

CALL FOR PAPERS

3rd Congress of the European Labour History Network (ELHN)
19-22 September 2019
Amsterdam, International Institute of Social History (IISH)

“Labour & Empire” working group

How Class Worked in the Age of Empire Comparative and Transnational Perspectives

As Pepijn Brandon and Aditya Sarkar underline in “Labour History and the Case against Colonialism” (*International Review of Social History*, 2019, pp. 1-37), labour historians are ideally placed to question the imperial revisionism and revivalism which at present seems so vivacious both in academia and in public debate.

This was probably not so true, or so striking, half a century ago. Indeed it took the Global Turn of the 1990s, the rise of comparative and transnational approaches, and notably the efforts initiated in Amsterdam by the scholars in charge of the International Institute of Social History (IISH), for labour history to become less Eurocentric and consider the workers of all continents, whether “free” or unfree, as worthy of interest.

Today the contribution labour history can make both to public discussions of imperialism and to a deeper, more sophisticated understanding of the past, is clear enough – and the panels we will present at the 3rd ELHN Congress will hopefully highlight that potential.

Many new alleys have been explored over the past twenty years, but the way class worked in the Age of Empire – an age that did not end with World War One but culminated in the inter-war period and survived long after 1945 – is still in need of further analysis. We know too little about the way cheap labour in the colonies and on the oceans was exploited and organised to serve metropolitan interests. We know too little about the plural mechanisms of class relations in the imperial world, relations that included subordination as well as accommodation and rebellion, relations that were defined and contested in a variety of official or militant languages.

The co-ordinators of the “Labour & Empire” working group welcome proposals for twenty-minute papers. Panels of three or four papers will be greeted with special attention. Potential topics include but are not limited to:

- Labour law in colonial settings and its relation to labour law in the metropolises.
- Patterns of work and control of the workforce – notably in agriculture, mining and transport.
- Transnational / transimperial / transcolonial labour activism.
- The interplay of anticolonial nationalism with trade-union, syndicalist, socialist or communist internationalism.
- The part played by labour movements in decolonisation; how they challenged the authority of the colonial state but also of the post-colonial states.
- Working-class views of or implication in colonial atrocities: genocide, partition, famine...

These issues can be considered in relation to the European empires as well as the contiguous empires of East Asia and the United States. The focus of the papers should be on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Proposals should be submitted to Yann Beliard (yann.beliard@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr) and Gareth Curless (g.m.curless@exeter.ac.uk) by 7 July 2019. Feedback will be given in the following week.