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EVERYWHERE

CONFERENCE

Capitalism, Crisis, and Global Reordering

Alternate Routes: A Journal of Critical Social Research

Tuesday June 23



Wednesday June 24, 2026

Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli

Viale Pasubio, 5, 20154 Milano, Italy



CONFERENCE

Capitalism, Crisis, and Global Reordering

Alternate Routes: A Journal of Critical Social Research

We are living through a time of profound transformation—an era in which the only constant is change and instability. From economic malaise and international uncertainty to political unpredictability, war, genocide, and hunger, volatility now shapes all spheres of social life.

As Marx and Engels long ago observed, “All fixed, fast-frozen relations... are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify.” Today, the logic of capital continues to unravel the social fabric, remaking the world at an ever-increasing pace.

Industrial production is being reshaped by artificial intelligence and automation, demanding new raw materials and reorganized global value chains. Free trade orthodoxy is eroding, giving way to a resurgence of tariffs, protectionism, and nationalist economic policy.

The geopolitical landscape is shifting rapidly, marked by trade wars, real wars, and a renewed scramble for space— territorial and in orbit. These upheavals are accelerating climate change, fuelling displacements, and sparking new forms of popular resistance – struggles not only for justice but for the survival of all life systems on Earth.

Alternate Routes: A Journal of Critical Social Research, in collaboration with the *Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli*, are pleased to welcome attendees to the international conference “Capitalism, Crisis and Global Reordering”.



Panels:

Panel 1 – Digital Capitalism and AI

Panel 2 – Anti-Colonial Theory, Memory and Narrative

Panel 3 – Labour, Class and Multipolar Transitions

Panel 4 – AI, Labour and Inequality

Panel 5 – Settler Colonialism and Dispossession

Panel 6 – Populism, Nationalism and the Far Right

Panel 7 – Migration, Borders and Policing

Panel 8 – Precarity, Class and Work

Panel 9 – Skills, Inequality and Critical Futures

Panel 10 – Culture, Ideology and Subjectivity

Panel 11 – Caring Empires: Decolonial and Anti-Colonial Reflections on Teaching and Practice in the Caring Professions

Panel 12 – Education, Austerity and Knowledge

Panel 13 – Finance, Corporate Power and Democratic Constraint

Panel 14 – Neoliberalism, Austerity and Crisis

Panel 15 – Digital Capitalism, Labour Regimes and Colonial Power

Panel 16 – Crisis, Temporality and Political Breakdown

Panel 17 – State Capitalism and Development

Panel 18 – Empire, Militarism and the Far-Right

Panel 19 – Labour Movements and Radical Pedagogy

Panel 20 – Authoritarianism and Geopolitical Power



Welcome Address:

This conference brings together scholars from across North America, Europe and Asia to examine how capitalism, technology, colonialism, labour and political crises permeate the early twenty-first century. What makes the conference significant is not only the breadth of its topics, but the way it situates emerging issues, especially artificial intelligence, digital capitalism, ecological crisis and authoritarianism, within longer histories of class struggle, imperialism and colonial domination. Conference themes demonstrate how contemporary crises cannot be understood in isolation from one another but are instead embedded in global systems of economic and political inequality.

This conference centres the struggles of working class communities. Across nearly every panel, there is a recognition that the defining conflicts of the twenty-first century are fundamentally labour questions in the broadest possible terms: who works, under what conditions, who benefits from technological change, and how power is organized within capitalist societies. In a time when mainstream discourse often assumes that class politics has disappeared or declined in relevance, this conference seeks to reassert the importance of working-class analysis and politics.

The working class today, both paid and unpaid, includes but is not limited to industrial workers, gig workers, care workers, informal labourers, migrants, digital workers, academic workers and precarious service-sector employees, among others. As Harry Braverman notes in *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, ‘classes, the class structure, the social structure as a whole, are not fixed entities, but an ongoing process, rich in change, transition and variation, and incapable of being encapsulated in formulas, no matter how analytically proper such forms may be.’ In this context, conference presentations demonstrate how capitalism continuously restructures labour in order to extract profit while weakening collective organization and worker bargaining power.

This emphasis is especially visible in panels such as “Labour, Class and Multipolar Transitions,” “AI, Labour and Inequality,” “Precarity, Class and Work,” and “Labour Movements and Radical Pedagogy.” These sessions highlight how economic insecurity and labour fragmentation have become defining features of modern capitalism. Presentations on wages for housework, peer-support worker unionization, informal labour and precarious employment show how many forms of socially necessary work remains undervalued, underpaid or invisible. These analyses are crucial because they connect everyday experiences of economic instability to larger structural transformations in capitalism.

The conference’s focus on labour is particularly important because it challenges dominant narratives surrounding artificial intelligence and automation. Much contemporary discussion about AI celebrates productivity gains and technological

innovation while ignoring the consequences for workers. By contrast, this conference approaches AI through the lens of labour relations and class power, and explores how AI technologies are being used to reorganize work, intensify surveillance, discipline labour and increase profitability for corporations while deepening insecurity for workers.

This perspective is crucial because technological change is never neutral. AI systems are introduced within existing power structures and unequal class relations, often allowing employers and governments to monitor workers more closely, automate jobs, weaken collective bargaining institutions, and expand precarious employment arrangements. The conference therefore frames AI not simply as a technological issue, but as a labour issue. The future of AI becomes inseparable from questions about democratic control, workplace rights, public ownership and economic justice.

The emphasis on working-class struggles also connects to broader discussions of inequality and social reproduction. Several panels highlight how capitalism depends not only on waged labour, but also on unpaid or underpaid forms of care work, domestic labour and community support systems. Discussions surrounding sex work, abolitionism and care economies point to the ways capitalism relies on gendered and racialized forms of labour that are often excluded from mainstream economic analysis. By foregrounding these issues, the conference expands the understanding of class struggle beyond factories and industrial workplaces to include housing, education, caregiving, migration and other spheres.

Presentations on settler colonialism and Indigenous resistance reveal how capitalist development has historically depended upon dispossession, racial and ethnic hierarchies, and unequal systems of global labour extraction. Working class politics here is not treated narrowly as an economic issue, but as part of a broader struggle against systems of domination that organize people differently according to race, nationality, gender, colonial status, and other markers of identity. Rather than treating colonialism as a historical phenomenon that has ended, many presenters argue that colonial logics continue to shape land ownership, migration systems, resource extraction and geopolitical conflict.

For example, papers examining migrant labour regimes in Europe and housing arrangements demonstrate how labour precarity often intersects with borders, policing and state violence. Migrant workers are frequently positioned as disposable labour forces within global capitalism, while Indigenous communities continue to resist resource extraction and land dispossession tied to capitalist accumulation. The conference therefore presents local labour struggles as inherently internationalist and anti-colonial. These discussions are significant in the current international context, where many countries are experiencing democratic erosion, expanding surveillance powers, political polarization and intensified border control regimes. In the context of an ongoing global refugee crises, rising anti-immigrant politics and the securitization of borders in Europe and North America, the conference positions migration not as an isolated humanitarian issue, but as a core feature of capitalist globalization and labour management.

Another important dimension of the conference is its attention to unionization and collective organization. In an era marked by declining union density and collective bargaining coverage in many countries, growing gig work and fractured workplaces, the conference repeatedly returns to the question of how workers can organize under these conditions. Discussions of unionizing peer-support workers, radical worker education and anti-fascist worker mobilization highlight the continuing importance of collective action. These presentations emphasize that labour movements remain one of the few organized forces capable of challenging corporations and governments, austerity and authoritarian politics.

This connection between labour struggle and democracy is central to the conference's broader political significance. Many presenters argue that rising authoritarianism, populism and far-right politics are linked to economic insecurity, weakened labour regimes and growing inequality. As workers lose economic stability and political representation, social frustration can be redirected into nationalism, xenophobia or authoritarian movements – easy scapegoats in times of social polarization. The rise of far-right politics is not simply a “cultural backlash,” but rooted in economic crises, austerity, declining public trust and intensified social inequality. Rebuilding democratic capacities therefore requires rebuilding working-class power through unions, public institutions and collective political movements.

The conference's emphasis on class also challenges the idea that globalization has made national labour politics obsolete. On the contrary, panels on state capitalism, multipolar transitions and global reordering demonstrate that international competition between states remains deeply connected to labour markets, production systems and resource extraction. The question of state power is, therefore, just as important today as ever. Whether discussing China's digital expansion, US imperialism, European austerity or Canadian state-Indigenous relations, the presentations reveal that underpinning labour exploitation and unequal economic relations are active and interventionist states which, as Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin note, ‘superintend’ *The Making of Global Capitalism*.

Importantly, the conference does not present labour struggles only in terms of paid-employment, suffering or defeat. Many papers also explore possibilities for resistance, democratic transformation and alternative futures. Presentations on democratic AI development, sustainability-oriented technologies, radical pedagogy, decolonial environmental care, and public service delivery point toward efforts to reimagine economic systems organized around human need rather than profit. These discussions reflect a belief that working-class movements remain central to any meaningful response to the climate crisis, technological disruption and democratic decline that have become a hallmark of our time.



One of the conference's most significant contributions lies in its interdisciplinary and international character. Scholars from sociology, political economy, philosophy, geography, labour studies, anthropology, education, cultural studies and others are brought into dialogue around shared questions of capitalism, crisis and resistance. This breadth reflects a growing recognition that contemporary global problems cannot be adequately understood within narrow disciplinary boundaries.

Ultimately, the conference reflects a broader intellectual and political moment marked by uncertainty about the future of democracy, work, technology and globalization itself. Across its panels, a central question emerges: how can societies respond to deepening inequalities, ecological breakdown, technological transformation, and authoritarian tendencies while imagining more democratic and emancipatory alternatives?

Despite narratives claiming that class has faded in importance, the conference demonstrates that struggles over wages, housing, technology, migration, care work, education, and wider systems of political and economic power are all fundamental struggles over labour and the distribution of social wealth. By connecting contemporary crises to histories of capitalism, colonialism and resistance, the conference provides a space not only for critique, but also for the development of new political and theoretical frameworks capable of addressing the challenges of the present era. By centering working-class experiences and labour politics, the conference provides a powerful critique of contemporary capitalism while also highlighting the enduring importance of collective resistance in shaping the possibility for more democratic and equitable futures.

Finally, a key strength of the conference is the social and collaborative atmosphere it fosters. Shared meals, receptions and informal gatherings create opportunities for participants to connect beyond their presentations and professional profiles. These moments encourage meaningful conversations, new friendships and lasting networks that often extend well beyond the conference itself. By bringing people together in a collegial and welcoming environment, the conference helps cultivate a sense of intellectual community grounded not only in academic exchange, but also in mutual support, shared engagement and solidarity. These commitments are at the heart of the conference and reflect the broader mission of *Alternate Routes: A Journal of Critical Social Research*, which is now in its 49th year as a forum for critical interdisciplinary scholarship and intellectual exchange.

