

# 1 **A master class in organizing**

2 Ezra Klein interviews Jane McAlevey

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## 7 **Table of recommended excerpts:**

8

9	<b>1:14 - 19:24 [19 mins] - Organizing vs. Mobilizing, Structure Testing</b>	<b>1</b>
10	<b>21:26 - 32:56 [12 mins] - Believing in ordinary people, method and discipline, beyond political</b>	
11	<b>ideology</b>	<b>8</b>
12	<b>38:41 - 42:42 [4 mins] - Credible Plan to Win</b>	<b>15</b>
13	<b>58:27 - 01:06:09 [7 mins] - “Voting Against Self-interest”, Dignity</b>	<b>22</b>
14	<b>01:06:09 - 01:12:51 [7 mins] - Organic Leaders</b>	<b>25</b>
15	<b>01:16:47 - 01:24:26 [8 mins] - Counting and Structure Testing</b>	<b>29</b>
16	<b>01:37:57 - 01:44:17 [6 mins] - Concern for Short-term Impact on People Served, Inoculation,</b>	
17	<b>Focus on Power</b>	<b>37</b>
18	<b>01:56:24 - 1:58:48 [3 mins] - Book Recommendations, I’ve Got the Light of Freedom</b>	<b>43</b>

19

## 20 **1:14 - 19:24 [19 mins] - Organizing vs. Mobilizing, Structure Testing**

21

22 01:14 - Jane McAlevey

23 Helping a human being come to their own conclusion without ever giving them your opinion, is the  
24 difference between organizing and mobilizing.

25

26 01:34 - Ezra Klein

27 Hello and welcome to the Ezra Klein show on the Vox Media podcast network. Something we've been  
28 exploring on the show recently is one, of course, the election, but two what does it mean to practice  
29 politics? What do you do to actually win power, and how does that differ from some of the things that  
30 feel like doing politics but maybe are not or maybe are not actually effective? I had a conversation  
31 recently with Eitan Hersh, which I recommend listening, about political hobbyism. There's a lot of good  
32 theory in that. I don't think it was so sharp on practice and that's one of the criticisms I got from some of  
33 you and I think that was correct. And so I wanted to have Jane McAlevey on the show, which was  
34 scheduled before, but really I think helps paired with that one.

35

36 02:11

37 She is an organizer, an author and a scholar. She has done more labor union campaigns than I, or  
38 probably even she can count, has organized hundreds of thousands of workers. She's an incredible  
39 thinker and practitioner of how do you actually organize people, what does it mean to do that kind of  
40 persuasive, day-to-day, moment-to-moment, service-oriented politics? She's a senior policy fellow at  
41 the University of California at Berkeley, and she has a new book out called A Collective Bargain:

42 Unions, Organizing and the Fight for Democracy” and this conversation - it's a bit long. It's a bit long  
43 and please don't be intimidated. It is an absolute gem and it is sharp and clear and we talk about the  
44 election and we talk about organizing and unions. And you know, honestly, there's just a lot here that,  
45 even if you're not trying to do politics, the specificity with which she thinks about how to persuade  
46 people to do things and what it means for you to be someone who does that, it will work in a lot of other  
47 parts of your life too. So I love this conversation. I think you will too.

48

49 03:11

50 As always, my email is ezrakleinshow@voxcom. Here is Jane McAlevey. Jane McAlevey, welcome to  
51 the podcast. Great to be here, thank you. You've outlined in your book “No Shortcuts” where you write  
52 that nothing produces deer in the headlights moments for activists in the United States, like the  
53 question what is your theory of power? So what's your theory of power?

54

55 03:30 - Jane McAlevey

56 My theory of power is, I think, fairly simple, which is, for all the rhetoric of the 99% versus the 1%...the  
57 truth is it's sort of right, but unless you have a theory of actually how to organize and then mobilize,  
58 build what I call unbreakable solidarity with a tight, effective structure, saying the 99% versus the 1%  
59 matters not. So there's two things. One is for our side, for the side of people who are not the super elite,  
60 the super rich in the corporate class, it is, in fact, our large numbers. That's what our strategic  
61 advantage is. It's our large numbers as up against a tiny elite that has always ruled. The failure of the  
62 progressive movement or the left or something left of the center line, is that very few people have a  
63 corollary theory of how do you actually do it - like, how do you actually get and I'm going to say more  
64 like the 90%, by the way, not the 99. I think it's more like my life experience that you can build to 90%  
65 unity across very diverse people without too much trouble, actually, once you know how to do it.

66

67 04:34 - Ezra Klein

68 One of the really important distinctions which you just kind of gestured at there. You talked about the  
69 difference between activism, mobilizing and organizing, and I think it's going to be important in this  
70 conversation. So could you run through those?

