

## Editor's Note

Charles Smith and Joan Sangster

Volume 84, Fall 2019

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1066533ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/lt.2019.0028>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (print)

1911-4842 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this document

Smith, C. & Sangster, J. (2019). Editor's Note. *Labour / Le Travail*, 84, 9–10.  
<https://doi.org/10.1353/lt.2019.0028>

## EDITORS' NOTE

TRANSITIONS. IF THERE HAS BEEN a driving theme in the teaching and researching of labour and working-class history over the past decade it is clearly one of dealing with broad social and political transitions. Growing out of the New Left movements in the 1960s and early 1970s, labour history found a vibrant community of young scholars eager to engage with the theretofore unwritten and largely forgotten history of working people and their struggles. While it would be inaccurate to argue that academia fully embraced these scholars in its history, sociology, and political science departments, there was certainly a space for labour and working-class history in the larger and expanding curriculum.

Today, we find ourselves dealing with a radically transformed environment. While there is no less interest in the study of working people and their struggles by a new generation of scholars, there is far less enthusiasm within academia to build and expand the space for studying working-class history. As the founding generation of labour history scholars moves toward retirement, a series of questions remains for our discipline over the next generation: What is the state of working-class history today? What are the issues, themes, and events that need more – and different – research? How do we celebrate the struggles and scholarship of the past, and put this writing in context, yet also reflect critically on the need for new approaches? What is the future for the study of working-class history?

These questions were at the centre of a series of conferences in 2018 and 2019. The first conference, organized by the Canadian Committee on Labour History (CCLH), occurred in Saskatoon on 13 and 14 October 2018. Entitled *Re-Working Class: Setting a New Agenda for Canadian Labour and Working-Class History*, the conference brought together scholars, union researchers, and activists to examine the current state of Canadian labour and working-class history while also seeking to chart strategies for moving our research and writing forward. Over the two days, participants examined critical questions about the teaching of labour history, commemorating past struggles, current writing on class and its intersections with gender and race, and how we might ask new questions in our disciplinary and interdisciplinary research. The *Labour/Le Travail* editors were part of the organizing committee; we believe that, if the field is to be vital and revitalized, we need these important venues for discussion and debate. Some of the questions posed about teaching in one of the conference panels, in which presenters examined some of the contemporary

challenges of teaching labour history, appear in this edition of *Labour/Le Travail*. Another CCLH conference is now in the making.

A second conference took place at the University of Winnipeg in May 2019 commemorating the centennial of the Winnipeg General Strike. Entitled *Building a Better World: 1919–2019*, the exceptionally organized conference brought together academics, activists, labour union members, and the general public both to explore the history of the strike and to ask new questions about what the struggles of the past can teach us about organizing new struggles today. The Winnipeg General Strike remains a foundational event in Canadian working-class history, which is not to say it is simply celebrated unreflectively or that historians' interpretations of 1919 have not shifted over time. One earlier transition was a special issue of *Labour/Le Travail* in 1984 (vol. 13), which shifted our discussions of the national, transnational, global, and gendered nature of the post–World War I labour revolt.

Recognizing the importance of the Winnipeg General Strike, this issue of *Labour/Le Travail* provides a snapshot of 1919: we are presenting two poems on 1919, written by George Elliot Clarke and Giovanna Riccio; a previously unpublished speech by Bill Pritchard; and, on our cover, the work of artist Robert Kell, from his Winnipeg 1919 series.

Finally, between 21 and 23 June 2019, a third conference, entitled *Feminism, History, and Theory*, a conference to celebrate the work of Joan Sangster, occurred at Trent University. At the centre of this conference was the foundational work of *Labour/Le Travail* co-editor Joan Sangster, in the fields of feminism, colonialism, and women and working-class history. More than a tribute, the conference sought to bring together emerging and established scholars to bridge new scholarship in labour and women's history in a constantly transitioning academia that does not always champion these themes. Class relations and labour provided a thematic and interpretive thread throughout the conference, often presented in conversation with colonialism, the history of the left, feminism, and women's history. These too are themes that *Labour/Le Travail* has championed in its pages and we hope it will continue to develop new scholarship in these areas, contributing to these critically important conversations as we seek new paths to build and expand our discipline.

Solidarity,

*Charles Smith*

*Joan Sangster*