

CENTER FOR LABOR AND A JUST ECONOMY  
AT HARVARD LAW SCHOOL



# 2025 YEAR IN REVIEW



CENTER FOR LABOR  
& A JUST ECONOMY  
AT HARVARD LAW SCHOOL

# A LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Twenty twenty-five is not a year that any of us will soon forget. Uncertainty has reigned in many ways. In our nation, we've seen norms of how the government operates upended while the presence of government in our lives aggressively retreats and asserts itself, depending on the venue. The ongoing and unconstitutional attacks on higher education, and on Harvard in particular, brought these unsettling changes to CLJE's doorstep.

Here at CLJE we asked the question that we always ask — what does this mean for the welfare and power of working people? During this year, we've focused on three areas that we felt needed urgent attention:

- 1) what do these challenges mean for the legal protections for collective bargaining and concerted action;
- 2) how are workers faring with the acceleration of AI adoption in our society, including our workplaces; and
- 3) what are the best ways to protect workers from the intensifying impact of the global climate crisis.

In all of these areas, we've used the CLJE methodology that we've been refining since we first launched our Clean Slate for Worker Power project — creating an evidence base through worker-centered research, convening a diverse group of colleagues to collaborate on innovative policies and then disseminating the results for feedback and action.

We hope you find in this year in review many ideas that spur your own new ideas and that in 2026 you will share those ideas with us. We're incredibly grateful to everyone who participated in our programs this year, including our amazing Harvard Law School students; Harvard Trade Union Program faculty and participants; and our generous funders.

Having the privilege of working everyday with the dedicated and caring CLJE team has given me hope and purpose during a trying time. I look forward to finding more hope and purpose together in 2026 as we move forward together.

In Solidarity,  
Sharon

# CLJE : Lab

## STATE AND LOCAL LABOR POLICY WORKING PAPER SERIES

CLJE and Workshop hosted working groups and a convening in the fall of 2025 where academics, advocates, and experts came together to discuss a new generation of innovative ideas for how states and localities can advance worker power.

We launched this series of working papers and policy briefs to explore these sorts of policies. As our federal labor law faces attacks on multiple fronts, we offer new strategies for state and local governments to strengthen worker voice, improve conditions, and foster organizing.



Clean Slate States Working Session

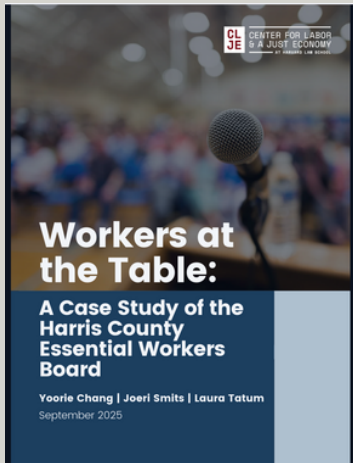
### CHECK OUT :

[Expanding Sectoral Standard Setting Under NLRA Preemption: Bringing Workers Together to Build Power and Set Standards in Tripartite Sectoral Models](#)

*With federal labor protections under pressure... state and local innovation offers a countervailing source of worker voice and power. Sectoral boards, if structured to emphasize democratic participation, can do more than raise minimum standards: they can help workers build democratic participation and influence that persist regardless of what happens at the federal level.*