71

72 04:46 - Jane McAlevey

73 Yeah, definitely, it's a lot of what I tried to do in "No Shortcuts", which was my PhD dissertation. So it  
74 forced me - very late in life PhD dissertation after dropping out of college, by the way, to run campaigns  
75 - but it gave me the time to really sit down and try and think through what had been so wrong for much  
76 of my life, listening to people who I otherwise liked but I thought had no effective theory of social  
77 change. So what I try and outline in "No Shortcuts" is a few things. One is that there's the first level of  
78 sort of things that people might do or things that one could do would be like charity, right? So charity...  
79 a migrant's arriving in this country - maybe not in this country today, but actually I'm going to go there -  
80 a migrant arriving in this country has very little. They go through a church or a house of faith. They get  
81 something given to them. We try and help them set up a house. That's very, very good. Obviously it's  
82 not a theory of change, but it's a good thing.

83

84 05:36

85 The next thing that people can do in the how can I do something positive is what I outline, a sort of  
86 advocacy, and in the advocacy model people aren't really central to the solution. You have lawyers, you  
87 have public opinion, research, you have high paid full time staff in Washington DC offices or not even  
88 high paid, by the way. I could say Greenpeace is an example of advocacy, right? Someone is concerned

89 about the planet. It's burning down, species are going away. You write a check to Greenpeace and  
90 they're going to take care of the problem for you. That's advocacy. Then you move to what I consider  
91 the great confusion of my adult life, which is the difference between the next two rungs of potential  
92 change, which is what I think of as mobilizing is the next rung and then organizing. So I divide them  
93 between charity, advocacy, mobilizing and organizing, and it's the latter two that I think most of the  
94 progressive movement is deeply confused about. So when I describe mobilizing in "No Shortcuts," what  
95 I'm trying to articulate is that mobilizing is essentially doing a very good job, a much better job than  
96 perhaps the people before you at getting people off the couch, who largely already agree with you. So  
97 in the mobilizing model, people are confused that they're doing what I think of as and I'll describe in a  
98 minute as organizing, because they're involving people and they might be involving people in very large  
99 numbers. The problem or the limitation of the mobilizing approach is you're only talking to people who  
100 agree with you already, and so, while it's effective to get them off the couch to a protest or even to the  
101 polls, the mobilization is of people who already have an opinion.

102

103 07:13

104 Organizing, which I put the highest value on in my life work, is the process by which people come to  
105 change their opinions and change their views. It's about bringing more people into the universe that you  
106 can later then mobilize from. Organizing is what I call base expansion, meaning it's expanding either  
107 the political or the societal basis from which you can then later mobilize. And organizing gets right to the  
108 question of the theory of change being a 99 to one or a 90 to 10, I think, more realistically, Organizing.  
109 In my view, and part of why I love trade union organizing so much, despite the many things that make  
110 me crazy about it, what I love about it is that - very different than all other kinds of sort of activism let's  
111 just say - in the US, trade union organizing puts you in direct contact every day with people who have  
112 no shared political values whatsoever. When you're a union organizer and you get a list of employees -  
113 ask me how later... - But when you get a list of employees, let's say a thousand - I'll just get you a  
114 simple number - a thousand nurses in a hospital and you've got to figure out how to build to 90% or  
115 greater unity and build unbreakable solidarity and a tight, effective structure with demonstrable  
116 supermajorities...just to get some of the ideas out. You're starting with people who have literally no  
117 shared political identity.

118

119 08:38

120 They got a job, the employer hired them, they went to work one day. So every union campaign is like a  
121 mini-cross section of America and depending on where it plays out, it could be a real mini-cross  
122 section, right? Geographically, by sector, because different kinds of gendered sectors of the economy,  
123 right, I've tended to work in, but not always... But essentially every single trade unionization campaign  
124 or every strike or first contract or successor contract I've negotiated is, frankly, a walking experiment in  
125 how you build political unity and what I call unbreakable solidarity in a time of intense polarization.

126

127 09:11 - Ezra Klein

128 I want to hold on this distinction for a minute. You're out there in politics, you're working for the Bernie  
129 Sanders campaign or the Joe Biden campaign or the Donald Trump campaign. How do you know if  
130 what you're doing is you're mobilizing or you're organizing?

131

132 09:21 - Jane McAlevey

133 Are you only talking to the list that's in what they call the PDA right now (which is the technology of  
134 choice to go talk to previously registered voters on the door for sake of argument)? And I have to say I  
135 am - stay calm now - I'm so resistant to the data-driven nature of how politics is happening right now.

136 So the first question I ask every union I'm working with right now, for example, when I say to them:  
137 what's your theory of how to go from the picket lines to the polls? What's your theory of how are you  
138 going to move people from a worksite-placed identity to a precinct-based identity? It's a radically  
139 different shift in how we think about their identity. So how are you going to do it? And the first thing that  
140 people do is pull out the PDA and they feel very excited because they've got this little PDA like a  
141 smartphone.