* *Forthcoming in **Eutopia**, a newsletter of the Feltrinelli Foundation [available here](#).*

Carlo Fanelli is Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Social Science at York University (Toronto, Canada) and co-editor of *Alternate Routes: A Journal of Critical Social Research*.



PROGRAM

Tuesday June 23

9:00-9:30 | Conference Badge Pickup

Room: Sala Polifunzionale

9:30-10:00 | Welcome Remarks

Room: Sala Polifunzionale

Welcome Remarks: **Carlo Fanelli**, York University; **Salvatore Prinzi**, ISPF-CNR (National Research Council of Italy); **Massimiliano Tarantino**, Director of Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli; **Heather Whiteside**, University of Waterloo

10:00-11:30am | Panel 1 – Digital Capitalism and AI

Room: Sala Polifunzionale

Chair: **Steven Tufts**, York University

Rachael Mulvihill, Carnegie Mellon University

The Affective Automaton: AI, Capital, and Dystopian Narratives

This paper examines the representation of AI in contemporary dystopian fiction and film, where AI reflects the logics of the capitalist order that produced it. I analyze novels and films including Dave Eggers' *The Circle* (2013), *Her* (2013), and *Tron: Ares* (2025). AI serves as a site of both fear and misplaced empathy. In *The Circle*, technology succeeds too well, dissolving social fabric through total transparency and algorithmic management. The real antagonist is corporate infrastructure, not AI. In contrast, *Her* and *Tron: Ares* humanize AI, showing it capable of intimacy, emotion, and moral reasoning while highlighting corporate and state control. I term these narratives "affective automatons."

Mark Thomas, York University

Moments are (still) the Elements of Profit: Reflections on Working Time in an Era of Digital Capitalism

The organization of working time is central to social and economic change. Key developments include the normalization of long work hours, precarious employment, and the internalization of neoliberal time disciplines. These shifts harm work quality, job satisfaction, and health, prompting calls for greater work-life balance. Neoliberal governments have reinforced pressures through employer-oriented legislative measures. New digital technologies further enable monitoring and regulation of working time. Drawing on Marx's assertion that "[m]oments are the elements of profit," this paper revisits working time in the context of technological innovation, precarious employment, and struggles in the platform economy. Case studies include digital technologies in gig jobs and recent Canadian gig worker legislation, contributing to a critique of neoliberal time discipline and exploring strategies to counter contemporary working time pressures.



Peter Schadt, FAU Erlangen–Nürnberg

Foundations of a Theory of Value in the Twenty-First Century: On the Political Economy of Digitalization

With the rise of artificial intelligence, the most recent wave of digitalization has moved to the center of public attention and Marxist debate. Contributions such as Yanis Varoufakis's Technofeudalism have argued that "information" generates unproductive rents, suggesting we may be witnessing an "end of capitalism." In contrast, positions like Christin Fuchs's assert that "information work" itself produces value. Yet this is only the latest chapter in a broader controversy grounded in fundamentally different readings of Capital. Within this ongoing "Marxological debate," disputes revolve around conceptualizing information, labor, and value under contemporary technological conditions. Outside this circle, however, neoclassical and marginalist approaches still dominate mainstream economics, shaping much of public and academic discourse. This makes it necessary to critically analyze and systematically classify contributions from recent decades to formulate a theory of value adequate for the twenty-first century. Such a theory must neither unreflectively subsume "information" under value-producing labor nor elevate "rent" into a narrative about the supposed end of capitalism. Instead, it should clarify how digitalization transforms labor, property, and accumulation without abandoning the fundamental categories of critical political economy.

Jonathan Martineau, Concordia University

Algorithmic Capital: Accumulation, Power and Resistance in the Age of AI

This presentation is a summary of our forthcoming book, *Algorithmic Capital* (Verso, 2026). It will focus on defining the concept of algorithmic capital, the theoretical background of a critical theory of AI, and the thesis that capitalism has entered a new post-neoliberal historical stage.

10:00-11:30am | Panel 2 – Anti-Colonial Theory, Memory and Narrative

Room: Sala Della Peruta

Chair: **Alfredo Rosete**, Central Connecticut State University

Karim Pourhamzavi, Beijing Foreign Studies University

The Palestinian Question and the Iranian Anti-Colonial Logic

Western capitalist crises coincide with political shifts toward right-wing extremist parties. Traditional Marxist theories have simplified racism as a tool of the capitalist class to divide the working class. While this approach is rightly critiqued as



economistic, a careful reading of Marx remains necessary to conceptualize racism in modern bourgeois societies. Racism can only be accurately understood by recognizing the immanent political, not just economic, status of citizens in national states.

Joshua Graf, University of Osnabrück

Theorizing Racism with Marx beyond Marx

The current capitalist multi-crisis in Western countries is accompanied by a political shift toward right-wing (including extremist) parties. Many (left) scholars have attempted to make sense of this objective simultaneity. Materialist, especially Marxist, theories of racism have historically tended to conceptualize racism too simplistically as an instrument of the capitalist class to divide the working class and increase its power and capacity to exploit the proletariat. Racism was regarded as “the true secret of maintaining its power.” For good reasons, this dogmatic approach was rejected as economistic as well as class-reductionist. Nevertheless, this paper argues that a careful reading of Marx remains indispensable for conceptualizing the character of racism in modern bourgeois societies. It maintains that the phenomenon of racism can only be adequately grasped by understanding the immanently political, and not merely economic, status of citizens within modern nation-states. Along with many Marxist scholars, the paper shares the intention of understanding racism as a form of “ideology.” This approach makes it possible to see that racism is not a matter of individual irrationality, but must be understood in relation to its material base: the modern nation-state.

Ilona M. Otto, Wegener Center for Climate and Global Change

Socio-Metabolic Class Conflicts in the Anthropocene

In my talk I will propose a concept of socio-metabolic classes, that is a social stratification approach based not only on differences in terms of possessions or social status, but also on differences in how these groups can control and benefit from the planetary material cycles and energy flows or suffer the consequences of environmental degradation. Referring to consumption data, I will propose six global socio-metabolic classes and I will show distinctive patterns in the energy use of these classes. The results of the analysis show that large inequalities exist in the human appropriation of energy and natural resources. Targeted policy measures that address excessive appropriation of energy and natural resources are needed, as are expansions in infrastructure and institutional change that supports the wellbeing of humankind, and especially of the most marginalized classes.



Mathis Lehoux, McGill University

Fanon's Temporalities: Remembrance and Resistance in Fanon's Thinking

This philosophy paper examines the role of history and memory in Frantz Fanon's work. Against readings that treat the past and culture as dismissive or merely instrumental, I argue that *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth* reflect two antipodal relationships to history: one mystified, the other revolutionary. The movement between them denotes historical awakening through remembrance of colonized pasts and realization of foreclosed possibilities. I draw on Walter Benjamin's critical remembrance (*Eingedenken*) to show how revolution in *The Wretched of the Earth* continues and fulfills past resistance. Fanon's attempt to overcome the mythical and fatalistic constraints of colonial history makes his work especially relevant today.

10:00-11:30am | Panel 3 – Labour, Class and Multipolar Transitions

Room: Sala di Lettura

Chair: **Bryn Jones**, University of Bath

Donna Baines, University of British Columbia

Unionising Peer Support Workers in the Opioid Crisis in Vancouver, Canada

The overlapping crises of late neoliberalism generate new forms of work and groups of highly exploited workers. Workers hired for their lived experience in "vulnerable" communities form an under-researched, precarious group. This paper analyzes the precedent-setting unionization of harm reduction peers in Vancouver's DTES and the mobilization of conflicting moral discourses of support and care during the union drive. The Labour Relations Board adjudicated that peers were skilled and valued employees deserving a collective agreement, rejecting the employer's claim that they were paid volunteers. Drawing on twenty qualitative interviews, Moral Economy Theory highlights shifting power relations between management, workers, the union, and the community, the commodification of peer identities and expertise, the culture of struggle in the DTES, and the importance of centering vulnerable workers' voices.

Madison Albert, McGill University

Wages for Housework and Family Abolitionism; An Unhappy Marriage?

This thesis examines the relationship between the 1970s Wages for Housework (WfH) movement and contemporary family abolitionism, asking whether family abolition is conceptually entailed by WfH's critique of reproductive labour.

Recent abolitionist interpretations—most prominently those advanced by Sophie Lewis—argue that because unwaged reproductive labour is central to capitalist accumulation and gendered domination, the family, as the institution that privatizes care, must be abolished. Drawing on foundational WfH texts by Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Selma James, and Silvia Federici, this thesis offers a critical reconstruction of this interpretation. I argue that it relies on a functionalist mode of reasoning that conflates institutions with the functions they perform. While reproductive labour is necessary for capitalism, it does not follow that the family is the necessary institution through which it must be organized. WfH, properly understood, targets the organization and valuation of reproductive labour rather than the family as such. The thesis then turns to the normative stakes of this distinction. Engaging Catherine MacKinnon's critique, I argue that while remunerating reproductive labour can increase women's autonomy—particularly by reducing economic dependence—it does not, on its own, resolve the gendered division of labour or eliminate relations of male domination. Taken together, the thesis clarifies the scope of WfH as a feminist political project: it offers a powerful critique of the privatization of care without entailing family abolition, and its limitations point not to abolition, but to the need for broader transformations in the organization and distribution of reproductive labour.

Sabah Alnasseri, York University

Transitioning to a Multipolar World Order: Back to Ibn Khaldun

In the prison notebooks, Gramsci characterized the crisis-ridden temporal gap between the decline of an old order and the transition to a new one as follows: the period is marked by the rise of fascist and populist forces that exploit uncertainty to restore the status quo ante of a dying order. Yet this interregnum is a contested space whose outcome is anything but certain. It is a moment of contestation over political power and leadership, where different projects with different ideological outlooks compete to establish a new order. The transition, a qualitatively significant temporal gap, to new orders requires a dialectical methodology for understanding. Just as history does not follow a straight progression on a unilinear timeline but unfolds with an open horizon—allowing regression and reversal and refusing confinement by clearly defined boundaries—so too must historical-dialectical concepts, characterized by constant movement. Based on a historical materialist methodology, we can identify criteria for the rise, fall, and transition of great powers and world orders, drawing lessons for a sustainable pluralistic system. This paper turns to the fourteenth-century Arab historian and political sociologist Ibn Khaldun in his *Muqaddimah* to define such criteria and draw lessons from the decline and fall of global powers.

Iqra Anugrah, University of Turin

Radical Origins of Capitalist Modernization in Cold War Indonesia: Early Findings

This paper offers a new interpretive reading of the role of economic technocrats behind the rise of capitalist modernization in Cold War Indonesia. Disillusioned by the perceived disastrous autarkic statism of Sukarno and the revolutionary fervor of the communists and the masses, the Berkeley Mafia of US-trained Indonesian economists saw market economy as a rational solution for Indonesia's underdevelopment and implemented the authoritarian New Order regime's brand of capitalist reforms under their aegis.

