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Labor and historical periodization of capitalism

by
*Alessandro Stanziani**



Unlike Polanyi, I will not speak of a “great transformation” to show a break in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that swept away the old pre-capitalist world through enclosures and the poor law and replaced it with a self-regulating economy which, in turn, is said to have been replaced by a new form of interventionism in the twentieth century. This chronology is false not only because the privatization of lands,¹ the proletarianization of the peasantry (see here after) and the mechanization fully developed only after the mid-nineteenth century, but also because the nineteenth-century market was anything but self-regulated.² On the contrary, there is no reason to oppose the liberal nineteenth century to the eighteenth and twentieth centuries described as interventionist, each in its own way. What differentiated these periods was not liberalism versus regulation, but different forms of regulation, with different aims, goals, and tools. Eighteenth and nineteenth century liberal interventions supported increasing social and economic inequalities, while since the late nineteenth century state intervention sought to reduce inequalities, although only between labor and capital inside each country and increased inequalities between the main land and its colonies. Is this

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¹ Robert Allen, *Enclosure and the Yeoman* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Robert Allen, “Tracking the Agricultural Revolution in England”, *Economic History Review*, LII, 2 (1999): 209–235.

² Alessandro Stanziani, *Rules of Exchange. French Capitalism in Comparative Perspective, 18th–20th centuries* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

periodization close to that advanced, among the others, by Douglass North and Alfred Chandler?³

These authors as well stressed the major breakthrough of the second industrial revolution; and they both stressed the importance of institutions in the origin and functioning of capitalism. I myself acknowledge the importance of the institutions, and the breakthrough of the second industrial revolution; however, unlike Chandler I do not consider that economies in the nineteenth century were self-regulated and I consider that the American model was hard to export. Even worse, resistance to it account for much of the tragedies of the twentieth century. Also, unlike North, I maintain that legal rules cannot be resumed to property rules and, above all, the introduction, affirmation and decline of legal institutions and institutions in general do not necessarily respond to efficiency purposes. The economic rationale consisting in efficiency's optimization was far from being the prime or unique mobile in the history of markets. Power and political hierarchies were equally important; this is a crucial point. Neo-institutional economics argues that in places where market are still "imperfect", it makes sense to have institutions to offset this deficiency; economic development will ultimately render these institutions obsolete.⁴ This program has been recently summarized in several articles and a book by Daren Acemoglu and some other of his colleagues.⁵ This model is less important for what it explains than for what it is unable to explain: Institutions include everything (the state, guilds, organizations, firms, associations, family, kinship, the village and even the market itself) and are both the source and the consequence of market dynamics.⁶ If institutions exist, then there must be an economic rationale for them.⁷ If Britain succeeded over other countries, in terms of economic growth and wealth, it was because of its democratic and efficient institutions; and what explain these institutions... was market. Like neo-institutionalism, I argue that the institutions are indeed important; but, unlike neo-institutionalism, I claim that historically these institutions did not respond exclusively to efficiency, scarcity and profit calculations, but also to power and values. Most important, we should stop advancing simplistic correlation, based upon uncertain data in terms of their historical (not economic or statistical) soundness to celebrate Britain and the success of the West. This approach is so successful since the end of past century that it convinced also politicians all around the world to adopt it. Thus, the Chinese and Russian "Transition" to capitalism was achieved starting from the idea that once the presumed universal, actually idealized Western institutions, had been transplanted everywhere, other countries as well would benefit of progress. This approach was particularly used in China, Russia and former socialist countries. The issue was relatively good in terms of growth, much less in terms of injustice, inequalities and lacking of rights. Thus, one day economic historians, and economists, should stop imagining that full democracy, capitalism and growth go necessarily together; unfortunately, most economic experiences do not confirm this dream. If this is so, then the next question consists in exploring how this tension between capitalism and democracy can help to decentralize

³ Douglass North, *Structure and Change in Economic History* (New York and London: Norton, 1981); Alfred Chandler, *The Visible Hand* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1977).

⁴ Douglass North, *Structure and Change in Economic History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1981); Douglass North et Robert Thomas, *The Rise of Western Civilization: a new Economic History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); Douglass North et Barry Weingast, "Constitution and Commitment: The Evolution of Institution governing Public Choice in 17th-century England", *The Journal of Economic History*, 49, 4 (1989): 803–832.

⁵ Daren Acemoglu, James Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origin of Power, Prosperity and Poverty* (New York: Grown Publisher, 2012).

⁶ On this: Alessandro Stanziani, ed, *Dictionnaire historique de l'économie-droit, XVIIIe-XXe siècle* (Paris: LGDJ, 2007); "The institutional economics in historical perspective", special issue, *Histoire et mesure*, 2 (2015).

⁷ Sheilagh Ogilvie, "Whatever is, is Right? Economic Institutions in Pre-Industrial Europe", *Economic History Review*, 60, 4 (2007): 649–684.

global history. Bayly, Darwin, Osterhammel among the others⁸ target Hobsbawm and his Marxist summaries of a history in which revolution and the shift from feudalism to capitalism form the keystones.⁹ These syntheses are never neutral, however; even when their authors try to read as much as possible of the research work in the areas concerned, they are still making choices and selecting options. Which ones?

Now, it is significant that Osterhammel rejects the main arguments put forward by Pommeranz: relying on the data provided by Maddison and Clark, he adopts instead the argument of those who think Europe had already acquired a considerable advance over China in the eighteenth century and that its success was due not to colonialism but to Britain's domestic market and its institutions (democracy, protection of private property, etc.). In addition, it benefited from science and European "culture", which was more open, free and suited to empirical application than oriental knowledge. Clearly, this is a relatively conventional position, but the most interesting is that now it comes from a specialist of Chinese history. The problem is that, like specialists of other cultural areas, Osterhammel is discriminating and detailed when he is studying his area—China—but he tends to accept stereotypes of "the West" such as urbanization and capitalization, the importance of the city, private property, innovations, etc., particularly where Britain is concerned. And he does so despite another approach, once described as "revisionist," has won a broad acceptance since the 1980s. According to this view, the first industrial revolution in Britain was far from the reign of capital over labor: the rate of capital formation in Britain was relatively slow until the mid-nineteenth century, and the capital/labor ratio increased sharply only afterwards.¹⁰ At the same time, proletarianization was relatively limited and temporary until the mid-nineteenth century¹¹ and even the privatization of common land took place at a slow pace and had little impact on growth until the 1840s.¹² This argument fully integrates De Vries' and many others' arguments according to which proto-industrialization strongly contributed to the economic growth and persisted much longer than usually believed.¹³ Other Important works show how limited capital markets were in Europe and Britain itself until the last quarter of the nineteenth century.¹⁴ Family and professional networks provided the bulk of capital while small units with limited liability dominated the scene.¹⁵ Outnumbered rules strongly limited the stock and produce ex-

⁸ Christopher Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914* (London: Blackwell, 2004); John Darwin, *After Tamerlane. The Rise and Fall of Global Empires, 1400–2000* (London: Penguin Book, 2007); Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World. A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

⁹ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution, 1789–1848* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962).

