

THE HISTORY OF WORK CONFERENCE

REMEMBERING E.P THOMPSON

VALLETTA CAMPUS,
UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
13TH OCTOBER 2023



L-Università ta' Malta
Centre for Labour Studies



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Cover: Alessia Zahra

Welcome note

Dear colleagues,

We are delighted to welcome you to the History of Work conference: Remembering E.P. Thompson.

This international conference is an opportunity to look back at the research inspired by E.P. Thompson's approach, and to give a space to the research it continues to inspire, in labour studies, social history, and related fields. The conference responds to the ever-resounding call to examine the history of work. The various papers explore this through the lens of the history of socioeconomic and class relations, strategies of resistance and collective action, employment relations, literature and the humanities.

We hope you will enjoy the conference and your stay in Malta.

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Organised with:

The Centre for Labour Studies (CLS)

Works in Progress Seminar Series (WIPSS)

The Centre for Labour Studies

University of Malta

The History of Work: Remembering E.P. Thompson conference is organised with the Centre for Labour Studies (CLS) at the University of Malta. The CLS was established in 1981 as an independent, educational, documentation and research centre within the University of Malta. It aims to:

- strengthen the University's link with workers, employers and the world of work at large; and
- promote social dialogue, active involvement and the effective participation of workers, and their representatives, in specific workplaces and in labour policy more generally.

In pursuance of the two-pronged aim of its mission, the Centre for Labour Studies seeks to establish healthy working partnerships and promotes synergies between academics, government, trade unions, employers and other actors from civil society involved in the field of labour relations. It seeks to organise educational programmes aimed at sensitising people actively involved or interested in work-related issues and industrial relations.

The Centre at present offers courses at Masters, Undergraduate, Diploma and Certificate level which are all in some way related to the world of work. These include a Master in Lifelong Career Guidance and Development; an Honours Degree Course in Work and HR; an Honours Degree Course in Occupational Health and Safety; a Diploma Course in Gender, Work and Society; and an MA by Research. In addition to these courses, the Centre also provides outreach educational programmes tailored to the specific needs of the particular participants.

In parallel to its teaching vocation, the CLS has a strong research role and acts as the main national research agency for the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound). Furthermore, it holds seminars and disseminates information on issues related to the world of work and industrial relations.

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Works in Progress Seminar Series (WIPSS)

University of Malta

The History of Work: Remembering E.P. Thompson conference is organised in collaboration with WPSS at the University of Malta.

The seminar series Work in Progress in the Social Studies (WIPSS), now in its 26th year. WIPSS seminars have always had two main aims:

1. to provide researchers in any branch of the social studies or related, with a forum in which they can obtain feedback for their ideas or findings in an informal setting marked by lively discussion;
2. to act as an interface between the University community and civil society in Malta.

The themes and topics presented under the WIPSS auspices include; civil society, environmental movements, populism, education, and migration among others. WIPSS offers researchers the possibility of engaging with the public in an informal manner while maintaining the validity, authority, and rigour of academic research. It also offers a space in which new and veteran academics have the opportunity to discuss research and ideas in a sense of collegiality and community.

WIPSS are:

Michael Briguglio

Francois Zammit

8:15 – 8:45 Registration	
8:45 – 9:00 Welcome	
9:00 – 10:00 Keynote Speaker: John Chircop (University of Malta) – Title: ‘Thompson’s Legacy in the Making: Histories of Work and Endurance, Dissent and Resistance’ <i>Moderator: Jurgen Gatt</i>	
10:00 – 11:15 Panels	
Panel A: Theories and Concepts <i>Moderator: Krista Bonello Rutter Giappone</i>	Panel B: Identity and Alternative Solidarities <i>Moderator: Anna Borg</i>
Revisiting the Thompsonian concept of moral economy Nikos Potamianos (Institute for Mediterranean Studies – FORTH)	Objective and Subjective Class as Drivers of Conventional and Unconventional Political Participation Maria Grasso (Queen Mary University of London) and Sotirios Karampampas (European Law & Governance School)
“An Unqualified Human Good”: The role of Law in The Poverty of Theory Julio Martínez-Cava Aguilar (University of Barcelona)	Mining for Metal: Social Organization, Identity and Solidarity among Informal Scrap Metal Collectors in Chicago Élise Martel (Loyola University Chicago)
Between Bacon and Marx: E. P. Thompson’s “Muggletonian Marxism” Christos Efstathiou (University of Birmingham)	A new attitude towards labour? Socialist emulation and female labour: The case of Red Triangle rubber factory Alexandros Doulkeris (Athens School of Fine Arts)
11:15 – 11:30 Coffee Break	
11:30 – 12:45 Panels	
Panel A: Labour, Literature, and Paradigms <i>Moderator: Ivan Callus</i>	Panel B: Collective Action <i>Moderator: Manwel Debono</i>
E.P. Thompson, Benevolence, and the Work of Romanticism in the 1790s Michael Demson (Sam Houston State University)	Work and Labour Movement in Salonica, Greece (1908-1936): Moral economy and collective action during the Interwar period Kostas Fountanopoulos (Independent scholar)
Scientific Labour and the Empire of Bodily Interiors: Imperialism, Metropolitan Masculinity, Victorian Vivisection David Agruss (Arizona State University)	The Moral Economy of the Peasants: The Case of Epirus during the First World War Vassilis Georgakis (Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences)
The Invisible Laborers and the Moral Dynamics of Work: Reinterpreting David Foster Wallace’s The Pale King through the lens of E.P. Thompson Zuzanna Ładyga-Michalska (University of Warsaw)	Class struggle and agrarian change in northern Italy during the exogenous shocks of the late 19th century. The case of Lombardy Silvia Bianciardi (Università degli Studi eCampus) and Giacomo Zanibelli (Università degli Studi Napoli Federico II)
12:45 – 14:00 Lunch Break	

