Global Labour Research Centre | GLRC

Newsletter. May 2026.

MESSAGE FROM ADRIAN A. SMITH, DIRECTOR

I ended April by attending Climate Change and Workers' Health, a one-day conference held by European trade unions in commemoration of International Workers' Memorial Day. The self-described objective, to confront worker suffering due to climate change, was driven by the pressing need for worker-focused responses to the accelerating climate crisis and especially extreme heat. It was a welcome chance to think through challenges faced by workers globally, and particularly – but by no means exclusively – outdoor workers in agriculture, construction, fishing, waste picking and beyond.

Much of the conference discussion focused on the need for regulatory measures addressing extreme heat, which seemed more or less universally accepted by the panels of mostly academics and labour unionists. Implicit in this is a belief in the necessity of climate adaptation, understood as responding to actual and anticipated climate effects as a way of moderating those effects. It was quite evident that, in terms of adaptation measures, there is clarity on the side of labour about what is needed, and much of this does not stray far from entrenched understandings of occupational safety and health. For instance, keynote Andreas Flouris (University of Thessaly / University of Ottawa) identified ten such needs, including workplace heat stress indicators, hydration and sanitation, rest and break schedules, personal protective equipment and cooling shade and ventilation. To secure this, noted Professor Flouris, there is a need for such measures as social protection floors, heat metrics and risk assessment, worker voice and participation, and collective bargaining.

In the day's discussions, however, it was quite striking how little climate mitigation, responses aimed at reducing or preventing further greenhouse gas emissions, figured into things. This suggests something of an unwillingness to match labour militancy with the urgency of the moment. I am certainly not the first to point this out in the labour movement. How we might get to that militancy is not through reproducing entrenched logic but by openly contesting it. *The safety and health of workers has always been subject to the deadly and ecologically destructive force of capitalist accumulation*. A bit of labour-ecology history may suffice.

What comes to mind is *Slave Ship* (1840) produced by J.M.W. Turner the nineteenth-century master of 'atmospheres and accidents'. Said to be 'the most enduring of all abolitionist works of art', it depicts a sailing ship in the distance caught in the throes of a hurricane, strewn across the foreground are body parts in broken chains, human cargo discarded, as fish and birds feast on the bounty.

It's an evocative image.

The piece has its roots in at least two places. It is a scene said to be inspired by James Thomson's epic poem *The Seasons* (1730), particularly *Summer*, about a shark making its way by profiting off the avails of that 'cruel trade', and, at once, the 1781 true account of the Zong. During its fateful voyage, the slave ship Zong, carrying 442 enslaved persons from Ghana to Jamaica, lost its way. The navigational errors supposedly led to a depleted supply of water, no matter that rainfall had occurred. The ship's crew jettisoned 130 of the enslaved overboard. The horrendous act, including the corresponding indemnity claim, spawned insurance litigation in which the owners were initially successful in recovering for lost property (human cargo) only to be overturned on appeal, is the subject of recent memorable interventions from the likes of NourbeSe Philips, Christina Sharpe and James Walvin. By all accounts the Zong crew and captain were merely following established business practice on the high seas – mass murder for insurance. Whether labour is regarded as ends or merely means, capitalists always make a killing.

Turner seems to appreciate aspects of this. The 1840 masterwork – originally referred to as Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On – signals something of a preoccupation with the travails of his time. Amongst the imagery in his earlier sketchbooks are pencil drawings of workers in a metalworks, blacksmiths engaged in kiln work – and so on. Though we may not wish to make too much of this, after all Turner produced some three hundred sketchbooks varying in subject matter and emphasis (much of his artwork bequeathed to Britain), these are peculiar interests in relation to his contemporaries, even at the height of the industrial revolution. For Turner, as an astute journalist recently summed up, "We are building a new world. We may not all survive it."

In other respects, *Slave Ship* was produced for the World Anti-Slavery Convention. Held in London in June 1840, it was billed as the first of its kind gathering, and even included a few black men as delegates, though in ultimately relegating white women abolitionists to a secondary space removed from the assembly, and excluding black women altogether, the gathering could not break free of all social mores of the period.