¹⁰ Nicolas Crafts, *British Economic Growth During the Industrial Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); Knick Harley, "British Industrialization before 1841: Evidence of Slower Growth During the Industrial Revolution," *The Journal of Economic History*, 42, 2 (1982): 267–289; Jeffrey Williamson, "Why Was British Growth So Slow During the Industrial Revolution?", *The Journal of Economic History*, 44, 3 (1984): 687–712; Phyllis Deane, "Capital Formation in Britain Before the Railway Age," *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 9, 3 (1961): 352–368; Charles Feinstein, and Sidney Pollard (eds.). *Studies in Capital Formation in the United Kingdom, 1750–1920* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

¹¹ Paul Lindert, and Geoffrey Williamson, "English Workers' Living Standards During the Industrial Revolution: a New Look", *Economic History Review*, XXXIV (1983): 1–25; Paul Lindert and Geoffrey Williamson, "Revising England's social tables, 1688–1812", *Explorations in Economic History*, XIX (1982): 385–408.

¹² Robert Allen, *Enclosure and the Yeoman* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Robert Allen, "Tracking the Agricultural Revolution in England", *Economic History Review*, LII, 2 (1999): 209–235.

¹³ Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Christine MacLeod, *Inventing the Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

¹⁴ Ron Harris, *Industrializing English law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Brian Cheffins, "History and the Global Corporate Governance Revolution: The UK Perspective." *Business History*, 43, 4 (2001): 87–118.; Jean-Laurent Rosenthal and Bin Wong, *Before and Beyond Divergence: The Politics of Economic Change in China and Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

¹⁵ Lance E. Davis et Robert J. Cull, *International Capital Markets and American Economic Growth 1820–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Naomi Lamoreaux, Jean-Laurent Rosenthal, "Legal Regime

changes, forward transactions and the possibility for marketing so called intangible capital (reputation, goodwill, futures).¹⁶ More recently Piketty's world best-seller also touched this point by showing the limits and institutional constraints on capital markets in the nineteenth century and the persistence of rentiers up through WWI.

However, this historiography never connected with that on labor markets and institutions; this was unfortunate because limits to capital markets and labor intensification went hand in hand. Indeed, a consistent bibliography proved the importance of coercive rules on the labor market in Britain and its colonies since the mid-seventeenth century to the repeal of the Masters and servants Acts in Britain in 1875, much later in its colonies.¹⁷ With the Poor Laws these acts criminalized the labor relationships and put the servants and workers and unequal relationships with their masters. This bibliography confirms the strong relationship between legal labor coercion and the economic growth, since proto-industrialization, to the first industrial revolution and colonial labor.¹⁸

If this is so, then which is the relationship between labor markets and labor institutions in Britain and across the Atlantic?

It is unfortunate that most of the huge historiography on wage labor in Britain and in the West is disconnected from historiography on slaveries. Of course, many historians discussed this relationship, either to confirm or to deny the role slavery, then colonialism, played in the industrialization of Britain and the West.¹⁹ However, quite interestingly, not only Williams or Inikori, but also Beckert start from the premise that the first industrial revolution was capital intensive and they ignore the nowadays dominant approach to it as mentioned before. This is unfortunate: if Britain was so capital intensive and full of profits and of unemployed proletarians, then, why slavery and coercion? Why not emigrants?

Instead, I suggest that the revisionist interpretation of the industrial revolution, surprisingly ignored by and ignoring debates on slavery, offers a strong support to it by proving the lack of labor in Britain, the low profits, and then the necessity of finding other sources of labor and profits in the colonies. The revisionist interpretation of the industrious and industrial revolution provides a more coherent support to the thesis relating capitalism and slavery than convention interpretations (capital intensive and precocious industrial revolution).

This need for a strong shift in perspective concerns also the debate on the great divergence. In Pomeranz' approach, the great divergence is mainly related to colonial expansion and factors endowments;²⁰ American colonies provided Britain and Europe with markets to sell their products, ghosts acres avoiding the fall in productivity, raw materials and sources of energies. Most of the ensuing debates focused on data, the reliability of those concerning China in par-

and Contractual Flexibility: a Comparison of Business's Organizational Choices in France and United States during the era of Industrialization", *American Law and Economics Review*, 7, (2005): 28–61.

¹⁶ Alessandro Stanziani, *Rules of Exchange. French Capitalism in Comparative Perspective, 18th–20th centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹⁷ Among others: Robert Steinfeld, *The Invention of Free Labor: the Employment Relation in English and American Law and Culture, 1350–1870* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1991); Robert Steinfeld, *Coercion, Contract and Free Labor in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001); Simon Deakin, Frank Wilkinson, *The Law of the Labor Market* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005); Douglas Hay, Robert Craven eds., *Masters, Servants, and Magistrates in Britain and the Empire, 1562–1955* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 2004).

¹⁸ Alessandro Stanziani, *Bondage. Labor and Rights in Eurasia, 17th–20th centuries* (New York: Berghahn, 2014).

¹⁹ Just a few references, a full discussion is developed hereafter: Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944); Stanley Engerman, "The Slave Trade and British Capital Formation in the Eighteenth Century: a Comment on Williams Thesis", *Business History Review*, 46 (1972): 430–443; Joseph Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); David Eltis, Stanley Engerman, "The Importance of Slavery and Slave Trade to Industrializing Britain", *Journal of Economic History*, 60, 1 (2000): 123–144. Barbara Solow, ed, *Slavery and the Rise of the Atlantic System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton* (New York: Kopf, 2015).

²⁰ Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

ticular, then India and other Asian countries.²¹ The most interesting is what this debate hides: first, like recent supporters of Williams' argument on slavery and capitalism (Beckert in particular), Pomeranz as well relied upon a very dated historiography on the British industrial revolution and totally ignores the revisionist approach. He did so because, in his mind, capital intensive Britain required raw materials, sources of energies and huge markets that only America could provide. However this approach was defended at a very high intellectual price: it ignored not only the new historiography on the British industrial revolution but also, even more problematic, labor among the factors of production. In the great divergence, it is simply as if labor did not exist; no abundance or scarcity of labor, no slavery, nothing. But it is simply impossible to explain the great divergence while ignoring slavery, cotton, and the importance labor still had in Great Britain. Instead, if we do so, then we have a very different picture: Britain required ghost acres, as Pomeranz argues, precisely because growth in Britain was labor, not capital intensive; markets for manufactures were equally limited because of persisting multiple activities and proto-industrialisation, hence the importance of American markets. In my perspective, the USA were the only real exception in the nineteenth century with a precocious capital intensive path and free wage labor in the North, together with forms of coercion in the north as well (indentured immigrants) and, of course, slavery in the South. If this was so, then, the great divergence with Asia, in terms of social and economic organization, took place much later than Pomeranz argues: in the west, capital intensification affirmed only in the first part of the twentieth century, in Japan after 1945 and in the rest of Asia quite recently.

