



## **International Conference of Labour and Social History**

Internationale Tagung der HistorikerInnen der Arbeiter- und anderer sozialer Bewegungen  
Conference internationale d'histoire ouvrière et sociale

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### **59<sup>th</sup> ITH Conference**

#### **Worlds of Digital Labour**

**Linz/Upper Austria, 26–28 September 2024**

Conference Languages: English / German

#### **CALL FOR PAPERS**

The pitfalls of platform economies, struggles for unionisation in digital entertainment companies, outsourcing and exploitation in social media enterprises, fragile global commodity chains in hardware production: Topics of labour and digital industries are prominent in today's news headlines. These themes, however, have a history that goes back several decades. Studying industrial relations at the dawn of computing, the struggles over automation and digitization, and the emergence of new forms of work can provide us with a better understanding of digital labour relations and struggles. The 2024 ITH conference addresses the role of industrial relations, labour struggles and knowledge regimes in the history of computing and IT - both in computer-related industries (hardware and software) and the IT services sector shaping the "old", established industries. Covering the time frame between the establishment of the commercial computer industry in the post-war era through the breakthrough of home and personal computing in the late 1970s until the commodification of digital communication in the 1990s, and aiming at a global perspective, we would like to address questions that are crucial for the history and present of labour and digitization.

Possible questions could be:

What visions of future work were propelled by the introduction of computers, and how were these visions perceived by the workforce?

Which aspects of pre-digital labour shaped the conception of digital work? What was the effect of informal DIY cultures and countercultural ethics on structures and practices of digital labour?

How were IT workers (programmers, systems analysts or operators) perceived and how did they perceive themselves within traditional structures of labour organising?

To what extent did structural inequalities, especially questions of race, class and gender, come to the fore?

How did unions deal with the threats (and chances) of automation and digitization?

What new forms of work relations, vocational education and labour organising sprung up in newly formed digital industries such as microchip manufacturing, software fabrication or computer games production?

How did the global division of labour manifest itself in the computing and IT

industries over decades?

How did the various pathways into the digital age differ around the globe, especially when comparing developments in the United States and Western Europe with those in state socialist countries and the countries of the Global South?

What effects did the introduction of personal computing have on work relations, the atomisation of the labour force, as well as the images and narratives of small-scale entrepreneurship?

How did the introduction of mobile technologies change both the digital industries and broader work relations yet again?

We welcome papers that strive to address these and related questions, and highly welcome contributions focussing on regions that traditionally lay outside the geographical scope of digital history, such as Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Africa.

## **SUBMISSION**

Proposed papers should include:

- Abstract (max. 300 words)
- Biographical note (continuous text, max. 200 words)
- Full address and Email address

The abstract of the suggested paper should contain a separate paragraph explaining how and (if applicable) to which element(s) or question(s) of the Call for Papers the submitted paper refers. The short CV should give information on the applicant's contributions to the field of labour history, broadly defined, and specify (if applicable) relevant publications. For the purpose of information, applicants are invited to attach a copy of one of these publications to their application.

Proposals to be sent to Laurin Blecha: [conference@ith.or.at](mailto:conference@ith.or.at)

## **CONFERENCE PUBLICATION**

As a rule (i.e. with very few exceptions) the ITH publishes edited volumes arising from its conferences. Since 2013 the ITH conference volumes have been published in Brill's [Studies in Global Social History Series](#), edited by Marcel van der Linden. The ITH encourages the conference participants to submit their papers to this publication project. High-quality papers will be selected by the volume's editors.

## **TIME SCHEDULE**

Submission of proposals:	26 January 2024
Notification of acceptance:	1 March 2024
Full papers or presentation version:	12 August 2024

## **PREPARATORY GROUP**

Gleb J. Albert, University of Lucerne

Julia Gül Erdogan, University of Stuttgart

Michael Homberg, Leibniz Centre for Contemporary History Potsdam

Stefan Müller, Friedrich Ebert Foundation

## **THE ITH AND ITS MEMBERS**

The ITH is one of the worldwide known forums of the history of labour and social movements. The ITH favours research pursuing inclusive and global perspectives and open-ended comparative thinking. Following its tradition of cooperating with organisations of the labour movement, the ITH likewise puts emphasis on the conveyance of research outside the academic research community itself. Currently ca. 100 member institutions and a growing number of individual members from five continents are associated with the ITH.

Information on ITH publications in the past 50 years:

<https://www.ith.or.at/en/publications/>

Online ITH membership application form:

<https://www.ith.or.at/de/mitgliedschaft/>

