

## CALL FOR PAPERS

**XIII<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Labour History**  
**March 12-14, 2020, V.V Giri National Labour Institute, NOIDA, India**

### **Mapping Lives of Labour**

The Association of Indian Labour Historians (AILH) and the V.V Giri National Labour Institute (VVGNI) jointly with the M.S. Merian-R. Tagore International Centre of Advanced Studies, New Delhi are organising the Thirteenth International Conference on Labour History between 12-14 March 2020 at the VVGNI Campus, NOIDA.

The broad theme of the Conference, 'Mapping Lives of Labour' aims to track the momentous changes that have affected the worlds of work over the last century through the prism of institutional and working lives. Over the long twentieth century, workers and the institutions connected to them underwent major transformations. These included the creation of the formal employment contract and its contestation, institutionalization of a notion of the 'male breadwinner' and its gradual erosion, and the massive migration from the global countryside to the cities propelled by what now appears to be a permanent crisis in the agrarian sector. While globalisation induced expansion and uneven development of capitalism accelerated these transformations, the core institutions of workers including trade unions and international organisations such as the ILO face new challenges. How have workers responded to challenges in the past by reorganizing their worlds in myriad ways and how have institutions and organisations fared over the last century? How do narratives of caste, race and gender problematize and reconstitute histories of labour? Can the story be simply that of 'rise and fall' of labour or one of mutual constitution and reconfiguration of labouring and other identities? The long twentieth century provides the vantage point to look back further into the past and cast a glance to the future to understand these transformations.

The following set of themes are suggested for detailed discussions:

### **1. Everyday Lives at Work**

If forms of work defined the experience of working lives, the reverse is also true: mapping everyday lives at work will be important to understanding work itself. How have varieties of work, visible and invisible, urban and rural shaped workers' worlds? How do everyday processes of negotiation transform and reproduce social relations at the workplace and outside?

### **2. Mapping the Political and Institutional Lives of Labour**

In a year that marks the centennial of the AITUC (All India Trade Union Congress) and the ILO, it will be important to examine the inter-connections between institutional histories and individual and collective lives of workers. How did languages of rights and social justice articulated by the ILO touch the worlds of workers in India and in other developing countries? Autobiographical accounts and oral histories of activists and others point to hidden narratives, conflicts and inner tensions through which the institutional life of organisations like the AITUC evolved.

How do workers negotiate relationships of power and authority at the workplace, in the street and neighbourhood? How does the 'formal' politics of organisations enter the everyday lives of workers? How do micro-social interactions at different sites define the political worlds of workers?

### **3. Movement, Mobility and the Lives of Labour**

Standard notions which associate industrialization with a 'settled' stable workforce are now universally critiqued. Movement and mobility is integral to the lives of workers, urban and rural. For large numbers working seasonally in informal and precarious conditions of employment, circulation and mobility between different sites of work, are crucial to sustaining individual and family lives. The conference will seek to explore the changing meanings of movement and mobility in the lives of workers.

### **4. Law, Regulation and Lives of Labour**

In a global context when laws and regulations that protect workers' rights and well-being are being rapidly eroded, there is now a greater concern with understanding the historical context in which the regulations emerged and their significance in the life-worlds of workers. Along with a focus on the making of legislations, we need to look the small events and disputes, the court cases and negotiations that give insights into the troubled histories of law and labour.

## **5. Land and Labour**

The separation of labour from land has been long considered as marking the classical founding moment of the formation of the modern working class. Yet this historical process of separation in the long twentieth century was neither a singular event nor one that worked equally or inexorably in all contexts. Valorization and revalorization of land went hand in hand with continued displacement of people on the land. A history of the working class that erases this memory of dispossession and displacement flies in the face of contemporary reality. From being 'surplus labour' vast masses of workers are today continually pushed into permanent redundancy and into the so called 'subsistence economy' seemingly outside the circuit of commodification and capital. What is the experience of the marginalized rural within this economic landscape?

## **6. Changing Images of Labour**

How have the images of labour changed over time? How do 'heroic' figurations coexist with images of labour which render it as 'vulnerable' and the 'precarious'? How have the symbolic and real manifestations of labour in the public sphere, its changing contours in iconography, painting and literature shape contemporary attitudes and trigger policy changes and organizational responses?

The Conference Organizers invite proposals for papers – an abstract of not more than 500 words indicating the main argument and the sources to be used – from established scholars and young researchers, labour activists, representatives of trade unions and members of civil society organizations, electronically by 30 September 2019 to [ailhconference2020@gmail.com](mailto:ailhconference2020@gmail.com)/[ilhrpnli@gmail.com](mailto:ilhrpnli@gmail.com)

The selection process will be concluded by 25 October 2019. Final papers should be submitted electronically by 15 February 2020. The conference organisers will take care of accommodation, boarding and domestic travel expenses (2<sup>nd</sup> AC or equivalent cheap flight).

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