14:00– 15:15 Panels	
Panel A: Liminal Dimensions of Work <i>Moderator: Francois Zammit</i>	Panel B: Precarity, Vulnerabilities and Exploitation <i>Moderator: Luke Fiorini</i>
The influence of the respective national histories on the labour movement in Britain and Italy (1968-1973) Alberto Pantaloni (Université Grenoble-Alpes; University of Urbino 'Carlo Bo')	Exploring Precarious Labour in Malta through the Lens of E.P. Thompson's Socialist Humanism Justin Attard (University of Malta)
The "transforming power" of unbelief. Secular Movement radicalism and the lived experience of the infidel working class. A road not taken. David Nash (Oxford Brookes University)	Industrialization and Child Labour: Social Aspects, Antecedents, and Outcomes Sviatlana Kroitar (Polish Academy of Sciences; Quinnipiac University)
Labour, Tuberculosis and Politics in Interwar Greece: A historiographical experiment based on the "history from below" Yannis Stoyannidis (University of West Attica)	Precarious Labour in Turkey: Political Implications Fatma Pinar Arslan (Istanbul Medeniyet University)
15:15 – 15:30 Coffee Break	
15:30 – 16:30 Keynote Speaker: Godfrey Baldacchino (University of Malta) - Title: 'How to move on from the idea that "work is misery, alienation, exploitation"?' <i>Moderator: Francois Zammit</i>	
16:30 – 17:00 Closing Address: Edward Zammit	

Keynote Speakers



John Chircop is resident professor in economic and social history at the Department of History and chairperson of the Mediterranean Institute. He obtained his Ph.D. from the University of Essex in 1997 with a thesis on ‘The British Imperial Network in the Mediterranean 1800-1870. A Study of Regional Fragmentation and Imperial Integration’. Early in his doctoral studies he was awarded a Wingate Scholarship from the Hyam Wingate Foundation, London.

Most of Chircop’s published research is in the comparative social-economic history of the wider Central Mediterranean, mostly converging on British colonial territories in the region. His main research projects focus on poor relief, welfare and public health, colonial/postcolonial labour regimes and migration during the long nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. Mediterranean historiography and the history of labour, workers’ resistance and organisation are two other stems of his research and publication. He is also involved in the study of Public Memory and Oral history, being the founder of the Public Memory Archive and now spearheading the setting up of Memorja: The Oral, Sound and Visual Archives at the National Archives.

His publications include *Mediterranean Quarantines. Space, Power and Identity, 1780-1914*, co-edited with F.J. Martinez (Manchester University Press, 2019); *Colonial Encounters; Maltese experiences of British Rule 1800 -1970s* (Horizons, 2015); *Labour History Revisited* (Horizons, 2013); *Vulnerability, Social Inequality and Health* (with Patrice Bourdelais, Lisbon, 2010); *The Left within the Maltese Labour Movement* (Mireva, 1994).

Title: ‘Thompson’s Legacy in the Making: Histories of Work and Endurance, Dissent and Resistance’



Godfrey Baldacchino is Professor of Sociology at the University of Malta. He has various publications related to labour studies, industrial relations and human resource management, including at least four books: *Evolving Industrial Relations in Malta* (with S. Rizzo & E. Zammit, 2003); *Managing People in Malta* (with A. Caruana & M. Grixti, 2003), *Malta and its Human Resources* (with V. Cassar & J. Azzopardi, 2018) and *Working Life: The Transformation of Malta: 1960-2020* (with M. Debono, 2021).

