



Worker Power and the National Labor Relations Act – Transcript

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Description

Over the last year, media headlines have been filled with stories of workers from various industries on strike and attempting to unionize. The roots of these efforts lie with workers in the 1800s and early 1900s who first attempted to organize and used strikes to protest low wages and poor working conditions. Those early labor movements contributed to the passage of the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) of 1935, which gave workers the right to organize into unions and made it the official policy of the U.S. to encourage collective bargaining. Union membership surged after the passage of the NLRA and peaked at 35 percent of wage and salary workers in 1954. The NLRA had less of an impact for women and people of color, however, whose main occupations in agricultural and domestic work were deliberately excluded from the law, exclusions that still negatively affect millions of workers today. The impact of NLRA in supporting collective bargaining has also waned over time. Today, only 10 percent of wage and salary workers belong to a union including 34 percent of public employees and six percent of workers in the private sector, very low compared to most OECD countries though unionization is declining globally as well.

The future of work and job quality rests in part on workers having agency and some ability to influence their work and workplace. The NLRA provides the legal foundation for workers' right to exercise that agency. As we look to shape the future of work, what lessons can we learn from the NLRA's history, impact and effectiveness today? This is the first conversation in our five-part series, [The History and Future of U.S. Labor Law: Conversations to Shape the Future of Work](#).

Opening Remarks



The Honorable Marty Walsh

U.S. Secretary of Labor

Martin J. Walsh was sworn in as the 29th Secretary of Labor on March 23, 2021. A lifelong champion of equity and fairness, and a proud product of the City of Boston, Secretary Walsh leads the U.S. Department of Labor with a strong connection to working people, and a commitment to creating an economy that works for all.

In 1997, he was elected to serve as a State Representative for one of the most diverse districts in Massachusetts. There, he focused on creating good jobs, protecting workers' rights, expanding mental health treatment, and investing in public transit.

Following his time as a State Representative, Secretary Walsh spent the last seven years as the Mayor of the City of Boston. While mayor, he led the creation of close to 140,000 jobs and helped secure a statewide \$15/hour minimum wage, paid sick leave, and paid parental leave. He established Universal, high-quality Pre-Kindergarten for all children, and free community college for low-income students.

Secretary Walsh was a national leader in the response to COVID-19, getting PPE to first responders and nursing homes; funding emergency child care for healthcare and frontline workers; halting evictions and providing rental relief; and setting up multiple funds to help small businesses survive. His work early in the pandemic to pause construction and establish safety requirements has been lauded as a model by both unions and employers alike.

As Mayor of Boston, Secretary Walsh also made his mark as a labor leader. After following his father into Laborers Local 223 in Boston, he rose to head the Building and Construction Trades Council from 2011 to 2013. He worked with business and community leaders to promote high-quality development, and he created a program called Building Pathways that has become a model for increasing diversity in the workplace and providing good career opportunities for women and people of color.

Born and raised in the neighborhood of Dorchester by immigrant parents, Secretary Walsh is driven to ensure our nation's economy works for everyone. Secretary Walsh is a survivor of Burkitt lymphoma and is a proud member of the recovery community who has worked to expand addiction treatment throughout his career. While working full-time as a legislator, he returned to school to earn a degree in Political Science at Boston College.

Speakers



Roy Bahat

Head of Bloomberg Beta

Roy Bahat is the head of Bloomberg Beta, an early-stage venture firm backed by Bloomberg L.P. that was the first venture capital fund to focus on both the future of work and artificial intelligence. He also serves on the faculty at UC Berkeley's Haas School of Business.

Roy recently organized the Aspen Business Roundtable on Organized Labor. He was also a commissioner on California's Future of Work Commission, following work he did with New America to understand the 10–20-year future of work and automation in America. He was named one of Fast Company's Most Creative People in Business, has served in government, and led a nonprofit in addition to his work at established corporations and day zero startups.

He serves on the board or as an advisor to several nonprofits including the Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society and the Economic Security Project.

Roy graduated from Harvard College, where he ran the student public service nonprofit. He was a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University.



Jennifer Epps

Executive Director, The LIFT Fund

Jennifer Epps is the new executive director of the LIFT Fund, which is the most innovative and progressive joint labor and philanthropic fund in the country. In this role, Epps leads the organization as its next leader in the fight to build a stronger worker and labor movement and support innovative and bold strategies being developed by organizers across America.

Epps brings to the LIFT Fund more than 15 years of experience as a seasoned organizer and strategic leader as well as extensive experience building worker power. After getting her start in community activism, Epps led new organizing campaigns in hospitals as vice president at 1199SEIU where she covered service and maintenance, technical, professional, and registered nurse units.

Her time with 1199SEIU prepared her for her leadership as the executive director of Prince George's County Educators' Association (PGCEA), one of the largest teacher's unions in the country. While at PGCEA, Epps continued building on the Association's rich history of racial justice work and community allyship.

She is a proud graduate of Howard University with proven expertise in implementing methodologies that achieve major victories in the labor movement. She lives just outside of the nation's capital in Bowie, Maryland, with her husband and two daughters.



Dr. Annelise Orleck

Professor of History, Dartmouth College

Annelise Orleck is a professor of history at Dartmouth College. She is the author of five books and co-editor of two. Among these are "Common Sense and a Little Fire: Women and Working Class Politics in the United States," "Soviet Jewish Americans," "Storming Caesars' Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty," "Rethinking American Women's Activism," and "We are All Fast Food Workers Now: The Global Uprising Against Poverty Wages." She is co-editor of "The Politics of Motherhood: Activist Voices from Left to Right" and "The War on Poverty, 1964-1980: A New Grassroots History." Her writing has appeared in Salon, The Guardian, Mother Jones, The Progressive, Bitch Media, The Conversation, TalkPoverty, and more.

Moderator



Charisse Jones

Economic Opportunity Reporter, USA Today

Charisse Jones is an economic opportunity correspondent for USA TODAY focusing on income inequality, economic access, and the ways the workplace is changing amid the COVID-19 pandemic. She was previously a staff writer for the New York Times and part of a Pulitzer Prize-winning team at the Los Angeles Times. In addition to being a veteran reporter, Jones is the author of several books, including the American Book Award-winning "Shifting: The Double Lives of Black

Women in America'' and the Misty Copeland memoir ''Life in Motion,'' a New York Times bestseller. She is a frequent contributor to CBS Mornings and has lectured on gender politics and race at the Harvard and Yale Clubs of New York City, the University of Georgia, and numerous other institutions.

