

CENTER FOR LABOR AND A JUST ECONOMY
AT HARVARD LAW SCHOOL

YEAR IN REVIEW

2024



CENTER FOR LABOR
& A JUST ECONOMY
AT HARVARD LAW SCHOOL

A LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Colleagues:

As I reflect on all that we accomplished at the Center for Labor and a Just Economy in 2024, I am filled with gratitude and determination. Let's start with gratitude. I'm grateful for all the collaboration and partnerships that we were able to forge this year and the way that these relationships enhanced our work. I'm grateful for:

- Our visit at the beginning of the year from Shawn Fain, president of the United Auto Workers, who inspired our Harvard Trade Union Program participants, students and community with his call for working class solidarity as the only route to a fair economy and a just society.
- All the unions, worker organizations, practitioners, policymakers, organizers, colleagues and students who contributed to our groundbreaking "Building Worker Power in Cities and States Toolkit," and who continue to contribute to ensure that the toolkit remains a go-to resource for states and localities looking for ways to empower workers despite federal preemption.
- Leaders like FTC Chair Lina Khan and DOJ Antitrust Division Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Doha Mekki who came to Cambridge to work with us and to share with our students and our community their vision for anti-trust and fair competition laws that value the interests of workers as much as the interests of consumers and corporations.
- Our partners across the university who have deepened and amplified our work on the important role of the labor movement in tackling big challenges, like protecting democracy, facilitating the transition to an electric vehicle future, raising awareness of the climate-driven threat to workers from exposure to excessive heat on the job and understanding how AI is transforming the experience of work.

Of course, I'm so grateful for our team at CLJE. You can see from the pages that follow that we have been incredibly busy in 2024. I teased in our 2023 Year in Review that we were growing the CLJE team – I'm grateful that prediction came true. In January, Michelle Miller came on board and throughout 2024 has opened so many doors for CLJE in the many urgent conversations going on around the country and the world about AI and the future of work. We also welcomed several new fellows whose research is making important advances in our understanding of CLJE's core issues, including [Max Kiefel](#), [Ava Liu](#), [Renaye Manley](#) and [Raj Nayak](#).

Let's move on to determination. We are determined in 2025 to continue to operate as a hub for collaborative research, policy, and analysis to empower working people, and to continue to bring advocates, lawyers, policymakers, communicators, and academics together to develop innovative strategies. More specifically, we are determined to:

- Grow our “Building Worker Power in Cities and States Toolkit” and disseminate it widely to our network;
- Deliver research-based insights on how AI is changing the experience of work, focusing on its impact on the lives of working-class women;
- Explore the role that unions play in educating members about democratic norms and the political issues most salient for them; and
- Continue to lead on mapping the future of labor law, particularly how that future is being shaped by the Supreme Court’s Constitutional and administrative law doctrinal shifts and what could happen if these shifts result in invalidation of the National Labor Relations Act.

We know that our mission isn’t an easy one – this year or any year. But we are grateful to be in this work with so many wonderful colleagues, and we are determined to do good alongside you.

In solidarity,
Sharon

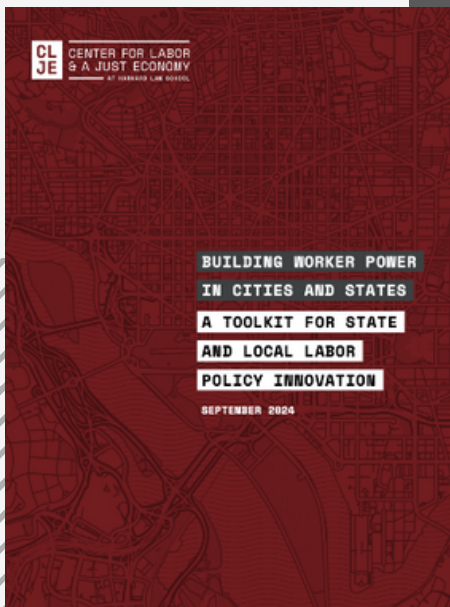


Sharon Block
Executive Director
Center for Labor and a Just Economy

STATE AND LOCAL POLICY

Labor law reform efforts have stalled at the federal level, and the Supreme Court's preemption doctrine constrains what states and localities can do to adopt policies that impact collective bargaining. Despite such challenges, workers and their unions have continued to find innovative paths to building power, including by pursuing policy change at the state and local level. Our state and local policy work focuses on developing our understanding of the possibilities for worker power-building policies in cities and states.

