-20 • www.urpe.org • www.leftforum.org

Capitalism, Climate Change and Social Conflicts

SESSION 1 SATURDAY 10:00AM-11:50AM ROOM: E326

Brian Tokar • Chris Williams • Younes Abouyoub

This panel will address how the capitalist mode of production exacerbates climate change and the consequences of this phenomenon for social relations. The focus will be on the broad social justice implications of the climate crisis and how this phenomenon participates in triggering violent local and regional conflicts around the world, while mainstream narrative continues to construe these recurrent conflicts solely in terms of ethnic and religious strife. It will also explore the potential for international conflicts in the future. Discussions will cover the spectrum of underlying causes such as drought and food shortages, and how current climate science predicts their rapidly rising occurrence.

Democratic and Participatory Economics

SESSION 2 SATURDAY 12:00PM-1:50PM ROOM: W605

Al Campbell • Alba Delgado Riano, Spain • John Cronan, Jr.

This panel will be about the issue in a post-capitalist society of workers running their worksites themselves (or in conjunction with other affected sectors of society). The three talks are different in nature and complementary. The first talk will be on both theory and practice, starting with the contribution of Spanish anarchists in the 1930s to the theory of self-management and then talking about the links between that and ICEA (Instituto de Ciencias Económicas y de la Autogestión - Institute of Economic and Self-management Sciences) practice now. The second speaker will look at what the extensive worker participation in management in the non-socialist Mondragón complex of coops can teach us of value for worker participation under socialism. The third speaker will talk about various ways people from their group are working to put the ideas of PARECON into practice in today's capitalist USA as part of building a movement to transcend capitalism toward a society like PARECON.

Is Fair Trade a Viable Model of Solidarity Economics?

SESSION 2 SATURDAY 12:00PM-1:50PM ROOM: W604

Chisara Ehiemere • Daniel Salcedo • Rodney North • Tamara Stenn

During the years of the Fair Trade movement's long, slow "birth" (approximately 1950 to 2000) most of its participants and advocates sought to create alternatives to the conventional marketplace and thereby develop what we would now call a solidarity economy. However, more recently Fair Trade practices have also garnered the attention of many corporations and – for a variety of motivations – hundreds of conventional firms now import 10 times the quantity of Fair Trade certified products as do 'solidarity' importers. Does this mean that a once utopian model has successfully taken root in the capitalist marketplace? Or does it represent a cooption and dilution of Fair Trade ideals? Our four panelists will bring four different perspectives, some conflicting, on the Fair Trade economy today, including how it is – or is not – changing industries, communities and producer/consumer relationships.

Global Warming and Economic Cooling: Causes and Fight-back Strategies

SESSION 3 SATURDAY 3:00PM-4:50PM ROOM: LHS

Gelvin Stevenson • Michael Tanzer • Winona LaDuke

The framework for this panel is that there are basic similarities, as well as important differences, between the crises of climate change and that of the global economy. Some of the commonalities which will be explored are the focus on a short time horizon, denials of the existence of a serious problem, incorrect identification of the villains, and the danger of "tipping points" being reached beyond which situations spiral out of control. Interactions between the two crises will also be explored, e.g., use of the economic crisis as an excuse to avoid steps to help curb the climate crisis. Finally, strategies will be discussed for dealing with both crises.

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From Bank Bailouts to Fiscal Austerity: Organizing to Fight the Budget Cuts

SESSION 4 SATURDAY 5:00PM-6:50PM ROOM: W605

Christopher Rude • David Kotz • Stephen Lerner • Colia Lafayette Clark • CHAIR: Sara Burke

Massive coordinated interventions by the capitalist state returned the banks to profitability. For everyone else, the end of the financial crisis in 2009 marked the settling in of second and third order crisis effects in the form of falling incomes and employment, greater poverty and inequality, foreclosures, homelessness and – in the advanced but not the emerging-market economies – rising budget deficits. The same countries that pushed through the “bank bailout” now intend to resolve these deficits through “austerity” cuts in spending on health, education, retirement benefits and other social spending. The banking crisis has become a fiscal crisis. Panelists will discuss the return to budget cutting and attacks on social spending in the United States and Europe, the likely size of the budget cuts and their effects on workers, the need for radical, direct action-based resistance and the challenges to promoting solidarity among different groups of workers, in the context of right-wing efforts to divide them.

The Struggle against Mainstream Economic Ideology

SESSION 4 SATURDAY 5:00PM-6:50PM ROOM: E321

Doug Henwood • Howard Sherman • Michael Meeropol • Michael Perelman

The three papers will speak to different aspects of this essential issue, and with different viewpoints. Michael Perelman will directly address decoding economic ideology. Howard Sherman will present on the issue of getting political economy back into the undergraduate curriculum. Doug Henwood will talk about how all these years of trying to “correct” mainstream economic ideology have led him to the conclusion that it's nearly impossible: the “common sense” of the masses is so deeply formed by prevailing social and ideological structures that no amount of fact-checking is going to change that.

Global Imbalances and the Great Recession

SESSION 4 SATURDAY 5:00PM-6:50PM ROOM: LHN

Armagan Gezici • Bilge Erten • Josh Mason • Mathieu Dufour

Since the outbreak of the world financial crisis, global imbalances have taken center stage in the debate on the causes of the financial meltdown and the global economic outlook. This debate generally has had a sharp focus on China, pointing at deepening US current account deficits since the mid-1990s and sizable Chinese foreign exchange reserve accumulation since the early 2000s. On this panel, we will discuss whether the trade deficit with China and other surplus countries is really a major cause of unemployment in the US, as advocated by certain liberal think tanks. We will also discuss whether the current rise of wages and the inflation in China have the potential of curing global trade imbalances that involve China. We will also talk about the consequences of an increased role of the IMF as the newly found global institution to cure imbalances.

Causes and Cures of Unemployment

SESSION 5 SUNDAY 10:00AM-11:50AM ROOM: W619

Howard Sherman • Fadhel Kaboub • Michael Meeropol • David Van Arsdale

All three speakers will speak to the topic indicated by the title, with significantly different ideas though all from progressive left and/or socialist frames.

Building the Socialist Alternative: History, Theory, and Radical Imagination

SESSION 6 SUNDAY 12:00PM-1:50PM ROOM: W619

Al Campbell • David Laibman • Julio Huato • Victor Alvarez Rodriguez

— Sponsored by Science & Society and URPE—

To be a serious guide to working-class and revolutionary movements, socialism must be envisioned in detail; it cannot be left at the level of abstract philosophical principles. Socialist theory must also draw upon the real experiences of post-capitalist societies, both positive and negative.