About

The History and Future of U.S. Labor Law: Conversations to Shape the Future of Work

U.S. labor laws passed in the last 100 years improved job quality for millions of workers, establishing and enhancing bargaining rights, wages, opportunities, and workplace safety while also helping to create the world's largest economy and middle class. These laws did not redound to the benefit of all workers and too often excluded women, people of color and immigrants from their protections. In many ways, these laws were the codification of a social contract across class in the U.S., creating the conditions for economic progress with a mostly common purpose. Today, however, the power of these laws has eroded and the rights they once afforded workers—to have a voice in the workplace, to be safe from harm, to access opportunity regardless of social status, to earn a decent living—have diminished. As a result, millions of workers in the U.S. today find themselves immersed in the fight, like many workers before them, to access opportunity and improve job quality for themselves and future generations.

The future of work will be shaped by what we do now, just as the labor laws passed long ago have influenced opportunity, employment and workplaces today. Understanding our past is, therefore, vital to charting the course for what we want work and job quality to look like tomorrow and decades from now. In this five-part discussion series, [The History and Future of U.S. Labor Law: Conversations to Shape the Future of Work](#), we will learn about and reflect on the history of U.S. labor law, examine current implications and challenges, and discuss how we shape a future of work that provides opportunity and dignity to all.

Opportunity in America

The Economic Opportunities Program's [Opportunity in America](#) discussion series has moved to an all-virtual format as we all do what we can to slow the spread of COVID-19. But the conversations about the changing landscape of economic opportunity in the US and implications for individuals, families, and communities across the country remain vitally important. We hope you will participate as we bring our discussions to you in virtual formats, and we look forward to your feedback.

We are grateful to Prudential Financial, Walmart, the Surdna Foundation, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, Bloomberg, and the Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth for their support of this series.

Economic Opportunities Program

The Aspen Institute [Economic Opportunities Program](#) advances strategies, policies, and ideas to help low- and moderate-income people thrive in a changing economy. [Follow us on social media](#) and [join our mailing list](#) to stay up-to-date on publications, blog posts, events, and other announcements.

Transcript

Marty Walsh (00:00:00)

Thank you, Maureen, and everyone at Aspen Institute for inviting me to address you today. I want to start by thanking all of you for being here today to discuss every worker's right to organize in this country. Workers organizing is democracy in action. It's the exercise of the fundamental right, the free choice to combine your power and advocate together. And it's in human right, not limited by where you live, where you work. I feel this fact personally. My parents came to the United States from Ireland looking for economic opportunity. They found that opportunity when my father joined a union as a construction laborer. He not only got a better wage, got a seat at the table. I joined that same union and was elected its president. Later, I was elected to public office and represent my community as a state legislator in Massachusetts and as mayor of the city of Boston.

So I'm here as labor secretary because of workers' rights to organize. It's something I believe deeply in and it's something this administration is committed to supporting for all workers. So I was very honored when President Biden asked me to help lead the White House Task Force on Worker Organizing and Empowerment. With Vice President Kamala Harris, we are promoting workers' rights and collective bargaining across the federal government and all across our economy. We are recognizing the value of unions to our workplaces, our communities, and our democracy. This comes after decades in which the balance of power was tilted against workers. From 1979 to 2020, economic productivity grew by over 60%, but the average hourly pay grew by only 17%. That's what happens when workers lose power.

Now we have an opportunity to restore the balance. A historic economic recovery is creating jobs and workers are seeing better opportunities. They're changing jobs for better pay and benefits or starting their own businesses. They're looking for childcare paid leave and flexibility. Their interest in joining a union is at a 50 year high. And at the Department of Labor, we're focused on empowering all workers with outreaching education, with enforcement of legal protections and by improving working people's bargaining power in the labor market. And we are working in a whole of government approach to level the playing field and put the power back in the hands of working people. And that's going to make our economy more competitive and more resilient over the long run.

President Biden has pledged to put power back in the hands of working people. And that's what we're doing. I appreciate you all having these essential conversations on workers right to organize. Thank you again and good luck to all of you participating in this important event.

Maureen Conway (00:02:36)

Thank you so much Secretary Walsh. Really appreciate those remarks. And now let me quickly introduce our panel and moderator. We have a fabulous panel today. You can find their bios on our website, and you'll learn more about them as the conversation gets rolling. So let me quickly just do a quick names to faces introduction. Today we have joining us Dr. Annelise Orleck, professor of history at Dartmouth College. Jennifer Epps, executive director of the LIFT Fund. Roy Bahat, head of Bloomberg Beta. And we are so thankful to have Charisse Jones, economic opportunity reporter from USA Today to moderate today's discussion. Charisse writes about income inequality, economic access, and the way workplace is changing amid the COVID-19 pandemic. And in addition to her award-winning reporting, Charisse is also the author of several books, including the American book award-winning "Shifting: The Double Lives of Black Women in America." Charisse, thank you so much for joining us and let me turn it over to you.

Charisse Jones (00:03:45)

Thank you so much. It's so great to be here to talk about this important and timely topic. And before we get our conversation going, I wanted to frame it a little bit so we can think a little bit about this issue which is so pertinent to American workers. The pandemic really illuminated and magnified the types of challenges many workers face in the workplace, especially those in frontline jobs, people who were taking care of the elderly and the sick, who were standing behind store and restaurant counters, who were working in factories and warehouses. Many of those workers have talked about and told me in my reporting how they were barely able to make ends meet because of low wages and how in the midst of a once in a century pandemic, they often didn't have the option to take sick days with pay, or they didn't have the equipment they needed to protect their health.

Those circumstances drove a wave of activism as workers and worker advocates fought for better treatment. And then as the US began to grapple with the labor shortage in some industries, we saw a wave of strikes and other actions as workers began using newfound leverage to demand higher pay, better benefits, and stronger workplace protections. There were those who specifically want unions. McDonald's employees have staged one day walkouts all over the country, calling on their workforce to organize. Starbucks workers in more than 110 stores in 26 states have filed petitions to unionize with the National Labor Relations Board and three in Arizona and Buffalo, New York have decided to join a union. And Amazon workers in Alabama and New York have taken or planned to take votes to do the same. Those who are in unions are walking off the job in some cases for the first time in decades, from the United Auto workers to Kellogg employees who went on strike last year.

The benefits of unions for those who belong to them have been documented by many economists. Membership increases the household wealth for all workers, but it gives a particular boost to workers of color, increasing their earnings, offering access to retirement savings and providing other benefits critical for financial security and closing the racial wealth gap. One report that I wrote about found that white union households had almost twice the median wealth of white households that did not include a union member. For black union households, the wealth difference was three times greater. And for Latino union households, the difference in wealth was five times greater.

But as Maureen said, union memberships have dropped by roughly half in the last 40 years. And resistance remain strong, not only from many corporations, but from some workers who feel such membership raises the cost of goods, doesn't benefit the entire labor force and leads to unemployment as jobs move from state to state or even overseas. So what do we need to do? Where has the American worker been and how do workers move forward? Annelise, I'd love to start with you. If you could take us back in time and paint a picture of what it was like around the time that the National Labor Relations Act was passed, what was the national mood? What were the challenges of work in the economy?

