



CHAPTER 1: COURSE INTRODUCTION

UNIT 1: HOW TO STUDY AND ENGAGE IN THE ONLINE COURSE "LABOUR HISTORY"

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SCRIPT OF THE VIDEO LECTURE

A comradely welcome to our “Labour history” online course!

“History is a Set of Lies Agreed Upon” is a widely cited statement. By designing this course, we were aware of this tempting trap. We clearly do not claim to be in possession of the historical truth. As you start studying, we would like to draw your attention to some important questions we have been grappling with in developing this course, which may be helpful in understanding and engaging better with its content.

First, how to tell this remarkably rich history of the labour movement spanning over more than two centuries and with such a profound impact on the historical trajectory of countries across the globe in an online course? Instead of offering a chronological account of events, we decided to engage through some key questions facing the working class today: Why has labour organised historically? And what were its aspirations and political projects for the working class and the society at large? What has been the role of working class struggles in advancing democracy? And what were the main tensions and contradictions? How has labour responded to the challenge of migration? And what can we learn from the relationship of labour to other social movements? Even if each



question is dealt as a separate chapter, the content of each chapter sheds some light also on the others.

Second, how to approach these main questions? Here we decided to organise each chapter as a combination of case study videos analysing a particular historical episode and a core video that seeks to bring together the main learnings from these stories and raise some questions for further discussion. It is important to emphasise here that none of these case studies can tell the complete story and this is for two main reasons. On the one hand, keeping the videos short means more pressure to condense and focus on only those aspects of the story that are most relevant to the theme of the chapter, although the key reading accompanying each video seeks to provide more context to the story. On the other hand, the purpose of each case study is neither to analyse every possible aspect of a story, nor to provide a final version on which we can all agree. Instead, each case study serves more as a teaser to kick-start a discussion about different aspects of that story, some of which we may not agree with, but also on other aspects that may not even be discussed in the video lecture. And most importantly, we want to open a conversation about what each story teaches us. How does it resonate with the questions facing the labour movement currently and in our particular context? We hope that the zoom workshops, which are a space for engagement with the course contributors, become also a comradely space for difficult questions and tough debates and thus for deepening the learning process.

And third, how to make stories from a specific historical, but also geographical context resonate with the activists from across the world? From the inception phase of this course we aimed to have in each chapter case studies from all the regions. However, despite our best efforts, some regions and sub-regions remain underrepresented. It is to fill this gap that we strongly encourage you to engage with the Exercise questions below each video lecture. They provide a possibility to reflect on the particular topic of that video and in doing so reflecting and telling the labour history of our own country.



In a nutshell, it is absolutely impossible to tell the complete history of the countless struggles of the working class people. What you will find in this course is only a small fraction of the variety of labour responses to the questions of their time and some of the main reasons behind these responses and eventually the trajectory of each story. Incomplete as they are and regardless of the region they come from, we hope that you bring the learnings of these stories from the past in your own organisations to inspire political debates in our labour movements today.

At this point, some words of heartfelt thanks and appreciation to people who made this course possible. To all the contributors of this course who patiently wrote and rewrote their video scripts and key readings several times and sometimes even recorded their videos more than once. To all our amazing certified trainers who provided invaluable feedback, which have greatly improved this course. Finally, this course would have not been possible without Peter Rossman: his exceptionally deep and vast knowledge of labour history, his persistence to reach and convince historians from across the globe to contribute to the course and his unwavering dedication to the labour movement. He is the main driver of the idea of an online course on labour history and the main force behind the materialisation of this course - one of his many precious legacies to the labour movement.

Enjoy the course and stay engaged in the different spaces for interacting with other activists and course contributors!