

Preliminary Exam in Comparative Working-Class History

Fall 1989

Write essays to answer four of the following questions. Employ evidence wherever possible to support your generalizations.

1. What, if anything, is new about the "new labor history"? Use examples from British and American historiography to illustrate your analysis.
2. Both the United States and France experienced major strike waves and union organizing drives in the mid 1930s, while the powerful German trade union movement went into a steep decline. What factors account for the fate of the labor movement in each of these three societies in the course of the 1930s?
3. Employ several examples of recent work in the field of Russian labor history to develop a social as opposed to a political interpretation of the Revolution of 1917 -- its causes and its consequences. Or is a political interpretation more appropriate?
4. Was there an international syndicalist upsurge in the decade from 1910 to 1920? Does the term suggest ideological, strategic, and social characteristics which were common to movements in England, France, and the USA or were the syndicalist movements in these countries really very different?
5. In what ways did political traditions shape the development of socialism in France and Germany during the second half of the nineteenth century? In the case of France, discuss the rhetorical, symbolic, and economic roots of the movement by considering the work of Bernard Moss and William Sewell.
6. 1919 was an insurgent year throughout much of the western hemisphere. Discuss labor insurgency in Italy and the USA and explain its demise in each case in the course of the early 1920s.
7. Consider two classic texts - E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (1963) and E. J. Hobsbawm, "The Making of the English Working Class, 1870-1914 in Workers" (1984). How is each of these writers using the phrase and why do they come up with different chronologies? Who's right? How has each of these works influenced your understanding of the process of class formation?
8. "The radical labor movement of the early twentieth century did not die a natural death in the USA, it was subjected to extreme repression and smashed in the period of World War One and the early twenties. In the following decade, the working class was increasingly integrated by mass culture, corporate welfare, and what we have since come to call consumer capitalism. From that point on, labor radicalism was a marginal influence in the American context."

