

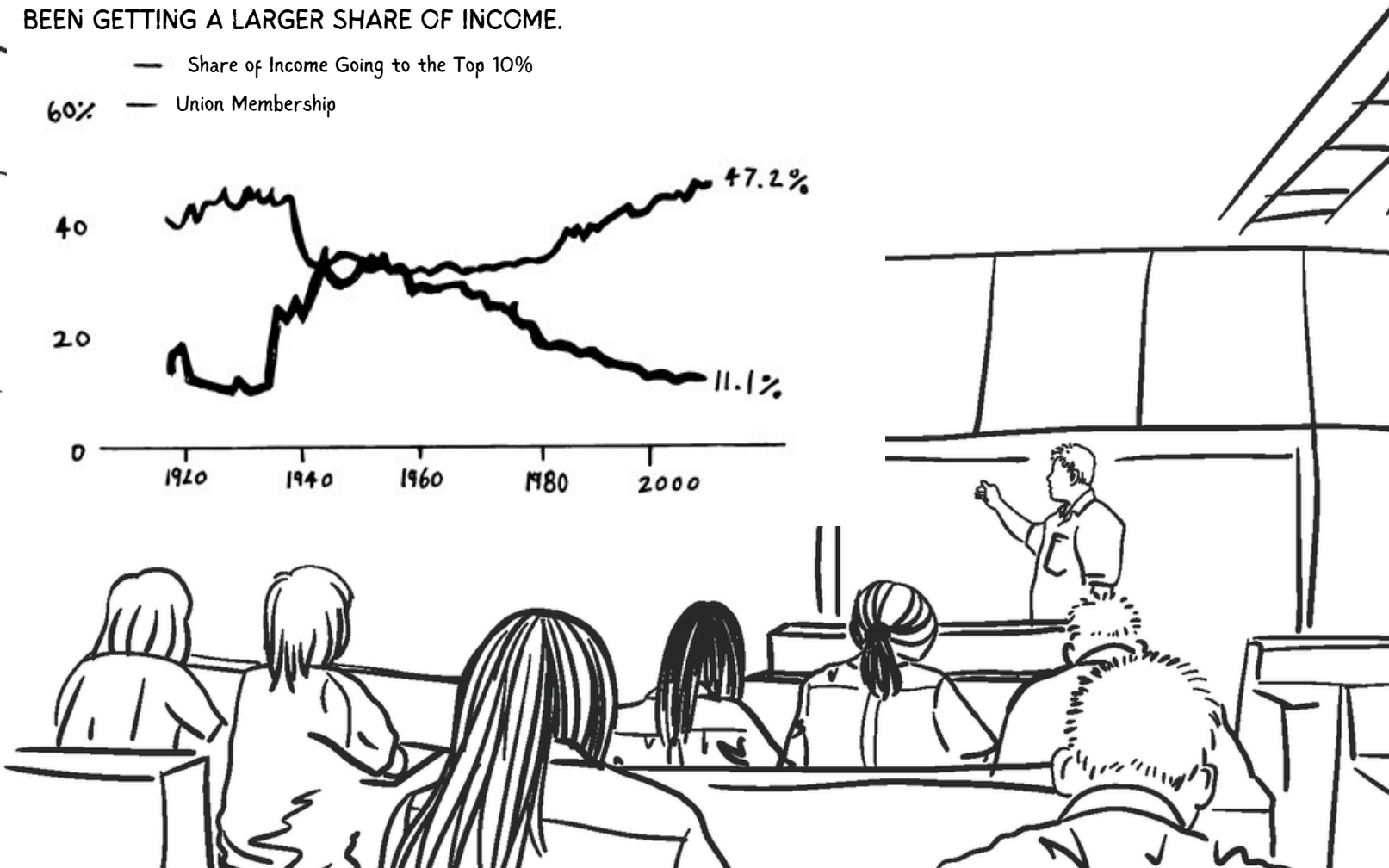
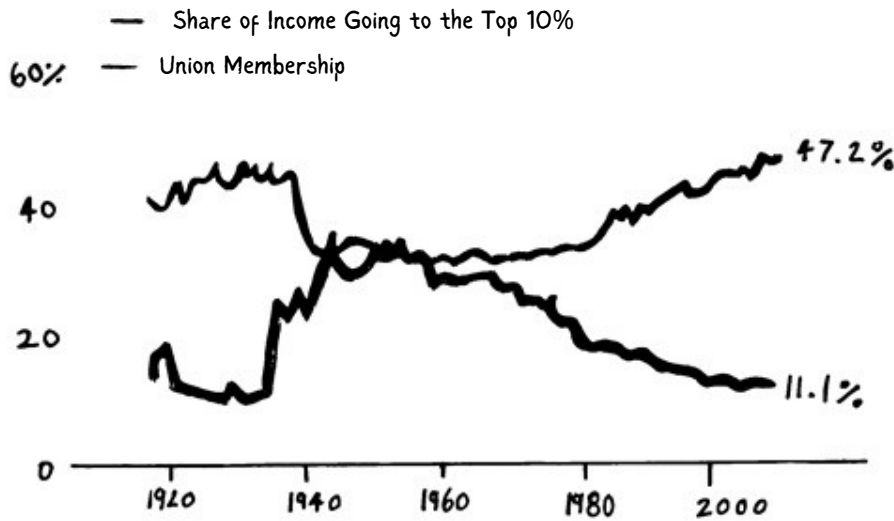
LEARNING Together

