

comparative method to gain a greater insight into each others' work. By pinpointing the ubiquitous character of dockers and how they challenged the roles prescribed for them by employers, unions, and nation-states alike, the assembled labor historians discovered opportunities to place their work in larger contexts. Such comparative appreciation was critical considering the current Liverpool dockers' struggle. As Eric Taplin (University of Liverpool) pointed out, dockers throughout the world have shown commendable solidarity with Liverpool men and women. Such fellowship is likely to be shared by conference participants in building permanent links across the geographical spectrum.

Russian Labor History at the 1997 Convention of the
American Association for the Advancement
of Slavic Studies

Gerald Surh

North Carolina State University

Judging by the November 1997 meeting of the AAASS, the bulk of work in Russian labor history is still concentrated on the two or three decades preceding 1917–1918, notwithstanding the appearance of a single panel on “Labor Politics after Communism” and individual papers on Soviet period themes by Diane Koenker (“Sons against Fathers on the Shop Floor in Early Soviet Russia: Generation and Class in the Soviet Workplace”) and Glennys Young (“Violence and Proletarian Identity, 1921–1932”). If this runs contrary to the overall shift of new research to the Soviet period, it may be due in part to the efforts of members of the newly formed Wildman Group for the Study of Workers and Society, which organized or participated in several panels at the conference.

A more apparent trend at the conference was a proliferation of labor and labor-related topics in diverse panels and under unexpected rubrics due to the reshaping of the parameters of labor history. Young's and Koenker's papers, for example, were presented in panels on “Newspapers as a Source” and “Youth in Conflict with Authority,” respectively. Page Herrlinger read a paper on worker religious sectarians as part of a panel on urban religion. Tsuyoshi Hasegawa and Michael Hickey presented on crime and punishment in 1917 in St. Petersburg and Smolensk, respectively, and Hickey chaired another panel treating popular revolts (*bunty*) with papers on “*The Bacchae* of 1905: Attacks on Vodka Shops and Revolution-

ary 'Intoxication'" (Arthur McKee) and "The Instrumental 'Bunt': 'Spontaneous' Violence as a Calculated Tool of Popular Resistance" (Dave Pretty). Worker violence was also treated by Barbara Engel on the Hickey/Hosegawa panel ("Not by Bread Alone: Subsistence Riots in Russia during World War I"). Mark Steinberg continued his study of the worker intelligentsia with a paper on "The Troubled Imagination of the Proletarian Poet," and he delivered a compelling comment for the panel "Narratives of Revolution, 1880–1930," on papers by Frederick Corney ("Living the Revolutionary Narrative in the 1920s"), Betsy Hemenway ("'*Pro zemliu, pro voliu . . .*': Dem'ian Bednyi and the Construction of a Bolshevik Foundation Narrative"), and Deborah Pearl ("Poetry and Song in the Workers' Revolutionary Movement of the Late Nineteenth Century," a stimulating paper suggesting a textual entry to a hitherto unexplored *mentalité* of solidarity shared among all workers, regardless of political affiliation).

In a roundtable on "hegemonic discourse(es)" in the labor and revolutionary movements, the concept received varied treatment. Dave Pretty used the memoirs of a worker activist to illustrate the tension between the reality of a strike and its ideologically informed reconstruction, emphasizing the distortion of the historical record in the generation of hegemonic narratives. Michael Melancon, the panel organizer, argued that the assumptions, priorities, and approaches normally applied to analyses of Russian labor and revolutionary history actually embody a Social Democratic and Marxist discourse which continues to constrict and distort our view of labor and revolution. Bill Rosenberg contended that worker hegemony in 1917 was a result of the correspondence between workers' experience and the words and discourse describing them, and that its disappearance after 1917 was due to the disappearance of that correspondence and the inability to find a new discourse to sanction new and confusing experiences. Dan Orlovsky asked what "democracy" meant in 1917 and, continuing Melancon's critique, pointed out the appearance of a broad understanding of the revolution shared by the masses of participants that cut across party lines and encompassed all of them. Several discussants highlighted Orlovsky's observations, which responded to and underlined Melancon's objections to Social Democratic hegemony. Reggie Zelnik agreed with most of what was said by all panelists, adding to Rosenberg's remarks that language not only shapes experience, but that experience also elicits and shapes discourse, referring to the remaking of soviets in 1917 when soldiers and peasants insisted on representation alongside workers.

