

**CFP: Remembering Toxic Pasts? Memory, Deindustrialisation and the Environment**

European Labour History Network Conference, 30 August–3 September 2021 in Vienna,  
Working Group *Memory and Deindustrialisation*

Deadline for abstracts: 15 September 2020

In the current moment various crises seem to merge and amplify each other. The climate crisis, the destruction of the natural environment as a long-term consequence of industrial extraction and exploitation, waves of financial crises – first the 2008 crash, austerity politics, now the economic downturn following the corona pandemic –, and the upsurge of (mostly right-wing) populist movements on all continents make up a worrying picture for the near future. Before this backdrop, environmental concerns and the worries of workers to keep their jobs by retaining industrial sites of production are frequently pitted against each other. The US president's promotion of the coal mining industry or the struggles about open cast lignite mining in Germany are just two recent cases in point. There is a particular construction of historical memory implied in this seeming opposition, one that purports the congruence between employees' and capital interests and largely neglects the structures of exploitation workforces are exposed to. It neglects at the same time the fact that workers and working-class communities have often been among the first to be affected by the environmental fallout industries generate. Accordingly, while deindustrialization processes have garnered vibrant industrial heritage scenes, hegemonic heritage discourses have often tended to underpin nostalgic, uncritical views of the past, based on selective memories without representing the environmental dimension of the industrial age and its transitions. Similarly, research in the field of labour history is just starting to focus more closely on the environmental dimensions of the worker's industrial lifeworlds. In this workshop we shall therefore attempt to bridge questions of labour, deindustrialisation, memory and environmental concerns:

How have histories of labour incorporated the environment into the narrative? In what ways may historians in the future write planetary history into the history of labour, of industrialisation, and deindustrialisation, and vice versa? How has the discourse over climate change and the Anthropocene affected the memory and heritage of labour? Do we need to revisit nostalgic accounts of the worlds of labour of the past against the background of the knowledge we have today? How can we write a history of deindustrialisation from both, environmental and workers' perspectives?

And more empirically: How have workers actually experienced environmental transformations? How was public health affected by industries and deindustrialization processes? How have environmental damages affected the life and health of the working classes? What were their fears and anticipations of the future during energy transitions? To what extent was the conflict between workers' interests and environmental concerns real? When and how did they converge?

How has the labour movement interacted with environmental activism and to what extent were environmental activists open to the struggle for working-class livelihoods? Maybe most crucially, how are these processes remembered, framed and represented today? And what can both environmental and labour activists learn from the past struggles?

Please send your abstracts for contributions by 15 September 2020 to:

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