

## **Study Group on International Labor and Working Class History: Annual Meeting**

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The Study Group sponsored a panel and business meeting on December 28, 1980 at the AHA convention in Washington, D.C. Four speakers addressed the theme, "The Status of Organized Labor Since World War II and the Prospects for the Future." Mike Hanagan of Vanderbilt University noted the tendency throughout the 20th century in France for labor unions to exchange job control for political reform, which has led trade union officials to depend upon bureaucratic alliances rather than mass organization. The events of May 1968, he suggested, marked the coming of age of highly skilled white collar workers and the decade since then has witnessed the attempted coalition between Communist and Socialist forces of their respective constituencies in the traditional and new working class. Daniel James, of the University of Brazilia, spoke on Latin America—specifically Argentina, Chile and Brazil. Terming the immediate post-war years a period of capital formation in these countries, marked by populist multi-class movements, he stated that the tensions within that alliance during the 1950s resulted in a more hostile governmental attitude towards labor organizations. While prospects are not good for traditional labor activity in the near future, James did stress the possibilities inherent in the changing priorities of the working class as it attempts to address the pervasive social and political problems of their societies.

Nelson Lichtenstein of Catholic University spoke on the struggle for control of the shop floor in the United States. He noted that, in the aftermath of World War II, formal union recognition provided a "shield" against managerial influence over a wide range of informal cultural and job-related worker customs. Shop stewards, he suggested, were important in encouraging this activity as they were the organic links between these local groups and the formal union structure. While technological developments and managerial efforts to rationalize industry undercut the power of these stewards by the 1960s, he pointed out that the workers' rights movement had not died but instead has been recently revived, in part the result of a left/liberal coalition with workers. Gary Steenson, the final speaker, discussed

Korea. Under that country's military regime, strikes are outlawed, the right of collective bargaining denied and existing unions can neither maintain more than one office nor organize more than one shop. Despite these oppressive conditions, there have been recent bursts of worker activity where the expressed anger is often directed against the officials of the unions who support the regime's proscriptions. As long as the United States government and the AFL-CIO continue to play an important role in support of the regime, Steenson predicted little chance for immediate change.

Following a discussion, a small group remained for the business meeting. (Attendance at this year's panel, about thirty, was lower than in the past. In part, this was due to the AHA's failure to advertise the meeting properly in the program and their failure to then correct that when requested by the Coordinator, Dale Newman. The ILWCH meeting also conflicted with a MAHRO function that evening.) Dale Newman of the University of Pittsburgh was reelected National Coordinator and she reappointed as regional representatives Mike Hanagan for the Midwest and Nick Salvatore for the Northeast. The other representatives, who were unable to attend, are being contacted. Some important business problems were discussed. Given the flexible publication schedule of the journal, it remains unclear whether representatives should focus on reports of meetings held or attempt to give advance notices of conferences. Similarly, should the focus be on traditional academic conferences, or might it be broadened to include more popular and/or political meetings of interest? Some attention was paid to the role of the regional representatives. If they actively seek reports from area members on conferences they themselves do not attend, can we assure these individuals that their reports will appear in the journal? Those at the meeting had little experience with the scheduling factors and space limitations involved in publishing the journal. A number of representatives expressed the need for some kind of literature (a letter, broadside, leaflet) suitable for distribution at conferences to build members and subscribers. In addition, if each representative had an updated subscription list for his/her area, attempts at attracting new members might be more successful.

As financial considerations will probably limit attendance at the annual meetings in the foreseeable future, it seems desirable to strengthen and clarify the role of the Coordinator and representatives. It was suggested that, beyond enlisting new members, these people might attempt to establish informal study groups in their areas and serve to bring together people with similar interests. Out of this might then stem other forms of communal activity within an area.

The 1981 meeting will be held at the AHA convention in Los Angeles. Those who have suggestions for a topic or speakers, or who wish to speak themselves, should contact Dale Newman, Box 396, Forest Road, Bradfordwoods, PA., 15015.