142

143 Yeah, they pull out their phone and it's got a pre-....

144

145 It's got like a downloaded voter file in it. That's what it is. And this is how too much of the election work  
146 is happening right now, and I will put it back to Obama's data geeks blending into the Clinton data  
147 geeks blending into.. right?. So it's good to geek out on some things, but not human nature, as quite the  
148 way that we've reduced them to just voters in a tab and we've done cross tabs on them based on what  
149 clothing they bought and 12 other things that we've migrated into what we think of as their voter profile.  
150 That's in a phone that you hand to someone who's going to go doorknock. So, for starters, elections are  
151 fundamentally mobilizing.

152

153 10:44

154 But if you're mobilizing, if you're doing election work in a routine manner like the one I just described to,  
155 the first thing I say is why are you going to go on the doors in that neighborhood and only talk to the  
156 people who are already registered to vote, when the biggest problem in America is who isn't registered  
157 to vote and how many people don't vote? So the breakdown in primary campaigns right now of the  
158 obsession of the two primary political parties focusing only on high propensity voters, or the other big  
159 theory that came from the 2007-2008 Obama campaign. The first one was the idea of really going for  
160 low propensity voters, and the world is just being sliced up now between low propensity voters, high  
161 propensity voters and people just cut these numbers without much regard to what about everyone who  
162 isn't on your list? Why aren't we just knocking on every single door in the neighborhood? Why aren't we  
163 engaging in a face-to-face, human conversation with people about first their self-interest and then how  
164 their self-interest collects up to the larger, broader interest.

165

166 11:39 - Ezra Klein

167 So if I'm a campaign manager, isn't that simply a resource allocation question that I wish I could right? I  
168 wish I had enough volunteers, I wish I'd have time, but I've only got a couple months, I've only got so  
169 many people, so I have to focus on the people who we seem like least to be able to turn over to our  
170 side and get out to vote.

171

172 11:54 - Jane McAlevey

173 Yeah, so that depends on your goals, right? And the problem with most, the problem with a politically  
174 driven or politics driven movement is that it's got very short term, narrow goals. And if you're an  
175 organizer trying to change the world and how people think, what you're doing in the short term - and I'm  
176 not, believe me, I use data driven tools, right? obviously, so, but I put them in the context of the broader  
177 goals. So I think one of the biggest problems right now in this country is that so much money flows  
178 through the hands of political campaigns every four years and drops into states and then it's just pull  
179 the money back out, hit the repeat button, repeat four years later. So we're not actually going in in an  
180 attempt to challenge or change or broaden or expand the ongoing views that ordinary people have in  
181 this country. We're going in for, like a tactical get them out once every four years to vote and then put  
182 them back to sleep.

183

184 12:55

185 That's not, that is not transformative. So again, by its nature, political campaigns are essentially  
186 mobilizing campaigns. You can see rare moments with an Obama maybe with the Bernie Sanders -I  
187 mean, for different reasons - but you can see moments when someone who's been never involved and  
188 who never had a clear thought about who was to blame for the problems in their lives might actually be  
189 engaged in a rare political campaign. But that's not the norm. The norm is we're talking to people who  
190 already have a sort of set of views.

191

192 13:24 - Ezra Klein

193 Tell me what you thought happened on Super Tuesday, because the Bernie Sanders campaign when I  
194 talked to people there, when I talked to people who support it, they have an analysis that sounds, at  
195 least superficially, like yours. Right, you have to organize. It's going to be an organizing driven  
196 campaign. The Joe Biden campaign had nothing like that and they had very few field organizers.  
197 Comparatively, they didn't have a theory of non-voters and then on Super Tuesday they actually get  
198 more turnout and they get more of the new voters in the primary than the Sanders campaign, working  
199 basically off of an elite theory of how to win power. Right, they get these endorsements from Klobuchar  
200 and Buttigieg and Beto and so forth. When you look at what happened that day and how it layers onto  
201 theories of organizing, how do you analyze it?

202

203 14:02 - Jane McAlevey

204 Well, without knowing in detail what they've said or what whoever's explanation is just going on, sort of  
205 that broad stream, what's been sort of covered in the media. I would say a few things. My very first  
206 reaction well, I have a lot of reactions to Super Tuesday, but trying to stick to this one point my first  
207 reaction was that the Sanders team and the volunteers and the surrogates and people associated with  
208 the campaign I don't mean the very whatever you might call it the upper act to the top of the campaign,  
209 but that the sort of army of people that they have gotten to volunteer for them actually don't know how  
210 to make hard assessments or do get out the vote. So when I say, make a hard assessment, if you've  
211 grown up in the social media climate, you're already in trouble in this country.

212

213 14:43

214 People need to get off social media and shut their phones down and get out, and I seriously mean that.  
215 So I feel very glad that I came of age before the age of small phones and social media, because I spent  
216 a lot more of my time doing face-to-face work and I'm sticking with it, by the way, for a lot of reasons.  
217 But so a hard assessment is not that which if you go on Twitter or you go on Facebook and people are  
218 constantly liking you, like you. First of all, you're confused that everyone actually likes you and, second  
219 of all, you have no idea what's going on in the real world, because you're talking inside of a very much  
220 of a self-selecting what I would call a self-selecting kind of bubble. So I think that they probably failed to  
221 understand how to do a hard assessment, for two reasons. One, it's hard to do good training quickly on  
222 hard assessments, like when you walk up to a voter on the door.