Annelise Orleck (00:07:20)

[inaudible 00:07:20].

Charisse Jones (00:07:24)

We need your volume. We can't hear you.

Annelise Orleck (00:07:28)

Okay, great. At the time that the National Labor Relations Act was passed in 1935, it came after decades of worker organizing fundamentally for the right to organize but for things we now take for granted that the National Labor Relations Act and its twin three years later, the Fair Labor Standards Act gave us; the weekend, minimum wage, maximum hours, basic safety standards. So they'd been organizing, and usually federal power was brought in against them often in the form of National Guard troops being called in by governors and as well the act that we think of as breaking up monopolies, the Sherman Antitrust Act was used repeatedly to try to break up strikes that were able to extend beyond a single state.

So that was the lead up. What started to happen in the 1910s and '20s was a transformation of the view of workers in those politicians who were coming into power. The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in 1911 was a very important event because it was witnessed by Frances Perkins, who would go on to be Franklin Roosevelt's Secretary of Labor and one of the architects of the National Labor Relations Act and the Fair Labor Standards Act. It was a fire that killed people in the district of State Senator Wagner whose name would go on the National Labor Relations Act. And so you began to get a shift. And I want to make clear, the shift would not have happened if worker organizing had not continued. And the unrest of the early years of the depression was profound, it was national, and it definitely went behind the passage of those acts.

However, as one of the executives of the NAACP said at the time, that along with the Social Security Act created, as he said, a social safety net just big enough for most black people in the country to fall through. The reason for that was that it didn't cover agricultural workers and it didn't cover domestic workers. And in terms of the jobs that people of color, particularly women of color had, they were not included. That was so they could get the act past Southern Democratic committee chairs and also folks in the West who really wanted to ensure a continued agricultural and domestic labor force. However, the fact remains that that's the single weakest part of the NLRA. And we can talk more about what needs to happen after.

Final thought is that we all think about Section 7A, which I think Secretary Walsh alluded to. It gave workers the right to organize and sparked a national organizing surge under the slogan the president wants you to join a union. That was an important shift and maybe we're back there again with a very pro-labor president.

Charisse Jones (00:10:28)

And in terms of the Fair Labor Standards Act, I mean, did that give more teeth to the National Labor Relations Act? Did it build upon it? I mean, what was that role?

Annelise Orleck (00:10:39)

Well, it really was something that Secretary Perkins absolutely wanted to pass because the right to organize was one thing, but again, having been an eyewitness to the Triangle fire in which 146 young people, mostly young women, some of them teenage girls died in the middle of Manhattan on a warm spring afternoon, tens of thousands saw this. She was among them. The Fair Labor Standards Act was a broader attempt to regulate the workplace to make it safer and also to establish the idea that there should be a federal standard for how many hours a week workers had to work. It gave us the weekend, it gave us overtime, all of those things which were not included in the original National Labor Relations Act.

Charisse Jones (00:11:27)

And Jennifer, you're an experienced organizer and you've worked on innovations in that realm or in that space. Tell us a little bit about yourself, your group, and how the history of the Labor Relations Act and the labor movement writ large informs what your group and your various partners are trying to do today.

Jennifer Epps (00:11:47)

Thanks, Charisse. So I've had experience, I've been organizing workers for over 16 years around working conditions, from frontline healthcare workers to teachers. And now as the executive director of the LIFT Fund, what I have the honor and privilege of working on is really this unique collaboration between labor and workers' centers being able to partner together to make change. We're seeing in real life with an amazing example of what happens when labor community, philanthropy work together to actually fund and have a shared agenda around racial social justice and economic solidarity together.

So being a part of the LIFT Fund has been allowing us to really see that close up and how, particularly in the South because we are now working on the Southern Worker Opportunity Fund, we think of it as the critical next piece to building worker power. I think connecting it back to the National Labor Relations Act, so we look at the NLRA has been here to do a lot of things. And I think it has improved workers' lives tremendously from its inception, but also, it's not... What would it look like for it to be a statute that doesn't include other marginalized sectors? Folks who are not included in the National Labor Relations Act as it is.

I mean, we're seeing now from Amazon to Starbucks, and like you said Charisse earlier, folks are having this energy and organizing and rising up to demand better working conditions, but the NLRA doesn't always have sufficient support or protections for those workers. So companies are blatantly violating the law and are seeing that there're little consequences for actually doing stuff. So I think for us at LIFT we're committed to supporting workers who are trying to organize and investing in the labor movement because we know that that's what happens when workers have power. The country wins and all workers win.

Charisse Jones (00:13:56)

And for the layman and lay woman that might be listening, what is a workers' center?

Jennifer Epps (00:14:03)

A workers' center is a place where there are folks who generally are working together that's not a union necessarily, but they are helping in terms of increasing power and standards for a group of workers in whichever sector that they're in. Sometimes it's black workers' centers. Sometimes there are Latino workers' centers and construction workers' centers that they're working with to improve conditions and standards in that space.

Charisse Jones (00:14:40)

So it's really pushing forward the idea that beyond unions, you can still have these worker collectives that can achieve change. It doesn't have to be a union specifically.

Jennifer Epps (00:14:50)

It doesn't have to, but a lot of times what we've seen at LIFT how they work together works really well I think in terms of having a workers' center and a labor union to ensure that there is a collective bargaining agreement, that the standards could be withheld and that the workers' center plays a different role in making sure that those workers are looking at things outside of work as well to improve lives and livelihoods and conditions that they are within the four walls of their actual workplace.

Charisse Jones (00:15:22)

And Roy, let's get you into the conversation a little bit. You invest in startups with a focus on ventures that help to build the future of work. Tell us a bit about yourself, Bloomberg Beta and how the history of work and the right to organize influences your vision and how your company is playing a role in shaping that.

Roy Bahat (00:15:44)

Sure. Thank you. It's great to hear the history because when I started doing this work of investing in startups, I never expected that organized labor would become my number one focus as an area at which to look. And I'll explain how I got there, which is I've worked in a bunch of different settings. I worked in government, I worked in a Fortune 500 company, I've worked in academia. I still teach at Berkeley. I started a company. And now for almost the last 10 years, I've been an investor in startups, a venture capitalist. And across all those settings, what I saw was that work didn't function very well, didn't work. For those who didn't have enough work, they were suffering from a lack of work. And for those like many of us, my guess is people listening to this broadcast and those of us here, the experience of actually working sometimes produces suffering.

And so when we started Bloomberg Beta, which is Bloomberg's VC firm, because Bloomberg focuses on serving all of the business world, we decided to focus on the future of work and believed it had to be improved. And that launched us on a quest to try to understand exactly what problems were we looking to solve. And this was, if you rewind five, six, seven years ago, when the headlines were all about how robots were going to take all the jobs. We were the first venture capital firm to focus on the future of work and the first ones to focus on artificial intelligence specifically. So we thought, hey, if that's going to happen, we're the bad guys here and we got to figure out how to fix that. And so we studied deeply the connection between technology and work. And what we discovered is, first of all, we don't really need to worry about the future of work that much, because there's enough to worry about in the present of work of what people are experiencing.