FROM “BUILDING WORKER POWER IN A PRECARIOUS FEDERAL LANDSCAPE: SECTORAL BARGAINING AND WORKER DEMOCRACY” | ONLABOR

## REPORT

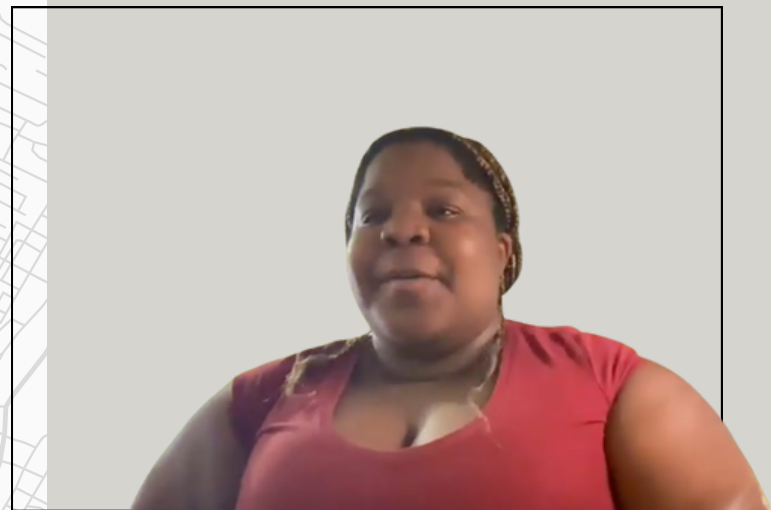
WORKERS AT THE TABLE: A CASE STUDY OF THE HARRIS COUNTY  
ESSENTIAL WORKERS BOARD

This report focuses on the groundbreaking Harris County Essential Worker Board (HCEWB), a first-of-its-kind workers' board composed entirely of frontline essential workers. Based on interviews with HCEWB members, county officials, and worker organization representatives, the report provides context on the creation of the board, challenges and strategies from its early years, and offers recommendations for future all-worker boards.

## WEBINAR

WORKERS AT THE TABLE: LESSONS AND REFLECTIONS FROM THE  
HARRIS COUNTY ESSENTIAL WORKERS BOARD

Serving on the board has shown me just how powerful essential workers are to the foundation of our communities. We're talking about people who keep hospitals, schools, homes, and whole industries running, often without the recognition or resources they deserve. Sitting on the board reinforced for me that worker voice isn't optional, it's necessary. Policies that shape people's lives are better, stronger, and more sustainable when the people doing the work are part of the decision-making.



KARA LEVY, CHAIR, HARRIS COUNTY  
ESSENTIAL WORKERS BOARD



# LABOR AND CLIMATE

## SCHOLARLY WORKING GROUP: IS IT ALREADY TOO HOT TO WORK? PROTECTING WORK AND WORKERS IN A WARMING WORLD

In partnership with the [Harvard Global Health Institute](#) and the [Department of Global Health and Population at Harvard Chan School](#), CLJE has launched a scholarly working group to explore the growing threat of extreme heat on worker health and safety. Focused on addressing global rising temperatures and the research and policy gaps that leave 2 billion workers around the world vulnerable, the working group brings together researchers, government employees, union leaders, and activists, from around the Harvard community and around the world to consider growing climate concerns.

### WEBINAR

### PROTECTING WORKERS IN HEAT ACTION PLANS

Across the globe, extreme temperatures and severe heatwaves are already impacting the health and safety of workers. States and cities from India to South Africa to the United States are developing Heat Action Plans to help their communities prepare for the worst impacts, including for outdoor and indoor workers alike. In partnership with the Mittal and Family Institute at Harvard University and the Africa Office of the Harvard University Center for African Studies, we hosted a [discussion](#) to learn how Ahmedabad, Boston, and Cape Town have developed and implemented Heat Action Plans, and why engaging with workers and their representatives is central to their success.



CONFERENCE

INDIA 2047: BUILDING A CLIMATE RESISTANT FUTURE



CLJE Executive Director Sharon Block and Fellow Raj Nayak attended “[India 2047: Building a Climate Resistant Future](#)” in New Delhi, India. Co-hosted by the Lakshmi Mittal and Family South Asia Institute and the Salata Institute for Climate and Sustainability at Harvard University, India 2047 brought together experts in climate, public health, labor, agriculture, and urban planning to engage in interdisciplinary conversations about how address harmful climate events like extreme heat.

HOW WORK, AND WORKERS, CAN INFLUENCE  
HEAT ACTION PLANS

We still need enforceable rules that give workers important baseline rights and the legal protections to demand those rights. But strong heat action plans – shaped by real collaboration with workers and their representatives – can be a powerful complement.

