CALL FOR PAPERS

In the wake of the 2nd Congress of the European Labour History Network (ELHN) at Nanterre (2-4 November 2017), and with the 3rd ELHN conference (Amsterdam 2019) already in mind, the ELHN “Labour & Empire” working group is organising a one-day conference on Thursday 8 November 2018 at Paris 3 – Sorbonne Nouvelle University on the following topic:

“Thinking about labour within and across empires”

Labour history over the past decade has become more global in its outlook – a welcome mutation that has not made national, regional and local studies redundant, but has allowed historians to ask old questions from a different, broader angle and also to embrace new objects and new methodologies.

The history of the British and more generally of the European and “Western” working classes can no longer be explored without consideration of the transnational character of capitalist development and of the cosmopolitan dimension this gave to class formation. The benefits of a global approach are possibly even more evident in the study of labour in the Global South, be it in the age of empire or in the post-colonial era.

The transnational and global turn should not, however, flatten and homogenise the experience of labour – the risk being a privileging of connection and unity over divisions, of subaltern agency and co-operation over power relations, of movement and mobility over fixed hierarchies.

Our task as historians is therefore to tackle both the circulation of radical ideas within and across empires, and the way States and employers tried to keep their migrant and diasporic workforce under control; both the cosmopolitan shapes of worker resistance and the racist, repressive practices imposed in the workplace and within certain territories to discourage collective action.

Such a scrutiny of labour's past can hardly be indifferent to present-day concerns about the social effects of globalised capitalism – one of the merits of imperial labour history
being to shed light on the contemporary legacies of colonialism.

The co-ordinators of the “Labour & Empire” group welcome proposals for twenty-minute papers. Potential topics include but are not limited to:

- The movement and regulation of labour across colonial and imperial borders.
- Transnational / transimperial / transcolonial labour activism.
- Transnational and global occupations, such as dockers and seamen.
- International organisations concerned with the promotion of labour interests and trade union rights.
- The role of regional and international trade union organisations in colonial and post-colonial contexts.
- Labour and anti-colonial nationalism.
- State and employer management of migrant workforce.
- The place of race and/or gender in global labour history.

The co-ordinators welcome proposals that consider any of these issues in relation to the European empires, as well as the contiguous empires of East Asia and the United States. Chronologically, the focus of the papers should be on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Proposals should be submitted to Yann Beliard (yann.beliard@univ-paris3.fr) and Gareth Curless (g.m.curless@exeter.ac.uk) by 30 June 2018.