



Invitation

Wednesday, 11 May 2016, 5pm



Gesellschaft
zur Förderung
des ZMO e.V.

“Produce or Perish”: The Crisis of the late 1940s and the Place of Labour in Postcolonial India

Annual Lecture of the *Gesellschaft zur Förderung des ZMO e.V.*
by **Prof Dr Ravi Ahuja** (University of Göttingen)

Venue

Zentrum Moderner Orient
Kirchweg 33

14129 Berlin

GEFÖRDERT VOM



Bundesministerium
für Bildung
und Forschung

A major strike movement emerged in India soon after the end of the Second World War extending into the early years of independence (1946-1950). Though it has rarely been discussed by historians, it was characterized, a decade later, as a period of 'industrial strife unprecedented in the history of India' (V.V. Giri). At its peak in 1946 and 1947, this strike movement was spread more widely than ever before across geographical space, involved many workers outside the older, factory-centred labour movement strongholds and included, among others, numerous employees of the expanded Indian state apparatus. It triggered a spurt of legislative activity on the part of the Interim Government and the first Government of independent India. In fact, crucial foundations of Indian labour and social legislation were laid during these years.

I attempt a preliminary analysis of this event, of its interdependence with other contemporary social and political mobilizations and of its political repercussions. My specific contention is that India's late 1940s were, among other things, a catalytic moment in the definition of 'labour' as a political and social category. I argue that the years from 1946 to about 1950 should be conceived of as a catalytic moment because long-term processes that dated back to the First World War at the least were condensed then under the pressure of a profound social crisis that unsettled, for a brief period, the structures of social and economic power and not only inter-community relations and the constitution of the state. Consequently, this acceleration of a long-term tendency gave rise to a regime of labour regulation that has proved, in several of its elements, resilient to change over almost seven decades.

Having taught at the University of Heidelberg and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London, **Ravi Ahuja** is presently Professor of Modern Indian History at the Centre for Modern Indian Studies in Göttingen. His research interests include the history of work and labour since the eighteenth century and the social histories of 'public works' and warfare.