

Global Labour Research Centre | GLRC

Newsletter. September 2025.

MESSAGE FROM ADRIAN A. SMITH, DIRECTOR

The defiant action taken by Air Canada flight attendants provided a key flashpoint in the month of August. The militancy of some 10,000 mainline and Rouge flight attendants shook the Canadian establishment. It was a meaningful assertion of collective economic power on lucid and principled terms against an employer and labour law regime determined to cut down collective action. Indeed, Air Canada executives felt secure in the belief that the Canadian state would intervene to send workers back to work. Presumptuous? *I think not.* Time and again, the state has shown something of a staunch commitment to intervene to undercut collective worker power in the broader public sector and beyond. Sure enough, Minister Patty Hajdu rushed in to, among other justifications, “preserve stability and supply chains in this unique and uncertain economic context.” But to the surprise of the Minister and employer, the rank and file refused to retreat. There are important insights to be gleaned, some of which I explore in my forthcoming GLRC publication. I will make some more general observations here.

Part of the rank-and-file militancy is rooted in contesting basic if stupefying assumptions about paid work in late capitalist society. The “main sticking points” between the parties were wage related – unpaid wages, said to be the equivalent of on average thirty-five hours per month for flight attendants, and inflation and living costs outpacing wages. This in the context of the highly gendered nature of commercial airline flight crews – overwhelmingly men pilot, predominantly women attend – where a range of disparities persist. And with the former having recently secured significant wage gains in bargaining, why was the *responsible* thing for flight attendants to do to accept “poverty wages”? Not a chance! It is a bold act of rank-and-file defiance reminiscent of actions taken in Ontario by teaching support workers in late 2022. *Could it be a harbinger of things to come?*

And speaking of responsibility, the state's intervention rests on a set of entrenched legal obligations known as responsible unionism. What the Air Canada flight attendants have forcefully shown is that, entrenchment notwithstanding, those obligations can be dislodged and recomposed *by and through the authority of*

workers in collective struggle. This marks a potentially pivotal pathway for challenging the foundational logic of post-war labour law.

CUPE did all the (responsible) legal things. The union gave notice to bargain on December 1st, within four months of the expiration of the collective agreement as legally mandated. The CUPE bargaining team met with the employer and exchanged proposals and then met judiciously throughout January. Bargaining continued after the expiration of the collective agreement on March 31st, which had been in place since 2015 (with a couple of reopeners on limited issues). The bargaining team remained engaged, participated in the sixty-day period of conciliation, and, upon receiving a No Board Report, waited out the twenty-one-day cooling off period as mandated before escalating action. A strike vote was held between July 25 and August 5 and, ultimately, a strong strike mandate was secured (of the 94.6% of members voting, 99.7% voted 'yes'). They held a National Day of Action on August 11th, under banners that included "unpaid work won't fly". On August 13th, they then gave seventy-two-hour strike notice calling for it to begin early on August 16th, in line with federal labour law.

Despite *responsibly* adhering to the machinations of post-war labour law, and less than twelve hours later, Minister Hajdu intervened invoking section 107 of the Canada Labour Code, imposing binding arbitration under the auspices of promoting industrial peace. The Canadian Industrial Relations Board then issued an order declaring the once lawful strike unlawful. It is a sleight of hand that goes to the contradictory nature of capitalist legal order. That the rank and filers refused to budge allows us to confront this mode of state intervention for what it is. Their defiance not only lays bare the constriction of responsibility by means of capitalist market logic, but it also clarifies that in the prevailing order (industrial) peace and war are not opposing states of existence but rather continuous modes of accumulation.

Upon learning about the rank-and-file defiance, Hajdu scrambled to announce a probe into the claims of unpaid work in the airline sector. It is undoubtedly a concession to stem the potentially militant tide. The state and capital live in fear of workers wielding their collective economic power in an uninhibited way.

The thing about responsible unionism is that it makes workers' collective economic power available in the most limited of circumstances, and only after a series of mediations, meditations and manoeuvring (jumping through hoops, by another name). It ensures that the outright ban on strikes and lockouts (as though these are equivalent) during the life of a collective agreement is enforced by union

brass against the advent of the wildcat strike. To the credit of CUPE national leadership, said to be backed by a coalition of unions, they refused to assume the role of dissuaders of discontent. It is a meaningful stance which holds great promise for the uninhibited wielding of working-class power. *How can it be sustained?*

OPPORTUNITIES

As we begin the 2025-2026 academic year, we would like to draw your attention to a few upcoming initiatives and opportunities through the GLRC.

1. IN PERSON COURSE | Workers' Justice: A Community-Based Course on Rights and Action

Dates: From September 18 to November 6

Organized by the Jane Finch Education Action Group, Jane/Finch Centre and the GLRC

We will offer a free course for those who live or work in the Jane-Finch/Rexdale/Northwest Toronto communities.

