

Senior Editors' Note

As we were preparing this issue, we received the sad news of the death of Eric Hobsbawm, one of the great historians of the twentieth century and an important contributor to the history of workers and their organizations. There was not enough time for memorials to be commissioned and written, but Editorial Board member (and former Senior Editor) Michael Hanagan remembered that in 1995 he and three New School colleagues had interviewed Hobsbawm (for an Iranian magazine that ceased publication) and that interview was never published.

We begin this issue with that interview, undertaken after the publication of *The Age of Extremes*, the final volume of Hobsbawm's tetralogy on the history of the world reshaped by the French and Russian revolutions. It is a wide-ranging interview, which not only discusses the four volumes covering the "ages" of revolution, capital, empire and extremes from 1789–1991, but also explores Hobsbawm's political evolution, including his relations with and reflections on communism, the New Left, the United States, E.P. Thompson, Perry Anderson and Steven Jay Gould.

The interview is prefaced and contextualized by Michael Hanagan and Behrooz Moazami in an introduction that sets the interview and its main themes—Hobsbawm's paleo-Marxism and comprehensive metanarratives and his views of democracy and globalization—within an account of Hobsbawm's personal, political and professional life.

The special issue on "Strikes and Social Conflicts" is introduced by guest editors Raquel Varela and Sjaak van der Velden, who explain its genesis in a conference they organized with the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, that was held in Lisbon, Portugal in 2011. It led to the founding of the International Association for the Study of Strikes and Social Conflict, as well as to an electronic publication. Four of the conference papers were eventually chosen for ILWCH publication and an article on migrant worker strikes in China was commissioned to give the special issue greater global reach.

The special issue opens with "Syndicalism and Strikes, Leadership and Influence," an article by Ralph Darlington on the Syndicalists of the early twentieth century and their impact on the combative labor movement and strikes of that era. Darlington ranges widely through five European countries—Britain, Ireland, France, Italy and Spain—and crosses the Atlantic to include the Wobblies in the United States as well. Rejecting a conventional wisdom that questions their importance, he argues that Syndicalists provided leadership as well as an influential ideology and a compelling vision of class self-organization and direct action—themes that thread through much of *ILWCH* 83.

Romulo Costa Mattos' "Shantytown Dweller Resistance in Brazil's First Republic, 1890–1930: Fighting for the Right to Reside in Rio de Janeiro"

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takes a different tack. He focuses on the social conflicts generated when the urban poor, mostly workers in the informal economy, defended their shantytown [favela] homes from elite efforts to evict them in the name of public health, modernity or security. Using Morro de Favela, a hillside shantytown in central Rio, as a case study, Costa Mattos teases out the hidden subaltern transcript of the shantytown dwellers' agency—including street demonstrations and newspaper sit-ins—by reading state edicts, newspapers and other documents against the grain.

Xavier Domenèch, in the next piece, “Workers’ Movements and Political Change in Spain, 1956–1977,” offers an incisive history of the struggles of Spanish worker movements against Franco’s fascist regime, arguing persuasively that these movements played a central role in undermining the regime and in ensuring a transition to democracy. The worker resistance during the repressive post-Civil War period developed the innovative strategy of “waves of strikes,” whose rapid territorial expansion eluded the regime’s security forces and enabled workers to win significant increases in wages and benefits. To counter changes in labor laws and repressive tactics, during the early 1960s Spanish workers pioneered another innovative strategy: the Worker Commission, a grassroots organization that linked up with other social movements at local, provincial and national levels to organize strikes and social protests. In the political transition that followed Franco’s death in 1975, these worker movements took control of the streets to demand—and ensure—a competitive electoral democracy.

“Strikes and Pickets in Brazil: Worker Mobilization in the ‘Old’ and ‘New’ Unionism, the Strikes of 1957 and 1980.” Paulo Fontes and Francisco Barbosa de Macedo compare the two emblematic strikes of twentieth-century Brazil in the São Paulo area: the 1957 Communist-led “strike of the 400,000” and the 1980 “forty-one day strike” led by Lula and his then politically independent metal workers union. But rather than contrasting the two strikes as representing the “Old” *versus* “New” unionism, as most analysts do, the authors focus on what they had in common, in particular their use of “volunteer” pickets. The volunteers were not workers in the striking factories, but allies who, for political or personal reasons, embraced the workers’ cause and were willing to risk violent direct actions that the “pacific” strikers could not take themselves, in order to enforce the strike.

