Podcast Transcript

Valuable Conversations with UCL IIPP

Damon Silvers

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SPEAKERS

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*NOTE: This is an AI generated auto-transcript which may contain errors.

Justin 00:11

Hello and welcome to valuable conversations a student produced podcast from UCL Institute for Innovation and public purpose. I'm Justin Birol. Today PhD student Nike dilemma and I talk to IIPP. Visiting Professor of Practice Daymond Silver's, for over 30 years, Damon has been a leading voice in the US labor movement. He served as the Director of Policy and Special Counsel for the AFL CIO, the largest Federation of unions in the United States this summer Daymond did several really, really interesting and good lectures at the IPP, about the relationship between the labor movement, climate change and innovation. You know, at IIPP, we often talk about how, in order to address climate change, in order to fix climate change, we really need a lot of innovation and innovation that's directed in a appropriate way so that it actually achieves the goals that we're setting out to achieve. And what David brings to this conversation is an analysis of how the labor movement can either be a catalyst for the change that we want, or it can actually be in opposition. And aligning those things is really, really important. So highly recommend checking out those lectures on this podcast. We do talk about that. But we also talk about Damien's life story, how he got involved in labor activism, during the dining hall worker strikes and anti apartheid protests when he was an undergraduate at Harvard, and how he decided to make that his life's work. We talk at length about many historical and present day aspects of the labor movement and how the labor movement has changed historically, over time, and where it might be going. It's a really timely and interesting conversation. And to make it even more timely. Damon is also he's a lawyer and a constitutional scholar. So we asked him to talk to us about the recent US Supreme Court rulings, which have have had a really devastating effect on a lot of people right now, especially around abortion, and also things like environmental regulation. So Damon wrote a really, really good essay about this on his substack. I've put the link in the description. And so we decided to talk about that. And we ended up talking about that actually a lot longer than we thought. This is a really long interview. It's the longest one we've done so far on this podcast. And, you know, we talked a little bit about the editorial aspect of it about how much we wanted to keep. And ultimately, we really liked the entire conversation and got a lot out of it and felt like we really understood Damon a lot better by the end of it. So rather than cutting it into pieces, and putting out multiple separate episodes, I've just

provided a few timestamps in the description. So if you want to skip around to different areas that might interest you check those out, you know, Damien's lectures, both at the IPP. And then also, if you just Google his name, you'll see he has many, many lectures and podcasts that he's recorded before. But I felt like this conversation gave me a lot better of a perspective on who he is as a person, what are his values and what he's really trying to do and how his work aligns with the broader work of the IPP. So, really hope you enjoy our conversation with demons Silver's. Okay, so Damon Silvers, thank you so much for joining us today and podcast.

Damon 03:40

Oh, it's a pleasure to be with you guys. Really, really happy to be here?

Justin 03:44

Yeah, I wanted to ask, so are you in London for the summer or what?

Damon 03:48

Well, I go back and forth between the United Kingdom and the United States. Okay. I, you know, I have a visiting professorship, which is why we're all here talking. And then I am a senior adviser to the to the AFL CIO, and one of the US is the US trade union body, and one of the USS largest unions, the American Federation of Teachers. So, sometimes I need to be there and sometimes I need to be here.

Justin 04:15

Right, because you also have a position at Newcastle, right? Yeah, I

Damon 04:18

have a visiting professorship appointment there and social justice. My partner, Gian whare is the MP for Newcastle Central. And so we spend, we spend our weekends loosely defined. In Newcastle typically, she is very devoted to talking with her constituents every weekend. And so if you want to know where I am on Saturday morning, it's knocking on doors in Newcastle.

Justin 04:47

Interesting. Okay. Um, you know, I we have a lot that we want to talk to you about, but I guess Can we just start out talking about where are you from? Where do you grew up?

Damon 04:57

So I was born in Cambridge, Mass The truth hurts, but I grew up in the sense of going to high school and that sort of thing in Richmond, Virginia, which is, as some of our listeners may know, was the capital of the Confederacy. Right. And so, when I was growing up, there was a 150 foot high column to the unknown Confederate soldier at the end of my street. Really. Wow. And, you know, one of the great learning experiences of my adult life was to understand that my neighborhood, which had been kind of which this culture is an object, if you didn't understand the politics is quite nice and kind of, you know, graces the neighborhood but in reality, it was part of an effort to repress to suppress the memory of the role that our neighborhood had played in the the freeing of slaves in Richmond, which really began literally on that spot, where African American soldiers captured the city, and liberated in many cases, because they had been, they had grown up in Richmond themselves and had run out and run away. They limited their own families. The whole history of that, which happened right there was kind of replaced by this giant Confederate statue. And I didn't really fully understand that, until I was an adult and had the chance to do some of my own reading,

Nai 06:30

right? Sure. That's pretty amazing. Like, my mom is from Richmond, Virginia area. And so I didn't know this history, but that's really, really cool to kind of hear about that.

Damon 06:42

It's, there's, I mean, when I was growing up, the history of Richmond was something that was possessed sort of possessed by very conservative and racist kinds of political forces. And when people talked about our history in Richmond, they meant, you know, Robert E Lee, and, and a kind of fantasize sort of Gone With the Wind, sort of notion of, of the past of slavery. And what I, I did my undergraduate thesis on the pre Civil War history of Richmond. And what I learned from doing that was that Richmond had this whole other history that effectively had been suppressed for a variety of different reasons, a history, a history of slave resistance, and, and of slaves, and of Richmond's African American community liberating itself. Not, you know, the way they did it was that, you know, young men ran away and joined various Union Army units. And then they came back, you know, in uniform. And there are accounts of people are literally liberating their parents, I mean, soldiers coming down, coming down the streets that I walked every day, and, and liberating their parents, there were spy rings set up in my neighborhood by anti slavery, whites working with they're working with slaves in their household, they, they infiltrated the White House of the Confederacy and pass information back to the union. Wow, there was this really rich history of, of liberation that nobody that I mean, I grew up in a largely African American neighborhood, nobody knew this history, none of my friends growing up knew it. Sure. Similarly, there was a

history after the Civil War, of labor organizing by freed slaves, with white workers in Richmond, particularly Irish and German immigrants. The city was controlled by the led by the Knights of Labor in the 1880s. Again, just like vanished, I mean, just a completely suppressed history of Richmond. I've since met people whose families were part of that who maintain those memories, you know, within their families. But you couldn't find, you know, that that history simply was not taught. It was, yeah. What it reminds me of actually, is now you know, what I know, for example, about the way that history is suppressed in Spain, for example, right, where there's sort of this sort of unspoken thing that we just never did. We just never discussed the Civil War, right. We all know all about it. But we never talked about it. Yeah, Richmond Sr. was a little bit like that.

Justin 09:44

So what brought your family there? Oh, well,

Damon 09:47

we're, we were we were newcomers. I mean, my my father was a physical chemist, which is really more like a physicist, but he got to he was hired as a professor at Virginia Commonwealth University, which is right, a large state university in Richmond. Yeah, in the mid 70s. And, and he got tenure there. And that's why we live there.

Justin 10:11

That makes sense. So when did you first start to get involved? get interested in, you know, public policy? And and I guess the unions are labor?

Damon 10:21

Well, you know, public policies have funny term.

Justin 10:27

You don't call it that, when you first get interested in it, right? You're just like, why does this happen the way that it happened?

