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Waving or Drowning? British Labour History in Troubled Waters

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The vigour of a field of history is usually assessed by reference to the quality of its historiography. Its health may also be judged by its presence in the curricula of educational bodies, public interest and the prevalence and robustness of journals and societies dedicated to it. This article employs these criteria sometimes overlooked in diagnosis of the condition of labour history to explore its predicament in Britain. It documents the weight of labour history in the academy, its fragmentation, the declining numbers of scholars and their diminished sense of common identity as historians of a unified subject. Despite intellectual vitality indicated by the literature, institutional decline and centrifugal tendencies pose questions about the strength, even the reality, in practice of the definitional field asserted in theory. The position appears unfavourable compared with countries such as the USA and Australia. Popularization of labour history in the labour movement and among the public, proffered as a path to renewal, also poses problems.

Keywords: labour history, Britain, universities, teaching, historians, journals, societies.

The fiftieth anniversary of *Labor History*, commemorated during 2010, coincided with the golden jubilee of the British Society for the Study of Labour History (SSLH).¹ The first issue of the SSLH's *Bulletin* in 1960 reported the new American initiative and succeeding decades saw fruitful cross-fertilization.² The influence of Thompson, Hobsbawm and Hill on American scholars and Gutman, Genovese and Montgomery on their British counterparts was complemented by exchanges in which the Warwick University Centre for

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Social History was central.³ Their trajectories were marked by similarities and differences. From the late 1970's, the SSLH's academic direction was challenged by the History Workshop movement. In the USA, *Radical History Review* and later, *International Labor and Working Class History* (ILWHC) appeared. By the 1990s, the Workshop movement had faded and its journal turned away from labour history. The SSLH remained the major presence in the field and belatedly sealed its 'institutionalization' by launching the academic *Labour History Review (LHR)*, three decades after the establishment of *Labor History*. In the USA, journals remained the primary focus. It was only in 1998 that the Labor and Working Class History Association (LAWCHA) was formed.⁴

In recent years links have diminished. Labour history in the USA underwent some decline although LAWCHA has consolidated its position. The SSLH, and labour history in Britain have faltered. New developments in the North American literature – interest in gender, ethnic, global history – have sometimes been pallidly reflected in Britain.⁵ While LAWCHA and its journal, *Labor-Studies in Working Class History of the Americas (L-SWHA)*, have sought engagement with organised labour, the public and people's history, the SSLH and *LHR* have sustained unrelieved academic agendas.⁶ In that context critical analysis of the position of labour history in Britain may prove instructive for historians in the USA as well as other countries where scholars confront dilemmas as to the future of the subject.

Some preliminary points are in order. Labour history is frequently referred to as a field, even a discipline, without a great deal of elaborated analysis of its scope, its unity, beyond its focus on labour, its boundaries and its relationship to other kinds of history.⁷ Assertion is made flesh, facts are created, by the establishment of societies, journals and courses which demarcate what counts empirically as labour history. Nonetheless some scholars have questioned the fitting out of a separate field. They have argued that this further

fragments the discipline and hinders aspirations to more total history. Better, it is claimed, to permeate history generally with an emphasis on labour.⁸ Critics as well as practitioners have commonly identified labour history with class analysis. Sometimes they have coupled it with Marxism, class struggle and commitment to the labour movement. Others have felt this latter assimilation simplifies and inflates what they concede, are significant tendencies in labour history. Analytically, class as a master category has been central to the historiography. But positing particular approaches as a condition for scholarship may render the subject peripheral to the discipline of history.⁹

Overall, it has been accepted that the vibrancy of labour history, its health or infirmity may be diagnosed from the state of the historiography. Intellectual vigour, or otherwise, may be deduced from the theoretical, conceptual, methodological and empirical potency of the literature. But the well-being of a field may also be gauged by its institutional anchorage and armature, by the extent and sophistication of its pedagogic organisation which assembles, develops, disseminates and legitimates that field's distinctive knowledge.¹⁰ The first measure is typically discussed in analyzing and assessing labour history. The latter is typically subordinate, at best referred to in passing.¹¹

Yet 'the material base', how a subject is organised, how it is promoted, how new generations are inducted into it, is as important to estimation of the resonance of epistemic endeavour as assessment of its literary topography.¹² This seems particularly true of modern labour history in Britain. It emerged from the 1950s marked by public and political concerns and sympathy with the labour movement. Its advocates increasingly strove to secure academic recognition.¹³ In one important sense, its progress, compass, and in the eyes of many its legitimacy, may be measured through examining the degree to which it is taught and researched in universities and attracts staff, students, journals and societies of practitioners. That does not tell the whole story. We should not overlook the long-standing, self-ascribed

mission of the SSLH ‘to educate the public in labour history’.¹⁴ How it succeeds in popularizing the subject beyond the academy, whether it engages non-professional historians, is also an issue. The degree to which labour history flourishes in schools, adult and continuing education and labour movement classes and how it is embedded and presented in archives and museums may be perceived as relevant to its health.¹⁵

It is widely acknowledged that labour history declined in Western Europe during the last two decades of the twentieth century. Politically, neoliberalism, the erosion of trade unionism and social democracy and the virtual extinction of ‘official Communism’ and, intellectually, post modernism, new ways of doing history and the questioning of class analysis, are perceived as causative of a ‘crisis’ which on some accounts has endured for thirty years.¹⁶ Yet we have more impressions than evidence of the nature and scale of the decline and where it leaves the subject in practice. Greater scrutiny of how labour history is organised and promoted may shed greater light on the situation in Britain and stimulate reflection internationally. It may provide food for thought as to whether labour history as conceived in theory possesses sufficient unity and coherence in practice to justify definition as a field.

Eschewing discussion of the historiography, which may be had in amplitude elsewhere, in favour of evaluating how the subject is taught and organised, this paper proceeds to explore its fortunes in British universities.¹⁷ It considers its reverberation beyond, in schools, the labour movement and among the general public. It documents the position of societies and journals, registering brief comparison with other countries. It concludes with observations about the future. If labour history is to progress it will have to restrain fission, or build bridges between the fragments, develop its persisting intellectual strengths, recharge its organisation and re-assert itself within both the discipline of history and popular manifestations of interest in the past.

Labour History in British Universities

Table 1 (Appendix) provides basic information about the teaching of labour history in 44 universities, 32 in England, 6 in Scotland, 4 in Wales and 2 in Northern Ireland. A quarter of the total, are post-1992 universities, former polytechnics. There are more than 130 universities in Britain, although not all offer history.¹⁸ The data was collected in autumn 2010 via email requests to staff in history departments where the SSLH possessed or recently possessed members or where activity was known to the author. Responses were supplemented and extended by examination of the websites of history departments and correspondence with historians. Limited in scope, far from exhaustive, indicative rather than conclusive, the exercise generated useful information on the present position. The last, similarly informal, survey was conducted in the early 1980s.¹⁹

An initial issue was the definition of labour history to be employed. The literature defines the subject widely. It sees it as embracing what some term 'narrow' labour history, the study of workers' institutions and labour movements, and 'broad' labour history, the social, cultural, demographic, religious and other aspects of workers' activities. Some explorations of the field emphasise the need to situate labour in relation to capital and the state and, more recently, transnationally, utilizing flexible conceptions of class and employment. Historiographers have been reluctant to impose temporal restrictions, although a recent paper suggests the fourteenth century as a starting point.²⁰ For present purposes I adopted an expansive definition based on those expounded or implicit in the literature. Labour history is the study of all facets of the experience of those who perform all kinds of labour, including casual, uncontracted or domestic labour, their lives, culture, institutions and inter-relations with other social forces internationally across the past.

