

Working-Class Anti-Imperialism and the Global Left: New Directions of Study

University of Bristol, 30 June 2023

The global turn has inspired a new generation of scholarship concerned with the links between labour and various forms of internationalism connected to socialism and communism, pan-ethnic, pan-racial and transnational religious movements, international institutions and organisations, and anti-imperial networks. What has emerged from these histories is a better understanding of the interdependent, dynamic, and often complex relationship between labour in all its commodified forms, workers' organisations, and different international bodies and movements which claimed to be operating on behalf of labour. At particular moments and in particular places, workers and international organisations could act in unison to further their shared objectives. Such alliances often proved to be fleeting, however. Typically, this was because connections were more imagined than real, because differences along the axes of class, gender, ethnicity, religion, and nationality proved insurmountable, or because vernacular understandings of collective organisation and resistance were incompatible with how external actors, particularly those from the global North, conceptualised the very same struggles. Of course, such differences and divergences should not obscure examples of intra-South movements which worked successfully in colonial and postcolonial spaces to further labour-related agendas, and often in ways that challenged normative understandings of work, the worker, and worker organisations.

In view of the increasingly diverse character of international labour history, the convenors for this one-day conference, which will be held in Bristol on June, 30, 2023, welcome 250-word proposals for papers which address one or more of the following themes:

- South-South cooperation and collaboration, with a particular emphasis on grassroots labour mobilisation and non-institutional forms of collective action
- Transnational and international movements, particularly those concerned with race-based and gender-based activism
- Alternative leftist international imaginaries for the post-imperial and postcolonial worlds
- Labour and pan-ethnic and anti-racist movements, including, for example, Black Internationalism
- Left-wing internationalism and its relationship with anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism
- International and transnational subaltern activists in imperial, colonial, and postcolonial contexts
- The relationship between mobile spaces, itinerant workers and international activists
- Racialised immigration regimes, with a particular focus on movements that supported or opposed race-based immigration laws
- The internationalisation of the 'labour question'
- The overseas activities of national trade union organisations

- The racialisation of coerced workers (from enslaved men and women to indentured workers) and its impact on labour internationalism and workers' solidarity
- Consumer-centred forms of resistance to imperialism and its relation with the production and circulation of goods
- Domestic labour and resistance to empire in the private space.

Proposals should be submitted to labourempire.elhn@gmail.com by **30 November 2022**. 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 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>.

Selected bibliography

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- Carolien Stolte, "Introduction: Trade Union Networks and the Politics of Expertise in an Age of Afro-Asian Solidarity," *Journal of Social History* 53:2 (2019), 331-347.
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