Title: 'How to move on from the idea that “work is misery, alienation, exploitation”?’



Edward Zammit is professor emeritus of industrial sociology at the University of Malta, specialising in industrial relations and human resources. He pursued his studies at the Universities of Malta, Chicago's Loyola (USA) and Oxford (UK) -obtaining his D.Phil in 1979. He has lectured as a visiting professor in other universities, including Germany, Holland and the USA. He has published a number of books and articles in academic journals on his special field of studies namely, human resources, industrial relations, co-operatives, social dialogue, workers' and trade union education, and the future of work and leisure. In addition to Malta, he has carried out and was involved in research projects in the former Yugoslavia, France, Spain, Sweden, and the UK.

At the University of Malta, he was responsible for setting up a number of academic departments - including the Centre for Labour Studies (originally known as the Workers' Participation Development Centre). Additionally, he was Board Member of the Bank of Valletta, the Malta Statistics' Authority, the Foundation for Human Resources Development, Deputy Chairman of the Employment and Training Corporation, Chairman of the central Cooperatives' Board and, for many years, the 'independent chairman' of the statutory, tripartite Employment Relations Board. In 2022, in recognition of his achievements, he was awarded Membership of the National Order of Merit.

Theories and Concepts

Revisiting the Thompsonian concept of moral economy

Nikos Potamianos (Institute for Mediterranean Studies – FORTH)

Moral economy is a concept introduced by E.P. Thompson in the 1970s, and since then it has become commonplace in history and other social sciences -particularly in social/economic anthropology. Its widespread use, however, has come at the price of a certain ‘blurring’ of its meaning: we often find moral economy conceived of as synonymous with all kinds of appeals to moral values in connection with the economy. This paper aims at contributing to a theoretical clarification of the concept, suggesting a definition that is quite close to the original Thompsonian one.

My argument is that moral economy, more than anything else, offers ways to study human logics that are different (or contrary) to the laws of the market. I will discuss some other conceptualizations of moral economy; the ways it has been used in studies of labour history; and I will suggest my own definition.

In a phrase, moral economy is a set of perceptions about justice, the limits of exploitation, the right of all to survival, the reciprocities that should govern social relations; a set of perceptions about appropriate economic behaviour, which are produced by and feed into the resistance of the popular classes to the transformations brought about by the domination of market laws, and which are usually connected to demands for market regulation.

The ‘historical moral economy’ studied by Thompson was characterized by reference to customary practices and particular conceptions of fairness which may not exist anymore. However, a common feature of the various versions of moral economy seems to be a defensive attitude and the lack of orientation to the future.

«An Unqualified Human Good». The role of Law in The Poverty of Theory

Julio Martínez-Cava Aguilar (University of Barcelona)

In recent years several scholars have shown how Thompson's historiographical contributions must be read in conjunction with his political interventions as an activist (Davis, 2014; Efstathiou, 2015; Hamilton, 2011). This presentation aims to contribute to this line of research by highlighting the importance of the question of law in the critique of Althusserian Marxism. According to the British historian, structuralism and poststructuralism lack a language to analyse the law as something else than an instrument of oppression, social control, or ideological fabrication. However, while the law provides a framework for the operation of class exploitation, it is always more than this. As Thompson explained in the epilogue of *Whigs and Hunters* (1975), all law, by its very form, implies restrictions on arbitrary power and serves as a 'regulative ideal' (rule of law). History shows how the popular classes have taken law as a space of conflict in which to fight their battles.

Where this conception of Law came from? First, I will explain how it derives from the project of British Marxist historians (Samuel, 1980; Harvey Kaye, 1984, 1992) and from the tradition of radicalism and democratic republicanism, one of the essential and least studied sources for understanding Thompson's work (Cole, 2001; Kenny, 1995; Foote, 2005). Finally, I will show how during the 1970s Thompson was deeply concerned by 'authoritarian statism'. He operationalised that notion of law in his defence of civil and political rights in works such as *Review of Security and the State* (1978) or *Writing by the Candlelight* (1980). This was the backdrop against which *The Poverty of Theory* (1978) was written.

