

ILO, Women and Networks

Methodological lessons from two case studies

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(Central European University)

*Gendered International Entanglements:
The ILO, Minimum Wages, Trade
Unionists, and Feminists in the Interwar
Period*



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*Imagine My Surprise: Rethinking the
Making of Conventions on Home-Based
Labor and Workplace Violence*



Chair: Valerio Torreggiani (ICS - Universidade de Lisboa)

Introduction: Eloisa Betti (Università di Bologna)

Discussant: Marica Tolomelli (Università di Bologna)

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Gendered International Entanglements: The ILO, Minimum Wages, Trade Unionists, and Feminists in the Interwar Period

The 1920s and 1930s were an era of dynamic internationalization of labor politics. For the International Federation of Trade Unions wage policy was a key issue. The hopes in 1919 that the ILO would promote the “provision of an adequate living wage” worldwide through international instruments quickly foundered. Instead, in the mid-1920s, the ILO held out the prospect of creating a politically extremely moderate instrument on “minimum wage-fixing machinery.” This presentation shows how this instrument became the platform for a groundbreaking international dispute between the ILO, trade unions, female trade unionists, and non-socialist women’s organizations over the question of a gender-equitable wage policy.

Susan Zimmermann is a historian of labor and gender politics and movements. In recent years she has published on the politics of women’s work pursued by the ILO and the women’s networks in its orbit in the interwar period and female trade unionists in state-socialist Hungary. Her monograph *Women’s politics and men’s trade unionism. International gender politics, female IFTU-trade unionists and the labor and women’s movements of the interwar period* (in German) was published in 2021. Zimmermann holds the European Research Council Grant “Women’s labour activism in Eastern Europe and transnationally, from the age of empires to the late 20th century”. Since 2014 she has served as President of the International Conference of Labour and Social History ITH.

Imagine My Surprise: Rethinking the Making of Conventions on Home-Based Labor and Workplace Violence

The historical record has many surprises for those of us who turn to the archives after participating in global campaigns for labor standards. In this talk I’ll argue that memory is not enough when considering how the ILO develops and passes conventions. I turn to the efforts of feminists inside and outside of the ILO, especially those connected to global labor federations, to discuss the winning of convention 177 on home-based labor (1996), for which I was part of a network of feminist researchers, and convention 190 on gender violence at work (2019), for which I was an observer through connection with the International Domestic Workers Federation. Through these examples I raise questions about writing ILO histories, feminist labor history, and the dialectic of past and present.

Eileen Boris is the Hull Professor and Distinguished Professor of Feminist Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara. She is the author, with Jennifer Klein, of *Caring for America: Home Health Workers in the Shadow of the Welfare State* (Oxford, 2012), *Making the Woman Worker: Precarious Labor and the Fight for Global Standards, 1919-2019* (Oxford University Press, 2019) and she is co-editor of *Women’s ILO. Transnational Networks, Global Labour Standards and Gender Equity, 1919 to Present* (Leiden: Brill 2018). She serves as President of the International Federation for Research in Women’s History, 2015-2020 and received the 2017 Distinguished Service Award to the Field from the Labor and Working-Class History Association.