BUILDING WORKER POWER IN CITIES AND STATES: A TOOLKIT FOR STATE AND LOCAL POLICY INNOVATION



This Labor Day, we launched “Building Worker Power in Cities and States: A Toolkit for State and Local Labor Policy Innovation.” A resource designed for policymakers, organizers, strategists, researchers, communicators, and lawyers, this toolkit surveys the landscape of worker power-building policies that have been — or might be — attempted at the state and local levels.

This interactive toolkit includes:

- 11 topical sections including state constitutional amendments, regulatory approaches to AI, sectoral standard-setting boards, and protections for excluded categories of workers
- Options for state and local action
- Analyses of preemption risk
- Policy models and worker testimonies

TESTIMONY

WASHINGTON STATE SENATE LABOR AND COMMERCE COMMITTEE WORK SESSION

In September, CLJE faculty and staff presented an overview of the toolkit before a bipartisan group of state legislators at the Washington State Senate Labor and Commerce Committee Work Session. Other topics discussed at the work session included the implications of labor law preemption and recent Supreme Court decisions on worker protections.



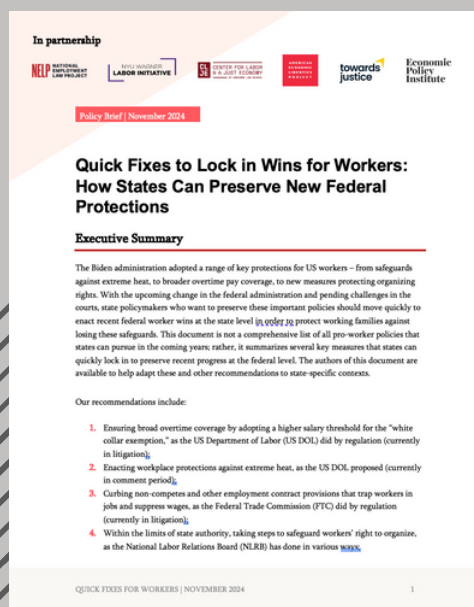
CONVENING

WORKER POWER AND UNEMPLOYMENT
INSURANCE WORKSHOP

Recent UI policy innovations have exemplified how states can design benefits systems in ways that empower workers and their organizations, making these programs more responsive to workers' needs and more effective at advancing an equitable economy. This workshop convened a wide range of stakeholders – including workers, advocates, academics, union leaders and policy experts – to take a deep-dive into these examples to learn lessons from implementation.



POLICY BRIEF

QUICK FIXES TO LOCK IN WINS FOR WORKERS:
HOW STATES CAN PRESERVE NEW FEDERAL
PROTECTIONS

This policy brief provides an overview of actions states can take to lock in federal policy wins for workers. Co-authored with the National Employment Law Project, the NYU Wagner Labor Initiative, American Economic Liberties Project, Towards Justice, and Economic Policy Institute, this resource includes policy models and other resources intended to serve as a guide for state legislators and governors invested in protecting workers’ rights and economic security.

CLJE FELLOWS: RAJ NAYAK

Raj Nayak previously served in a range of senior roles at the Department of Labor during the Obama and Biden Administrations, including as the Assistant Secretary for Policy, Secretary's Deputy Chief of Staff, and Senior Counsel to the Solicitor. At CLJE, Nayak is working on strategies to promote worker power in the wake of the Supreme Court's recent precedent impacting federal protections for workers, consumers, and the environment.

Possibly the biggest change the [Supreme Court] has wrought [in recent years] is laying the groundwork to profoundly constrain the ability of our national government to ensure basic protections across a range of contexts: for workers, consumers, the environment... Instead of playing a supporting role, state governments must now more than ever play a starring role in protecting workers' rights.

- SHARON BLOCK AND RAJ NAYAK,
"PICKING UP THE SLACK ON WORKERS'
RIGHTS: A NEW STATE STRATEGY" IN
ONLABOR



TECH & LABOR

Across sectors, the integration of untested, emerging technologies into workflows and management processes has ramped up considerably over the past decade. While these technologies can be beneficial to workers, they also have the potential to degrade work, negatively re-shape discipline and performance evaluation, and establish limitless surveillance of workers.