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF RUTGERS LEARN

WINTER 2025

Political Economy and Labor Education

AS UNION MEMBERSHIP HAS FALLEN, THE TOP 10 PERCENT HAVE BEEN GETTING A LARGER SHARE OF INCOME.



New Online Union Leadership Academy Classes:

February :New Media and Union Organizing | April: Strategic Research

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Newsletter designed by Djar Horn. Cover Art Shutterstock and Nina Horn-Scordo
2025

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



Dear LEARN Community,

Welcome to the tenth issue of our semi-annual newsletter – Learning Together. It’s hard to believe it, but that means I have been serving as the Director of LEARN now for over 5 years. During that time, we’ve offered over 100 open enrollment courses, completed dozens of custom trainings for unions, put on countless free public programs, and produced several applied research reports. This coming year we plan to continue that work and grow the program with the addition of a **new advanced labor leadership certificate**. We will also continue to **grow our political economy education program** – which is the theme of this issue of the newsletter. As I explain in the feature article, for workers to successfully organize and build powerful organizations that address unjustified inequalities in society, they must have an understanding of how the economy currently works and develop a vision for what it could look like when it truly works for everyone. Also in this issue you will learn about our upcoming classes and webinars this spring. We hope you will consider joining one of our classes or recommending them to friends and co-workers as we rely on tuition to keep this program running. Thank you for all of your support and we look forward to seeing you soon!

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "T. Vachon".

Todd Vachon
LEARN Director



Todd Vachon (AFT and UBC-Carpenters) was sworn in as President of the Middlesex-Somerset Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO on Jan. 9, 2025

INSTRUCTOR SPOTLIGHT:

Ahmer Qadeer

Ahmer Qadeer is a Managing Director at QRI, a private investigation and research firm. He specializes in conducting strategic research and investigations on behalf of advocacy organizations, with a focus on promoting economic justice and labor rights. His expertise spans antitrust issues, corporate governance, and workplace organizing. Before joining QRI, Ahmer served as the Director of Strategic Initiatives at the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), where he oversaw the union's research, public policy, and capital strategies work.



He also held positions at SEIU 32BJ, the AFL-CIO, and Workers United. Ahmer holds a Ph.D. in Planning and Public Policy from Rutgers University, where his research examined regulatory mechanisms to promote accountability and systemic change in housing markets. His work combines rigorous academic training with practical experience. Ahmer is a Senior Research Fellow at the Workplace Justice Lab, where he researches labor issues and their implications for policy and advocacy.

You can take a class with Ahmer, beginning in late March, 2025. He will teach Strategic Research as part of our upcoming Union Leadership Academy.

Student Employee SPOTLIGHT:

Selenne Garcia

Selenne Garcia is a student employee with Rutgers LEARN. She is getting a B.A. in Theater and expects to graduate in 2027. This is her 2nd year supporting LEARN as a student employee. Selenne has accomplished a lot with LEARN, from creating graphic designs, social media content and helping with our newsletter, to tabulating survey data.



Feature: The Importance of Political Economy Education for Workers

by Todd E. Vachon

My first lesson in political economy came when I was a kid, about 12 years old. At the time, my family owned a small business—a general store and gas station—in a small town in Eastern Connecticut. Due to market forces, including the rise of corporate chain stores, my parent’s business was struggling. By the late 1980s we were facing bankruptcy and foreclosure. Fortunately, there was a rising demand for skilled construction workers at the time.