11:30-12:00pm | Coffee Break

Room: Sala Polifunzionale

12:00-1:30pm | Panel 4 – AI, Labour and Inequality

Room: Sala Polifunzionale

Chair: **Jen Wrye**, North Island College

Tracy Smith-Carrier and **Nicole Kudor**, Royal Roads University

Income Inequality and Poverty in Canada in the Era of AI

As AI reshapes the world, little is known about how its uptake will influence income inequality and poverty. Li and Dobbs (2025) argue that high-complementarity occupations, which require advanced education and decision-making skills, are most likely to benefit from AI, while low-complementarity roles face greater automation risks. This could deepen income disparities and reinforce polarization (Rau & Stokes, 2024). This study uses a critical theoretical lens and reflexive thematic analysis to explore perspectives of AI leaders (n = 5–10) and income security advocates/researchers (n = 5–10) in Canada on how AI affects redistributive processes and market trends, including the potential role of basic income in addressing AI-induced dislocations. Research questions examine: (a) participants' views on AI's impact on social protections and labor market trends; (b) the envisioned use of basic income in response to AI disruptions; and (c) potential avenues to resist policies that exacerbate income inequality. The study is co-authored with Jessica Allen and Louise Adongo.

Lauren Avis and **Aiden McIlvaney**, McGill University

AI is Taking ALL of Our Jobs: Deepfake Pornography and the Digital Sex Worker

This paper examines the ramifications of deepfake and generative AI in appropriating online sex workers' (SW) content and increasing the risks to their labor.

With the rise of deepfake technology, content is at risk of artificial reproduction, robbing SW of both intellectual property and income. Image-based sexual violence (IBSV) poses a universal threat, concentrated toward women (Akter & Ahmed, 2025). While the impacts of IBSV can be extrapolated to employment or IP law frameworks (Mania, 2024), the issues facing SW are inadequately assessed, resulting in insufficient protection (West, 2025). This paper addresses the disparity in avenues for justice by developing a dual-pillar approach: first, identifying gaps and literature deficiencies in assessing the unique threat to SW from non-consensual AI reproduction of their content; second, evaluating the inadequacy of proposed policy and legal frameworks in enabling justice for victims. Protecting SW from this emerging threat requires recognizing them as a distinct victimized group needing special attention beyond standard solutions.

John Bessai, Independent Scholar

AI Regimes and Crisis Capitalism: Canada's Sub-Imperial Settler Order in Global Reordering

Artificial intelligence and automation reorganize capitalist production while crises accelerate political-economic realignment across trade, war, and climate disruption. This paper analyzes Canada's AI research and governance regime as a regime of crisis capitalism linking national institutional design to global reordering. Canada is conceptualized as a sub-imperial settler formation embedded in extractive value chains and security alliances shaping AI capacity, risk management, and legitimacy. AI institutes, funding instruments, and public-sector digital modernization are treated as infrastructures of accumulation and social ordering that distribute vulnerability unevenly across labor, regions, and Indigenous jurisdictions. Three dynamics are analyzed: (1) AI strategy translates geopolitical and economic volatility into innovation imperatives, stabilizing elite authority while shifting adjustment costs onto communities and workers; (2) digital governance reorganizes access to support and surveillance; (3) tariffs, protectionism, and economic nationalism intensify industrial policy and resource sovereignty struggles. Methodologically, the paper combines historical-institutional analysis, policy genealogy, and close reading of public documents. It contributes to debates on capitalist production, platform economies, and the nation-state's role, showing AI regimes as political technologies reshaping accumulation, labor struggle, and accountability during global reordering.



Taylor Miha, Toronto Metropolitan University

Towards a Democratic Development of AI: The Pluralistic Perspective

This project addresses a timely philosophical question: How might we develop a moral framework for technologies operating with logics in tension with human reasoning? Today, artificial intelligence systems can make decisions not readily interpretable within our existing conceptual frameworks. The ever-quicken pace of technological development exacerbates this problem: competitive economic pressures reward output over comprehension, leading us to deploy systems our interpretative models can barely grasp. This project proposes a pluralist methodology enabling coordination between technical, humanistic, and public perspectives without collapsing them into a false unity. Philosophical pluralism holds that no single framework can claim epistemic authority over what resists human comprehension. Each discipline illuminates partial dimensions others cannot, creating a coherent sense of meaning from difference. The broader the range of perspectives involved in technological design, organization, and implementation, the more the interests and benefits embedded within the development of technology are aligned with democratic aims, curbing the risks of authoritarian outcomes.

12:00-1:30pm | Panel 5 – Settler Colonialism and Dispossession

Room: Sala Della Peruta

Chair: **Nalini Persram**, York University

Peter Kulchyski, University of Manitoba

Bush/Work: Political Economy and Cultural Politics in Northern Indigenous Resistances to Capital Accumulation

Drawing on involvement in resource extraction struggles in Northern Canada, this paper emphasizes the centrality of these struggles in contemporary capitalism. Examples include oil and gas pipelines in the Western Arctic (Dene), hydro projects in Northern Manitoba (Cree/Ininewak), and an expanding iron mine in Nunavut (Inuit). These conflicts involve critical capitalist value chains and require global perspectives. The Mary River Iron Mine illustrates connections between German steel companies, coal, Australian iron ore, Arctic climate impacts, and Indigenous rights. The Marxist concept of ‘mode of production’ highlights the inspirational values and cultures of Indigenous peoples in resisting exploitation.

Jessica Jacobson-Konefall, University of Lethbridge

To Revolve, to Resist: Concentrating Siksika Constellations in Alberta, Canada

Alberta, Canada—named for the British monarchy—is the homeland of Blackfoot, Dene, Cree, and Métis peoples and a key site of fossil fuel extraction.

This paper examines the ongoing genocide and resistance of the Blackfoot people using Benjaminian montage to represent settler occupation and Indigenous mass death. Guided by Blackfoot cultural worker Lilly Wells, the essay explores dialectical solidarity, connecting ancient medicine wheels and contemporary practices to resist settler colonialism and international capitalism.

Felipe Costa Lima and **Melina Anastasopoulou**, University of Luxembourg

The Digital Land Titling Trap: Dependencies, Displacement, and Alternative Futures for Laos

The Lao state's promotion of digital governance and agribusiness investment is deeply intertwined, driving a legal reconfiguration that often marginalizes communal rights. Our research examines flagship initiatives such as the National Land Titling Program (NLTP), the Lao Land Portal, and the e-Government Master Plan. We argue that these digital systems are not merely administrative upgrades but key operational mechanisms enabling a "concession fast-track." They technically legitimize displacement by creating a state-sanctioned, datafied definition of land that overrides oral testimony and customary evidence, effectively rendering complex, lived landscapes as state property available for agribusiness projects. This technology actively reconfigures the epistemic foundations of the rule of law, instituting a hierarchy in which standardized data systematically trumps communal land stewardship. A powerful triad of foreign capital, the state-commercial nexus, and agribusiness operators propels this process, co-producing a legal environment where investment contracts routinely supersede constitutional protections, creating tension between the state's role as a development facilitator and its duty as a rights protector.

Tracy Supruniuk, York University

The World Cup Comes to Canada: A Tale of Dispossession

International sports organizations like FIFA and the IOC claim that major events such as the World Cup and Olympics create a "positive global impact" (FIFA) and build "a better world through sport" (IOC). They, along with hosting governments, also argue that these events bring economic and urban development. These claims are questionable given the economic issues faced by former hosts such as Greece, Canada, Russia, and Brazil. As a case study, this paper examines the economic costs of hosting six World Cup games in Toronto and seven in Vancouver during the 2026 tournament. In 2018, when the World Cup was awarded to Canada, the U.S., and Mexico, Toronto's estimated cost was \$30–45 million; this has now ballooned to \$380 million. For Vancouver, costs have risen from \$240 million to as high as \$624 million.

This paper analyzes how public spending on the World Cup constitutes what David Harvey calls “accumulation by dispossession,” examining key social, political, and economic consequences and showing how the event serves capital’s interests over those of local residents.

12:00-1:30pm | Panel 6 – Populism, Nationalism and the Far Right

Room: Sala di Lettura

Chair: **Stephen McBride**, McMaster University

Thea Baines, University of Toronto

Gendered Nationalism and Populist Radical Right Politics in an Era of Global Crisis

This paper examines the gendered dynamics of Europe’s populist radical right (PRR) amidst overlapping global crises and capitalist restructuring. Since the 2008 financial collapse, the European debt crisis, and the 2015 migration crisis, PRR parties have leveraged economic precarity and cultural anxiety to advance exclusionary nationalist agendas. Central to this is a persistent gender gap: PRR movements are male-dominated (Männerparteien), rooted in patriarchal norms and authoritarian masculinity. Yet PRR gender politics are shifting: leaders deploy neo-feminist and homo-nationalist rhetoric to legitimize restrictive immigration regimes and frame themselves as defenders of women’s rights. Female leaders such as Marine Le Pen and Giorgia Meloni exemplify this recalibration, broadening appeal while substantive policies continue to undermine gender equality. Understanding these dynamics illuminates how gender is instrumentalized for political expansion amid capitalist and global crises.

David Goutor, McMaster University

Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Elite Acquiescence: the 1930s and the 2020s

Two of the key themes of this year’s conference are capitalism and crisis. My paper explores the response to one of the most profound crises a society can face: the rise of fascism. It particularly explores the class politics of this response, developing a historical comparison between the previous period of anti-fascist struggle and the current fight against the far-right in the Western world, especially the United States. In comparing the 1930s and the 2020s, some obvious differences must be recognized, but some key parallels are unmistakable. In particular, while the far right in America in the 2020s is not as ferocious and disciplined as that in Europe in the 1930s, the quiescence of American elites is evidently greater, as manifest in the immense (and still growing) financial support of the far-right, the explicit connections between the Donald Trump administration and key components of the elite (especially in the tech sector), and most broadly the determination of markets to “shrug off” all signs of the demise of democratic institutions.

This leaves anti-fascists with the challenge of creating a new Popular Front that can mobilize a broad-based coalition including workers for the struggle against rising authoritarianism.

Rafaela Sá, McMaster University

Bringing the Public Back In: Public Service Delivery and Decarbonising Heating in British Columbia, Canada

Private actors are frequently involved in climate policy, especially through de-risking initiatives and alternative service delivery. By transferring private financial risks and exposing public infrastructure to the market, private actors may profit from public projects at low risk. However, this public-private dynamic has limitations, including bureaucratic inefficiencies, unequal risk distribution, and limited transparency and accountability. Private sector involvement in public service delivery may therefore fail to adequately address the climate emergency. Many studies have evaluated the successes and failures of public service delivery in sectors such as municipal water supply. However, limited empirical analysis has been conducted in heat decarbonization. Our project conducts a qualitative case-study analysis of decarbonization in British Columbia, focusing on district energy and thermal networks, which rely on alternative service delivery. Our main concern is whether the public-private dynamic in this sector delivers reliable, fair, and accessible public services to BC residents. We investigate which model of public service delivery for heat decarbonization is most effective in achieving social desirability, effectiveness, and efficiency. By applying McDonald's (2020) evaluative framework, we examine three cases: an investor-owned utility, a public-private partnership, and a public-owned utility. We find that the public-owned utility model performs better in terms of universality and governance indicators (being more accountable and charging consistent fair pricing) but slightly worse in terms of sustainability metrics (provision of heat is not as decarbonized as in the other models).

