

# NEWS OF THE PROFESSION

## *Divisions of Labour*

Movements of workers (labour) necessarily involve large groups of people. The mobilisation of large groups in mass movements is, for the activists, the perennial problem. To an activist, the powerful forces making for division and apathy, as against solidarity and animation, operate as a dead weight, conserving the past and frustrating the future. The aim set for the 8th British-Dutch conference, based on Manchester from 17-20 September 1992, is to examine, historically, the social and political bases of divisions of labour.

Contributors to the conference are invited to address themselves to the theme at two levels. First, in terms of division at the level of the social base: those ethnic, gender, occupational, and cultural factors which have tended to divide or to unite workers in their social and work activity without necessarily having any obvious effects upon political and economic organizations. Second, however, contributors might address themselves to division at the level of the movement: the way in which factors dividing or uniting at the social level impinge upon and join other considerations – economic, political, and so on – creating sectionalism or solidarity among trade unions, and factionalism or cohesion among political parties.

The most useful papers are likely to be those which attempt to combine factors operating at both levels, social base and movement, in order to address major historical issues. But potential contributors should not be inhibited from offering papers which are more narrowly conceived: their new research may throw useful light on particularities which can be woven, through conference discussion, into a more general argument.

The conference theme goes to the heart of a key difference between British and Dutch society: that of the absence in British society of “confessional” or religiously affiliated labour organizations and political parties, in contrast to Dutch “pillarisation” – the division of all forms of social organization on such lines. Yet the contrast may be greater than it seems, for within the “broad church” of the British labour movement factions and sections have expressed differences internally which may be expressed externally in Holland. A conference of British and Dutch labour historians should be well placed to gauge the real comparative divisions of labour within apparently unique social forms.

The conference theme also provides an opportunity to contribute to a variety of smouldering or active historical debates. Our conference title reminds us of the volume edited by Royden Harrison and Jonathan Zeitlin, *Divisions of Labour: Skilled Workers and Technological Change in Nineteenth Century England* (1985) and invites us to explore the extent to which craft or skilled workers and their particular historical experiences constituted a distinct social formation, or shaped the labour movements of Britain and Holland. Papers mining this vein may well be regarded as a contribution to debate around the attempt to explain the changed character of the later nineteenth century British labour movement in terms of

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“labour aristocracy”, but the question of division within the labour force in terms of skill or qualification cannot be exhausted by that particular problematic. In the British context and in the history of the twentieth century, for example, new questions might be posed about the participation of blackcoated workers in labour politics and union organization. In the Dutch context, there was certainly a discernible division between the skilled and unskilled and between regular and casual workers, but perhaps because of the primacy of the political party from the 1890s and the relatively late development of industrial enterprise the fracture at the social and organisational levels was apparently less acute than in Britain.

There is some scope perhaps for revisiting the “labour aristocracy”, or other elements of social formation and stratification, in terms of Hobsbawm’s original and much questioned economic definition. In Britain, Greg Anderson has usefully related the labour market to the aspects of social formation [in Chris Wrigley (ed.), *History of British Industrial Relations 1875-1914* (1982)] and for the Netherlands there is Ad Knotter’s work on Amsterdam’s nineteenth-century labour market.

A second major area of historical debate to which our conference theme relates, is that of the history of the labour process. Discussion of the social division appertaining to the possession of skill and qualification necessarily starts from the workplace, but examination of division in terms of the labour process raises questions of gender, ethnicity, international competition between capitals, and much else. British and Dutch historians who wish to explore issues here might find a unifying framework in the American work of D.M. Gordon, R. Edwards, and M. Reich, *Segmented work, divided workers. The historical transformation of labor in the United States* (1982). To what extent can our respective national movements’ historical experiences be related to their model of proletarianisation, homogenisation and segmentation; and our experiences of immigration, gender division, and so on, be seen, temporally or causally, as analogous?

A third area of debate is in terms of the division between social democracy and communism [and its variants] in labour movements. Discussion hitherto has been too much conducted perhaps in terms of divisions of political practice and theory; questions of objects and means. Our conference can provide an opportunity to inject a new element into the debate: to explore the possibility of a social explanation for divisions usually interpreted entirely politically. There is a big task here that historians have hardly started to address. In British historiography, the work of Alan Campbell provides us with something of a start. His *Lanarkshire Miners* demonstrated how ethnic and other social and economic divisions within the coal-field affected trade unionism; and his later work is showing how the development of a militant trade unionism among younger generations was associated with communism. In the Netherlands, work published in Dutch by Bert Altena on the syndicalist workers of Vlissingen provides an interesting analysis of the impact of social, occupational, cultural and generational factors on a local movement; and there is in English a relevant article by the Dutch scholars Joost Wormer and Marcel van der Linden, ‘The end of a tradition: structural developments and trends in Dutch Communism’ [*Journal of Communist Studies*, 4, 1988, pp. 78-87].

The conference will take place at the Manchester University Extra Mural Department’s Holly Royde Conference Centre, 56-62 Palatine Road, West Didsbury, Manchester M20 9JP, but we hope to arrange for a part of the conference to be

peripatetic in emulation of the excellent arrangements at Groningen in 1990. The British Society for the Study of Labour History will be meeting the UK costs of our Dutch colleagues. The administration of the conference will be through the Division of Continuing Education, University of Sheffield, 85 Wilkinson Street, Sheffield, S10 2GJ.

Those interested should contact John L. Halstead at the University of Sheffield, Britain, as above or Lex Heerma van Voss, Oude Waelweg 94, 1111 TA Diemen, The Netherlands.

### *Remaking the Working Class*

The theme of the next North American Labor History Conference will be: "Remaking the American Working Class: The Recomposition of the Labor Force and its Implications for the Labor Movement in Historical Perspective". The conference will be held October 15-17, 1992, at Wayne State University in Detroit and will explore changes in the American labor force, placing in historical context contemporary shifts in its composition and in the occupational structure and the implications of these changes for the labor movement – in organizing, relationships with government or employers, and labor's political culture. For more information write Elizabeth Faue, Department of History, 3094 Faculty Administration Building, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI 48202, USA. Tel. -313-577-6986.

### *Social Movements*

The Thematic Group on Collective Behaviour and Social Movements of the International Sociological Association and the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung will organize the First European Conference on Social Movements. The conference theme is: "Social Movements and Societies in Transition: East and West European Experiences and Perspectives", Berlin, October 29-31, 1992.

Over the last few years Eastern European countries have experienced profound societal changes. In the decades before, Western European countries went through more gradual transformations. Social movements have stimulated and been stimulated by these transitions. The conference is a first attempt to bring social movement scholars from the East and the West together. Parallel sessions will be organized addressing the following themes: social movement theory; methods and research designs for the study of social movements; the role of ideology and utopias in directing movement activities; organizational patterns and organizational change in social movements; the movement's environment; internationalization of protest. In addition a number of open sessions will be organized. Conference languages will be English and German.

Those interested should contact Dr Dieter Rucht, Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin, Reichpietschufer 50, D-1000 Berlin 30, Germany. Tel. -30-25491-306. Fax -30-25491-1448.

### *Socio-political Change and Crime*

The 11th International Congress on Criminology will be held in Budapest, August

22-27, 1993. The general theme is: "Socio-political change and crime: a challenge of the 21st century". Special meetings will be held, *inter al.*, on "historical criminology" and "socio-history of crime and crime control". Those interested should contact Prof. Hans-Jürgen Kerner, Neue Kriminologische Gesellschaft, Corrensstr. 34, D-7400 Tübingen, Germany. Tel. -49-7071-292931.