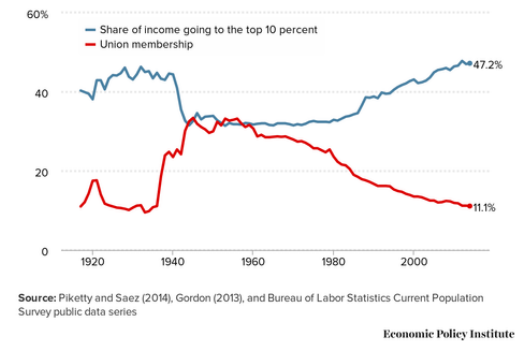
Through his friend network in the volunteer fire department, my father was able to join the local carpenters union and immediately began working in the industry—including at several local power plants. Within a year of his becoming a union carpenter, our family experienced a transition from being working poor to being middle class. We had health insurance, I got glasses and braces, and my dad built our family home—the home I now bring my children to visit as he enjoys his retirement thanks to the union pension

The two-part lesson was pretty simple – the economy can and will throw people under the bus, even if they are doing everything right, and banding together with fellow workers can build the power needed to bring home a bigger share of the value you produce through your labor. As I came to be working age I only ever applied for jobs at unionized workplaces, working summer jobs as a Steelworker at the local paper mill and box factory, as a Laborer at the local nuclear power plant, as an SEIU member washing dishes at the nursing home, and ultimately as a carpenter myself when I entered the apprenticeship program.

It was during my career as a carpenter that I experienced my second piece of real-world political economy education during the financial collapse of 2008 and ensuing Great Recession. Like all of my fellow union members, I was unemployed for nearly two years as the economy grinded to a halt and new construction projects were back-burnered. Unemployment insurance ran out, but the bills kept coming in. As my union sisters and brothers were facing home foreclosures, we watched the federal government bailout banks that were deemed “too big to fail.” Most of my union siblings were infuriated, but we lacked a shared understanding of what was happening. Some aligned with the perspective of Occupy Wall Street, which was that the financial capitalists had gotten too powerful and were fleecing the people. But many others succumbed to the Tea Party perspective – that it was the government’s fault, not capitalism.

I would speak out at union meetings. I organized fellow union members to attend protests, rallies, and marches in Hartford and in front of large financial institutions that received bailout money. Ultimately, at the recommendation of my always wiser partner, I decided to apply to and return to college at this time to bridge the long period of unemployment. It was at the University of Connecticut that I discovered labor education. When I entered the MA/PhD program in sociology my advisor, Michael Wallace listened to my back story and immediately directed me to meet with Mark Sullivan, the Director of the UConn Labor Education Center. Mark and I hit it off right away and conjured a way to fund my graduate assistant work through labor ed and I spent the next three years developing, organizing, and facilitating labor ed programs for unions around the state.

As union membership has fallen, the top 10 percent have been getting a larger share of income
Union membership and share of income going to the top 10%, 1917–2014



Feature: The Importance of Political Economy Education for Workers



Amazon workers learn about political economy.



IATSE officers and staff education

However, as a graduate assistant I was working for the first time in my life in a non-union environment, which led to my next life lesson in political economy. One day in the fall of 2013, by way of email, the university decided to radically reduce insurance coverage for the 2,100 graduate assistants at the university. A number of us pulled together an emergency meeting. Our union organizing committee was formed overnight. After building out the committee to have a broad base of representation across a diversity of departments and organizing a list of hundreds of supporters from those departments, we aligned with the UAW.

"It is impossible to overstate how important it is to connect the big picture political economy education with the nuts-and-bolts training of workplace organizing".

We won recognition of our local in April of 2014. After a year of negotiating, we won our first contract in 2015, including significant improvements in health benefits, and that fall I was elected as the first president of the new union. Through the card drive and contract campaign I learned firsthand the importance of having a shared understanding and shared vision – without that common base we could not have won so much and in such a short period of time.

After completing my dissertation and tenure as union President, I accepted a job at Rutgers working on labor education in the Department of Labor Studies and Employment Relations, where I work now. Picking up as the new Director of LEARN, I thought a lot about my life lessons as I started to reshape our labor education offerings. I wanted workers to understand that the capitalist economy is ruthless, that solidarity was our best chance of not only surviving but also thriving, and that we needed to have a shared analysis and a shared vision in order for that solidarity to be most effective.

The history of LEARN (originally the Institute for Management and Labor Relations), like that of most university-based labor ed programs, dates back to the early post-war period and focuses on nuts-and-bolts trainings for labor and management to ensure a functioning labor relations system. A system as free as possible from unnecessary labor unrest and work stoppages.