Damon 10:32

Well, politics was a staple of my family. And of all my parents, friends, and it was what we, it's what we ate with our breakfast. Now, interestingly, not. We had, I knew some people growing up who were actively involved in public life, but not very many. I did not grow up, you know, some people did with congressmen and senators at the dinner table. I grew up around people who were very intensely interested in, in, in politics. But whose lives were, you know, they had other jobs, they they act, mostly academics. My grandfather was very interested in politics, and he was a congregational minister. But, you know, politics was a politics was a constant subject of conversation when I was growing up, and I had political opinions from the time I was like, six years old. Right, I was, you know, I came of age, so to speak, right at the time that Ronald Reagan became president of the United States and Reagan's administration had immediate had immediate impact on the education budgets, of America's public schools, and particularly in states like Virginia, where the state government really didn't value education very much. Particularly, education in predominantly African American communities, which is what Richmond was time I was growing up. And so, you know, I in when I was in high school, I was involved in a lot of organizing and protest around school budgets, already. And so I, you know, my first experience of public policy, you know, of real, like, hands on public policy was trying to keep my high school open, when it was under budget, in 1981. And we were successful at that. For me, public policy was always kind of, as a young person, public policy was always intertwined with protest, I didn't really see it as I experienced it as an intellectual exercise. But I also it was inextricably sort of intertwined with Where do you get power? Of course, and you might notice that that actually is the theme of my of my lectures here at UCL, is a certain continuity. But really, my early intellectual interests were much more formulated in terms of History and Sociology, and philosophy, not so much public policy as such. Right. But, but yeah, I think I think thinking back on it, that fight over school funding after Reagan was the first the first time that I like, you know, sat down with public officials and talked about, you know, policy decisions. I was, I was 16. Wow.

Justin 13:30

That's, that's really remarkable. Yeah. And then, you know, I see also, according to Wikipedia, which I want to fact check this.

Damon 13:37

My Wikipedia entry is pretty old.

Justin 13:40

Well, it doesn't mention UCL. So maybe we need to update. Well, yeah. If somebody

Damon 13:43

wanted to fix it, I'd be fine with me. I believe the rules are that I can't. Right. Right. Right.

Justin 13:48

But it says that you were in college as an undergrad, you were both active in the anti apartheid movement. And also that you represented dining hall workers and the negotiations with the University, which was Harvard, right. I don't know who put that in. I think it's on the Harvard Business School website.

Damon 14:08

I did not represent dining hall workers. I was I, I helped. I was I was a student supporter of workers and remain an alumni supporter of the dining hall workers. I was actually on picket lines with them some years, about four years ago, when they when they successfully blocked an effort by Harvard to substantially cut their health care. Again, for people listen, a lot of people who are listening to this may not be aware, but in the United States, your healthcare is tied to your employment, right? It's not like United Kingdom where, you know, everybody has health care. Anyway, but yes, I was. I was actually a dining hall worker at Harvard in a very small way. i It's funny now that I'm not sure what the logic of this really was, but I guess it just shows something about inflation. I I worked one night a week at Harvard dining halls. You No washing dishes and, and I think I was paid $15 A week by cheque. And that money was meaningful at the time. But, but what really happened there, and it had a lifelong impact. I talk about this a lot when I'm asked sort of like, how did you get involved in the labor movement? Yeah. And the truth is, I was involved in the labor movement from high school I, I, I had just the most, I had just the greatest good fortune when I was in high school to meet and be influenced by people who were part of, in different ways, and from some very different kinds of places. Part of the effort to build progressive South after the Civil Rights Movement, an effort that an effort that seemed like it was it might succeed in the 1970s and early 80s. But ultimately, it was overwhelmed by right wing politics. But I was around that as a young person, and I met the most courageous and good hearted people in the context of that. And, and so part of that, my high school, my high school, Social Studies teacher, Roger grey, took me and some friends of our students and fellow students of mine took us all on he because he was the teachers union rep in Richmond, and in in Richmond at that time, and until about two years ago, the teachers were forbidden from actually meaning actually organizing and collectively bargaining there was it was against the law for the teachers to bargain collectively with the city and against the law for the city to bargain with them was a state law and the city was subjected to it. But the teachers had a union anyway, that did its best, and did his best to represent people and give them voice but they had no formal rights. And so my, my social studies teacher was the union rep for our school, and he invited us to go along to this giant labor March and rally Solidarity Day in 1981, we all rode on a bus that was chartered by the United Auto Workers from from Fredericksburg, which is halfway between Richmond and Washington, I also got the chance to do support work for the United Farm Workers courtesy of a German conscientious objector who had been sent as part of his alternative service to organize on behalf of the farm workers in Richmond. You know, that's why these kinds of experiences in high school but what really, but just to come back to the, to the Harvard dining halls, so, you know, the Harvard dining hall Workers Union, elected new leadership around the time that I went to school there, and they had a much more

militant approach to org to bargaining with the, with the university, and there was a lot of talk of a strike. And, and, you know, I was some people may find this hard to believe, but I was kind of a shy and awkward 18 year old freshman at Harvard, I was a long way from home. And, and I was trying to figure it all out, right. And, you know, the dining hall, my Wednesday nights, washing dishes in the dining hall was like, in the emotional arc of my week, this was sort of like the low point. You know, I mean, you know, I was, people were work, they're all were sort of, in a sort of ignored me, but they were sort of friendly, but not sure nothing special. So anyway, the university is the university is there's the tensions are escalating around the contract. And, and I was aware of that through student politics, political groups, and they handed out, you know, to students, supporters, they handed out buttons, you know, support, you know, I support the dining hall workers. So I wore one of these buttons to work. And it was like, it was like, I'd set off an earthquake. For start, for starters, the manager who's always been kinda like, you know, kind of, it wasn't always nice to me. So I spent the whole shift, closeted in his office on the phone with the big bosses. And all the workers were, like, overjoyed, they all like, hugged and kissed me and stuff and, like, all of a sudden, like I was, you know, visible and, and it also became clear to me how much this mattered. Right, that that, you know, I mean, for me, right, the bargaining, you know, these negotiations were, for me as an 18 year old. I mean, these negotiations were one cause among many in this kind of thing. Sure. And then I experienced sort of personally the intensity of what, of what labor organizing and labor negotiating means for working people. And I think in some ways that was that moment in that kitchen was the defining moment in my life about professionally, I mean that it made the implications of that. And the fact that every experience I've ever had sense is reinforced with the meaning of that moment. Really, just profoundly check.

Nai 20:26

Something that comes to mind when you tell me the story, is this idea of community. So being able to kind of Forge community through this kind of shared struggle. And I find out kind of really moving, I also am really interested, it seems like your experience kind of disrupts this narrative of young people being apathetic about politics, and what's going on with regard to how power is moving around them. But this is definitely not your story. You saw yourself as a person who could be an agent of change, and be engaged with others around the struggles. And I think that where did that come from? Was that always there? Like, I'm very interested in learning about that, because you started at such a young age as well.