In response, CLJE is exploring a framework for empowering workers in shaping the impact of AI and emerging technologies on the experience of work.

MICHELLE MILLER, DIRECTOR OF INNOVATION

Michelle Miller joined CLJE as Director of Innovation after a decade as co-director of Coworker, an organization she also co-founded that nurtures early stage worker-led organizing across multiple industries. Miller pioneered the labor movement's research and response to the proliferation of software and technology tools being used to manage and surveil workers and working class people.



The labor movement has the potential to profoundly impact the development of technologies and ensure that they provide benefit, not harm, to all people in the future.

– MICHELLE MILLER, IN THE PROMISES AND PERILS OF AI AT WORK: A Q&A WITH MICHELLE MILLER | ONLABOR

REPORT

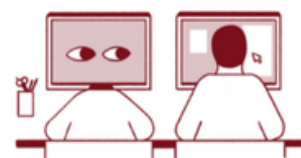
WORKER POWER AND VOICE IN THE AI RESPONSE

This report outlines a series of action-oriented recommendations to respond to the use of artificial intelligence in the workplace, such as banning the use of AI to suppress union organizing, mandating an AI Impact Monitor, requiring access to human beings when algorithm-based decisions such as firings are made, and encouraging new penalties when AI-driven surveillance is misused.

PRESS COVERAGE: How to protect workers in the age of AI, according to Harvard IN FAST COMPANY

Worker Power and Voice in the AI Response

January 2024



Center for Labor and a Just Economy at Harvard Law School

PANEL

CONFERENCE ON THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF AI

“We can’t be so dazzled by technology that we lose sight of the fact that if the AI business model can’t accommodate abiding by principles of decent work in their supply chain, then there is something very wrong with that business model.”

- SHARON BLOCK, “LIGHTNING TALKS: THE AI STACK EXAMINED,” AT THE HARVARD KENNEDY SCHOOL ASH CENTER FOR DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND INNOVATION



COMMENTARY: AI ETHICS AT OXFORD

CURRENT AI CHALLENGES TO THE FUTURE(S) OF WORK

Sharon Block, Isabelle Ferreras (University of Louvain and CLJE Senior Research Associate), Michelle Miller, and Jeremias Adams-Prassl (University of Oxford) published a piece on the AI Ethics at Oxford Blog discussing the challenges as well as opportunities posed by the integration of AI in workplaces around the globe, including that which presents a chance to “reopen questions as to the distribution of power in the workplace... to create new norms for participation and co-governance... [and] to promote an ethical form of AI.”



ANTITRUST AND LABOR

Consolidated corporate power and anti-competitive business practices have long had impacts on labor markets and the economy in ways that affect workers' wages, benefits, and working conditions, as well as their capacity to organize and bargain collectively. Our work in this area this year explored the intersection of antitrust policy, labor market competition, and workers' rights.

EVENT: LINA KHAN, FTC

ANTITRUST, LABOR, AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

In February, we hosted Lina Khan, Chair of the Federal Trade Commission, for an evening panel event with the Harvard Law community on the relationship between antitrust and labor. In a lively discussion with Sharon Block and many HLS students, Khan discussed the collaborative impact of federal interagency efforts, the effect of noncompete agreements on working people, and the protection of worker privacy in an increasingly AI-enabled world.



Credit: Lorin Granger

"A basic tenet of the American experiment is that real liberty means freedom from economic coercion and from the arbitrary unaccountable power that comes with economic domination. This is just an incredibly important and exciting moment for government to be fighting corporate power and fighting monopoly power and unlawful uses of that power to really hurt Americans."