For decades the program carried out this mission dutifully and effectively. But as the share of unionized workers has continued to decline, especially since the 80s it became clear to me that merely providing nuts and bolts classes on bargaining, labor law, grievance handling, and public speaking was serving an ever-smaller share of the workforce. With this reality in mind, I envisioned two related pathways forward which could compliment the nuts-and-bolts labor education training – **CONTINUE**

READING ONLINE [HERE](#)

The Labor Education Center: A Living History



Unions, worker organizations, and community groups use the Labor Education Center every day. This is the house that Labor built. AFGE, AFSCME, AFT, DSA, HPAE, IBEW, IFPTE, New Labor, RWDSU, SEIU, UBC, UFCW and many others hold meetings, negotiations and trainings here in New Brunswick. We have a great Labor Library as well. When SMLR hosts career events for our students, you will find Labor recruiting. Reach out to LEARN@rutgers.edu for more info or to reserve rooms for an event.



Union Leadership Academy-1970's LEC



UALE-Women's Summer School, LEC-2010



UFCW, SEIU and LIUNA recruit SMLR students at the LEC

NEW LABOR 2024 15th annual GALA at the LEC



AFT Conference at the LEC-2024

What's On the Menu for 2025: Programming

REGISTER NOW

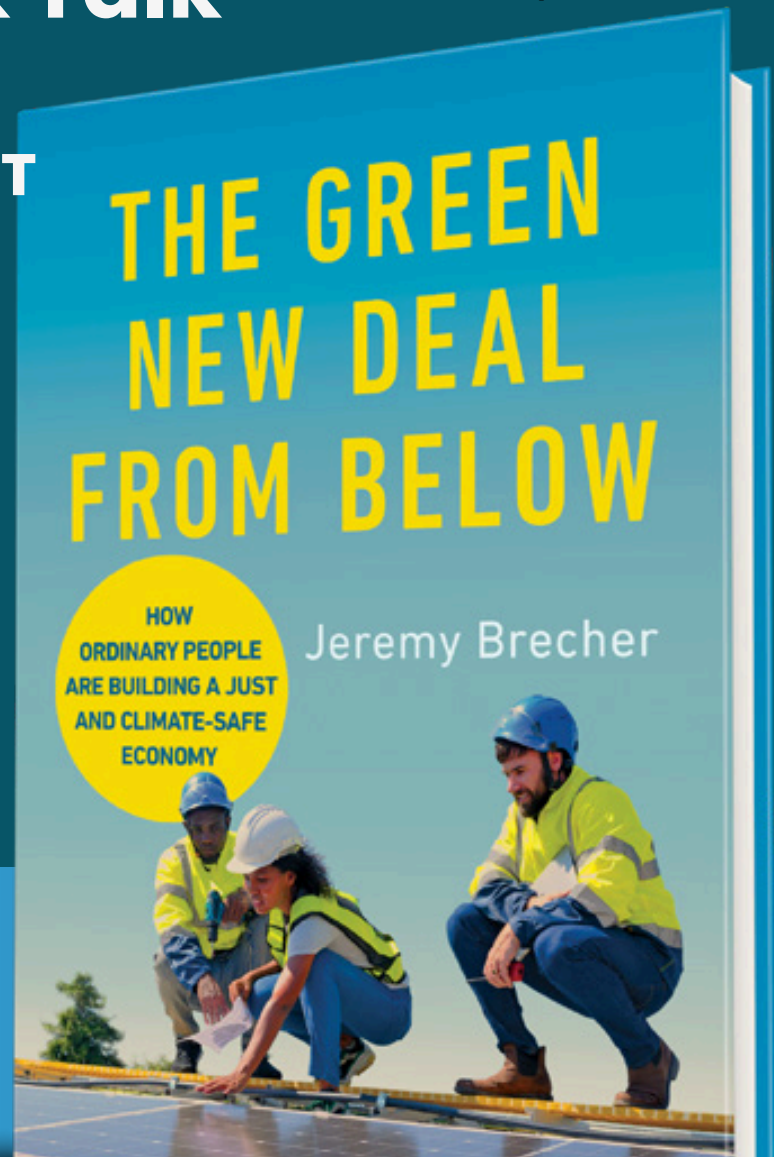


bit.ly/JBI3025

Jeremy Brecher Virtual Book Talk

January 30, 2025
7:00PM EST/5:00PM MST

Brecher's latest book, *The Green New Deal From Below: How Ordinary People Are Building A Just And Climate-Safe Economy*, provides an overview of more than 100 Green New Deal from Below initiatives in over 40 states.



Co-Sponsors:



LABOR NETWORK
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TULE - Trade Unions
and Labour
Environmentalism
Study Network



Order his book today and Use Promo Code F24UIP when ordering from www.press.uillinois.edu, to receive a 30% discount. Offer good until June 30, 2026.