Turner's painting immerses the viewer in an unfolding extreme weather event. The attentiveness to carnage, in motion, expressed through a stylistic innovation which departed from landscape artistic conventions of the time. It entices, draws you in, forcing (or is it daring) you to look. This, as artist Musa Harar notes, is 'a method, a trick to keep you in front of it'. From the swirling chaos of the watery inferno, all of a sudden, a leg appears. A broken shackle. Are those out-stretched hands reaching from the ocean? Limbs? The ocean roars. The fish feast. The slavers retreat. The "commercial hunting of blackskins" has a profoundly ecological dimension.

Included at the exhibition of the piece in 1840 was an unpublished poem, "Fallacies of Hope" (1812), the title alone is instructive for our thinking about the logic of occupational safety and health. But let's go a bit deeper. An excerpt reads:

Aloft all hands, strike the top-masts and belay;
Yon angry setting sun and fierce-edged clouds
Declare the Typhon's coming.
Before it sweeps your decks, throw overboard
The dead and dying - ne'er heed their chains
Hope, Hope, fallacious Hope!

Where is thy market now?" [my emphasis]

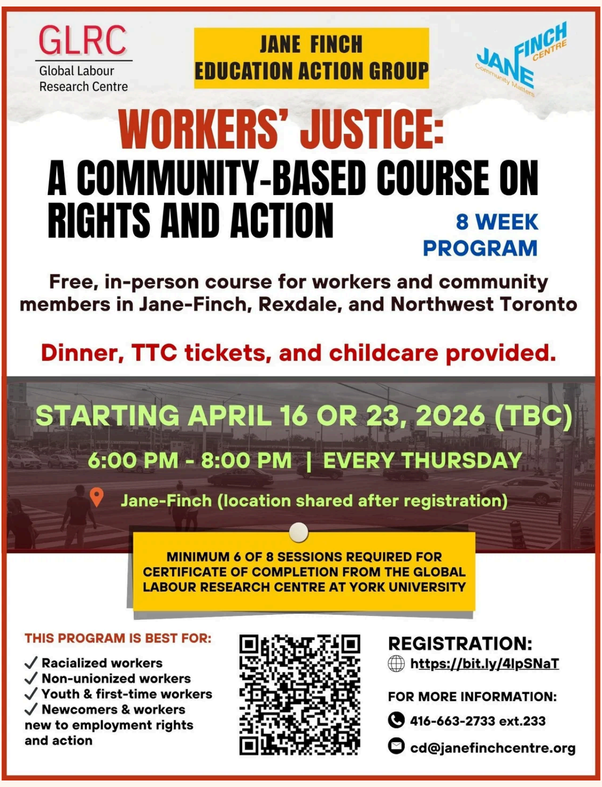
With apologies to Derek Walcott, the sea (indeed all the earth), is capitalist market history.

At the heart of the '*ill*-logic' of *ongoing* capitalist relations in all its guises – in unfree and free forms; colonial and postcolonial; modern, postmodern and those pockets of not-yet or never-to-be modern – is a skewed calculus. Throw them overboard to ensure profitability. We can call it addition by subtraction. It doesn't just mark, maim and kill labouring bodies in service of accumulation, it produces them for that purpose and that purpose alone, all the while recruiting the planet into its totalizing project as it destroys ecological life-forms. This is the logic engulfing the story of worker illness, injury and death today and it must not only be openly contested but replaced if we are to meaningfully address the effects of extreme heat and climate change on workers' health. Modest measures will not do in the face of the behemoth of capitalist-produced climate emergency.

GLRC EVENTS

1. Join the Workers' Justice: A Community-Based Course on Rights and Action

A free, in-person course for members of the Jane-Finch, Rexdale, and Northwest Toronto community. Together, we'll explore what makes a good job, why workplace injustices exist, and how workers can confront unsafe conditions, wage theft, and employer power while building long-term collective strategies for change. Participants will engage in practical, accessible discussions, receive a certificate of completion from York University's Global Labour Research Centre, and enjoy dinner, TTC tickets, and childcare at no cost. Come build knowledge, confidence, and solidarity to fight for justice at work and beyond.



GLRC
Global Labour Research Centre

JANE FINCH EDUCATION ACTION GROUP

JANE FINCH CENTRE

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

8 WEEK PROGRAM

Free, in-person course for workers and community members in Jane-Finch, Rexdale, and Northwest Toronto

Dinner, TTC tickets, and childcare provided.

