

Senior Editors' Note

Although this issue of *International Labor and Working-Class History* does not have a central theme, our present political predicament provides its anchor with two sets of articles that take up the problem of workers and right-wing politics. The first set focuses on the worlds of work and military dictatorships in the countries of the Southern Cone. In Brazil in 1964, Chile in 1973 and Argentina in 1976, civil-military coups overthrew democratically elected governments whose sympathies lay with the left and inaugurated long periods of military rule. In all three countries the new military rulers were determined to “break the power of organized labor, restrict labor rights and tilt the field of labor relations in favor of business,” Peter Winn writes in his introduction to the articles.

Workers were the chief victims of repression under these dictatorships—the official truth commission in Argentina concluded that a third of the Junta’s victims were workers and this, according to Victoria Basualdo, is a lower bound. Yet most historical narratives of this period have tended to downplay or ignore the impact of these regimes on workers, and that is why conferences were convened on the topic of workers and military rule in Rio de Janeiro in 2015 and Buenos Aires in 2016. The three papers published here, on Argentina, Brazil and Chile, synthesize the material presented at those meetings along with other published and unpublished writings and give our readers an accessible introduction for the non-specialist in South American labor history and a comprehensive historiographical overview for the specialist.

In Argentina, Brazil and Chile, workers were engaged on the shop floor and in party politics in the run-ups to the military take-overs. Indeed, the coups themselves were a response to the growing power of workers under democratic governments and the fears of civil and military elites that their interests were under threat, Winn writes. This antagonism between workers and forces on the right stands in contrast to the situation in a number of nations today where right-wing parties and movements have garnered the support of workers. And this brings us to the second set of articles, which explores workers and the radical right around the world today.

What stands out from these articles is the diversity of worker experiences with right-wing party politics. In Madrid, Sophie Gonick argues that the far right has made few inroads with workers, in part because it is closely identified with the discredited Francoist period and also because Spain never experienced the hallmarks of Fordism, so the experience of its workers has deviated from those of other nations of Europe. According to Gilda Zazzara, in northern Italy workers support the Northern League and its anti-immigrant platform. Yet they continue to participate in militant union activity on shop floors. In

Poland, the post-communist order with its commitment to capitalism left no space for redistributive politics, David Ost writes. The Law and Justice Party has filled that vacuum and delivered the goods, so to speak, to industrial workers. In India, the Hindu nationalist right recognizes the importance of workers for their political coalition, but its efforts to organize labor under the auspices of its trade union confederation, the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, have been mixed and shaped by regional differences in the history of worker politics, according to Smriti Upadhyay. Finally, Ernesto Semán unpacks the facile equation made between Donald Trump and Juan Domingo Perón and argues that such comparisons “disguise the intrinsically American form of authoritarianism that democratic institutions have produced and that they are now trying to absorb.”

In his introduction to these articles, Marcel van der Linden reminds us that the far right made inroads among workers precisely at the moment when the left went into decline. “There is no iron law that working-class dissatisfaction with its situation and with the traditional labor movement always results in sympathies for the Radical Right,” he writes. For van der Linden, and for many others, “the question of the hour is how labor movements can re-connect with working-class families who feel excluded and ignored.”

This issue also contains four research articles that span colonial Senegal, post-war Turkey, early twentieth-century Durban, and inter-war Iran. In “Challenging Colonial Forced Labor? Resistance, Resilience and Power in Colonial Senegal (1920s–1940s),” Romain Tiquet explores the daily reality of forced labor in colonial Senegal. Tiquet shifts the focus from the bureaucratic routines of the colonial state, the focus of much of the literature on forced labor in the period, and introduces the concept of “resilience to overcome the pitfalls of the resistance paradigm and bring new insight into attitudes of distance, refusal and adaptation used by local populations as methods to ‘absorb the shock’ of every-day colonial coercion.”

Didem Özkiziltan and Aziz Çelik, in “Turkish Industrial Relations at the Crossroads: Revisiting the History of Industrial Relations in the Early Post World War II Period,” challenge the conventional wisdom that the Turkish labor movement became independent of the state and adopted class-based politics after 1961 when constitutional reforms gave workers a number of rights, including the right to strike. While they do not deny the importance of these reforms, they argue that the legalization of trade unions in 1947 was an equally critical turning point in the history of labor in Turkey. “Revisiting Labor Activism in Iran: Some Notes on the Vatan Factory Strike in 1931,” by Serhan Afacan, examines an equally important juncture in the history of Iranian labor activism, the Vatan Factory strike of 1931. Drawing on worker petitions to the parliament of Iran, Afacan argues that these documents reveal that workers possessed a sophisticated understanding of the world. Workers followed “a gradually ascending strategy” in which they engaged

with, in order, supervisors on the shop floor, factory management, local officials, the parliament, culminating in the person of the Shah.

Jonathan Hyslop, in his “The Politics of Disembarkation: Empire, Shipping and Labour in the Port of Durban, 1897–1947,” explores the “labor politics of race in Durban harbor” between 1897 and 1947. Hyslop moves away from a “national” focus on South Africa and considers the port and its workers in relation to a global and British imperial framework, on the one hand, and the city of Durban itself, on the other. He argues that these shifts in perspective show that the politics of labor in Durban diverged from that of the Rand, the Eastern Cape and Cape Town, the primary foci of South African labor history, and that the connection to British India shaped those politics in a number of ways.

In what may be a first for *ILWCH*, we are delighted that this issue contains a review essay by Cam Grey on labor in the agrarian world of ancient Rome. Despite a monumental paucity of sources, several recent works have taken up the challenge of agrarian labor and with great erudition explore the subject with sensitivity and care. Grey points to two great themes in all the works under review. The first is seasonality, which structures the annual cycle of labor and, therefore, life itself. The second is scale, which ranges from the large *latifundia*-style estates to the small subsistence-level holdings. Grey concludes that the “tentative yet sophisticated roadmaps laid out in these four monographs provide the beginnings of an atlas for our field to collectively construct.”

Rounding out the issue, Stephen Parfitt reports on academic casualization in the United Kingdom. Parfitt writes that data from 2016 shows that only 15,000 of the 140,000 teaching staff hired since 1999 were employed on full-time contracts. As a consequence more than half the faculty at universities today is on precarious, short-term, or temporary contracts. Contingent faculty are fighting back with “pop-up” unions to demand better conditions as well as in concert with the University and College Union, which is open to all academic workers in the UK and increasingly taking up the issue of contingent faculty.

In a comment that also speaks to campus working conditions, Barnaby Raine, a doctoral candidate in history at Columbia, explores what the recent debates on campus free speech may offer the struggle for labor rights in the university. Raine writes, “An employer’s refusal to sit across a table and hear the complaints of his workers . . . functions to muzzle that speech, even if no clubs or bats are anywhere in sight. It is not a surprising course of action for capitalists to take if left to their own devices, but it jars with any noble claims they issue to champion free speech . . . Our challenge is to show how mystifying, how impossibly naïve and worse are those who plead for speech but will not talk of power.”

The muzzling of workers is happening routinely on campuses across the United States. Georgette Fleischer, a member of the *ILWCH* community, is a recent victim. For some years Fleischer had been fighting for union representation of contingent faculty at Barnard College and she reported on that struggle

in *ILWCH* 91 (“Come Together, Right Now/Over Me, Over You, Over Us”). Last year, after seventeen years in the Barnard English Department, Fleischer was dismissed with little explanation. It is hard not to connect her dismissal with her labor militancy. For more on the case, visit <<https://academeblog.org/2017/11/03/barnard-adjunct-fights-for-her-job/>>.

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