

Work in a Democratic Society

Session Abstract:

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This session brings together practitioners and academics to explore new thinking about who should control work and how collective bargaining can be used more widely and effectively even outside workplace negotiations. The result can be collective bargaining as a democratizing force. John August advocates looking at collective bargaining as part of a greater whole with a wide range of stakeholders who are affected by collective bargaining as a process. Robert Chiaravalli finds that the functional role of labor and employment relations has diminished within employer organizations. Some of the diminishment is a function of market changes, the level of unionization, and changes in the imperatives of companies. Ellen Dannin first explores congressional debates around the drafting of the NLRA and then draws on experiences of a work community whose collective examination of its environment improved that environment for the workers and others who entered those spaces. According to Joe Fahey, at workplaces every day, people figure out smarter ways of working together "often due to individuals, whose instincts and quiet leadership are key to good workgroup relations. Fahey finds that innovation and cooperation are innate human capabilities, and most people prefer working in conditions that make both possible. Jody Hoffer shares four case examples of health systems where workers are using relational coordination to improve performance, three in the U.S. and one in Denmark. We will explore how this relational coordination can be broadened and used intentionally to improve outcomes for workers themselves as well as other stakeholders.