

Call for Papers

Archiv für Sozialgeschichte 68 (2028)

More Than Half a Lifetime: Labour History as a History of Society

Over the past two decades, *Labour History* has enjoyed a remarkable resurgence, something that was hardly to be expected after so many declarations of its demise. Many of the older lines of conflict, which have always been part of political self-positioning within the discipline of history, have now been smoothed over. The perspective has broadened: gender history and the diverse impulses of *Global Labour History* have contributed innovative ways to challenge old certainties about wage labour relations, organizational forms, exclusionary mechanisms and practices of solidarity. In the Federal Republic of Germany, the debate on ‘history after the boom’ has inspired numerous projects and research networks. In cooperation with a changing sociology of industry and work, these efforts have helped reopen the discussion on the nature of work and placed greater emphasis on the agency of different groups of workers. The *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* invites scholars from various disciplines to reflect on the changes in the world of labour from new perspectives, both empirically and methodologically. We encourage scholars to consider not only the period since the 1970s, but also the entire societal history of the world of work from the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries.

We suggest the following four key areas:

Dimensions of work and employment relationships

The history of wage labour, particularly during the heyday of Labour History, was at the centre of much research, focusing specifically on the conditions of the emergence and the processes of transformation of capitalist societies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, it has become clear that wage labour and the associated contractual relationships represent only one form – and not necessarily the dominant one – of employment relationships. Furthermore, there have been and continue to be very different manifestations and mixed forms of free and unfree labour across different historical periods and regions, which could coexist and overlap both temporally and spatially. Our focus is on the economic, legal, political and gender-specific conditions of work; the ways in which inequality has been produced; the rationales and practices underpinning it; and how these issues have been addressed and reproduced in contemporary contexts. In this regard, hybrid forms of employment, especially in the service sector, are particularly important. They have long been, and still are, overshadowed by typical industrial wage labour. Examples include domestic,

household and agricultural work, which are characterised by a high percentage of migrant workers, as well as bogus self-employment, outsourcing and employment relationships within global value chains and platform economies.

Workplaces, material conditions and technological change

Previous traditions of labour history emphasised the development of the so-called 'productive forces'. Technologies and material resources, production sites and distribution centres, skills and specialist knowledge were examined as the framework conditions of wage labour, which shaped both working conditions and the scope of action available to working people. These aspects remain important areas of inquiry in more recent Labour History, particularly when researching workplace environments, the effects of structural change, advanced vocational training, occupational safety and environmental factors. We are interested in research perspectives that address the shaping of technological change in relation to work through academic research, political governance and societal responses to innovation. Against this backdrop, we welcome a wide range of proposals that conceptualise, empirically investigate or analyse through the lens of subjective experience the transformations of materialities and spaces in the world or work.

Negotiation processes: movements, strikes and protest

The shaping of labour relations lies at the heart of the history of trade unions. We welcome contributions that examine which conceptions and understandings of 'work' shaped the objectives of trade union organisations, and how this influenced membership recruitment and organisational structure. We are particularly interested in proposals that focus on transnational cooperation and interconnections, as well as those that address the 'new' social and religious movements, their conceptions of work and non-work, and the forms their struggles for recognition took. Although the study of strikes and labour disputes has a long tradition in labour history, it has received less attention in recent years. There are various possible perspectives here. What (potential) changes in function have strikes and labour disputes undergone? What forms of *Eigen-sinn* (Alf Lüdtke) and emotions, which conflicts of interest and what formal and informal rules have shaped labour disputes since the nineteenth century? Of particular interest are contributions that discuss the relationship between law and labour, supranational labour law standards, the practice of labour courts, and their regulatory claims and standard-setting procedures.

Care work

One reason for the resurgence of Labour History is that the field has moved beyond an overly narrow focus on (male) wage labour to include forms of work that can be broadly described as care or reproductive work. This refers to both unpaid work in the home, such as raising children and organising family life, and the rapidly growing service sector, consisting mainly of care or education work, ranging from healthcare and nursing to care for the elderly, social work and domestic services, such as cleaners or domestic staff. This highlights the various forms of recognition and disregard, as well as the creation of different structures of inequality within welfare states.

At a conference organised by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in Berlin on 11–12 March 2027, we would like to discuss and further develop ideas for contributions, proposed topics and general questions on the subject of the *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 68 (2028) outlined above. We invite all interested scholars to submit proposals to afs@fes.de by 10 December 2026. Proposals should not exceed 3,000 characters (including spaces) and may be written in German or English, as may the presentations and subsequent articles. The editorial team of AfS 68 will subsequently select contributions for the inclusion in the volume. Manuscripts should be around 60,000 characters in length. The submission deadline for contributions is 15 November 2027.

The *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* is edited by Claudia Gatzka, Kirsten Heinsohn, Thomas Kroll, Anja Kruke, Philipp Kufferath (managing editor), Friedrich Lenger, Ute Planert, Dietmar Süß, Nikolai Wehrs and Meik Woyke.

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