Between Bacon and Marx: E. P. Thompson's 'Muggleonian Marxism'

Christos Efstathiou (University of Birmingham)

This paper aims to trace the development of E. P. Thompson's peculiar approach to Marxism. More specifically, Thompson's effort to combine empiricism with Marxism, as an alternative to 'Marxist orthodoxy', will be discussed and contextualised. Thompson's so-called 'humanistic approach' did not fully develop before the Cold War era; in fact, several socio-economic requirements for his 'empiricist Marxism' did not exist before the late 1970s and the relative decline of the old working class in Britain. A particular attention will be paid to Thompson's *The Poverty of Theory* (1978). Thompson's attack on structural Marxism will be seen as an example of the work of a larger cohort of scholars who aimed to synthesise Marxism and empirical science. I will specifically discuss Thompson's debt to several British Marxist historians, but I will also explore some interesting links between him and Rosa Luxemburg, Leszek Kolakowski, Lucio Colletti and Cornelius Castoriadis. I will also try to explain how his studies of eighteenth-century Britain (e.g. in *Whigs and Hunters* (1975)), as well as his conception of the Rule of Law, made him to declare war against Althusserianism. At the end of this historiographical analysis, one will be in a better position to understand several striking similarities between Thompson and other twentieth-century scholars influenced by Marx.

Identity and Alternative Solidarities

Objective and Subjective Class as Drivers of Conventional and Unconventional Political Participation

Maria Grasso (Queen Mary University of London) and Sotirios Karampampas (European Law & Governance School)

While political participation has generally been linked to individual resources, the rise of contentious politics has been historically linked to the rise of the labour movement against capitalism. As such, subjective class identification with the working class can be understood as a driver of unconventional or protest participation. On the other hand, professional objective class positions can also be linked to higher levels of participation according to the resource mobilisation model. In this paper, we investigate the patterns that link class — both subjective, in terms of identification, and objective, in terms of occupation and labour market position — to both conventional and unconventional political participation. While the class cleavage is said to have become progressively less salient during the post-war period, we examine the extent to which it still holds relevance in both its objective and subjective types for political participation. Moreover, the rise of new value cleavages from the 1960s onwards is understood to have broadened the class bases of protest participation to include middle-class professionals. Recently, the economic crisis and the rise of movements against austerity have revamped the interest of scholars in the social bases of protest and the role of class in the emergence of the massive anti-austerity protest wave of the Great Recession. In this context, grievances and socioeconomic position may be considered to be important for understanding the underlying social structural dynamics of protest politics and political participation. Indeed, different perspectives have been proposed regarding the role of class, with some arguing for a return of working-class politics and other advocating the rise of a new contentious subject in the form of the precariat. We analyse the role of subjective and objective social class for conventional and unconventional political participation with a detailed original cross-national survey conducted in 2015 in nine European countries.

Mining for Metal: Social Organization, Identity and Solidarity among Informal Scrap Metal Collectors in Chicago

Élise Martel (Loyola University Chicago)

Scrap metal collection is an important source of raw materials for the mini-mill sector of the steel industry and is an example of the de-organization of the workplace. While scrap work is de-organized, it is not *dis*-organized. At a time when even day labourers -- arguably among the most precarious of workers-- have made collective inroads, scrap collection is marked by a *seeming* absence of solidarity among collectors.

In this paper I investigate whether, to what extent, and in what ways solidarity is expressed among scrap metal collectors in Chicago. Driven by the call of E.P. Thompson to take account of customs, values, and experience as they inform class formation and collective action, and drawing upon original ethnographic and interview data, I analyse my data with the following question in mind: Under what structural and cultural conditions, and through what structural and cultural processes, is solidarity expressed at the scrap yard?

Clues to why solidarities take the form they do are located both inside the market and out. Economic, industrial, and demographic structures outside, and divisions of labour / labour processes within intersect with systems of meaning around gender, work, the family and traditional morality to inform the way distinctions are drawn and solidarities supported among scrap collectors. While it may seem that shared values transcend occupational and racial/ethnic-based solidarities, a closer read reveals that historically situated structural similarities among actors, coupled with radical market uncertainty and systems of meaning have much to teach us about axes of selective-solidarities.

A new attitude towards labour? Socialist emulation and female labour: The case of Red Triangle rubber factory.

Alexandros Doulkeris (Athens School of Fine Arts)

This paper attempts to examine if there were new attitudes(s) towards labour during the interwar period in the USSR, especially on the part of female workers. This attempt focuses on the case of the Red Triangle, a Leningrad rubber factory.

In the late 1920s, a labour movement emerged within the soviet factories. This movement was called socialist emulation and was primarily aimed at increasing labour productivity. Red Triangle was the first soviet factory where the movement of socialist emulation appeared and many women quickly became an active part of it. Many women workers willingly lowered their wages, increased their output, tried to reduce absenteeism and even reduce production failures. But, to what extent does this participation reflect a new attitude towards labour? Did or not women begin to think their labour as another obligation or another oppression?