The course will be in-person from September 18th until November 6th from 6-8pm.

Dinner, TTC tickets and childcare will be provided for participants. As well, participants will receive a certificate of completion from the GLRC.

To register visit: <http://tiny.cc/42io001>

WORKERS' JUSTICE: A COMMUNITY-BASED COURSE ON RIGHTS AND ACTION

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SEPTEMBER 18-NOVEMBER 6, 2025

Thursdays | 6:00PM-8:00PM

In Person: Location will be shared with participants
Participants will receive a certificate of completion from the
Global Labour Research Centre at York University



**JANE FINCH
EDUCATION ACTION GROUP**

GLRC

Global Labour
Research Centre

REGISTRATION:

 <http://tiny.cc/42io001>

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

 416-663-2733 ext. 233

 cd@janefinchcentre.org



2. CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS | CONFERENCE

Dates: September 26 - 27

The organizing committee for [The Power of Marxist Thought Conference to be held at York Sept 26-27](#) is looking for volunteers to help with a variety of tasks: poster for the event, provide directions and register participants, among other things.

Volunteers will receive a link to receive a free ticket to the conference upon completion of a zoom training session and in exchange for 3 hours of your labour

time.

We ask that volunteers [sign up on this schedule](#) and indicate if you are flexible to reschedule, in the event that something in the conference schedule catches your interest.

3. CALL FOR PAPERS | GLRC Submissions

We are soliciting participation in two GLRC writing initiatives. We welcome submissions throughout the year for:

1. [Perspectives series](#) – concise opinion pieces meant to spark public dialogue and encourage new ways of thinking on a range of work and labour related issues. These articles are meant to inform and promote labour perspectives in a manner that challenges the current state of knowledge in a particular field;
2. [Snapshot series](#) – plain-language reports and summaries meant to connect labour, community and academic research in the public interest. It considers “what the research found” and “how it can be used” to identify and communicate real-world impacts from academic research.

Note: Those interested in submitting to either initiative in **video or audio format** can contact us by email at: glrc@yorku.ca.

GLRC EVENT

Trade Wars, Manufacturing & International Solidarity: Responses from Canadian and Mexican Unionists

Date: Thursday, September 11, 2025

Time: 2:00 pm to 4:30 pm

Location: York Lanes 280N | York University

Speakers:

- Eladio de la Cruz, Authentic Labour Front of Mexico, National Coordinator
- Guio Jacinto, United Steelworkers, Researcher on Trade and Industrial Policy
- Marco Chavez, Miners' Union, Local 271 at ArcelorMittal Mexico
- Miguel Angel Villalobos, Miners' Union, Local 271 at ArcelorMittal Mexico
- Stuart Trew, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Director of the Trade Investment Research Project

Moderator:

- Paul Bocking, United Steelworkers Humanity Fund

About the event: The trade war unleashed by US president Trump has had devastating consequences for workers in Canada and around the world. Union leaders and researchers from the United Steelworkers, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, the Miners' Union (Los Mineros) and the Authentic Labour Front (Frente Auténtico del Trabajo) of Mexico, will discuss the effects of Trump's tariffs on Canadian manufacturing and the broader economy, ways to build a more resilient economy that prioritizes workers and their communities, and the role of international solidarity.

The Centre for Research in Latin America and the Caribbean presents:



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EXTERNAL EVENTS

1. (ONLINE) Book release | *Strike While the Needle is Hot*

Book Release for Labour Organizers, with authors Kennedy Block and Josh MacPhee (of Justseeds) and guests Alexandra Bradbury (musician and editor at *Labor Notes*), Robert Ovetz (record collector and author), and Kevin Van Meter (labor educator)

Date: September 10, 8:00 pm to 9:30PM EST)

Join us this Wednesday for what will certainly be a fun event as we celebrate the release of the new book *Strike While the Needle is Hot* on strike records from around the world.

Register [here](#).

Watch the book release [here](#).

Get a copy of the book [here](#).

2. (IN PERSON) People's Hearing | "Peace of the Pie": People's Hearings on Military Spending

Organized by the Toronto Association for Peace and Solidarity (TAPS)

Date: September 20, 1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Location: United Steelworkers 25 Cecil St., Toronto, ON M5T 1N1

Details are available [here](#).

3. (IN PERSON) Book launch | *Slavery and Capitalism: A New Marxist History*, by David McNally

Thursday, October 9 (7 - 9pm)

Location: Society Clubhouse, 967 College Street, Toronto, ON M6H 1A6

Register [here](#).

4. (IN PERSON) Public Lecture | *Can We Engineer Our Way Out of Climate Crisis? Return of the Repressed Heat: Towards a Freudo-Marxist Theory of Geoengineering*, with Andreas Malm

Friday, October 10, 4:00 pm - 6:00 pm

Location: Emmanuel College-75 Queen's Park Crescent East Toronto, ON M5S 1K7

Register [here](#).