Damon 21:11

Well, I mean, I would say a couple things about that. I mean, it requires a certain, I'm afraid to say that, that that kind of confidence, which in some ways I had from a very young age, despite the fact that I was not a socially adept person, right, that I there was a part of me that there was a part of me that could stand up in front of a crowd at the age of 16. And move people to action. That was more that was way ahead of the part of me that could make you know, that could, you know, sit at a bar and talk to people. I mean, it was it makes it there was a there was a disjuncture there. You know, I was I was raised, I was raised. I mean, I should say, you know, my mother was involved before, years earlier, my mother, both when we lived in Philadelphia, and Richmond, my

mother was very involved in in sort of the funding and politics of the schools that we went to, right. I mean, I grew up, and both of my parents in different ways had been modestly active. In in, in the Vietnam War, protests against the Vietnam War, as supporters of the civil rights movement from afar. As my father was a huge and passionate supporter all of his life of, of the Cuban Revolution, something which I disagreed with him about certain respects. But on the other hand, he saw Cuba in 1961, I did not. So I was sort of inculcated with the idea that taking action is is taking action is possible, in fact, not only possible, it's like the only thing to do. That was like deep in and also, you know, that was pretty. That feeling was very prevalent in American society in the 1970s. When I was growing up, the anti war movement, the civil rights movement, these things were, for adults, these things had happened literally yesterday, and for many, and for some people, they were happening then, right, the, the, the historians view that, you know, the civil rights movement ended in 68, or whatever. That's not how it felt that's that nobody told us you know, and, I mean, I'll give you a couple of examples of this, these kinds of influences. I remember my mother saying, I remember the way my parents talked about Malcolm X. And, you know, my mother saw Malcolm X speak in New Haven, and in a church, and in her hometown, yeah. And she said, she said to me when I was when I was young, she said, You know, I grew up in New Haven, Connecticut, and I knew, you know, it wasn't segregated. I mean, I knew black people, but people went to school in me. They, my grandmother worked in the schools administration office in Hamden, Connecticut. There were black people worked with her it wasn't, you know, it wasn't like one of these like, really weird twisted scenes on the surface. She said, everybody got along just fine. On the surface, she said, and then she said, I want to hear Malcolm X in his church, and I was the only white person there and the place was completed as a church member and he was, he was in the Nation of Islam. Right, right. He was supposed to be anti Christian. So so she went to this to hear him speak the church. is completely full, right? Like there's 1000 people in the church. And she's like the only white person there. And the church is full of very well dressed, middle class professional, African American women. And he's speaking and she's said she was incredibly impressed by him that he just he was so, so brilliant in the way he analyzed things and his use of rhetoric. And my mother was an English teacher, she knew something about rhetoric. And, and she said, and she learned, though, and the crowd, she said, responded to him, like nothing she had ever seen. And she learned from that experience, and she was 23 or 24. She said, she learned from that experience that African American people in the United States were really, really angry. That

Nai 25:52

that right that that time period, yeah.

Damon 25:55

That like people were put, we're putting on a good face. Right, right. But because this was at the time of the Birmingham bombings, wow. Right. This was, you know, this was at a time in which people were being literally killed daily in Mississippi and the civil rights struggle. And nobody was talking about it. And Malcolm X got up in front of that crowd and said, This is unacceptable, right? This is, this is this is routine. And this is unacceptable. Yeah. Right. And from and my father would watch Malcolm X on TV, he would appear on TV, and he said, years

later, he said, smartest man I ever saw. Wow. So I was given a, and my father was no slouch in terms of smart people. And I've been to Harvard and Yale and this kind of stuff. He said, hands down, while Malcolm X was the smartest person he'd ever heard speak on politics. Your question about, you know, people's sense of being able to act? Yes, I was fed a diet of not only can you act, but you must write. Right. And, interestingly, my parents and their friends, largely, there aren't what they did was kind of, I put it kind of in a minor key. Right. Like, their whole lives weren't activism, they, but they honored and viewed as heroes, the people who did, yeah, sure. And that, that I was I was immersed as a young person in that environment. And so I think that, that plus whatever my innate psychological defects that produced what you're talking about, but also, you know, my life as a young person spanned a very peculiar moment. Sure, which was the moment between the kind of post 60s era of activism, right. I mean, there are more strikes in the United States in the 1970s, than at any other time in modern American history other than the other than the period around World War Two. Right, right. Right. The 1970s were a period of intense labor activism. strikes were a daily feature of drama tv, nightly news, these people are on strike, these people aren't strike. Yeah, the struggles around both of the Civil Rights Movement and the anti war movement continued into the 70s in major ways. And there was lots of activism in the 70s on college campuses, lots of it, it was just the norm was the norm. Right. The 80s When I actually went to college, and 82 verged into a different kind of world. Right, in which and you see, you can see it today in polling, by the way that, that people who came of age in the 1980s are among the more conservative people in America and the American electorate. The it's ironic, you know, these generational effects? Yeah. Yet people who came of age later, are the core of Bernie Sanders is constituency. People came of age significantly earlier. Right, were influenced by the Civil Rights Movement, the anti war movement, or really old people by the New Deal. But that Reagan generation is pretty conservative. And, yeah, it, you could feel it at the time. During that period, I would say, and it went right to the 90s, you can feel it, you know, on college campuses. Now, the exception, of course, was the anti apartheid movement, which guys what you guys mentioned, and which was, you know, for me, another kind of major sort of coming of age. And something I'm enormously proud of I, you know, having played a small role in that, and having and seeing the victory.

Nai 29:47

Tell us, please tell us kind of how you got involved. I know there was a lot of movement around divestment. It was global. So I'm just really curious to hear. Okay, how did your vision tour turn towards what was happening in South Africa?

Damon 29:59

Well, So, again, you know, the struggle against apartheid in South Africa was a one of the backdrops of public life. When I was growing up, I mean, my memory when I, when I first became aware of what was going on in South Africa, I think was around when I was 11 or 12 when Steve Biko was killed, and when there was an uprising in Soweto in the townships outside Johannesburg, connected, and around the the murder of Steve Biko and Steve Biko was, you know, a, Steve Biko was the leader of the black consciousness movement in South Africa, his a lot of his ideas were similar, and I think influenced by Malcolm X. France phenom and but he was a

key, he was sort of the key figure in in the D colonialization, of the spirit, shall we say, in South Africa. And he was murdered by the South African police. And so I was wet. So starting there, I was aware of the basics thing, right, that there was apartheid in South Africa that black people in South Africa weren't allowed to vote that they were treated, you know, in a subhuman kind of way by by the white minority. And they and I was also aware, and it shaped my choice of where to go university, there was a big student movement in at Harvard in particular, asking the university to asking Harvard to sell its stocks that had held in its investment portfolio, that in the companies that invested in South Africa, and there had been big student protests at Harvard, 1000s of people in 1979 1980 1981, when I was in high school, trying to decide where to go to university, and it was part of the backdrop of why I wanted to go to Harvard was because of that type of activism that I knew about. And you know, I felt passionately that that Apartheid was wrong. And I couldn't imagine why anybody would think otherwise. Or why. What I didn't really understand was, I devoted myself to striking a blow against this system. But I didn't really understand how profound a system it was that I was taking aim at. You know, that both the United States and the United Kingdom had profound economic and security ties with the apartheid government. The corporate presence was merely the tip of the iceberg. And it was serious business. It was serious business economically, it was serious business, politically. And from a kind of security perspective, it was part of a Cold War, right? It was part of a whole web of, you know, really ugly stuff that both the United States and the United Kingdom engaged in during the Cold War, right. So but but when I got to Harvard, I sort of tried to connect the people who were involved in that movement. By that time, the movement had had kind of ebbed way had ebbed way. But when South Africans rose up against apartheid, with much greater seriousness, in the mid 80s, we were, we were agitated, we had been agitating all along. And then all of a sudden, it was like, the number one story on the national news night after night after night of the police and the army slaughtering people in the streets of South Africa, who were protesting for the right, you know, the right to vote the right to get a job, you know, this kind of stuff. And, and we were able to mobilize in that context, the way that we were able to organize a mass movement of Harvard students, as the same thing was happening in universities all over the country. And we eventually had, I think, the big of the single biggest political rally ever in the history of Harvard in 1985. We had 5000 people filled the entire campus needs, and Jesse Jackson came and spoken. And I got to know the these amazing people who led who were leaders in the apartheid, anti apartheid movement I had I talked with Bishop Tutu, and on the phone, because Harvard really mattered what Harvard is your Harvard was an important institution, right in this structure in ways that I didn't really understand. Amplify, right, exactly. And so the the, the anti apartheid movement in South Africa felt that we were doing something meaningful. And in the end, Harvard mostly divested as the sort of the whole thing collapsed as the whole infrastructure of apartheid politically and economically collapsed. A lot of the people we were trying to pressure who ran Harvard were saw themselves as liberals. They had elaborate defenses for why they were doing what they were doing, sure, but they were totally wrong in history proven them to be totally wrong, and we were right. We knew we were right all along because Alan Bozak and Bishop Tutu and and indirectly Nelson Mandela, who was in prison And right but had people speaking for him? All told us, you know, this is helpful, please do this. Yeah. Right. And it was our ultimate argument at every turn with the universe with Harvard was who were you'd to say that you understand better what to do in South Africa than Nelson Mandela?

