

International Labour Law Now: Towards the Transnational Governance of Work

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Room 723, 7/F., Cheng Yu Tung Tower, Centennial Campus, HKU

International labour law has historically reflected the normative forms of work of the 20th century in the Global North. As a result, much work in the Global South – self-employment, informal work, subsistence work, for example – has been badly served or ignored altogether. Transformations within the world of commerce, finance and production are now disturbing this architecture, eroding once-sharp distinctions between the labour markets of the North and South, generating new forms of precarious work, and heightening the role of new actors and institutions in labour market governance.

This paper suggests that the emerging regulatory landscape is best captured now in terms of the ‘transnational governance of work’. The landscape is at once multi-leveled, fragmented and conflicted: contending narratives and agendas advanced by a diverse cast of transnational private actors and organizations now play critical roles in establishing workplace norms and practices, simultaneously creating bases for competing rights claims by other market actors. Canvassing recent decisions and labour market governance project, the paper illustrates how workers’ rights are shaped by the character of the regimes in which they are adjudicated and complexly intermingled with ideas and decisions concerning economic and social governance.



Kerry Rittich is Professor of Law, Women and Gender Studies, and Public Policy and Governance at the University of Toronto. She writes in the areas of labour law, global governance, law and development, and gender and critical legal theory. A former Associate Dean at the Faculty of Law, she is a Senior Faculty member at the Harvard Institute of Global Law and Policy and has been a fellow at the European University Institute, the Mackenzie King Visiting Professor of Canadian Studies at Harvard University, Visiting Professor at the Watson Institute for International Studies at Brown University and Sciences Po Law School in Paris, and Professor and Academic Director of the Center for Transnational Legal Studies, London.

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