The Appendix tabulates in outline, a variety of subject matter taught in universities from serfdom to international Communism. It suggests that the theoretical unity which for many constitutes labour history as a field and which is imparted by a common focus on labour, may diminish or dissipate in the practice of compartmentalized teaching of specific, disconnected or loosely-connected topics or specialised research and writing. Frontier disputes contribute to the difficulty. In other countries the term ‘social history’ includes ‘labour history’. In Britain, labour history covers the social history of workers but so *inter alia* does social history. Particular treatments of working-class politics, political institutions, population, health or living standards may turn out to be indistinguishable in content and method from political, economic, medical or demographic history.²¹ It seems sensible to follow conventional demarcation with its emphasis on unity and the big picture; some scholars, conscious of its breadth may find it arcane or ornamental, of limited relevance to what they do

Table 1 certainly discloses disjuncture between enunciations of labour history as a field, even a discipline, in the literature and the way in which it is practised in the academy. It demonstrates the absence of any integrated labour history on definitional lines in the university curriculum. There are no degree or diploma courses, no general courses in ‘medieval’ or ‘modern’ labour history, indeed the term itself hardly figures in prospectuses and websites. At LSE and Warwick, where extended courses existed until the 1980s, they are no longer offered.²² One respondent records: ‘there is no labour history as such that I know of ... labour history has drifted off the agenda at Warwick.’²³ Other responses affirm that attempts to teach labour history anywhere near holistically and across time on the model even of Eddie Hunt’s 1980 text, which was stimulated by coursework at LSE, have not reproduced themselves.²⁴ With occasional exceptions, such as slavery and serfdom, much of what is taught is time-restricted, ‘modern labour history,’ ‘labour under capitalism’. There appears to

be little attention to management and managerial strategies. Much of the teaching concentrates on Britain. Study and comparative study of America, France, Germany and Russia is present. There is scant evidence that ambitious manifestoes announcing transnational history have made much impact.²⁵

Where labour history is taught, it is taught in fragmentary fashion – one respondent referred to ‘bits and pieces’. Whether it is presented in specific courses or as part of hybrid modules we are talking about ‘aspects of labour history.’ The number of dedicated courses is small. They cover diverse topics: serfdom; slavery; industrialization; Chartism; radicalism; protest; social movements; the Labour Party; gender; health; employment; and leisure. They are complemented by mixed modules which blend labour history with political, economic, social and cultural history. Such apparent moves towards more total history may be welcome. One respondent remarked ‘labour history still influences a lot of the social history that is taught’. But it is difficult to measure how prominently labour history figures in these classes, how it is handled and how different historical approaches subsist and interact within them. Serious analysis of labour may get lost: ‘my level three course is really more demographic and social history than labour history.’ The teaching of bite-sized chunks of labour history in the dedicated modules may ignite or consolidate interest and foster further study. It may curtail deployment of detail, elaboration of context, continuity and connection with other phases of labour history, understanding and unity.

If this applies to students it may apply to teachers. Given the absence of overarching courses in labour history, does a specialist in the history of Communism, gender or ethnicity applied to workers, a historian of miners, domestic servants, the peasantry or immigrant labour, see that specialism as integral to a narrative which embraces, to limit the time-span, the industrial revolution, the development of capitalism across the centuries, Chartism, social democracy and diverse aspects of workers’ cultures? Do chroniclers of Chartism, when

career considerations demand concentration, get beyond the nineteenth century or the first part of it, to comprehend their subject in relation to the ‘New Unionism’ of the 1880s, ‘the Great Unrest 1911–1914’ or the rise of the Labour Party? Do scholars pushed by current university agendas to develop specific expertise, rather than attend to wider panoramas, envision their work as part of a unified national or global labour history? Or as a discrete, specialist, relatively insulated, preoccupation?

Answers, if we discount for rhetoric, will veer towards the negative or restrictive. Compared with the 1960s and 1970s, we know much more about almost everything or, some might opine, about less and less. Fewer of us can be labour historians in the same way as our predecessors. The state of the art volumes, *Essays in Labour History*, published between 1960 and 1977 examined issues from 1800 to 1939. They were written by historians interested in the entire period and most of the issues. The texts were produced for an audience that shared that interest. Like the SSLH they were initially inspired by determination to emulate G.D.H. Cole, the polymathic pedagogue who wrote for professional and lay audiences. It is different today, although we would stress that division and redivision of fields and disciplines is not an ineluctable process. It is the result of purposive activity which ultimately meets the employment imperatives and career interests of academics.²⁶ The abstract epistemological unity lent to labour history by its focus on the broad landscapes of labour – Cole would not disagree with our earlier definition – may therefore splinter in the conditions of scholarship in higher education in the twenty-first century. The patterns of provision in Table 1 suggest a mosaic, even a jigsaw. Our survey reveals little co-ordination of labour history components of the curriculum, sustaining doubts as to whether a field pertains in pedagogic practice as distinct from historiographic logic.

Specialisation and dissolution of grand narratives effect other fields of history. What is striking in this case is the overall paucity of provision revealed by Table 1. This sense of

limitation is heightened if that provision is measured against the total programme of departments and history teaching across all universities. In contrast with the past, labour history is largely confined to history departments. Its development in the 1960s and 1970s was associated with the emergence of separate departments of economic and social history. The subject was also taught to a lesser extent in departments of government/politics, industrial relations and sociology.²⁷ The former were assimilated into history departments in the 1990s, although a handful remain, while responses suggest that the teaching of labour history in the latter is vestigial. Reflecting on scale and fissure, older staff who once envisioned labour history as a discrete field were pessimistic about its future prospects in this regard: 'I don't think labour history as such is being taught now ... I guess this means that [my department] no longer teaches labour history ... the future seems to promise further segmentation and specialization.' Respondents also felt history generally faced a future of belt-tightening and were concerned about the small numbers of staff engaged in labour history in relation to coming challenges.

Staff, Research, Context and Identity

Table 1 lists 69 university staff who on a generous estimate have been engaged in teaching and/or research in labour history over the last decade. Of that total, 10 have retired and one died during that period while a further 10 have moved into other fields of history, to the degree that their teaching in labour history is non-existent or negligible. Only a minority of the remaining 48 staff spend most of their teaching time on the subject. An even smaller minority, 7 scholars, spend almost all their time teaching labour history. The majority combine labour history with cultural, economic, social, political or other forms of history and Table 1 demonstrates the range of labour history they teach. A trawl of websites of departments listed in the table disclosed only four academics explicitly identifying themselves with, or declaring an interest in the subject, including one describing her main

concern as labour history and gender and another as labour history and employment relations. For many, affiliation is implicit in their role. A sense of marginality is reinforced by the dearth of Professors of Labour History. The handful of Readers – usually in ‘Social and Labour History’ – appears to have evaporated with promotion and retirement.²⁸ The feeling that the subject is peripheral is amplified when we consider that in 2008 it was estimated there were just under 3000 teachers of history across British higher education.²⁹

At one university the retirement of two labour historians means that the subject will not be offered in the immediate future. At another the main labour history course is to be discontinued through retirement. At other universities key players are entering the retirement zone. Age is far from the only operative factor in labour history’s increasing marginality. Some staff who have recently retired and others who are still in post had turned towards new areas before retirement. This tendency marks the career path of the 10 former historians in Table 1. But it is also reflected in the trajectory of some of our core group of 48 historians. There are different patterns. The labour history teaching of some older colleagues has diminished although they continue to research and publish in the area. Younger staff who have completed doctoral studies in the subject, early career researchers, may have taught and published in labour history before moving on to new fields.

The provision of teaching in British universities is driven by lecturers’ predilections and student demand – with departmental management reconciling the two when necessary. Labour historians can be under pressure to teach more ‘relevant’ or fashionable forms of history – in one case, environmental history, in another, the history of medicine. Our survey also disclosed departmental cultures in which labour history was perceived as ‘unfashionable’ or ‘old hat ... no longer at the cutting edge’ and was squeezed out of the final cut for courses, despite individual lecturers’ interest in offering it. In other instances it had never been really accepted: ‘Staff at the “proper” university here with some notable exceptions ... thought that

labour history was rather beneath them ... Seems that perception still applies.' At one university, the small number of takers for a course on Tolpuddle and its representations ensured it was dropped; in another case, a module on the US working class was converted into a general course on twentieth-century American history because of student demand.

Beyond the modules listed in the table, doctoral programmes are relevant to appraisal of the subject. In Britain, they provide a large measure of student choice and flexibility. Moreover, since the 1980s staff have proved increasingly willing to supervise and examine Ph.Ds in subjects which once might have been considered outside their expertise. In 2000, 83 theses, in labour history, in 2005, 115 theses and in 2008, 84 theses were successfully completed in British universities.³⁰ However, these figures cover submissions at masters as well as at doctoral level. Closer scrutiny suggests that even applying expansive definitions of the subject, a significant number of these theses could more profitably be aligned with cultural, political, social, or other forms of history. Further, we lack comparable figures for thesis completions in other fields of the discipline. If labour history is experiencing difficulties in relation to degrees and qualifications, research and publication appear to be buoyant. The bibliographies published annually in *LHR* attest to a flourishing historiography.³¹ Scholarly inquiry remains resilient. Articles, collections and monographs continue to appear on old staples, Chartism, the Labour Party, Communism, trade unionism – as well as work on gender, ethnicity, identity, sexual orientation and comparative history. This affirms the intellectual vitality of the subject: it suggests the contribution it can make to the discipline is far from exhausted.

