

## Fifty Years

This issue, and the supplement published simultaneously, conclude the fiftieth volume of the *International Review of Social History*. In 1956 when the first issue appeared, A.J.C. Rüter, director of the International Institute of Social History (IISH) at the time, provided three reasons for launching the journal. He observed that the “rather meagre” interest in social history in the current journals (including the French *Annales*) was “a fact readily explained by the space available on the one hand and the supply of manuscripts on the other”. He believed, moreover, that there was a demand for an *international* medium, where social historians from different countries and continents could exchange views on mutual similarities and differences. Finally, Rüter noted that social historiography, which had slowly come to fruition under the protective aegis of economic historiography, had become emancipated and had acquired its own dynamics.<sup>1</sup>

Social history has now evolved into a broad and variegated discipline with a *raison d'être* that is rarely questioned. Several other professional periodicals now complement the *Review*, including *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (since 1958), *Journal of Social History* (since 1967); *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* (since 1974); *International Labor and Working Class History* (since 1975); *Social History* (since 1976); and *Histoire et sociétés* (since 2002). Social historiography is no longer isolated from broader historical scholarship. And communication between social historians from different countries and continents has intensified. Overall, the mission that the *Review* aimed to promote appears to have been accomplished.

We should take care, however, to avoid becoming complacent, as the old challenges have made way for new ones. As holds true for most other social-historical journals, the *Review* was long dominated by Eurocentric mindsets: the “modern” era was believed to have begun in Europe and North America and to have gradually spread to the other continents; the temporality of the North Atlantic region determined the periodization of changes throughout the rest of the world. Encouraged in part by discussions at the IISH, subsequent editorial committees have attempted to overcome this Eurocentrism since the late 1980s.<sup>2</sup>

Although we have managed to cover the history of Asia, Africa, and Latin America far more extensively in recent years, the change of course

1. A.J.C. Rüter, “Introduction”, *International Review of Social History*, 1 (1956), pp. 1–7.

2. Heralding the effort is the statement “Free and Unfree Labour” of the Editorial Committee in the *International Review of Social History*, 35 (1990), pp. 1–2.

remains incomplete. We are becoming increasingly aware that mere geographic expansion of the scope will not suffice, and that far more daunting challenges await. The “globalization” of the discipline will enable us to reveal previously invisible transnational connections, to reconsider many of our old concepts and theories – without abandoning our pursuit of clear causal explanations – and to integrate insights from contiguous disciplines. We hope that the scholarly community will join us in these explorations during the years ahead.

*The Editorial Committee*