And specifically what people told us that they wanted, whether it was in small group settings, one-on-one surveys, and not just for people like us who have jobs where we talk and type, but for what we now call essential workers, what they said they wanted was dignity. And dignity has a very particular meaning. Of course there's the common meaning of a sense of honor and respect that people accord to themselves and we accord to them. But there's also a sense of fitting in, of is my work necessary? Is my work... I mean, the word essential wasn't part of the work vocabulary then. And when we discovered that the truth is we didn't see much of a role for organized labor at the time, in part because so few private sector companies were organized. And so we didn't see it as something that needed to be part of the solution.

But as we've looked at one solution after another, it's pretty clear to me that we won't find our way out of this unless we reinvent the approach to organize labor, because what workers are saying about dignity that they want is they want pay, they want stability of income. And then once they have that stability, they want more income and they want say. They want the ability to feel powerful and we say

have a seat at the table, but that's really about say. And then all of this latest wave of organizing began to kick up. And we have seen the way that working people act when the solutions that the economy presents to them are unsatisfactory. They do extreme things at the polls. We all do extreme things at the polls. And so this wave started to sweep in and I began to see that this is just inevitable. Working people are going to seek change and use the good tools at their disposal. And they see that most industries fared very well during the pandemic. And they're just asking, well, why didn't that reach me?

And so now the way we see our role is that if you imagine this wave is inevitable, what do we have to do? Well, we have to figure out a way to make it more functional, because it's pretty clear that the traditional methods, the answer is not going to be to rewind time and do it the way we did it in the past. That mostly worked for white men and not for everybody across the society. The tools, and we'll talk more about this, have become quite outdated. And so our role as investors is to support CEOs who want to reimagine this. And we've had an effort going with Aspen that's been a business round table on organized labor so that business people can consider our part of the equation, but then also to support experiments. What are the new tools? What are the new ways? And Jennifer was talking about the symbiotic collaboration between workers' centers and unions. That's one example of a type of mode that is now thriving. What are the thousand other things we need to try to create something functional?

Charisse Jones (00:20:45)

And Jennifer, can you talk a little bit about... I mean, we do have this wave that's happening. So people are finding a voice and finding some means, but there have clearly been a lot of obstacles to organizing in recent years. What are some of those obstacles and how are you in your organization trying to get around them?

Jennifer Epps (00:21:07)

There are a lot of obstacles similar to the ones that Annelise brought up before that led us to the point where we were able to get the National Labor Relations Act. Maybe not as intense where... But in some cases, just as bad. I think the fact that the matter we are seeing very huge companies spend a lot of money fighting workers to be able to organize in one voice at work. I think about a story. One of my first organizing drives with home care workers, similar to my grandmother who came here from Honduras and became a home care worker and was making less than \$10 an hour. These home care workers in DC. They wanted a union. The company spent a lot of money intimidating them and bullying them and they were unsuccessful in their organizing call.

And I think that's one of the biggest pieces that we're seeing is that folks who want to organize, who are in a position, particularly folks who've been marginalized, black and brown workers, women, want to be able to do these things in the way. And they have to overcome the fear and challenges of knowing, hey, I might lose my job if I do this. I might not be able to feed my family. I know that this is the right thing to do, but it's the hard thing to do. And we as the LIFT Fund and as the folks who are trying to work to change the NLRA, we have to do all that we can to make sure that they have a fighting chance. And I think that is what the LIFT Fund is doing is figuring out how does the community organizations, the government, how do the unions and the workers' centers all work together to make sure that folks have a fair share in organizing and that people in the community are supporting them?

Charisse Jones (00:22:57)

And Annelise, can you jump in here and talk a little bit about what's transpired. We had this huge uptick in union membership. Through the early '50s, you had the UN Declaration on Human Rights saying that there was a right to organize and then union membership just began to plummet. And so can you

Speak a little bit about what happened over the last few decades that has led to this and the need to renew and redefine organizing?

Annelise Orleck (00:23:27)

Yes. And I know my job here is to do history and I will in one second, but I just wanted to pick up on a couple of things that Jennifer and Roy said, because I think they're really important. The issue of dignity and respect right now is profound and you can't put a dollar amount on it. And I interviewed the first two women who had led a strike in a Walmart in the United States in 2012. Their organization is literally called OUR Walmart, Organization United for Respect. Fast Food Worker Alliance, people that I interviewed, the R-E-S-P-E-C-T Fast Food Worker Alliance. And I interviewed Walmart worker who did a freedom ride to Walmart headquarters. And she said she was really struck because people were literally hungry. They literally didn't have enough food on the table, but the first thing they wanted to talk about was being treated with respect. So that's an issue that we can't avoid.

As far as obstacles, also, when Jennifer was talking, I thought about the fact that the Walmart workers, Walmart literally hired the same industrial espionage international security firm that defense contractors were hiring to spy on these low wage workers, which the workers thought was really amusing. But as Roy points out, you can spend a lot of money to try to stop unionism and not so much to pay the workers. Okay. Back very quickly on history, which I know I'm supposed to do. The NLRA really first started to be gutted. There was a huge surge of organizing in the '30s and through World War II. 1946 I think was the biggest strike here in American history after the war ended. And then 1947 was the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act.

And the Taft-Hartley Act really was intended to limit the power of unions as outlined in the National Labor Relations Act. It banned closed shops by saying that, and closed shops is the union has won an agreement with the employer and then everyone who comes into that shop who's hired has to join. It banned that. It banned unions power to bring another unions or other companies to boycott an employer, what's called a secondary boycott. Interestingly, it had a free speech clause, but it pushed unions to get rid of anyone who had had ties to the US Communist Party, which was really involved in organizing in the '30s. So that happened.

Nevertheless, union power continued to grow through the '50s, '60s, and '70s. And you had, I think, at one point upwards of 30% of workers in the country belonging to unions. With the election of Ronald Reagan, unions had become so established that they had gone over to the conservative side in many cases. And a group of air traffic controllers in their union they endorsed Reagan. He was elected. They called a strike in 1981 for shorter hours, for more safety controls and for more money, a very highly skilled job. Anyway, Reagan broke the air traffic controllers' strike because federal employees did not have a legal right to strike, fired 11 of the 13,000 strikers, brought in non-union workers. And this became a pattern that took place throughout the 1980s.