Justin 35:19

You Yeah. It's amazing on every level, but I want to fast forward a little bit. So you go to you go to you go to law school and get an MBA. And how did you come to end up working for the AFL CIO? You because you've been there for now? 20 years?

Damon 35:43

Yeah, I've retired. I retired from the AFL CIO full time, right? This spring, I worked for the AFL CIO in a variety of roles for 25 years, right. But that's not one of my career in the labor movement began. I went after I went to Cambridge, actually, for a year, I studied history as a graduate student, but was offered a job at the end of that year. Helping the clerical and technical workers at Harvard organize a union. I knew those people I knew the people doing the organizing, admired them a great deal. And they offered me a job. And I remember sitting in the library in Cambridge, doing my research and thinking, you know, I'm not sure this is really as valuable thing to do as to help these folks organize. And, and so I took that job. And so I worked for two years, as an organ as a sort of jack of all trades. I mean, I did everything for that union. Other than organize, the people did the organizing were former Harvard workers. And I was and I was a student, I was a former student. And there's a big difference. Sure. I learned all about that difference during that job, but I did everything else I did photocopying, and research and, and press work and inner carrying secret messages and all kinds of stuff. Right? I did everything. And I did that for two years. And then I went to work for the Amalgamated Clothing and textile workers union, which, like the name says, organized people in the clothing and textile industry, and in a bunch of related areas, some auto parts and other things. It's a union that no longer exists because of the collapse of those industries. It merged and merged and merged. It does exist. It merged into other unions and r&d merged. It's local still exist. They're called workers united. And I have to say, with great pride, they are the Starbucks union.

Nai 37:37

Oh, really? That is

Damon 37:37

cool. Okay, great. And, but the other, but to give you a sense of what the what that union was, like, if you've ever seen the movie, Norma Rae, which is movies with Sally Field made in the late 70s, about textile organizing in the South. It's that union. And I worked for them for three years. And I did, I did organizing, I did mostly research and work in the capital markets. And we did a lot of very heavy duty anti apartheid work, actually, that union was very, that union was very progressive, and really gave scope to us to do all kinds of good things in the course of representing our members, and we helped force a whole bunch of banks to cut ties with South Africa at a critical point. And we we did some work trying to protect the Amazon. I mean, we did a lot of things that we're, we're sort of broad, sort of broad social advocacy, but mostly what we did was organized industrial workers, and the working poor. And and when I say that I later experiences in my life reinforced what I learned

in the dining hall at Harvard, what I'm mostly talking about is my experiences doing organizing in the clothing and textile industry in the South. It's they were, there wasn't time to describe what that was like. But it was a profound thing. I'll just say one thing. Yeah. I've never seen a human being more tired than then the workers who would come off the 12 hour shifts in a textile mill. Yeah. People were so tired, they couldn't. They couldn't speak. They couldn't, couldn't put sentences together. It and the courage of the people who fought back against that in these small towns in the Carolinas, you know, it's, you know, 30 years later, I can I can't even I can't even begin to describe it. The so so anyway, I've worked in the labor movement for five years, and at the end of that, I thought that I might I could use some actual training that I was I was pretending to be a lawyer and pretend I mean, not literally it wasn't, wasn't practicing that license. But I was right. But I was, you know, I was I was doing, I was looking at legal issues. I was doing financial analysis, and I didn't really, I was making it up. I mean, I was making it up as I went along. And I needed, like, the real training. And so I went, I got an MBA and a law degree at Harvard, I went back to the same place, it's kind of, you know, black, well, you know, and I got those degrees. And then the leadership of the AFL CIO, the American labor movement had changed while I was in school, and people really devoted to organizing and to being connected to the larger, larger, socially progressive. Politics had to come to power. John Sweeney, who was the President of SEIU, who became a dear friend and mentor to me, Richard Trumka, who is the president of the coal miners union, and helped lead the effort to align the labor movement with the anti apartheid movement in the 1980s. He led strikes of civil he led sympathy strikes of white coal miners in the South, in support of strikes by African by black coal miners in South Africa. And he got arrested at the South African Embassy Rich. Rich was really my close friend, John Sweeney was my mentor, he was another generation than me, Rich was. Both these men died in the last two years, John Swinney died of COVID. And Rich had a heart attack. At the peak of his, at the peak of what Rich was trying to do for working people, he had a heart attack a year ago, and died. But, but these guys, these guys won control of the AFL CIO in a, in a sort of pitched internal battle. And I went to work for them. In 1997, coming out of law school. I just didn't it was a, it was like a no brainer, it was a huge, all the people that I knew in the labor movement had been trying to get the AFL CIO to be more of a forward more, more of a be less of a business Unionist organization and more of a social movement. And people totally committed to that task had had had one at one power through an election. And like, where else was I gonna go? I mean, you know, it was it was the Great, the great opportunity, it was the opportunity of a lifetime. And and there I stayed. I mean, I found, as I used to say, people, people asked me, Well, why don't you do something else. And I was like, Well, you got something more, you have something better, you have something more relevant, or what I used to say is, I know, I know organizations that are more politically pure, but they have no power. And I know Oregon, and I know organizations that are more powerful, but you don't want to do what they do. And, and but most importantly, and I should, it's, that's a nice psyllid, it's a nice little cylinder isn't but really, the vast honour of being able to represent, you know, the working people of the United States. You know, to be, and to do so in a way that is legitimate, meaning that that the AFL CIO has, depending how you count between the various times between 12 and 15 million people, they elect the leaders of the unions that make up the AFL CIO, the delegates elected president. Right. It's, it's, the president hires me and tells me what to do. Right. It's legitimate. It's not it's not me think making up what working people might want. Right? It's being the the agent of the elected leaders of the American of American working people, you walk into a room, right? Meeting Room, there's no there's nothing better you can say, there's no better card to hand across the table than that one. The great privilege and honor of being able to do that remains with me. I mean, I I still do it as an outside adviser. But but you know, yeah, nothing better.

Justin 44:25

Right. I have a couple of questions about this. So I'm 29. So in my lifetime, and then, I guess, in the decade or two before unions have basically been, you know, decimated in the US, right. And you've talked about this a lot so and you know, so it's funny on a personal level. I never imagined like joining it. It just never seemed like a possibility for me. I have a few friends who are in unions like maybe teachers union, couple friends in Hollywood because I'm from LA but that you know and And, you know, it kind of one thing I heard you talk about or I read something that you wrote possibly about how the labor, the structure, I guess you could call it the operating model, or the, you know, business model maybe isn't the right word for what unions actually are. And how they work has changed has changed in the past. It's not, it's not been historically static, you know, and as I said, it wasn't until college when I read about it, that I realized, like, oh, you know, we have the unions to thank for, you know, the 40 Hour Workweek, and, you know, weekends and all that. At the same time, now, you know, such a, you know, a smaller and smaller percentage of people are in unions. And also, it seems that there's, there's just a lot of kind of institutional obstacles in the wake of the labor movement that haven't seemed to go away, even with more progressive kind of politic political administrations. So I'm just curious, like, do you think that how have you seen it change in your time working for the AFL CIO? And maybe, if you want to talk a little bit about the historical aspect, and then, you know, how do you how do you think do you think that unions should kind of change form again, going forward? And how?

