



## International Conference of Labour and Social History

Internationale Tagung der HistorikerInnen der Arbeiter- und anderer sozialer Bewegungen  
Conference internationale d'histoire ouvrière et sociale

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### **57<sup>th</sup> ITH Conference** **The Political Ecology of Work in Times of Disaster**

**Linz/Upper Austria, 22–24 September 2022**

Conference Languages: English / German

#### **CALL FOR PAPERS**

The onset of the global pandemic radically challenged the world of work. Lockdowns and other public health policies re-segmented labour markets, reallocated rights and reinforced privileges. Homework exploded, all while workers deemed “essential” kept on risking their health in services, care, slaughterhouses and farms. Both in the Global South and the Global North, labour legislation was rolled back, and trade-unions muted.

The 2022 ITH conference takes from the present epidemiological crisis to reflect on other times of disaster and their implications for workers, organised labour and labour relations. This includes ecological disasters like earthquakes, floods or droughts; technological disasters such as Fukushima in 2011 or the Bhopal gas tragedy in 1984; medical crises like epidemics or pandemics, such as the Black Death, the post-World War One influenza pandemic and the current Covid-19 pandemic.

No disaster is purely natural. A disaster takes place within environmental, social, economic and political contexts that ultimately determine the impact of a disaster. Human Intervention is important to the outbreak of such events. It is human society, not nature, that is in crisis due to viruses, geological or climatic changes; it is human society that produces technological disasters; it is the geo-ecological shifts between humans (society) and nature that can produce biophysical hazards. The social and economic impact of a hazard is determined by nature and extent of societal vulnerability. It is this societal vulnerability that turns a hazard into a disaster, the endemic into an epidemic.

How well societies prepare for, cope with or recover from disasters is determined by their social, political, economic and cultural vulnerability and their capacity to absorb these shocks (their resilience). At the ITH conference 2022 we focus on how labour was affected by and dealt with disasters in both a long-term and short-term perspective. We approach this topic through the lens of political ecology, i.e. we take the viewpoint of both environmental history and Marxist political economy.

There are numerous factors that deepen labourer’s vulnerability and their capacity to cope with shocks: environmental, economic or institutional factors. Studying disasters via a political ecology approach allows us to analyse these factors in a combined way. From a political ecology approach, we see that the expansion of capitalism and the inherent exploitation of both labour and nature has had a severe impact on workers’

vulnerability to hazards: it worsened the livelihood of many, and weakened communal institutions (e.g. commons), but has also created the preconditions for environmentally-induced disasters. These pre-conditions materialise in varied ways in different societal contexts – a heterogeneity that needs to be explored.

We invite contributions that explore the following questions:

- How have the working people experienced and interpreted different forms of disasters in the past and the present?
- What is the role of organised labour in shaping the outcome of a disaster?
- What are the short- and long-term effects of disasters for workers and labour?
- What is the political impact of an epidemic crisis on labour?
- Who are the workers in the disaster relief sector?
- Are there any progressive opportunities coming out of a disaster?
- What is the impact of disasters and crises on patterns of labour circulation and migration?
- Can we observe selective effects of disasters along racial, ethnic or gender lines?
- Has the Anthropocene changed disasters / led to more disasters?
- How have workers adapted to disasters, e.g. via social movements, solidarity, etc.?
- How have state interventions, law and legislation mediated the impact of pandemics and other crises and to what extent has labour influenced this?

## **SUBMISSION**

Proposed papers should include:

- Abstract (max. 300 words)
- Biographical note (continuous text, max. 200 words)
- Full address and Email address

The abstract of the suggested paper should contain a separate paragraph explaining how and (if applicable) to which element(s) or question(s) of the Call for Papers the submitted paper refers. The short CV should give information on the applicant's contributions to the field of labour history, broadly defined, and specify (if applicable) relevant publications. For the purpose of information, applicants are invited to attach a copy of one of these publications to their application.

Proposals to be sent to our conference manager Laurin Blecha: [conference@ith.or.at](mailto:conference@ith.or.at)

## **CONFERENCE PUBLICATION**

As a rule (i.e. with very few exceptions) the ITH publishes edited volumes arising from its conferences. Since 2013 the ITH conference volumes have been published in Brill's [Studies in Global Social History Series](#), edited by Marcel van der Linden. The ITH encourages the conference participants to submit their papers to this publication project. High-quality papers will be selected by the volume's editors.

## **TIME SCHEDULE**

Submission of proposals:	31 January 2022
Notification of acceptance:	28 February 2022
Full papers or presentation version:	15 August 2022

## **PREPARATORY GROUP**

Rolf Bauer, ITH, Vienna  
Adrian Grama, Leibnitz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies (IOS), Regensburg  
Chitra Joshi, Association of Indian Labour Historians (AILH), New Delhi  
Stefan Müller, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), Bonn  
Susan Zimmermann, ITH, Vienna

## **THE ITH AND ITS MEMBERS**

The ITH is one of the worldwide known forums of the history of labour and social movements. The ITH favours research pursuing inclusive and global perspectives and open-ended comparative thinking. Following its tradition of cooperating with organisations of the labour movement, the ITH likewise puts emphasis on the conveyance of research outside the academic research community itself. Currently ca. 100 member institutions and a growing number of individual members from five continents are associated with the ITH.

Information on ITH publications in the past 50 years:

<https://www.ith.or.at/en/publications/>

Online ITH membership application form:

<https://www.ith.or.at/de/mitgliedschaft/>