So I'm thinking of... There were strikes at Phelps Dodge, Hormel Meats, International Paper. In the '90s, at the Detroit Free Press and in 2016 communication workers struck Verizon. In each case, the company fired striking workers and brought in non-union strikers. And that pattern, starting with the PATCO strike, was really what started to gut unions. So I think those are all the reasons that union memberships fell as well as a changing capitalism that we can talk about, the upsurge that everybody's been talking about, and I hope we'll talk about it a little more later has really been of a new kind. So fast food workers, service workers, hotel workers, home healthcare workers, and public workers. And it's a women's movement a lot and it's a people of color movement. So it's a really different labor movement than the one that led to the NLRA.

Charisse Jones (00:27:52)

And speaking to that a little bit, one of the audience members had a question, have there ever been any meaningful efforts to reform NLRA in Congress to make it more inclusive of all the workers that were excluded? And if so, why? If not, why not?

Annelise Orleck (00:28:10)

It's been very hard to get through because Taft-Hartley very much limited its power. Instead, we can talk about that in the end when we get to what we have to do. There have been attempts to pass state laws. So for example, the United Farm Workers pushed successfully in the 1970s in California for the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act. And that's really a model for trying to build some of the protections that cover other workers into the structure of labor for farm workers. But it was only last year that they were able to get the same protection in terms of an eight hour day that the Fair Labor Standards Act gave other workers. Farm workers were always expected to do more and their wage structure was less.

Charisse Jones (00:28:58)

Roy, the right to organize crosses several systems, each of which have their challenges. We've got a corporate culture that's often anti-union. As we've talked about, we've got laws or regulatory framework that's got a lot of holes in it. There are groups of workers who might be struggling to build a framework to organize and unions have had their own problems. What do you see as some of the biggest issues that cross all of these systems and make it a lot harder for workers to have a voice?

Roy Bahat (00:29:29)

Well, the good news is everybody agrees on one thing. And I've talked to business leaders, I've talked to union leaders, to labor leaders who are not in unions, working people, folks in government, everybody agrees the current system is broken. It's very hard to find somebody who says let's just do it exactly the way we're doing it other than maybe some of the vendors who are involved, like maybe some lawyers who're not as sold on change. And my read of the history, although Annelise is an expert a thousand times more than I am, but my read of the history, and I'd be curious for her perspective, is that often but not always, law follows what happens in reality, that workers would go and strike illegally and then that kind of strike, having been seen by legislators later to be beneficial, might then be included in the framework of law.

And so the way I think about it is what are the things we can do? And if I look at business leaders, because I want to start with my home community, CEOs have a lot of biases that don't serve them anymore. Many of them have learned in school that unions are dead weight loss. And they've learned this microeconomics framework that causes them to always reject unions or almost always. Second is many of them take organizing personally. When their workplace organizes, they think, what did I do wrong? Oh my gosh, that you should need such a horrible thing. Now, a board of a company doesn't say, what did I do wrong when the CEO asks for more money or more something. It's just, that's what people do is they try to advocate for more. And so we know that even well-intentioned CEOs, even CEOs who are the children of union organizers themselves, feel like they can't participate in the system in a way that is constructive.

And there are many issues around this. The culture of work. Work providing benefits has led to a culture of paternalism in the workplace. But the net effect of all of it is that for business, the knee jerk response is to treat the union as an enemy. And I think that's just not going to work going forward. And what we

need are intrepid business leaders who are willing to try something new. In Judaism, we have this idea of the first person who went to cross the Red Sea, before it was obvious the Red Sea was going to part that person's name was not shown. And that person walked in up to their head before the Red Sea is parted or so goes the interpretation. And that's the kind of courage that I think we're going to need to see business leaders show, because I really think there's a case to be made, that the most important business skill of the next 20 years, one that isn't taught right now at most business schools is how to collaborate with an organized workforce.

And then of course, people in government think this systems are antiquated, but any discussion to reform the system runs into these polarized attacks. I mean, the Team Act, which was a Republican driven act, that's now had its second go. There's a case to be made that some of what's in there is really useful that workers would rather have a non vote... Having been on many boards, I think having a non-voting worker elected representative on a board is better than no worker representation, but traditional labor and union says this is horrible. Come out against it. It's an attempt to replace. They might be right about that. I'm not saying that they're wrong about that, but it prevents us from having a good discussion.

And then when I look at labor and I intentionally say labor and not unions, because I think the two are not synonymous. Unions are both critical and not the only way. Institutionalized labor often focuses like all institutions on its own self preservation on making sure that the elected leaders don't criticize the membership, that kind of thing. And unions are large organizations and large organizations have some common problems across all of them. Disconnection from the base. If you talk to working people, I'll just say they say things like I'm afraid. That fear is the thing. And I think that both Jennifer and Annelise were getting at this. Fear of organizing is what's holding them back. And I think we need to create some conditions. The market is helping us. The labor shortage is helping us. New communication tools that allow workers to communicate anonymously without surveillance from the company are helping. But there's also I'll just say this knee jerk attitude on behalf of workers that the boss is the enemy. Solidarity with all people, but the boss, the boss is a pig. And that just doesn't make sense to me.

We have got to get out of this working together and figure out some solutions. And there are some green shoots. We've seen in the tech industry examples of non-union organizing that have really been effective. These women at Amazon who got Amazon to move on climate change. Some workers at Google who got Google to stop serving certain clients, the Google walkout. And so I think that labor is in the air right now. You can see it on TikTok. I even fund with some other folks some grants for new stories about labor workers have more power than they had a few years ago. And we got to figure out some experiments to run because in the absence of that, we'll get what we've gotten, which is the big unions. Their members say they're too focused on elected officials and politics and not focused enough on direct value. We just got to bring it back to basics. So I guess I'd say I'm team experimentation here for trying new things and seeing what works.

Charisse Jones (00:35:10)

Jennifer and Annelise, jump in here. I mean, what do you think about that? I mean, are unions one kind of antiquated model that's useful, but really should not dictate how we try and bring about change in the workplace and dignity and fair compensation? What do you think about what Roy was talking about?

Annelise Orleck (00:35:31)

Jennifer, do you have thoughts?

Jennifer Epps (00:35:33)

Go ahead, Annelise. I'll go after you.

Annelise Orleck (00:35:36)

All right. I'm always asked when I talk about... My last book was on what I call the uprising against poverty wages around the world and in the United States. And one fact that we absolutely have to talk here is that we're not just talking about the declining unions, we're talking about a 40 year decline in real wages, which means what you can buy with your paycheck. That is the definition of a broken system. And it's the first thing that has to be addressed. Now yes, unions have been discriminatory and unions' leadership has been dominated by white men, although that's starting to change. And we have had the formation of all these new kinds of movements, including workers' centers. All of it is really important.

But when I looked at who funded a lot of the organizing that took place in fight for \$15, for example, and in the retail workers movement and restaurant opportunities council, all of these very grassroots kinds of worker uprisings, the unions were absolutely crucial. SEIU for fight for 15, the food and commercial workers for looking at helping grocery workers and retail workers organize. They can't always get into unions. It's very difficult to hold the kinds of elections with these large workforces that result in unions. Some of the old National Labor Relations Board rules are needlessly constraining. So there have to be experiments, but I think we really do have to move beyond this knee jerk criticism of unions. As many workers said to me, the only thing worse than my union is no union.

