



Invitation

Wednesday, 2 May 2018, 2 pm

The Ethiopian Labour Movement, 1960-2010

Lecture by **Samuel Andreas Admasie**

The Ethiopian labour movement and the struggle over wages, labour rights and conditions constitutes an under-researched aspect of recent Ethiopian history. Despite the fact that the trade union movement has formed the largest organised and membership-based civil society force over the past half century, it has been dismissed as irrelevant and weak. Despite the fact that it has repeatedly broken out of state control regimes during key conjunctures, it has consistently been described as entirely co-opted. When, moreover, militancy and labour radicalism has become too apparent to ignore, these features have tended to be explained as mechanical outcomes of external influences and subsumed under broader political headings.

The research presented in this talk is based on sources from the archives of the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Bahir Dar textile factory, the Ethio-Djibouti railway, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, and the ILO, the Tom Killion archive at the Hoover Institution, local newspapers, and finally interviews with key participants.

The findings demonstrate how the Ethiopian labour movement in fact has repeatedly developed an assertiveness and militancy incompatible with its characterisation in the literature, and how these cycles have impacted on shifting of real wages and conditions of labour. In particular, the period 1963-1975 saw pronounced mobilisation and a steadily increasing level of militancy and assertiveness that drove a sustained incline in real wages. The findings therefore point to the importance of the labour movement as a vehicle for the agency of Ethiopian workers. These findings are increasingly relevant within the present conjuncture, which is characterised by a fast process of proletarianisation, and real wages which are historically low.

Samuel Andreas Admasie is a graduate of Addis Ababa University, the International Institute of Social Studies and Leiden University, who recently completed a dissertation on the history of the Ethiopian labour movement for the University of Basel and the University of Pavia. Since 2013, he serves as the regional representative of the International Institute of Social History in Africa, and he is a member of the editorial board of *Labour History*. He has taught at Addis Ababa University and the University of Hargeisa.

Venue

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