Changes in context have been crucial to the condition of labour history. The decline of organized labour and the left is relevant. Union membership fell from 13.3 million in 1979 to around 7 million today. There was no revival under New Labour and density continued to fall to 27 per cent of the labour force. On every index, membership, density,

employer recognition, incidence of collective bargaining, workplace organization, strikes and industrial and political ‘voice’, unions are weaker than during the high-tide of labour history. New Labour rejected its own history and the idea of a labour movement; it embraced a soft neoliberalism antipathetic to strong unions; it consummated the marginalization of the left.³² How this relates specifically to changes in labour history is more often asserted than argued. For sure, the first post-war generations of academics experienced depression and war or grew up in a Keynesian world where relatively strong unions were part of the cultural and political furniture, although union leaders took little interest in the growth of labour history and rarely provided research funds for it. The attachment of the first two generations of modern labour historians to a rising labour movement provided inspiration and impetus for their work; it strengthened their collective identity. For some the impasse of the left in the late 1970s and the reverses organized labour subsequently suffered under neoliberalism exposed its limits as a progressive force and bred distance or defection. Plausibly their social and political prominence and the role unions played in public policy in the 1960s and 1970s made them attractive to researchers and funding bodies while the defeats of the 1980s had a negative impact.

Yet it remains questionable why contemporary decline should of itself stifle interest in a movement’s past, particularly periods when it was significant. Moreover, we are not simply talking about unions and parties: from the 1970s labour history extended its traditional concerns with the labour movement to engage with work and workers and their culture . These have changed but not declined while organized labour remains, for all its deficiencies, a progressive force. Further, America seems to constitute a counter-case. American unions have been in decline since 1950 – less than 10 per cent of private sector workers are members – and are significantly weaker than in Britain. Yet unlike Britain there appears to be little fit between the fortunes of labour and labour history since 1950.³³

The decline of the labour movement together with explanations couched in terms of changes within scholarship – the advent of post-modernism, specific forms of gender and ethnic history, the turn from class – are pertinent. But they have to be situated more widely in the dissolution of the Keynesian social-democratic consensus and the ascendancy of a neoliberalism determined to subordinate labour in all its manifestations. What were perceived as radical subjects came under hostile scrutiny from a state on which universities depended for largesse. Labour history encountered problems with funding and cuts in resources. There was no significant resistance. From the 1980s universities were restructured in neoliberal directions; most academics adapted to new imperatives and a political and cultural ethos which drove new historiographical interests and meant there were fewer opportunities in labour history. Some embraced the cult of the novel; they turned from both labour and labour history to ‘sexier’ pursuits. In short, intellectual change was influenced by economic and political change.³⁴ New generations of academics grew up in this context. Neville Kirk has eloquently observed the tendencies antagonistic to labour history in recent years of ‘the competitive status-ridden and introverted world of higher education’, with its ‘institutionalized market-based targets, competition, and monetary rewards’.³⁵

Insistence on relevance and the ‘impact’ of research on economy, public policy and society, competition for funding, measurement of research; an, albeit uneven, push towards student markets; grading, hierarchization and pasteurization of (some) scholarly journals; tendencies to commodification of education, burgeoning of skills training and erosion of universities’ always limited role as centres of critique; they are all part of this. The intensification of such trends and their influence on academic agency and marginal subjects are likely to be exacerbated by general financial attrition from 2011; cutbacks in funding the humanities, particularly history programmes; restrictions on postgraduate study; shedding of

staff; and increasing student fees.³⁶ A reasonable prognosis is that these factors will further diminish the prospects for renewal of labour history in universities through the appointment of younger historians.

Those completing PhDs aspire less frequently to teach the history of labour. Those who do, find themselves in a hostile environment and recalcitrant labour market. Posts in labour history were rarely advertised in the past. Convention has generally dictated broad-based appointments in 'modern' or 'medieval' history. Within a general stress on versatility and adaptability, attention is rarely given, as it was sometimes in the past, to labour history as against cultural, political and social history. Specialist appointments are likely to be in these areas or in fields such as gender or religious history, family or heritage history, the history of medicine, the environment, the body, the emotions or sexuality. One respondent noted: 'it is likely that young historians even if they teach and research aspects of labour history would not use such a term to describe themselves. The job market is so competitive today.' Material conditions structure identity; identity influences action. Once appointed, such new staff tend to move on into other fields of history. Even if they teach modules which contain elements of the subject, 'if they adopt any label at all they wouldn't go for "labour history".' Significant change is 'highly unlikely'.

It is arguable that labour history has got lost. It subsists in diffuse segments or as an ingredient in broader courses. It is more of a minor strand, a current, a focus, than a field. Perhaps this is the price of more total history. If so it is one some other fields of the discipline have not paid. Richard Evans' historiographical primer and polemic refers to the influence of Thompson and *The Making* and discusses the growth of 'history from below.' Reference to labour history is otherwise spare and incidental.³⁷ David Cannadine's collection surveying the discipline at the turn of the century has essays on cultural, political, social, gender, intellectual, religious and imperial history. But nothing on labour history.³⁸ A well-

known student reader has one index entry, 'labour history see Marxist history.'³⁹ The section referred to addresses Hill, Thompson and tersely, Hobsbawm and the labour aristocracy debate. Labour history does not figure on mainstream historiographical agendas or in popular academic discourse.

We should register two points about the back-story. First, the present should not be judged against an earlier 'golden age of labour history.' There was never a *belle époque* in the university curriculum – as distinct from the wider resonance the subject enjoyed in the 1960s and 1970s. This was fuelled by the publications of the first generation of modern labour historians and it receded from the 1980s.⁴⁰ In terms of teaching, labour history grew in uneven, and outside a few centres, circumscribed fashion. It never struck deep enough roots in university programmes, never mustered a sufficient critical mass of courses, senior staff and graduate students to resist academic neoliberalism. The evidence that we have shows limited growth in provision from the 1950s to the 1970s, retrenchment and decline in the 1980s and no significant resurgence when universities again expanded from the 1990s.⁴¹ In this curricular and institutional sense, vital to legitimacy, both rise and fall have been gradual and restricted.

Second, we have noted that some of the founding fathers had reservations about labour history as a discrete field in relation to the drawbacks of fragmentation and aspired rather towards a total social history.⁴² It is far from clear that the contemporary integration of the subject with adjacent fields of history in broader modules represents a significant step towards *histoire totale*. Rather, we may be witnessing the dissolution of labour history into what are considered significant, interesting, or relevant fragments essentially subordinate to narratives which privilege political, social or cultural history. Discussing similar processes in North America, and granting full weight to the positives, particularly the interdisciplinary crossing of boundaries, the leading Canadian historian, Bryan Palmer, concluded with

concern: 'Because if "labour history" is advanced by its integration into larger analyses of social, cultural, political and economic life, so, too, is it the case that when a subject cannot sustain its name, it is in danger of losing itself among these many other subjects that have no shyness in proclaiming *their* identity.'⁴³

Beyond The Academy

From its inception in the 1950s some of the creators of the new labour history, whose main purpose was to lodge it in the universities, insisted that it should reach beyond them. Scholars should endeavour to encourage 'a revival of interest in Labour History among the people to whom our subject peculiarly belongs.'⁴⁴ They were aware of the problems of teaching it to trade unionists: 'History is an intellectually sophisticated study and for most of our students it cannot be a good starting point'; and they acknowledged that in planning classes for labour movement activists, 'it would be necessary to resist the demand that "the lessons of history" should be presented in convenient packages.'⁴⁵ They recognized that union officials were often practical people who wanted education, or training, to deliver results. They perhaps underestimated the degree to which they were suspicious of criticism, their determination to engage with scholars on their own terms, and the ultimate insistence on the part of some power-holders that the education of activists should not question the political and policy imperatives of unions as understood by their leaders.⁴⁶

Such problems had not proved insuperable in the past. Labour history had developed from the early 1900s in workers' education, not universities, in the classes of the agencies of independent working-class education, the Plebs League, the Central Labour College and the National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC), as well as the state-sponsored Workers' Educational Association (WEA), which worked in partnership with the universities.⁴⁷ In a situation where the bureaucracy of the unions was rudimentary and only beginning to form a

distinctive educational philosophy, the voluntary bodies had the field to themselves. They attracted the services of a range of pioneers of labour history, the Webbs, Tawney, Cole, Maurice Dobb and Raymond Postgate, as well as enthusiastic amateur historians. Problems centred on perennial tensions between simplification and complexity, inspiration and understanding, contingency and the forward march of teleology. But these classes helped thousands of workers to comprehend their past. They enlightened them as to the potential and problems of the present.⁴⁸