Of course, if one wants to fully appreciate this point, then one has to include Africa, Asia and the Indian Ocean in our picture of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. In this case as well, a major renewal of the historiography took place during last twenty years; the conventional approach of the "import substitution" strategy of Britain vis a vis India moved into new directions. First, the circulation of knowledge, techniques and products was proved to be bilateral between Britain, and eventually the rest of Europe, and Asia. Britain adopted and adapted Asian techniques, while in China as in India adaptation of western techniques also took place.²² Second, and starting from this, several authors insisted that the process of deindustrialization of India, due to the British conquest, was relatively limited in both space (several parts of India continued to produce and sell manufactured products in both India and the rest of Asia) and time (a new growth took place since the second half of the nineteenth century).²³ This approach provides important insights insofar it widens the Atlantic perspective into a global view and it shows the importance of the Indian Ocean and Asia in the transformation of the West. Coercion and profit transfers from India to Britain were important and coercion played a central role, in particular in tea plantations in Assam and indigo production in Bengal.²⁴ In these cases as well, as in the Atlantic, forms of slavery and plantations

²¹ Patrick O'Brien, "Ten Years of Debates on the Origin of the Great Divergence", <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/1008>; Stephen Broadberry, Bishnupriya Gupta, "The Early Modern Great Divergence: Wages, Prices and Economic Development in Europe and Asia, 1500–1800", *The Economic History Review*, 59, 1 (2006), 2–31; Robert Allen, Jean-Pascal Bassino, Debin Ma, Christine Moll-Murata, Jan Luiten Van Zanden, "Wages, Prices, and Living Standards in China, 1738–1825: in Comparison with Europe, Japan and India", *Economic History Review*, 64, 1 (2011): 8–38; Robert Allen, *The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Prasannan Parthasarathi, *Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not: Global Economic Divergence, 1600–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

²² Robert Allen, *The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Prasannan Parthasarathi, *Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not: Global Economic Divergence, 1600–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Maxine Berg et al. (eds), *Goods from the East, 1600–1800. Trading Eurasia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015).

²³ Giorgio Riello and Thirtankar Roy (eds.), *How India Clothed the World: The World of South Asian Textiles, 1500–1850* (Leiden: Brill, 2009); Giorgio Riello, *Cotton: The Fabric that Made the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

²⁴ Rana Behal, *One Hundred Years of Servitude. Political Economy of Tea Plantations in Colonial Assam* (New Delhi: Tulika Books 2014); B.B. King, *The Blue Mutiny: the Indigo Disturbances in Bengal, 1859–1862* (Phil-

played a major role in the industrialization of Europe, in both terms of profit and raw materials and products.

To summarize, existing although mostly disconnected bunches of the historiography identified the importance of labor and coercion in Britain and its empire, the lack of capitals during the industrial revolution, and the importance of the empires in terms of resources, markets and profits. By joining these historiographies we may have a new and coherent image of the British industrialization in imperial and global perspective and with a crucial role for labor and coercion in it.

Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1966); Alessandro Stanziani, *Labor in the Fringes of Empire* (New York: Palgrave, 2018).

Labor Feminists and Domestic Workers¹

by
Eileen Boris



“The domestic servant is still the Cinderella of the World’s labor scene today, overworked, underpaid and generally neglected by society,” reported the *New York Times* in February 1971 following the release of a study by the International Labour Organization that documented household labor worldwide.² In the early 1970s, however, the major labor federation in the United States, the AFL-CIO, wasn’t doing much to rectify such exploitation. It could not imagine adapting organizing and collective bargaining to workers in such scattered places with multiple employers, one official explained to Edith Barksdale-Sloan, the director of the reconstituted National Committee of Household Employment, who had transformed a women reformer and employer organization to launch the woman of color and worker-run Household Technicians of America in 1972. For the AFL-CIO, however, domestic workers weren’t like other workers; they could not be organized.

So, the union went back to a strategy reserved for women in low-waged sectors and others outside of unions: state protection to insure maintenance of a minimum wage so not to undermine the conditions of its own members and maintain the overall social wage. The AFL-CIO joined feminist, civil rights, and religious advocates pushing to extend the nation’s wage and hour law to private household workers. And they succeeded in extending the Fair Labor Standards Act in 1974 to some household labor, though home care workers were redefined shortly thereafter as “elder companions” and taken out of the law until the struggles of domestic workers of all kinds and service sector unionists pushed the Obama administration to end that travesty and extend wage and hour coverage to most home care workers, finally in 2015.

Just because in the 1970s US industrial and craft unions dominated by white men found no room in the house of labor for domestic workers—then still overwhelmingly African American but increasingly migrant women of color—didn’t mean that household workers themselves had not joined together for rights and dignity, better wages and working conditions, during a long century of struggle. And just because feminists and academic experts supported their efforts did not mean that these non-domestic worker reformers could truly speak for the household workers whose conditions they sought to improve either.

It would take another forty years for the AFL-CIO, the nation’s peak labor body that represented US workers at the ILO, to recognize and celebrate the organizations formed by domestic workers themselves, the NDWA and the IDWF. By then, its public employee and service worker affiliates had been organizing one type of domestic worker, home care aids and personal attendants, for a quarter century. But it was hard to shake off the belief that “a man’s home is a castle” rather than a woman’s workplace, that the labor inspector and shop steward had no right to enter the private sphere, and that the making of people—cooking, cleaning, and caring—what feminist scholars call reproductive labor—was really work worthy of living wages and not just tasks performed by wives and mothers out of love or necessity. Current pushback against the union rights of home care workers remind us of how partial our victo-

¹ Talk to DOMEQUAL, Venice, June 15, 2017. Eileen Boris is Hull Professor of Feminist Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara, USA and President of the International Federation for Research in Women’s History. She is the author of the forthcoming, *Making the Woman Worker: Precarious Labor and the Fight for Global Standards, 1919–2019* (Oxford, forthcoming 2019).

² “Study by ILO Finds Servants Are Badly Paid and Neglected,” clipping, *New York Times*, February 13, 1971, WN 8-3, Jacket 2, ILO Archives, Geneva. For fuller references contact the author, eboris@ucsb.edu.

ries have been but have led to some home care unions and domestic worker associations joining in solidarity against austerity regimes and growing inequality, on the one hand, and demanding larger social wage and the right to care, on the other, through the Fight for \$15 protests. To the extent that unions recognize that the new face of labor in the US is the immigrant woman of color undertaking care and other forms of service, intimate labors, for families and the state, they can make common cause with the rising of domestic workers for justice.

I invite you to explore the tangled history of unionists, labor feminists, and domestic workers, beginning with the birth of the International Labour Organization (ILO) itself. For most of the 20th century, a tension existed between major trade unions that ignored household workers in crafting ILO conventions and women reformers and unionists, often representing women in industry, who attempted to end such exclusions. Not until recent decades have these groups supported the worker self-organizing that resulted in Convention 189, “Decent Work for Domestic Workers,” and beyond. History is instructive in showing how we got to where we are, recovering lost threads or alternatives, and reminding us that the present came from past struggles and thus we can make a different future.

Delegates assembled at the ILO’s very first International Labour Congress (ILC) in late October 1919 directed conventions and recommendations on hours, unemployment, night work, child labor, maternity protection, and hazardous substances to industrial, maritime, and some commercial (office) workers, explicitly leaving out domestic labor—servants as well as home outworkers and most agricultural workers. Women in general and workers in the global South appeared as special cases, deviants from the Western usually white male subject of labor standards. When the Cuban government delegate, for example, asked if a draft convention on employment agencies would include domestic and commercial undertakings, the French government delegate replied, “no,” adding that it was up to each government to decide whether to warn against abuses in those sectors. These were the years that industrial nations excluded agriculture and private domestic service from their labor codes; Great Britain, one of the powers at the ILO (with France) at the time, certainly did so when it came to unemployment insurance and maximum hours statutes.