Daniel Evans, Swansea University

Automotive Populism in the UK: Petrocapitalism, Car Dependency and the Rise of the Far Right

Efforts to mitigate global warming are increasingly met by backlash, as radical right populist movements (RRP) promote climate denialism. One scale increasingly central to right populist politics is the municipal, with urban infrastructure planning becoming a new frontline, particularly efforts to reduce car dependency. Across Europe, urban transport planning designed to limit automobility has provoked a wave of "automotive populism", as car ownership emerges as central to libertarian, anti-state politics and authoritarian masculinity. Automotive populism has become a

key vector for the growth of right populism in the UK, with Nigel Farage's Reform Party effectively mobilizing pro-car, anti-net-zero campaigns against low emissions zones (ULEZ) in London and 20 mph speed limits in Wales. This paper explores the rise of automotive populism, how the political economy and ideology of "petrocapitalism" and automobility dependency shape domestic life and culture while entrenching imperialism abroad (Huber, 2022). It examines the anti-ULEZ campaign in London and the anti-20 mph campaign in Wales, analyzing the discursive construction of automotive populism and its class basis, drawing lessons for the left in preempting popular opposition to climate change mitigation efforts.

1:30-2:30pm | Lunch

Room: Sala Polifunzionale

2:30-4:00pm | Panel 7 – Migration, Borders and Policing

Room: Sala di Lettura

Chair: **Tracy Supruniuk**, York University

Gemma Bird, University of Liverpool and **Davide Schmidt**, Manchester Metropolitan University

The New Guest Workers of Europe: A 'Migration Fix' for the Crises of European Capitalism?

This paper examines how labour migration regimes have become integral to managing the crises and contradictions of contemporary European capitalism. Across the EU, the rollout of "talent visas," mobility partnerships, and temporary worker recruitment schemes coincides with intensifying anti-migrant politics and the expansion of securitized borders. These initiatives are framed as solutions to labour shortages in both "high" and "low" skill sectors and as responses to long-term demographic decline, revealing Europe's growing reliance on migrant workers to sustain its economic model and maintain competitiveness within a shifting global order, while also intensifying anti-migrant rhetoric. In this paper, we map guest worker schemes, talent visas, and 'mobility partnerships' launched at the EU and member state level, contrasting them with post-war foreign labour recruitment experiences. We conceptualize these policies as tentative 'migration fixes' that seek to reconcile employers' demands with a racialized politics of European nativism. Finally, we analyze the structural tensions shaping these fixes, assess their durability within Europe's broader conjuncture of economic and political instability, and consider forms of labour resistance and organizing emerging within and against these regimes.



Leila Talani, King's College London

The End of Globalization?

This presentation explores quantitative and qualitative definitions of de-globalization in International Political Economy (IPE), proposing a critical definition based on the restructuring and relocation of production within globalization. It examines how recent technological changes—AI, automation, and others—have reshaped global economic integration.

Alfredo Rosete, Central Connecticut State University

Deportations, Gentrification and Care

Economic scholarship on care work has examined intra-household dynamics, public provision, and provider incentives. However, how these sources interact, compensate, and cover different aspects of care work remains underexplored, particularly its gendered dimensions. This paper provides a unified framework for understanding care sources through markets, states, and communities, arguing their substitutability is limited and varies with racial, ethnic, and class composition. We apply this framework to examine how gentrification and deportation affect community access to care, highlighting avenues for grassroots movements to sustain social wealth and counter austerity and racial violence.

Zoe Savitsky, York University

From Serve and Protect to Protect and Serve: Law Enforcement as Protected Identity

Identity-based protections in U.S. law (on the basis of race, national origin, etc.) have a nearly two-century-old history. By the twenty-first century, local, state, and federal law included robust protections for “discrete and insular minorities,” a concept later expanded to include women, disabled people, and others. Over time, the concepts of “suspect” or “protected” identities migrated into disparate areas of law and policy, including public terrorism statutes and private social media policies. Despite careful policing of identity-class boundaries, what constitutes a protectable “identity” and which identities receive legal protection have changed significantly in the past decade. This paper focuses on job-based identity protections for law enforcement officers, tracing their evolution from a fringe right-wing demand to actionable state legislation, adopted and enforced by tech companies. The paper deconstructs the arguments enabling law enforcement’s professional identity to become personal and immutable, showing how these changes undermine the rights of historically minoritized populations while empowering private corporations to bolster state authority and perpetuate violence.



2:30–4:00pm | Panel 8 – Precarity, Class and Work

Room: Sala Della Peruta

Chair: **David Goutor**, McMaster University

Bryn Jones, University of Bath

Goodbye Working Class – Hello Proletarians

For over a century, socio-political analysis and socialist movements have viewed wage workers—particularly manual laborers—as the most exploited and potentially radical agents for social transformation. Traditionally, this class was equated with industrial workers in capitalist factories. Over the last forty years, this identity has been challenged as manufacturing jobs have been offshored to faster-growing economies in the Global South, particularly South and East Asia. Does the West still have a traditional working class, or was the association with industrial labor a conceptual mistake? This assumption traces back to Marx and Engels, who equated the working class with industrial laborers, deemed revolutionary due to their exposure to the hardships of dependence on capitalist ownership of production. Emancipation would require socializing these resources. Their vision, originating in Britain's Industrial Revolution, influenced both radical and mainstream analysis, focusing on occupation, education, and qualifications as defining features of the working class. This designation is analytically and empirically challengeable, as Marx, Engels, and subsequent followers neglected the broader concept of the proletariat.

Stefano Ba', Leeds Trinity University

Precarity and Everyday Class Struggle: A Critical Theory Approach

This paper conceptualizes precarious employment as a form of everyday class struggle in both the labor market and the workplace. Precarious workers continually mobilize strategies to maintain paid employment, constituting class struggle that is not politically organized but manifests in daily survival efforts. Precarity arises from capitalist restructuring, including non-standard contracts, flexible work, automation, and platform-mediated labor. It reflects the pressure to commodify living labor. The paper draws on Open Marxist and Critical Theory to argue that precarity is intrinsically tied to wage relations and subordination, reframing the analysis of the precariat as an expression of systemic class struggle and resistance.

Koyel Lahiri, Krea University

Post-Fordist Work, Informal Workers and Politics: Revisiting Meaningful Struggle

This paper explores the default pro-union framing in labor studies through an ethnographic study of factory workers' politics in the Delhi National Capital Region



(NCR), India. One puzzle of contemporary factory worker politics is the simultaneous existence of a desire for unions and undisguised animosity toward them. A common refrain among activists and union leaders is, “Workers don’t want this; they have no unity...” Discussing this diverse range of political articulations allows me to set the stage for a broader assertion: a worker’s politics may best be understood through a three-fold relationship with work—work at the worksite, social aspects, and selfhood aspects. To strengthen workers’ voices and address ecological and other linked crises, we need to pay more attention to the social and selfhood dimensions of this relationship.

Viktoriya Vinik, York University

Airbnb under Occupation: Housing, Class, and the State-as-Landlord

Scholars have shown that housing rentierism drives inequality and reshapes class relations. Yet much of this work collapses the issue into the binary between asset owners and non-owners or frames it primarily through the contradictions of indebted homeownership. This paper reintroduces Marx’s theory of the landowning class to analyze the contradictory class positions of Airbnb hosts in the West Bank. Israel’s property regime is structured around the state-as-landlord: 93 percent of land is nationalized and administered by the Israel Land Authority, leased under terms that systematically facilitate Jewish settlement while excluding Palestinians. By theorizing Airbnb hosts as rentiers embedded in a settler-colonial rent regime, this paper makes three contributions to current debates. First, it demonstrates that the analytical collapse of landowners into capitalists obscures forms of class struggle around housing and land that are as fundamental as those in the sphere of production. Second, it shows how theorizations of housing-based class formation must attend to contradictory and racialized property relations that cannot be captured by the owner/non-owner binary. Third, it situates platform-mediated housing rentierism within the *longue durée* of state-led dispossession and land monopolization, expanding beyond financialization narratives to account for the role of the state in asset economies.

4:00-4:30pm | Coffee Break

Room: Sala Polifunzionale

4:30–6:00pm | Panel 9 – Skills, Inequality and Critical Futures

Room: Sala di Lettura

Chair: **Katherine Nastovski**, York University

Marianna Forleo and **Laura Evangelista**, INAPP

Quality of Training and Skills Development in European Policies

The current historical, social, and economic phase is marked by accelerated transformations affecting economic, political, and technological spheres. The spread of artificial intelligence and geopolitical instability is profoundly changing production processes and forms of social life, where education and training are key to strengthening the resilience of European societies, supporting inclusion, and ensuring citizens' adaptability. Moreover, the European Union has gradually recognized the link between the quality of education and systemic transformations. This analysis investigates the relationship between the quality of education and socio-economic transformations within the broader context of European policies. Systematic investment in quality, including through the critical and regulated use of micro-credentials, is not only strategic for the EU's competitiveness but also necessary for addressing ongoing transitions, reducing inequalities, and promoting sustainable development models in the contemporary world.

Harman Uppal, Simon Fraser University

Island Laboratories and Building Nations: Reshaping Terra Nullius in Rachel Heng's *The Great Reclamation*

In Heng's historical novel, the protagonist succumbs to colonial ideologies of terra nullius, transforming a bustling Singaporean fishing village (kampong) into a deserted shore, or "natural laboratory." The government later uses the kampong for land reclamation to expand territory and build the nation. By calling this process "the great reclamation," the government reproduces European desires for "spiritual and social redemption," echoing deserted-island genres. Through close reading, this paper examines how Singapore's reclamation replicates Euro-Western imperial and nation-building ideals. By comparing Heng's depiction to myths of Atlantis and Antillia, the paper shows how fictional and imperial rhetoric advance neoliberal conquests.

Margherita Lanini, Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna

Abstentionism and Class Divide in Italy: The Labor Market Roots of Economic and Political Inequality

Abstentionism represents a key failure of modern democracies, challenging legitimacy. Despite its spread in advanced capitalist societies, causes remain unclear: do citizens abstain due to political dissatisfaction or social and economic exclusion? This paper links political behavior to material conditions in Italy (1983–2018), using national and regional electoral data. A long-run structural perspective investigates how labor market stratification into social classes contributes to abstention. Disaggregated wage inequality indicators across gender, regions, age, and occupation allow nuanced assessment of economic disparities' effects on political participation. Parametric and non-parametric techniques explore both relevance and temporal structure. Results suggest labor market stratification affects non-voting over medium-term cycles (5–8 years) with cumulative effects. Heterogeneity across stratification measures highlights the importance of disaggregated indicators. Findings support Power Theory: economic marginalization fosters political marginalization, reinforcing structural abstention.

