

Senior Editors' Note

Workers' education is the main theme of *ILWCH* 90. Education played a key role in the elaboration of the imagination, the discourses, and the claims that were the foundation of working-class politics. Yet, this vital dimension of the laboring experience has been relatively neglected by historians. By assembling these diverse but related articles, Michael Merrill and Susan J. Schurman have revealed the central place of education in workers' lives and expectations over the last two centuries. The significance of the research presented in this issue is all the more important because, as the editors' emphasize in their introduction, workers' education is neglected today as trade unions grapple with shrinking resources and more immediately pressing imperatives in a rapidly neoliberalizing world in which workers' rights and benefits come under constant attack.

The thirteen articles comprising this special issue cover Europe, Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America, allowing an appreciation not only of workers' attempts to wrest control of knowledge from the ruling classes, but also of the varied ways in which, as Michael Merrill and Susan J. Schurman stress in their introduction, education and knowledge have been contested terrains for workers to build their *political* as well as their workplace strength. It is precisely the political nature of workers' education that provides a thread running through the various contributions to this issue. Worker education emerges as quintessentially political because it is grounded in the realization by laborers that knowledge needed for their emancipation would come neither from dominant institutions nor from mere everyday experience. As the editors explain, such awareness is fundamental to the understanding that labor history is not "something that largely occurs to workers rather than is made by them."

For sure, the political dynamics underpinning workers' education could lead to divergent and even controversial outcomes, as Jenny Jansson's comparative study of the institutionalization of workers' education in Britain and Sweden highlights. Jansson shows that in Sweden worker education was highly centralized while in Britain there was a variety of institutions and organizations that were engaged in these efforts. She hypothesizes that this may be a factor in the ideological unity and strength of the Swedish labor movement as opposed to the greater fragmentation of the British working class in the twentieth century. Petros Gougoulakis elaborates on the importance of workers' education in Sweden as part of the Popular Adult Education movement, a strategic effort geared at not only improving the status of workers in Swedish society, but also at shaping the institutions and norms of Sweden's democracy and welfare state in accordance with labor's visions and priorities. In that sense, workers'

education operated as a cornerstone of a critical, actively participating citizenry, encompassing labor, social movements, and diverse social forces.

Two other articles explore the specificities of the British case. Andrew Jackson's investigation of a local experience within the English cooperative movement of the second half of the nineteenth century provides a lively account of the evolution in the agendas and contents of workers' education from initial economic concerns toward broader engagements with the country's political, social, and cultural context. Of particular relevance is Jackson's discussion of the unequal gendered dynamics of access to education, which constituted a challenge workers confronted, in Britain as elsewhere, not only in their struggles, but also within their own organizations. John Grayson also deals with a specific British industrial locale, South Yorkshire, in more recent times. He shows how the labor movement, once it was deeply entrenched in that region, intersected with academia and other societywide dynamics of grassroots education in providing opportunities for workers' grassroots organic intellectuals, in Gramscian terms, to emerge. Moving to southern Europe, Dimitra Lampropoulou's study of night schools in Greece not only elucidates how young entrants into the ranks of the working class found a pathway to collective identity and political autonomy in labor-centered education, but also underlines how that very autonomy and the struggles it shaped could become part of workers' education itself.

Gabriela Scodeller broadens the special issue's gaze beyond Europe and adds a further dimension to the contestations surrounding workers' political development by emphasizing the international dynamics affecting Latin America during the Cold War. Scodeller's is a highly original study of a continentwide, religiously inspired, educational labor program. It documents the tensions arising from workers' educational demands to keep pace with increasingly radicalized conflicts at the cost of clashing with established formats and pedagogies.

At the same time, while responding to grassroots expectations for activist training, such shifts were at risk of producing new organizational and ideological rigidities. The South African case, analyzed by Jonathan Grossman, is also characterized by rapidly growing and radicalizing labor organizations, which by the 1980s had become major opponents of the apartheid regime. Grossman's case study of striking workers and educational "service organizations" in Cape Town indicates that the effectiveness of workers' education was not confined to delivering knowledge as a separate moment in the development of the working class, but was rather integral to labor's struggles as it sustained workers' collectivism during strikes and the resistance of dismissed employees.

A keynote address, a rich set of four "reports from the field" and one interview completes this special issue's global survey of workers' education, emphasizing the continuity between past historical experiences and current struggles. In her keynote address to the 2016 International Federation of Worker Education Association (IFWEA) in Lima, Peru, Dorothy Sue Cobble shows how historical experiences and international connections are of decisive importance not only to defending labor gains, but also to sustaining the current growth of workers' organizations worldwide. Cobble also argues that workers'

education fosters and underpins the community bonds of women workers as key actors in an emerging “emotional proletariat,” whose work increasingly relies on interpersonal connections, communication, care, and affect. Namrata Bali, educational director of the renowned Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) in India illustrates how education remains a key terrain for advancing the demands of vulnerable workers, especially women in precarious and informal occupations, in today’s fragmented employment landscapes. Bali’s contribution also hints at the changes traditional notions of union-centered education face as the organizations of the self-employed combine features from both labor unions and social movements. The salience of educational activities in the shaping of class identities among workers organizing outside manufacturing centers and operating along social movement lines is also evident in the case of the landless rural workers’ movement in Brazil, examined by Celia Regina Vendramini and her three Brazilian colleagues, two of whom are movement activists. Danny Roberts and Lauren Marsh’s report on labor colleges in the Caribbean confirms that educational activities became especially urgent for workers in the transition to postcolonial nation-states and the economic neoliberalization fostered by globalization. But in older industrialized countries as well, labor’s ability to consolidate its positions in the current global scenarios seems to benefit greatly from the historical rootedness of workers’ educational programs, as suggested by Aslak Leesland’s overview of the Norwegian Workers’ Education Association.

Two contributions touch on the academic and theoretical aspects of labor education. Kerstin Pohl’s and Klaus-Peter Hufer’s interview with Oscar Negt, distinguished author (with Alexander Kluge) of the recently reissued *Public Sphere and Experience*, sums up this issue’s focus on education as a political act that develops workers’ capacities to counter the logic of capital and the market at a systemic level. Negt also reminds us of the difference between education and learning, especially to the extent that the former requires workers to creatively and critically question the existing state of things. Second, our Classics Revisited text, Georges Duveau’s *La pensée ouvrière* (1948), reviewed by Michael Hanagan, allows us to trace the deep historical roots of such critical questioning by showing the focus labor scholars have long placed on education as a key ingredient in the political development of a self-conscious working class.

Two free-standing articles and Marcel Van der Linden’s report on the formation of a European Labour History Network complete *ILWCH* 90. Leonard Rosenband’s critical appraisal of Jan De Vries’s concept of “industrious revolution” is an important, empirically informed response to recent revisionist historiography on early industrialization and its problematic suggestion that workers consented to longer hours and intensified work for the sake of improved living and consumption standards. Lastly, Ali Sipahi offers a fascinating account of prison labor in Turkey, showing how changes in this state institution did not so much respond to requirements of increasing productivity but rather reflected an attempt of turning prisoners into willing participants of a precarious world of

work. Sipahi's article is ultimately a reminder that, should labor fail to autonomously contest the terrain of knowledge, the main theme in this issue, other actors and institutions are deeply invested in shaping workers' subjectivity to their own ends. *ILWCH* 90 underscores the importance of worker education in both the past and the present for workers and for the movements that represent them. Finally, Marcel van der Linden's report on the establishment of the European Labour History Network witnesses a further step in the consolidation of labor history as a disciplinary field that is reshaping, on a transnational scale, traditional boundaries of academic knowledge.

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