

***Economics for Everyone:***  
**Outline for a Short Series of Workshops**  
**“Reclaiming Economics: Understanding Capitalism, So That We Can Be More Successful at Changing It”**

**Structure:** Four 90-minute sessions (could be compressed into one long day, preferably held over two half-days, or even spread over 4 days – depending on the context and time constraints).

**Format:** Each session includes an introductory lecture (45 min.), Q&A (15 min.), and then time (30 min.) for a simple individual or group exercise involving the material that was just presented. Students can complete the exercise independently if the time runs out.

**Materials Needed:** Classroom, powerpoint projection facilities, flip charts, paper & pencils, tables for students to work at.

**Supplementary Reading:** Students will be assigned selected chapters from *Economics for Everyone* to read in preparation for/conjunction with the workshops. The more reading that can be completed ahead of time, the better – but the seminars will be comprehensible to someone who hasn’t read the book. Hopefully the workshop will spur them to complete the book independently.

**Intended Audience:** Interested non-specialists (union members, community or environmental activists, retirees, etc.) who want to:

- Learn about basic economic concepts, and how the economy works
- Feel more confident in challenging conventional assumptions and attitudes of economics, in support of their demands and proposals for greater social justice

## **Session 1:**

### **What is the Economy, What is Capitalism, and Where Did It Come From?**

**Readings:** Chapters 1-4 of *Economics for Everyone*.

**Main Theme:** Demystify the economy; reinforce that the economy exists to meet human needs (not the other way around). Explain the key characteristics and history of the capitalist economy. Review competing schools of thought in economics, and the inherently value-laden, political content of economic theories.

#### **Topics:**

The economy, and its purpose  
How we measure the economy  
Characteristics of a *good* economy  
Economic evolution through history  
The origins of capitalism  
Changes in capitalism  
The origins of neoliberalism  
The history of economic thought  
The links between economics and politics

#### **Key Terms Introduced:**

work production goods services consumption investment finance environment  
GDP growth capitalism production for profit wage labour class slavery  
feudalism capitalism neoliberalism surplus distribution

#### **Class Exercise: GDP and Human Well-Being**

Guided exercise to review statistics on economic performance and human development from the U.N.'s annual Human Development Report. Shows that the link between economic growth and human well-being is indirect and uneven, at best. Shows that societies have choices regarding how to channel and manage the economy, in the interests of human well-being.

## **Session 2:**

### **The “Little Circle” of Capitalism: Work, Production, Tools, and Reproduction**

**Readings:** Chapters 5-10 of *Economics for Everyone*.

**Main Theme:** Productive human activity (or “work,” broadly defined) is the only source of value and progress in the economy. In capitalism, most work is performed by paid employees. The capitalist economy consists of an ongoing, circular process of investment, employment, production, consumption, and reproduction. Workers need capitalists in this cycle (to invest, and hence set the economic machine in motion), but capitalists need workers too (to perform most of the work that’s required in capitalism). That core circular dynamic is the central relationship in capitalism, and is crucial to its overall functioning.

#### **Topics:**

Work and production  
Different kinds of work  
Working with tools  
Defining capital  
Investment: What it is, and why it matters  
How companies are organized and owned  
What companies (and managers of companies) do  
Labour as a commodity  
Labour extraction under capitalism  
Employment and conflict  
Unions and collective bargaining  
The economic role of households  
Reproduction: “producing workers”  
Closing the “little circle”

#### **Key Terms Introduced:**

work production value-added employment productivity subsistence tools capital  
physical capital fixed capital technology corporation capitalist class stock market  
top managers major owners labour extraction labour discipline labour intensity  
labour market segmentation unit labour cost cost of job loss unions  
collective bargaining households unpaid work reproduction income expenditure

#### **Class Exercise: Dividing up the Economic Pie**

Guided exercise to review simple GDP statistics regarding the distribution of income between different classes in society (profits, wages, other). How has the distribution of income (measured this way) changed over time, and why?

## Session 3: The “Big Circle” of Capitalism: Environment, Finance, Government, and Globalization

---

**Readings:** Chapters 15-21 and 23 of *Economics for Everyone*

**Main theme:** The core “circle” of capitalism (investment, employment, production, consumption, and reproduction) takes place within the context of a more complex, flexible, and in some ways fragile system. Here we add these broader features and players to our “map”: the natural environment, the financial industry, government, and the global economy. These features make capitalism more complex – but the core “little circle” still fundamentally drive the system.

**Topics:**

Nature’s role in the economy  
Sustainability  
Climate change and the limits to growth  
The private banking industry  
Central banks and monetary policy  
Financial instability and fragility  
The historic role of government in capitalism  
The economic functions of government today  
Forms of globalization  
The history of globalization  
Free trade agreements and international economic institutions  
What’s wrong with free trade?  
Closing the “big circle” of capitalism  
Injections and leakages

**Key Terms Introduced:**

environment natural resources ecological benefits pollution sustainability  
climate change money bank central bank inflation monetary policy monetarism  
bonds shares stock market speculation financialization derivatives fiscal policy  
program spending transfer payments government production public consumption  
public investment income tax sales tax payroll tax wealth tax deficit debt burden  
exports imports services trade free trade agreements multinational corporation  
foreign direct investment exchange rate migration injections leakages

**Class Exercise: YOU Write the Budget!**

Individuals are given the opportunity to design a fictional government budget, broadly corresponding to real-world aggregate data from the actual economy, involving choices regarding revenue sources and funded programs.

## **Session 4: Challenging the Economy**

**Readings:** Chapters 25-27 of *Economics for Everyone*.

### **Topics:**

Giving capitalism a report card  
Is capitalism vulnerable?  
Improving capitalism  
A high-investment sustainable economy  
How to pay for reforms  
Capitalism and socialism  
Capitalism and human nature

### **Key Terms Introduced:**

systemic instability financial fragility global imbalance environmental limits  
social democracy socialism reforms public ownership economic planning  
individualism human nature selfishness cooperation

### **Class Exercise: Visioning a Better Economy**

Group brainstorming and negotiating exercise to identify priorities for economic reform.

Each group develops a short-list of:

Key things which must be changed in our economy.

Key policy tools which would allow that progress.

Key arguments/appeals/"hooks" which would help to marshal broader public support for those demands.

Is the "economy" genuinely the barrier to social progress? Or is it something else?

---