Nalini Persram, York University

“Why Resist? Why Surrender?” Reflections on Resistance, Acquiescence, and the Frankfurt School

This paper examines resistance and acquiescence. Why resist social structures that confine us and facilitate global ills? Why attempt to push back against forces producing inequality, planetary destruction, and misery? Is political power too overwhelming? Is resistance futile? Might one adopt Max Horkheimer's Frankfurt School perspective and capitulate? In contrast, Herbert Marcuse chose resistance. The paper explores the diverging positions of Horkheimer and Marcuse, examining their political projects, theoretical frameworks, and personal contexts to better understand our predicament. The speed, complexity, and intensity of global crises—exacerbated by ecological degradation and the rise of artificial intelligence—pose urgent questions. Concurrently, the Israeli government acts with impunity against Palestinians, and another leader forcibly removed an elected official and bombed Venezuela, openly seeking its oil. The paper asks: what can be done, and how should we think?



4:30–6:00pm | Panel 10 – Culture, Ideology and Subjectivity

Room: Sala di Lettura

Chair: **Rafaela Sá**, McMaster University

Solomon Schafer, McGill University

Ideas with Lives of Their Own: Ideology, Critique, and Conspiracy Theory

This paper examines whether conspiracy theories can be understood as a form of ideology and the advantages and disadvantages of doing so. Both ideology and conspiracy theory are contested concepts. I discuss three approaches to ideology in critical theory: as idealism (Marx), socially constitutive (Gramsci, Althusser, Ricoeur), and false consciousness (Frankfurt School). Conspiracy theory can be seen as social practice, sociological explanation, psychological process, or incoherent concept. Considering these frameworks together reveals insights into the class dynamics, social function, and normative ambiguity of conspiracy theories. I argue that conspiracy theories can be valid subjects of ideological critique under specific conditions, highlighting their potential as obstacles to struggles against domination.

Rebecca Carrai, KU Leuven

Capitalism in Fashion: Spatial Histories of Global Luxury Leather

This presentation explores the global fashion industry as a key actor in postindustrial neoliberal capitalism. From flagship stores to peripheral industrial districts, fashion reshapes global value chains and urban spaces. The paper examines how architectural historians can analyze the environmental and societal impacts of global luxury fashion, particularly leather goods, which traverse multiple production sites. Florence, historically linked to leather and luxury fashion, faces fashion-driven gentrification. The presentation advocates a ‘follow the thing’ and ‘global value chain’ approach to connect architectural, urban, and capitalist analyses.

Ahmed Kanna, University of the Pacific

Contemplating Capitalism: How Anthropological Theory Depoliticizes Class, Oppression, and the Climate

This essay reflects on the decline and fall of Marxism as both an analytical and praxis framework in sociocultural anthropology, and what that has cost our theory. It springs from a sense developed over decades of teaching and field research that anthropology—the self-purported social science seeking to shed light on “what it means to be human”—has made a self-sabotaging error in turning away from Marxism. It has conceded far too much under the “long shadow of the Cold War.” I offer as telling examples the case of recent introductory anthropology textbooks,

exploring how such texts produce theory on questions of class, oppression, and the climate crisis. These texts, I argue, disconnect capitalism and class from racism, gender, and colonialism, ultimately arguing for a contemplative rather than a political engagement with capitalism. This generates a reformist praxis and an image of capitalism as immovably entrenched in current conditions, perhaps even in “human nature.” I contrast this contemplative attitude with the analysis of capitalism, oppression, and the climate crisis, and the relation of socialist analysis to socialist strategy, produced by Marxist anthropologists and Indigenous, Black, and Latinx Marxists who are generally ignored by the field. These Marxist traditions, I argue, teach pathways to knowledge through struggle rather than contemplation. I close with a reflection on Marxist-feminist anthropologist Eleanor Burke Leacock’s comment that the teaching of anthropology should ignite a passion for socialist praxis in students.

Florence Manlapas, McGill University

“Super Freak:” ‘Normal’ Sex as a False Need

Herbert Marcuse writes that “a comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom prevails in advanced industrial civilization.” Such unfreedom is predicated upon the manipulation of individual needs in accordance with social utility. Therefore, “the individual works for himself only in so far as he works for the apparatus, engaged in activities that mostly do not coincide with his own [true] faculties and desires.” These false needs prevent the individual from resisting oppression because they, unbeknownst to the individual, serve the interests of hierarchical society and his own subjugation. The satisfaction of these false needs brings happiness that he believes to be genuine. Furthermore, the ability to recognize such desires as false is a prerequisite for pursuing a free society. I argue that the human need for ‘normal’ sex is one such false need. In demonstrating this, I expose how sexual desire has been constructed so that sex can be socially useful in contemporary industrial society by ensuring the supply of labor, thereby reinforcing existing structures of domination.



Wednesday June 24

9:30–11:00am | Panel 11 – Caring Empires: Decolonial and Anti-Colonial Reflections on Teaching and Practice in the Caring Professions

Room: Sala di Lettura

Chair: **Iqra Anugrah**, University of Turin

Teresa Macías, York University

Unsettling Environmental Care: Decoloniality, Degrowth and the Challenges of Green Social Work Education

This paper reflects on the challenges of incorporating environmental justice issues within social work education. It interrogates normative Eurocentric onto-epistemological assumptions about humanity's relationship to nature, which underpin conceptions of care in green social work education. These assumptions perpetuate "ontological fictions" that limit imagination of alternative futures for humanity, the planet, and caring professions. I introduce two key schools of thought—decoloniality and degrowth—as alternatives that foster discussions that are environmental, decolonial, ecological, political, economic, anti-racist, and anti-patriarchal. The paper establishes a critical stance against colonial and modernist perspectives, advocating an epistemic shift in green social work education.

Harjeet Badwall, York University

Anti-Colonialism and Narrative Practice

Social work imagines itself as a site of social justice. Many assumptions circulate about practices that support social change. Approaches often fall into two categories: interventions that aim to help individuals, or methods that challenge structures of oppression. This paper examines how post-structuralism, specifically Narrative Therapy, can offer more nuanced engagement with justice and anti-colonialism. Narrative Therapy is presented as an alternative practice approach, illustrating how narrative practices can support anti-colonial and anti-normativity conversations within social work. The paper emphasizes that therapeutic conversations are, and must always be, political conversations.



Anne O'Connell, York University

Abolition Social Work or the Professionalization of the Care Economy?

The crisis of capitalism, border security, and austerity in Canada is reshaping the care economy. Deeply affected by US imperialism, white supremacy, and global reordering, Canada is cutting public services to fund military expansion. Workers in the care economy, such as social workers, are impacted both as workers and by the consequences of a weakened social fabric. In classrooms and practice, conflicting ideas about social work's direction and purpose persist. In response to social movements and renewed calls for anti-colonial and decolonial justice, abolitionist theories in social work are gaining ground. Built on carceral abolitionism, community organizing, direct action, and mutual aid, abolitionist practices seek the removal of surveillance and punishment from institutions. Alternative economies, policies, and communities are being imagined to challenge inequities. Concurrently, professionalization and regulation demand standardization aligned with US models. This paper explores these competing approaches and the possibilities for survival they cultivate.

9:30-11:00am | Panel 12 – Education, Austerity and Knowledge

Room: Sala Della Peruta

Chair: **Heather Whiteside**, McMaster University

Lana Parker, University of Windsor

A Snake Eating Its Own Tail: The Financialization of Public Education

A persistent question in critical education scholarship is whether schooling can ever be disentangled from its role in capitalism's formation and continuance. This question has become increasingly complex in recent years, not simply because of the ideological terrain of education, but because of its shifting material conditions. Public systems have faced five decades of neoliberal discourse, which has prepared the ground for a still more troubling shift: the loss of public funding for equitable education systems and the growth of privatization. In ongoing work, I have traced the harmful spiral into financialization confronting Western public education systems, highlighting three relationships: first, how entrenched neoliberal ideology, particularly narratives of individualism, lays the foundation for growing fiscal austerity in public education; second, how austerity erodes material conditions, disassembling labour power and creating an argument for private sector incursions; and, finally, how privatization destroys democratic governance and responsibility.

This paper continues to spotlight this pernicious cycle, this capitalist ouroboros. It draws on empirical research with experienced Canadian educators to present a phenomenological case study of how capitalist-friendly governments (i.e., the current Ontario government) open avenues for privatization in public education by undermining labour organization, imposing private sector “solutions,” and dismantling democratic decision-making. I argue that as the financialization of education becomes a more overt capitalist project, both discursive and material resistance need to be developed.

Jen Wrye, North Island College, and **Lynelle Yutani**, Camosun College

Dismantling Public Postsecondary Education in British Columbia, Canada: The View from Academic Labour

This presentation examines the accelerating dismantling of public postsecondary education in Canada, with a particular focus on British Columbia, as a manifestation of contemporary capitalist restructuring and global reordering. Provincial and federal policy regimes have produced a long-term pattern of stagnant or declining public funding for colleges and universities, forcing institutions to rely heavily on volatile private revenue streams, such as international student tuition. Within this environment, institutional senates and education councils increasingly face criticism for insufficiently safeguarding academic integrity and collegial governance, as decision-making processes become subordinated to financial imperatives and managerial centralization. Drawing on our experience as Faculty Association presidents, we outline how the BC case exemplifies a broader Canadian trend in which postsecondary education is reoriented away from a public good and toward market-determined priorities. This reordering not only reshapes institutional structures but also constrains universities’ and colleges’ capacity to contribute to democratic life, social critique, and knowledge production beyond immediate economic utility.

Gabriele Borghese, Università degli Studi “Suor Orsola Benincasa
Neoliberal Education and Its Critique: Hypotheses for a Revival of Education from a Critical Perspective

Since the 1980s, debates on pedagogy and schooling have shifted from social and political perspectives toward neoliberal theories, from human capital to statistical indicators guiding school policy. Presented as neutral, these policies have devastated education and its aims, falsely claiming innovation. This presentation retraces key moments in this critical transition, which has led to decline in the discipline and a loss of meaning in human education. By returning to a critical Marxist perspective, we see education’s unavoidable connection to capital, historically tied to industry. Neoliberal policies have used education to accompany labor-market changes. The presentation outlines limitations and harmful consequences of neoliberal education, including the erosion of social security, and marginalization of health and social rights.