STARTING APRIL 16 OR 23, 2026 (TBC)

6:00 PM - 8:00 PM | EVERY THURSDAY

Jane-Finch (location shared after registration)

MINIMUM 6 OF 8 SESSIONS REQUIRED FOR CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION FROM THE GLOBAL LABOUR RESEARCH CENTRE AT YORK UNIVERSITY

THIS PROGRAM IS BEST FOR:
✓ Racialized workers
✓ Non-unionized workers
✓ Youth & first-time workers
✓ Newcomers & workers new to employment rights and action

REGISTRATION:
https://bit.ly/4lpSNaT

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
☎ 416-663-2733 ext.233
✉ cd@janefinchcentre.org

2. GLRC Community Lounge – Office Hours Now Open

The GLRC is pleased to support our community by opening the Centre's lounge for office hours on **Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.** Dependants are welcome.

The lounge provides a comfortable space for studying and work, along with access to a small library, a mini-fridge, and a coffee maker.To use the lounge, **students must register in advance** here and indicate the time they plan to arrive.

We look forward to welcoming you into the space!

RECENT PUBLICATIONS | Perspectives Series

- We recruited them, now we are blocking them: Canada's broken promise to newcomers, by Lynn Yu Ling Ng. *GLRC Perspectives No. 10, January 2026*

CALL FOR PAPERS | GLRC Submissions

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.

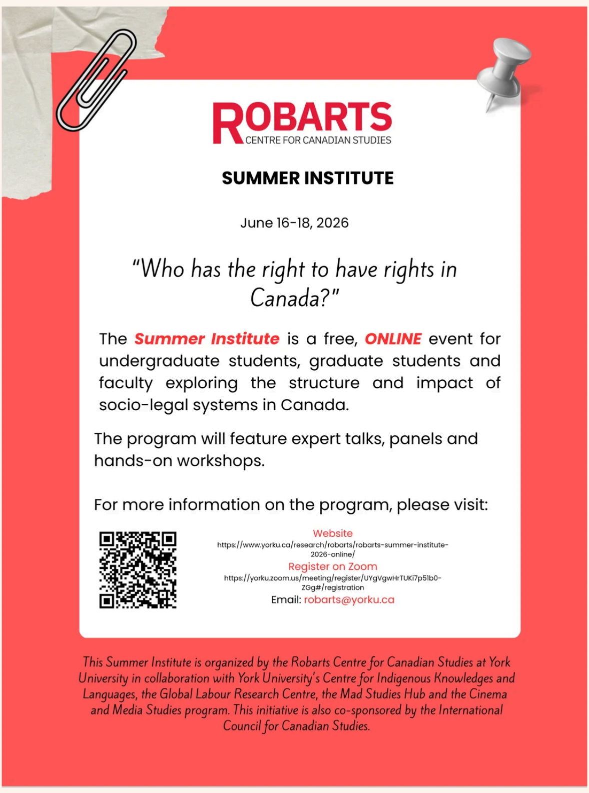
OUR COMMUNITY EVENTS

1. The Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies will host an online **Summer Institute** for undergraduate and graduate students. The program will focus on socio-legal systems in Canada and will include expert talks and hands on workshops.
The event is free and open to all with registration.

View detailed program schedule HERE

The course goes from from 16 to 18 June 2026

Registration will run from 7 January to 29 May 2026. For questions, contact robarts@yorku.ca.



ROBARTS
CENTRE FOR CANADIAN STUDIES

SUMMER INSTITUTE

June 16–18, 2026

"Who has the right to have rights in Canada?"