Jennifer Epps (00:37:27)

Thank you, Annelise. I think you raised a lot of the points that I was going to raise. But I think the thing that LIFT has done and the thing that I've seen, I don't disagree that there needs to be experimentation, but to what end? And experimentation so that workers can build real power. And that what we're talking about here is a struggle for power. And so how do we ensure that there is a vehicle in which workers have more power that's sustainable? And I only have seen that done in a collective bargaining contract. There are other are ways that people can gain power, but a more sustainable way to access power no matter who the person is, whether the CEO is a great one or not, there is something that exists beyond the personalities that have the ability to change real lives and impact people's paychecks and whatever else that they need and dignity at work.

So I do think that the way in which folks are thinking about the unions and how these other opportunities and experience could figure out how to work together, because I think that's what LIFT is doing. It's like there are these other opportunities, there are workers' centers that are trying to do the right thing. And a lot of the workers would love to be in the union. And a lot of the workers' centers would love for that to happen as well, as well as still do the work that they need to do that's outside. So I don't think it's either or. I think it's, how do we figure out how to do it together?

Annelise Orleck (00:39:00)

Just one more very quick fact, if you look at a chart on the decline of union membership since the late 1970s, it correlates exactly with the decline in the numbers of people in the country who consider themselves middle class. So that's just a fact.

Charisse Jones (00:39:17)

And Roy, talk a little bit about some of the firms that you've invested in like Unit and what you're doing. What are some of these alternative models that you think you'd like to see more of?

Roy Bahat (00:39:28)

Sure. And I'll just say I'll share a few examples, but the headline is we'd love to see more. We'd love to see more people who are founders, whether of companies or nonprofit organizations or new unions and talk to them. Not all of them could we invest in because we're an investment firm trying to make money, but we want to know about it and find ways to collaborate. And what I'd say is the headline of the dream is are there forms of worker organization that might actually be good for the companies, for the workers, of course, and for the companies at which they are present? Because if they make those companies less successful, we've seen what happens to industries and unionized companies in the market. And while there are some counter examples of some unionized businesses performing better, it's not that hard to find examples of cases where unions harmed the performance of the company where the union is present.

By the way, I think unions are an essential option here. I'm not trying to badmouth unions. I'm trying to say that it's part of a milieu. I mean, I joined the union at Cal and served on the California governor's Future of Work Commission, which was co-chaired by Mary Kay Henry from SCIU, but just I'll share an anecdote of what a gulf there is an understanding and then I'll tell you about some of the direct experiments. Mary Kay Henry and I spoke at a business conference. And it was a well heeled business conference with a wonderfully prepared moderator and public company CEOs in attendance. And the journalist who introduced her said, "This is Mary Kay Henry, the head of SEUI," which if you're in the labor movement would be as unthinkable as calling Joe Biden the president of the UA of S it's just not a mistake you would make, but it reflects the lack of understanding.

And one of those reasons I think is that the most common option is unions that are too big. In the US we can tell fewer than 20 new independent unions, not a new local branch, but a new independent union are formed in the US every year. As an innovator, I look at that and I say, well, that's evidence that there's not that much innovation happening in how unions form, because you only have the established institutions. And so we invest in a company called Unit, which is @unitworkers.com. And in the same way that companies can spend lots of money on various consultants and vendors to bust a union, it's only fair that there should be a vendor who helps form the union. And so Unit helps a workforce to form an independent union.

They can then decide if they want to affiliate with one of the big national labor unions, that's their choice, but unit just had its first union formed, I think it was last week or earlier this week even, which is in North Carolina, which is a right to work state. So a state that most unions would traditionally just ignore because it's too hard to get unionizing activity to happen. And Piedmont Health Services United, which is a community health primary care provider won overwhelmingly for a pretty small union. The vote was 29 to three. And so what you see is there are models that can work at small scale.

I also mentioned over in the Slide O discussion, we invest in a company called Open Collective that among other uses allows workers to easily form what's called a mutual aid society, where they pool their resources and support one another. That's one version of what unions do. And my basic view on this is if you... I can find you people who are stalwart, well-intentioned labor advocates who will point at these new experiments and say, this is an example of everything wrong and they'll bring the religion of how it's always been done, or they'll say that, well, you can't have a improvement in labor backed by a capitalist. That's by definition wrong. And I think if we enter that kind tribal religious thinking, we're just going to keep having the same results we've had.

And so I'm into experimentation. Unit is a great example of that, Open Collective is another. And I hope that that will create the awareness of what can be possible so that we can then enshrine some of that in law. And I'll just say one more thing about law, because it did come up in the chat and I think it's essential to mention. One major gap in current law is that it doesn't cover the independent contractors. If you are a 1099, then a union as it currently exists is not available to you. Other things might be available to you. There's no reason 1099s couldn't elect a worker board representative for example, but we're going to need to experiment because the old tools just are failing us

Charisse Jones (00:44:15)

And to that end, what do you do about independent contractors? Is that something that you've got to go to Congress to lobby for some kind of change in the labor relations law? I mean, how do those workers get the kind of protection that so many are clamoring for?

Roy Bahat (00:44:35)

Yeah. First of all, I'm not one of them, so I'm hesitant to speak on their behalf. But I'll tell you my views on what might work and it'd be more important to hear from them, which is no, I don't think we need to wait for Congress. In general, as much as I believe in legislative change and believe in our system, when we point at law as the solution, what can sometimes happen is it's disempowering to us as individuals. Those systems they feel gargantuan, they feel unmoving and they're not. The systems are just us and the antidote is trying new things. And so what I believe is that what we ought to see among 1099s is a whole wave of experimentation. And we are seeing some of it.

There are organizations like Gig Workers Rising. They are the women organizing Mechanical Turks. By the way, I don't think it's an accident that the new wave of labor organizers tends almost without exception to be women and people of color. I think it's always been the people who feel like the system offers the least for them who act on the system to change it. So fair enough. And so I think that what we ought to see is trial and error. And that may mean doing things that are not covered under current law until law covers it. And the other thing I just say, and this is also to everybody in the audience is we may be sitting here thinking, oh, there's some experts. And they're talking about it. And they have ideas on what to do. This is a domain where none of us really knows the answer, I'll just say. And we are all making it up as we go.

I mean, when we organize this Aspen Business Roundtable on Organized Labor, we are astonished to find ourselves possibly the preeminent business group talking about what to do about organized labor, which is scary, because we just got going. And so that's really a call to everybody here that your ideas, your attempts, your experimentation can be part of the solution. Twitter is one place where the conversation is I think really active and happening. It's certainly not the only place with conversations like this one or another, but it's a call to action for all of us

Charisse Jones (00:46:36)

And Jennifer and Annelise, do you have anything to add to the conundrum faced by independent contractors? These gig workers, these Uber drivers, et cetera, what do they do to get the kinds of protections that they want, that they're clamoring for?