Saeed Hydaralli, Roger Williams University
The A.I. “Cheating Crisis” in Higher Education: Pedagogical Labor, Institutional Anxiety, and the Reorganization of Knowledge

We are living through a period of profound economic, political, and technological transformation, marked by accelerating instability in systems of production, labor, and governance. Among the most visible expressions of this transformation is the rapid diffusion of artificial intelligence, which is reshaping not only industrial production and value chains but also institutions charged with the reproduction of knowledge and expertise. Within higher education, A.I. has come to be framed as precipitating a significant crisis for teaching and learning, that is to say, for the labor of pedagogy in the human sciences. This challenge has been articulated in terms of what has come to be described as an “A.I. cheating crisis,” wherein students are said to be using A.I. tools to outsource academic work, particularly essays and other take-home assignments. Consequently, much of the current debate remains narrowly focused on strategies for detecting, preventing, or discouraging student use of A.I. outside the classroom, treating such use as the primary problem to be solved. Instead, the analysis developed in this paper is directed toward getting beneath the surface of the perceived A.I. cheating crisis in order to identify, disclose, and formulate, in the form of a dialogue, what Harold Garfinkel (1967) described as “the seen but unnoticed” problem that tacitly organizes and animates this discourse, situating this controversy within wider transformations of academic labor and institutional life in the contemporary political-economic moment.

9:30-11:00am | Panel 13 – Finance, Corporate Power and Democratic Constraint

Room: Sala Polifunzionale

Chair: **Adam Zviric**, McMaster University

Jongchul Kim, Sogang University

Rights and Responsibilities in Contemporary Finance: A Political-Philosophical Critique of Modern Persona and Property

Contemporary financial systems in the 21st century are embedded with a structural paradox: the privatization of profits and the socialization of losses. Whereas conventional economic discourse relegates this issue to regulatory failure or technical risk management, this presentation posits that such disequilibrium originates from the ontological bedrock of modern Western political philosophy—namely, the fictional constitution of ‘Persona’ and ‘Property.’ Modern philosophy, represented by John Locke, conceptualized human attributes as separable property, analogous to objects, and established ‘Persona’ as the abstract subject possessing them. Drawing upon the ontological critiques of Friedrich Nietzsche and Alfred North Whitehead, this presentation argues that such a concept of Persona is a linguistic fiction that disregards the relationality of reality. This study reveals that modern finance functions as a mechanism that arbitrarily fuses ‘exclusive property rights’ with ‘contractual rights’ upon this fictional foundation. Consequently, it confers infinite rights upon creditors while displacing accountability onto abstract collective personae like the state and corporations. In conclusion, this research identifies the crisis of modern finance not simply as an economic event, but as a political-philosophical problem deeply rooted in the genealogy of the modern subject.

Atle Midttun, Norwegian Business School

Corporate Responsibility and Business Ethics Under Contested Globalization

Western-led deregulation in the 1990s and early 2000s opened markets worldwide, prompting rising civic pressure for corporate accountability. In this environment, CSR and Business Ethics emerged as leading frameworks for embedding ethical and environmental concerns into global business practices, rooted in a Western liberal-democratic value base that has since come under increasing challenge. The paper traces how successive waves of globalization have shifted CSR and BE from Western-led universalism toward a multipolar value foundation shaped by the growing influence of Eastern and Southern economies. This transition brings divergent political systems and social models into global commerce: while most G7 countries

are rated “full democracies,” the E7 are largely authoritarian or hybrid regimes. The result is intensifying contestation over the meaning and purpose of CSR and BE. Western-oriented frameworks—codes of conduct, social audits, ESG reporting—now coexist and compete with state-centric or development-first approaches, producing a fragmenting global ethical order evolving into a plural, negotiated one. Using a comparative political-economy lens, the paper integrates theory with four illustrative cases: Rana Plaza in Bangladesh; H&M and Xinjiang; Huawei and 5G; and Western corporate exits from Russia after the 2022 invasion. Indicators on trade openness, market expansions, and shifting G7/E7 GDP weights provide additional context.

Miranda Martinez, The Ohio State University

Community Finance and Disaster Colonialism: Puerto Rico’s Credit Unions Between Austerity and Popular Mobilization

Cooperativism in Puerto Rico has a long history, and credit unions have recently experienced rapid growth, as more residents join them to protest the destructive financialized colonial order. Following Puerto Rico’s 2015 bond default and imposition of a fiscal oversight board, austerity intensified. The 2017 Hurricane Maria caused mass infrastructural damage and fatalities. Between 2010 and 2020, Puerto Rico lost over 11% of its population, while 2019 saw tax exemptions for wealthy American cryptocurrency investors, exacerbating housing inflation and social exclusion. Mass mobilization has challenged financial control, and the turn to credit unions expresses a desire for a more just economy. Credit unions have funded initiatives like affordable solar financing, micro-grids, and agricultural cooperatives, yet small-dollar lending also sustains consumption and rationalizes structural economic violence.

Carlo Fanelli, York University

The Employers’ State: Labour, Business and State Power in Canada

In few arenas of class conflict is the state’s role in securing capitalist power more visible than in workplace relations. Through a combination of coercive and consensual mechanisms, states have long played a central role in regulating labour, supporting employer interests and managing worker resistance. Using Canada as a point of departure, this paper examines the persistence and expansion of precarious, low-waged and insecure work across the Global North and South, arguing that such conditions are not exceptions but characteristic features of capitalist labour markets. It then traces the intensification of austerity, labour market restructuring and attacks on worker and union rights from the Great Recession through the COVID-19 era. As trade union density declines and working-class insecurity deepens, the paper reflects on the challenges facing contemporary labour movements and considers the need for new forms of worker organization capable of connecting everyday experiences of precarity to broader struggles against capitalist class power.

Third, it compares the mayoralties of John Tory and Olivia Chow, arguing that while they diverge in political style and rhetorical emphasis, both operate within, and ultimately reproduce, the structural limits of neoliberal urbanism. By situating Toronto within wider debates on state rescaling and urban political economy, the article demonstrates how provincial centralization and fiscal orthodoxy constrain the scope for democratic space at the municipal level,

11:00-11:30am | Coffee Break

11:30-1:00pm | Panel 14 – Neoliberalism, Austerity and Crisis

Room: Sala Della Peruta

Chair: **Heather Whiteside**, McMaster University

Giampaolo Conte, University of Rome 3

Economic Liberal Reforms and a New Pathway for Capitalistic Development

The paper examines the historical development of liberal-capitalist reformism from the Industrial Revolution to the present. Since recent financial crises, “liberal reform” has become synonymous with austerity and economic hardship, particularly for workers and segments of the middle class. The study argues that such reforms primarily served to integrate semi-peripheral states into the capitalist world-economy by imposing institutions, norms, and practices aligned with the interests of dominant elites and hegemonic powers—initially Britain, later the United States. Liberal reforms thus functioned as mechanisms for capitalist expansion, embedding social, economic, and financial structures centered on accumulation, profit-seeking, and systemic transformation, designed to create a new pathway for capitalistic development.

Brianne Anderson, McGill University

The Ills of Austerity: EU Fiscal Policy, Euroscepticism, and Populism in Italy

The success of Italy’s right-wing populist and eurosceptic movement signals challenges for European integration, reflecting long-term discontent with EU-recommended austerity and crisis mismanagement (Migrant Crisis, COVID-19 pandemic). This paper examines the relationship between austerity and euroscepticism in Italy over time, analyzing the internal structural problems of the Italian economy, pre-2007 austerity measures, the Great Recession, fiscal consolidation, and the European Debt Crisis. The paper critiques ongoing austerity measures, highlighting contradictions and their misalignment with guidelines in the Draghi report, while suggesting alternatives to prevent rising euroscepticism.

Maria Ivanova, Goldsmiths, University of London

From Riches to Rags: The Peculiar Case of Great Britain

Key Western economies are currently grappling with soaring government debt and chronic deficits. Sovereign debt levels have reached or exceeded, sometimes by a large margin (or multiples, as in the case of Japan), 100 percent of GDP in France, Britain, Italy, and the United States. Germany, once Europe's industrial powerhouse, now faces precipitous industrial decline, albeit from a relatively low level of government debt. The burden of debt is compounded by unmistakable symptoms of economic decline. Hence, economic miracles are unlikely to offer a way out of the debt trap. This paper examines the peculiar case of Great Britain, once the birthplace of industrial capitalism and global economic leader, now a society in managed but seemingly unstoppable decline. Lack of investment, low labor productivity, crumbling infrastructure, inept governance, and the self-inflicted Brexit predicament underlie Britain's profound economic malaise and social decline, epitomized in the decimation of its middle class and a generalized fall in living standards. Despite postwar-high taxation, government debt has reached unprecedented peacetime heights, with interest payments approaching 10 percent of annual spending. Britain's fortunes are now highly dependent on bond investors, with shielding them from distress becoming the government's overriding concern. This study addresses how Britain arrived at this situation, its future prospects, and the cautionary lessons it may offer.

Paolo Ramazzotti, University of Macerata

The Neoliberal Paradox

This paper addresses two issues. First, why are neoliberal policies accepted? Is it because their goals are socially more desirable, or because there is a gap between what people need and what they want? Second, what should a policy that contrasts neoliberalism consist of? Is it a matter of goals, sensible theories, or the ability to convince people that an alternative is possible and preferable? These questions are worth asking due to the paradox of neoliberal consensus: the ability of neoliberal policies to gather political support from those who suffer their consequences. The paper begins with a brief outline of post-democracy, then offers a Polanyian perspective in which neoliberal policies shape economic and social changes that, in turn, influence how people self-identify in relation to the economy and political spectrum. The discussion then addresses implications for economic policy. The main contention is that, because economic policy affects self-identification, technical analyses showing alternative policies may be important but insufficient. An alternative to neoliberalism is possible if it fosters non-defensive self-identification—i.e., belief in the ability to act toward an economy that meets social needs. This requires identifying economic ends that overcome social and political dispersion and reconstruct social solidarity, as well as action by economic policy agents beyond government, such as unions and other intermediate bodies.



11:30–1:00pm | Panel 15 – Digital Capitalism, Labour Regimes and Colonial Power

Room: Sala Della Peruta

Chair: **Donna Baines**, University of British Columbia

Lorenzo Veracini, Swinburne University of Technology

Settler Colonialism in the Digital Worlds

The digital worlds we inhabit are shaped by profoundly unequal relations, and critical data studies have emerged in recent decades as an interdisciplinary scholarly subfield dedicated to the denunciation and understanding of systemic modalities of subjection, marginalization, dispossession, appropriation, and domination. This article explores the dynamics of what is here defined as digital settler colonialism: a mode of domination premised on the relentless appropriation of the online ‘territories’ inhabited and curated by ‘digital natives.’ This mode of domination is fundamentally characterized by a logic of elimination.

Martin Deron, Concordia University

Beyond Algorithmic Capitalism – Redirecting ICT Towards Sustainability-Oriented Futures

In a time of profound change and instability, the ICT industry drives both economic acceleration and ecological disruption. Capitalism restructures global supply chains via artificial intelligence and automation, while computing’s resource-intensive nature conflicts with Earth’s preservation. This presentation examines the urgent need to redirect ICT, moving beyond “ICT for Green” and techno-solutionist paradigms, toward a critical framework for socio-ecological transition.