Finally, another important question is whether women found or not more difficulties in participating to this movement than male workers and what were their incentives for their participation in the movement. In other words, socialist emulation consisted a step towards their emancipation or was it simply a way of securing their position in the factory by becoming likeable to the administration?

In the attempt to answer the above questions, the newspapers published by the workers themselves, written testimonies, and other archival materials such as minutes of women's assemblies will be used.

Labour, Literature, and Paradigms

E.P. Thompson, Benevolence, and the Work of Romanticism in the 1790s

Michael Demson (Sam Houston State University)

This paper revisits Thompson's reading of 'benevolence' in Godwin's novel, *Caleb Williams* (1794). Godwin's gothic novel revolves around the characters of Mr. Falkland, a murderous but guileful gentleman, and his secretary, the eponymous Caleb Williams, who detects his master's crimes but cannot escape Falkland's ensuing, relentless calumny – Falkland accuses Williams of theft, and consequently Williams cannot find a benevolent audience for his pleas for justice. Thompson discovers in this novel Godwin's radical conception of 'benevolence': the duty to attend pleas for justice with disinterested rationality, free of class prejudice – a conception, Thompson elaborates, that contended in the 1790s with the traditional aristocratic association of benevolence with paternalism. This discovery is, in fact, Thompson's larger argument about the essential political role that Romantic literature of the 1790s played in counter-institutional social movements of the nineteenth-century: it reconfigured popular notions of, and sensibilities around, justice. His brief reading of *Caleb Williams*, however, does not address the complexities and contradictions in the more than thirty mentions of 'benevolence' in novel, interventions that call into question the 'benevolence' of British imperialism, the Atlantic slave trade, economic and social paternalism, and religious intolerance. This paper visits the limits of Thompson's reading, extrapolates his thesis by examining Godwin's attention to the machinations and socio-political consequences of calumny, the process by which people are rendered not credible, and reflects more generally on the turn to literature as a possible recourse in seeking social and political justice.

Scientific Labor and the Empire of Bodily Interiors: Imperialism, Metropolitan Masculinity, Victorian Vivisection

David Agruss (Arizona State University)

As the British Empire expanded geographically and became increasingly hegemonic during the nineteenth century, and as the colonizing mission became increasingly violent both politically

and culturally in the wake of the Indian Rebellion in 1857, the work of scientific exploration and knowledge production undertaken in the metropole came more and more frequently to be imagined metaphorically as a kind of imperial exploration and colonial domination. In this way, the Victorian sciences and the labour of Victorian scientists themselves became sites of colonial/imperial mediation in that scientific discovery and knowledge production in the metropole were imagined as deployments of colonial/imperial power and practices of subjection. Scientific labour in the metropole thus emerged in the nineteenth century as a kind of colonial/imperial labour. As the nineteenth century proceeded, the discourses of geology, palaeontology, experimental physiology, and vivisection, among other sciences, became increasingly suffused with the language of imperialism and colonialism such that geological rock strata, deep time, and even animal bodies became vistas over which the scientist explorer was 'master of all I survey,' to use Mary Louise Pratt's formulation describing the totalizing gaze of the imperial/colonial subject. From roughly the 1840s onward, the burgeoning Victorian sciences thus offered alternate 'imperial' and 'colonial' sites for the masculine consolidation of power through totalizing knowledge that did not require physical bravado in the far-flung colonies and distant empire but instead offered sites of scientific exploration within the metropolitan laboratory.

Turning to the example of heated, late-Victorian, public debates about vivisection, this paper examines experimental physiology handbooks, popular debates in magazines and newspapers, and a brief analysis of H. G. Wells's novel *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) in order to analyse how the relentless labour of experimental physiology to amass scientific evidence of the intricate biological movements of bodily interiors was persistently metaphorized as imperial, hyperbolically masculine, sexual, and even, according to one Victorian commentator, "pornological" labour.

The Invisible Laborers and the Moral Dynamics of Work: Reinterpreting David Foster Wallace's *The Pale King* through the lens of E.P. Thompson

Zuzanna Ładyga-Michalska (University of Warsaw)

In this paper, I seek to unearth the interplay between E.P. Thompson's concepts of class consciousness and moral economy, and David Foster Wallace's novel *The Pale King* (2008). Drawing upon my own analysis of the novel in my *The Labour of Laziness in American 20th-Century Literature* (2019), I seek to explore in this paper how Wallace's depiction of the bureaucratic labour of IRS employees is intertwined with Thompson's emphasis on the workers' lived experiences and the tensions between economic efficiency and the human dimension of work.