It wasn’t that domestic workers lacked champions. “The endless labors of the domestic slave are not put down in these programs,” announced Madame Marie Majerova, a delegate to the simultaneous 1919 First International Congress of Working Women and a technical advisor to the Czechoslovakia delegates to the 1919 International Labour Conference (ILC), “and so they intend to see that the women in the home get justice in the matter of length of working hours... then, only when the working man himself has a full understanding of all other branches of work and their responsibilities and their right to rest and recreation, then only can there be a thoroughly democratic program of reform in working hours presented.”³ In contrast to the ILO, the short-lived International Federation of Working Women would extend questions of working hours and weekly rest to all workers, including domestic ones. Reported Britain’s Edith MacDonald: “it may have seemed by listening to the discussion on domestic service that it was rather an unskilled trade, but it is such clauses as this that would provide for legislation defining definitive holidays and so on. It could raise the status of domestic servants, and so enable numbers of women who do not object to it but are unable to accept the conditions prevailing at the present time, to be absorbed.”⁴

Though some union women/labor feminists of that day like MacDonald sought inclusion of domestic workers in labor law, and would upgrade the occupation, others would rather see the occupation be replaced through collective forms of housekeeping or household technology. This kind of attitude, with its own devaluing of the labors of daily life, was rampant

³ Stenographic Report, ICWW, Second Session, October 30, 1919, 16–17, IFWW Collection, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe, USA.

⁴ Stenographic Report, IFWW, 2nd Conference, Seventh Session, October 22, 1921, 21–22.

among pre WWI British feminists who hired servants; some of their employees organized the Domestic Workers Union of Great Britain and Ireland inspired by the suffrage fight. While employers disparaged housework, worker organizers claimed, in words which echo today, that the domestic “should be encouraged to feel (what she really is) as important to the community as the worker in any other sphere.”

The vision of replacing or withering away of domestic service persisted after the First World War and then after the Second one. When a Norwegian woman labor inspector suggested training in household work as a solution to curbing unemployment among factory women in 1921, Mrs. Sarah Green, a telegraph operator from Kansas City and US Women’s Trade Union League delegate to the IWWF, replied, “If you women in Europe were to have more modern things to do washing, ironing and that sort of thing, you could take your women out of domestic service and move them on up the social ladder in place of dragging them down... We in America feel that it does not take brains to do washing, so all we have to do now is to turn on the electricity and let that do it for us. If you women in Europe would do that, there would not be so many women in domestic service.”⁵ Talk about blindness to the challenges of reconstructing war-torn Europe!

The “mix-class” Women’s Trade Union League was committed to encouraging domestic worker organizing and favored placing them under the same wage, hour, and other labor standards existent for any other job. During the Great Depression, its New York leaders, by then firmly ensconced in the state’s Department of Labor, fought for wage and hour legislation and to establish alternatives to the Bronx slave market, street corner temporary hiring where unemployed Black domestics waited for day work, experienced sexual and other forms of exploitation—and sometimes never got paid for their efforts. Domestic workers gained access to worker compensation but not wage and hours or collective bargaining in New York, but generally remained outside the law despite efforts of some reformers and union allies.

While middle class reformers and academics, notably the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) that created clubs for household workers, sought to establish codes of conduct and professionalize service, workers themselves began to organize—creating their own unions. In the midst of the depression, the Harlem based Domestic Workers Union of New York became Local 149 of the Building Service Employees International Union, the predecessor to the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). Originally this union included hotel chambermaids and domestics, but in mid decade, the maids went over to the hotel worker local. It was the largest union of its kind, though with a membership of 1,000 in the late 1930s, it included only a minute fraction of the city’s domestic workers. It established standards for private employment that prohibited work detrimental to health and safety, including labor in homes with contagious diseases. Like the reformer based National Committee on Household Employment, the Domestic Workers Union sought to replace personalism with contractual rights. Members protested tests for venereal disease when local municipalities sought to institute them. Race advancement organizations—notably YWCA Industrial Assemblies and chapters of the National Urban League in Chicago, Philadelphia, Jackson, Mississippi, St. Louis, Oakland, Knoxville, and Baltimore—also proposed codes with a 48 hour week, overtime up to 56 hours per week, no child labor, and the right to organize and bargain collectively. In St Louis, the Urban League made adherence to these codes as a condition for employer participation in its employment agency. In organizing as Black women, such associations followed in the footsteps of earlier ethnic (Irish, Finnish) and African American groups. In the late 19th and early 20th century, worker resistance mostly had remained informal, although unions formed aided by the IWW in Denver, Black clubwomen in Washington DC, and the Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union in the South. But with the ideology of the home as a man’s castle and hostile political and social circumstances,

⁵ Stenographic Report, IFWW, 2nd Conference, Sixth Session, October 21, 1921, 21.

sustaining organization among low waged workers proved difficult here as with garments and other industries of the time.

Into the gap came reformers, the NGOs of the day. Along with federal agencies and women's groups, particularly the Women's Bureau and the YWCA, the Urban League sought to upgrade domestic labor through training programs and model contracts. The NGO as facilitator of worker action represents one organizing model still much in use. Resulting groups, including those connected to the Urban League's Negro Workers' Councils, remained associations or clubs. Unions failed to sustain themselves—given that neither the AFL's craft model of organizing nor the CIO's workplace industrial model addressed the fragmentation of domestic labor or the needs of the women who toiled for other women. Organizers found in the YWCA model, which brought women from various sites together for a number of educational and recreational programs and then encouraged them to act, a more appropriate form for advancement than traditional trade unions. NGO organizing shifted strategy from union recognition and collective bargaining (who was the employer, individual housewives? A campaign in every home?) to legislation and lobbying, a tactic with its own downside, the possibility of disempowering workers by placing daily activities in the hands of more educated "experts." In supporting domestic worker rights and unionization, Left feminists around the New Deal embraced the labor standards strategy, but failed to gain inclusion in the New Deal's measures for social security, labor standards or collective bargaining. The hope of Dora Jones and the Domestic Workers Union dissipated from the New Deal succumbing to the racist removal of sectors dominated by African Americans and Mexicans from the labor law and Roosevelt's own refusal to buck his Southern Democrats in Congress—a story that reminds us that local, national political economies matter.

At the ILO the unemployment crisis of the Great Depression brought some attention to domestic work, then the largest occupation for women. Domestic work earlier had entered ILO deliberations obliquely: included in a few conventions and recommendations that addressed women and child laborers, such as the minimum age for children in non-industrial occupations, and discussed as a cause of prostitution and in relation to forms of coerced or bonded labor. Jobs supplying housing, like live-in service, were deemed inherently dangerous, subjecting women to sexual assault. In 1933, as its contribution to the fight against "white slavery," the ILO adopted a convention abolishing fee-charging employment agencies (C#34), justified as a measure to stamp out abuse of women in domestic service who presumably found themselves placed in environments of sexual danger. The creation in 1933 of a Section on Conditions of Employment of Women and Children under French socialist Marguerite Thibert facilitated research. Following up on the urging of the Chilean Worker's delegate, Thibert contracted a study of "The Social, Economic, and Legal Conditions of Domestic Servants." Published in 1934, this report concluded that the stigmatized social status of the labor trumped the idea of self-regulating labor markets as out-of-work women refused to enter household service. It called for including domestic workers, with the hedge "as far as possible," in general standards developed to improve living and laboring conditions, with the goal of eliminating the "social difference between" servants and other workers. It recommended legislation to extend social insurance and vocational training to household workers, permit their organizing, and encourage living out rather than living in their place of employment. It did not imagine unionization.