223

224 15:30 - Ezra Klein

225 What is a?

226

227 15:30 - Jane McAlevey

228 hard assessment. Yeah, a hard assessment is instead of me just walking by you on the street and  
229 saying, let's just imagine you have like a \$15.00 "yes" pin on and I walk by you and I say, "Sanders

230 person, high five!" And you high five and keep walking and I just assume that you're going to be a  
231 Sanders voter. Like that's not even a real assessment, but that's a fast and too easy assessment that  
232 people make. If you're doing a hard assessment on the doors with somebody, meaning in a face-to-face  
233 conversation, you're going to set up a series of tests to know whether or not the quick yes they gave  
234 you is actually real and how real it is. So in every union organizing campaign that I've had the pleasure  
235 of running which is now, many people who lose the campaign fail for a number of reasons, and the first  
236 is that they do weak assessments. They don't go back and actually engage that person and they don't  
237 continuously engage that person with what we call a series of structure tests and these are buzzwords,  
238 although they weren't very well known recently, but we do what's called a series of structure tests.

239

240 16:31

241 So if I get a yes, Ezra, are you going to stand with your coworkers and be united and stand up for  
242 yourself, whatever issue you tell me matters to, and unite together to form a union. And you say yes to  
243 me once and walk away and I don't ever go back to you and ask you that question five different ways  
244 and actually increase how I'm asking you to show me your answer. Show me the answer to that. Will  
245 you put your name on what we call a majority petition? Will you actually put yourself publicly into a  
246 much higher risk status of that assessment? So assessments are huge, the heart of the campaign, the  
247 more important the assessments are. And so I'm not going to just say Ezra, it's great that you're willing  
248 to make the decision to stand with your coworkers and sign the union authorization card, because that's  
249 a private act that no one's going to know whether or not Ezra is actually serious.

250

251 17:22

252 I'm going to actually do something else with you. Once you sign that union membership card, I'm going  
253 to say the most important thing is that your coworkers understand and your employer for that matter,  
254 but that your coworkers understand that you're ready to stand united with them to form the union. And  
255 here's what we call a majority petition, which simply says I'm prepared to vote yes for the union. Now  
256 you're going to have to put your name in a big signature line, because I'm going to make that signature  
257 line as big as humanly possible for a reason. I'm going to make you sign your name really, really big on  
258 that piece of paper and I'm going to show you what it's going to look like. And then I'm going to ask you,  
259 by the way, at some point which the Sanders campaign, apparently, I don't think, knows how to do that  
260 well either, I'm going to do something called inoculation, which is I'm going to say, before I leave that  
261 conversation with you, when your manager sees your name on that poster, what do you think your  
262 manager is going to say to you? Come back to inoculation in a minute.

263

264 18:07

265 But so that act of getting someone to not just sign a private card but to sign what's going to be called a  
266 majority petition, we're going to make them feel as safe as we can. We're going to say your name is not  
267 going to be shown until majority sign gets to some of the identity questions and majority and in-group  
268 and out-group that I think you like to think about. But I'm going to come back the third, fourth, fifth and  
269 sixth time, because what we know in a real life campaign is that the next person is going to talk to that  
270 worker as their manager and the next person is going to talk to that worker as Fox News and the next  
271 person is going to talk to that worker as their God or the person representing their God and the next  
272 person is going to talk to that worker may have very different opinions and that momentary impression I  
273 got when they agreed to sign in private a union authorization card to have a union election. So hard  
274 assessments mean you actually ask someone to take public risk with their assessment and then you  
275 retest and retest and retest and over a 45 day union election campaign we might retest it five or six or  
276 seven times and each time we're increasing the risk factor that we're asking the worker to take in

277 conjunction with their coworkers, because it's the only way we know that it's a real assessment that  
278 they're going to vote yes.

279

280 19:12

281 When good union organizers have a practice that we engage in with each other, when we have a union  
282 campaign and this goes back to Texas and Bernie for real which is we can't, we'll say, got a big national  
283 labor relations election like they're big, they're super high drama.

284

285 19:27

286 There's almost nothing like them in my life If it's a big election with a lot of workers at stake and there's  
287 been a union bust or hire to terrorize them and destroy them.

288

289 19:34

290 We know generally within a vote to what the exact vote count's going to be and we can do it by  
291 department. We'll say to the organizing team, especially to junior organizers, numbers in the box, put  
292 your name on it, put the yes and no margin. If you had turf in a certain department, put the yes or no  
293 margin on it and then we're going to debrief those numbers when the real numbers come in. So part of  
294 how we know who's going to vote yes or no for union is part of how the Sanders folks should have  
295 known who is going to vote yes or no or vote which was the bigger issue by a series of structure tests  
296 that they could have been engaging in with people so that they know reliably that that person's going to  
297 show up despite all odds and vote for Sanders versus whatever Amy Klobuchar or Buttigieg or their  
298 minister or someone tells them at that very last minute.