The Pale King portrays the lives of ordinary IRS employees, capturing their struggles, aspirations, and socio-economic constraints. The novel's focus on the psychological and emotional impact of the employees' class-based limitations echoes Thompson's understanding of class consciousness as a historical phenomenon shaped by collective experiences and self-identification. In addition, *The Pale King* addresses the tension between economic efficiency and the human dimension of work. I read this tension through the prism of Thompson's concept of the moral economy to highlight the peculiarities of work experience in the late 20th-century American office.

Whereas in my previous work, I interpreted the theme of 'laziness' in Wallace's novel as a form of resistance against the dehumanizing setup of the bureaucratic labour organization, in this paper, I expand my interpretation by arguing that Wallace's exploration of laziness resonates closely with Thompson's understanding of agency and resistance in the workplace.

By offering a Thompsonian analysis of *The Pale King*, I demonstrate the novel's potential to enrich our understanding of contemporary modes of class consciousness and 21st century codes of moral economy. From this perspective, Wallace's narrative offers a unique testimony and a unique insight into how the capitalist norm of productivity continuously deforms human experience of work and the sense of agency of the workers.

Collective Action

WORK AND LABOUR MOVEMENT IN SALONICA, GREECE (1908-1936): Moral economy and collective action during the Interwar period

Kostas Fountanopoulos (Independent scholar)

Greece is barely at the heart of Europe's political, and social developments. Except for the classical era, little is known about Greek social history in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This conference offers me an opportunity to present to an international audience the social history of the most revolutionary Greek city in the first half of the 20th century, Salonica.

My guide in this narrative will be the work of the English historian E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963). This book revitalized our views on the formation of the working class. The relevant literature has treated the formation of classes no longer as an objective fact but as a process that it can make progress, show signs of regression, or even become completely inactive.

In Salonica, for example, there was no heavy industry. However, social competition was omnipresent. This article argues that the social confrontation in Salonica was organized around the control of the labour process and the regulation of the labour market's operation. Employers used to think of the organization of production through the low production costs. The workers, however, gave a different meaning to the work effort. For them, work meant: (a) the unity of daily life and daily work; (b) family work; (c) an explicit gender division of labour. Any attempt made by the employers to modify one or more of these axes trying to make production more profitable provoked the reaction of the workers. And, in this sense, worker's conceptions are characterized as 'moral economy', because they offered an alternative proposal of economic and social organization to the 'political economy' of employers.

The Moral Economy of the Peasants: The Case of Epirus during the First World War

Vassilis Georgakis (Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences)

While the political and military events of Greece's involvement in the First World War have been examined thoroughly, little attention has been drawn to the social unrest which accompanied the political conflict. Parallel to the main political events (namely the 'National Schism') Greece had to endure an economic crisis, caused by the disruption of trade and the naval blockades, resulting in high prices, food shortages and famine. Food Riots, a long-forgotten form of collective action, remerged, even though in a completely different social landscape. With this announcement, I intend to focus on the peasantry of Epirus, a mountainous area of north-western Greece, where the effects of the food shortages were amplified by the structural deficiencies of the local rural economy. My aim is to explore the forms of collective action in this particular area, but also to put them into the context of the transformation of the Greek society and economy, towards modernity and capitalism. In this announcement I will attempt to examine the strategies of the Epirus' peasantry, through the lenses of the concept of 'moral economy' as it was introduced by the British historian E. P. Thompson and was refined by the American anthropologist James Scott. Namely, I will examine the political background of the peasantry, the shaping of a certain repertoire of collective action and its implementation during the First World War, while I will also make an effort to approach what Thompson described as *mentalité* of the popular masses.

Class struggle and agrarian change in northern Italy during the exogenous shocks of the late 19th century. The case of Lombardy.

Silvia Bianciardi (Università degli Studi eCampus) and Giacomo Zanibelli (Università degli Studi Napoli Federico II)

The aim of this study is to reconstruct the changes in the relations between landowners and peasants following the agrarian crisis of the 1880s in Lombardy (Italy) from 1880 to 1900. The area identified is the province of Mantua this territory is particularly relevant both because of a significant presence of landowner and because it was the epicentre of the first agrarian strikes in the Peninsula, the 'La Boje Uprisings' (1884- 1885), which although harshly repressed, produced mobilization effects that

transcended the boundaries of that area, with important repercussions on the national level: in fact, it is in this episode of claims that the origins of 'modern union action' can be traced. The hypothesis we will test is whether class struggles led landowners to undertake operations to improve working conditions and other factors of production, thus fostering a virtuous response to exogenous shocks, and whether this tendency persisted even after the protectionist measures of 1887 took effect. We will also test whether it is possible to identify similarities in response with other land tenure systems present in Italy other than the Po Valley, such as Tuscan sharecropping (Mezzadria).