SHARON BLOCK AND RAJ NAYAK | [HARVARD CLIMATE BLOG](#)

# TECH AND LABOR



## PENNSYLVANIA SEIU LOCAL 688 AI AGREEMENT: STRONG PROTECTIONS FOR WORKERS AND THE PUBLIC

On March 28, 2025, SEIU Local 688 President Steve Catanese joined Governor Shapiro to announce a groundbreaking partnership with the state on the implementation of Generative AI. SEIU 688 represents state workers in social services and benefits provision for the Commonwealth. This partnership, as outlined in a letter from Governor Shapiro, includes the formation of a worker board that will oversee implementation of Generative AI tools.

*“We are proud to have played a background role advising President Catanese and Local 688 on this process, and we’re hopeful that it can be a blueprint for other locals to build even more protections.”*

MICHELLE MILLER, CLJE AND CYNTHIA CONTI-COOK, RESISTANCE LABS

## PANEL

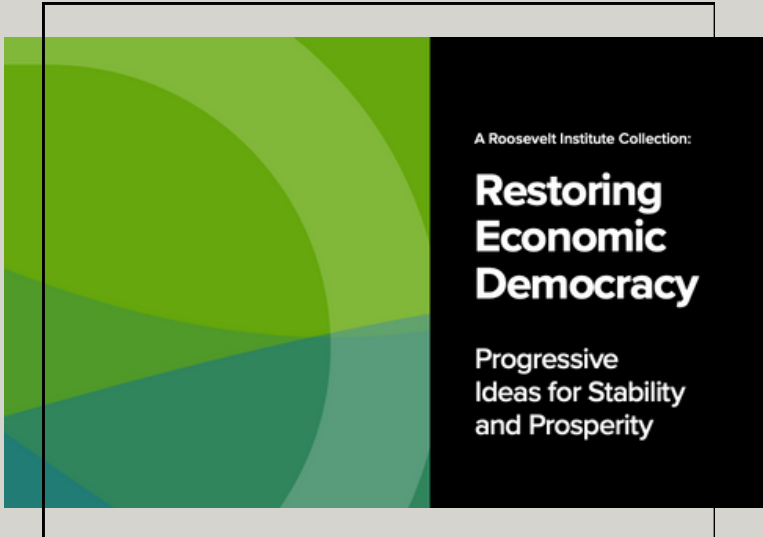
## UNDERSTANDING AI WITH DATA & SOCIETY: STANDING UP FOR HUMAN VALUE IN THE AI ECONOMY

In November, CLJE Director of Innovation Michelle Miller spoke on a panel on the value of human labor in increasingly automated workplaces, hosted at the New York Public Library by Data & Society.



## ESSAY

### DEMOCRATICALLY DEPLOYING AI MEANS LETTING LABOR LEAD



Sharon Block and Michelle Miller's essay on the importance of centering workers in decision-making around AI in the workplace is a part of the Roosevelt Institute's "Restoring Economic Democracy: Progressive Ideas for Stability and Prosperity" collection.

## BLOG POST

### BEYOND AUTOMATION ANXIETY: SHIFTING THE NARRATIVE FROM TECHNOLOGICAL FEARS TO WORKER POWER

[A working class vision for a better world] should... include a more democratic, worker-led approach to how we use technology and how it impacts our communities. What might it mean over the next few years for technology policy and labor activists to work toward that? How do we engage working class people in designing a vision for technology, not just as people experiencing harms? How do we think about cities, states, and municipalities as sites of experimentation and contestation for new models of workers co-designing technology initiatives with employers? What kinds of organizations do we have to be and what capacities do we have to build in order to do this?



# LABOR AND DEMOCRACY

## THE NLRA UNDER ATTACK

In a [piece](#) for the Democracy Journal, Sharon Block, Seema Nanda, and Raj Nayak discuss the implications of the crisis facing the NLRA for workers and democracy writ large, and what opportunities may lie at the state and local level for organizing progressive policymaking.