By the 1950s they encountered a decline from which they never recovered. In workers' education, labour history survived in courses run by the Co-operative College, in the long day-release classes for trade unionists that some universities mounted, and in the adult residential colleges, some union activists attended, notably Ruskin College, Fircroft, Coleg Harlech and Newbattle Abbey.⁴⁹ After its absorption of the NCLC from 1964, the TUC expanded its new trade union education which became dominant in the following decade. This concentrated on shop stewards and the skills they needed to represent their members at work. History was a dispensable distraction.⁵⁰ Simultaneously, the expansion of labour history inside the academy functioned as an alternative attraction for the founders of the new labour history. Many of them came from adult education. Their path ran away from it into internal university teaching, scholarly research and publication. Even the most radical, valuable political commentary aside, wrote for a broad but largely educated readership.⁵¹ Thompson, Hobsbawm, Sheila Rowbotham, touched a wider audience and their writing was addressed in WEA classes. But that audience included few shop stewards, union officials or, excluding full-time adult education, workers who had left school at 15 or 16.⁵² Labour history underwent academicization. The SSLH, which interested trade unionists at its inauguration, evolved into a society of academics and aspirant academics.⁵³

There were tensions and a major reaction, the History Workshop movement. Against academicization it posed the people's history and the missionary impulses, reconfigured and reinforced by the revived radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s, of the Labour Colleges and the Communist Party Historians' Group. Radiating out from Ruskin College from the late 1960s, History Workshop saw labour history as one thread in a skein which bound together capitalist history, cultural studies, peasant studies and crucially womens' history and feminism.⁵⁴ Celebrating the class struggle, workers' experience, democratization of history and the creation of worker historians, it stimulated pamphlets, a book series, large scale conferences, the impressive *History Workshop Journal* and local groups. It is not to deprecate its achievements to note that both its impetus and its support came largely from academics, students and adult students, teachers and other professionals. In a time of militancy and radicalism its reach into organised labour remained restricted; it disintegrated by the 1990s as neoliberalism consolidated its hold. Its journal experienced gradual but significant academicization; it followed trends in academic history at *fin-de-siècle* and by the new millennium it had moved decisively away from labour history.⁵⁵

Reflecting on the position in Britain, the Australian scholar, Terry Irving, observed that a 'tension between history as practised and understood in labour movements and as it is pursued by academics is endemic to labour history.'⁵⁶ It has been of negligible practical relevance in recent decades simply because the teaching of labour history in the labour movement as well as to other constituencies beyond university students has been so sparse.⁵⁷ At Ruskin College, home of History Workshop and its animator Raphael Samuel, people's history has mutated into a broader, softer, public history as Ruskin has morphed from a 'trade union college' into a college preparing adults for university and offering some degrees itself. Public history retains some of the intonations of its predecessor. It asserts the need 'to historicise the present' and for history to break the boundaries of the ivory tower and expand

the vocation of the historian. Like History Workshop, it insists on the importance of oral history and memory, visual history, museum presentations, archival projects and developing skills which can transform students into 'do it yourself' historians.

Labour and work is there; like politics it is no longer central. It remains infused with a mission; explicit commitment to the working class is replaced by dedication to educating the general public.⁵⁸ Ruskin has pioneered a masters degree in public history. It provides evening classes and conferences on historical topics, including labour issues, local history and black history. However, history generally and labour history particularly, is now marginal in the courses of other adult colleges. Like Ruskin they have been revamped in an access mould and sometimes provide the first year of university degree courses and short courses, often in the social sciences and life skills. At Coleg Harlech, Fircroft and Hillcroft, history is vestigial. At Newbattle Abbey and the Northern College it is typically confined to evening classes.⁵⁹

Labour history likewise finds little place in the educational programmes of trade unions, provided directly or in collaboration with colleges and the WEA. A recent survey of provision makes no mention of it. Union efforts in this area are twofold: training activists in representational skills and brokering training for employability through the state-financed Unionlearn project.⁶⁰ Labour history has figured peripherally in some courses organised by the big unions, Unison and Unite. It has been part of programmes tailored for union activists by a small number of universities, but not to any great degree. What initiatives there have been remain scattered and small scale. The Rail Maritime and Transport Union (RMT) has made attempts to encourage activists to study socialist history.⁶¹ The History and Policy group, consisting largely of academics, has established a trade union forum intended to engage union officials in discussing how reflecting on the past can inform future strategy.⁶² Overall, there are few signs of a new marriage between organised labour and labour history.

The schools are vital sites for the development and dissemination of history. In the past, bodies such as the NCLC took a keen interest in how the subject was taught there, a tradition continued into the 1990s by Samuel.⁶³ The National Curriculum legislation for England makes history compulsory between the ages of five and fourteen – thereafter it is voluntary — and emphasises European and world, as well as British history. It stresses the need to portray the impact of social and technological change. The syllabuses for the General Certificate of Secondary Education which school students normally take at 16 have been criticised for their focus on twentieth-century Germany and Russia, although they aim at providing pupils with ‘understanding of the political economic and social aspects of each period and culture [and] other races and ways of life.’⁶⁴ There are similar tropes in syllabuses for ‘A’ levels, the conventional qualifications for university entrance, which feature topics such as the industrial revolution, ‘Chartism and later struggle’ and ‘Representation and Democracy in Britain 1830–1931.’⁶⁵

In the 1960s and 1970s, teacher autonomy, the influence of scholars such as Thompson, Hobsbawm and Sheila Rowbotham on staff and the reprographics revolution permitted greater consideration of the experience of the exploited and oppressed. This was eroded from the 1980s by the neoliberal backlash.⁶⁶ It is difficult to gain a grasp of the bewildering array of history taught today; or progress beyond the tentative conclusion that while social, economic and cultural approaches are deployed, and while ‘ordinary people’ figure to a greater degree than sometimes in the past, there is little labour history *per se*. Anxieties concerning the decreasing number of school students studying history and the consequent appointment of the conservative television historian, Niall Ferguson, to advise the government have provoked widespread debate.⁶⁷ In it the importance of history from below and the need to study industrialisation, the Enclosure Acts, the making of the working class and the contribution of Hill, Hobsbawm and Thompson, have at least been raised.⁶⁸

Somewhat ironically, the dwindling away of the History Workshop movement and changes in its journal were contemporaneous with a turn to history by sections of the public.⁶⁹ There was a growth of interest in local and family history, heritage history, television history, ethnic and gender history, identity history of all kinds. It was driven by desire to discover, connect with, evoke and sometimes celebrate the past.⁷⁰ The new ‘do-it-yourself’ history took further the focus on experience and empathy of History Workshop while discarding its preoccupation with class, labour and emancipation. There were strains of the antiquarianism and neglect of history as a means to understand the past in all its complexities, rather than attempt to relive it, with which History Workshop had been reproached.⁷¹

But if labour and work was secondary, it was not entirely lost in the popular passion for the past. Local bodies such as the People’s History Museum, the Co-operative Archive, the Modern Records Centre, the Working-Class Movement Library and more, which had blossomed in the last decades of the twentieth century, continued to attract students and organise regular exhibitions, conferences and events aimed at the labour movement and wider. Interest in commemoration and local history, some of it at least related to labour, some of it open to a labour dimension or a more rigorous labour dimension, is apparent from regional activity. A 2010 survey covering two months in the Manchester-Salford area noted a range of events: commemorating mining in Salford; celebrating Black History Month; exploring the history of the Manchester Ship Canal; examining the past of the local docks and dockers; and discussing the ‘Great Unrest’, the militancy of 1911–1914. There were talks on Engels in Salford and historical novels; a play about women workers in the 1970s, *Striking the Balance*; the film about the 1968 sewing machinists strike, *Made in Dagenham*; and a variety of WEA classes on local history. Similar activity flourishes in most parts of Britain, sometimes energised by local labour and socialist history groups. The shelves of bookshops in cities and towns are crowded with texts of ‘local interest’. Some of them deal with labour

history, although less perhaps than in the past with the labour movement. Some pay it inadequate attention.⁷²

Arguably academic labour historians could involve themselves to a greater extent with the public's love affair with yesteryear. Mark Crail's recent book, for example, suggests how we can relate to family history. At least some essays in synthesis and popularization written by academics and former academics incorporate strands of labour history and suggests ways forward.⁷³ If we look beyond the universities we find, without exaggerating it, continued interest in labour history. There is a lot going on, albeit, I stress, in an uneven, fragmented, *ad hoc* and episodic fashion. Consonant with wider social and economic change and the decline of the public intellectual, there are no Coles, no Tawneys, no Webbs, speaking to constituencies beyond the academy, particularly in the labour movement. There is no network of classes: the sustained provision of continuing education aimed at workers which pertained at times in the past is absent. It is relevant to inquire what labour historians have done to relate to and develop existing activity. How have academics and their societies responded to calls 'to reach and engage with a wider public, with trade unionists and other interested parties in the public and political spheres and to welcome all practitioners of labour history, whether professional or non-professional, academic or non-academic' ?⁷⁴

Societies and Journals

The SSLH is the oldest and best known organization of labour historians in Britain and the only one which aspires to recruit practitioners across the United Kingdom. It is far from realising that aspiration. Table 1 lists 69 scholars identified as labour historians over the last decade. Of that total, only 28, little over 40 per cent, are members of the SSLH. The position with regard to the 48 academics identified as currently functioning as labour historians also provides cause for concern. Only 24 of these historians, 50 per cent of the

total, are currently members. A small number of university historians practise labour history. A bare majority perceive the need for membership of a long-established, society dedicated to the subject.

