

Leo Panitch School for Socialist Education (LPSSE)

Socialism and Capitalism // October 17 and 18, 2026

Course offered (free of charge) in Fredericton

Instructor: Thom Workman

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Overview:

Our weekend course examines the historical development of socialism as a response to the continual evolution of capitalism. We ask: “What is socialism now and how did we get here?” And we ask: “What is capitalism now and how has it changed?” All the while we trace the evolution of socialism as an analytical and political paradigm responding to the harmful and often violent effects of capitalism. Throughout our journey we will stress that the essence of socialism involves the desire to get beyond the horrors and trauma caused by capitalism.

Saturday, October 17th

Segment 1:

9:00 am - 10:30 am

Socialism, the French Revolution, and the Russian Revolution

After introductions, we will provide a rough outline of the essentials of socialism with respect to economic, social, and political questions. We can begin to wrap our heads around the character of socialism by seeing it as a response to the successes and failures of the two most salient political events of the last 250 years: the French revolution in the late 18th century and the Russian revolution early in the 20th century. We conclude this segment with a snapshot of the basics of socialism today.

Break 10:30 - 10:45

Segment 2:

10:45 am - 12:15 pm

Capitalism: Origins and Evolution

Critics have defined capitalism in several ways. Each definition highlights a problematic aspect of capitalism and helps shape the socialist response. In a nutshell, to better understand socialism we must understand the basics of capitalism. In this segment we will explore the key elements of capitalism including private property, wage labour, and

the continual extension of the commodity form into all facets of life. We will also highlight capitalism's crisis-prone character (including the four major historical crises — late 1890s, 1930s, 1970s, and late 2000s). And we will review the relevant aspects of capitalism's past leading to the post-WWII accumulation regime and the eventual rise and consolidation of the neoliberal order (our world today with a dab of 'austerity').

Lunch 12:15 - 1:15 Details TBD

Segment 3:

1:15 pm - 3:00 pm

The Capitalist State

Let's get into the reeds! Drawing upon generations of socialist analysis this segment examines the state as the primary institution overseeing capitalist consolidation and expansion. We explore its two primary functions: *i)* optimizing the conditions of capital accumulation which takes innumerable forms and *ii)* the management of the class struggle at home and abroad. Specific attention is also drawn to the historically repressive nature of the capitalist state, especially in the aftermath of the Russian revolution.

Break 3:00 pm - 3:15 pm

Segment 4:

3:15 pm - 5:15 pm

Imperialism

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant surmised that commercial activity and "perpetual peace" went hand in hand. Wow – did he ever miss the mark! History teaches us that global capitalism has meant "perpetual war" for millions upon millions of innocent victims – and it continues to mean this as we see with the Iranian war, the Gazan genocide, the Russo-Ukrainian war, and protracted regional conflicts in the horn of Africa. Indeed, things are much worse. It is indubitably the case that global capitalism and existential crises linked to ecological breakdown and the lingering threat of global thermal-nuclear war – not peace! – go hand in hand. This segment looks at the mechanisms of imperialism more closely, especially as it has evolved in the post-WWII era, the unique role of the US as the custodian of the post-WWII capitalist order, and recent trends in the global capitalist economy that have called the continuation of US hegemony into question.

Saturday evening social (optional) Details TBD

Sunday, October 18

Segment 5:

9:00 am - 11:00 am

Capitalism, Canada, and Class

With our understanding of socialism, capitalism, the state, and imperialism under our belts, this session explores Canada's capitalist history more closely. We look at the consolidation of capitalism in the 19th century, the historic formation of unions, the formation of socialist parties in the early 20th century, the post-war economic boom, the consolidation of the neoliberal framework, and the present challenges facing socialists, unions, and the working class.

Coffee Break 11:00 - 11:15

Segment 6:

11:15 am - 12:30 pm

Unions and the Labour Regime

Building on segment 5, we'll survey the consolidation of the post-WWII labour regime with a focus on Canada. We examine the development and nature of labour laws, labour militancy, union density in the private and public sectors, the gutting of labour laws, gender issues in the workplace, the neoliberal assault on the working class and their unions over the last few decades, and the challenges facing unions at this foreboding Trump-Carney juncture.

Segment 7:

12:30 pm - 1:30 pm

Wrap-up: Building Socialism today

Over lunch, and in a bit of a more relaxed manner, this segment explores several of the paradoxical situations or dilemmas within which we socialists find ourselves. We'll talk about the realities of the repressive nature of the capitalist state and the 'do-nothing' messaging of the mass media and mass culture. Despite these obstacles, we socialists persevere, and we'll finish our course by highlighting workplace resistance, working class struggles today, and global push-back in all of its forms. Socialists remain optimists! – we are fundamentally committed to supplanting the 'profit oriented' capitalist system, a system bringing misery and wretchedness to untold numbers, with a society built around the production of goods and services to meet genuine human needs.