

Senior Editors' Note

The senior editors of *International Labor and Working-Class History* are pleased to follow our first issue devoted to African labor history with this one, *ILWCH* 87, which turns to the labor history of South Asia. Labor history in the South Asian, and particularly Indian, context has taken off in recent years. The founding of the Association of Indian Labour Historians in 1996 and the major international conferences hosted by that organization every two years in New Delhi have energized the field. At the same time, major centers for the study of labor have emerged outside the subcontinent, most prominently the Centre for Modern Indian Studies, led by Ravi Ahuja at the University of Göttingen in Germany. And, of course, the researchers at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam have played a significant role in the revival of labor history both inside and outside South Asia. Under the leadership of Willem van Schendel, the institute has assembled an excellent collection of archival materials on the subject.

The articles contained in this issue form what may be labeled a third wave of writings in South Asian labor history. The first wave focused on trade unions and their leaders, and this was followed by a second, which shifted to the workers themselves and traced their social and cultural lives and activities. Leading figures in this shift included Dipesh Chakrabarty, Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, and Chitra Joshi. These historians trained their historical eyes upon workers in the formal sector (those that came under labor legislation), who were mostly found in large factory settings. The third wave of labor historians has broadened its historical vision to study labor in a variety of settings, scales, and sectors, and the articles in this special issue continue in this tradition.

The six articles that comprise the core of this volume may be divided into three pairs. The first looks at South Asian laborers as migrants. From the early nineteenth century, men and women from the Indian subcontinent provided bodies that were put to work from the Caribbean to the Pacific. In their contribution, Subho Basu and Yoshina Hurgobin challenge accounts that see these workers as the objects of history, buffeted by forces beyond their control, and show that they were themselves the subjects, making choices that took them from the Indian Ocean island of Mauritius to the sugar plantations of the Caribbean. During the world wars of the twentieth century, troops from the Indian Army were critical to the British war effort, but no less important were laborers from South Asia, who provided critical support for the armies on the field. Radhika Singha explores the experiences of these workers in France during the years of the First World War.

The second pair of articles looks at different dimensions of labor in the critical middle decades of the twentieth century, around the moment when India

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and Pakistan achieved independence from British rule. Siddhartha Krishnan focuses on the intriguing case of the Toda, inhabitants of the Nilgiri Hills of South India. From the late nineteenth century, the Toda were subjected to British colonial policies to turn them into farmers. These efforts were reversed in the wake of Second World War. The net result was to proletarianize them, but in unexpected ways. Rukmini Barua considers the *dada* or “neighborhood tough,” a neglected figure in South Asian labor history, but a critical political intermediary who intersected in remarkable ways with the upright union representative.

The final pair of articles investigates more recent developments in India. The conditions of work and the position of workers are being reshaped dramatically in South Asia today, and knowledge of these changes can bring to historians new perspectives. Durba Chattaraj traces the shift of manufacturing from urban to rural areas in south Bengal. While the ruralization of production that she describes is reminiscent of pre-nineteenth-century manufacturing in the subcontinent, it is taking place today under a relentless logic of profit maximization that seeks to exploit lower labor costs in the countryside. Michael Goldman explores how the informalization of labor, the making of a global city, and the financialization of the Indian economy intersect in struggles over the urban commons of Bangalore.

The South Asia focus concludes with reports from the field on Pakistan and Bangladesh. Dina M. Siddiqi traces the travails of Bangladeshi garment workers since the deaths of more than 1,100 workers in the collapse of Rana Plaza in April 2013. Although the accident was thought to be a “game-changer” that would radically transform the conditions of garment work in that country, this has not happened. Siddiqi explains why. Kamal A. Munir, Natalya Naqvi, and Adaner Usmani paint a bleak picture of the situation of workers in Pakistan. Although Pakistan has been in the news a great deal since the events of 9/11, this report gives a rare glimpse into the lives of its working people.

This issue also contains two additional articles and a review essay. In “Who Speaks for Workers? Japan and the 1919 ILO Debates Over Rights and Global Labor Standards,” Dorothy Sue Cobble has uncovered previously unknown battles over whether a woman, Tanaka Taka, and a factory supervisor, Masumoto Uhei, could speak for Japanese workers at the inaugural conference of the ILO. In “‘Money is the Only Advantage’: Reconsidering the History of Gender, Labor, and Emigration among US Teachers in the Late Nineteenth Century,” Karen Leroux argues that the search for better remuneration for their labor services—not a civilizing mission—drove female teachers to migrate from the United States to Argentina. Finally, Justin Rogers-Cooper surveys several recent books that deal with the gender, labor, and domestic dimensions of the Cold War.

In our last issue we announced that ILWCH had initiated a new system for the submission and review of articles called ScholarOne. Proposals for articles, in the form of 500-word abstracts, may be uploaded at <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/ilwch>. While the ScholarOne system has simplified our workflow, it has not

affected our rigorous review process. To remind our readers, all articles submitted to the journal, including those for our special issues, are reviewed by the senior editors as well as at least two anonymous referees.

Finally, we are pleased to announce that our next issue will return to a long-standing ILWCH concern with issues of gender. Devoted to the topic of domestic labor, and edited by Eileen Boris and Premilla Nadasen, the issue will present a global survey of this important topic from the nineteenth century to the present.

Carolyn Brown, Jennifer Klein and Prasannan Parthasarathi