

3rd International Conference in Economic and Social History

“Labour History: production, markets, relations, policies

(from the late Middle Ages to the early 21st century)”

24-27 May 2017, Ioannina, Greece

Report by Leda Papastefanaki (University of Ioannina)

Between 24 and 27 May 2017 the 3rd International Conference in Economic and Social History “*Labour History: production, markets, relations, policies (from the late Middle Ages to the early 21st century)*” was held in Ioannina, Greece. Organized by the Greek Economic History Association and the Department of History-Archaeology of the University of Ioannina, the conference was a significant event, bringing together 140 scholars from 20 countries, mainly Europeans. Historians, economists, social anthropologists, political scientists and sociologists, they were meeting together to present their research on labour history. The programme can be viewed here <https://conferences.hdoisto.gr/2017/en/programme/>.

The conference aspired to examine the diverse and historically changing types of labour in different geographical areas and state forms, from the Middle Ages to the present day, as well as the perceptions and redefinitions of labour across different systems of political economy. Even though there wasn't strict geographical limitation, the aim of the conference was to bring to the foreground relevant research carried out for the Mediterranean and the Balkans. The conference revolved around four thematic axes: a) labour in production; b) labour markets; c) labour relations and d) labour policies. Comparative approaches at a national, regional or international level on history, historiography, the theory of labour relations and the history of political economy were welcomed. Viewpoints exploring the role of gender age, ethnicity, race and family in the historical formation of the division of labour, labour relations, labour markets, labour policies and workers' experiences were also welcomed.

The conference programme was very rich with 30 sessions, one roundtable and two keynote lectures, by Marcel van der Linden on trends in global labour history (“Labour history goes global”) and by Touraj Atabaki on “Workers, class and revolutions in 20th century Iran”.

Sessions in many different historical subjects across time and space have been organized: on free and unfree labour; regulations and guild labour; artisans and skilled workers; industrial labour and technological change; industrial relations; labour in the agricultural sector; maritime labour; immigration and labour markets; households, domestic and child labour; gender discriminations of labour; labour and culture; labour conflicts; labour policies and productivity; labour in economic theory; transformations of labour in the context of global capitalism.

Few sessions were focused in the Greek case like this one on the history of technology in relation to labour history (organizer: Spyros Tzokas), or the sessions on labour in the public sector and the work during the WW II Occupation in Greece (with Maria Kavala, Yannis Skalidakis, Vassilis Manousakis). Of special interest were the sessions dealing with aspects of labour in the common past of Greece and Turkey, the Ottoman Empire. The session on the ethnic and religious divisions of labour in the Ottoman Empire and Greece (with Minna Rozen, M. Erdem Kabadayi, M. Arvaniti, Orly Meron) and the two sessions on labour relations in the ottoman large estates (Çiftliks) in the 18th and 19th centuries Balkans (organisers: Alp Yücel Kaya, Yücel Terzibaşoğlu, Dilek Akyalçın Kaya, Fatma Öncel) were highlighted the importance of research in Greek, Turkish and Israeli archives.

Other sessions were focused on “labour in retailing and street vending” across Europe (organizer: Nikos Potamianos), on “maritime work in the context of crises” in the Mediterranean (organizers: Jordi Ibarz, Enric Garcia Domingo), on “labour relations in Central-European industries” in the 20th century (organiser: Tibor Valuch), on “global perspectives on labour relations and industrial peace, from 1930s to the present” (organizer: Alina-Sandra Cucu). Two sessions were dealing explicitly with labour and gender: “Labour and gender in early modern Europe” (organiser: Alexandra Shepard) and “Gender, working class grievances and power relations in the Yugoslav factory” (organisers: Chiara Bonfiglioli, Goran Musić, Rory Archer).

The closing roundtable discussed the “Transformations of labour and social sciences” with the participation of M. Erdem Kabadayi, Georgia Petraki, Sigrid Wadauer, Nikos Potamianos and Leda Papastefanaki. The speakers explored differing concepts of labour history (like class, gender, precariousness, formal/informal) and their use in social sciences.

During the conference, extended discussion has emphasized the need for a) the integration of the local empirical research data to broader contexts, b) the elaboration

of concepts and new questions and c) the systematic comparisons in transnational / transcontinental, entangled or global approaches. The shared past between Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria and other Balkans or Mediterranean countries could largely facilitate these comparative perspectives.

Current economic crisis has affected work's regimes globally in multiple ways. As many researchers experience financial insecurity and flexible work relations, it is very hopeful the strong presence of labour historians in associations, networks and conferences, like the last one that took place in Ioannina. It seems that labour history, as a distinct field, is flourishing. Although it is beyond doubt that the diffusion of English language in academia cannot be taken for granted, English served in the Ioannina conference as the academic *lingua franca*; it was very encouraging the extended use of this new lingua franca by labour historians all over the world, which made possible discussions and exchanges.

The organizers of the Ioannina conference aim to give continuity to the discussions started in this conference and to encourage cooperations. Joint efforts in common research and publication projects are surely possible between labour historians in (Northern, Central and Southern) Europe, in the Mediterranean and (why not) in a global level. From 2013, the experience of the bottom-up networks like the European Labour History Network (ELHN) and the multiple working groups under the wings of ELHN could constitute an example of broader collaborations among labour historians.