

CALL FOR PAPERS

14th International Conference on Labour History, 2027

March 11-13 2027

Labour in the Time of Crises: New Frontiers, Old Challenges

Conference Dates: 11-13th March 2027

Venue: National Law School of India University (NLSIU), Bengaluru

Organised by: The Association of Indian Labour Historians (AILH) in collaboration with the Centre for Labour Studies, NLSIU

CONFERENCE DATES
11-13 March 2027

VENUE
NLSIU, Bengaluru

ORGANISED BY
**AILH & Centre for Labour
Studies, NLSIU**

KEY DATES

ABSTRACT & BIO NOTE DUE
30 September 2026

NOTIFICATION OF ACCEPTANCE
20 October 2026

FULL PAPER DUE
1 February 2027

I stood on a hill and I saw the Old approaching, but it came as the New....

—Bertolt Brecht, *From the Darkest Times* (1938–1941)

The Association of Indian Labour Historians (AILH) and the Centre for Labour Studies, National Law School of India University, invite original contributions for its 14th International Conference to be held at NLSIU, Bengaluru in March 2027.

The world of labour is currently buffeted by multiple overlapping and cascading crises that are rapidly transforming working lives across the globe. Marked by unprecedented technological disruption of AI, trade wars, climate crises and burgeoning economic inequality between and within nations, the cumulative upheaval unfolds today against a raging geopolitical conflict. A handful of Big Tech corporations now command resources that rival national economies, their platforms restructuring labour at scale, while mass redundancy threatens even the white-collar workers. Organised labour, hollowed out across the world by deindustrialisation, deliberate contractualisation, and the concerted assault of states acting together with capital during the last four decades, faces new challenges in the post-globalisation, post-neoliberal era. In India, legislative restructuring through the introduction of the new Labour Codes, the suppression and absence of union activity in large areas of the economy, and the fragmentation of the workforce along caste and contractual lines have accelerated this erosion.

What we see today is the normalization of precarity and informality, propelled by algorithmic control and management by platforms that render work hyper-visible yet unprotected. It has brought paradoxical visibility to hitherto invisible labour—women, immigrants and marginalized groups in the care economy alongside gig workers in the new platform and digital regimes. And yet, workers have not simply succumbed to this new form of enclosure; they have improvised novel forms of solidarity and resistance, often outside old institutional channels and sometimes in defiance of them, responding to structural crises with fresh expressions of worker agency, from Luddite refusal to platform cooperatives.

This conference asks how today's upheavals echo and illuminate earlier moments of industrial and technological disruption, coerced migration, regulatory capture, and social contestation. The COVID-19 pandemic, artificial intelligence, new labour codes, global migration flows, sub-contractualisation, and the growing visibility of care and domestic work

have pushed the boundaries of labour history into new terrains and new frontiers. Yet, many of the challenges that labour and labour history confront today are 'old' in the garb of the new, as suggested by the circulation of neologisms such as 'techno-feudalism'; we invite reflections that interrogate what such terms illuminate—and obscure—about contemporary capitalism. We encourage a dynamic, comparative, and interdisciplinary approach that engages contemporary shifts alongside their historical antecedents. We invite participants to address the following issues, clustered around five broad themes, with emphasis on their interconnections.

Conference Themes

1

1. Technology, AI, and the Crisis of Agency

How are digital platforms, automation, and AI remapping the labour landscape? How are ideas of skill re-conceptualised in the times of AI? How do these changes refigure hierarchies of gender, caste, race and skill? How are these contested and reaffirmed? How has human labour's embodied skill in craft industries matched up to the challenge of AI-led automation? Historically, how have craft and skill adapted and responded to technological change? Do the current transformations represent genuine rupture or merely new forms of workplace surveillance and discipline? We seek papers tracing historical antecedents from Taylorism to cybernetic management, examining algorithmic control and enskilling/deskilling alongside industrial precedents and recovering histories of worker response to technological displacement.

2

2. Law, Regulation and Rights of Labour

Does the legal architecture of labour in our time reflect continuity or rupture? How have labour laws evolved historically and how have they affected diverse working populations? Have labour laws in India always been a site of legal labour protection or have they produced and sustained segmented forms of informality? We welcome contributions that examine legal cases, policy reforms, India's new Labour Codes and questions around social security and labour welfare in historical and comparative perspectives in moments of systemic shock. How have workplace rights—which provided the template for universal human rights—fared in the era of deregulation and technological disruption? How has regulation of technological behemoths and capitalist firms displaced or extended regulation of labour?

3

3. Migration, Agrarian Urbanism, and Global Shocks

Building on tech/law shifts, what are the shifting frontiers between rural and urban labour? How have migration patterns—internal and transnational—transformed historically in response to crisis? We seek papers on peri-urban landscapes and agrarian urbanism, on climate, pandemic, and war as accelerators of distress and circular migration alongside long-cycle rural-urban flows, and on migrant agency in building solidarities across fractured geographies.

4

4. Care Work, Domestic Labour, and Social Identities

How do varieties of care and domestic work—performed overwhelmingly by women, Dalits, migrants, and marginalised groups—challenge prevailing definitions of labour? How are work, identity, and inequality interwoven along lines of caste, gender, ethnicity, and citizenship? How do times of crisis redefine the meanings of social reproduction? How do care and domestic work contest the fragile line between the "private" and the "public"? This cluster explores historical trajectories of exclusion and the persistent question of who counts as a worker.

5. Labour Movements and the Praxis of Resistance

Labour history has always aimed to trace not just the structural conditions of oppression but also the arc of struggle for justice. What historical repertoires of resistance from earlier moments of technological rupture, epidemic, or legal assault remain available to workers today, and what must be freshly invented? We seek papers on new solidarities against contractualisation and digital isolation, on legal and extralegal claims-making, and on the praxis connection between historical scholarship and contemporary struggles for dignity and justice.

This conference aims to cultivate cutting-edge, interdisciplinary dialogue on labour's historical and contemporary frontiers while strengthening scholarly and activist networks. Comparative, cross-regional, and intersectional papers are particularly encouraged, as are panel proposals (3–4 papers) linking two or more themes. Selected papers will be considered for publication in a special volume.

Submission Guidelines

- Abstract (500 words): Outline argument, sources/methods, and fit with conference themes.
- Biographical note (100 words).
- Panel proposals: Include abstracts for all papers and chair/discussant details.
- Deadline: 30 September 2026.
- Submit to: ailhnlconference@gmail.com
- Notification: 20 October 2026
- Final Paper (5000-6000 words): 1 February 2027
- This is an entirely in-person conference. All paper presentations and conference sessions will take place on site.
- There is limited funding for domestic participants. We will actively support all selected paper presenters in their applications for institutional funding for the conference.

FOR ANY FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

Chitra Joshi, AILH
Vijetha Ravi, NLSIU

Kindly write to us at:

ailhnlconference@gmail.com

"And the procession moved through the night, but what they thought was the light of dawn was the light of fires in the sky. And the cry 'Here comes the New, it's new, salute the New, be new like us!'" would have been easier to hear if all had not been drowned in a thunder of guns.

—Bertolt Brecht, *From the Darkest Times* (1938–1941)