

CALL FOR PAPERS

Labor and the transition to electric vehicles: A global perspective

Organizing team: Ian Greer (Cornell-ILR), Harry Katz (Cornell-ILR), Art Wheaton (Cornell-ILR), Mathieu Dupuis (Université Laval), and Anja Kirsch (Freie Universität Berlin)

Location: ILR Conference Center, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York City

Dates: May 9 and 10, 2025

The conversion of manufacturing of internal combustion engine vehicles (ICEV) to electrical vehicles (EV) is a priority for governments around the globe in their efforts to reduce human-made greenhouse gas emissions and decarbonize the transportation. The consequences of this shift for the world's auto workers, however, are far from settled. Whether it leads to job losses, deterioration in working conditions, or changes in skill requirements will depend on many factors such as labor market policies and institutions, government support, and union power.

With this conference, we aim to develop a global understanding of the EV shift and its consequences for workers. We seek to attract scholars to present research based in all three regions from which major automakers originate (East Asia, North America, and Europe) and important sites of production (such as Brazil, South Africa, and India) and raw material extraction (such as the Democratic Republic of Congo and Chile). We invite research on traditional auto makers and suppliers as well as new players in the industry, including EV producers and firms in the electric battery value chain. We also welcome research on public policies and union strategies relating to the EV transition.

Following the conference, selected authors will be invited to further develop their papers for publication in an edited collection published at Cornell University Press at the end of 2025. This book will be an early contribution to the literature on the EV transition and its effects on workers. Our initial approach, as outlined in Dupuis et al. (2024), has been to examine efforts to prevent job losses, to improve the quality of new jobs, and support workers making transitions out of the world of ICEV manufacturing and into that of EV manufacturing. With this conference and edited book, we will broaden this approach by taking a global perspective and by illuminating how firms, governments and unions navigate the issue of labor in the transition to electric vehicles.

Topics will include:

- *The global restructuring of the auto industry.* The dominance of China in EV manufacturing, the advantages of first movers like Tesla, and the strategies of incumbent automakers all determine where autoworkers' jobs will be saved and lost, and where the work will move to.
- *Industry policy.* Incentives for consumers, grants to develop new technologies, and funding streams to ramp up production and build charging stations may or may not be designed with an eye to safeguarding wages and working conditions.
- *Labor market policy.* Governments can provide the tools to support the workers moving into EV jobs or out of ICEV jobs, through retraining, job placement assistance, or cash benefits.
- *Transportation policy.* The EV shift may take place within a more comprehensive change in mobility to reduce dependence on privately-owned vehicles and create jobs in public transportation.
- *Union strategy.* Union efforts to bargain over wages and workplace change may be related to larger policy questions that shape the industry, labor market, and transportation systems.

- *The voices of workers.* The debate over EV features voices from policymakers, experts, corporate executives, and union leaders and largely neglects the possibility of a democratic, and worker-driven approach.
- *Conversion of auto production.* Attracting EV-related investments may secure the jobs in auto plants but also bring risks, including extended retooling periods and changes in demand and policy.
- *Ramping up of battery production.* Incumbent automakers are building battery plants, which creates new manufacturing jobs but also raise concerns over health and safety, wages, and union organizing rights.
- *Mineral extraction.* EVs require an increase in lithium, cobalt, and other minerals, but the social and ecological costs of expanding extraction can be devastating and raises questions of how affected communities and workers can mobilize and gain a voice.

Deadlines: An abstract of approximately 500 words is due by **September 1, 2024**. Notification of acceptance will be by **November 1, 2024**. Upon acceptance, a full paper is due by **April 1, 2025**.

Questions: If you have any questions, please contact Ian Greer at icg2@cornell.edu.

Expenses: We will be able to cover travel and accommodation expenses for conference presenters.

Reference: Dupuis, M., Greer, I., Kirsch, A., Lechowski, G., Park, D., and Zimmermann, T. (2024). A Just Transition for Auto Workers? Negotiating the Electric Vehicle Transition in Germany and North America. *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, online first.