299 -----

300 20:18 - Ezra Klein

301 *That makes all the sense to me.*

302

303 20:19

304 *But something you said earlier, I think, in my observation of my reporting seems salient here, which is a*  
305 *lot of people thought they were doing organizing when they were doing mobilizing Correct and*  
306 *mobilizing relies on a conception of shared agreement that is already existing out there in the electorate*  
307 *or in whatever constituency you're trying to mobilize, and my experience of the Sanders campaign and*  
308 *Sanders supporters is that there is a belief in a wider zone of agreement and a disbelief in*  
309 *disagreement.*

310

311 20:47

312 *That can be a problem, and this is not to say anything pretty good about the Biden campaign, which I*  
313 *think almost skated by if the Sanders campaign mobilized and that also creates counter mobilization.*  
314 *The Biden campaign basically didn't try to mobilize and just like, let the wave of the Democratic Party*  
315 *sweep into it, and so there seems to me to be a real distinction between what you have to do to*  
316 *mobilize and the personality type that requires, the temperament, the strategies, versus what you have*  
317 *to do to organize and the personality type and strategy that requires and I like to hear you talk a little bit*  
318 *about that because it seems to me, not just in Sanders but all over politics, I see this, and particularly*  
319 *on social media as a huge problem, so two things.*

320

321 **21:26 - 32:56 [12 mins] - Believing in ordinary people, method and**  
322 **discipline, beyond political ideology**

323

324 21:26 - Jane McAlevey

325 One is that I do think there's a difference between mobilizing and organizing, for sure, and both the  
326 people who are effective activists, which is what I call mobilizers. Mobilizers tend to be activists. They're  
327 better at engaging when I call the self selected crowd of people who exist in some universal bubble  
328 already, versus organizers. And let me just say I think that the personality of organizers, which you can  
329 test fairly quickly, like when I'm doing hiring people are like how can I get some good organizers? Well,  
330 you better hire. Well, right, there's a theory that you hire too. So, yeah, what do you look for?

331

332 21:55

333 Let me tell you what I'm looking for. First. This is the point of it. It's really a point of it and it's simple and  
334 deep. I am looking for people who genuinely believe that ordinary people have high intelligence and  
335 can think and that they really deeply respect just ordinary people. Like that...a workers will see through  
336 that shit in five seconds. Excuse my language, should I not be doing that? People will see through  
337 someone who doesn't really believe in them in about five seconds from their facial expressions.

338

339 22:28

340 So one is like I start out every day genuinely believing that people can make radical changes and how  
341 they think about and see the world. And if you don't think that and you don't if you don't think that and  
342 also if you don't like, respect why someone has the set of views they have and at least start there and  
343 be willing to work there with them, even if they're fairly different than my own, which almost every  
344 worker in a campaign I've worked on starts out with values that are or at least immediate self-interest  
345 that seem pretty different than mine. But if you don't respect where they're coming from, what shaped  
346 them, how they got there and deeply appreciate that and then have a theory of how to help them shift  
347 from maybe having the wrong idea of who's to blame for the pain in their lives. Like they might be  
348 blaming Mexican immigrants for selling their jobs instead of the CEOs of corporations that created trade  
349 rules that facilitated the departure of their job. Like if you can't appreciate who that person is at that  
350 moment and look at them with what Paulo Freire, Myles Horton, who shaped me a lot when I was  
351 young, when I worked at the Highlander Center like if you can't look at someone and imagine where  
352 they might be, based on the fact that most people want to have clean water, a safe planet, a decent job,  
353 nice neighbors and fairness, then you've got a problem to begin with. You're not going to be a good  
354 organizer if you don't genuinely love ordinary people. Like you have to kind of love them and respect  
355 them, and I think that's a big problem, or a fair amount of the sort of like sectarian left is that I think  
356 people are trying to....

357

358 23:57

359 I don't know if it comes from Marxist teleology, now that I finally read it, I mean. The truth is I'll tell you a  
360 funny moment my first year in the PhD program, which was 2010,. Right, so I'm organizing for 25 years,  
361 winning a lot of campaigns, helping hundreds of thousands of people at that point shift their lives in very  
362 material gain ways and ways that have very little to do with material needs, by the way, and I don't  
363 know any of this lingo. So I started a PhD program just because I'm fighting cancer and I can't keep  
364 doing my work for a while in 2010. And in the very first class it's like intro to sociology at the PhD level  
365 or the core canon, and we start with Marx. An you know I've never read a word of Marx at that point in  
366 my life, and not one person in the PhD graduate program I was in believed me. They were like but

367 you're this really successful trade union organizer? Of course you know Marx inside and out and I'm  
368 like you all need to get out of this building.

