

## **Women and Trade Unions in Europe and beyond, 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries**

Organisers: Silke Neunsinger (Labour Moment Archives and Library, Stockholm) and Susan Zimmermann (Central European University, Budapest)

### **Call for Papers**

This session is connected to the research project 'in-the-making' described below. We are looking for papers related to any of the questions specified in the questionnaire, which is given at the end of the description, or any other related topic.

The project described below aims to include contributions related to all European countries and regions, as well as contributions building on and developing global and transnational perspectives.

We are absolutely open for cooperation of all kinds within this framework and for additional cooperation and activities within the ELHN.

If you are interested in contributing to the project described below before the ELHN Conference already please do let us know.

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**'Women and Trade Unions in Europe, 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries' (WATU)** is a joint research project envisioned as consisting of three phases.

Project start date: 1 June 2015

This description has been prepared by:

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### **Short description:**

Using a wide range of archival and other primary material this research project examines the histories of women in socialist, Christian and communist trade unions, trade union-type organizing and work-place related activism, and the woman politics of related organizations and activist networks. Its major focus is on various European countries, while also including transnational interaction and international co-operation, from the beginnings in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. The history of women and trade unions in Europe is to a large extent unwritten; there is little up-to-date scholarship. Three major lines of thinking inform this research.

First, we are interested in how labour women's organizing and politics transcended and challenged, and were shaped and restricted by, the boundaries of all-women and single-sex organizing on the one hand, and working-class mixed-sex organizing on the other. While the former type of organizing tended to marginalize working-class women and their political interests because these were focused on working-class-issues, the later tended to marginalize working-class women and their interests because the politics of these women were women-oriented. Research into the history of both women's organizations/activism and working class organizations/activism has tended to duplicate rather than transcend these respective boundaries, and thus has maintained rather than questioned the historical marginalization of labour women's organizing and activism. This project is aimed at challenging this double marginalization.

Second, we are interested in how the relationship between issues of class and issues of gender, as well as other social questions, impacted on the politics and activism of trade unions and woman workers (incl. those involved in irregular and non-normative labour relations). Traditional research into the history of trade unions, trade-union type politics and work-place related activism has conceptualized these politics mostly as class-politics, disregarding to a large extent gender asymmetries that have characterized the world of work, and the histories of gendered political struggle aimed at challenging or maintaining these hierarchies. By contrast, women's and gender history of the first generation, in its endeavour to establish gender as a useful category of historical analysis, foregrounded gender at the expense of class (and other categories), while the new intersectional gender history, rather than fully and critically interrogating questions of class, has often paid lip-service only to exploring this dimension of historical analysis; this shortcoming has been a result of both the emergence of intersectional gender history in a period when historians turned their back to the history of the working classes, and the origins of this new approach in the critical interrogation of the implicit whiteness – rather than the implicit class-biases – of gender history. We conceive of research into the history of women and trade unions in Europe as a historical-empirical contribution to overcoming these deficiencies.

Third, we wish to critically interrogate the Eurocentrism which has coloured the politics and activism of trade unions and labour women in Europe and internationally. In this way we aim to contribute to an emerging historiography which conceives of Europe as a historically privileged world region yet doesn't privilege the (Western-)European experience in terms of historiographic concepts.

### ***Research Plan and Project design***

The project is envisioned as consisting of three phases, with the first, initial phase – for which modest funding has been secured – scheduled June 1 to December 31, 2015. Phase II will be dedicated to the preparation of a larger scale grant proposal, Phase III to the joint research project.

#### Phase I, June – December 2015: Information gathering and research framing

Junior Researchers and other interested scholars document primary and secondary sources and contribute to answering other questions on the history of women and trade unions in Europe writ large as contained in the **Questionnaire**.

This information will be shared and discussed, and the next stage of the project designed during a **Workshop** co-organized (so far) by Silke Neunsinger and Susan Zimmermann.