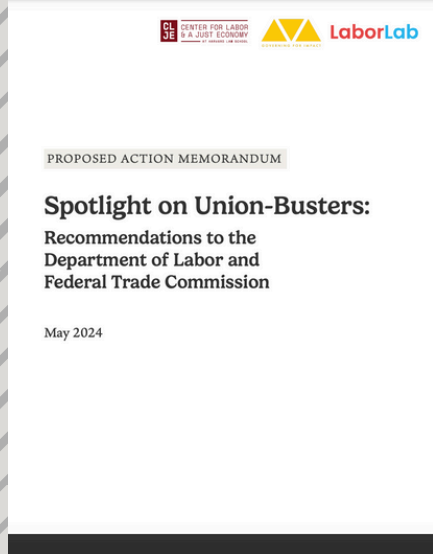
- LINA KHAN, FTC CHAIR, IN "ANTITRUST, LABOR, AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY"

PRESS COVERAGE: [Four Questions with FTC Chair Lina Khan](#) IN HARVARD LAW TODAY



Credit: Lorin Granger

MEMORANDUM



SPOTLIGHT ON UNION-BUSTERS: RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION

In this memorandum, Governing for Impact (GFI), LaborLab, and CLJE outline strategic actions consistent with existing law that the agencies can take to protect workers' right to organize and make informed decisions about unionization, free from unduly coercive anti-union behavior. The report proposes changes the DOL's Office of Labor-Management Standards (OLMS) can make to the reporting requirements mandated by the Labor Management Reporting and Disclosure Act (LMRDA) to increase transparency around the scope of companies' use of anti-union firms in unionization drives. In addition, the organizations recommend that the FTC investigate whether persuader firms facilitate unlawful conspiracies between competing employers to hold down wages and prevent unionization.

EVENT: DOHA MEKKI, DOJ ANTITRUST DIVISION

LABOR MARKET COMPETITION AND WORKERS' RIGHTS

In October, Doha Mekki, Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General at the Department of Justice, Antitrust Division delivered engaging remarks to the Harvard Law School community about how the agency's enforcement efforts have been informed by an understanding of the impact of labor market competition on working people's lives.



Credit: Steve Gilbert

PRESS COVERAGE: Antitrust boosts labor gains IN HARVARD LAW TODAY



Credit: Lorin Granger

LABOR AND DEMOCRACY

Unions have long played a key role in strengthening and protecting democracy. Our work on this topic explores strategies that go beyond the transactional nature of the relationship between workers and candidates, and considers the role of the labor movement in legitimizing and defending democracy.

SEMINAR SERIES

LABOR AND DEMOCRACY SEMINAR SERIES

Our ongoing seminar series with the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard Kennedy School invites globally recognized scholars to present cutting-edge research on the intersection of labor and democracy.



ALEXANDER HERTEL-FERNANDEZ, “Unions, Political Engagement, and the Practice of Voting”



AIKO SCHMEISSER, “Do Unions Shape Political Ideologies at Work?”

WEBINAR

THE ROLE OF UNIONS IN ELECTIONS & DEMOCRACY

In recent years, American politics, union organizing, and workplace dynamics have changed dramatically, prompting a reevaluation of unions’ role in protecting and strengthening democracy. Our pre-election webinar, “The Role of Unions in Elections and Democracy” featured Caitlin Fishman, Political Director, Service Employees International Union (SEIU); Jake Grumbach, Associate Professor at the University of California, Berkeley, Goldman School of Public Policy; and Jessica Tang, President of American Federation of Teachers AFL-CIO (AFT) Massachusetts in a conversation moderated by Sharon Block.



LABOR IN THE JUST TRANSITION

The labor movement is poised to play a pivotal role in shaping the impact of the clean energy transition on workers and their communities. Our research and policy interventions consider the role and impact of labor in facilitating an efficient and just climate transition.

HARVARD @ CLIMATE WEEK NYC

PANEL: “IS IT ALREADY TOO HOT TO WORK?”

Sharon Block spoke at the Salata Institute Climate Action Accelerator’s Climate Week NYC event. She participated in a panel on the impacts of rising global temperatures on workers’ health and safety, alongside other experts from the national and global labor movement.



**THE SALATA INSTITUTE
FOR CLIMATE AND SUSTAINABILITY**
at Harvard University



SALATA INSTITUTE SEED GRANT

CLJE received a seed grant from the Salata Institute for Climate and Sustainability at Harvard University to undertake a project examining the understanding of the link between collective bargaining, climate policy implementation, and outcomes for workers and their communities. This study sits at the intersection of law, organizing, climate, and democracy.