The final article in the special issue brings it into the twenty-first century, while extending its geographic and cultural reach to China. In “Contesting Class Organization: Migrant Workers’ Strikes in China’s Pearl River Delta, 1978–2010,” Chris King-Chi Chan synthesizes a generation of research into an account of strikes and social conflict in the Pearl River Delta set within China’s changing political economy. This region has been in the forefront of China’s rapid industrialization and on the cutting edge of changes in labor relations from the start of economic reforms in 1978 to the recent surprising strike wave. Chan selects four emblematic strikes to serve as his case studies. They demonstrate the growth of class consciousness and class action among

migrant workers in only a few decades, with much of that worker action demanding union democracy. Because of capitalist cooptation and unrepresentative official unions, Chan concludes, class action precedes self-organization in China, rather than the reverse as in the West.

“Notes From Marikana,” this issue’s Report From the Field, continues the themes of the special issue. It analyzes the 2012 strike of platinum miners that ended in the bloodiest massacre in post-apartheid South Africa, which many compared with the infamous 1960 Sharpeville massacre of black protesters. But the authors reach beyond Sharpeville to more revealing historical analogies in post-Second World War French Africa and post-Boer War South Africa, arguing that like subordinated workers in those earlier colonial conflicts, the black platinum miners of Marikana are fighting for “equivalence”—with white workers—at once a demand for dignity and for a radical restructuring of earnings and working conditions.

The issue’s Symposium features papers from a conference on Cesar Chávez and the United Farm Workers (UFW) exploring why that legendary leader and organization of the 1960s and 1970s failed to consolidate a union that had won progressive labor legislation and bargaining rights in the field. It is introduced by Nelson Lichtenstein, who organized the conference and has brought together three authors of recent books—Matt Garcia, Miriam Pawel, and Frank Bardacke—who have very different concerns and explanations, from state intervention to Chávez’s intolerance of dissent and economism, prioritizing consumer boycotts and hostility to undocumented immigrant workers.

Our two freestanding articles for this issue cut in very different directions. One emphasizes the capacity of the working class to reshape itself and its conditions, even in this age of cybernetic automation and globalization, while the other stresses the constraints on workers and their strategies created by state policies.

Darlington’s discussion of the IWW prepares the reader of *ILWCH* 83 for “The Multitude and the Many-Headed Hydra: Autonomous Marxist Theory and Labor History.” Verity Burgmann portrays the Wobblies as precursors and exemplars of the organized “multitude” of contemporary autonomous Marxist theory, which views the working class, not capital, as the origin of the labor-capital dialectic and as its dynamic element throughout history. Burgmann sets out to rescue autonomous Marxist theory in general and Antonio Negri in particular from “the enormous condescension of labor history”—including Mike Merrill’s critique of Negri and Hardt’s influential book *Empire* in *ILWCH* 78—arguing that there is an affinity between autonomous Marxist theory and both labor history from below and the new transnational and global labor history.

Lara Putnam’s “The Ties Allowed to Bind: Kinship Legalities and Migration Restriction in the Interwar Americas” explores the impact of the construction of “family” in US immigration legislation of the 1920s on British West Indian immigration. Ironically, she finds, the consensual unions and sibling-centered extended families that had previously sustained BWI

immigration and family strategies now enabled the US government to virtually eliminate extended family immigration while maintaining that its policies were color blind and family-unification friendly. Using family histories as her case studies and letters to local US consuls as sources, Putnam transforms the abstract migration statistics into human stories, and what might seem to be reasonable policy changes into family tragedies and the death of dreams. Putnam also enters into dialogue with the controversy about Global Labor History in *ILWCH* 82, arguing that GLH needs to include in its history of labor migrations a history of the obstacles that often impeded them.

Peter Cole's Review Essay focuses on books about US longshore workers and their organizations and struggles, from progressive unions on the Pacific coast to conservative unions in New York, highlighting their unusual solidarity and strategic importance in the world economy, an importance that continues even in the age of globalization and containerization. With a critical eye, Cole assesses four recent books—Victoria Johnson's *How Many Machine Guns Does It Take to Cook a Meal*, Harvey Schwartz's *Solidarity Stories*, James T. Fisher's *On the Irish Waterfront* and Suzan Erem and E. Paul Durrenberger's *On the Global Waterfront*—and what they reveal or elide about the history of longshore workers and their unions.

Taken together, the diverse pieces of *ILWCH* 83 explore different aspects of social conflicts and direct action that span the twentieth century and raise questions for workers and their organizations in the twenty-first century, particularly those facing the challenges of globalization, neoliberalism and technological change.

Carolyn Brown, Jennifer Klein, and Peter Winn