#### Work plan Phase I:

##### 1 June – 1 November 2015:

##### A. Work with the *Questionnaire*:

- The *Questionnaire* will be widely circulated, and contributions of any kind and size invited from whoever is interested.
- Junior researchers for whose contribution modest funding has been secured, work on full documentation of primary and secondary sources, and collect information on the questions contained in the *Questionnaire*, with reference to Central and Eastern Europe writ large:

N.N., focus on Austria and German-language sources

Ivelina Masheva, focus on Bulgaria, [masheva@gmail.com](mailto:masheva@gmail.com)

N.N., focus on former Czechoslovakia

Ewa Maczynska, focus on Poland, [Maczynska\\_Ewa@phd.ceu.edu](mailto:Maczynska_Ewa@phd.ceu.edu)

Alexandra Ghit, focus on Romania, [alexandraghit@gmail.com](mailto:alexandraghit@gmail.com)

Selin Cagatay, focus on Turkey, [Cagatay\\_Selin@phd.ceu.edu](mailto:Cagatay_Selin@phd.ceu.edu)

Sandra Prlenda Perkovac, focus on former Yugoslavia, [prlenda\\_sandra@phd.ceu.hu](mailto:prlenda_sandra@phd.ceu.hu)

- Senior researchers' contribution: History of women and trade unions internationally

### 1 June – 30 November 2015

#### B. *Workshop* preparation:

- Senior Researchers and Junior Researchers prepare (for) the December *Workshop* (see C., below)
- Invitation of additional researchers and resource persons

### December 2015 or January 2016

#### C. *Workshop*

##### Participants:

Senior Researchers, Junior Researchers, and additional researchers and resource persons

##### Draft Program:

- Country presentations, thematic presentations
- Summary of and reflection on information received, and on presentation
- Presentations on and discussion of research design
- Discussion of and decision on grant proposal strategy, division of labour, grant preparation schedule, etc.

#### **Questionnaire:**

#### **Women and Trade Unions in Europe, 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries**

The role of women in trade unions and work-place related activism as well as trade unions' women and gender politics have remained highly under-researched on a local, national, regional and international scale. This collaborative project seeks to bring together researchers to discuss and facilitate research on women in unions and unions' work with women workers, as well as all forms of work-place activism concerned with women. We are interested in bringing together scholars interested in and/or having expertise in research on local unions, workplace organisation, national unions and national union confederations as well as international unions, international union confederations, international trade secretariats and other networks of women workers from the 19<sup>th</sup> century until present.

#### Please collect and give information on the following questions:

- 1) Short overview, important dates in the historical development of women in unions and women worker activists.
- 2) Historiographical development of the field? Can you contextualize this in the light of the general development of unions and union confederations?
- 3) Archival situation, which sources are available? Please indicate the institutions which keep the material and give details about the material in terms of content and scope.
- 4) Bibliography of available secondary literature, please include an English translation of titles.
- 5) Which kinds of union and networks have women been engaged in and which unions have been concerned with women workers?
- 6) Names of important female labour activists with short info on biographical data and role in trade union and women networks.
- 7) Which gender specific structures existed in unions? For example have women's committees existed in mixed unions or did separate women's trade unions come into being?
- 8) What has been on the agenda of unions and labour feminists in terms of gendered labour politics and labour politics relevant to women?
- 9) Which strategies and tactics were used to achieve these goals?

- 10) Can you mention or even describe the networks used by labour feminists?
- 11) What kinds of statistics are available about women in unions? Can you give information about the number of women activists, how many female members, age and civil status of activists, trades etc?
- 12) What kind of alternatives, organizations and activism have existed such as grassroots movements, local protests?
- 13) Did education for union women exist and how did it develop?
- 14) Were any of the labour women active in international trade unions, international trade union confederations, in any of the international trade secretariats, or any other international organisation or network?
- 15) Do you know of any international and regional networks and bilateral co-operation such as international solidarity or international summer schools?