Jennifer Epps (00:46:55)

Right. I think at LIFT, we have a couple examples of some of our grantees that have been able to do tremendous work in spite of the fact that they're not a part of the National Labor Relations Act or have the ability to organize. So we've had organizations that have been working with tech workers who are 1099 and working with the unions to talk about these opportunities, to talk about what's happening and how to shift the field. And they've been working together. And I think that's an experimentation that we're still seeing how it's going to play out. I think what we're seeing too, one of the folks that we've been working with are the nail salon workers in New York City who have been trying to figure out how do they organize? Mostly immigrant women of color who are wanting to figure out how to improve those standards in New York City where you would think you would not be able to get your nails done for so cheap because they have undercut folks who are doing the work so much.

So they've been able to organize in some ways and try to push legislation to actually happen to increase and improve standards all over. One of the things that Roy said that I wanted to talk about a little bit is that idea about working in the South. I think that's what we are seeing too, in terms of how hard it's been, but there is jobs opportunity, people who are moving to the South and that there's a shifting demographic that we are interested in in the Southern Worker Opportunity Fund to really figure out how do we help build the infrastructure that can build a larger movement? Because it's already happening. And I think the more and more folks are interested in going to the South unions, philanthropy, the more it could change. And so we're seeing as a real opportunity as well.

And then lastly, I think when we talk about access being the most fundamental part of all of this, access to the Labor Relations Act, those who have it have been trying to figure out how to win despite the many challenges in front of them. And then those who don't have access, like I said, with the salon workers and the 1099 tech workers and Uber drivers and how do we make sure that we're creating a space so that they can have access and change their working conditions?

Annelise Orleck (00:49:22)

I think one of the things that both Roy and Jennifer have brought up that are really important is who is classified as a 1099. I call the gig economy an end run around the new deal, because it is a misclassification of workers who should be employees. They're disempowered workers, their employers have a great deal more power than they do. And the labor protections of the new deal that we're talking about here, we're supposed to equalize a little bit and allow workers certain basic protections as part of a national moral economy, if you will. And so the Obama administration Department of Labor did start to try to address what they called misclassification of employees as independent contractors. And I think that that's something that has to continue to happen, whether it's the nail workers or the Uber drivers or adjunct professors. I mean, that's a great example of a workforce that has advanced degrees and has been totally impoverished by the gig economy.

So that is crucial. And I think we're going to have to figure out how to manage that. And I think it can come to some extent via state and federal Labor Department rules. But I think that actually there's going to have to be an updating of the National Labor Relations Act and the definition of employee. That's why we're a hundred years back in many ways [crosstalk 00:50:56]-

Charisse Jones (00:50:56)

[crosstalk 00:50:56] on broad based. Annelise.

Annelise Orleck (00:51:00)

Yes.

Charisse Jones (00:51:01)

Annelise, can you hear me?

Annelise Orleck (00:51:03)

Yeah.

Charisse Jones (00:51:04)

I think we lost you for a minute. So we didn't hear all of your unfortunately.

Annelise Orleck (00:51:09)

Okay. Well, what I was saying is I think we have to have a fundamental push to redefine legally the meaning of employee. And there are countries around the world, even dictatorships, ironically, the brutal dictatorship of Duterte who originally ran in the Philippines as a populist, has addressed this issue of what the Philippines workers call contractualization, everybody becoming a contract worker instead of an employee. It's not real. It's a way to impoverish workers at the cost of employers. Walmart for example has all these independent contractors who are purposely kept under the number of hours per week that would make them legally classified as employees. So they don't have to pay any of the kinds of benefits that federal or state labor law require. So this is a huge issue. And it's one that we won't be able to bring real equity or justice unless we've dealt with.

Charisse Jones (00:52:14)

I want to get to a couple more of the audience questions. One of the questioners wanted to know in the spirit of experimentation, what are the panelists thoughts on broad based industrywide bargaining as a potential solve as proposed by David Madland? Roy and Jennifer, you want to get into that? And then we can see what Annelise thinks as well.

Roy Bahat (00:52:38)

Oh, I mean, I think that that "sectoral bargaining" is a very promising direction. There are ways in which it has existed in the US in the past. There's a power question about how to make it happen because it requires enough of the companies and enough of the relevant labor organizations to all come to the table together. Almost happened it seemed in California and might still happen. The short answer is yes and the longer problem to solve is how. Experimentation is great by the way, but it's only one step. Once you experiment, you got to enshrine that in laws that give everybody an equal playing field and industries that give everybody at equal playing field and bargaining across an entire industry, which happens by the way in industries that have trade unions. It happens to some degree in construction. It happens in Hollywood. For sure, seems like a very constructive direction.

Jennifer Epps (00:53:38)

I think that similar to what Roy said, we are absolutely seeing how there could be a sectoral strategy in how we organize and how we bargain because that's the way things seem to be going. I think when you think about auto workers, when you're thinking about industries that are all over that folks have the similar interest to do it. Do I have the answer on how to do it? But I think LIFT is in a space where we are open and interested in figuring out how folks are doing and how we can support their work.

Annelise Orleck (00:54:13)

The forerunner to the National Labor Relations Act, the National Industrial Recovery Act, right after FDR's election had sectoral bargaining with three constituencies represented on the board and this is also partly an idea that was sparked by Roy talking about having non-voting worker representatives on corporate boards. And the view of the Roosevelt administration economists was that an unruly economy, a constantly boom and busting economy could be regulated if you get the input of all the major constituencies of which organized labor was one. And so it was organized labor business and consumers who negotiated sectoral agreements on wages and prices and worker power and all the fundamentals of keeping an economy going.

And I would suggest that we should go back to something like that. It certainly wasn't perfect. Eleanor Roosevelt and the labor leader, Rose Schneiderman were furious because they were constantly lower wages negotiated for women, for people of color. So it was far from perfect, but I think it's an interesting model. And as we look at an unruly economy at the moment, it's something worth thinking about.

Charisse Jones (00:55:35)

And what are your thoughts about worker owned co-ops? Is that a model that helps address workers' voice and power? That's from one of our audience members. Jennifer, you want to take that or Roy?

Jennifer Epps (00:55:53)

I don't have much experience with worker owned co-ops, but I have talked to some folks who are doing it, I think in North Carolina. And it seems pretty cool in terms of the ability for workers... You're seeing right now with the Great Resignation and you're seeing folks organizing. You're seeing a lot of different things that are out there that say people want to figure out how to self determine and be able to be in a place where they have some part ownership in it. So I don't know much about it, but I have heard that there's been some success stories. I think the one thing that I would want to make sure that there is back to access that the folks who are also starting these are intentionally about including black, indigenous and people of color into this space, because they may not always have, or we may not always have the opportunities to have this worker co-op experience or experiences.

