

Senior Editors' Note

Several recent issues of *International Labor and Working-Class History* have been either entirely thematic or substantially devoted to a particular question or forum. Nevertheless, ILWCH continues to welcome unsolicited manuscripts from scholars whose work is relevant to the broad and increasingly variegated field of labor and working-class history, and this issue showcases seven articles that demonstrate the impressively wide range of cases and themes that researchers in this field address. Not only do these articles range over a number of different geographic locations—Spain, Britain, France, Mexico, southern Africa, China—they also reflect the wide spectrum of historiographical, theoretical, and political concerns that engage the attention of those who study labor and working-class history.

Two of the articles in this issue are situated primarily in Spain during the late 1910s, and are excellent examples of the very different concerns that can be addressed by historians of workers' movements even when focusing on apparently similar times and places. In "An Uncanny Honeymoon: Spanish Anarchism and the Bolshevik Dictatorship of the Proletariat, 1917–1922," Arturo Zoffmann Rodriguez reconsiders the initially positive response of many Spanish anarchists to the Bolshevik Revolution, a phenomenon that has perplexed historians, who have largely attributed it to the anarchists' misreading of the Bolsheviks' true nature. Zoffmann Rodriguez offers a different explanation, one that refrains from portraying the anarchists as ingenuous or misinformed, and argues instead that the particular historical moment of the Russian Revolution, which coincided with a wave of intense worker militancy and state repression in Spain, made the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat palatable, even appealing, as the radical Left struggled for survival in the face of right-wing violence and social-democratic reformism. Although Zoffmann Rodriguez is addressing the specific case of the Spanish anarchists, his arguments speak to the larger interpretive challenge for historians to understand what seem to be, at first glance, misunderstandings, and to spare our historical subjects the "condescension of posterity," in the memorable words of E.P. Thompson.

It could be argued that no category of worker has been treated with more condescension than rural laborers. Julia Hudson-Richards, in her article, "Ships, Bread, and Work: Agrarian Conflict in the Mediterranean Countryside, 1914–1923," directly questions the assumption that the latter were mostly passive spectators during the period of heightened worker militancy in Spain during and immediately after World War One. At the same time, she argues that the Spanish national context is not necessarily the most useful frame for understanding the mobilization of agricultural laborers in the region of Valencia. Rather, she foregrounds the export economy in oranges and the devastating impact of

World War One, which not only sharply reduced demand for luxury items such as Valencia oranges but also left few vessels available for shipping the oranges to overseas markets. This, combined with a series of catastrophic climatic events, reduced rural workers to near starvation. Though a substantial number of the orange workers were also small proprietors, wage work had become increasingly crucial to their survival, so once faced with the virtual collapse of the orange economy, they adopted discourses and practices, including the strike, more typically associated with fully proletarianized workers.

Sara Hidalgo's article "The Making of a 'Simple Domestic': Domestic Workers, the Supreme Court, and the Law in Post-Revolutionary Mexico" focuses on yet another category of worker that has been marginal to the historiography of labor movements until recently. This study of legal cases involving paid housework considers how the (gendered) space in which work is performed can become its defining characteristic, especially for juridical purposes. Whereas Mexican courts, from the 1920s on, tended to respond sympathetically to workers' grievances against employers in line with the pro-labor discourse of the post-revolutionary state, Hidalgo shows that jurists typically denied such protections to domestic workers. Despite significant political and economic shifts in Mexican society over the next few decades, the courts remained remarkably consistent in characterizing the space of women's paid domestic work as protective and harmonious, thereby obviating the need for legal aid or "*amparo*," and straining logic by distinguishing male domestic labor as "outdoor work" that, in contrast, deserved formal social protections. Indeed, even as women employed as domestics have organized and mobilized in recent years, the Mexican government has refused both to grant them recognition as workers with full legal rights and to concede that their workplace should be susceptible to regulation.

In our age of the celebrity chef whose aura lends a glamorous sheen to the restaurant kitchen, it is tempting to forget that most restaurant workers, now, as in the past, toil under conditions that are distinctly unglamorous, and even a danger to their health and physical safety. This is the point of departure for Martin Bruegel's contribution, "'The Martyrs of the Saucepan': Parisian Cooks, French Gastronomic Reputation, and Occupational Health around 1900." The article shows how cooks and other restaurant employees—whose work conditions ranged from deplorable to intolerable—explicitly drew a connection between their own concerns for occupational health and safety and the dangers that tainted food and insalubrious conditions posed to the dining public. Such claims allowed them to build a broad base of support for their demands regarding restaurant regulation. Moreover, their revelations of foul conditions in restaurant kitchens threatened to taint France's reputation as the standard-bearer of gastronomic excellence. Bruegel goes beyond the details of this particular case, moreover, to argue that his research demonstrates that campaigns to address workplace health and safety did not flow exclusively, from medical experts and their colleagues top-down, but also emerged from the activism and concerns of workers themselves.