TESTIMONY

COMMISSION ON TRUTH AND TRANSPARENCY IN TEXAS HYDROGEN DEVELOPMENT

Project Manager Yoorie Chang testified on the importance of good union jobs in large-scale infrastructure projects before the Texas Climate Jobs Project’s “Commission on Truth and Transparency in Texas Hydrogen Development,” a two-day convening that invited experts, union leaders, policymakers, and community members to Austin to examine the future of clean hydrogen development in Texas.



Credit: Baffour Kyem



HARVARD TRADE UNION PROGRAM

The Harvard Trade Union Program is an 83-year-old intensive 5-week executive training program designed for trade union leaders. Comparable to the advanced education that Harvard University offers to executive-level individuals in business, government, and law, HTUP teaches the essential skills for the management and leadership of unions, as well as providing a unique opportunity to explore key issues for the labor movement. It remains a unique opportunity to learn alongside union leaders from across the country, share ideas that will shape the future of union membership, and build lasting relationships with fellow cohort members.

SHAWN FAIN AT HTUP GRADUATION



In 2024, we marked HTUP graduation with a speech from labor giant Shawn Fain, President of the United Auto Workers. Fain delivered a powerful commencement address, reminding us that to live a life with dignity and respect is a universal right.



“This is our generation. This is a defining moment in where we are going to go as a society. Are we going to continue on this track of a few people on top taking all the wealth, or are we going to take our lives back? We have seen workers fighting Starbucks and Amazon. And where there are fights for social justice anywhere, UAW is going to stand with them.”

- SHAWN FAIN, UAW PRESIDENT AT THE 2024 HTUP GRADUATION

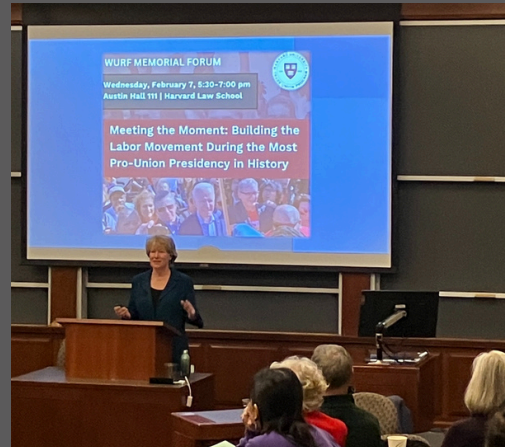
Credit: James Rasaiah

PRESS COVERAGE: [United Auto Workers Leader Shawn Fain Delivers Keynote at Harvard Trade Union Program Graduation](#) IN HARVARD LAW TODAY

WURF MEMORIAL FORUM

LYNN RHINEHART: "BUILDING THE LABOR MOVEMENT DURING THE MOST PRO-UNION PRESIDENCY IN HISTORY"

This year, Lynn Rhinehart, Senior Fellow at the Economic Policy Institute, delivered the Wurf Memorial Forum lecture. Every year in concert with the HTUP program, a speaker is chosen to deliver a lecture in accordance with the mission of the Wurf Memorial Fund, to "reflect Jerry Wurf's belief in the dignity of work, and his commitment to improving the quality of lives of working people, to free open thought and debate about public policy issues, to informed political action...and to reflect his interests in the quality of management in public service, especially as it assures the ability of workers to do their jobs with maximum effect and efficiency in environments sensitive to their needs and activities."



JOHN T. DUNLOP FORUM

MARK ERLICH: "The Way We Build: Restoring Dignity to Construction Work"

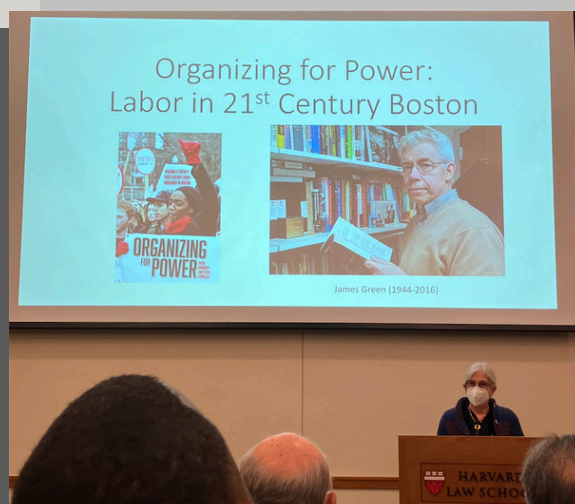
The John T. Dunlop Memorial Forum honors a distinguished contributor in the field of industrial relations and labor. This year's guest speaker, Mark Erlich, CLJE Fellow, blended long-view history with his personal experience inside the building trades to explain one of our economy's least-understood sectors.