369

370 24:48

371 A lot. Like what Marx wrote is fascinating to me now in retrospect, but it has nothing to do with my  
372 capacity to respect ordinary people and help them come to understand who's really to blame for the  
373 pain in their lives and then take effective action to sort of do something about it right, like, how do you  
374 actually change it? So one is helping them reorient their worldview by going through a whole series of  
375 questions with them right, in a very effective one-to-one conversation that follows a series of steps, that  
376 has very serious method and discipline and theory to it, and then helping them come to understand how  
377 they might change it. It's, they're related but different, and I have met so many people who have  
378 contempt for the intelligence of ordinary people and I just say to them yeah, you might have good  
379 politics, you need to leave. You won't last in this campaign for five minutes because workers will smell  
380 your contempt in five seconds.

381

382 25:39 - Ezra Klein

383 Tell me about that moment when assuming you do have that respect and you are talking to somebody  
384 and you find yourself in true disagreement, right what their view is of what the problem is or what the  
385 power structure is. It's just very different than what you think it should be. One of the things that struck  
386 me about your mobilizing, organizing distinction has to do with how, with what are the incentives around  
387 disagreement. Do you escalate or do you somehow find a way to synthesize or get around it? What do  
388 you do when you find that disagreement? Or what do you do in different contexts, maybe against  
389 mobilizing and organizing when you run into that disagreement?

390

391 26:12 - Jane McAlevey

392 This really gets to a lot of method and discipline stuff and, as I frequently joke, my favorite topics are  
393 method and discipline. ...Not really true - I mean - I talk about sports and some other things, but  
394 anyway... When it comes to this work and how to change the world, I actually think method and  
395 discipline matters. So one of the core things that I...

396

397 26:28 - Ezra Klein

398 Can you just define those first? For people not familiar with method and discipline,

399

400 26:32 - Jane McAlevey

401 Method.. literally I mean, what's my approach knocking on a door to a worker who I've never met? Am  
402 I just going to knock on the door and hope they answer and just be like, hey, Sally, how's it going  
403 today? Or do I actually have an entire approach of what I'm going to do when Sally opens the door? Or,  
404 by the way, her husband or her kid or fill in the blank or aunt or uncle, depending on what kind of  
405 household it is and what income strata they're in?

406

407 26:54

408 So by method I mean something replicable that you can teach, that we can do over and over and over.  
409 That's a method, right, a method to the madness, method to the work and discipline, then is, how  
410 seriously do we take it? Like, literally, how serious are you about the method? So I do a lot of training of  
411 both rank-and-file worker leaders and of organizers, and when I say to them... So there's method. I'm  
412 going to run through organic leader identification. I'm going to run through how you come to understand  
413 who the most trusted, influential person is in the workplace as quickly as you can. There's a method to

414 it. To do that, you have to be effective at what we call the six-step organizing conversation, and I'm  
415 going to come back to the six-step organizing conversation because I'm not going to get myself into a  
416 jam on the question you asked me, because of the way I'm going to approach a conversation, because  
417 I'm going to know where to go when someone really disagrees with me, based on a method I have,  
418 right? So the discipline is - how serious are you about it? And I'll come back to the method in a minute.  
419 But in this instance I was just doing training in Europe with a bunch of German unions and I start my  
420 wrap on method and discipline and they say well, what do you mean by the discipline part? And I say  
421 so if you work on a campaign team of mine, just for sake of argument.

422

423 27:59

424 Every single person has to do a weekly work plan. It has to follow a certain format, unless they have  
425 one better than mine, which occasionally they do, and that's great, but not often. So I teach people how  
426 to make work plans. Like, half my life is like teaching young people how to make a work plan. So you  
427 must submit a weekly work plan by five o'clock every Sunday. You have to write a new written rap.  
428 That's literally one of the key things we have to move in the conversation this week in this campaign -  
429 because we're reacting to whatever the employer's doing. We're getting ahead of them, we're  
430 pre-thinking the next move the employer's going to take in the campaign.

431

432 28:30

433 So everyone has to write a written rap. And people are like "why do you have to write a written rap in  
434 this campaign every Sunday at five? And I said because it's going to make you better at talking and  
435 listening to every single worker in the campaign. What else do you have to do? You have to make sure  
436 that all your numbers on the structure tests that you're working on are in the database by five o'clock on  
437 Sunday. So there's a whole... and then on Monday morning every single staff person's going to come  
438 into the room together. I'm going to have picked out the best written rap. Hopefully there was a best  
439 one. I'm going to have tweaked everyone else's individually and the person who wrote it is going to  
440 model the best written rap and everyone's going to work that rap in that room until we have it perfectly  
441 and no one's leaving to go out and talk to workers until we can all rap down the best rap.

442

443 29:07

444 Like that's discipline... that goes with the set of methods. And I find in my life experience - now in three  
445 books - when we do these things, we win. So that's method and discipline. So let's go back to the  
446 question you asked me, which was when I find myself in a conversation with someone who I have very  
447 different views than... if it's a purposeful conversation, not if I'm sitting at the bar, you know, or  
448 something, or wherever, or if were at an Oakland Raiders game in the old days - before they left.

