

CALL FOR PAPERS

WORKSHOP

Untangling the circulation of ideas: historical perspectives on dispute resolution and enforcement in labour law

**11-12 September 2025
University of Strathclyde, Glasgow**

This Workshop is organized by Johanna Wolf (Max Planck Institute for Legal History and Legal Theory), John Howe (University of Melbourne) and Rebecca Zahn (University of Strathclyde). It is being financially supported by the Max Planck Institute for Legal History and Legal Theory and the University of Strathclyde.

A system of modern labour law comprises three broad mechanisms: a process by which labour rights and standards are determined and set as legal norms; mechanisms whereby information about the observance of labour standards is obtained and fed back into the system; and processes and mechanisms by which standards can be enforced where necessary.

While there has been extensive historical research concerning the development of labour standard setting, there has been less investigation of the second and third mechanisms of labour law – what we might call labour law enforcement. Different bodies are charged with ensuring labour law’s enforcement. For example, trade unions and labour inspectorates may monitor conditions in the workplace. Enforcement also takes place through dispute resolution bodies (such as arbitration and conciliation bodies as well as labour or industrial courts and tribunals); through trade unions calling industrial action; through other informal trade union and worker action; deployment of administrative sanctions by state agencies; or availability of court sanctions such as penalties.

From the outset, the development of national labour law was influenced by international networks and exchanges, in which both problems and solutions were discussed. Ideas circulated here, inspiring each other, being further developed, and being adapted to the respective national contexts. This circulation of ideas extended to how to ensure compliance with and enforcement of labour law. However, little is known about the history of these international networks or the paths and ideas of their protagonists. Following a successful conference at the Max Planck Institute for Legal History and Legal Theory in September 2024, in which we particularly drew attention to the biographies of labour lawyers and their national and transnational paths, we now propose a focus on how ideas for labour law’s enforcement circulated and developed through individuals or international networks and organisations.

We, therefore, seek papers from researchers in law, history or other related disciplines, which explore the history of international and transnational ‘entanglements’, networks, links and other modes for the circulation and exchange of ideas across borders and jurisdictions which shaped labour law enforcement practices, focusing particularly on the 19th and early 20th centuries. This might include topics such as:

- the shape and form of occupational health and safety regimes and their enforcement;
- ideas on the regulation of the working day and how to ensure compliance;
- methods and models of direct action, for example strikes, to enforce labour standards;
- the shape and form of dispute resolution models such as conciliation and arbitration;
- the development of labour inspectorates as state-based institutions designed to monitor and enforce compliance with the law.

This list is not exhaustive and we are open to other topics which fit within the general theme of the workshop.

We are particularly interested in how ideas about labour law enforcement circulated internationally within networks and organisations hitherto under-explored in the literature (such as the International Association for the Legal Protection of Labour/Labour Legislation, and the International Association of Factory Inspectors) before or during the process of the crystallisation of national labour law systems. The focus of the call for papers is on the foundation phase of modern labour law’s development rather than on a set temporal period, recognising that foundation may have happened at different times in different countries.

Interested contributors should submit an abstract of 300-500 words to Johanna Wolf (wolf@lhl.mpg.de) by 14 March 2025.

The selection of workshop contributions will be done by the scientific organizers primarily on the basis of the submitted abstracts. The abstract must indicate the specific contribution of the paper to the overall workshop topic. Applicants will be informed of the results of the selection process within four weeks of the submission. They should prepare a written draft paper for circulation in advance of the workshop.

Practical information:

The workshop will be held at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow on 11-12 September 2025. The aim is to meet in person. There will be no conference fee and catering will be provided for all participants. Financial support for travel and accommodation is available.

Questions about the conference can be directed to the organizers:

Johanna Wolf (wolf@lhl.mpg.de)

John Howe (j.howe@unimelb.edu.au)

Rebecca Zahn (Rebecca.zahn@strath.ac.uk)