ILWCH and Labor History: Origins, Vision, and Trajectory: Introduction

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David Montgomery was a towering figure as a historian, the leading US labor historian of his generation and a founding father of the New Labor History.

He was also central in the development of ILWCH, its editor for more than a decade, beginning in 1977. Montgomery transformed a newsletter with a European orientation into an engaged, but scholarly, journal of international labor history and remained a leading member of its editorial board until his recent passing.

For all these reasons, we decided to start this fortieth anniversary issue of ILWCH with a conversation with David Montgomery, arranged specially for publication in this issue. We did not know at the time that this would be one of David's last interviews, perhaps even his final words about ILWCH and labor history. Michael Hanagan and Geoffrey Field, who had shared many years with David Montgomery on the ILWCH editorial board, conducted and edited the interview. It begins with the founding of ILWCH in 1972, but ranges widely over the past four decades, discussing changes in the field and the journal brought about by such paradigm shifts as gender analysis, identity theory, and the cultural turn. The conversation concludes with Montgomery's views about labor history today and tomorrow, including his own last research project on workers and the revolt against colonialism in the twentieth century, an international history project interrupted by his untimely death.

Field and Hanagan introduce and frame their conversation with Montgomery in the essay that opens this first part of our fortieth anniversary issue. "ILWCH: Forty Years On" is a pocket history of ILWCH, tracing its moves from California to Pittsburgh and then to Yale, The New School, and Rutgers, and the leading roles played by David Montgomery, but also by Robert Wheeler, Helmut Gruber, Louise Tilly, Ira Katznelson and Dorothy Sue Cobble in these changes of host institution and leadership. Their essay also summarizes the debates over ILWCH's direction, scope and subject that punctuated those changes and reflected their eras, making it a perfect companion reading to the wide-ranging interview that follows.

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