

European Labour History Network (ELHN) conference
University of Uppsala, 11-13 June 2024

Labour & Empire Working Group – Call for Papers

“Working-Class Anti-Imperialism, the Global Left and Beyond”

In the wake of the one-day conference “Working-Class Anti-Imperialism and the Global Left: New Directions of Study” held at the University of Bristol on 30 June 2023, our working group is eager to further explore the rich and complex questions debated on that day.

Inspired by new imperial history, global labour history, post-colonial studies, and the transnational turn more generally, we seek to present panels that revisit the imperial experience from below, examining the part played by workers in the rise, persistence and fall of empires (both formal and informal, both continental and maritime), from the 1870s to the 1970s.

International organisations, in particular those populated by socialists, communists, anarchists and syndicalists, had an important role to play in the global formation of anti-imperial movements. At the same time, in some occasions they represented an obstacle or a factor slowing down the growth of anti-imperialism. With this in mind, a first broad topic we want to discuss is the formation of anti-imperialism *outside* organised labour organisations. We seek papers that innovate our usual geographical patterns, tracing connections both within the same imperial entity or trans-imperially. We want to explore anti-imperial activism aimed at and promoted by all kind of workers (industrial labour, peasantry, domestic labour and so on), active in public and private spaces, and employed across the various contractualised, coerced and indentured forms adopted in empires in the 19th and 20th centuries. A focus on south-south connections and on the transfer of anti-imperial ideas and practices from the colonies to the metropole will be especially welcomed.

A second topic we want to explore is the self-representation of workers across lines of class, gender, race, language and ethnicity. How did workers taking part in anti-imperial activism describe themselves? How relevant was their own self-identification in the definition of their anti-imperial political activism? Were, for example, whiteness or blackness, masculinity or femininity, language, national and ethnic belonging deciding factors in seeking solidarity and collaboration across national and imperial lines? Critical reflections seeking to deconstruct strategies of self-identification deployed by groups, organisations or individuals proactive in anti-imperial movements will be at the centre of our analysis.

The convenors welcome 250-word proposals for papers which address one or more of the following themes:

- Anti-imperial activism outside organised labour;
- Transnational and international movements, particularly those concerned with

- race-based and gender-based activism (e.g. Pan-Africanism and feminism);
- Globe-trotting subaltern activists in imperial, colonial, and postcolonial contexts;
 - Alternative geographies of radical anti-imperialism;
 - Gender, productivity and anti-imperialism;
 - Anti-imperialism among coerced and indentured workers;
 - Racialised immigration regimes, with a particular focus on movements that supported or opposed race-based immigration laws;
 - The internationalisation of the labour question;
 - Trans-imperial relationships between anti-imperial movements and transfers of ideas and practices from the colonies to the metropole;
 - The consumer-centred forms of resistance to imperialism in the South and its relation with the production and circulation of goods;
 - Domestic labour and resistance to empire in the private space;
 - The self-representation of workers within anti-imperial movements;
 - Patterns of solidarity and collaboration across racial, class, gender, national and language lines in global anti-imperial movements.

Proposals should be submitted to labourempire.elhn@gmail.com by **31 August 2023**.

Papers should focus on either the 19th or 20th century (or both). They can focus on any geographic location, but proposals that are decentred and/or written from the perspective of the global South in colonial and postcolonial contexts are particularly welcome. The organisers will promote the publication of a selection of the papers as an edited volume or as a special issue in a leading journal of the field (more details TBA).

For more information about the ELHN Labour&Empire group and its activities, please visit: <https://socialhistoryportal.org/elhn/wg-empire>.