449

450 29:33

451 I'm going to start every conversation that's an organizing conversation... and I'm going to follow a  
452 series of steps. And the first step is hello, it's called showtime. It's like being really enthusiastic, right? I  
453 mean, he wants to talk to someone who's not interested in talking to you. A lot of people miss that step.  
454 I'm just saying... So like, show enthusiasm for the person you don't know that you're about to talk to.  
455 And in that enthusiastic step one, I'm going to tell them exactly why I'm there. There's no bullshitting,  
456 there's no beating around the bush. Like I'm here because coworkers of yours called up and they're  
457 interested in figuring out how you can make things better in the workplace. That's it. Move on. Like, I'm  
458 making a succinct statement, I'm being very honest about why I'm on your door and you don't know me  
459 and I don't know you, and the very next thing I'm going to do with that person is I'm going to ask them if

460 you could change three things that work tomorrow, what would they be? That is where I'm going as step  
461 two, and there's a reason for the method.

462

463 30:18 - Ezra Klein

464 And you're going there fast.

465

466 30:19 - Jane McAlevey

467 And I'm going there fast and I'm not asking how was your day? I'm not asking do you like your  
468 manager? Let me tell you what else I'm not asking. I'm not asking are there issues in this place? What  
469 problems do you have?

470

471 30:30

472 I could go through a long list of bad questions that people ask in that step until they learn through  
473 practice, through the method and discipline work, what not to ask, because all of those answers are  
474 going to get me a whole bunch of crap I have no interest in. If I've got to talk to a thousand workers over  
475 the course of a couple of weeks. I've got to have a method to do it and a theory and a practice, and if I  
476 get right to the question that I've learned I get the best answers to, and very quickly. I've never met  
477 anybody who didn't have an answer to at least - what's one thing you want to change about work  
478 tomorrow? There's nothing ideological about that question. I'm not imposing any values when I ask that  
479 question, just hey, what are three things that you would change tomorrow at work if you could? By the  
480 way, when we move to doing the work - what I call whole worker organizing - which starts to blend their  
481 identities to things outside of work that comes later in the campaign, the very same question is very  
482 effective for me to understand what they think about outside of work. I will later ask them in a separate  
483 one-on-one... hey, if you were mayor, what are the first three things you do? Because the answer to  
484 that question is one that people have answers to also and it's not muddled and muddied and doesn't  
485 get me opinions about what's going on in their neighborhood and a whole bunch of crap and who parks  
486 where, and I don't care. I want to know, if you were a mayor, what are the first three things you do?  
487 Because it's going to give me immediate insight into your human priorities. So, same with the workplace  
488 question and the reason why, when I later find out that we may have very different political views, it  
489 doesn't really matter to me. It's because, if I know the three things that matter most to you about the  
490 workplace that you want to change, I'm sticking with that conversation the whole way through it and I'm  
491 going to help you understand who's in the way of fixing that problem and how only you and your  
492 coworkers can actually fix it, and I'm going to walk you through examples of how workers have done it  
493 who look just like you and are just like you, elsewhere. So it doesn't matter to me in the short term that I  
494 have a disagreement with them. I'm going to start trying to help them understand.

495

496 32:14

497 If a nurse says to me "God, I'm exhausted every day. I love my job so much. I work in the neonatal  
498 intensive care unit, I work in the ICU, I work in wherever I work in, and I'm so frustrated that I can't get  
499 my job done. I just... we need more staff on the floors. I don't know if she's a Republican, a Libertarian,  
500 a Democrat, Green party member, has never voted in her life, has never cared. I don't know the answer  
501 to any of that. And when she tells me that, I'm off and running.. Because the thing I'm going to ask her  
502 when I start to agitate is... given how much profit your employer had last year, why do you think you're  
503 working so short on the floors in the hospital when you're trying to take care of your patient, like I'm  
504 going to get, the whole point of organizing is I'm going to get her to start thinking about the answer to  
505 that question.

506 -----

507 32:56

508 *I'm never going to tell her what the answer is, I'm going to just start framing a series of questions they're*  
509 *going to help that nurse begin to understand why it is she works for a filthy rich employer and why it is*  
510 *she can't get her job done. That's the short term and it's going to be pretty crystal clear. Like there*  
511 *aren't a lot of mitigating factors to why a nurse is working for a very rich employer, doesn't have enough*  
512 *staff on the floor it's called greed.*

513

514 33:23 - Ezra Klein

515 *This strikes me as a very difficult thing for a lot of people in politics, because you get into politics and*  
516 *you have strong opinions on what is wrong and what the answers are, and you want to tell people what*  
517 *those opinions are and if they think you're wrong, you want to argue them into why you're right. And*  
518 *what you're saying is that if you want to organize people, you may know where you want to get them,*  
519 *but telling them that it's not going to help.*

520

521 33:46 - Jane McAlevey

522 *Never Like, never like...what do people not want to have done to them in this country? Be told*  
523 *something. Who wants to be told something? Like I should go to the gym more often yeah, thanks for*  
524 *letting me know. Like I already know that, by the way.*

