PROGRESSIVE ALTERNATIVES:

INSTITUTIONAL RECONSTRUCTION TODAY

SPRING 2021

GOVERNMENT - 1092

LAW – 2391

KENNEDY – DPI 348

TUESDAY 1 TO 3PM

Roberto Mangabeira Unger

Areeda 226

Telephone: 617-495-3156

E-mail: unger@law.harvard.edu

Faculty Assistant: Brenda Bee, 617-496-1764,

[bbee@law.harvard.edu](mailto:bbee@law.harvard.edu)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

An exploration of the past and future agenda of progressives, whether self-described as liberals or as leftists. What should they propose, now that they no longer believe in the usefulness of governmental direction of the economy or in the sufficiency of redistributive social programs? A basic concern is the relation of programmatic thought to the understanding of change and constraint.

In the recent historical period, progressives have sought to humanize the established order rather than to reimagine and remake it. Here the main focus is on institutional or structural change in the market system and in democratic politics. Among the themes to be discussed are the nature and future of the knowledge economy, the status of free labor vis-à-vis capital, the relation of finance to production, the making of a high-energy democracy that no longer needs crisis to make change possible, and the education required by such economic and political alternatives. A central theme throughout is the content and implications of the idea of freedom.

The course will draw on many disciplines and consider examples from many settings. It will try to develop ways of thinking as well as proposals for change.

Jointly offered by the Law School and the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (Government Department).

CLASS SEQUENCE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

For theoretical background to the argument of this course, I suggest you read the following from *False Necessity,* “Introduction to the new edition”, Chapter 1 (pp. 1-40), from Chapter 4, pp. 172-254, from Chapter 5, pp. 342-362, 441-539. You should aim to complete this reading by the end of Spring Recess.

All reading assignments not in the assigned books can be found on the course website.

PART I

THE PROGRESSIVE CAUSE TODAY: THE SITUATION AND THE TASK

**January 26**: The dictatorship of no alternatives in the world and the progressive cause.

RMU, *The Left Alternative*, preface and pages 1-51

RMU, “Society: The Perpetual Invention of the Future” from *The Self Awakened*, pp. 171-181

**February 2**: The dictatorship of no alternatives in the United States and the progressive cause.

RMU, *The Left Alternative*, pp. 1-19, 98-132

RMU and Cornel West, *The Future of American Progressivism* (course website)

**February 9**: Social democracy as the default position of the progressives.

Adam Przeworksi, *Capitalism and Social Democracy*, pp. 7-46

RMU, *The Left Alternative*, pp.83-97

**February 16**. The rise of the knowledge economy as challenge and opportunity.

RMU, *The Knowledge Economy*, pp. 1092, 159-188 (course website)

“Readings on social democracy and varieties of capitalism” (course website)

PART II

PROGRESSIVE ALTERNATIVES TO NEO-LIBERALISM AND TO SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

**February 23**. Democratizing the market

RMU, *Democracy Realized*, pp. 30-52, pp. 187-220

RMU, *The Left Alternative*, pp. 53-63

RMU, *The Knowledge Economy,* pp. 93-158, 277-287 (course website)

**March 2**. Deepening democracy.

RMU, *The Left Alternative*, pp. 156-163

RMU, *Democracy Realized*, pp. 212-220

RMU, “Democracy as Anti-Fate” from *The Self Awakened*, pp. 182-195

**March 9**. Educating and equipping the individual.

John Dewey, a passage from *Experience and Education* (course website)

RMU, *Democracy Realized*, pp. 229-235

RMU, “Self- Consciousness: Humanity Imagined” from *The Self Awakened*, pp. 111-144

**March 16**. Spring Break

**March 23**. Reshaping globalization

RMU, *The Left Alternative*, pp. 133-148

RMU, *Free Trade Reimagined*, pp. 166-212

PART III

IMAGINING AND ACHIEVING STRUCTURAL CHANGE

**March 30.** Projects and agents: the class constituency and political practice of radical reform.

RMU, *The Left Alternative*, pp. 42-51, 164-170

RMU, *Democracy Realized*, pp. 10-16

**April 6**. Ideals: the normative grounding and direction of progressive alternatives.

RMU, *The Left Alternative*, pp. 149-163

RMU, “Deep-Freedom: The Politics of the Religion of the Future” from *The Religion of the Future*, pp. 290-340 (course website)

**April 13**. Structure and structural change: the social-theoretical account of the remaking of structure.

RMU, *Social Theory: Its Situation and Its Task*, pp. 80-128

**April 20**. Conclusion: the progressive cause reconsidered.

ASSIGNED BOOKS

The assigned readings equip students to engage the argument of the course. They also help provide common ground for discussion in class and in section.

Some of the readings are posted on the course website, which you should consult regularly. The readings not posted on the course website are drawn from the works of the instructor listed below. These works can be downloaded for free from the instructor's website: robertounger.com They are also available at the central Harvard Coop as well as from Amazon.

Videotapes of each class will be posted on the course website a few days after the respective class.

Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *The Knowledge Economy*

Hardcover with free e-book

Verso

Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *The Left Alternative*.

Paperback

Verso

Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *Democracy Realized: The Progressive Alternative.*

Paperback

Verso

Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *Social Theory: Its Situation and Its Task*.

Paperback

Verso

Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *False Necessity*: *Anti-Necessitarian Social Theory in the Service of Radical Democracy.*

Paperback

Verso

Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *The Self Awakened: Pragmatism Unbound.*

Paperback

Harvard University Press

WRITING REQUIREMENTS

During the semester undergraduates will write two brief papers. The first paper will be due in class on **February 23**. The second paper will be due electronically by **March 23**, by noon.

Each of these papers, on topics to be set, will respond to a major problem or idea discussed in the course up to that time. Each will be between 6 and 10 double-spaced pages long. Each will count for 20% of the final grade.

In lieu of a final examination, all students will write an extended take-home examination. This final paper or examination will provide them with an occasion to respond to a central aspect of the argument of the course. It should have a minimum of 15 and a maximum of 20 double-spaced pages. The topic or topics will be described in class on **April 6**. The final examination paper will be due by 4 p.m. on **Monday, May 3** (no extensions). It will count for 50% of the final grade for undergraduates. 10% of the final grade for undergraduates will be attributed to participation in section.

The grade for all graduate students, including law students, will be based entirely on their final take-home examination, which will be for them the only writing requirement in the course.