Membership peaked at around 700 individual members in 1979. At that point, it was observed that the majority of British labour historians were members. The figures declined from the 1980s and that trend has persisted. Membership fell from 280 in 2001 to 195 in 2005, 173 in 2007 and 159 in 2010.⁷⁵ The SSLH is substantially an English society. Although it has members across Britain and worldwide, 75 per cent of them live in England. It remains an organisation of academics. However only 80, or 60 per cent, of 133 individual members resident in the UK and Ireland can be identified as academics on a broad definition which takes in retired lecturers and postgraduate students. The ratio of 80:30 between academics/retired academics/aspiring academics, on the one hand, and non-academics, on the other, is illuminating. It exposes the relatively small base a society which has primarily targeted university staff presently possesses among its chosen clientele. It also demonstrates the relatively high proportion of non-academics who remain within a small and diminishing membership. The majority of members are male and we possess no figures on ethnic background.⁷⁶

Three hostile features seem to be operating. Membership is via subscription to its journal *LHR*, presently £28 per annum. Most academics can access *LHR* online via their university even if retired. Older members may still value hard copies. Younger academics, given intensive specialisation, may be interested in a minority of articles; skimming the rest they may question why they should pay £28 for material they can access *gratis*. Society membership typically produces no other tangible benefits and this trend seems likely to intensify. The second element is demographic. The membership figures suggest a high proportion of the SSLH's academic members are in their sixties, even older. Until

comparatively recently membership appears to have been significantly based on the diminishing ranks of the society's founding generation and the somewhat younger '1968' cohort. Many of the latter are now retiring. They have not been replaced by younger groups.⁷⁷ Finally, developments in universities and the intensification and constricted focus of the academic labour process can crowd-out extra-curricular scholarly activity. Dependent on academics, the society has recently been characterised by low levels of activism. This circumscribes realising the limited potential for renewal.⁷⁸

A fundamental factor influencing decline is the impact of political and cultural change on academic identities discussed earlier. The generation which established the society wished to develop and popularize labour history. But they did not put all their eggs in one basket. They taught, researched and wrote a variety of history and they cultivated multiple, intersecting identities as economic, social and labour *historians*. In the growth years of the SSLH, the flourishing of class analysis; a labour movement growing in prominence and influence; attachment to it, its history and its contemporary opportunities and difficulties; the engagement, enthusiasm and optimism generated by pioneering a new area at a time of radicalism and educational expansion: these factors cemented among many labour historians a sense of commonality and community. This was far from complete. Whether one studied women, Chartism, the Labour Party or working class crime, there was an ethos of shared interest, articulated in and reinforced by, membership of the society which helped to make both that society and labour history a small success.⁷⁹

Things changed from the late 1970s with the triumph of neoliberalism, the conservative turn in British history and new divisions and fashions within the discipline. In today's conditions the erosion of optimism and commonality as well as enhanced specialisation and pressure to publish, have encouraged still further fragmentation of interest and practice. Many historians have situated themselves in temporary, flexible, *ad hoc*

networks, often focussed on generating publications, rather than structured, ecumenical societies. Some historians of the Labour Party have cohered around seminars sponsored by the Institute of Historical Research, others around the Political Studies Association. There was briefly a journal, *Labour Party History*. There was an unsuccessful attempt to create yet another subspecialism with the journal *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*. Some historians of Communism gathered around *Socialist History* and later launched *Twentieth Century Communism*. There have been experiments in forming networks to study strikes, mining and post-war trade unionism around the European Social Science History Conference. On this reading which is underpinned by the membership figures, significant numbers of historians teaching and researching aspects of labour history and conceiving themselves as specialists in that specific subject matter do not consider the SSLH to be an organisation it is imperative to join. They do not consider it a necessary attribute and extension of their scholarly identity, a required forum for intellectual conversation with academic, still less non-academic, colleagues. There is only in a reduced sense any overarching community of labour historians.⁸⁰

The SSLH has proved incapable of stemming fissiparous tendencies, although it has stuck resolutely to the academic path forged by its founders. The launch of *LHR* as an orthodox scholarly journal in 1996 confirmed that in terms of its constitutional mission ‘to educate the public in the field of labour history,’⁸¹ it continued to identify the public with academics. The journal’s belated launch 36 years after the society was established and when the society and subject were in decline may have come too late to restrain what were already strong centrifugal trends. Moreover it remained locked into traditional historiographical problematics as surveys of content during its first decade attested.⁸² Between 2006 and 2010, *LHR* published 58 articles. Their content again clustered around traditional fare: trade unions and industrial relations (26 per cent), the Labour Party (14 per cent) and other labour

movement matters (35 per cent). There were fewer articles on women and gender (10 per cent), other working-class social history (12 per cent) and ethnicity (1.7 per cent).

Contributions were skewed towards the twentieth century. Over 50 per cent were concerned with the latter, compared with 25 per cent devoted solely to the nineteenth century, a figure inflated by six contributions in a special issue on Chartism. The emphasis is British. Only 15 articles appeared on international topics and the majority were published in two special issues on transnational labour history.⁸³

The book series 'Studies in Labour History', sponsored by the SSLH, has enhanced the profile of the subject. It, too, is written by academics for academics. Twenty nine monographs/collections were published between 1998 and 2009. They covered a wide range of labour history. Nevertheless the publishers who prioritize history and social science monographs discontinued the venture. While this did not suggest confidence in the size of the scholarly market, it was somewhat blunted by the decision of Liverpool University Press, a smaller, less well-known academic publisher, to continue the series with a similar pitch to professional historians.⁸⁴ The SSLH's other main activity, twice-yearly conferences, are also aimed at academics. There appears to be little enthusiasm for public history: the only initiative was a series of *LHR* pieces on public history and museums some years ago.⁸⁵

The general situation is unprepossessing: scrutiny of the position of other national and regional associations shows it is not determined. Subjective factors and human agency play a part. Within England itself there are two functioning regional bodies, the North East and North West Labour History societies. Both consist of a mixture of professional and lay historians and those simply interested in labour history. Both have had their ups and downs, their periods of inactivity. Each has a membership which taken together exceeds that of the SSLH and each has attempted to mobilise local interest via conferences and events. Both take an active interest in community archives and museums – the North West society has

always had a close relationship with the Working-Class Movement Library – and both produce annual journals. The North East society has been the recipient with the WEA of a grant to examine the political history of the region.⁸⁶ In the past there was membership overlap with the SSLH; today it seems that most people are willing to join only one society. Historians active in the SSLH are rarely active locally. Links between the national and regional bodies which existed in the 1960s and 1970s have been progressively attenuated, a process underpinned by academic change, and are presently almost non-existent. Articles in *LHR* possess academic kudos compared with those published in regional journals.⁸⁷

At national level, the Irish, Scottish and Welsh societies provide instructive comparison with the SSLH. The Irish Labour History Society was formed in 1973. It has been successful in recruiting both trade unionists and academics, in attracting government funding and securing premises in the Dublin-based Labour History Museum Archives. Its journal, *Saothar*, appears annually and maintains high standards while its membership, which covers the whole island, grew from 275 in 1994 to 400 in 2008.⁸⁸ The Welsh society, *Llafur*, which has endured for 40 years, was recently revamped as the Welsh People's History Society. It too has established itself as part of the landscape of Welsh History in and beyond the universities. It has recruited trade unionists and lay historians, at one point it enrolled 1,700 members. Today, it has 275 individual members while its annual journal, *Llafur* and its conferences resonate beyond the principality.⁸⁹ The Scottish society has also experienced some membership decline from around 250 members a decade ago to around 170 individual members today, with consequent diminution of activity. Its journal, *Scottish Labour History* continues to appear annually.⁹⁰