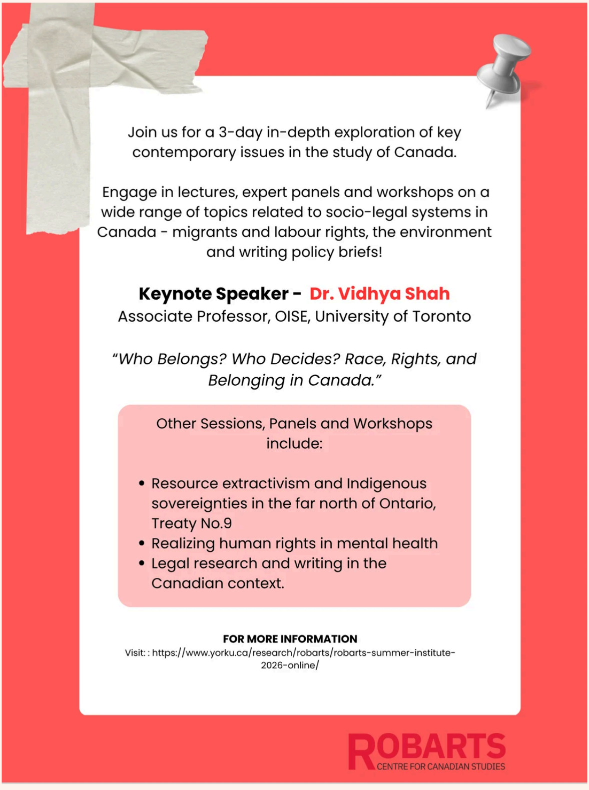
The ***Summer Institute*** is a free, ***ONLINE*** event for undergraduate students, graduate students and faculty exploring the structure and impact of socio-legal systems in Canada.

The program will feature expert talks, panels and hands-on workshops.

For more information on the program, please visit:

Website
https://www.yorku.ca/research/robarts/robarts-summer-institute-2026-online/
Register on Zoom
https://yorku.zoom.us/meeting/register/UYgVgwHrTUKi7p51b0-ZGg#/registration
Email: robarts@yorku.ca

This Summer Institute is organized by the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies at York University in collaboration with York University's Centre for Indigenous Knowledges and Languages, the Global Labour Research Centre, the Mad Studies Hub and the Cinema and Media Studies program. This initiative is also co-sponsored by the International Council for Canadian Studies.



Join us for a 3-day in-depth exploration of key contemporary issues in the study of Canada.

Engage in lectures, expert panels and workshops on a wide range of topics related to socio-legal systems in Canada - migrants and labour rights, the environment and writing policy briefs!

Keynote Speaker - Dr. Vidhya Shah
Associate Professor, OISE, University of Toronto

"Who Belongs? Who Decides? Race, Rights, and Belonging in Canada."

Other Sessions, Panels and Workshops include:

- Resource extractivism and Indigenous sovereignties in the far north of Ontario, Treaty No.9
- Realizing human rights in mental health
- Legal research and writing in the Canadian context.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
Visit: : https://www.yorku.ca/research/robarts/robarts-summer-institute-2026-online/

ROBARTS
CENTRE FOR CANADIAN STUDIES

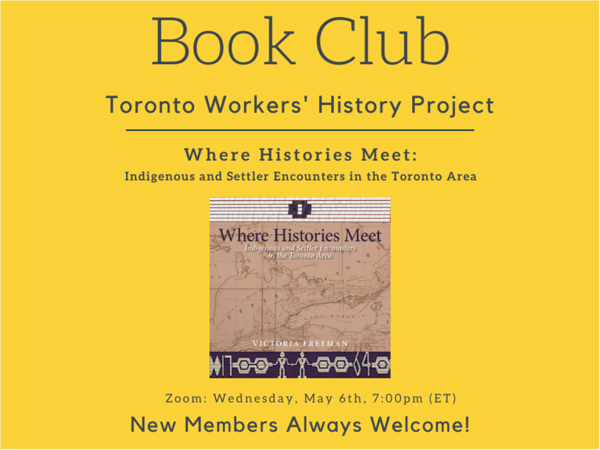
EXTERNAL EVENTS

1. Toronto Workers' History Project

When: May 6th, 2026
Time: 7pm
Topic: Book Club: Where Histories Meet
Zoom link: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89106192356?pwd=DaLcqqDrIuVYViJjCbNps4WeFkJXXw.1
Meeting ID: 891 0619 2356
Passcode: 521467

One tap mobile
+14388097799,,89106192356#,,,,*521467# Canada
+15873281099,,89106192356#,,,,*521467# Canada

Join by SIP
• 89106192356@zoomcrc.com
Join instructions
https://us02web.zoom.us/meetings/89106192356/invitations?signature=zZpMpcqK4EjCUBJNeEQmqMxAx-0M9GKo2uPj-3oPkQw



Book Club
Toronto Workers' History Project
Where Histories Meet:
Indigenous and Settler Encounters in the Toronto Area

Where Histories Meet
Indigenous and Settler Encounters in the Toronto Area
VICTORIA FREEMAN

Zoom: Wednesday, May 6th, 7:00pm (ET)
New Members Always Welcome!