*The relationship between strong democracies and strong labor movements is reciprocal: You can't have a strong democracy without a strong labor movement, and you can't have a strong labor movement without a strong democracy. Right now, our democracy is being tested like never before in modern history. How and indeed whether we can have a strong labor movement while the NLRA faces deep legal uncertainty has profound implications for how we meet this moment.*

## REPORT

### THE VARIED VOICE OF LABOR: UNPACKING THE POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT OF LABOR IN THE 2024 ELECTION



#### **The Varied Voice of Labor: Unpacking the Political Engagement of Labor in the 2024 Election**

Alexander Hertel-Fernandez  
Max Kiefel  
Alan Yan

May 2025

This [report](#) by Alexander Hertel-Fernandez, Max Kiefel, and Alan Yan focuses on unions' role in political education, communication, and mobilization. In collaboration with [Columbia Labor Lab](#), we explore how unions serve as sources of information about the government, the economy, and specific public policies for their members, as well as how they mobilize members for political action across different levels of government.



## LABOR AND DEMOCRACY SEMINAR SERIES

### WEBINAR

#### LABOR IN THE COURTS: HOW UNIONS HAVE STOOD UP FOR WORKERS' RIGHTS DURING THE FIRST 100 DAYS

Since day one of the Trump administration, the labor movement has been at the forefront of litigation on behalf of federal workers. Craig Becker (AFL-CIO), Danielle Leonard (Altshuler Berzon LLP), Seema Nanda (CLJE), and Ben Sachs (Harvard Law School / CLJE) discussed how the lawsuits in which AFL-CIO, AFGE, AFT, AFSCME, SEIU and other unions have joined as plaintiffs affect hundreds of thousands of workers and every American.



### WEBINAR

#### LABOR AT THE POLLS: UNDERSTANDING HOW UNION MEMBERS APPROACHED THE 2024 ELECTION



The 2024 election highlighted the shifting partisan allegiance of working-class voters. What impact does the labor movement have on members' political decision making? Mike Podhorzer (CAP), Stephanie Ternullo (Harvard University), Alan Yan (UC Berkeley), Max Kiefel (CLJE), Alex Hertel-Fernandez (Columbia University), Kim Anderson (NEA), and Sharon Block weighed in.



# HARVARD TRADE UNION PROGRAM



## HTUP CLASS OF 2025 IN NUMBERS

- **83rd** year, **112th** session
- **42** participants from **17** unions
- **4** countries represented: United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, and Canada



## HTUP GRADUATION



Photo Credit: James Rasaiah

*Unions were built for big fights. You all were built for big fights. We know we can build a future where every worker gets a just day's pay for a hard day's work.*

JULIE SU, FORMER ACTING SECRETARY OF LABOR |  
2025 HTUP GRADUATION SPEAKER

PRESS COVERAGE: HARVARD LAW TODAY

## WURF MEMORIAL FORUM

CLAUDIA GOLDIN: "AN EVOLVING ECONOMIC FORCE"

Our Jerry Wurf Memorial Forum speaker this year was 2023 Nobel laureate and economic historian Claudia Goldin (Harvard University), who discussed her research on women's labor market outcomes, the evolution of the gender pay gap, and its implications for American society.



## JOHN T. DUNLOP FORUM

DARON ACEMOGLU: "WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF THE LABOR MOVEMENT IN THE AGE OF AI?"



The John T. Dunlop Memorial Forum honors a distinguished contributor in the field of industrial relations and labor. This year's speaker was 2024 Nobel laureate economist Daron Acemoglu, discussing his book, *Power and Progress*, exploring the implications of AI and automation on the future of work.

## JAMES GREEN MEMORIAL FORUM

JACQUELINE JONES: "NO RIGHT TO AN HONEST LIVING"

This year's James Green Memorial Forum on Labor History speaker was historian Jacqueline Jones, who spoke about her book, *No Right to an Honest Living: The Struggles of Boston's Black Workers*.



# WORKERS' CAPITAL PROJECT

HARVARD  
LAW SCHOOL



TLF PEER  
MENTORING PROJECT

at the Center for Labor  
and a Just Economy

## TRUSTEE LEADERSHIP FORUM: 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 kicked off its third year this November with 14 trustees from across the country, representing 100 years of collective trustee experience.