It is noteworthy, despite recent drops in membership in Scotland and Wales, that all three societies organise in countries with substantially smaller populations than England. Yet they have more, and in the Irish and Welsh cases significantly more, individual members than

the all-British SSLH. For like the SSLH, they confront situations where the teaching of labour history in their smaller university sectors is restricted and diffuse, while academics encounter similar pressures to their English counterparts. As might be expected, their institutional membership is significantly smaller but it is also different: for example, fewer academic libraries and more trade unions subscribe. Given distinctive contexts, histories and traditions, drawing detailed lessons may be of questionable utility. But one factor, and perhaps lesson, which stands out is that in comparison with the SSLH all these societies at different times, unevenly and with varying success, have demonstrated a drive to popularize labour history and to root it among the people who made it. All three societies have at times developed greater outreach and forged stronger links with local communities and labour movements than the SSLH.⁹¹

In this they have more in common with other societies around the world who aspire to expand the subject in collaboration with those to whom it matters most. The Australian Society for the Study of Labour History (ASSLH) was in its early days influenced by the SSLH. Today its local branches, sometimes organised by trade unionists and lay historians, provide a contrast. At the same time, its journal, *Labour History*, and its national conferences attract professional historians, political scientists, sociologists and industrial relations scholars. They are sometimes sponsored by unions and community groups and address issues relevant to the contemporary labour movement. The activities of the AASLH ‘provide [labour history] with an appeal which resonates beyond the university’⁹² In the United States LAWCHA is younger than its Australian or British counterparts. Where the SSLH has stuck to the label ‘labour history’, LAWCHA has adopted the more striking and aligned ‘working-class history’. Fundamentally, LAWCHA looks outwards and attempts to transcend the ivory tower. It enrolls scholars in industrial relations, labour students, political science, as well as historians, union and community activists and students with the purpose of promoting wider

and deeper understanding of the history of working people. Unlike the SSLH, LAWCHA has functioning regional linkages and attempts to stimulate the teaching of working-class history across educational boundaries and in the unions through connections with school teachers and labour educators. Its journal, *L-SWHA*, like its Canadian opposite number *Labour/Le Travail*, is broader, less confined to academic presentation of scholarly research than *LHR*. In the context of a large catchment area, LAWCHA membership has doubled to over 500 in the years since its formation.⁹³

Reservations need to be entered. It is notoriously difficult to compare Britain with Australia or the United States in meaningful fashion. For example, Britain possesses a fraction of the latter's territory, population and students in higher education. We have no figures on the extent of LAWCHA's catchment area for recruitment or the overall number of labour historians in the United States. Related to population, a very rough measure, LAWCHA's membership might not be very different in size from that of the SSLH. American universities have also witnessed a push towards quantitative measurement of research with consequent emphasis on conventional publication in mainstream journals, rather than popular or unorthodox outlets, stress on forms of history marketable outside the academy and vocational training.⁹⁴ Pearson's brief observations on labour history in several American universities merit amplification and I have no wish to overdraw a picture of American sunshine and English showers.⁹⁵ More evidence and analysis is necessary before we can make firm and illuminating comparisons.

Labour History As A Field

A decade ago a collection of papers reviewing labour history in Britain pronounced it in reasonably good health. Its editor concluded: 'Overall labour history has undoubtedly been successful in getting itself established in the mainstream of British history'.⁹⁶ The

judgement was limited. It was overwhelmingly based on discrete discussion of the literatures dealing with a variety of aspects of labour history substantially explored in isolation from each other. They were not considered as a unified whole, incorporating and transcending its component parts. There was no scrutiny of teaching; there was only slight, and then historical, examination of organisation.⁹⁷ If we look at things differently we may judge things differently. Labour history continues to stimulate research and publication which strengthens the historiography of parts of the subject.⁹⁸ If we aggregate these literatures on the page, as they are rarely aggregated in pedagogic practice, if, at the price of some artificiality in relation to such practice, we assemble them historiographically into a field of study and treat the results as a measure of the well-being of that field, then we may find grounds for optimism. If we take account of ‘actually existing’ balkanization and critically travel the terrain traversed in this article, if we consider the specific weight of labour history relative to other fields of the discipline, how it is organized, promoted and disseminated, we may be less sanguine.

From this perspective, labour history in Britain came in out of the cold in the decades after 1960, largely through the efforts of a small group of committed, gifted and determined historians operating in the unusually favourable circumstances of Keynesianism and the growth and radicalization of organised labour and higher education. Despite an encouraging environment, it never achieved the academic ballast or standing that economic history or briefly social history enjoyed. It never constructed the critical mass necessary to lodge itself significantly and enduringly in the academy. Handicapped by a less supportive climate, it is today marginal to mainstream agendas. Fission is the fashion. Aspects of labour history figure in a small number of courses; they are integrated, sometimes as an ancillary aspect, in others. Consonant with the contemporary *zeitgeist* corrosive of grand narratives, this remains far from the aspirations of the pioneers for total history with labour close to its epicentre. The

subject is constrained by a sparsity of acolytes. Many are self-identified as scholars of this or that area, rather than labour historians *per se*. Centrifugal factors are exacerbated by and contribute towards, the decline of labour history's best-known society. The gap between the theorizing of a field and the practice of protagonists of its parts suggests the need for qualification of favourable pronouncements on the future based substantially on analysis of the historiography.

Looked at in this light the prognosis is not auspicious. It is legitimate to treat the subject as a part-time enthusiasm of a small number of academics and a significant part of the teaching and research of a very small minority. It is equally legitimate to conceive labour history as a strand informing recognized fields of history, as one component of general courses. Compared with the 1940s and 1950s this represents progress. In the past greater ambitions were expressed. If we want more today there is a need to reformulate and to reassert, the role of labour history as a discrete, interlinked field and strengthen its role in wider integration. It is a problematic project: whether the will and the forces are available is questionable. The argument that labour historians should look beyond university classrooms is compelling. As the distinguished American historian, James McPherson, reflected: 'surely it is possible to say something of value to fellow historians, while at the same time engaging a wider audience?'⁹⁹ The experience of other countries is to hand. But again change is not without its difficulties.

Modern labour history in Britain has been largely moulded by university teachers. Academics are academics, with the interests, skill-sets and mentalities of academics, not public pedagogues. Conventional means of creating and presenting knowledge are embedded in the academic process. The intensifying demands of university posts, pressures to compete for research funding, assessment of output, the clamour for more *academic* publications, as well as the need to master an ever-burgeoning knowledge base, further constrain 'push'

factors. There are problems with 'pull' factors. The controllers of labour movement education construct restricted conceptions of what is relevant for activists. The adult colleges look towards university preparation and life skills; the school curriculum is crowded with competing alternatives. Imaginative leadership, determination and strategy is necessary if public appetites for labour history are to be developed. If this seems to be the way to go, progress is, to put matters mildly, far from assured. In the end, as in the past, it may depend on external events and a revival of the fortunes of the labour movement.

APPENDIX

Table 1: The Teaching of Labour History in British Universities

University	Teaching	Staff with Record of Teaching/ Researching Subject
Aberdeen	No labour history taught as such. Impinges on modules in Political, cultural and oral history.	1(R)
Aberystwyth	No dedicated courses. Relevant to modules in political, economic, social, Welsh history.	1, 2 (F)
Anglia Ruskin	Dispersed through some courses. Particular emphasis on Labour Party. Labour History Research Unit.	3
Bangor	No specific courses. Relevant to range of modules in economic, social, political and Welsh history.	1, 1(F) 1(D)
Birmingham	No specific courses. Modules on Chartism, 19 th cent Radicalism, 19 th cent Social Protest.	1(F) 1 Researcher

Cambridge	Modules on British Social History since 1800; Class Party and Politics, 1930-2000.	2
Cardiff	Modules on slavery, serfdom, industrialization at undergrad and postgrad levels.	2
Central Lancashire	Figures in courses in political, economic, social, comparative history.	3, 1 Researcher
Durham	Labour movements come up in various modules. Also Labour politics in Dept of Government.	1 History, 1 Government
East Anglia	Insignificant in teaching or research.	1(F)
Edinburgh	Figures in undergrad & postgrad modules on political, economic, social, American and Scottish history.	2(R), 1(F)
Exeter	Involved in modules from Black Death to Politics and Party in Britain 1880-1970, Victorian Britain, Britain in Twentieth Century and modules on Labour Party.	1
Essex	Figures in modules on British Social History 1830-1950; Sex, Class and War in Britain 1930-2000, undergrad. Co-operative movement covered in postgrad module on consumer culture.	1
Glasgow	Covered in undergrad modules on political, economic, social history e.g. Women and Gender; Poverty, Poor Law and Philanthropy 1790-1985; Work and Play; Industry and Innovation; Lenin and Leninism. Also postgrad courses in social history, American and Scottish history.	1, 1 (F)