A panel entitled "Text and Context: Russian Workers' Movements, 1900–1917" featured papers that sought to explore the nature and the roots of a worker politics embodying a class consciousness that shadowed but remained independent of Marxist teachings and was practiced both inside and outside of the revolutionary parties. Alice Pate's paper on "The Revolutionary Culture of Moscow, 1906–1914" explored that theme by bringing to bear evidence on organizational affiliation and dynamics that showed no

consistent pattern of party loyalty among Moscow workers but a gravitation toward the activists who furthered their local and practical needs most effectively, irrespective of party. Pate found, however, that this “small” politics among workers was nonetheless expressed in a language drawn from the revolutionary parties, indicating that its distinctive discourse has to be sought in nonlinguistic sources. Phil Skaggs discussed “Mensheviks on the Shop Floor, Petrograd and Khar’kov, 1917” by exploring the position of the pivotal figure of the worker activist and the Social Democratic ideal of seeking to transcend the distinction between worker and intellectual. Gerald Surh also sketched an alternative view of worker politics in yet another locale in “Democracy and Violence on the Talka: Framing a Civic Order in Ivanovo-Voznesensk, 1905.” Like Pate, Surh found a distinct workers’ political discourse imbedded within the long summer strike in the textile town, the site of the first soviet of workers’ deputies. Analyzing the two instances of worker violence among the otherwise restrained and rule-observant strikers, he argued that the crucial consideration in both the violence and the restraint was the concept of a law-governed civic order. This belief fueled both the strikers’ resolve to keep the peace and their anger when they believed that the authorities and their employers had violated that order by breaking their word.

The meeting of the Wildman Study Group discussed the state of Russian labor studies today, beginning with a brief talk on Allan Wildman’s legacy by Reggie Zelnik. He described that legacy as one which did not stop with workers but went on into the mainstream of Russian social history to treat soldiers in 1917 and, in his last years, peasants. To follow Wildman’s example, Zelnik noted, we should think of what labor history (however we define it) can contribute to Russian history as a whole. In doing this, we need to be as inclusive as possible and to avoid erecting “artificial walls” between fields. After some digressions and personal reflections, several of those gathered offered suggestions for how Russian labor studies might be reframed, if not redefined. Page Herrlinger added a note of practical necessity to the call for broadening the field by recounting a recent conversation with a publisher’s agent who soured when she told him her book was about labor but brightened when she mentioned that it dealt with religious belief as well. Wendy Goldman called attention to the importance of gender considerations, and she also suggested that labor studies be expanded to include any process of “proletarianization,” a concept central to her own work on the 1930s. Under this rubric, she includes topics such as migration, urbanization, and the state’s role in controlling the lower classes through recruitment, “passportization,” and family policy, and all the processes in the transition from peasant to worker generally. No agreement or disagreement with such a broad but bounded definition of Russian/Soviet labor history was expressed, but that was probably due more to caution and reluctance to commit to a specific vision of labor history, and the meeting did not set any strict guidelines as to what should or should not constitute

the field. Instead, the concept of the Wildman Group suggested by Zelnik's remarks—that it be committed not to drawing boundaries but to breaking them down and to providing a kind of commons where people of diverse views and approaches can meet and discuss their work—seemed to be shared and accepted.

Affiliations and addresses of the scholars mentioned above may be obtained in the AAASS Directory of Members, 1997–99, or by writing to Alice Pate at apate@earth.colstate.edu or c/o Dept. of History, Columbus State University, Columbus GA 31907 USA. Information about the Wildman Group may also be obtained from Pate, or at the group's web site: <http://www.colstate.edu/~apate/wildman>.