Damon 46:22

That's a, it's a sizable question. That's not no, no. It's a very important one. And let me just first say, Justin, that you're right about your memory of what you read by me is right, I've made a point on a number of occasions of writing that people need to understand that the word union encompasses a lot of things. Yes. Right. And they are sort of layered historically. Meaning that, that today, there are unions whose origins are in really different kinds of organizations. Yeah. You know, some unions have their origins in, in medieval guilds, and like craft guilds, some unions have their origins in. I make a point of saying that some unions have their origins in anti slavery conspiracies, there are unions in the American South and in the Caribbean, and so forth, that if you look like where did this come from? How did these people learn to act collectively? Well, they did it by resisting slavery, you know, and then their children and grandchildren and great men, a culture of organization and resistance was passed on that became a union local, that the there are unions that are the product of mass movements, in industrial settings, so like the United Auto Workers, for example, in the United States, or the Fiat Workers Union in Italy, they are the product, they're the product of some historical uprising, against the way people were abused in, in, in mass production. In the 20th century. There are public sector worker unions that are have their origins in civil service, associations, very highly professionalized. There are others that have their origins, again, in in mass social movements. You know, the, the teachers unions and major American cities all had to strike illegally to get and in public sector unionism in the United States is very closely tied to the civil rights movement, particularly in big cities. As a product of the civil rights movement. Martin Luther King was killed on a on a public sector, garbage strike picket picket line, essentially, his last speeches about his last speech

is a speech to sanitation workers and their families and allies about how we are going to go on an illegal picket line. Right. And that's what we're gonna do that, you know, we in the labor movement often say, you know, Martin Luther King died on the on the picket line. Yeah. But what we often don't We don't say often enough, is that his last speech was an exhortation to to go on a strikers March. That was illegal, right to his was a justification for violating a court injunction. So So unions are a lot of things. And I think that right now, well, what whatever I say, doesn't matter. In reality, working people in the developing world right now are reinventing what unions are. The unions that have been created of you mentioned Hollywood unions that are being created of people doing digital content creation. Unions of the Amazon workers were organizing in Alabama and Staten Island. I mentioned Starbucks, I think that may be in some ways, the most interesting thing in the United States. These unions don't function the same way as the auto Workers Union did in 1940. They are the product of unions are the product of the lived experience at work of the people who form them. And, and so I think that's going on all around us. I think it's an open question whether the legacy institutions of the labor movement are able to integrate with all of this new organizing and effective way. I think as the great challenge the labor movement faces is how to merge working people's existing institutions, with the institutions and ways of organizing that are in the making among young workers, I think that's the great challenge, we shouldn't expect Amazon workers to necessarily want to have the same kind of organization that auto workers had any more than we would have expected auto workers to have the same kind of organization that locomotive engineers had, or that carpenters had the genius of the labor movement through time is its ability to, to grow to encompass all the lived experiences of working people. I think, though, that there were certain things that are fixed that are not going to change. And that when you start hearing people say that should change, you're hearing people saying something that's not helpful. Right. So So I think that the fundamental the fundamentals of workers organizing collectively in the workplace, to bargain collectively with their employers, right to have the end to sit independently of their employer. Right, and to have that bargaining have legal form. Right, so that so that it can't be altered unilaterally by the employer, I think those things are, if you look at all the things that you call a union, they all do that in one way or another. Right now, there's some is greater or lesser, and government involvement in different situations and so forth. But those things are those things, collective organization in the workplace, to bargain collectively with the employer. That is the core thing that all these different kinds of organizational forms have. And it's as old as it's as old as the Bible. Right? If you can go back and listen and read carefully in Exodus about, you know, Moses sitting down with Pharaoh, right? You will read an account of a collectively organized group of workers having a negotiating session with their employer.

Justin 52:25

That's incredible. I didn't, I did not know that I need to go back in history, in addition to my

Damon 52:31

it's an it's an intense thing, if you had any experience with this kind of thing, and you read Exodus, you're like, Oh, I know what they're talking about. It's wild,

Justin 52:42

makes a comment commonality of just being able to join together.

Damon 52:47

And by the way, every thoughtful labor leader that I know of, understands what I just said, Yeah, I'm not saying anything. That's like, I'm not saying anything that is like heretical in the world of labor. Right, everybody understands, and that, that the labor movement has to be open to, to new generations of workers, their experience, the kinds of organizations they want to build. The the something I think it's really important to be said here, though, is that after 40 years of neoliberalism and wage suppression, in the more neoliberal developed economies, meaning the United States, most of all, but the United Kingdom number two, after 40 years of that, unions have never been more popular. So in the United States, right now, we have 10 plus 10% of the workforce, 6.6% of the private sector workforce is actually in a union, but 68% of the American public support unions and would like to be in one. Yeah, right. Now, it's something as as, as they say, in Hollywood, Something's gotta give. Right, we have legal structures. This is not the labor movements problem. We have legal structures that effectively prevent workers from being in unions when they want to, and, and allow employers to refuse to bargain collectively and to fire people who try to try to organize, and until and we need to fix that. Right. That's why there's this giant gap between actual union membership and, and and union support. And I believe, although I've not seen polls, I believe something similar is happening in the United Kingdom. You know, I think a lot of people like to talk a lot of people both in the president and the Tory party, thought that Mick Lynch and the Trent and the and the RMT. Were going to be unpopular. When they

Justin 54:43

got such a badass on TV just shutting down every single, you know, news presenter that was like, Are you going to violently stop people for going to work and yeah, he was just so on the ball. Yeah,

Damon 54:57

right. Well, in a country of low wage worker Those who have had to who have had who had been powerless for decades. Right? It turns out that the people who stand up for themselves are popular.

Justin 55:08

It's kind of it's kind of funny, because it's like you said something like 68% would want to be in a union. It's like, I bet you know, that remaining percent that says they don't. It's maybe you don't want to be in a union. But if you

said, you know, do you want, you know, better wages, better benefits, like all the things that unions actually fight for? Those are just kind of like universal things for workers?

Damon 55:28

Well, here's an interesting thing. In my experience, union organizing, union elections in the United States are hard fought, and often very close. The Union Election at Harvard that I was involved in organizing was an election of 3600 workers, it was decided by three votes. Wow. Under US labor law, nobody has to join a union. Right? You, you, you. And some, in some situations, workers who are represented by unions have to pay a fee to the union because the union is obligated to represent them. Right. But nobody has to join. Right joining is voluntary. It's almost always true that after the election, when the union wins, everybody joins,

Justin 56:19

even the people that voted against it right.