Throughout the decade, lone worker delegates at the ILO suggested inclusion of domestic workers in various conventions, including maternity and holidays with pay. Such recognition had little impact then or during the early post-WWII years, when the head of the US Women's Bureau and British trade unionists Florence Hancock and Albert Roberts pushed with ILO labor feminists in the organization's Office for international instrument for domestic workers. Employers laughed them off and governments were generally uninterested. Labor feminists had other priorities: professionalization of women's work and equal pay with men. Despite demands for more consideration of household workers by the 2nd African Regional

Conference in 1964, it took until 1971 for the ILO to issue a report on the status of domestic workers and another forty years for action.

In the US, the question of employment rights for domestic labor became linked with the civil rights movement, especially the Household Technicians of America, which by the late 1970s merged into the Urban League. Employment bureaus for domestics sent women into homes to assist elderly and infirm people; advocates sought to upgrade private household labor; and unions looked to organize domestics but found home care workers instead. Radical activists, like the New Communist California Homemakers Association, placed together service and migrant field workers, general assistance and AFDC recipients, and the unemployed in the same “strata,” targeting state-funded home care for organizing drives. The militancy of U.S. born and immigrant women of color proved central for the transformation of still stigmatized and always underpaid household workers into home attendants, part of a growing health care industry. In New York, California, and elsewhere, these women refused to accept exploitative conditions. They protested, as did Mary Jones of Chicago, whose outraged comments captured the publicly funded but privately performed nature of the labor: “We do the work, the state saves money off of our work by keeping people out of nursing homes, the private companies make big bucks off their contracts, but the clients and the workers get low wages and no benefits, or get their hours cut back! It’s just not fair! This isn’t a job [sic.] this is Slavery!”⁶

SEIU pioneered in organizing household workers. When New York domestic workers employed by a third party, as opposed to those hired directly by someone in the home, gained the right to bargain collectively in 1976, SEIU’s flagship building maintenance Local 32B-32J initiated a Household Workers Organizing Committee. Unlike some older industrial unions, this old AFL union understood that workers in non-industrial settings were organizable. Over the next two decades, SEIU and other unions, especially United Domestic Workers of America/American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (UDWA/AFSCME), formed viable home care unions of women who moved between types of household employment, welfare, and aide jobs in nursing homes and hospitals. They brought together coalition politics and community organizing and, in some states, established through political clout new forms of representation, most notably the public authority, to create an employer for the purpose of collective bargaining for those who labored in scattered homes as “independent providers”—a model transferred to child care organizing as well. But these innovations depended on friendly local and state governments. Republican governors who surged to office following the 2008 recession deployed executive orders to undercut many of the previous rights that home care unions won. The Supreme Court denied their status as public employees and in the increasing hostile legal climate home care locals lost membership. Some began to cooperate with the rising immigrant led movement of domestic workers. UDWA/AFSCME in California has worked with the California Domestic Worker Alliance, though home care workers were left out of the Domestic Worker Bill of Rights and come under welfare rather than labor section of the state law.

Today some home based workers have gained entry into labor standards just as the standard employment contract is withering away: employers refuse to recognize workers as employees covered by wage, hour, occupational health, and social security protections and governments look the other way. While unions in the US and some Western European nations are struggling to maintain themselves, unionization is growing elsewhere in the world. Hostile governments do not explain this divergence as much as the power of national in relation to global capital and the workings of the state, presence of social movements, and specific factors, including ethnic, caste, and racial divisions and legal systems. Though domestic worker associations and unions seek inclusion in existing labor law, they also have generated alternatives, including establishing cooperatives, shifting legal responsibility to human rights

⁶ Boris research notes.

commissions, and building their own capacity for leadership and campaigning. Through organizing the whole woman and paying attention to relationships between her family and paid labor, they are waging a prolong battle in which changing attitudes toward home labor is the first step. But whether the standard employment relation is flexible enough to combine production with reproduction in all its forms is an unfolding story. The relationship between unions and domestic worker associations is open, undergoing change as a common enemy seeks to destroy both.

What do we learn from this history? The struggle for rights and recognition is long with many campaigns and setbacks. Domestic worker advances have not come in a vacuum: labor feminists and male trade unionists sought to improve conditions but not always in a way that valued the necessary work of household labor. Codes of conduct, training courses, legislation, and unionization are not new. Times of general social movement struggle have been best for advancement: civil rights, immigrant rights, and women's rights movements have created openings.

As recent events suggest, only when workers themselves organized and could gain representation to the ILO through its trade union component, only when they defined the issue and not their labor feminist or women expert allies, and only when they forged their own transnational networks, could decent work for domestics become a global concern.

In the 1970s, focus on the informal sector and the household as sites of income generation, abetted by feminist scholars inside and out of the ILO, expanded conceptions of what counts as work. Shifting contours of work, while necessary, was insufficient to generate change. It would take domestic workers themselves to force the world to consider household labor as employment—and the conditions for that effort would only occur with the new century.

The Latin American Problem in the Liberal Mind: Adolph Berle and the Limits of Anti-Communism as Social Policy

by
*Leon Fink**



The blueprint was clear enough.¹ With the declaration of President Franklin Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy in his inaugural address of 1933, followed quickly by U.S. support for a hemispheric-wide abrogation of armed intervention into the affairs of neighboring states backed by formal annulment of the interventionist Platt Amendment, New Dealers determined to open a wide southern front in their vision of international political and economic development. Yet, even as carrot-and-stick diplomacy helped bring Mexican and Brazilian troops into combat on the side of the Allies, while also helping to suppress German influence in Argentina, the end of the war confronted policy makers with a series of new dilemmas. In particular, the perceived threat of Communism, as centered in the Soviet Union and a growing Soviet Bloc, complicated a simple endorsement of anti-imperialism, social welfare, and labor rights.

In Germany, New Deal liberals (and British Labour allies) readily backed a revived democratic civic order, one drawing at once on Christian social doctrine and overtly social-democratic principles, installing regulated capitalist economies within an expansive free-trade order. And indeed, largely purged of its fascist-identified right wing, European postwar politics outside Spain and Portugal generally swung decidedly to the left. After beating back communist insurrection in Greece, liberals both within and outside the Roosevelt and Truman Administrations could rely for the most part on the democratic suasion of native anti-communist labor and political blocs (albeit, as in Italy, with CIA funding) to keep Soviet-friendly political forces in check. Soon, under the umbrella of the Marshall Plan, raised in 1948, Western Europe set itself on a path of sustained economic growth and long-term political stability.

In Latin America, however, the picture (at least for U.S. liberals) was always more complicated and the strategic choices more limited. In the context of a worldwide fight against fascism (and explicit U.S. preference for 'democracy' over 'dictatorship'), pent-up demand for its raw materials and agricultural commodities, and surging labor movements, Latin America—a region long prey to oligarchy, strong men, and dictatorship—had also witnessed something of a 'democratic spring' at the end of World War II. Indeed, by mid-1946, of twenty LA nations only five states remained without some formal measure of "popular legitimacy."² One key to democratization across the continent was organized labor, which, as historian Jon Kofas suggests, often stood out as one of the few mobilized sectors in otherwise vast but subordinated rural populations.³ All the more significant, then, that from the 1930s through the early

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¹ This paper is an excerpt from my current, ongoing project on American liberals and Cold War foreign policy, 1945–1980. It benefits from the editorial ministrations of several helping hands, especially Jeffrey Gould, David Diaz Arias, Daniel James, Jeffrey Sklansky, and Susan Levine.

² Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough, "Introduction; The Postwar Conjuncture in Latin America: Democracy, Labor, and the Left," in Bethell and Roxborough, eds., *Latin America Between the Second World War and the Cold War, 1944–1948* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge U Press, 1992), 5.

³ Jon V. Kofas, *The Struggle for Legitimacy: Latin American Labor and the United States, 1930–1960* (Tempe: Arizona State University, 1992), 1

1940s, a Marxist-inspired Labor Left grew in influence across the region—even while exercising wage restraint during the war—with hopes, according to sociologist Ian Roxborough, for a “sort of Social Democracy a la Western Europe” in the postwar period.⁴

To be sure, American ‘liberals’—and here I include officials of both the Roosevelt and Truman Administrations as well as representatives from the U.S. labor movement, then divided between the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the CIO—were at once hopeful yet wary of political developments south of the border. They took heart, among other things, from the erection of a progressive constitution in Cuba in 1940 and the election of Auténtico president Ramón Grau in 1944 over Fulgencio Batista’s handpicked successor. They likewise cheered what seemed an opening towards pluralist democracy when the Mexican Revolutionary Government renamed itself the PRI with the first primary election of candidates (other than president) in December 1946. Similarly, across the previous two years, a social-democratic party led by Victor Haya de la Torre had helped elect President José Luis Bustamante in Peru, democrat Romulo Betancourt had been installed over the old oligarchy as president of Venezuela, and, perhaps most surprisingly, in Guatemala democratic revolution in 1944 replaced one of the continent’s oldest strong men with a progressive military regime, which then quickly abided by the election to the presidency of university philosophy professor, Juan Arevalo. In the latter case, the U.S. perhaps most conspicuously showed its reformist sympathies, denying dictator Jorge Ubico a last-minute appeal for aid and sending its most influential regional ambassador, Spruille Braden, to Arevalo’s inauguration.⁵ Even in regimes traditionally resistant to U.S. influence, the signs seemed to be pointing upwards for American liberals, as Brazil’s Gen. Getulio Vargas took the first steps in dismantling his authoritarian Estado Novo (even before he was deposed by the military and replaced by popular elections in late 1945), while in Argentina, even Juan Peron (a man whom liberals hated) had buttressed authority seized during a war-time military junta with overwhelming popular electoral support in 1946. Altogether, it was a time, as Betancourt himself would later recall, when “with ballots or with bullets, the peoples were bringing democrats to power.”⁶ In all these democratic moves, historical experts attest, the U.S. played an important role, at least “indirectly.”⁷

Formation of such fledgling democratic regimes, however, provided at best temporary reassurance of the coming world order to U.S. liberals. In the European theater, to be sure, they were quick to identify the chief threats to democratic renewal: fascist and right-wing parties on the one hand, and Soviet-identified Communist movements and organizations on the other. In Europe, that left a healthy ‘middle ground’ of Catholic, Christian-Democratic, liberal, republican, labor, and non-communist socialist parties—and accompanying trade union federations—with which to do business. In Latin America and the Caribbean, however, the water was often murkier. Among the dilemmas—what were U.S. democrats to make of (or how strongly to oppose?) Latin American military strong men? How unacceptable, in turn, were the non-communist but heavily statist, so-called ‘corporatist’ regimes in Brazil, Argentina, even Mexico? A basic breach separated most U.S. liberals from their post-1930s Latin American counterparts, who, as historian Angela Delli Sante-Arrocha explains, almost universally combined democratic with socialist and statist commitments in a mix that was “practically the antithesis of classical liberalism.”⁸ Finally, how best to combat Latin American Communism, an enemy without a state (at least until Cuba in 1960)? The questions, on all counts, boiled down for liberal democrats to a single query: who could be counted on as friends and

⁴ Kofas, 4.

⁵ Steven Schwartzberg, *Democracy and U.S. policy in Latin America during the Truman Years* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 204–206.

⁶ Betancourt, as quoted in Schwartzberg, xiii.

⁷ Bethell and Roxborough, 7.

⁸ Angela Delli Sante-Arrocha, Juan José Arévalo, *Pensador Contemporáneo* (Mexico City: B. Costa-Amic, 1962), 14.

allies in building what one influential liberal, Adolf A. Berle, awkwardly called a “socially oriented Latin American democracy”?⁹

If there was an American official at the end of World War II with a portfolio to extend the vision of the New Deal south of the border, that person was likely Berle. A Boston-born child prodigy and proud of it—entering Harvard College at fourteen and the youngest Harvard Law graduate at age twenty-one—Berle (as his biographer assures us) “set no modest goals for himself,” and aspired to be no less than “the Marx of the shareholding class,” a social seer who would steer “between the proletariat and plutocracy” towards a middle path of “corporate liberalism,” or community-sensitive form of regulated capitalism.¹⁰ He began a lifelong connection with Latin America when the Army assigned him to the Dominican Republic, then under US military occupation, in 1918, before heading to Paris and the Versailles liberal brain trust around President Woodrow Wilson that included Joseph C. Grew, Walter Lippmann, William Bullitt, as well as historian Samuel Eliot Morison.¹¹ As a professor of corporate law at Columbia University, he became famous for his co-authored work with Gardiner Means, *The Modern Corporation and Private Property* (1931), a careful argument on behalf of governmental regulation of the marketplace (as opposed to trust-busting) that proved most compatible with the economic policies of President Franklin Roosevelt. Throughout the war years, Berle, as Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs, mixed the security priorities of realpolitik with the broad principles of the president’s non-interventionist and pro-democratic Good Neighbor policy. Thus, in dealing with Brazil (where he would serve as ambassador in 1945–46), the State Department praised dictator General Getulio Vargas for declaring war and even sending troops against the Axis, while gently calling for commitments to future democratization. Such kid-gloved treatment contrasted with diplomacy towards Argentina, where a similarly authoritarian-statist regime augmented its sins by active trade with the Germans through the early years of the war. Withholding of recognition from such a “fascist” regime and plans for a possible “peace-keeping” force (initially aimed at Argentina) via a reorganized Pan-American Union were hallmarks of Berle’s hemispheric activism as was his call for a Brazilian version of the TVA. While supporting the military overthrow of Vargas (who had backed off his own election pledge), Berle clashed with the State Department’s cozy connections to U.S. oil interests and what he called “colonizing capital.” Attempting to reanimate Brazilian democracy, the American ambassador even welcomed the return of a legalized Communist Party into the mix of the nation’s electoral forces. Generally chafing under the Anglo-European focus of Dean Acheson’s State Department, Berle left his government post in 1946, yet remained a vociferous advocate for developmental assistance to the hemisphere even as U.S. props for such ends were drastically scaled back. Unlike Europe, there would be no Latin American Marshall Plan, or at least not until Berle himself helped to revive the idea via Kennedy’s Alliance for Progress.¹² In the interim (i.e. between the Truman and Kennedy years), Berle clung to influence in Washington D.C. as a Democratic Party adviser

⁹ Berle “Forward,” Serafino Romualdi, *Presidents and Peons: Recollections of a Labor Ambassador in Latin America* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1967), xv.