Vito Di Santo, University of Milan

Mediterranean Capitalism at a Crossroads? Diverging Labour-Market Trajectories in Southern Europe (2005–2023)

Southern Europe has long been discussed as a relatively coherent “Mediterranean” family of welfare and labour-market arrangements, typically associated with strong reliance on the family, segmented employment structures, and uneven social protection. Yet, after the 2008 crisis and the subsequent cycles of EU economic governance—ranging from the Lisbon Strategy and the European Semester to the European Pillar of Social Rights and NextGenerationEU—evidence suggests that convergence within this cluster cannot be taken for granted. This presentation investigates whether an internal bifurcation has emerged within the Euro-Mediterranean model, contrasting Italy and Greece with Spain and Portugal in

terms of labour-market outcomes and policy trajectories. The analysis adopts a comparative design covering 2005–2023, distinguishing two phases (2005–2013 and 2014–2023) to separate crisis impacts from post-crisis consolidation. Using harmonised data from Eurostat and the OECD, we build a dataset of 25 indicators grouped into six domains: employment and unemployment; youth outcomes; gendered long-term unemployment; contract structure (temporary work, part-time and involuntary part-time, and employment protection); productivity and well-being; and policies and social spending, including ALMP components, unemployment benefits, education, health, and social protection. Methodologically, we combine non-parametric tests (Kruskal–Wallis), MANOVA by domain, and a PCA with varimax rotation on spending profiles to identify latent policy dimensions (an “employment-oriented” vs a more “transformative” investment profile). Results point to a robust and persistent divergence: Spain and Portugal display comparatively stronger inclusion and resilience—especially for younger cohorts and contractual stability—while Italy and Greece remain characterised by enduring segmentation and weaker capability-enhancing policy effects.

Salvatore Prinzi, Global Labour Research Centre

Challenging Lavoro Povero: The Fight for Living Waged Work in Italy

This article examines the political economy of low-waged work in contemporary Italy through the debate surrounding salario minimo and salario dignitoso. It argues that low wages are not simply a market failure but a structural feature of Italy’s low-wage growth model, sustained by labour market fragmentation, precarious employment and the weakening of redistributive institutions. Moving beyond technical understandings of wage regulation, the article frames the distinction between minimum and living wages as a political struggle over social reproduction, class power and redistribution. Situating the Italian case within broader European and international debates, it analyzes the implications of the European Union Minimum Wage Directive (2022/2041) and highlights Italy as a revealing outlier due to its absence of a statutory minimum wage and the limits of collective bargaining coverage. The article further explores how deindustrialization, regional inequality and labour flexibilization have weakened traditional forms of labour representation, pushing wage politics increasingly outside formal institutions. In this context, it focuses on the grassroots campaign for a salario minimo garantito promoted by Potere al Popolo. Through analysis of the campaign’s organization, social composition, and signature initiative, the article argues that bottom-up living-wage mobilizations function both as responses to institutional failure and as indicators of a deeper crisis in Italy’s low-wage political economy. Ultimately, the article reflects on the prospects and limits of rebuilding working-class power under conditions of precarity. Co-authored with Carlo Fanelli.

11:30–1:00pm | Panel 16 – Crisis, Temporality and Political Breakdown

Room: Sala Polifunzionale

Chair: **Tracy Smith-Carrier**, Royal Roads University

Adam Zvrlic, McMaster University

Making Sense of the Conjunctural Moment: A Cultural Political Economy Approach

As observed by Antonio Gramsci, “A crisis of long duration will mean that there are irresolvable contradictions in the structure which are organic. The attempts by the various political forces to preserve the present economic structure by overcoming these contradictions ‘form the terrain of the ‘conjunctural’” (Sassoon, 1987). Indeed, from the Great Recession to the current crises of affordability and social reproduction, what we are witnessing is the arc of a crisis of long duration. This is a moment when the global political-economic system is being overcome by its own contradictions, or what Gramsci referred to as a “conjunctural moment.” This presentation demonstrates the potential of cultural political economy in understanding the various crises represented in this conjunctural moment through a dialectical analysis of both their political-economic structural and semiotic “meaning-making” entry points. In doing so, this approach sheds light on why some political-economic possibilities to overcome “conjunctural moments” become more favored than others. Insights are drawn from original analyses of economic and discursive strategies used to navigate the political-economic crises brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic in the Canadian context, offering a roadmap to analyze the multitude of interrelated crises this moment presents.

Nikita Zagvozdkin, University of Wuppertal

The Not-So-Discreet Charm of the Lumpenbourgeoisie: On the Dialectics of Modern Political Crisis

Drawing on the Marxist tradition, this paper constructs the concept of the lumpenbourgeoisie in relation to advancing far-right forces and reflects on the contemporary polycrisis through its lens. With the digital revolution transferring anthropological attributes essential for capital valorization (Virno) from humans to machines, human development under the patronage of capital (the so-called “neoliberal subjectivity”) ceases to be necessary for capital circulation. Thus, humans can—and ultimately should—be forced into abstraction. A new “primitive accumulation” (Marx), conducted on both institutional and anthropological levels, dismantling superstructures of reproduction and reducing the complexity of life, becomes the vital interest of capital.

Yet herein lies the political crux: such transformation contradicts the normal conditions of the bourgeois regime and can therefore be undertaken only by a paradoxical subject—a fraction of the ruling class not constrained by its habitus and ready, in Marx’s words from the 18th Brumaire, to undermine the “order” for its own sake. The lumpenbourgeoisie (as exemplified by Trump) is not only a force of reactionary change. Rather, it embodies the dialectics of modern crisis, showing authoritarianism, poverty, irrationalism, violence, and war not as negation but as the truth and fulfillment of the existing social order.

Taher Hasoon, Toronto Metropolitan University

Genocide and the Control of Temporal Freedoms

Genocide is not merely the intentional killing of an ethnic, national, racial, or religious group; it is the intention to destroy all aspects of a particular people. This distinction is crucial, as genocide involves destruction that does not necessarily entail death. Unlike murder, genocide possesses a torturous quality insofar as it temporally extends the suffering of a group by making destruction—not death—its ultimate end. The entity that undertakes such a crime seeks to seize control of a group’s past, present, and future by (a) enforcing a future of destruction, (b) disregarding historically enacted intentions of self-determination, and (c) producing a present marked by unfreedom and pervasive suffering. This essay examines genocide as a seizure of a people’s temporality, imposing and perpetuating a destructive temporal horizon. It draws on Martin Heidegger’s conception of temporality to show that freedom to organize one’s temporal ecstases—past, present, and future—is necessary for self-determination. In contrast, genocide operates by stripping a people of their ability to be in time, rendering their destruction possible. Finally, Karl Marx is invoked to understand how systemic violence and oppression function as positions of power within capital, producing structural discrepancies between groups that make genocide both possible and actualized.

Eleonora Roldán Mendivil, University of Potsdam

Class, Social Reproduction and Sexuality in modern Capitalism

In this paper, I would like to outline some critical thoughts and observations, that – inspired by a larger Marxist debate – can include a vision of queer liberation within the framework of social reproduction theory. My fundamental question here is: how do the gender binary categories of man and woman relate to each other in capitalism? How are they mediated differently in the context of capitalist re-production than in pre-capitalist societies? After all, in feudalism, gender relations also strongly determined the sphere of the family and thus social re-production – but what exactly was different?

And, how come the broader Left has bought into sexual and gender identity politics in forms, that are hardly distinguishable from liberal-bourgeois frameworks? In times of (far) right attacks on immigrants and queer folk across the globe – at times using one imagined group against the other – questions of security and solidarity are more urgent than ever.

1:00–2:00pm | Lunch

Room: Sala Polifunzionale

2:00–3:30pm | Panel 17 – State Capitalism and Development

Room: Sala Della Peruta

Chair: **Carlo Fanelli**, York University

Raphael Sassower, University of Colorado, Colorado Springs

The Predicaments of State Capitalism

This paper explores whether there are limits to the economic power of the state. Drawing on literature on State Capitalism, I examine the conditions under which the state becomes a capitalist entity, emulating capitalist principles and functioning as a corporation rather than a publicly funded bureaucracy. While not delving into the history of the nation-state as co-constitutive of modern capitalism, I frame my analysis with 20th- and 21st-century examples, from China and the EU to the United States. States mobilize financial control to compete internationally and stimulate domestic economic sectors (agriculture, energy, military-industrial complex), sometimes using direct involvement in higher education and research. Examples, including SpaceX's rise as a successor to NASA, illustrate the benefits and drawbacks of transforming the state into a business enterprise.

Stephen McBride, McMaster University

Paradigm Shift? Canadian State Capitalism and Global Reordering

This paper outlines the response of the Canadian state to the destruction of the old rules-based international order. In practical politics, two broad responses have been identified: appeasement of the U.S. and doubling down on the existing neoliberal paradigm at home; and efforts to devise a new industrial strategy linked to competitiveness within a new, still undefined international order. Though often presented as alternatives, the two are not necessarily contradictory. The paper analyzes key government documents, including the Fall 2025 federal budget, to investigate attempts to maintain an existing paradigm through state contraction and austerity for some, alongside an expanded role for the state in creating a new industrial strategy consistent with sustaining capital accumulation, based on selective deregulation and state incentivization of private investment.

Heather Whiteside, University of Waterloo

Back to the Future: State Capital and the Capitalist State

Animated through serial crises across the twenty-first century, the “new” state capitalism is an increasingly lively field of study, indicating the various ways in which the capitalist state is (re)assuming a major role in market intervention through public ownership and state finance. Seeking to offer a conjunctural account of the evolution of state capitalism, this paper examines the long track record of Canadian state-owned enterprises within the global context of a rising new state capitalism, arguably more competitive, aggressive, and hybrid. Several motivations for state ownership in Canada are identified, ranging from economic nationalism to neoliberal crisis management and support for capital accumulation, exemplified through entities such as the Canada Infrastructure Bank, Canada Lands Company, and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Consistent with the conference theme, this paper highlights transformations in the capitalist state as they relate to legacy twentieth-century state-owned enterprises operating within twenty-first-century state capitalism. The findings indicate the adaptation of state institutions through dogged efforts to socialize the costs and risks of capitalism over time.

Roberto Tamborini, University of Trento

The National Capitalism

A growing number of political leaders in the Western world pursue agendas that lie outside democratic principles, methods and customs that we believed to be established forever. What do they have in common, what kind of political-economic system are they creating, and why are they successful? Beyond the inevitable differences in context and history a core of common characteristics seems to emerge, which I propose to dub "Nationalcapitalism". The paper develops the notion of Nationalcapitalism within the frame of the species of capitalism. Its key difference/contrast with liberal and democratic capitalism is the rise of unfettered economic-financial concentrations with the shift towards authoritarian elective regimes, aiming at unbounded executive power of the government. The roots of Nationalcapitalism are traced back to the socio-economic fault lines created by the worldwide neoliberal regime, and in particular the fallout of the Global Financial Crisis during the 2010s. Finally, the critical issue of the relationship between Nationalcapitalism and democracy is addressed.



