



WILLIAM BRENNAN INSTITUTE FOR

LABOR STUDIES

From the director

Throughout our nation's history, organized labor has led the effort to push back against employers who have no regard for the dignity, safety or well-being of the wage earners who are the backbone of our economy. While progress for the American wage earner has been attained incrementally, this Labor Day sadly recognizes a return to an issue for some powerful employers, billionaire business leaders, and elected officials that many thought was put to rest decades ago- child labor.

Child labor refers to for-profit companies maximizing profits by exploiting children to backbreaking, unsafe work on a part or full-time basis for a pittance of what any adult would be getting paid for the same work. The practice deprives children of their childhood and is harmful to their physical and mental development.

To be clear, when discussing child labor, we are not talking about a teenager getting a job to earn money, learn important skills, and build character.

Child labor has been in practice for most of human history. From the founding of our nation, children were working longer hours than most modern adults in an effort to earn money to help the family because wages were so low, and public schools were not available.

The custom of child labor reached its peak in the United States during the Industrial Revolution. In 1890, 1.5 million children aged 10-15 were employed; in 1900, 1.75 million children aged 10-15 were employed, when 16% of all workers were under the age of 16. Conditions were brutal for these children, working 6 days a week, 10-14 hours per day, in dangerous conditions at poverty wages.

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Jim Begley, director of the William Brennan Institute of Labor Studies

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From the director continued

Employers hired children because they were easier to control and less likely to unionize, could pay them lower wages, work them longer hours, and assign them to smaller areas on smaller machines because of their physical size.

Persistent reform efforts from organized labor to eliminate child labor throughout the 19th century finally galvanized a breakthrough in the early 20th century when nationwide sentiments began to shift.

In 1907, the National Child Labor Committee hired an American sociologist and photographer named Lewis Hine, who traveled the country by going to textile mills and coal mines to photograph kids working to document child labor in America. The photos shocked the nation.

At the same time, the burgeoning women's movement became increasingly active on the issue, pushing for compulsory education laws that would effectively ban child labor

by mandating school attendance. This push proved highly effective. By 1918, all states had compulsory schooling laws on the books.

The efforts culminated with the passage of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938. Signed into law by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, this law establishes federal child labor provisions that are still in place.

After 85 years, it is reasonable to wonder why the moral calamity of child labor is an issue once again. With companies struggling to hire workers, some in the business community have funded efforts to support rolling back child labor restrictions.

According to a report from the Economic Policy Institute, in the past two years, at least fourteen (14) states have enacted or proposed laws rolling back child-labor protections they had previously passed which enhanced the federal Fair Labor Standards Act.

For example, Iowa introduced a law that would allow 14-year-olds to work in meat coolers; Wisconsin introduced a bill that would allow workers as young as 14 to serve alcohol in bars and restaurants, down from 18.

Immigration advocates say the loosening of child labor rules poses the greatest threat to migrant children, who are already more vulnerable to exploitation.

Predictably, according to the U.S. Department of Labor, the number of minors employed in violation of child labor laws increased 37% in the last year. McDonalds was fined for employing 305 minors, some as young as 10 years old in 62 stores throughout the country. Packers Sanitation Services paid a \$1.5 million fine for employing 102 children, some as young as 12 years old, to work in meatpacking facilities in eight states, including Nebraska.

Labor Day, a celebration of the social and economic achievements of the American wage earner, is a reminder to heed the words of former U.S. Secretary of Labor Alexis Herman, in which she said "If we can't begin to agree on the fundamentals, such as the elimination of the most abusive forms of child labor, then we really are not ready to march forward into the future."

In solidarity,
Jim

ICLI launches Introduction to Organized Labor microcredential

Macy Walczer

In an ever-evolving job market, it is essential to pursue knowledge for personal and professional growth. The University of Nebraska at Omaha plans to address this need head-on with its up-and-coming division, Innovative and Learning-Centric Initiatives (ICLI). ICLI aims to empower individuals currently in the workforce by offering microcredential courses tailored to enhance productivity, relevance, and value in today's job market. These courses are designed to be not only accessible but also affordable, making knowledge acquisition more inclusive than ever.

ICLI's microcredential courses are designed to be short yet impactful, typically spanning six weeks. Priced between \$80 and \$300, these courses cover a range of subjects that resonate with today's job market demands. From "Creating Usable Instructions" to "Grant Development," "Communicating in Remote Work Environments," "Sustainability," "Foundations in DEIA&B" (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility, and Belonging), and more, the offerings cater to a range of professional needs and industries.

These courses are thoughtfully designed to cater to the needs of learners with busy schedules with asynchronous, remote learning, and the majority spanning just six weeks, taking around three hours of time each week. "Working for something so new, it's exciting to be a part of it," says Ana Lopez Shalla, the director of Strategic Partnerships at ICLI, "I think a lot of

the courses we're beginning to offer could be so useful for a lot of individuals in the workplace right now because a lot of what we're teaching isn't offered in colleges and certainly isn't accessible to those not even enrolled in a university. ICLI is looking to make these valuable skills easy to access for anyone who wants to learn."



Ana Lopez Shalla
Director of Strategic Partnerships

What sets ICLI apart is its commitment to bringing in subject matter experts who have extensive experience in their respective fields, all of whom hail from the Omaha community. Among the specialized courses offered is "Introduction to Organized Labor," administered by Jim Begley, the director of the William Brennan Institute of Labor Studies (WBILS). Priced at only \$86.99, this course provides a foundational understanding of the American labor movement.