Precarity, Vulnerabilities and Exploitation

Exploring Precarious Labour in Malta through the Lens of E.P. Thompson's Socialist Humanism

Justin Attard (University of Malta)

In *Socialist Humanism: An Epistle to the Philistines* (1957), E.P. Thompson reflects: “Man’s actions are human actions: and, also, ‘his own wants’ are not purely animal wants, but human needs, physical, moral and intellectual. He needs clothes for warmth, and also for adornment; he needs shelter, but also ‘room to turn round in,’...In this resides the dignity of human labour.”

Thompson’s rich contributions to the fomentation of socialist humanism played a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of the New Left by accentuating the need for the emancipation of the human being’s essential nature. Although socialist humanism fell into decline in the latter decades of the twentieth century, various contemporary theorists such as David Alderson and Robert Spencer are now actively embracing and reviving socialist humanism and the vision for a better, more humanistic world that it espouses (Spencer and Alderson, 2017).

This paper will explore how the application of social humanism as a theoretical framework can help make sense of precarity in Malta. Malta represents a compelling case study of the rise of precarious labour with non-EU nationals, women, and ethnic minorities constituting much of the precariat. Puygrenier (2023) notes that migrants to Malta are “filling the interstices formed by a capitalist system whose erratic, casual and ephemeral labour needs presuppose a waiting population continuously at its disposal, a labour force that can be endlessly mobilised and de-mobilised”.

Thompson’s ideas will be tested in this paper by analysing how the current ‘job rich yet wage poor’ labour market in Malta is intrinsically inimical to socialist humanism. Such insights will then be applied as a blueprint for shifting beyond a precarious labour force that dehumanises to replace it by ‘a dialectic of hope’, as McCann (1993) terms it, that is more concerned with human needs rather than profit.

Industrialization and Child Labor: Social Aspects, Antecedents, and Outcomes

Sviatlana Kroitar (Polish Academy of Sciences; Quinnipiac University)

The use of children as workers was not an invention of the industrial revolution (IR). Throughout human history, it was common for poor children to start working at an early age (at home, on a farm, and helping with minor siblings).

How did child labour change with the advance of IR? Existing as domestic work regulated and normalized only within the family, child labour in the pre-industrial world was rather informal. Industrialization altered its nature. Since then, children were assigned specific functional duties in the production process instead of being an additional aid to the adult workforce. Children shaped a separate sector of the labour force, with specific organizational principles, internal structure, regulations, and norms. Child labour became a social institution. What were the antecedents? IR dramatically changed the economic landscape and shifted labour roles, institutions, patterns, and relations. The sharp growth of factories and mines supplied with automated equipment boosted demand for unskilled/low-skilled labour. It led to a surge in child labour, a problem that some societies still have not been able to fully solve.

What were the social consequences? Child labour was accompanied by a deterioration in human potential (physical, intellectual, emotional) since most children worked in unsatisfactory conditions (crowdedness, lack of sanitation, occupational injuries, etc.), experienced long and unsocial working hours (i.e., often had the same work shifts as adults), constantly felt exhausted and stressed, were extremely vulnerable and exposed to mistreatment by employers and colleagues. Child labour contributed to the reproduction of social inequality. Children were paid less than adults and didn't have trade unions to protect their labour rights. They didn't typically attend school which extremely reduced their chances for upward social mobility (poverty circles, poverty trap). All this contributed to the growth of social tensions and the construction of unsustainable models of society.

Why explore this? Studying the history of modern economies may be insightful for a better understanding of today's processes and the solution to the problem of child labour in countries that have not yet managed to fully resolve this issue.

Precarious Labour in Turkey: Political Implications

Fatma Pınar Arslan (Istanbul Medeniyet University)

The *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (AKP), which came to power in 2002, made significant changes in the field of economy. However, these changes meant that the neoliberal transformation that started in 1980 entered a very violent and rapid period, rather than being the AKP's own invention. One of the most important aspects of the AKP's economic policies, consistent with the period before it, was the multifaceted attack on the rights of the organized working class. In line with international trends, regular labour was increasingly replaced by irregular and irregular forms of work. The increase in women's participation in the labour force, the acceleration of migration from the village to the city, and especially in recent years, the widespread presence of migrant labour in the labour market has led to the emergence of irregular and precarious forms of work in different ways. On the other hand, the reactions of the urban and precarious workers to the government continued to emerge in different forms from time to time.