What's On the Menu for 2025: Programming



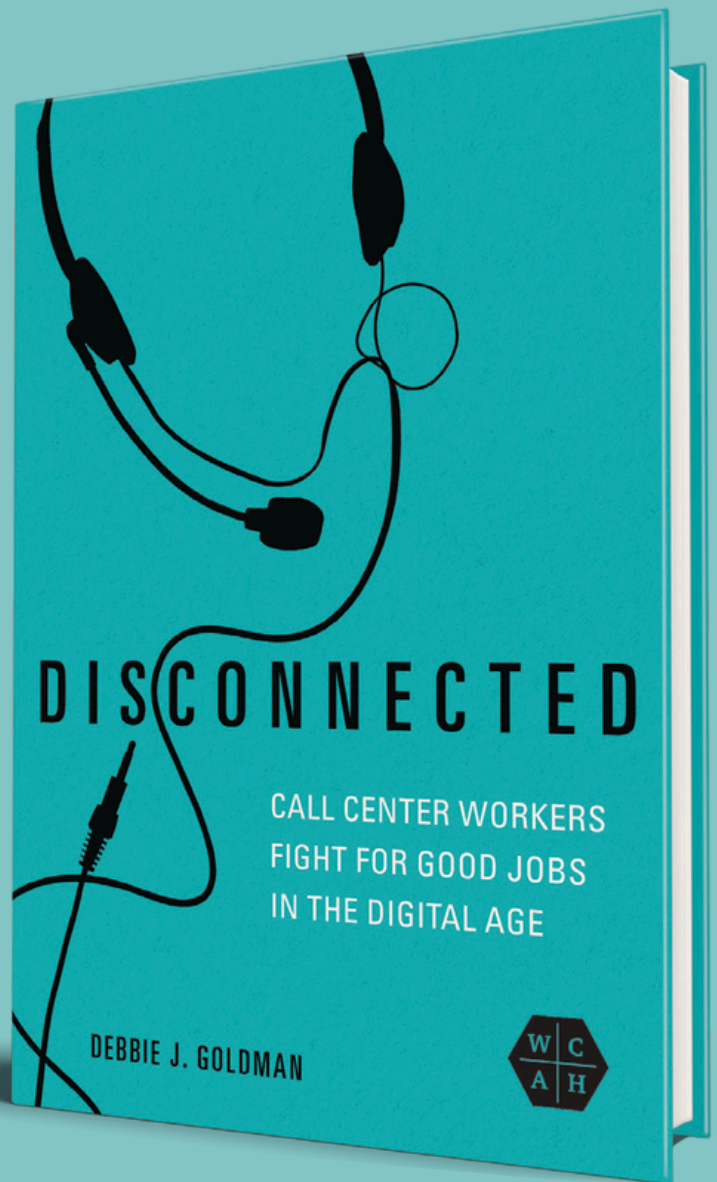
DEBBIE J. GOLDMAN
Former CWA Research Director
and Telecommunications Policy
Director.

Debbie J. Goldman Book Talk

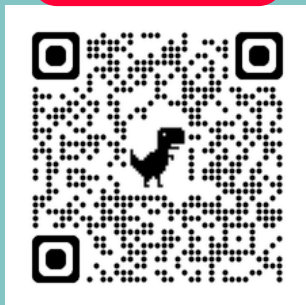
**DISCONNECTED: Call Center Workers
Fight for Good Jobs in the Digital Age**

Monday, March 10 - 7pm EST - Online

Debbie Goldman tells the story of employees in telephone call centers: who once blended skill and emotional intelligence to solve customer problems while the workplace fostered camaraderie and job satisfaction. But with the deregulation of the phone industry and the introduction of digital technology, management isolated the largely female workforce in cubicles, imposed unreasonable sales quotas, and installed surveillance systems and strict time limits on helping customers.



[REGISTER NOW](#)



bit.ly/DG31025

Use Promo Code **S24UIP** when ordering from our website www.press.uillinois.edu , to receive a 30% discount. Offer good until December 31, 2025.

What's On the Menu for 2025: Classes

NEW MEDIA AND UNION ORGANIZING:

HOW UNIONS AND UNION MEMBERS CAN
USE NARRATIVES, MEDIA, AND SOCIAL
MEDIA TO ADVANCE THEIR OBJECTIVES.

Join New Working Majority and learn how unions and base-building organizations can utilize social media, the new media landscape, and digital narratives, within your organizing efforts.