In “Making Capitalism with Gangsters: Unfree Labor in Shanghai’s Cotton Mills, 1927–1937,” historical sociologist Wai Kit Choi builds on his carefully researched case study of Chinese textile workers to make an important intervention in the ongoing discussion of coerced labor in capitalist economies. Historians of what has become known as the “Second Slavery” have argued strenuously not only that unfree labor systems are compatible with the logic of capitalist expansion but that capitalist economies routinely rely upon forms of direct coercion. While Choi does not dispute the compatibility of unfree labor and capitalist production, he presents highly persuasive evidence that bonded labor in the Shanghai cotton mills was not a response to the needs or logic of capitalist production. Rather, it was the result of a particular set of social relations that allowed certain segments of Shanghai society to profit from the recruitment of workers—most of them young women—who were compelled and constrained in a variety of ways. Moreover, the ability of these groups to protect their interests meant that bonded labor endured in the cotton mills even though mill owners came to regard such labor arrangements as an impediment to increased productivity. To be sure, we need to consider how broadly this argument can be applied, but we think anyone interested in the question of unfree labor would be wise to engage with Choi’s astute observations and conclusions.

Almost all of the articles published by ILWCH, though typically based on historical research, have considerable relevance for contemporary discussions of labor, working-class culture, and politics. But the two contributions that round out the list of articles appearing in this issue are especially stimulating to read in the current context. Duncan Money’s “Race and Class in the Postwar World: The Southern African Labour Congress” rescues from historical oblivion a remarkable, if short-lived, transnational initiative by white male workers in several soon-to-be-independent African colonies. Through a series of labor congresses, union leaders in southern Africa, in the aftermath of World War Two, attempted to create a geographically capacious labor confederation whose statements and positions drew on a militant Marxist critique of capitalism. At the same time, the vast majority of the leadership defined the category of “worker” in such a way as to exclude blacks and women. The brief “transnational” effort to expand white union power quickly foundered as proto-national loyalties and party affiliations took precedence, but this episode is a reminder of the way working-class identities can be rigidly racialized and gendered even at a moment of apparently radical resurgence.

The article by Phil Rawsthorne, “Implementing the Ridley Report: The Role of Thatcher’s Policy Unit during the Miners’ Strike of 1984–1985,” is significantly longer than the usual piece published in ILWCH, but the dramatic and sobering story that it narrates is very much worth reading from beginning to end. Few ILWCH readers are likely to have any illusions about the policies implemented by Margaret Thatcher and her minions during her time as the British prime minister, but there may still be a lingering assumption that her politics reflected a strict adherence to free-market principles, such as they are, and

to the rule of law. Not only does Rawsthorne use recently released documentation to demonstrate that the positions adopted by Thatcher during the 1984–1985 miners’ strike reflected, first and foremost, political motivations and not economic calculations, but he also provides us with a full sense of how profoundly anti-democratic were the maneuvers adopted by Thatcher’s inner circle to defeat the strike and break the union movement. In many ways Thatcher’s abuses of power and privatization of political decision-making foreshadow the “soft authoritarianism” that has become such a salient feature of contemporary politics.

In addition, we are pleased to include a report from the field and a review essay in this issue. Jean-Numa Ducange, Frank-Olivier Chauvin, and Elisa Marcobelli report on the activities of the European Socialism Network (EUROSOC), which promotes interchanges among scholars doing research on socialisms as well as the acquisition of materials to support such research. Though focused primarily on Europe from 1870 to 1914, the network reaches beyond that place and time period, including, for example, documentation from Shanghai on the early developments of socialism in China. Finally, in a thoughtful and provocative review essay, Jason Resnikoff explores “The Problem with Post-Work.” Agreeing with C. Wright Mills that “work has no intrinsic meaning,” Resnikoff argues that five recent books on this theme have tended to conflate work and the work ethic, thereby naturalizing the human need to work and skewing discussions of “post-work” in a particular direction that may not be the most fruitful.