2. Capital Reading Group (Online Course / Online Reading Group)

Organizers: Marx Memorial Library, Alfredo Saad Filho, Professor of International Political Economy, Queen's University Belfast, Celal Özkızan, Assistant Professor in International Relations and Politics, Northeastern University London, Deepak P, Senior Lecturer in AI, Queen's University Belfast, Karl Patrick Norberg, PhD Student, King's College London.

From Wednesday, May 20, 2026-Wednesday, March 24, 2027 2 PM-4:30 PM EDT

This course comprises 20 zoom sessions on Wednesday evenings commencing 20 May, with an introductory taster session on 6 May. No sessions in August and December.

The Reading Group will cover the whole of Capital Volume 1, from the Prefaces to the Appendix of this economic and literary masterpiece. No previous knowledge of Marx or Marxism is required. Readers from all political persuasions are welcome; our aim is to analyse Marx based on his own words, and keep the Marxist tradition alive and vibrant.

Free Session (May 6): https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/free-taster-session-capital-reading-group-tickets-1985438931290?aff=oddtdtcreator

Full Course (May 20-): https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/capital-reading-group-tickets-1984908173780?aff=oddtdtcreator

CALL FOR PAPERS

1. Historical Materialism Conference (23rd edition).

Planetary Warscapes Ablaze: Imperial Mutations in Infernal Times

When: 5th Nov 2026 10:00 - 8th Nov 2026 7:00
Where: School of Oriental and African Studies, Russell Square, Central London
Deadline for proposals: Friday 15 May 2026
https://www.historicalmaterialism.org/event/twenty-third-annual-conference/

2. Call for Articles: Strikes and Social Conflicts in Hostile Environments
Deadline: May 31, 2026
Invitation to Submit Articles to Workers of the World, online journal of the International Association of Strikes and Social Conflicts (IASSC)
Following a highly successful International Association of Strikes and Social Conflicts conference held in Washington, DC in September last year, we are now extending an invitation for submissions of articles on the conference's broad theme of 'Strikes and Social Conflicts in Hostile Environments' (see below) for publication in our journal Workers of the World later in 2026.

Details of the submission process can be found here.
Original call on the website of Workers of the World here

2. Join Spectre Journal

Spectre, a biannual journal of Marxist theory, strategy, and analysis, is asking for support during a difficult moment for the international Left. The editors are working to continue publishing critical and independent socialist analysis.

Readers can help by subscribing here and donating here

Supporters are also encouraged to spread the word about Spectre's upcoming special double issue this fall.

3. Call for Articles: Strikes and Social Conflicts in Hostile Environments
Deadline: May 31, 2026
Invitation to Submit Articles to Workers of the World, online journal of the International Association of Strikes and Social Conflicts (IASSC)
Following a highly successful International Association of Strikes and Social Conflicts conference held in Washington, DC in September last year, we are now extending an invitation for submissions of articles on the conference's broad theme of 'Strikes and Social Conflicts in Hostile Environments' (see below) for publication in our journal Workers of the World later in 2026.

Details of the submission process can be found here.
Original call on the website of Workers of the World here

4. Call for Papers | The Refugee–Migrant Distinction: Toward a Global History
Deadline: June,19th 2026
Submissions accepted from June 1st to 19th 2026
Publication: December 2026

The study of collective identities related to labour has flourished remarkably in Brazilian historiography, achieving significant regional and institutional scope in recent decades. Challenging traditional frameworks of national history, research on the worlds of labour has not only continued the shift towards the lived and perceived experiences of the working class, expanding the theoretical and methodological provocations brought about by history from below, but has also deepened this perspective. Broadly speaking, what unites these studies is the emphasis on the capacities and forms of agency of workers—whether in political struggle, associative practices, social movements, acts of protest, leisure activities, daily life, power relations, or within multiple workplaces and arrangements—and on the socio-legal, ethnic-racial, class, regional, age, gender, and sexuality intersections that historically shape them.
More information here

PUBLICATIONS OF INTEREST

Ahmed, S., & Tucker, D. (2026). Normalisation of Wage and Benefit Theft in the Bangladeshi Garment Industry. *Work, Employment and Society* Online First.

