

Between Thompson and the Global: Reflections on Labour History Today

We invite papers for a workshop entitled “Between Thompson and the Global: Rethinking Labour History Today”, to be held at the University of Warwick on 26-27 June 2026. This workshop will seek to bring together historians of labour to collectively reflect on a large historiographical shift that has taken place over the last two decades, from the social history of labour (in national contexts) to global and trans-national labour history. The social history of labour “from below” is a tradition initiated by E.P Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), and extended over several decades by a robust tradition of politically engaged left-wing historical studies of the working classes: a tradition most powerfully entrenched in British historiography (but with many imprints elsewhere, ranging from the United States to Brazil to South Africa to India). The global history of labour, which revised and questioned many of the features of “Thompsonian” history-writing, has sought to overcome “methodological nationalism” in the writing of labour history, to investigate specific labour histories within a global frame, and to enable trans-national histories of workers and work. It has emerged as an increasingly dominant frame of reference for contemporary studies of labour around the world.

This workshop seeks to place these two historiographical traditions in conversation with each other, to examine the stakes of the passage from the older, “Thompsonian” tradition to the “global turn”, and to think about the changed meanings of “doing labour history” today. Participants are urged to explicitly reflect on the methodological and conceptual issues at stake in the practice of labour history.

We would like to invite submissions that address (but are not necessarily limited to) the following themes:

1. To what extent has the global labour history tradition that has flourished over the last 20 years drawn upon or rejected the methodological and conceptual approaches of Thompsonian social/labour history? What other methodologies and concepts have been deployed and proven fruitful?
2. How do we address the burgeoning critique of Thompsonian social/labour history as parochial and Anglocentric (Bressey, 2015; Satia, 2020), and how have historians responded to this challenge and reshaped British labour history accordingly? What can historians of British labour learn from broader global trajectories of workforce formation and labour movements?
3. How might integrating histories of consumption, environment, and reproduction enrich our understanding of labour and its global entanglements?
4. In what ways can collaboration between historians of Britain and the global south generate new analytical frameworks or unsettle established narratives of class, race, and empire?
5. What kinds of politically-engaged global social and labour history can best respond to the contemporary challenges of rising global inequality and the appropriation of class politics by some sections of the populist right?
6. The legitimacy of 'radical' forms of labour-history writing initially arose from politics, from the apparently established centrality of the industrial working class both in society and in projects of social emancipation. That centrality has now been in precipitous decline for a long time. In this

context, how might we think about what the ‘politics of doing labour history’ actually implies today?

7. What has been gained and what has been lost in the shift from a labour history dominated by “history from below” to one dominated by global history?

We invite scholars from across disciplines to submit 300 word abstracts for pre-circulated papers by 5pm on 30 January 2026, and to submit their papers for pre-circulation by 5 pm on 29 May 2026.

This workshop is organised by

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Please send abstracts to globalhistory@warwick.ac.uk