Damon 56:21

Now, why is that? It's because the election is not an election about do you like unions or not like unions? Do you want to do you want? Do you want better wages and working conditions do not want better conditions, the election is about power. It's about people's perception of whether they have the power to stand up to their employer or not. And they repeat, and it's a choice between hope and fear. Right? It's and when you when people realize, oh, this is possible. This is doable. Everybody, everybody joins, right. It's the the, this is part of why this is sort of core to why the labor movement is so important if you want a decent society, and why in why, in my opinion, anti union campaigns, the way the way they're run by employers and the law firms they hire. They're, they're a kind of proto fascism, right? They're about crushing people. Right in the way that George Orwell, George Orwell described the ambitions of the state in 1984, they were about making people feel that they are powerless and hopeless and nothing can be done. Right. That is the objective of the anti union campaign. And, and I've seen it play out over and over again, when you said, you know, the other 32% is 68%. of pro union, the other 32% would be if they could be or something. In my experience, that's absolutely true. Because the issues here are hope and fear. Not I would prefer to be poor. Right, but, but I'm afraid that if I do anything, I'm afraid if I do anything, it will get worse. Yeah. Right. That's powerful. That's what is. Yeah. That's so

Nai 58:09

inspiring. That's really powerful. It's really interesting, because you and I have very different backgrounds. So my father, he's a member of AFS me, Oh, yeah. All my life very active, going marching on the Capitol. And so I've

always been a part of unions where I can be, and it's, do you think unions are they're making a resurgence? Now? It seems like, and do you see that continuing, or particularly in the US, but also the UK?

Damon 58:36

So I'm very optimistic about the future of the labor movement. And let me just say, by the way, asked me, Is the asked me the union your father was, is is active, and that's the union that Martin Luther King died for that that is Martin Luther King was on an ASMI picket line, when he was killed, and asked me is an organization with a history of being kind of the embodying the energy and hopes of the civil rights movement. It is. It's an organization of incredible that's had an incredible positive impact on America. And more people should be

Justin 59:18

well, that's, that's amazing. Yeah, thank you for sharing that. You are now a visiting professor at ITP for what the next few months are, how long is this? Well,

Damon 59:39

you know, visiting professorships are an interesting thing. It's a little nebulous.

Justin 59:43

So how did you how did you end up here? Did Mariana mazzucato recruit you or how did you manage to?

Damon 59:50

I've known I've known Mariana for a while I think back to 2012 or 2020 12. Yeah. And she You and I share a set of common intellectual interests and a common sort of way of seeing the world I've, when she did for those listening, Marianna is the director of the IIPP there. And when I first met Marianna, she was just completing her work on the ways in which the public sector had supported the creation of the technology behind the iPhone. I was so impressed by that I thought that was really an extraordinary piece of research with extraordinary implications. And so she and I've sort of talked back and forth about a wide range of things over the years. And in 2019, I had the opportunity to take a sabbatical from the AFL CIO, and I didn't want it to be in the United Kingdom with my partner, Gian whare, whom I mentioned earlier, who's the who's the MP for Newcastle Central. And, and so Marianna said, Well, why don't you come want to come spend some time here at the Institute and, and I had a project in mind which the four foundation was kind enough to fund about labor and climate change, right, which ended up being the lectures that I gave this term,

Justin 1:01:11

we'll post the link in the episode.

Damon 1:01:15

And so that's kind of and so I came as a visiting professor at that time, and IIPP is sort of like the Hotel California, right? You can you

Justin 1:01:24

got anytime you like, never leave.

Damon 1:01:29

Meaning that the visiting professorship title you're always visiting. And when I retired, there was an opportunity then to dig in a little more, to dig in a little bit to come back and give some lectures and kind of be around. And, you know, it's, it's a term by turn thing I'm thinking about a couple of different things that I'd like to do in the fall one. One having to do with the Industrial History of the United Kingdom, I have a, say, I have a book manuscript that sort of got stalled, that got stalled by COVID. issue. I gave it to the Ford Foundation, the day the United States locked down. And like, which, then, you know, I mean, it was impossible to think about anything like that, you know, for years after that, but because then there was the Trump election. I mean, it was really the backlash to say, the Biden election. But But, but so I have this rather lengthy essay about the relationship between the industrial between D colonialization. The industrialization and Brexit in the UK. sounds very interesting. Well, perhaps you think it's interesting, maybe, maybe, my honor, and Reiner will as well. The so that's one project. And then the other project I have in mind is it has to do with neoliberalism, and with the end was understanding what neoliberalism is and was and and what its, what its political consequences. were,

Justin 1:03:09

you know, that's, that's one of those words, neoliberalism, that means a lot of different things to different people. What is it? What do you kind of how do you conceptualize,

Damon 1:03:16

I think it's very something very, very specific, which is the set of policy ideas that were associated initially with Reagan and Thatcher, and then sort of metastasized into something that became almost universal in the 1990s. And it's called neoliberalism because it's the revival of economic and social theories from the early 19th century that were that were originally called was the original meaning of the term liberalism was the the economics and politics of the, of essentially factory owners in, in early 19th century Europe and America, right. neo classical economics, right, laissez faire economics, and kind of a sort of social openness, or the combination of laissez faire economics with the kind of social openness. Now Thatcher and Reagan weren't particularly socially open. But their politics and economics kind of morphed into this attempt to have market fundamentalism, right, unregulated markets, to have unregulated markets be a common belief across all political all the entire political spectrum. So you could be in American terms a quote liberal meaning like that you would be anti racist and pro choice and pro immigrant and you would have this belief in unregulated markets, or you could be a right winger meaning that you would be, you know, you would believe in the authority of the Church and, and low taxes and and you would be skeptical or it'd be, you know, sort of crypto racist and whatever I mean, there could be a hard right winger, you would have the same economic ideas that the, you know, more or less,

Justin 1:05:22

it's treated as just common sense, right?

Damon 1:05:24

It mean to us Gramsci, his term, hegemonic exact right. Now, that's neoliberalism neoliberalism as its predecessor, liberalism, and I don't mean, again, I do not mean American liberalism. Right, but laissez faire economics as it was practiced in the 19th and early 20th century, and neoliberalism basically had the same outcomes. Right? Depression, war and fascism. And, if you doubt that, pick up today's newspaper, so to speak, right, and look where we are. Right. Right. And, and, and the the, the idea that I have really is to examine why it is what is marketed as kind of an ideology of freedom is actually an ideology of coercion, and an unaccountable power. And when I think of what I mean by unaccountable power is, is Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk. That's unaccountable power.

Justin 1:06:35

Sure. Absolutely. That's, that's a good definition and interesting reflection on it. And, you know, that kind of underlies many of the topics that we were talking about talked about today, and that you talked about in your lectures. You know, there was one question in particular, and obviously, I'm gonna post the links and encourage everyone to listen to your climate change and innovation lectures. I think you just did an amazing job untangling this web of incentives and interrelationships between the labor movement and the environmental movement, right, and mainly focusing on the US and Europe. And, you know, one lecture was a comparison mainly between France and Germany. Another was between the Obama Biden administration, there's a lot there to dig into.

And, you know, we all I think everyone who listens to this podcast will be very familiar with the IPCC is projections and all of the, you know, the urgency of of, of what we need to do, right. Um, there are several threads that that we could go down on this. But the one thing that I really wanted to ask you about is, you say at one point that climate change is, at its core, an engineering challenge on a very large scale, right? Just the idea that in order to reduce our carbon emissions, we need huge amounts of technology, technological innovation and resources towards the changing the energy system. But I also think it one question that I like to ask all of our guests on the podcast is one of IPPs catchphrases is innovation is political. Right? So how do you reconcile those two? What does innovation is political mean to you? And how do you kind of think about that? It being an engineering challenge, versus a political or economic or social challenge?

Damon 1:08:28

Well, it's a great, it's a wonderful question, it sort of gets right to the heart of what I was trying to do. And also, you know, I was talking about my history at IIPP. And by the way, I didn't say this, I just throw this in here. I just love being in IIPP. And the reason I love being here, I mean, I'm very, very close friends, with Marianna, and with Reiner and other faculty, but in Kate, but the real reason I love being here is because I love being with the students. I find the global, just these extraordinary people who come here to learn, you have

Justin 1:09:02

to get to Americans. But yeah.

