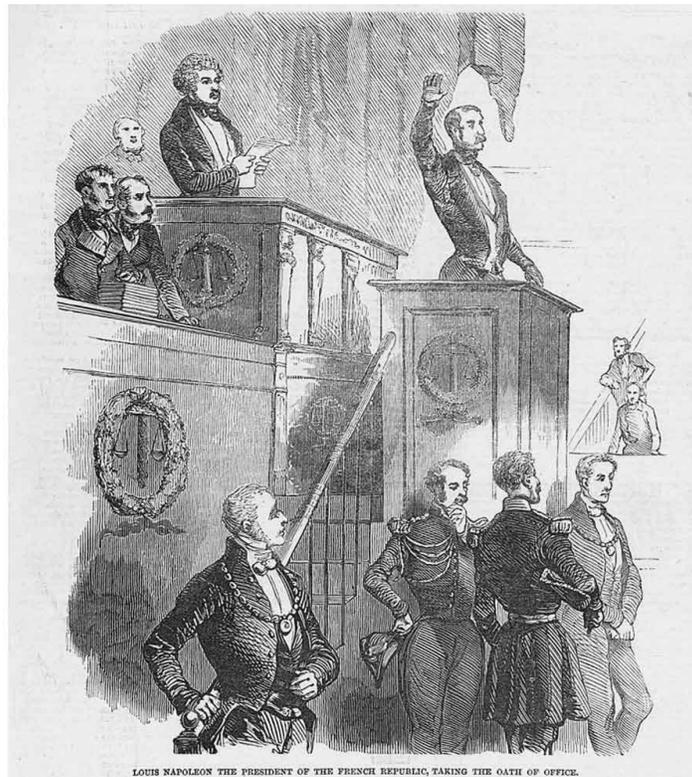


***First Time as Tragedy, Second Time as Farce:  
Marx's The Eighteenth Brumaire and Beyond***



**Brooklyn Institute for Social Research**

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July 12-August 2

Tuesdays, 6:30-9:30 pm (EST)

[Zoom](https://zoom.us/j/4093182254) (<https://zoom.us/j/4093182254>)

Readings ([Google Drive](#))

Reading log/journal ([Google Doc](#))

Karl Marx's magisterial essay *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* is a history in real time, combining Marx's talents as a working journalist with his critique of political economy and theories of historical transformation. A narrative and analysis of Napoleon's nephew Louis Bonaparte's rise to the Emperorship of France (in which history repeated itself, "the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce"), the *Eighteenth Brumaire* contains some of Marx's most well-known statements on class conflict, the state, and the power of symbols, all the while wrestling with one of the central questions of socialist politics: Why did the revolutionary impasse in capitalist society result not in a proletarian republic, but in a novel kind of authoritarian regime? In its examination of the rise of one of the first modern, mass-based, right-wing regimes, the *Eighteenth Brumaire* has served as a landmark work, for theorists across the political spectrum, in the analyses of fascism and authoritarianism in the twentieth century. How can we read

the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, and how might it help us understand the political and social predicaments, and possibilities, of today?

In this course, we will read closely the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, in companionship with contemporary works of political theory, considering its significance for Marx's broader theory of capitalist society, the dynamics of revolutionary and reactionary movements therein, and their legacy for contemporary politics. What, after all, is "Bonapartism"? How does it overlap with—and differ from—concepts and regimes like fascism, dictatorship, and totalitarianism? What are the historical and modern examples of Bonapartist states? And what insights does this text provide us for thinking more broadly about politics in a Marxist vein? In addition to the core text and related excerpts from Marx and Engels, readings will include selections from Leon Trotsky, Antonio Gramsci, Hannah Arendt, Nicos Poulantzas, Stuart Hall, Eric Hobsbawm, Mike Davis, Dylan Riley, and Terrell Carver.

### **Course Policies:**

**Format:** This course is a seminar. The basic requirements are completing the reading assignments to the best of your ability, attending our meetings, and participating in our discussion. In each of our meetings, I will provide an overarching summary of that evening's readings and their relation to the theme of the course. I will facilitate the discussion and do my best to clarify passages and answer questions that arise.