Glasgow Caledonian	Modules on Work and Leisure 1850-1970; Health in the Workplace in 20 th Century. Also covered in Scottish history modules.	1
Huddersfield	Modules in political, economic, social history e.g. 19 th century Britain, Winter of Discontent, Britain on the Breadline. Occasional modules on Socialism in Britain.	2
Hull	Taught in modules on economic and social history, slavery, Stalins Russia, inter-war Germany.	-
Kingston	Figures in 19 th /20 th century US politics and modules on slavery and race.	1
Keele	Some labour history in modules – Victorian Society, Suffragette Stories. Also in Politics Department, eg Politics of Radical Protest.	-
Leeds	Modules on Fraternity, Skill and the Politics of Labour 1660-1810 and Chartism. Modules on Slavery in India and USSR cover labour issues.	1
Liverpool	Modules, Slavery in 19 th Century Europe. Socialism in Eastern Europe. Also Politics Department modules on Fascism, Thatcherism, Social Movements and modules in Irish Studies.	1, 2(R)
LSE	Figures in modules in Dept of Economic History, eg The Industrial Revolution and Legal and Social Change since 1750. Touched on through Masters courses.	1(R)
Loughborough	Touched on in modules in BA History and Politics. Anarchism Research Group.	1(in Business School)

Manchester	Modules in British Population and Social Structure 1700-1870, Child Labour in Britain 1700-1870. Also modules on Social Movements, The French Left (Government Dept) Work Economy and Society (Sociology). Soviet Socialism and Power and Protest (Social Anthropology)	1 and 1 in Dept of Government
Manchester Metropolitan	Modules on suffragettes, poverty, slavery and social history. Modules (undergrad). Figures in courses on regional history (postgrad).	1(R), 1 and 1(R) in Dept of Government
Middlesex	No history taught. Bits of labour history in employment relations, law courses.	1, 1(F)
Newcastle	Modules, Popular Politics and Reform 1811-50; Reading History; Jarrow Crusade; French Communism. Also parts of British History 1789-1918.	2
Northumbria	American Labour History in 19 th Century. Co-operative Movement covered in module on consumerism.	2
Nottingham	Modules on Comparative Labour History – Britain, Germany, Russia. Figures in modules on Weimar Republic, World War 1, From Gladstone to Asquith and other political modules.	2
Oxford	Comes into economic, political, social history on P.P.E.degree, though less than in past. History Faculty lectures on Industrial Revolution; Working Classes: Men, Women and Children; From Chartism to Labourism; Themes in Social Policy; The Long 1970s; The Peoples War; New Labour Era; Socialism, Class and Class Structure. Optional module on Gender and Work.	1

Reading	Modules on International Communism and History of the Labour Party.	1
Sheffield	No courses in History Dept. Modules on Fascism and Labour Party in Government Dept.	1(R)
Sheffield Hallam	Included in undergrad modules on Class, Gender and Nation 1780-1914; Postwar Britain; World of Labour (Labour Economics); and Northern Soul (regional identities). Module on Chartism.	1
St Andrews	Work and Politics in Modern Scotland. Features also in War and Welfare, Britain 1939-51.	1
Sussex	Part of modules on 1926, Britain and World War II, Women In Post War Britain.	-
Strathclyde	Involved in undergrad modules on slavery, serfdom and oral history. Postgrad courses, Elites, Employers and the State; Social History of Work.	1
Swansea	Special subject: The South Wales Coalfield. MA module Popular Politics and Protest 1780-1850. Comes up in other modules.	1
Ulster Magee	Module Capital and Labour (undergrad). Labour, Nationalism and Unionism (postgrad).	1

Ulster Queens	Figures in range of modules undergrad & postgrad in British, Irish and American history.	2
UCL	No specialist courses. Covered in economic and social history and transnational modules.	1(F)
Warwick	No dedicated courses. Figures in modules, Reform Revolt and Realism, USA 1832-75; Social Movements in Western Europe since 1960s; Radicalism in the English Revolution.	1(F) 1(R)
West of England	Relevant modules through BA and MA programmes eg British Slave Trade; Class Politics and Protest 1770-1850; Gender, Politics and Identity; Globalism; British Economy; Crime, Protest and Popular Attitudes; The Bristol Poor.	1
Wolverhampton	Undergrad modules on Victorian Britain; Revolution in Ireland; Spanish Civil War; British Workers and Migration: Women in Britain. Also modules on Masters in Social Science.	1
York	Two modules on Russia cover labour history. Also Politics in Later Victorian Britain. Features in other modules for MA in History and Politics. Politics Dept has module on Labour Movements.	1

Abbreviations: D deceased; F, formerly taught/researched labour history; R, retired.

Notes

[1] For the former see Dubofsky, 'Stroll down Memory Lane'. For the latter, Allen et al., *Histories of Labour*; and Mcllroy et al., *Making History*.

[2] Jacobs, 'Labor History'.

[3] Kirk, 'Challenge, Crisis and Renewal?', 170-1; Sangster, 'Gendering Labour History', 143-9.

[4] Mcllroy et al., '50 Years On'; Samuels, 'History Workshop 1966-80'; Faue, 'United States of America', 181-3.

[5] Haverty-Stacke and Walkowitz, *Rethinking US Labor History*; Pearson, 'From the Labour Question', 195-6, 206; Mcllroy et al., '50 Years on', 9-10; Freeman, review of *Histories of Labour*, 225-6; Irving, review of *Making History*, 228-9.

[6] Faue, 'United States', 179-85; Kirk, 'Challenge, Crisis and Renewal?', 163, 175.

[7] For definitions see Van der Linden, 'Labour History', 8181-3, where the subject is categorised as a discipline; and Halstead, 'Labour History', 252-3. We conceive labour history as a field of study, rather than a discipline with its own conceptual armoury. It is a field which draws on perspectives from other fields of the discipline of history and other disciplines, notably the social sciences.

[8] Hobsbawm, 'Looking Back', 5; Asa Briggs quoted in Obelkevich, 'Witness Seminar', 156. Many Marxists – and other historians, cf. the *Annales* school – would concur in the argument for totality. In this perspective a discipline of labour history may be considered an over-generous concession to economism, an economism which differentiates itself from economic history! In any Marxist problematic, exploration of the history of exploitation requires examination of the history of other forms of oppression – and resistance – which combines economic, political, social and other approaches to the past.

[9] Fielding, 'New Labour', 42-3; Mcllroy, 'Origins', 105-12; Kirk, *Social Class and Marxism*; Campbell and Mcllroy, *The State We're In*, 17.

[10] Voskeritsian, *Industrial Relations*, 1-4.

[11] This is the drift of the essays in Lucassen, *Global Labour History*, Heerma van Voss and van der Linden, *Class and Other Identities* and Haverty-Stacke and Walkowitz, *Rethinking US Labor History*. Allen et al., *Histories of Labour*, makes more reference to societies of labour historians but the stress remains strongly historiographical. Pearson, 'From the Labour Question', 195-6. 206, does look briefly at provision and reports some decline in courses and dedicated staff at U.S. universities.

[12] Van der Linden and Heerma van Voss, 'Introduction', 16-17, partly assesses the fortune of the subject by reference to the number of periodicals devoted to it and see Pearson, n.11.

[13] McIlroy, 'Origins', 27-30, 56-7, 100-2.

[14] *Constitution of the Society*, 1.

[15] McIlroy, 'Origins', 56-7, 98-9.

[16] See, for example, van der Linden and Heerma van Voss, 'Introduction', 14-16; Savage, 'Class and Labour History', 55-6.

[17] For recent snapshots of the historiography in Britain, America and other countries, see Allen et al., *Histories of Labour*.

[18] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wk/listofuniversities>. There do not appear to be significant differences in relation to labour history between 'old' and 'new' universities.

[19] McIlroy, 'Origins', 92-6.

[20] Van der Linden, 'Labor History', 8181-3; idem, 'Labour History Beyond Borders', 353-4; Halstead, 'Labour History', 257-8.

[21] For general surveys of the state of history in Britain and its development since the 1960s, see Evans, *In Defence of History* and Cannadine, *What is History Now?*

[22] See Hunt, 'Labour History at LSE', 11 and Mason and Obelkevich, 'Labour History at the Centre', 22-3.

[23] Unless otherwise referenced the information and comments quoted in this and the following section draw on our survey.