JAMES GREEN MEMORIAL FORUM

AVIVA CHOMSKY: "Organizing for Power: Building a 21st Century Labor Movement in Boston"

The James Green Memorial Forum honors its iconic labor historian namesake. This year, Aviva Chomsky, Professor of History and Coordinator of Latin American, Latino and Caribbean Studies at Salem State University in Massachusetts, spoke on organizing a modern labor movement in the City of Boston.



WORKERS' CAPITAL PROJECT

The Workers' Capital Project creates a framework for studying responsible investment and labor's capital and how they have been deployed in efforts to resist shareholder primacy, short-termism, and the social harms of financialization. Through research, programmatic convenings, and on-going engagement with practitioners, this project acts as a home for innovative work related to investment practices, fiduciary regulation, and the developing landscape of ESG investment, especially focused on labor and work.

PEER MENTORING PROJECT

The Trustee Leadership Forum's (TLF) Peer Mentoring Project (PMP) at CLJE organizes and supports labor pension fund trustees to step into their power and foster more effective stewardship and responsible investment in service of their beneficiaries. Rooted in authentic relationships, the PMP arranges participants into pairs (two Trustees) for 1:1 conversations and pods (several participants plus an experienced advisor) so trustees can go both deep and broad on the issues most important to their Funds and plan participants.

This year, we:

- Built on a successful pilot year, kicking off our second year; 20 trustees from across the country, representing 100 years of collective trustee experience, are participating in the PMP in 2025.
- Partnered with the National Education Association (NEA) to launch a four-part mini-course titled 'Leadership for the Common Good' for those who are in, or aspire to be in, positions of District, Association and Public Leadership. The course featured CLJE staff members Eric Horvath and Vonda Brunsting, as well as collaborators and contributors to the Peer Mentoring Project, Andy Hirshman, Denise Bradford, Doug Prouty, Michael Hairston and Jim Kane.



CLJE FELLOWS: RENAYE MANLEY



Renaye Manley works with local pension fund trustees, state and city comptrollers and treasurers to urge investors to address risk related to mismanagement, low job standards, financial speculation, monopoly power and industry precarity. Manley recently released the first Civil Rights Audit Standards with PolicyLink, which will function as the first-ever tool to hold U.S. businesses accountable for their commitments to workplace equity and preventing discrimination.

A part of CLJE's work engages in global labor issues. With the support of organizations like the European Climate Foundation, we also host an array of international research fellows and research associates who work on significant challenges for global labor.

PANEL



FOR DEMOCRACY IN SOCIETIES: TRADE UNIONS AND ELECTIONS

CLJE Fellow Max Kiefel moderated a virtual panel conversation with trade union leaders from around the world to discuss the role of trade unions in elections. This webinar marked the launch of the International Trade Union Congress' "For Democracy" campaign to rally the collective power of trade unions worldwide to advocate for democratic values and worker rights. Professor Sharon Block delivered opening remarks.

LECTURE

FROM SECTORAL BARGAINING TO WORKS COUNCILS: IS A CONSENSUS REALLY EMERGING IN THE US?

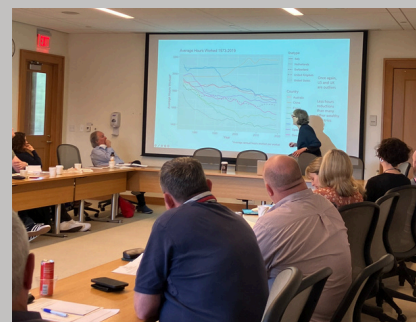
Professor Benjamin Sachs gave a talk at the Stockholm University Department of Law comparing the reforms called for by Clean Slate for Worker Power and those of a strand of conservatism championed by organizations like the American Compass and politicians like J.D. Vance that advocate for some of the same reforms, including sectoral bargaining, works councils, and workers on corporate boards. In his talk, he highlighted where the two groups are aligned and where they diverge (on the level of policy design, motivation for reform, and overall vision for the U.S. economy), and offered some ideas about what we can learn from this unexpected political development.



