

Phil A. Neel

“Flattened Utopias: Deindustrialization and the Digital Pastoral in China and Beyond”

12/04 (Fri), 3:00 PM - 5:00 PM (EST) @ Tolley 204 + Hybrid

Hybrid event registration Link: https://syracuseuniversity.zoom.us/meeting/register/CzeFkSKgRLyO1iLeSokoHA

In recent years, terms like "involution" (内卷) and "lying flat" (躺平) have played a central role in pop appraisals of Chinese politics, succinctly expressing trends as distinct as deflation, overwork in the tech sector, and rising youth unemployment. Meanwhile, online influencers have made fortunes acting out a rustic return to the countryside. Often romanticized, these digital artifacts are also Romantic in the more formal sense, expressing a familiar form of utopian pastoralism generated by industrialization itself. Over the same span of years, employment began to deindustrialize, the state launched wide-ranging governance reforms, and extensive crackdowns targeted underground labor organizers, Marxist political groups, and feminists, both devastating and driving a widespread reinvention of the Chinese left. This talk inquires into how these trends might be related to one another, how similar political expressions have emerged in previous cycles of industrial transformation, and how all of this links to the broader forces shaping the global landscape of class conflict.

Phil A. Neel is a communist geographer who researches and writes on global industrial trends and political philosophy. He is the author of *Hinterland: America's New Landscape of Class and Conflict* and *Hellworld: The Human Species and the Planetary Factory.*

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