Wednesdays, February 5 to March 12
EAST COAST: 6PM-9PM
CENTRAL: 5PM-8PM

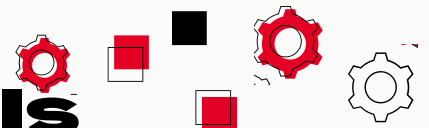
 www.newworkingmajority.com



bit.ly/NM225
Online Class
Tuition: \$100

ENROLL NOW

Strategic Corporate Research Fundamentals

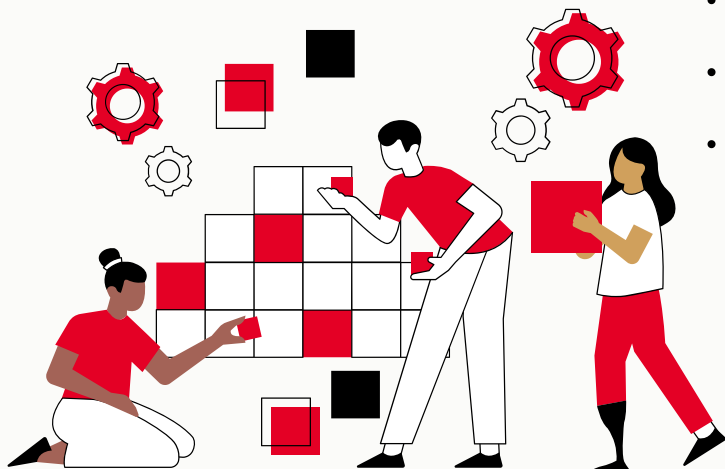


Instructor: Ahmer Qadeer, Managing Director at QRI

Thursdays, March 27-May 1, 2025
6:00pm -9:00pm EST
Online Only - Tuition: \$100

Course Overview:

- Learn the essential tools and techniques to analyze companies and industries for strategic bargaining, organizing, and advocacy efforts.
- Learn to research corporate structures, key decision-makers, financial health, competitors, and vulnerabilities.
- Learn how to use research methods and publicly available data to build innovative strategies.
- Practical case studies and hands-on exercises



Registration will be
open January 20



Labor and Employment Law

Certificate Program 2024-2025

Bias, Harassment and Discrimination - Instructor: Akhila Naik, Esq.

[Click here to register](#)

Thursday, January 23, 2025 Time: 9 a.m. - 2 p.m. (EST)

This course will cover the federal and New Jersey state laws prohibiting disability, gender, and race discrimination, and harassment. Topics will include legal definitions of disability, legal requirements of reasonable accommodation, what constitutes disparate treatments on the basis of gender and race, and other issues of special concern.

Workplace Investigations & Interviews: Overview -Instructor: Carla Katz, Esq. J.D.

[Click here to register](#)

Thursday, February 20, 2025 Time: 9 a.m. - 2 p.m. (EST)

Workplace investigations and interviews as a whole, including an overview of issues and the law related to the field from an experience local union president and accomplished labor lawyer.

Workers' Compensation - Instructor: James Cooney, Esq.

[Click here to register](#)

Friday, March 21, 2025 Time: 9 a.m. - 2 p.m. (EST)

Covers the New Jersey workers' compensation law; which provides cash and medical benefits to those disabled by work-related injuries and diseases. Includes employee coverage, compensable injuries and diseases, ensuring payment, and workers' abilities to sue employers for damages.



Negotiation, Arbitration & Conflict Resolution

Certificate Program 2024-2025

Interest-Based Bargaining - Instructor: William Dwyer

[Click here to register](#)

Friday, January 24, 2025 Time: 9 a.m. - 2 p.m. (EST)

Mutual gains for all concerned in bargaining and grievance handling by identifying interests, exploring options and reaching win-win agreements through a tried and true joint problem-solving process.

Strategic Grievance Handling and Contract Enforcement - Instructor: William Dwyer

[Click here to register](#)

Friday, February 21, 2025 Time: 9 a.m. - 2 p.m. (EST)

This class explores valuable methods and techniques to help ensure that negotiated contracts are successfully enforced and the hard-won gains at the bargaining table are honored and sustained.

Grievance Arbitration I: Foundations - Instructor: Joan Parker

[Click here to register](#)

Thursday, March 20, 2025 Time: 9 a.m. - 2 p.m. (EST)

This sequence of two courses is designed to increase the practitioner's skills in preparing and presenting grievance arbitration cases. Students must complete the first class in order to take the second.

Grievance Arbitration II: Advanced - Instructor: Joan Parker

[Click here to register](#)

Thursday, April 10, 2025 Time: 9 a.m. - 2 p.m. (EST)

Major subjects discussed include preparing for arbitration, the hearing, presenting a case, standards for just cause, evidence, criteria for contract interpretation, remedies, the decision, and different systems.

