Sociology alumnus receives best dissertation award

The Labor History Journal has awarded Wits sociology alumnus, Lucien Van der Walt (PhD, 2007) its prestigious international prize for the best PhD dissertation of 2007.

Van der Walt’s thesis, *Anarchism and Syndicalism in South Africa, 1904-1921: Rethinking the History of Labour and the Left* won the prize for the best PhD on a labour topic - historical or contemporary - regardless of discipline. The Journal is widely considered the pre-eminent publication for historical scholarship in its field in the world.

The award is made based on the significance, originality and quality of research, the sophistication of methodology, the clarity of presentation and cogency of arguments and the contribution to the field of labour studies.

Van der Walt’s thesis looked at the influence of anarchism and syndicalism on left, labour and nationalist movements in southern Africa from the 1890s through the 1920s. Internationally, this was a period of widespread anarchist and syndicalist influence.

Van der Walt showed that, contrary to conventional wisdom and partisan accounts, these currents had a pervasive influence locally as well. This radical tradition worked across the colour line and across borders. It pioneered socialism and labour unionism amongst people of colour who were sceptical of both African and Afrikaner nationalism and it aimed at a universal human community based on internationalism, self-management and libertarian socialism.

Van der Walt was supervised by Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER) Professor Jonathan Hyslop (PhD, 1991) who commented: "Van der Walt's thesis is a remarkable feat of scholarship which effectively challenges much of the received wisdom in South African labour history. The award of this prize is richly deserved international recognition for truly original work."