"I hope students can gain an understanding that these were real men and women who 'paid it forward' with their blood sweat, and tears so that one day future generations would have a better quality of life." Begley says, "I hope students can gain an appreciation for the struggles in history of the labor movement."

Participants will delve into the core

principles of labor unions, exploring their historical significance and the individuals who have shaped the movement as it stands today. By the course's conclusion, students will gain insight into the intricate relationship between the economy, at-will employment and the indispensable role of unions. The course spotlights the four crucial tools that unions employ to gain power and become equal partners with management in any organization.

"Since this is an asynchronous, e-learning module, students can take this course at their convenience on their iPhone, tablet, or computer, without having to be in a classroom setting." Begley says, "This module helps reach a much wider audience." Begley's passion for educating individuals about labor issues is nothing new, but this upcoming course run will be the first of its kind.

While he has taught workers about labor unions for years as part of his affiliation with WBILS, this is Begley's first opportunity to teach a re-



mote course. He aims to educate labor union leaders, members, and potential members. UNO's ICLI division is working to break educational barriers, as well as make education accessible and affordable for individuals looking to up-

skill, reskill, and thrive in today's job market. To learn more about ICLI's innovative microcredential courses or enroll, visit <https://advance.nebraska.edu>, or scan the QR code.



Vogel's work in public affairs fuels research in Union apathy

By Penjani Banda

Morgan Vogel, Ph.D, has dedicated her career to studying and promoting the welfare of public workers.

Vogel, a research associate at the Center for Public Affairs Research at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, has trained in public management and motivation of public employees. Most recently, Vogel's work at the CPAR has focused on researching and studying union apathy among members. This study is a collaboration between the CPAR and the William Brennan Institute for Labor Studies.

CPAR's mission is to produce and disseminate high quality public scholarship about topics that impact the lives of Nebraskans. The CPAR also undertakes a variety of community engagement projects and works with public state agencies and nonprofit organizations within Omaha and the broader state of Nebraska in its state-wide mission to conduct rigorous research in different areas.

Vogel says the CPAR and WBILS are great partners in

studying attitudes and behaviors of public employees in the workforce and in promoting a diverse and democratic society.

Vogel says research is underway as the CPAR is currently conducting surveys to collect information which will help guide the WBILS on formulating initiatives for dealing with union apathy.



Morgan Vogel, Ph. D, Researcher

"Broadly on a national level, support for labor unions is at the highest it's been in decades," Vogel says. "These surveys will help the CPAR understand why there is such great support for unions but still apathy among union members."

She says the survey will study union attitudes overall and union efficacy in the state of Nebraska to understand the perceptions that public workers hold with regards to unions. This will act as the foundation to guide on the next steps in galvanizing more support for union

members and union leadership.

"From the work we do at CPAR, we know that Nebraska has the one of the strongest labor force participation rates in the country," Vogel says. "The research will highlight why people might be reluctant to join a union or why those who might be working in an organization that's unionized may not be paying members."

Vogel urged members of the public workforce, both union and non-union members, to take the survey, as this feedback will be of great use to the CPAR and the WBILS.

To take the survey, visit https://unomaha.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_861jmuMH-dg8Ncuq or scan the QR code. All responses welcome!



A Labor Day like No Other: Article Review

In 2023, Labor Day marks a significant departure from previous years. The transformation lies in the changes to labor laws that have made it easier for workers to unionize. Recently, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) restored the original intent of labor law, which is to empower workers to collectively bargain for improved wages and working conditions.

In a recent case, the NLRB ruled that when a majority of workers affiliate with a union, the employer must either voluntarily recognize the union or face an election. If the employer engages in unfair labor practices during this process, the NLRB immediately declares the union recognized and orders bargaining. This marks a fundamental shift away from the employer-cen-

tric labor laws of the past five decades, where there were minimal consequences for unfair labor practices. Firing or threatening to fire pro-union employees was a common tactic, with only limited penalties. However, this situation is changing. The new labor law interpretation is already impacting workers' ability to unionize.

For instance, employees at a Manhattan Trader Joe's, whose union election ended in a tie, are invoking this decision to have the election nullified and their union recognized.

The NLRB is also working to expedite election timelines and protect individual workers who initiate unionization efforts. While the recent rulings represent significant progress, there are still challenges ahead, especially in cases where employers delay reach-

ing contractual agreements. Despite these challenges, it is clear that labor laws are evolving to align more closely with their original intent: giving workers the tools they need to improve their working conditions and wages. As this new era begins, it brings a more favorable environment for workers looking to unionize and collectively advocate for their rights. To learn more about this case and how things have changed, read the full article at: <https://prospect.org/labor/2023-09-04-labor-day-like-no-other/> or scan the QR code.



Upcoming Event

This workshop will allow union officers and e-board members an opportunity to explore their unique talents, learn the talents of your fellow union officers/e-board members in your local, and identify how to apply your talents toward the goals for your local union by utilizing the CliftonStrengths Assessment from Gallup. The workshop price is \$75. Interested? Email Jim Begley at jamesbegley@unomaha.edu with the names from your local to register. See you there!



 WILLIAM BRENNAN
INSTITUTE FOR LABOR STUDIES

LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP

November 7, 2023 | 5 - 7 PM

UNO Barbara Weitz Community Engagement Center or via ZOOM