

**S. 10. 5. – NEW SCHOLARSHIP ON DOCKWORKERS:
AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

Chair: Jordi Ibarz Gelabert
(University of Barcelona)

Panel Abstract

With global perspectives and case studies on France, the United States, South Africa and Senegal, the panel will explore new scholarship on a category of maritime workers reputedly particularly inclined to strike, unionize, and engage in other forms of collective action. Papers will be presented by: Raquel Varela, professor at Universidade Nova de Lisboa and fellow of the International Institute for Social Research (Amsterdam) ; Peter Cole, professor at Western Illinois University and research associate at the Society, Work, and Development program at the University of the Witwatersrand; Daniel Hidalgo, University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria ; John Barzman, professor at Université Le Havre Normandie, listed here as a discussant ; and chaired by Jordi Ibarz (Barcelona). As it has been for millennia, port transport is an essential aspect of mobilizing the resources of the seas as it is the literal and metaphorical link with the human population living on land. Scholarly attention has focused on technological and organizational change, and in the last twenty years on the waterfront workforce which loads and unloads ships. Groundbreaking new research has been produced that focuses on single ports, national networks, comparisons of ports and international solidarity. Although the customs of contemporary dock workers derive in part from ancient, medieval and early modern times, they underwent considerable change and expansion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with the growth of ship size, specialization and tonnage carried, and especially with the container revolution. The panel aims to stimulate the necessary syntheses which this new scholarship has made possible. Case studies concern international networks, ports on the US West Coast, in Portugal, Senegal, South Africa, France and elsewhere. The panel will be chaired by Jordi Ibarz (University of Barcelona).

Keywords

ports, labor, cargo handling, international networks

The International Dockers Council and International Federation of Transportworkers

RAQUEL VARELA 

Abstract

In the last fifty years, the International Federation of Transportworkers (ITF) and, more recently, the International Dockworkers Council (IDC) were faced with the question of how to maintain their stated internationalism when faced with globalization, social dumping and solidarity struggles. Various events raised the question of « open borders » as mainstream official policy, « no borders » as a radical left solution, or closure of national borders, often combined with racism and xenophobia, as a perspective defended in some cases. We examine indications of the emergence of a Marxist policy of trade unionism, which does not defend free circulation as a state policy for itself, nor the closure of national borders, but promotes an effort to defend free movement of workers from the point of view of international solidarity, carried out in concrete struggles. In this paper, we present evidence that higher paid workers in richer countries, if they want to save themselves from social dumping, can, together with the poorest workers, promote common forms of struggle to prevent competition between them. We analyse the development of this debate as it underpinned the role of IDC in the internationalist labour movement of dockworkers after 2008 crisis in Europe.

Biography

Raquel Varela is a researcher and university professor. Starting Grant from the Foundation for Science and Technology / New University of Lisbon / IHC and Fellow of the International Institute for Social History (Amsterdam). As visiting professor at Universidade Federal Fluminense, she was responsible for the Global History of Work. A professor at ISEC, in Labor Relations, she coordinates the international project « In The Same Boat? Shipbuilding industry, a global labor history » at ISSH Amsterdam. She is author and coordinator of 30 books on labor history, Welfare State, History of Portugal, Europe in the XX Century, social movements, and global history. Several are translated into German, English and French. She has published 61 articles in journals with scientific arbitration in history, sociology, education, economics, social service and political science indexed by ISI Thompson, CAPES Qualis A, Scopus, among others. She is also author of 75 chapters of books published

Dockworker Power: Race and Activism in Durban and the San Francisco Bay Area

PETER COLE (Western Illinois University)

Abstract

The paper will probe the three main contributions of my new comparative history *Dockworker Power: Race and Activism in Durban and the San Francisco Bay Area*. First, in the decades after World War II, organized dockworkers (in unions and outside them) stood at the forefront of black freedom struggles in their respective port cities and countries, both built on racial capitalism. To do so, black, white and other peoples organized, where ordinary people possess their most power, arguably, at work. Be it named social movement unionism (in SA) or civil rights unionism (in US), such potential only has been realized occasionally, yet Durban's all-black and San Francisco's diverse dockworkers consistently fought for racial equality. Second, this paper will discuss dockworkers' responds to containerization, a revolutionary technological process with the potential to eviscerate worker power—but which did not. Dockworkers managed to survive, those with stronger unions more able to do so, offering a telling example of how organized labor can face automation, sure to become more intense. Though containerization resulted in an explosion in trade, particularly in shipping, maritime, labor, and other historians have insufficiently examined given its tremendous impacts. Third, this paper will discuss dockworker activism in transnational social justice struggles. Alternately described as black or labor internationalism, Durban and San Francisco Bay Area dockworkers possess long histories of stopping work to assist black and worker struggles in other countries. This book also is the first global North/global South comparison of port workers. Hopefully, it contributes to IMHA conversations on how maritime workers and their organizations can shape our world.