This course is best approached as a common, collaborative inquiry. Our discussions will largely be guided by *your* interests and reasons for taking this class—the most important thing is how you read these texts and what you get out of them. The course is open to students at all levels of knowledge. Naturally, this depends on your ongoing attendance, participation, and engagement! Do not be shy to ask questions, pose comments, and reply and engage with each other.

Try to have your camera on while the class is in session and use the 'raise hand' button if you would like to be in the queue to speak. You are also encouraged to use the chat if you would like to chime in with a comment without interrupting the main conversation.

**Communication:** You are encouraged to use our shared [reading log/journal](#) to post interesting or unclear selections from the reading, to raise broader questions, and to suggest topics for our upcoming class discussions. In addition to using this as a running log of your thoughts over the next four weeks, you are also encouraged to reply to each other's posts. These notes and conversations will be launching points for our weekly discussions. Please feel free to email me if you would like to share any thoughts, comments, or questions individually outside of this format.

**Readings:** I have tried to assign weekly readings under one hundred pages per week. Give priority to the required readings. The additional, supplementary readings are entirely optional, and provide further context. I also reserve the right to alter the syllabus during the course of the class, with sufficient advance notice.

You do not have to purchase any books for this class—all course readings will be available either as PDFs in our Google Drive folder (please let me know if you have trouble accessing the readings)

or linked in the syllabus. However, if you would like to purchase any of the course texts, I suggest helping support independent bookstores by using [www.bookshop.org](http://www.bookshop.org).

## **Week 1 (July 12): Revolution Deferred**

### *Required Readings*

- Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire*: 1869 Preface, [1885 Preface](#) (by Engels), Chs. 1-3
- Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital*, pp. 21-40
- Mike Davis, “Marx’s Lost Theory: The Politics of Nationalism in 1848” pp. 160-178

### *Additional Readings*

- Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System IV*, pp. 77-141 (focus on pp. 86-95, 105-117)
- Terrell Carver, “Imagery/Writing, Imagination/Politics: Reading Marx through the *Eighteenth Brumaire*” pp. 113-128

## **Week 2 (July 19): Class Politics and State Power**

### *Required Readings*

- Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, Chs. 4-7
- Marx, *The Civil War in France*, Section III (pp. 1-14)
- Marx and Engels, “[The Relation of State and Law to Property](#)”
- Marx, [Preface](#) to Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy
- Engels, “[Letter to J. Bloch](#)” and “[Letter to Conrad Schmidt](#)”

### *Additional Readings*

- Stuart Hall, “Rethinking the Base-Superstructure Metaphor” pp. 62-90 (focus on pp. 74-78)
- James Martin, “Performing Politics: Class, Ideology and Discourse in Marx’s *Eighteenth Brumaire*,” pp. 129-142

## **Week 3 (July 26): Fascism, Dictatorship, Totalitarianism**

### *Required Readings*

- Antonio Gramsci, “Caesarism” and “Observations on Certain Aspects of the Structure of Political Parties in Periods of Organic Crisis” (both from the *Prison Notebooks*)
- Leon Trotsky, “[Bonapartism and Fascism](#)” and “[The Workers’ State, Thermidor and Bonapartism](#)”
- Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, pp. 147-157, 229-236
- Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, pp. 279-287

### *Additional Readings*

- Bob Jessop, “The Political Scene and the Politics of Representation: Periodising Class Struggle and the State in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*” pp. 179-194
- John Willoughby, “Understanding the Emergence of Authoritarian Capitalist States” pp. 670-686

### **Week 4 (August 2): Bonapartism Redux?**

#### *Required Readings*

- Kojin Karatani, *History and Repetition*, pp. 1-28
- Stuart Hall, “Popular-Democratic vs Authoritarian Populism” pp. 123-149
- Dylan Riley, “American Brumaire?” pp. 21-32
- Jeremy Meckler, “Marx America Gramsci Again: Understanding Trumpism Through Bonapartism and Caesarism” pp. 1-17

#### *Additional Readings*

- Marco Boffo, Alfredo Saad-Filho, and Ben Fine, “Neoliberal Capitalism: The Authoritarian Turn”
- Asad Haider, “[Law and Order: Make Marxism Great Again](#)”