Damon 1:09:06

But last, but last night, I was with a group of students who were from Mexico, Colombia and Brazil, and who were so engaged in their own societies and in their interaction with the with the world. I learned, I learned so much by being here from the students, that I just, I just find it really, really rewarding. So, but some people listening to this podcast might say, Well, what in the world is any of this have to do with innovation? And the answer is that I think all of us here at IIPP kind of have a common belief that innovation is is is an intensely political process, that innovation that the the kind of You know, Eureka moment, the apple falling on Newton's head or whatever the eureka moment is just one piece of what innovation really is. And that the, I mean, Mariana talks a lot about market shaping, which I think is an extraordinarily important concept, right? Markets are not from God, they are they are created, shaped, regulated by both by states and by institutions of various kinds. So, so So in every sense, innovation is political. But secondly, the key question with innovation, the key question about innovation, is is, is, is deployment is, is, you know, all kinds of people have had great ideas that were never deployed effectively. One thing that I mentioned in my manuscript is, in the later Roman Empire, there were people who invented steam engines. But nobody thought it was particularly interesting or important. They saw them as toys, right? In a, in a slave society, labor saving devices were not so important to the people who counted, right and controlled resources. That's the best way to understand it's hard to it's hard to

understand this, it's hard to understand how, you know, how it was that these things weren't deployed? Alright. Climate change, is the point that I made in my talks, climate change is at its root at its core, an engineering problem. That is absolutely true, if we want to prevent a catastrophe. And I think I'm not sure that everybody who's listening to this knows exactly what I what the IPCC, the United Nations is actually saying, right? Because they are kind of coy about it in their reports, but what they are saying is, we are on track to three degrees centigrade global warming, within the lifetime of people who are listening to this to this podcast, three degrees, three degrees is catastrophe, unmanageable. Three degrees is unmanageable rapid climate changes, which we whose full consequences we cannot predict, but which the most likely outcomes are. So our economic and social and ecological change that we can't manage. Right, that that, that were there were there are no method, there is no mitigation. Right? The now that can be prevented, right? It's not, we're not doomed, that can be prevented, but only through massive engineering over the next 15 years. Right. So at one level, at the Science level, it is an engineering problem. But engineering is the product of politics. Right? Right, or political economy, engineering is the product of political economy. And the starting point of my initial lecture is that, okay, we have an A genuine emergency, it can only be solved by very large scale engineering, which means very large scale investment, it is crystal clear, that is not going to happen just by sort of hoping that the markets do it. Like the financial markets, corporations, internal investment programs, we're just never we're not gonna get the speed and scale. And we've been pretending that we will for 30 years since. You know, since the late 80s, when climate change was sort of definitively diagnosed, we've been pretending that these that neoliberal solutions will work, they are not working, and we are running out of time. Yeah, we need a more like, we need more like a wartime approach, meaning we throw resources at this problem, essentially directed by the state. The that's what we do. That's what every society does in a genuine emergency. That's what we did in COVID. That's, that's what we do in wartime. Right. And we need to do that now. And the problem is, how do you get the political will to do that, right. And that's why labor and labor is the indispensable actor here. Working people's support for that kind of mobilization is essential. Without it, it won't happen. And we just, we just crean into three degrees, and whatever that means, right? And so the whole point of my lectures is engineering means investment means politics means organizing political support. And in in all the world's major economies where this is necessary, that means getting working people support and that means that means that governments have to engage with working people have to engage with their unions and their political parties, and have to craft an approach to climate change and to climate related innovation and engineering and so forth. That creates good jobs and a better future. The jobs that jobs that are created through through fighting climate change, have got to be better jobs, not, not more jobs, not comparable jobs, better jobs than the jobs that previously existed in the carbon in the carbon fuel sector. And in order to do that, in order to make that happen, we have to break the power of people like Elon Musk, because those people are trying to make money by having the the jobs of the future be worse than the jobs of the past. And what they're going to do is set off a global climate catastrophe. That that that is, that's why a lot of people made fun of the movie don't look up. I was like, this isn't this isn't a satire. This is absolutely reality. Right? I mean, obviously, the details are not reality. But the basic dynamic of that movie is reality. It is the choice we face. It's between indulging, indulging psychotic billionaires, and their desire to make money off of our fear. And actually making the investments we need to make and getting the politics lined up and get and making the economic future of working people in the context of fighting climate change better than our past. Those are the choices. And if we go with the billionaires, we're gonna get three degrees of warming, that and everything that has happened in climate policy, since 1990, shows that that's true.

Nai 1:16:24

Right? I like that you make explicit the need around in terms of, you know, mission oriented climate change policy, the need for movement, in terms of making that happen. And so you talk about labor being really in really, really integral to that. How, what can begin to I guess, amplify these movements grow these movements? Like what do you see as some of the mechanisms by which we can really make this thing happen more so?

Damon 1:17:00

Well, you know, boy, as I say, that is a good question. I see, I think about the most, one of the most effective things that could be done in supportive action on climate change. And I'm not saying I know how to do it, but one of the most effective things that could be done would be effective labor law reform that gave workers greater voice in countries in the in the countries that have to make these decisions, combined with political will, from elected officials and others, that climate change has got to be the top, the top item, right, we need the, you know, in both the first and the second world wars, every society on all sides, but in particular, with particular effect, the democracies negotiated essentially labor peace agreements, AND, OR, and right to organize agreements with the labor movements in their countries. Right, it was, if you go back and look at the history of workers rights in both the United Kingdom and the United States, the key things that happened that enabled the labor movement to grow and be and and and be a permanent feature of these societies. Were the were the social compacts reached in the First and Second World Wars. In the United Kingdom. It was the first world war that was decisive. In the United States, it was the second world war. But there were agreements of this kind in both countries in both wars. The it was understood by everybody, it was understood by every political leader, that having the full support of industrial workers for wartime mobilization was essential. And that whatever would have to be done to get that full support had to be done. Climate change is the same problem, except the stakes are actually higher. Right? The stakes are higher. And what we need right now is for political leaders who understand what the stakes are to be sitting with the representatives of working people and figuring out what does a common agenda look like for fighting climate change that helps working people. And this has been made near the the effect of neoliberalism, on the world's economy, and on in particular on labor has made the fight against climate change really, really hard, because working people have zero confidence, all right, that that, that they're going to be treated well in this because of how badly they've been treated by their governments and by their employers over the last 40 years. I'll tell you, the person who really understands this, although sometimes it's a little hard to it's a little hard to understand what he's saying. The person who totally gets this and speaks very powerfully about it as Pope Francis, who has said over and over again in public PayPal and cyclicals that you can't fight climate change without dealing with the human As a nation, the financialized capitalism is created. Right, right. I think he's I, you know, in certain respects I am. I'm plagiarizing from him in a very different idiom. But but this this challenge, this challenge of undoing the neoliberal labor dynamic, in order to be able to organize a politics, the politics necessary to fight climate change, is the fundamental challenge facing the world. And, and I would say one more thing about for this audience, which I do talk about in the lecture, way too much time is spent in climate discourse about things that are

irrelevant. And that are divisive. They're divisive and irrelevant. So one, and I think from the IIPP perspective, one of the most important things to understand it is not relevant, is the question of what's going to happen in the world's poorest countries in terms of, of carbon emissions.