¹⁰ Jordan A. Schwarz, *Liberal: Adolf A. Berle and the Vision of an American Era* (New York: Free Press, 1987), quotation vii, 13–17, 62; For Berle’s mature reflection on the social-economic system he had long studied, see his lecture series published as *The Twentieth-Century Capitalist Revolution* (London; Macmillan, 1955). Here, he hails modern-day capitalism for its “unsurpassed achievement” and for “having left every other system in recorded history immeasurably far behind,” (2) even as he distinguishes its conglomerate, and regulated, character from free-market shibboleths. “The corporation,” he argues, “almost against its will, has been compelled to assume an appreciable part the role of conscience-carrier of twentieth-century American society... In greater or less degree, the practice of national industrial planning is now familiar throughout great areas of the twentieth century corporate capitalist system.” (148, 134)

¹¹ Grew became a distinguished life-long career diplomat, Lippmann a famous journalist and political commentator, Bullitt served as first U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union, and Morison enjoyed a long and much-decorated scholarly career.

¹² Schwarz, 267–304, quotation 276; Schwartzberg, 30–41.

with deep contacts in the foreign policy establishment, including personal friendship with CIA director, Allen Dulles. (As Secretary of State Dean Rusk would later compliment him, when it came to Latin American affairs, ‘all roads led to Berle.’¹³)

For liberal Democrats, however, as much as for their conservative Republican counterparts led by Eisenhower’s Secretary of State (and Allen’s older brother) John Foster Dulles, the foreign policy focus swung strongly towards the perceived Communist menace in Latin America as well as Asia and Western Europe. Liberal political energies split between continuing advocacy of state-inflected development policy at home and abroad and a fierce anti-communism willing to jettison many erstwhile New Deal friends. U.S. retreat from democratic commitments was accompanied by a recrudescence of military dictatorship. The general direction of the new era was signaled in multiple centers: Somoza’s coup and subsequent severe repression against labor and the Left in Nicaragua beginning in 1947; overthrow of Venezuela’s elected President Gallegos by the General Perez Jimenez dictatorship in 1948, forcing Romulo Betancourt into a decade’s roving exile; the 1948 seizure of power in Peru by General Manuel Odria from the democratic coalition government of President José Luis Bustamante; and the replacement of the Cuban Autenticos by the Batista regime in Cuba in 1952.

As one of the most prominent of New Dealers active in Latin America, Berle’s own evolving commitments were telling. He had fought as early as 1940 to rid the National Lawyers Guild of Communists, and in 1947 he became New York Liberal Party chairman, leading the charge against the state’s Labor Party and Henry Wallace-style Democrats. Similarly, already by 1952, he was training his foreign policy sights on “the problem of Communist Government in Guatemala.” As Berle would instruct fellow liberal Arthur Schlesinger Jr., the Guatemalan government was no longer “an American movement at all,” but a likely staging ground for a coming “Russian–controlled dictatorship.” Even allowing for the need for at least many of the social reforms enacted under newly-elected Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz, Berle insisted that such programs could be accomplished by native, non-communist talents or by U.S.-inspired initiatives. At all events, however, the ‘Russian’ influence in Guatemala must be kept at bay: Berle reported that he was arranging a meeting on the subject with Assistant Secretary Rockefeller, who “can work a little with General [sic] Eisenhower on it.”¹⁴ In two years, the U.S.-engineered Guatemalan coup first suggested the limits of ‘liberal tolerance’ in the early postwar years in Latin America, even as the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion even more quickly established iron-clad boundaries for President Kennedy’s newly-enunciated Alliance for Progress.

¹³ Schwarz, x.

¹⁴ Schwartz, 159; Diary, Oct, 17, 1952, Adolf Berle (AB) Papers, FDR Library, Hyde Park, New York.

Cooperation across disciplines: The Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (BCDSS)

by
Jeannine Bischoff



The Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (BCDSS) promotes research on forms of dependency in pre-modern societies. The center concentrates on transcultural and interdisciplinary research with a focus on non-European pre-modernity. To tackle the dynamics and plurality of this topic, the center aims to be a forum for scholars and research from all over the world.

The BCDSS was officially founded in December 2017 and has recently received funding within Germany's Excellence strategy by being approved as a Cluster of Excellence, starting 1 January 2019. The program is Germany's most prestigious funding scheme, designed to strengthen top-level research at universities in Germany. The approved Clusters are characterized by a high level of involvement of non-university partners and multidisciplinary in the majority of projects. Overall, the University of Bonn received funding for six Clusters of Excellence—more than any other university in Germany.

The BCDSS provides the roof under which all activities of the Cluster of Excellence “Beyond Slavery and Freedom – Asymmetrical Dependencies in pre-modern societies” are carried out. The interdisciplinary research project will be funded for seven years with several million Euros per annum providing positions for researchers of all academic levels, as well as funding for initiatives like workshops, summer schools, or archival research. After the first seven years, with a renewal proposal, it may be possible to extend the funding a further seven years. The Cluster includes colleagues from four faculties (Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Law and Economics, Faculty of Protestant Theology, Faculty of Catholic Theology), and from 25 individual disciplines.

“This approval is a resounding success for our interdisciplinary scholarly work and proves that this topic is essential to understand current political debates in the field of dependency and labor”, stated Prof. Dr. Stephan Conermann, Spokesperson of the BCDSS. “During the next years, we will make Bonn an internationally leading research hub for Dependency and Slavery Studies.”

A hub for international and interdisciplinary research

The research aim of the BCDSS is to explore asymmetrical dependencies in pre-modern societies because, despite the diverse forms that human bondage and coercion have taken over time, academic debates in the modern West have primarily focused on the most extreme one: slavery. Especially the trans-Atlantic experience of slavery has been intimately entangled with the creation of the modern West. It still continues to inform our notions of what freedom and a lack thereof mean. “Slavery” and “freedom” are ideologically charged terms. The BCDSS aims at using a more neutral terminology to go beyond the binary opposition of “slavery versus freedom” by suggesting “asymmetrical dependency”—or, more precisely, “strong asymmetrical dependency” as a new key concept, which includes debt bondage, convict labor, tributary labor, servitude, serfdom, and domestic work as well as forms of wage labor and various types of patronage.

The BCDSS will focus on societies that are usually labeled as “pre-modern”—as well as on regions and contexts (also in early modern and modern times) that were not directly affected by Western colonization. The reasons are two-fold. First, the Arab world, Asia, pre-Columbian

America, and even parts of Europe have not been studied as extensively as their Atlantic counterpart in this regard. Second, the Humanities at the University of Bonn constitute a critical mass of outstanding specialists actively doing research on the pre-modern and on the non-western world.

To test and re-conceptualize existing definitions, the BCDSS will significantly broaden the empirical basis of research through a temporal and spatial extension of the field. The BCDSS will connect current debates on asymmetrical dependencies in the ‘modern world’ with new research on societies outside of this sphere of influence.