Biography

Peter Cole is Professor of History at Western Illinois University (USA) and Research Associate in the Society, Work and Development Institute (SWOP), University of the Witwatersrand (South Africa). He previously wrote *Wobblies on the Waterfront: Interracial Unionism in Progressive-Era Philadelphia*, edited *Ben Fletcher: Life and Times of a Black Wobbly* and co-edited *Wobblies of the World: A Global History of the IWW*. He tweets from @ProfPeterCole

Social radicalism and workers unionism at the waterfront: the case of colonial Dakar

DANIEL CASTILLO HIDALGO (IATEXT-University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (Spain))

Abstract

This communication analyses the configuration of specific social movements and unionism at the Dakar waterfront during the colonial Age (Cooper, 1990 and 2000; Person 1986). It builds from the conception of social radicalism proposed by Alice Mah (2014) in order to study how social claims and workers' unions operated from the early 20th century up to the last stages of the Colonial State (Thiam, 1993; Young, 1994). Thus, we observe how dock unions were located at the head of the political struggles in a number of key events which heavily affected the institutional colonial structure (Callebert 2017; Castillo & Wélé, 2018). Our research is mainly built from original documentation from the National Archives of Senegal and the French Overseas Archives (i.e., official reports on social and economic affairs; labour inspection). Thus, we aim to prove the existing linkages between waterfront radicalism and social advances in the colony and how the labour unionism struggled the functioning of the colonial state, chiefly during the interwar period.

Biography

Daniel Castillo Hidalgo is Assistant Lecturer at the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. He broadly published on maritime and economic issues in Senegal and West Africa during the contemporary period. His research interests focus on the development of port communities in Senegal as well as the spatial evolution of port systems in the African continent in the long run. He co-edited with Ayodeji Olukoju, *African Seaports and Maritime Economics in Historical Perspective* (2020, Palgrave).

Technology and culture : four configurations of port labor in Le Havre 1792-today

JOHN BARZMAN (University of Le Havre Normandy/UMR IDEES 6266 CNRS)

Abstract

What can the long perspective add to the history of port labor ? A case study of the port of Le Havre from the French Revolution (1790s) to today (2020) is due for publication in 2020. It allows the researcher to distinguish four configurations of technology, culture and labor organization that refer to ships, port equipment, goods transported and culture. In a first configuration (1790s to 1830s) wooden, relatively small and inexpensive sail ships were loaded and unloaded by registered trades and labor contractors using rudimentary equipment. In a second (1830s to 1880s), large sail ships and early steam ships stimulated the emergence of a “new large technical system” (enclosed dock) which reorganized professional customs. In the third (1880s to 1960s), more expensive steel ships, driven by steam, then diesel engines, required shorter turn-around times in harbor, and mechanization of cargo-handling operations. But the vast but irregular increase in the volume of goods traded led to an explosive growth of the workforce, with strikes that eventually (1928) built a strong and stable trade union. In the fourth period beginning in the 1970s, specialized bulk carriers (oil tankers, grain carriers, for example), then container ships carrying general goods led to a decrease of the number of dockers, but not to the disappearance of the strong union, which had created a strong and enduring (so far) culture of solidarity among its members and their families. Inspired by the collective undertaking which led to “Dock Workers. International Explorations in Comparative Labour” (2000), the paper will summarize essential elements that can be compared in different ports.

Keywords

ports, labor, cargo handling, international networks

Biography

BA: Harvard College, MA: U. Wisconsin Madison, PhD: UCLA, HDR: Paris I Panthéon Sorbonne. Professor Barzman has studied the history of social movements, port societies, and dock labor. Among other works, he contributed in various capacities to Dock Workers. International Explorations in Comparative Labour History 1790-1970 (2000), Environnements portuaires/Port Environments (2003) and a chapter on France to Raquel Varela's Global Encyclopedia of Dockers (forthcoming 2020). His *Les dockers du Havre de la Révolution à nos jours de la brouette au portique* is due to be published in 2020. Former member of the Editorial Board of the International Journal of Maritime History.