5. (IN PERSON) Conference | *Toronto Troublemakers School, Labor Notes*

Date: Saturday, October 18, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Location: East End United Church, 310 Danforth Ave, Toronto, ON M4K 1N6

Join labour activists from the Toronto area to strategize, share skills, and learn ways to organize to win! Troublemakers Schools are day-long mini-conferences that cover organizing skills and highlight real-world examples of taking on the boss and winning. We're excited to join workers in Canada and to keep building international solidarity, especially at this time when billionaires and bosses are profiting by dividing Canadian and U.S. workers.

Registration fee (covers event registration and lunch):

\$CAD 55* / \$USD 40 - Regular registration

\$CAD 28* / \$USD 20 - Low-income/student rate (choose if you need)

*Prices are set in USD. Actual cost to you in CAD may fluctuate depending on the exchange rate to USD at the time of your purchase.

Details are available [here](#).

6. (IN PERSON) The Christmas Market

Date: November 4 to November 30

Location: Crow's Theatre - 345 Carlaw Avenue, Toronto, ON M4M 2T1

Studio Theatre: A Crow's Theatre commission from Dora Mavor Moore Award-winning playwright Kanika Ambrose (*our place, Truth*), *The Christmas Market* is a radical and deeply felt new play set against the shimmering bustle of a snowy holiday market. Far from home, three Caribbean migrant workers carve out a sense of belonging in an unfamiliar—and often unforgiving—landscape. In the quiet moments between shifts, they discover unexpected friendship—forging unshakeable bonds through their humour, grit, and shared determination to survive their first Canadian winter. Razor-sharp, funny, and unflinching, *The Christmas Market* is a powerful exploration of community resilience and the hope created by found family. Details are available [here](#).

7. (ONLINE) 2024-2025 #Slaveryarchive Book Club

- **September 13 at 2:00 p.m. (EST): A Cultural History of Slavery and Human Trafficking** (Bloomsbury Academic, 2024) with general editor Benjamin Lawrance (University of Arizona) and the editors of the six volumes.
- **September 20 at 2:00 p.m. (EST): I Have Avenged America: Jean-Jacques Dessalines and Haiti's Fight for Freedom** (Yale University Press, 2025) by Julia Gaffield (College of William and Mary).
- **October 4 at 2:00 p.m. EST: Freedom Ship: The Uncharted History of Escaping Slavery By Sea** (Penguin Random House, Viking, 2025) by Marcus Rediker (University of Pittsburgh).
- **November 15 at 2:00 p.m. (EST): Worlds of Unfreedom: West Central Africa in the Era of Global Abolition** (Princeton University Press, 2025) by Roquinaldo Ferreira (University of Pennsylvania).

Details are available [here](#).

CALL FOR PAPERS

CFP: 'Bread, Butter, and Bacon On Shore'

Deadline: 7 September 2025

<https://socialhistoryportal.org/news/articles/311976>

CFP: Migrant labour resistance and struggles in agriculture

Call for Papers, deadline 30 September 2025

<https://socialhistoryportal.org/news/articles/311992>

Special Issue: Labor Histories of Electrical Industries

Deadline: 1 October 2025

<https://socialhistoryportal.org/news/articles/311952>

CFP: Temporary Migration (20th –21st Centuries): Spaces, Regulation, and Imaginaries (English French and Arabic)

Call for Papers: deadline 5 October 2025

<https://socialhistoryportal.org/news/articles/311993>

HAAL Special Issue: Land, work and rural women's resistance in Latin America, the Caribbean and the Global South

Deadline: 30 October 2025

<https://socialhistoryportal.org/news/articles/311966>

Historical Materialism: Workers and Capital

Deadline for abstracts: 31 October 2025

workersandcapital.historicalmaterialism.org

The body and health in feminist labour history

Deadline: 15 November 2025

<https://socialhistoryportal.org/news/articles/311894>

Journal of African American History: Special Issue on "Black Women's History in the Twenty-First Century: Engaging the Future"

Deadline: 1 January 2026

<https://socialhistoryportal.org/news/articles/311905>

PUBLICATIONS OF INTEREST

Karner, A. (2025). [Coalitions in Motion: Labor and Riders Organizing for Transit Justice](#). *New Labor Forum*, Online First.

Maury, O., Hakala, O., & Näre, L. (2025). [Ambivalent affects in the platform assemblage: perspectives from the food delivery sector](#). *Globalizations* Online First

Verena Schmidt and Catarina Braga (2025) [The Role of Collective Bargaining in Promoting Just Transitions](#). Geneva: International Labour Organization.

If you would like to submit any announcement items (events, research or job opportunities), contact us at glrc@yorku.ca.



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