2:00–3:30pm | Panel 18 – Empire, Militarism and the Far-Right

Room: Sala Lettura

Chair: Mark Thomas, York University

Francesco Macheda, Xi'an Jiaotong–Liverpool University

The Military Foundations of Imperialism in the Contemporary World

Over the last decade, military power has strongly reemerged as a constitutive element of contemporary imperialism. This paper deconstructs what we term the imperialist feedback loop, which operates as follows: the technological and financial dominance of core economies provides the foundation for military dominance, which in turn reproduces coercively the asymmetric global division of labor underpinning technological and financial dominance. Military dominance exerts its effects through five key mechanisms: (1) brain drain, (2) coercive repression of industrial wages, (3) forced absorption of armaments, (4) intensified resource exploitation and appropriation, and (5) preservation of hierarchical international currency regimes. Empirically, the study employs a hidden Markov model to dynamically cluster panel data (1988–2024), identifying a stable hierarchical world structure. The findings confirm the persistence of a stable imperialist core and validate the proposed model of the imperialist feedback loop, positioning militarism at the heart of imperialist reproduction.

Davide Ventrone, McMaster University

Greening U.S. Empire: The Politics of U.S. Imperialism and Green Finance

The rise of green finance—broadly understood as investments directed at mitigating and adapting to climate change—has generated significant debate over its political implications. Scholars increasingly focus on how power relations shape the pace, scale, and direction of renewable energy transitions, determining the extent to which a shift away from fossil fuels can be realized. While existing literature has heavily emphasized the influence of asset managers and the (dis)enabling role of domestic (anti)green coalitions, it has done little to connect ongoing political battles over the energy transition within the United States to its power as an informal empire. Ongoing domestic struggles between asset managers pushing green finance and Republican-backed fossil fuel producers resisting the transition have broader implications for U.S. hegemony and thus warrant further analysis.



Xiaoya Huang, McGill University
Who Codes the Digital Future? China's Bid for Hegemony Through the Digital Silk Road

The Digital Silk Road (DSR) is the technological pillar of China's 2015 Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It offers developing countries access to emerging technology at comparatively low cost, rapid deployment, and flexible financing arrangements. Existing scholarship has largely focused on the DSR's economic implications for BRI participant states. This paper instead shows that China also leverages the DSR as a strategic soft-power instrument designed to normalize and diffuse its preferred models of digital governance.

Steven Tufts, York University

Unions and the Rise of the Far-Right: Toward Anti-Fascist Worker Mobilization.

The rise of the far-right in North America and other jurisdictions continues to present contradictions and challenges for workers. While some argue the far-right is largely a petit bourgeois or white supremacist formation, it is more complex in terms of composition and structure. This paper discusses both the historical and contemporary relationships of unions with the rise of the far-right. Labour unions have played an important part in the resistance to the far-right including fascism, but there are exceptions. The paper begins with a typology of unions in relation to the far-right. The paper then provides a brief historical account of union response to the rise of fascism in Europe and Canada. The third section of the paper examines the contemporary response of unions in North American to the rise of the far-right. In some cases, unions are resisting reactionary movements while in others there is appeasement. Growing nationalism, anti-immigrant sentiment, transactional labour politics, declining union democracy and corruption make unions susceptible to enabling the far-right projects. I conclude with a call for unions to move beyond anti-racist programs to anti-fascist campaigns and education.

3:30-4:00 | Coffee Break

Room: Sala Polifunzionale

4:00-5:30pm | Panel 19 – Labour Movements and Radical Pedagogy

Room: Sala di Lettura

Chair: **Salvatore Prinzi**, Global Labour Research Centre

Bafta Sarbo, Initiative Schwarze Menschen

The Diversity of Exploitation: On the Critique of Dominant Antiracism

In Germany, a liberal concept of racism is advocated by anti-discrimination agencies and the radical left alike. This approach is primarily concerned with representation, inclusion, and diversity. The connection between class and 'race' is rarely addressed. Nevertheless, a critical Marxist tradition of racism research exists. Identity-based social discourse, as well as the pandering of socialist organizations to identity politics, led us to believe that a contemporary Marxist intervention into this dynamic was necessary. The Diversity of Exploitation offers a political intervention in the current debate on structural and institutional racism, whether in the labor market or the police force. After numerous book readings, with the German version now in its fourth edition, we realized the importance of a Marxist intervention, with a specific focus on the historical genesis of racism in Germany, into German identity politics. Political developments in Germany are paralleled by similar developments in other western countries as democratic parties and the far-right alike make use of anti-migrant sentiments as its main mobilization factor. With Germany as one of the largest imperialist powers in the world, the workings of German class society hold a global relevance. We aim to characterize what can be adapted but also identify the limitations to understanding the specific workings of 'race' and class in Germany within an international context. Co-edited with Eleonora Roldán Mendivil.

Katherine Nastovski, York University

Radical Worker Education: Assessing Traditions and Pedagogies

Considering crises within workers' justice organizations and broader social, political, and economic upheavals, we are prompted to ask: what role can workers play in struggles for global justice? What does workers' justice mean in this context? Surprisingly, literature on labor renewal and transformation often omits education, despite radical and emancipatory education being core to political movements for social change. This paper asks how radical worker education can support responses to contemporary crises. Based on exploratory research surveying global historical models, it critically assesses the theoretical landscape of these traditions and pedagogies, highlighting key tensions and contradictions to consider in building spaces for radical worker education in the twenty-first century.

Jacob Robbins-Kanter, Bishop's University, and **Daniel Troup**, MacEwan University

Competing Visions of Class and the Politics of Inequality in Canada

How are the qualitative and quantitative dimensions of class politicized in Canada? To answer its question, this paper conducts a discourse analysis of Canadian politicians' rhetoric about socio-economic class, identifying its association—or lack thereof—with poverty, economic inequality, and work. The central claim is that egalitarian class

politics has been weakened by pervasive rhetorical fragmentation between class's qualitative and quantitative aspects. In other words, an incohesive conceptualization of class across the political spectrum has undermined egalitarian political agendas while strengthening inegalitarian ones.

Carlos Torres, York University

Understanding Social Movements, Activism and Dissent in Western Countries

In the traditional sense, social movements mobilize activism and dissent to resist oppressive law, policy and regulations, and/or to rebel against perceived injustices. Forms of mass protest and resistance can be effective for social change due to intense pressure on the State that can take several forms such as violence, vandalism and use of communication networks. While this description of what social movements accomplish in relation to progressive social change has its merits, recent cases of movements such as La Campora (2001 to present) in Argentina warrant a different pathway into understanding the role that political economy plays in relation to social movements. This presentation will elaborate on La Campora in Argentina as an example as a "fixated" social movement (Torres 2023). Further, this presentation will examine activist social change through the following perspectives: the criminalization of dissent (Watts 2020), the co-optation and commercialization of social movements, hierarchy formation within social movements, political prisoners, among others. The rise of protest culture more generally will be examined from a global justice and human rights perspective

4:00-5:30pm | Panel 20 – Authoritarianism and Geopolitical Power

Room: Sala Della Peruta

Chair: **Saeed Hydaralli**, Roger Williams University

Bushra Alimerdan, University of Guelph

Navigating Neo-Ottomanism: Türkiye's Challenge to Neorealism in the Pursuit of Regional Power

This presentation confronts Wendy Brown's contention that we live in "nihilistic times" resulting from recent political changes. I argue that the effects Brown describes have become a core part of capitalist technological development, especially as it expands into the automation of cognitive work (computerization, robotics, and artificial intelligence). I further argue that we must take this long tradition of nihilism in knowledge work seriously to confront the post-neoliberal world emerging today. I will use the two possible futures Marx identifies in the Grundrisse to contextualize the potential contribution of knowledge work to a more just and equitable future.

Maurilio Pirone, University of Bologna

The Age of Techno-Authoritarianism

This contribution analyzes techno-authoritarianism: the authoritarian distortion of digital technologies alongside the digitalization of politics. The main thesis is that we see a dual convergence: centralizing logic in major digital platforms, and pressures to strengthen executive power at the expense of checks and balances, hollowing out liberal democracies. The first part offers observations on processes independently affecting digital technology and democratic erosion. Big Tech has historically been strongly centralized, often masked by progressive narratives, while Western democracies have weakened mediating structures. The second part identifies pivotal processes contributing to the overlap: the establishment of a global war regime, militarization of the digital sphere, new right-wing movements, and turning points like the invasion of Ukraine and the Gaza genocide. Addressing the deep causes of the emerging global war regime is necessary to dismantle the nexus of authoritarianism and digital technologies.

Robert Spadidakis, McGill University

The Authoritarian Rebel

Drawing on seminal Frankfurt School theorists, this paper argues that contemporary right-wing populism in bourgeois democracies increasingly reflects Theodor Adorno's concept of the rebel personality. In contrast to conventional authoritarian traits of conformity and rigidity, the rebel values unrestrained independence, hedonism, and hatred of authority, yet paradoxically desires submission to strong, coercive leaders.

Claudio Colaguori, York University

Shifting Global Power Arrangements in the Geopolitical Agon

When reason and logic break down violence ensues. Troubled relations between nations states most often occur based on economic and or territorial grounds, and when trade arrangements fail, the use of force often becomes the primary modality of power. This presentation aims to make sense of current conflicted global power arrangements by presenting items of analysis that highlight the sociopolitical tensions marking the present geopolitical order. Global capitalism, being essentially a political competition for resources inevitably pits nation-states against each other in a contest for resource hegemony. Thus, I will be presenting ideas from scholars such as Mearsheimer (2001) who posit that competition among dominant nation-states is driven by a directive to gain hegemonic authority in a global system that lacks a truly effective stabilization mechanism for cooperation and peace.

The current global order marks a resurgence of an agonal politics that mirrors the adversarial contest that characterized the Cold War era where “global power blocks were set objectively upon collision” (Adorno). Some themes covered will include: the new formations of ideological tribalism and “us versus them”, the myth of the international rule of law, the rise of the BRICS bloc, the declaration of the “Donroe” doctrine, and the unfolding of other turbulent political events that mark 2026.

6pm | Social Reception

Babitonga Café (Ground Floor Feltrinelli Foundation)





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The Malpensa Express train and the Malpensa Shuttle connect Malpensa Airport to the city center

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www.malpensaexpress.it/en

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Orioshuttle → [www.orioshuttle.com/_eng/Orio al Serio Airport > Milan Central Station](http://www.orioshuttle.com/_eng/Orio%20al%20Serio%20Airport%20%26gt;%20Milan%20Central%20Station)
Direct bus ride in about 50 minutes - Daily, Monday through Sunday

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Orio al Serio Airport > Milan Central Station
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→ <https://www.trenitalia.com/>

→ www.italotreno.it/

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Line M2 (green) - Moscova stop

Line M5 (purple) - Monumentale stop

Line M5 (purple) - Milano Porta Garibaldi stop





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