Pre-requisite: Grievance Arbitration I course must be completed

Public Sector Labor Relations

Certificate Program 2024-2025

Public Sector Grievance Handling & Discipline - Instructor: Joyce Klein, Esq., J.D.

[Click here to register](#)

Thursday, January 16, 2025 Time: 9 a.m. - 2 p.m. (EST)

This course will examine the grievance procedure, employee and employer rights and responsibilities, standards of just cause and their application to real life cases, and the burden of proof. Participants will discuss how to resolve grievances at the lowest level and will be given a brief overview of the arbitration hearing process.

Scope of Public Sector Negotiations - Instructor: Christine Lucarelli-Carneiro, Esq.

[Click here to register](#)

Friday, March 7, 2025 Time: 9 a.m. - 2 p.m. (EST)

This course will address all aspects of the scope of negotiations in New Jersey's public sector. It will trace the legislative, judicial, and PERC developments that have affected the issues that can and must be the subjects of collective negotiations and grievance arbitration. Also, how PERC decides the scope in particular cases.

Grievance Arbitration I - Instructor: Joan Parker, Ph.D

[Click here to register](#)

Thursday, March 20, 2025 Time: 9 a.m. - 2 p.m. (EST)

This sequence of two courses is designed to increase the practitioner's skills in preparing and presenting grievance arbitration cases. Students must complete the first in order to take the second.

Grievance Arbitration II: Advanced - Instructor: Joan Parker, Ph.D

[Click here to register](#)

Thursday, April 10, 2025 Time: 9 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Major subjects discussed: preparing for arbitration, the hearing, presenting a case, standards for just cause, evidence, criteria for contract interpretation, remedies, the decision, and different systems.

Public Sector Contract Interpretation - Instructor: Steven Weissman, Esq.

[Click here to register](#)

Friday, May 2, 2025, Time: 9 a.m. - 2 p.m. (EST)

How the meaning and enforceability of contract language negotiated under the N.J. Employer-Employee Relations Act has evolved over the last 40 years, and how court decisions, arbitrators' opinions, and PERC rulings have served to establish a set of principles and guidelines for negotiating binding contract language in the public sector.

LEARN Lessons

"LEARN Lessons" is a collection of mini-lectures delivered by various experts on topics of importance to unions, labor relations professionals, health and safety advocates, and others working in the field of work and employment. Click on the image to see the video.

Legal Framework of Collective Bargaining

The Legal Framework of Collective Bargaining: Part 1

Overview of Union Membership in the U.S.

Presented by
Carla A. Katz, Esq.

June 7, 2023



The Legal Framework of Collective Bargaining: Part 2

What is Collective Bargaining?

Presented by
Carla A. Katz, Esq.

June 7, 2023

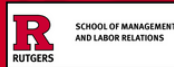


The Legal Framework of Collective Bargaining: Part 3

What Laws Impact Collective Bargaining?

Presented by
Carla A. Katz, Esq.

June 7, 2023



The Legal Framework of Collective Bargaining: Part 4

Public Sector versus Private Sector Law

Presented by
Carla A. Katz, Esq.

June 7, 2023



Carla A. Katz discusses the Legal Framework of Collective Bargaining in 4 brief lessons. These LEARN Lessons can be used individually or as a group to introduce your bargaining team or members to collective bargaining concepts.

Black History Month



A Democracy Cannot Exist Without Labor Unions: Paul Robeson and the Labor Movement - William Brucher, Rutgers University

National Association of Wage Earners (1921)

"We had had to paddle our own canoe because our women have had no standing with the American Federation of Labor or the National Women's Trade Union League."

Nannie Helen Burroughs, "Negro Women Unprotected," n.d., Library of Congress, Manuscript Division.



From Secret Trade Societies to Clubs: Early Black Women's Labor Organizing Outside of Labor Unions - Danielle Phillips-Cunningham, Rutgers University 12

White Papers



To commemorate our 75th anniversary, LEARN launched a white paper series titled “*A Better Tomorrow: Research & Reflections on the Past, Present, and Future of Workers.*” The contributions include original research, reflections from scholars and practitioners, and chapters from forthcoming books by LEARN-affiliated faculty, students, and friends.

Overview of the White Paper Series and call for Submissions

Paper #7501 "From Mutual Destruction to Common Preservation" by Todd E. Vachon

Paper #7502 "Revaluing Work(ers) for Democracy and Sustainability" by Tobias Schulze-Cleven and Todd E. Vachon

Paper #7503 "Pop Culture and Class Conflict in the Marvel Cinematic Universe" by Steven Manicasteri

Paper #7504 "What is Race?" by Les Leopold

Paper #7505 "Remembering Ernie: A Biography of Ernest DeMaio" by John Harranty

Paper # 7506 The Importance of Political Economy Education for Workers By Todd E. Vachon Rutgers LEARN

You can read the full call for papers as well as the first few white papers on the LEARN webpage, [here](#).