*Very few people understand the challenges of a member pension trustee. These unpaid roles require a great deal of time, research, thought, and education so that we can effectively advocate for and protect what for most of our members is the largest single asset that they will earn over the course of their lives. The Peer Mentoring Project provided access to high quality educational sessions and an opportunity to learn from trustees from all over the country. The program proved invaluable as trustees learned to adapt to the “new normal” that was 2025. I am a veteran trustee in my 11th year of serving my members. The PMP gave me tools that allowed me to be even more deliberate and successful in my public pension advocacy work.*

SUE LEMMO, VICE-CHAIR, PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC SCHOOL EMPLOYEES'  
RETIREMENT SYSTEM

### TLF ANNUAL CONVENING

The 17th TLF Annual Convening took place over three days in June at Harvard Law School. This year, 60 labor-affiliated pension trustees came together for panels and discussions labor and pension investment decision making.



### PEER MENTORING PROJECT 2025 COHORT

- In its **3rd** year
- **14** participants
- **100** years of collective trustee experience

*TLF has been a great opportunity to meet others from a variety of plan types and geographical locations. I truly feel supported by staff, leaders, and fellow trustees. Many topics stretched my comfort zone and created new opportunities to learn. I feel my own board has gained from what I have learned from my peer mentors.*

JANIS ELLIOTT, NEBRASKA PUBLIC  
EMPLOYEES RETIREMENT BOARD CHAIR



# EXPERT COMMENTARY

## DAVOS

## WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM 2025: BALANCING THE SCALES



Sharon Block moderated “[Balancing the Scales](#),” a panel at the [World Economic Forum’s Open Forum 2025](#) on rising global inequality and the role that fair labor standards, education, and technology can play in addressing its impact. Block was joined by Katherine Garrett-Cox (Gulf International Bank), Anis Kallel (Flouci), Chantal Line Carpentier (UNCTAD), and Melvyn Lubega (Baobab).

*If the Court strips away independence, Congress must act to amend these agencies’ authorizing statutes to ensure that those protected by these agencies do not have their ability to get a fair hearing of their interests captured by a President’s political whims.*

SHARON BLOCK AND TANYA GOLDMAN IN “[CONGRESS MUST STAND UP TO THE SUPREME COURT’S ATTACKS ON INDEPENDENT AGENCIES](#)” | HARVARD LAW SCHOOL JOURNAL ON LEGISLATION

WSJ: “CAN UNIONS RECOVER? TWO EXPERTS SQUARE OFF”

### SHARON BLOCK: YES

*“The labor movement will continue to face roadblocks, especially with an antiunion administration in control in Washington. But rising inflation, unemployment and AI-driven automation will make it clearer than ever for workers that supporting unions is their best bet to take back control of their own futures.”*

# CAMPUS EVENTS

SENATOR SHERROD BROWN AND CONNIE SHULTZ:  
THE FUTURE OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY IN THE  
FIGHT FOR THE DIGNITY OF WORK



VOICES FOR LABOR AND A JUST ECONOMY:  
A CONVERSATION WITH KEN CASEY OF THE  
DROPKICK MURPHYS



CENTERING WORKERS' RIGHTS IN U.S. TRADE POLICY  
WITH AMBASSADOR KATHERINE TAI



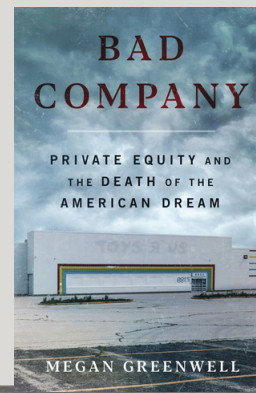
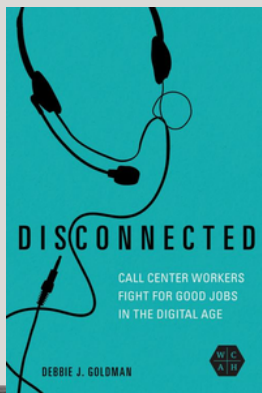
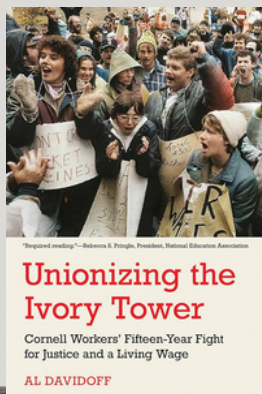
THE ROAD TO 80% COLLECTIVE BARGAINING  
COVERAGE WITH DR. THORSTEN SCHULTEN