Five specialized fields of research

To live up to these highly ambitious aims, the BCDSS has developed an interdisciplinary, international and multi-faceted strategy along five specialized fields of research:

- A) Grammars of Dependency
- B) Embodied Dependencies
- C) Institutions, Norms, and Practices
- D) Labor and Spatiality
- E) Gender (and Intersectionality)

Within these five Research Areas, researchers will explore innovative angles of dependencies. The results will not only be presented in individual case studies, but also in collaborative projects. For each of the five Research Areas the BCDSS members have developed a collaborative project that serves the respective research aim of collecting and presenting results in the most useful way for the academic community. For example, Research Area A will produce an open-access handbook on semantics of dependencies including examples from all regions and times studied within the BCDSS. Therefore, it will contribute to our understanding of the complex scale between the two extremes of strong asymmetric dependency and so-called freedom better.

The BCDSS aims to broaden individual scopes of academic training by cooperation across disciplines. The BCDSS has decided for these five Research Areas because various forms of asymmetrical dependency have existed throughout human history in all parts of the globe. They are part of the “human experience.” The five Research Areas will contribute to research on the BCDSS’ two basic hypotheses from various perspectives: (1) There are enduring institutions of asymmetrical dependency in all human societies; and (2) these asymmetrical dependencies are formative for these societies.

During the next seven years, the BCDSS will work on proving these two hypotheses and is looking forward to intense research in Bonn and abroad.

Let’s continue the conversation

The BCDSS is eager to extend its network and to work cooperatively worldwide. To reach the BCDSS, please contact us via dependency@uni-bonn.de, visit our website (www.dependency.uni-bonn.de/en), follow us on Facebook (Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery studies) and Twitter (@DependencyBonn), or just come by in Bonn.

Co-existence and interaction between free and unfree labour: The workers' perspective

2018 SEMINAR OF THE ITALIAN SOCIETY FOR LABOUR HISTORY (SISLAV)
UNIVERSITY OF TURIN, ITALY, 21–22 SEPTEMBER 2018

by
Giulia Bonazza
(German Historical Institute, Rome)



In the frame of the Italian Society for Labour History (SISLAV), founded in 2012, the working group on “Free and unfree labour” has been created in June 2016 to explore the multiple labour relations which, throughout history and at all latitude, have played a role in the processes of labour extraction and commodification: wage labour, slavery, servitude, tributary labour, convict labour, etc. The working group is connected with parallel initiatives at the European and Latin American levels (the “Free and Unfree Labour” working groups of the European Labour History Network and the *Red Latinoamericana y del Caribe de Trabajo y Trabajador@s* – REDLATT) and at sub-continental level (e.g. the “Free and Unfree Labour” strand within the Nordic Labour History Conference). All of them have joined the long-term conversation that has developed during the last decades around the issue of the co-existence and interaction of free and unfree labour relations, and about the very boundaries of “freedom” and labour coercion. A rich collection of empirical research has resulted from this debate, which has contributed to question traditional postulates of labour history, including the centrality of the Industrial Revolution, the process of proletarianization, and the concept and boundary of the working class.

Within this frame, the Seminar “Co-existence and interaction between free and unfree labour: The workers' perspective” was convened by the “Free and Unfree Group” of the SISLAV at the University of Turin, Italy, in cooperation with the Global History Lab (University of Turin). It sought to foreground the perspective of the workers who were imbricated in distinct and co-existing labour relations. In fact, the organizers felt that, with a few exceptions, the new scholarship on “free and unfree labour” has featured two major limitations. On the one hand, it has focused on the abstract entanglements between labour relations rather than on the concrete interaction among workers (and their organizations). On the other hand, it has developed largely in separation from those labour studies which, especially for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, have addressed the role of the workers' organizations, practices and political cultures, and their relationship with the State.

Therefore, the Seminar aimed to integrate the perspective on labour relations with the viewpoint of the experiences, ideas and organizations of the workers themselves. In particular, it focused on the following themes: 1) The co-existence and interaction, within the same workplace, of workers imbricated in different labour relations; 2) The co-existence in the life of the same worker of multiple work experiences imbricated in distinct labour relations; and 3) The solidarity and conflict among workers imbricated in different labour relations, and the relationships among their organizations.

The five sessions provided five entry-points to these themes, by addressing the following thematic axes:

1) The ambiguous contract, with a focus on the importance of (economic and non-economic) coercion within the contractual regime, and empirical cases addressing the experiences of the Chinese “coolies” in Peru (Leonardo Scavino), indigenous workers in French

Equatorial Africa (Ferruccio Ricciardi), ex-workers of the *bracero* program in Mexico (Abel Astorga Morales) and off-shore large retailers in Lebanon (Michele Scala).

2) Labour movement, workers and representations of the work, with empirical cases on the relationships between Afro- and Italo-American workers in the early twentieth-century US (Marco Moschetti), Antonio Labriola's observation of the composition of the working class of late nineteenth-century Rome (Massimo Gabella) and the representations created by Argentinean workers involved in the self-management of failed factories (Vanessa Coscia).

3) Male and female workers in the world wars, where the focus lay on colonial workers and POWs in the French arsenals during WWI (Pierre-Alexis Hirard), the interactions between convicts and "voluntary" labourers in the Soviet Gulags (Pavel Grebenyuk) and the shift from workers' elite to forced labour experienced by the Genoese workers deported to the Nazi concentration camps on 16 June 1944 (Irene Guerrini and Marco Pluviano).

4) Co-existence and fluidity in labour relations ("free" and "coactive") as standard in the global history of labour, with the presentations addressing public works and famine-relief policies in colonial India (Amal Shahid), the role of the household in twentieth-century Greece (Aiki Vaxevanoglou), and the ambiguity of the concept and practices of "modern slavery" in contemporary Brazil (Julia Harnoncourt).

5) Contemporary labour and coercion, with two papers clustering around the work of refugees in present-day Italy (Simone De Cecco) and Lebanon (Sofia Agosta and Michele Scala) and one investigating the perception of industrial work at the Fiat-Sata plant in Melfi, Italy (Elena Dinubila).

The sixteen papers were presented in four different languages (Italian, French, English and Spanish), covered the chronological period from the eighteenth century to the present, and had a wide spatial scope, from Europe, South and North America to Africa and the Middle East. Different "types" of workers were addressed: indentured workers, voluntary migrants, enslaved labourers, sailors, convicts, daily labourers and independent peasants. This diversified focus matched with the rich methodological approaches and the interdisciplinary nature of the papers. Indeed, not only historians, but also sociologists, anthropologists and ethnologists took part in the conversation. This proved key to moving beyond standard conceptualisations in labour history (e.g. the divide between freedom and coercion), towards new research horizons and collaborations among the larger group of researchers in human and social sciences.

Whereas the question of the co-existence and fluidity in labour relations provided a common ground for discussion, in the final session the participants highlighted the particular relevance of two themes that will be further developed into related publications during the next months: 1) The ambiguous contract and 2) The solidarity and movements between male and female workers from the workers point of view and their strategies.

ISHA Newsletter

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Submissions are welcome including brief notes, such as reports on conferences; personal accounts related to ISHA issues; announcements of forthcoming conferences and meetings on issues related to ISHA; readers' comments sharing your reactions to and thoughts about materials published in the Newsletter. All documents need to be formatted using Microsoft Word (.doc). Please send all manuscripts as an e-mail attachment to the editor.

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