What We Have Been Up To: Fall 2024 Classes



Fundamentals of Collective Bargaining: September 28, 2024

Instructor: Rebecca Givan

Conflict Resolution at the Workplace October 19, 2024

Instructor: Saul Rubinstein

Countering and Preventing Harassment December 1, 2024

Instructor: James Cooney



Labor and Employment Law: An Overview September 22, 2024

Instructor: Tamara Lee, Esq.

Employment Relationships from Start to Finish October 20, 2024

Instructor: Melanie Lipomanis, Esq.

Constitutional Rights and the Workplace November 17, 2024

Instructor: James Cooney, Esq.

Leave and Absence Workshop December 14, 2024

Instructor: Rosemarie Ciparullo, Esq., J.D.



Public Sector Labor Law: An Overview September 29, 2024

Instructor: Leonard Schiro, J.D.,

Public Sector Collective Bargaining November 2, 2024

Instructor: Anthony Bagliore

PERC Policies and Procedures December 7, 2024

Instructors: Joe Blaney, Esq.



Unions and Democracy

September 10 - October 15

Instructors: Steve Lawton, and Tunisia Allah-Byrd

Labor and Employment Law for Workers

November 12- December 17,

Instructor: Ray Heineman, JD



Have friends or colleagues who may be interested in LEARN programs? Like and share our courses on Facebook and Twitter!

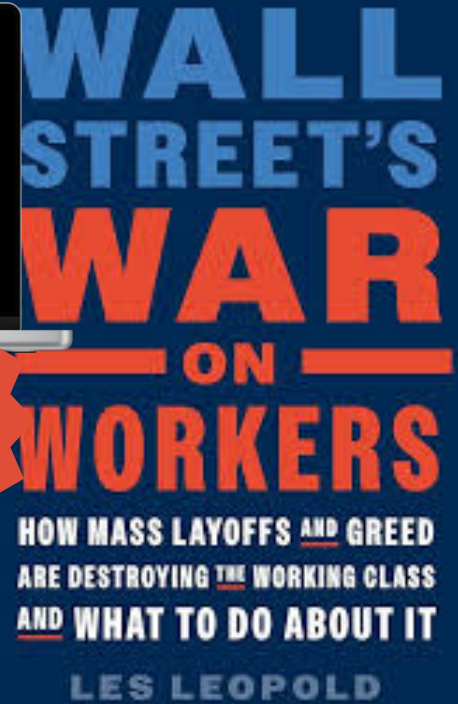
What We Have Been Up To: Fall 2024 Classes

Book Talk with Les Leopold October 1, 2024

On October 1, 2024, Rutgers LEARN had a Book Talk event with Les Leopold about his book *Wall Street's War on Workers: How Mass Layoffs and Greed Are Destroying the Working Class and What to Do About It*.

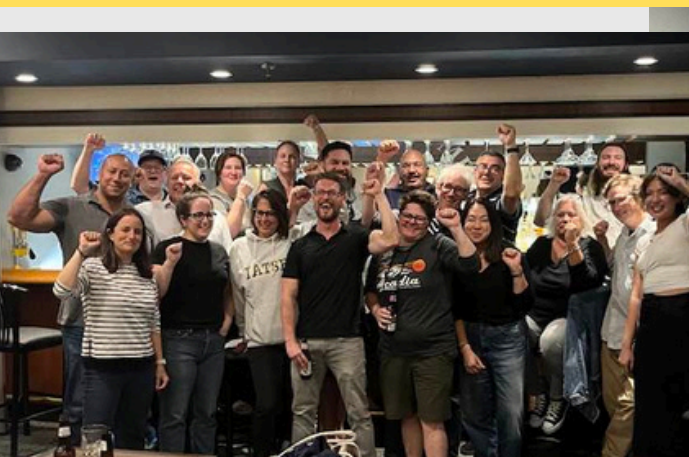


[Download Recording](#)



“Mass layoffs have had a profound impact on politics”.

Labor Education Takes Us Everywhere



IATSE, Baltimore MD



IUOE, Local 68, Atlantic City NJ



UAW, Lordstown OH

FOLLOW

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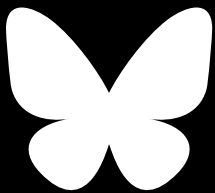
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