Roy Bahat (00:56:53)

Yeah. I'll just add that worker co-ops are extremely promising and they sometimes work very well. They're not an alternative to unions. We see that with REI unionizing right now, and REI is not just a worker co-op, but it's a co-op and also has unionizing. And by the way, the track record of worker co-ops is not, oh, these are always great businesses that thrive. They sometimes work and sometimes don't as might be expected or sometimes work for a while as might be expected with any new or emerging effort. Not that worker comps are that new, but emerging. And here's what I'd say is that the problem we need to solve with worker co-ops is on some level. The problem we need to solve with worker organization

generally is in some level our bigger problem, which is small scale democracies don't always work at representing the interests of all the people involved in them. And a lot of working people don't like their union. And I would agree with that comment about, well, I don't like the union, but the only thing worse is maybe not having one, that Churchill paraphrase or something.

But still things like work rules and union activities that sometimes protect weak performers often end up harming the experience of strong performers. And that's an issue with workplace democracy. That is something we need to iterate on and figure out how to solve. We don't have great solutions for it. I will say I'm inspired here by the Johns Hopkins professor, Hahrie Han, who has this line that democracy is a muscle. And my hope about worker organizations is that by exercising the muscle of democracy at a scale that people can relate to the workplace, we as a society can build the skills to exercise the muscle of democracy at the ballot box and all these other places. I mean, no wonder people behave strangely at the polls, if that's their only democratic thing they're doing and it's once every two or four years. If you went and hit the gym once every two or four years, maybe I should speak to this, you wouldn't be that good at it. And so I really do believe that democracy is a muscle idea.

Charisse Jones (00:59:05)

And Annelise and Jennifer, I think you spoke to this a little bit, but we have another audience question. Since it's very difficult to pass legislation in Congress is updating labor law on the state level more realistic?

Annelise Orleck (00:59:18)

Well, one thing that I think is a great example in terms of making the NLRA more inclusive is the domestic workers bills of rights that the National Federation of Domestic Workers under Ai-jen Poo have been able to pass in 10 states. Now, there is a federal law that originally VP Harris and now Rep Pramila Jayapal and Kirsten Gillibrand have introduced to try to cover domestic workers. But it's amazing that 85 years out we still have not covered domestic workers who make up such a huge labor for us in the United States, especially if you bring in people who are doing home healthcare and who are even caring for sick relatives.

So in California there's been some interesting legislation to cover those people. So I think state legislation is key. State legislation has had a lot to do with raising the prevailing wage in this country. When California and New York passed the \$15 wage in 2016, it started a trend where now more than 40% of low wage workers are in states with a \$15 minimum wage. And even municipal. There've even been municipal laws raising the wage and also providing paid sick leave, which is brand new in the United States, shockingly, for many, many, many workers. So yeah, I think that strategy has been one of the experiments that the grassroots uprising that's been going on since 2012 has really taken on with enthusiasm.

Jennifer Epps (01:00:56)

Yep. I agree [crosstalk 01:00:58]-

Charisse Jones (01:00:57)

And we're winding down with our time, so... Jennifer, you want to just jump in real quick and then we're going to do a round run. [crosstalk 01:01:04]-

Jennifer Epps (01:01:04)

Yeah. Only thing I wanted to add is that we are seeing it on the state basis I think of folks organizing and winning things at the election that they did in New York. They have the farm workers bill that happened recently that they are now organizing. And then I think part of it too, and something that we're thinking about with the Southern Worker Opportunity Fund is the right to work laws. Where can we push back at? And I think some states are trying to expand it so that it's about fighting back on those as well.

Charisse Jones (01:01:44)

All right. So we've got about two or three minutes left. So what I want is from each one of you to either expand upon something that you've already talked about, that you want to just buttonhole at the end or bring up one last point that you think is important to get on the table that we weren't able to address. And we can start with Annelise.

Annelise Orleck (01:02:06)

Okay. The one thing that I learned in doing the research for my last book in the US and abroad is that women's issues are very front and center. So there's the Me Too McDonald's movement that struck in something like a dozen cities to protest sexual harassment. This is a global movement against sexual misconduct. The hotel workers' Hands Off Pants On. The labor movement now is also being driven by an attempt to finally bridge the gender wage gap, to fight pregnancy discrimination, which has been a huge issue especially with big companies like Walmart that for a long time refused to abide. And I think those are really interesting areas of organizing particularly pregnancy discrimination because it unites people across right left divides as does the Living Wage movement.

Charisse Jones (01:02:57)

Roy, you want to go next?

Roy Bahat (01:02:59)

I think I just want to underline the thing I said, which is it will take all of us. So if you're sitting here thinking somebody is the enemy and you're the good guys or the good people and that other entity is the man, the one to take down, that's to me not the kind of thinking that's going to get us there. I will take the labor movement literally at its desire for solidarity and say, all of us need to be in solidarity with one another. And that is going to be incredibly uncomfortable as all of us try to figure it out. And Lord knows, I feel incredibly uncomfortable as a person with the word capitalist in my job title, showing up in some of these situations, just trying to figure out together, how do we make a system that actually functions for all of us?

Charisse Jones (01:03:46)

Great. And Jennifer, you want to take us home?

Jennifer Epps (01:03:49)

Sure. I just want to say that we're in a pivotal moment. I want to think Aspen for even bringing this conversation together so that we can talk about it and hear different views and have different world views about it, but ultimately try to figure out how do we make sure that workers have an opportunity to be able to fight for the things that they need? Because we know how hard it is to do that. To take care of families in this day and age is tough. All the things that are going on in the world. So we can't just take for granted that these opportunities for folks to be able to organize is just going to be here and that we make this more than a moment, but also a movement.

Charisse Jones (01:04:38)

Wonderful. I think we're at the end of our time. So I'll throw it back to Maureen for closing remarks.

Maureen Conway (01:04:45)

Fantastic. Thank you all so much. This was terrific. Apologies to the audience. We had a couple of little technical hiccups today, but it was well worth living through them for this conversation. So really appreciate all of this honest and open exchange of views from Jennifer, Annelise, Roy, Charisse, fabulous moderating. Thanks to Secretary Walsh for kicking us off and thanks to all of you for your comments and questions. Really appreciate you being here today. Please join us next time for "The Rewards of Work Lessons from the Fair Labor Standards Act." That came up a little bit in today's conversation. We'll be diving into it more on April 7th at two o'clock Eastern Time. So please join us then. And just a last final thank you to my wonderful colleagues, Matt Helmer, Tony Mastria, Yoorie Chang, and Victoria Prince, who are all sitting behind the scenes, making everything work. Really appreciate all your hard work in getting these things done. Thanks everybody for joining us today. See you next time.