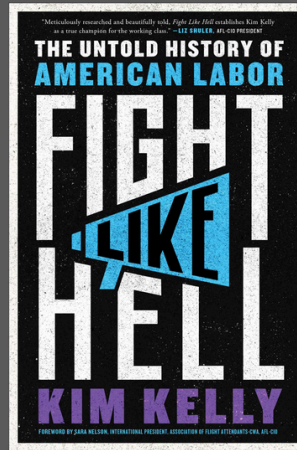
UK TRADES UNION CONGRESS

TUC: LEADING CHANGE PROGRAMME

The TUC (Trades Union Congress UK) provides a training program for senior trade union officials called Leading Change. In June, we hosted TUC leaders and member unions for a series of lectures and discussions on the prospects for the labor movement in the USA, UK, and around the world. The TUC currently has 48 member unions representing 5.5 million workers in the UK.



KIM KELLY, “FIGHT LIKE HELL: THE
UNTOLD STORY OF AMERICAN LABOR”



KIM KELLY IN CONVERSATION WITH NICK JURAVICH,
UMASS BOSTON ASSISTANT PROFESSOR



NATALIE FOSTER, “THE GUARANTEE: THE
FIGHT FOR AMERICA’S NEXT ECONOMY

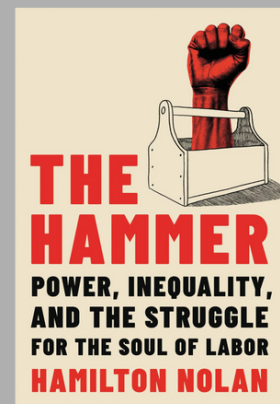


NATALIE FOSTER AND MICHELLE
MILLER, DIRECTOR OF INNOVATION

HAMILTON NOLAN, “THE HAMMER: POWER INEQUALITY, AND
THE STRUGGLE FOR THE SOUL OF LABOR”



HAMILTON NOLAN WITH MICHELLE MILLER,
DIRECTOR OF INNOVATION



PANEL



THE REBIRTH OF AMERICA'S LABOR MOVEMENT: AMAZON LABOR UNION AND THE FUTURE

We were honored to host Acting Secretary Julie Su, President of the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA Sara Nelson, and the team behind the documentary Union, Brett Story and Stephen Maing, for an energizing conversation with the Institute of Politics at Harvard Kennedy School JFK Jr. Forum and the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard Kennedy School. The conversation was moderated by Marshall Ganz, Rita E. Hauser Senior Lecturer in Leadership, Organizing, and Civil Society at the Harvard Kennedy School.



Credit: Martha Stewart

PANEL

THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN LABOR LAW

The American Constitution Society at Harvard Law School hosted Executive Director Sharon Block and Faculty Co-Director Benjamin Sachs to discuss the threats to labor law that the current Supreme Court poses.

PRESS COVERAGE: Recent Supreme Court decisions contribute to an "existential threat" for labor law IN HARVARD LAW TODAY



Credit: Lorin Granger

PANEL

DRIVING DIGNITY: REWRITING THE RULES FROM THE SERVICE INDUSTRY TO THE GIG ECONOMY

CLJE and former SEIU President Mary Kay Henry held a roundtable discussion on women workers in the service industry who have unionized and women in the gig economy who are fighting tirelessly for the right to do so. Hosted by Sharon Block and Michelle Miller, the roundtable featured women from the rideshare, childcare, and homecare industries.



SEMINAR SERIES

SUPPLY CHAIN CAPITALISM: LABOR SOLIDARITY ACROSS GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS

A joint effort of the Program on Law and Political Economy and CLJE, this series examined law's role in structuring global supply chains. Across four installments, we discussed how contemporary modes of supply, production, and capital ownership – or Supply Chain Capitalism – impact the distribution of power and resources between the global north and the global south and between capital and labor.

- Hila Shamir | A New Labor Law for Supply Chain Capitalism
- Vivian Price | Talking Union, Talking Climate
- Desiree LeClercq | Global Trade as Worker Power
- Chandan Kumar | Labor Solidarity Across Global Supply Chains





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