Nai 1:21:00

Why is that relevant, because they're not

Damon 1:21:03

the problem. Right, in order to be able to get away from the three degrees, the what needs to happen is the United States and North America, the United States, Mexico, Canada, North America, Europe, and, and East Asia, China, Japan, Korea, etc. But most of all, China, these three areas have to cut their emissions radically 30 to 40%, by the late 2030s. That's what has to happen. They are so dominant, those three areas are so dominant in terms of global emissions, that if meanwhile, the global poor, increase their emissions, it's irrelevant. Right? So we need to help the developed world does need to help the developing world deal with the consequences of climate change, right? We and to help them develop and as low carbon a way possible. But if they just went and did whatever they wanted to do in terms of carbon emissions, it's almost impossible for them to, for them to do any further meaningful damage. It's it's us, it's it's us, it's we who have to act. And by us, I mean, North America, Europe, China, Japan, right, that's where the fight is. And all this kind of hair, you know, hand wringing and hair pulling about, about like, what about, you know, what about other places? And will they develop and all this, it's, in the terms of the immediate emergency, it's not actually relevant. And some of the things that people spend a lot of time tearing their hair about are not relevant. Air travel, for starters, interesting. Tell us about that? Well, air travels about 3% of global emissions. Remember what I just said, We need a 40% cut. And when you tell and a 40% cut is doable by changing the engineering of our power system, our built environment and our in our in our transport systems. We do not have to tell the great British public that they don't that they can't go to Spain anymore. Right? Telling people that is destructive. Right? And it's and it's not true. Yeah, right, what we need to get the buy in for is the heavy engineering that deals with the real emissions. And we've got to stop all this kind of moral hand wringing and get the job done.

Justin 1:23:26

Man, that is a lot to consider and digest. And I really appreciate that summary of it. So the last thing on the on the climate lectures is, you made a comment in the third lecture that kind of gave me chills a little bit, which is you were talking about how there's this strange irony that's happened. And this is an example of the US where, actually, the oil and gas industry are, in some ways, highly unionized. But more important, maybe more importantly, like they're those those are really high paying jobs with good benefits. And the unions in those industries, really fight for their people. And this has created a strange dynamic where that then it's pitting the labor movement against the environmental movement in a very unproductive way. And, and you you say, you

know, very straightforwardly, it can't blame anyone for for, you know, wanting more pipelines, because those are good jobs, you know, if they're in that industry, and you made a comment that says the oil and gas industry understands political economy, even if the Democratic Party does not, because the right has managed to weaponize this, right. And this is something that as an American who's been frustrated with the Democratic Party for a very long time, I really hit close to home and I just wonder if you have any insight, especially because you have worked with you know, the Democrats in Congress and other people, like, give any insight on how we might get them to understand like, cuz you know, it's just not going to cut it to say we're going to do Teach 55 year old coal miners how to code. You know, that whole thing, although I will give credit to Biden that he hasn't been as strongly on that as that was a couple years ago, but still, like, you know, how do you how do you kind of change this within? Within the Democratic Party? I suppose, you know, because for pulling out the Republicans aside, it's a different battle?

Damon 1:25:21

Well, I'm going to say something extraordinarily cynical about this. This is a question of the attitudes of the environmental funders. Right? The the Democratic Party, the environmental movement is a substantial part of the Democratic Party. The labor movement is also a substantial part, in fact, a larger part, but the labor movement very big and includes people from all different of all all different industries and a wide range of opinions about a lot of things, and so on and so forth. Right. The part of the labor movement that matters in these discussions, is the part of the labor movement that actually does the work. Right, that does the work related to energy, transportation and manufacturing. Right. And that part of the labor movement drives the train in terms of the labor movements, overall posture on energy and climate policy. And for good reason, right? The healthcare workers drive the labor movements view of health care. Auto Workers drive the view, you know, I mean, we we THAT'S WHAT SOLIDARITY means. The environmental movement is very heavily shaped by what its funders want, and their view of the world. And those funders, I mean, some of the some of the some of the I want to be clear, some of the environmental movements funding is essentially crowd sourced. But a lot of it comes from wealthy individuals, and foundations, and people write very large checks. You know, an example that was, you know, Mike Bloomberg historic relationship with the Sierra Club. I mean, historic, I mean, like, for 50 years, but, you know, directing money during the last 10 years, Mike Bloomberg has given a lot of money to the Sierra Club. Way more than, you know, then typically, they're able to crowdsource Sure. So it really is a question of what the what the in terms of getting the Democratic Party sort of properly positioned? I mean, you know, you might, I mean, Joe Biden has done wonders. I mean, frankly, Joe Biden's approach, this is part of my lecture is Joe Biden's approach to these issues, getting the blue collar labor movement in the room, making sure that labor standards apply to public investments and energy. That the being tough about this has really moved things, I think, really significantly in a positive direction. When you think about that approach, you know, the way Joe Biden's effort to pass is successful effort to pass infrastructure bill, and the continuing effort to pass what was originally called bill back better is now Now some other name, which was $600 billion of climate related energy provisions. And that effort, and him unifying the labor movement in the environmental movement behind that effort, has created a really different dynamic than we saw during the Obama administration with like the Keystone Pipeline fight and these these other fights that were extraordinarily divisive. And that led a lot of people in the energy related labor movement to think that, that they were that the

environmental movement didn't get didn't care about them and their families and their jobs. And I mean, that whole thing was really poisonous. And what Biden is doing right now is not only will actually do the heavy engineering we need to do to solve, to fight climate change and meet Paris targets, but unifies people. And we see it having benefits in all kinds of places. I mean, the US construction labor movement just did a project labor agreement covering all the labor involved in a vast offshore wind development on the east coast of the United States with the Scandinavian wind company. Oersted is the dominant player in the world, talking about 10s of 1000s of jobs, very good jobs. Right. So we so we, you know, we changed the paradigm of, of renewable energy jobs from you know, the minimum wage guy going around trying to sell your rooftop solar to a highly paid union construction worker building an offshore wind to building and maintaining offshore wind stuff, and the supply chain, right and the supply, right, like, you know, where's where the parts coming from and all that. Right, it changes the it changes the conception of what's going on. The labor movements go Is good jobs for its members. And for working people generally, it's not an error. It's not an industry specific thing. Right. But union leaders and their and workers in the United States, in recent years have had this experience of the the legacy jobs that are creating a planetary crisis actually pay enough to lead a decent life. And the jobs that create renewable energy resources over and over again end up being not very good jobs. Right. That is that threatens the planet, right in that gap threatens the planet in the context of, of democracies. Right. Right. And that, you know, and that's got to change. And there's nobody, I think, in the public policy world, no political leader in a world who has done more to try to close that gap and Joe Biden, and this is heroic work. But I will, I will say, because you mentioned where the lecture, the best example of how to deal with the really hard stuff, right here. And an example the Democratic Party ought to look closely at is the is the German coal agreement. The German coal agreement is the most sophisticated and aggressive effort to really, to really get to the heart of the matter. The German coal agreement is an agreement negotiated in 2019, between the German coal companies, the German labor movement, the German states, the lender, were the coal industry is the German Federal Government, the environmental movement, the German science Institute's, I mean, really, all society kind of agreement to close the German coal industry completely by 2038. Now, I know some people think 2038 is too late. But that's not the point. The point is they did it. The point is they did it. And the point is that they that everybody bought into it, including the coal, including the coal miners, and, and and it has stuck. Alright, that was five, it was three years ago. The agreement stands, it's not under attack. If and it's going to be reviewed, and they'll look at the timetable. Right. Sure. Now, of course, all these things are under some pressure because of Ukraine. The point is that, that as a model for social decision making around climate and for ensuring that people's lives get better, that fighting climate change is not an impoverishing act. But an act of hope. Is that's a great example.