

## Representations of the social question (Groningen)

Christianne Smit

Call for papers

Imagination and commitment. Representations of the social question  
International Conference, University of Groningen, The Netherlands  
10-11 May 2007

The 'social question', as it was raised in the western world between approximately 1870 and 1914, addressed individuals as well as local and national governments. Awareness of the circumstances in which the working classes were working and living expanded. Historical research on this subject has focused mainly on the political implications: the incorporating of social issues in political writings or party programs, political agenda setting, social policy and the roots of the modern welfare-state.

This kind of research has neglected the representation of the social question, taking it for granted and moving on to political consequences and possible solutions. Whereas, however, there is every reason to study the process of representation of the social question itself. The many ways in which the social question is represented focus on the interpretations of the problem, and its place in society. Not only content, but also the different forms of representation are constructed with specific purposes and effects. Representations behold an analysis of social issues and their moral and political implications, sometimes in embryonic yet essential form.

Therefore, a broad perspective on representations of the social question is needed, to enhance our understanding of this important historical issue, which is in fact one of the essentially contested questions of social and political history. This interdisciplinary conference – including the fields of history, social and political sciences, media studies, literary sciences and art history – will not only provide us with new perspectives on the social question itself. It could also help to broaden the definition of politics, and shed light upon the social and political implications of art and literature.

Keynotes will be given by:

Patrick Joyce, Professor of Modern History, University of Manchester,  
and

Seth Koven, Associate Professor of History, Rutgers University.

This conference will focus on two themes:

1. Form, genre and style of representations of the social question

Perspectives: Which forms of representations were thought to be suitable? Fiction or non-fiction, text or image? Why was this author or artist fascinated by social issues? For which purposes was the social question represented in this specific form or genre? (awareness, moral education, entertainment, aesthetics, (political) solutions?) Was realism predominant as a style in visual arts and literature? Which different discourses evolved around this issue?

2. Social and political effects of representations of the social question

Perspectives: In what ways did specific representations influence imagination, knowledge and ideas on the social question? What kind of podiums and media were used? In which ways were society and politics influenced by the representations? Did they place the social question on public and political agendas? Was there an international arena or network in which representations of the social question were transferred? What role played representations in fostering commitment to solving the social question?

Papers are welcomed on the representation of the social question in: literature and theatre, journalism, pamphlets, political speeches, conferences and exhibitions, photography, visual arts, and on their respective reception and various effects on politics and society.

Proposals (200-300 words) should be submitted to Dr. Ilja van der Broek (I.M.van.den.Broek@rug.nl) or Dr. Christianne Smit (C.A.L.Smit@rug.nl), the conference organisers, by no later than Monday 8th January 2007.

Dr. Ilja van den Broek  
History Department,  
Groningen University

Dr. Christianne Smit  
History Department,  
Groningen University

Conference website:

<http://www.rug.nl/grssh/research/researchgroups/dpk/representationconference>

See also:

<http://odur.let.rug.nl/politicalculture/>

<http://www.rug.nl/grssh/research/researchgroups/dpk>

Reference:

CFP: Representations of the social question (Groningen). In: ArtHist.net, Sep 13, 2006 (accessed May 14,

2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/28491>>.