In this study, we will discuss how the changes in the working and organizational forms of labour in Turkey during the twenty years of AKP era are compatible with precarious labour explanations. We will try to explain what has changed in the ideology of the working class by addressing the traditional and new forms of resistance that have emerged in these 20 years.

Liminal dimensions of work

The influence of the respective national histories on the labour movement in Britain and Italy (1968-1973)

Alberto Pantaloni (Université Grenoble-Alpes; University of Urbino 'Carlo Bo')

This research project aims to investigate and compare the specific characteristics that the labour movement took on in the British and Italian national contexts during the great cycle of workers' mobilisations that roughly spanned from 1968 to 1973. The aim is to understand how much and how the cultural traditions and historical experience of each country had on these political and trade union movements. The end of the 1960s saw the beginning of a major intensification and extension of industrial conflict across the capitalist world. The main international feature of that new wave of struggles was that it made the strike an increasingly normal activity for a broader and broader spectrum of the labour force. In addition, there are strong wage demands and a relative shift to the left of the trade union movement. Within this context, characterised in general by the so-called 'end of the golden age' of capitalism, this comparative study cannot but start from the profound differences not only of the labour market in the two countries, but also of industrial and income policies, without forgetting the importance that stability or instability of governments played on those same policies. That said, in particular, we intend to undertake an analytical comparison on the following issues: industrial relations systems, class composition, internal and external migratory flows, levels and ways of joining trade union organisations and their different structuring; contents, objectives (in particular wage claims) and repertoires of action of struggles.

The 'transforming power' of unbelief. Secular Movement radicalism and the lived experience of the infidel working class. A road not taken.

David Nash (Oxford Brookes University)

Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) contained sections on the "Transforming Power of the Cross" and on the political significance of Thomas Paine. But Thompson's Methodist background meant that *Making* failed to follow up on the radical potential

within infidelity and secularism. Yet Thompson's own interest in cultures and their creation means infidelity deserves an important place in his radical pantheon. This paper places this history 'back' within the Thompsonian paradigm. It showcases the importance of the lived experience of denying the doctrines within Christianity, a series of power constraints that had damaged the lives of the working classes. Infidels and secularists challenged and escaped the oppressive doctrines of 'original sin', the atonement, a hierarchical creation story and an account of the fall which justified inequalities, alongside attempts to 'close down' the enlightenment. Infidels also demanded free expression and access to ideas – not least of which was access to family limitation knowledge, the denial of which had been a major source of their poverty. This area and others also constitutes a way in which women might be put back into the Thompsonian paradigm.

This analysis also acknowledges Thompson's thesis in *Whigs and Hunters* (1975) that projects of ruthless dispossession and nefarious accumulation of common resources by powerful vested interests also occur outside of the economic and material world. In this case words, doctrines, access to free speech and knowledge were made victims of 'enclosure'. In organising cultural resistance the infidel/secular movement realised the existence of literate communities scattered across the country, but united by experience and a shared culture, showing new possibilities of resistance.

Labour, Tuberculosis and Politics in Interwar Greece: A historiographical experiment based on the 'history from below'.

Yannis Stoyannidis (University of West Attica)

During my undergraduate studies I conducted historiographical research about E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963). One of the major effects that this reading had on me was acquainting with the idea of long historical changes with multiple causes. By this presentation I intend to unveil one issue that concerns the social history of health and labour. During my doctoral research, which I concluded in 2016, I had the opportunity to study how Greek governments noticed and later decided to activate themselves on dealing with the social disease of tuberculosis. In this presentation I will offer shortly an insight into the question of TB before WWII. Mainly I will explain how it became from a disease of the elite to a disease of the labouring youth.

My main goal will be to explain how the idea of Thompson for a history from below was applied in comprehending tuberculosis politics in pre-WWII Greece. In *The Making of the English Working Class* Thompson explained that Chartism was the result of religious traditions and culture, of protests and early Press public reading. In this case I would like to show which were the social subjects who attracted the sight of politicians, how workers' unions became active agents in this dialogue between lower classes and governments. My main concern is to discuss how the idea of history from below together with a social history can prove in a decent historiographical method that uncovers more sides of our common and unknown past. How did politicians respond to the unions' protests? Which solutions were finally chosen and how did the young health system look like after the interventions of various agents.