Antonucci, L., & Palier, B. (2026). Can the welfare state protect workers in the age of platform work? The new policy and politics of welfare in the digital economy. *Competition & Change* Online First

Bao, X. (2026). How do enterprise union frames affect union effectiveness in China? *Journal of Industrial Relations* Online First

Blanc, E. (2026). Unionizing Young Workers: America's Labor Uptick and Youth Outreach Strategies. *ILR Review* Online First

Cornet, M., Torres-Cierpe, J., & Le Ludec, C. (2026). Bringing AI data workers to the forefront: Aspirational débrouille strategies in Madagascar and Venezuela. *Big Data & Society*, *13*(1).

Eva, C., Gray, M., Leroy-Dyer, S., & Hunter, B. (2026). Taking the long view: Indigenous employment 1981–2021. *Journal of Industrial Relations* Online First

Ellem, B., & Goods, C. (2026). Place and power in the remaking of fossil fuel sites: a study of just transition drivers in an Australian coal region. *Australasian Journal of Environmental Management*, Online First

Farrugia, D. (2026). Lay Moralities of Young Workers and the Moral Economy of Service Labour. *Work, Employment and Society*, *40*(2), 295-313

Gepts, T., Mason, S., Eby, M., & Emmott-Torres, E. (2026). Organizing associational power: A strikers' inquiry into the 2022 UAW strike against the University of California. *Critical Sociology* Online First

Gürler, D. (2026). Winning the right to work through solidarity: The Argentine workers' self-management movement. *Economic and Industrial Democracy* Online First

Haiven, M. (2026). The speculative imagination within, against and beyond Amazon: the Worker as Futurist project in an increasingly fascist context. *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory* Online First

Matuszczyk, K., Nowicka, M., Harder, N., & Herpell, M. (2026). The Value of Care: Brokering Work Conditions and Wages within a Transnational Care System. *ILR Review* Online First

Minotakis, A. (2025). Regulating AI in the workplace: A critique of the EU AI act and the platform work directive through a worker-centred lens. *Platforms & Society*, *2*.

Monroe, J., & López-Andreu, M. (2026). 'I've got to do this. I have no choice': The contradictory role of social reproduction in explaining the impact of precarious dependent self-employment. *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, *47*(2), 310-330

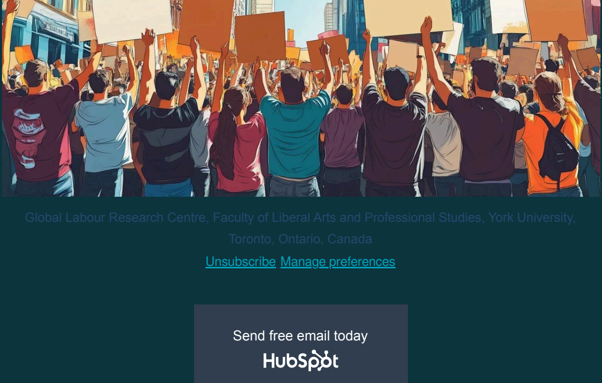
Pérez-Ahumada, P., & Godoy-Márquez, N. (2026). Can strike action revitalize labour unions? An empirical analysis of the Chilean case. *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, *47*(2), 573-597

Piro, V. (2026). Resilience, Reworking, Resistance: Collective Forms of Agency among Unorganised Migrant Workers. *Work, Employment and Society* Online First

Tilly, C. and Carré, F. (2026) Digital Transformation of Retail Work: The Rise of Chaotic Rationalisation. *British Journal of Industrial Relations* Online First

Xu, Hui, and HailongJia (2026) The Contested Terrain of Skills: Revisiting Labor Process Debates and the Chinese Factory Regime. *Sociology Compass* 20(3)

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



Send free email today
HubSpot