[24] Hunt, *British Labour History*.

[25] See the argument set out in Van der Linden, 'Beyond Borders'.

[26] Briggs and Saville, *Essays in Labour History*; idem, *Essays in Labour History 1886-1923*; idem, *Essays in Labour History 1918-1939*; Shaw, *Marxism and Social Science*, 52-4; McPherson, 'What's the Matter with History?', 237.

[27] McIlroy, 'Origins', 92-6.

[28] To our knowledge there were until 2009 one professor and two Readers in Social and Labour History. These titles disappeared with individual promotion and retirement. A Professor of Industrial Relations and Labour History remains in a Business School where, however, no significant teaching of labour history is conducted.

[29] <http://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/statistics/teacher.html>

[30] See *LHR* 66, No 3, 313-18; 71, No 3, 253-60; 74, No 3, 375-86.

[31] See, for example, *LHR* 73, No 3, 287-321; 74, No 3, 334-71. In terms of past identification of the subject with Marxism it is our impression that a minority of the current literature and a small minority of the academics listed in Table 1 can be categorised as 'Marxist' in any broad but meaningful way.

[32] See Daniels and McIlroy, *Trade Unions in a Neoliberal World*, passim.

[33] McIlroy and Campbell, 'Still Setting the Pace?', 184-88; Moody, *US Labor in Trouble and Transition*.

[34] McIlroy, 'Origins', 85-5; McIlroy et al, 'Fifty Years on', 8-14.

[35] Kirk, 'Challenge, Crisis and Renewal?', 163-175.

[36] Brown, *Higher Education*.

[37] Evans, *In Defence of History*, for example, 63-5.

[38] Cannadine, *What is History Now?*

[39] Green and Troup, *Houses of History*, 332, 33-43.

[40] Cf. McIlroy et al, 'Histories of Labour', 13; McIlroy, 'Origins', 90-98. Hobsbawm's description of 'a golden age', *Worlds of Labour*, ix, is based on literary output. Van der Linden and Heerma van Voss, 'Introduction', 14-17, refer to 'the discipline's golden decades' on the basis of the literature, unspecified numbers of professional historians working in the subject, 'the internationalisation of the discipline' and its influence on other fields of history and the social sciences.

[41] McIlroy et al, 'Histories', 13; 'Origins', 23-5, 90-8.

[42] Hobsbawm, 'From Social History to the History of Society', 71-93; Briggs in Obelkevich, 'New Developments', 156.

[43] Palmer, 'Canada', 218.

[44] Harrison and Pollard, 'Editorial', 7.

[45] *Ibid.*, 6, 7.

[46] Harrison would later encounter these difficulties in relation to classes for trade unionists: McIlroy and Halstead 'A Very Different Historian', 134-5.

[47] See, for example, McIntyre, *Proletarian Science*; Simon, *Search for Enlightenment*; Fieldhouse and Associates, *History of Modern British Adult Education*.

[48] *ibid.*

[49] McIlroy, 'Origins', 28-30.

[50] McIlroy, 'Trade Union Education', 244-75.

[51] McIlroy, 'Origins'.

[52] This comment is based on the author's experience of the WEA and trade union education in the 1970s and 1980s.

[53] McIlroy, 'Origins', 100-102.

[54] Samuel, 'History Workshop 1966-80', 410-17; *idem*, *A Collectanea*; Eley and Nield *Future of Class*, 36-8.

[55] Samuel, *A Collectanea*; <http://hwj.oxfordjournals.org/content/by/year>.

[56] Irving, review of Allen et al., *Histories*, 256.

[57] This answers Irving's question as to why writing about British labour history typically assumes that labour history is an academic subject: see Irving, review of Allen et al., *Histories*, 256.

[58] Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*; Ashton and Keane, *People and Their Past*.

[59] <http://www.ruskincollege.history>; <http://www.harlech.ac.uk>; <http://www.fircroft.ac.uk>;
<http://www.hillcroft.ac.uk>; <http://www.newbattleabbeycollege.ac.uk>; <http://www.northern.ac.uk>

[60] Shelley and Calveley, *Learning with Trade Unions*.

[61] Based on comments to the author by representatives from Unison, Unite, GMB and RMT trade unions.

[62] <http://historyandpolicy-org>; Reid, 'Let the Enemy In'.

[63] Millar, *Labour College Movement*, 256; Keane, 'Raphael Samuel', 51-62.

[64] <http://www.aca.org.uk/curriculum/history>.

[65] See, for example, http://web.aqa.org.uk/pub_policies-pastpapers;
<http://web.aqa.org.uk/qual/gce/humanities/history>.

[66] Husbands et al., *Understanding History Teaching*, 10.

[67] See, for example, the statements of the Historical Association, <http://www.history.org.uk>; and the Better History Group <http://www.anglia.ac.uk/ruskin/en/home/news>.

[68] See, for example, Vernon, 'Too Important'; Hunt, 'Cosy Portrayal of the Past?'.

[69] The view that *History Workshop Journal* remains significantly attached to labour history and attracts a general as well as a professional audience, Irving, review, is mistaken. The journal's present concerns are with

forms of cultural and social history which typically have little to do with labour. Its editorial board and contributors are almost uniformly academic: cf. Barbara Taylor, 'History Workshop Journal', <http://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/HWJ.html>.

[70] See, for example, Macmillan, *Uses and Abuses of History*, passim.

[71] See, for example, Hobsbawm, 'Labour History and Ideology', 13; Harrison and Halstead, 'Editorial'; Hunt, 'Cosy Portrayal'.

[72] Campbell and Mclroy, *The State We're In*, 11-15.

[73] Crail, *Labour Movement Ancestors*; Campbell and Mclroy, *The State We're In*, 11-15.

[74] Kirk, 'Challenge, Crisis and Renewal?', 175.

[75] Figures from subscription list of *LHR* circulated by Maney Publishing autumn, 2010; Campbell and Mclroy, *The State We're In*, Table 2, 18. In addition, there are more lucrative institutional subscribers. Their numbers fell from 240 in 2001 to 211 in 2010, leaving the journal economically viable: *ibid.*, Table 3, 18.

[76] *ibid.*, 18, 19.

[77] Based on subscription lists, autumn 2010.

[78] Campbell and Mclroy, *The State We're In*, 24-8.

[79] Mclroy, 'Origins', 72.

[80] Although our survey encountered several academics who taught a module on labour history and were members of the SSLH yet did not perceive themselves as 'labour historians'. Students of Chartism constitute a thriving distinctive network whose annual conferences are sponsored by the SSLH.

[81] SSLH, *Constitution*, 1.

[82] Mclroy et al, 'Fifty Years On', 67.

[83] Figures calculated from *LHR* volumes 71-75. Other labour history journals which circulate in Britain and sometimes feature work by British historians include the long-established *International Review of Social History*, edited from the Institute of Social History in Amsterdam; the US journals *ILWCH*; *L-SWHA*; *Labor History*, an American journal edited in Britain; and *Labour History* (Australia).

[84] Campbell and Mclroy, *The State We're in*, 42-3.

[85] See for example, *LHR*, 66, No 2 (2001); 67, No 1; 67, No 2, (2002); 67, No 3 (2003).

[86] <http://www.nelh.net>; <http://www.workershistory.org>. In a sign of changing times the annual journal *North East Labour History* recently became *North East History*. The journal *North West Labour History* has in recent years attracted trade union finance.

[87] McIlroy, 'Origins', 52. More recently historians at Newcastle and Northumbria Universities have established a North East Labour and Society Research Group distinct from the labour history society although it publicises events through it.

[88] O'Connor, 'Irish Labour History Society', 147-59.

[89] Hopkin, 'Llafur', 129-46.

[90] Duncan, 'Scottish Labour History Society', 117-28.

[91] See ns 79, 80-81. Also relevant are the Socialist History Society which produces the journal *Socialist History*, edited and written largely by academics, although it organises events attended by a mixture of professional and lay historians; and the London Socialist Historians which runs a lively website and holds periodic meetings.

[92] Patmore, 'Australia', 255.

[93] <http://www.lawcha.org> This is not to overlook the question of the quality and uniformity of critical gaze and possible dissonance between judgements based on extensive direct experience of the position in Britain and reliance on external estimation of the position in others.

[94] I am grateful to Gerald Friedman for comments on the USA. See also, D. F. Noble, *Digital Diploma Mills* passim.

[95] See n 11.

[96] Berger, 'Introduction', 16.

[97] Berger, 'Interview with John Halstead', 201-12.

[98] McIlroy et al, 'Fifty Years On', 6-13.

[99] McPherson, 'What's the Matter with History?', 253.

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