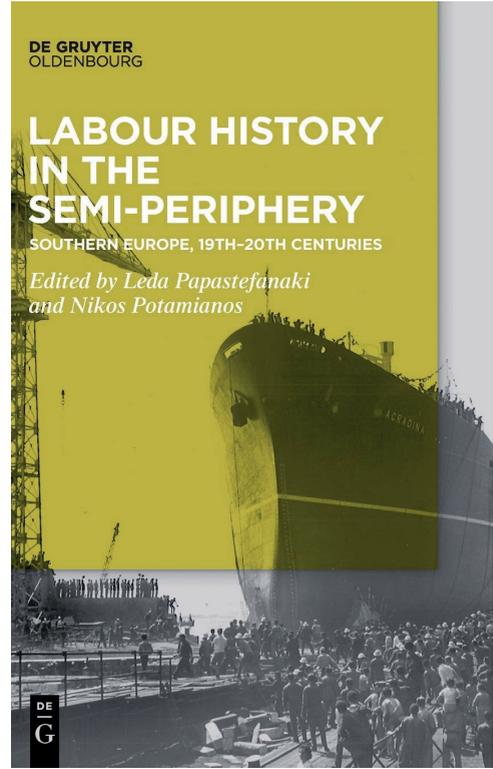


ON A CONTRIBUTION

TO NEVER-ENDING

JOURNEY OF

LABOUR HISTORY



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Labour history is one of the most diverse and controversial topics in literature, and such is the case for labour history of Mediterranean hinterland as well. The multi-author volume *Labour History in the Semi-periphery – Southern Europe, 19th–20th centuries* edited by Leda Papastefanaki and Nikos Potamianos bears this exact matter. With an increasing interest in labour history (and Marxist historiography, in general) due to systemic crisis of capitalism, the volume is just another answer to many questions.

The book consists of four parts and fourteen chapters in total, and an introduction by the editors. The first part comprises four chapters by Stavroula Verrarou, Daniel Alves, Anna Pina Paladini, and Vincent Gouzi, focusing on small property owners and labour. Verrarou challenges the conventional wisdom of hegemony of small property in rural Greece and stresses that this was only the case by the end of the nineteenth century, and there existed an interplay of rural labour and big property. This suggests that small owners, who also happened to be potential wage

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labourers, was in a class conflict against the big property to conserve their status. Gouzi draws a framework for the characteristics of industrial labour in Greece in twentieth century and compares it to other European economies in order to express its specificities – like prevalence of small size industrial entrepreneurship, independent employment, and gender division of labour. The chapter by Alves brings up a different question and discusses the history of shops' Sunday closing in Lisbon in the nineteenth century. It shows that the conflict of interest between shopkeepers and their assistants was at play and it wasn't until the eve of the First World War for some traditions to change. Then, Paladini analyses the changes in government policies regarding the artisans in Italy between 1925-1960. The main take here is that the changes in laws were somewhat positive (from the artisans' point of view) during the specified period and it was an opportunity for political parties to integrate artisans into political system.

The second part comprises three chapters, and questions formal and informal labour in different sectors. The chapter by Svetla Ianeva brings into discussion the coexistence of guild and non-guild labour in the central part of the Ottoman Balkans in the nineteenth century. It is apparent from the discussion that guild and non-guild labour were sometimes complementary and sometimes exclusionary, varying according to specific conditions. A chapter by one of the editors, Nikos Potamianos, examines the street vendors of early twentieth century Athens in terms of their survival against shops and their position in the class structure. While there are many and various factors for the survival of street vendors, the chapter points that there were some street vendors who identified themselves with retailing community, contrary to the general tendency to identify them with working class. In the third chapter of the second part, Maria Papatanas-siou addresses industrial child labour in the late imperial and the interwar Austria. She finds that

children's employment in industry was neither dominant nor negligible during the related period, and their career tended to move from factory to the putting-out industry.

The third and largest part of the volume is divided into five chapters and it addresses industrial labour relations in Southern Europe. Milan Balaban studies everyday life in the Bata Company town of Borovo (in Croatia) during the 1940s and the chapter concludes with specific conditions of the town with which the Bata Company tried to form ideal workers. Kostas Paloukis analyses the case of the neighbourhood of Peristeri, Athens in interwar period in order to demonstrate how refugees and migration both form and change a community during the time when class polarisation was evident. Going back to Italy, Anna Pellegrino examines the labour arbitration in Italy between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, expressed as individual cases of various situations between workers and employers. The chapter firmly concludes that those cases set the new limits of the employers' authority and paved the way for new relationships. The chapter by Paolo Raspadori focuses on corporate welfare in Italy between the 1920s and 1950s. The author finds that the welfare services in Italian companies improved between 1923-1955 in general, while they slowly retracted from healthcare and housing services due to pervasion of welfare state policies in those fields. For the last chapter of the third part, Andrea Umberto Gritti addresses the efforts to control labour conflict in its general form and at the Falck Steelworks between 1948-1962. It is concluded that the company was successful with founding an imagined community of the corporation which served to management's plans.

The chapters by Enric Garcia-Domingo and Aurora Iannello constitute the fourth and last part of the volume. Garcia-Domingo analyses the history of the profession of *maquinista naval* (ship engineer) in Spain between 1877-1980. It is concluded from the series of regulations investigated in this chapter that it took a century for this

profession to get social and academic recognition. Lastly, Iannello studies working conditions of Palermo shipyard between 1945-1970 and trade union activity of *cantieristi*, the Palermo workers. She concludes that while the Palermo shipyard had highly qualified labour force like the rest of European shipyards, they experienced a lack of bargaining power due to specific conditions of shipyard's geographical position.

Although the choice of title inevitably reminds the reader of world-systems theory, the editors make it clear in the introduction that the volume in general doesn't belong to any school or current. Thus, it leaves us with the idea of sketching a geographical -rather than a theoretical- framework, hinting that the area examined throughout the volume have some characteristics and historical context in common (late industrialization supposedly being one of them). All in all, the volume utilizes archival resources on a vast

scale, while integrating them to different contexts of agriculture, industry, trade, and marine. It also helps to showcase different aspects of labour relations in different sectors – like the direct relation of production between landowner and worker, the role of guild in artisanship, government intervention in trade etc. While it seems like a greater part is dedicated to the 20th century in terms of time, and to Italy and Greece in terms of place, the former is understandable due to semi-peripheric characteristics of the research area in question. However, one may argue that the volume could definitely benefit from more contributions on diverse locations, and this rightfully is the goal to be fulfilled by future studies. Achieving this with contributions like the aforementioned volume here will greatly feed the literature of comparative history, and help us to put things in a larger context.