## BOOK TALKS

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

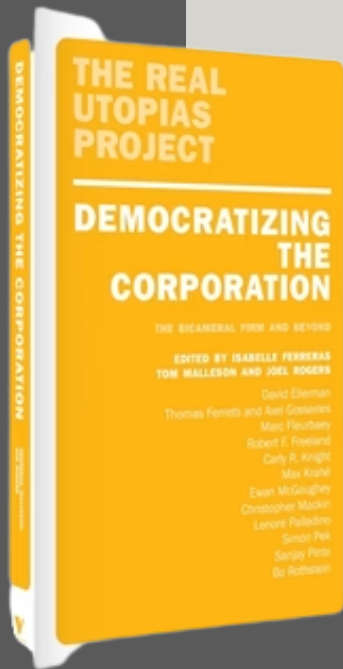
“UNIONIZING THE IVORY TOWER”  
BY AL DAVIDOFF



“DISCONNECTED: CALL CENTER WORKERS  
FIGHT FOR GOOD JOBS IN A DIGITAL AGE”  
BY DEBBIE GOLDMAN

“BAD COMPANY: PRIVATE EQUITY AND  
THE DEATH OF THE AMERICAN DREAM”  
BY MEGAN GREENWELL

# DEMOCRATIZING WORK



## DEMOCRATIZING WORK

Democratizing Work is a global research initiative built around three goals: democratizing work, decommodifying labor, and decarbonizing the economy. Since May 2020, the project has mobilized more than 6,000 researchers from more than 750 universities and academic institutions around the world. The goal of this program is to help society, particularly labor leaders, climate and human rights activists, business leaders, and public servants harness the power of research to lead on implementing the three principles.

## SPAIN SETS UP EXPERT COMMITTEE TO IMPLEMENT ARTICLE 129.2 AND DEMOCRATIZE FIRMS

The Spanish Ministry of Labour established in February an expert committee tasked with drafting a report on Article 129.2 of the Spanish Constitution. The report will outline the importance of granting workers participation and ownership rights at the firm level, and propose a pathway for the Spanish Government to move forward with economic democracy. As part of its coalition agreement, the Spanish Government had indeed committed to legislating on this Article, making this initiative a significant step toward democratizing firms. The report will be published at the end of January. Isabelle Ferreras (FNRS/University of Louvain-Harvard CLJE) serves as chair of the committee. This development marks a major milestone in bringing the principles of democratizing work to the political and executive level!



### GERMAN EDITION OF DEMOCRATIZE WORK RELEASED IN OCTOBER

“Democratize Work. The Case for Reorganizing the Economy” is now available in German as “Die Demokratisierung der Arbeit,” published by Transcript. This marks the sixth translation of the book, reflecting the growing international momentum behind the movement to democratize work.

*“Employees... form their democratic conceptions at work through their ‘understanding of justice vis à vis their workplace arrangements. But their conceptions have no standing, they just execute the orders and they don’t really see why. They have been raised as citizens, they have been told they are equal in dignity and rights, but once they set foot in a capitalist environment, that sense of citizenship has no meaning anymore.”*

ISABELLE FERRERAS IN “A NEW MODEL FOR WORKPLACE DEMOCRACY—THE ‘BICAMERAL CORPORATION’” BY OLLY HAYNES | PROSPECT

## 5 YEARS OF #DEMOCRATIZINGWORK

On May 16th, 2020, amid the global disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Democratizing Work Manifesto was launched: a call to advance research that critically engages with three interconnected principles: democratizing work, decommodifying labor, and decarbonizing the planet. In its first week, the manifesto was signed by over 3,000 scholars from more than 750 institutions, and was soon joined by thousands more. It was published in 43 newspapers and translated into 27 languages, reflecting its broad international resonance.

Five years on, we celebrated a virtual convening marking the fifth anniversary of the manifesto. This event will provide an opportunity to take stock of what has been accomplished and, most importantly, to advance a robust, interdisciplinary research agenda that deepens our understanding of the manifesto’s three core principles and their implications for workers, their organizations, and society in general.