525

526 33:59

527 *Like I should eat better food or actually, in my case, I eat pretty great food but it's like no one wants to*  
528 *be told anything, and being told things doesn't actually work, which is why I think that there can be a*  
529 *mismatch between a lot of campaigns by sort of like progressives or left of center or like left you know,*  
530 *again, these are mishmash categories in this country but so much of what I experienced people doing,*  
531 *especially in the activist mobilizing world, is just telling people stuff and kind of I mean, think about the*  
532 *proverbial... Like a lot of left parties in this country who have spent a lot of time asking me why I've*  
533 *never been a member of any of their parties and I, like in the old days I would start with like because*  
534 *you shove small fine print newspapers in my hand with big opinions on them and I could care less*  
535 *about it. Like you don't tell people things right, the beauty of organizing and it's really real is that people*  
536 *are smart and so if you begin to ask them a series of questions that you have to sort of operate on in*  
537 *the fly but there's a set of frameworks with the questions are that we ask. And that was a pretty simple*  
538 *one. I gave you an example of right. I got a nurse I mean, I outlined plenty in the new book in Collective*  
539 *Bargain who, in fact, were at the beginning of the campaign openly saying they are going to be Trump*  
540 *voters.*

541

542 35:11

543 *For example, I was in Pennsylvania, swing state, Pennsylvania, 2016, right, it was a big year. So 7,000*  
544 *nurses. But if I reacted to someone wearing a MAGA button or a bumper sticker on a car, I saw that's*  
545 *not going to help me have a conversation with that person at all. And what I'm interested in doing is I*  
546 *believe most nurses are just flat good people, by the way, so helping them come to their own*  
547 *conclusion like this is the key. Helping a human being come to their own conclusion without ever giving*  
548 *them your opinion is the difference between organizing and mobilizing. It's like a series of steps in a*  
549 *conversation that begin to get a worker questioning, why does she never have enough staff so that she*  
550 *can fulfill her dream of doing the kind of nursing that she wants to, which is actually really taking care of*  
551 *her patients.*

552

553 35:59 - Ezra Klein

554 You said earlier in the conversation that if you've been on social media, you're already in a bad place  
555 on this, and is that because social media is simply an endless training in how to tell people what you  
556 think?

557

558 36:08 - Jane McAlevey

559 Yeah, that's definitely one thing. I mean my, you know, I only joined Twitter a couple of years ago and  
560 it's the only one I do. I do nothing else and I'm about to get off of it because it's like my two-year mini  
561 experiment with Twitter. So one it just means that you're not actually out engaging, you're not reading  
562 something interesting, you're not getting your own views challenged and, mostly in the world of, if you  
563 care about making the world a better place, you're not achieving anything. I mean, in the campaign in  
564 Philadelphia, I will say that one of the hardest conversations I had to have and this was a difference  
565 between my pre-PhD years as an organizer and my post-PhD I met in 2015,.

566

567 36:40

568 I go right back into the field in a huge campaign, I actually had to get all the nurses to shut their  
569 Facebook pages down and it was a really hard conversation because they were like what do you  
570 mean? Take it down? I'm like I actually, literally, I'm asking you nicely to close the whole page, like we  
571 need to close the social media pages down in every hospital and in every unit. And the nurses like well,  
572 why? And I said for two reasons.

573

574 37:02

575 One, you actually need to be having face-to-face conversations with your coworkers, like you're not  
576 going to have anyone overcome fear by banging away on social media late at night and two people  
577 would say things to me like oh but Jane, I reached out, looked through her Facebook page and I sent  
578 her a bunch of leaflets last night on Facebook and I'm like that's great, but that's not actually engaging  
579 her in the way that she needs to be engaged and you're wasting all this time at night and you think  
580 you're doing something productive in the campaign, but it's not going to help that person actually shift  
581 their thinking. So getting them to shut down the Facebook pages was radical and super important early  
582 in the campaign. So to me that's a metaphor for, like we all need to sort of be shutting these things  
583 down.

584

585 37:44 - Ezra Klein

586 I read a book years ago. This is a business book, one of these ones that has one good point that could  
587 take about 800 words to explain. That's right, yes, and it's called Fake Work, and the idea of the book  
588 was that people, particularly in modern businesses, are doing a huge amount of work that feels to them  
589 like work and sort of looks like work you know, you're on Slack or you're, you know, on the Facebook  
590 pages or whatever but it actually has nothing to do with the goals of the organization or of their own job,  
591 and so it's fake work. It exhausts them, it takes up their time. It looks like work, but it actually is not work  
592 in the sense of being intentional, purposeful and productive. And it sounds like you're saying that a lot  
593 of what people do in politics is fake politics. It looks like politics and it feels like politics and it takes a lot  
594 of time and it makes you tired, but it's not actually.

595

596 38:29 - Jane McAlevey

597 It's exhausting, certainly not organizing, that's right. It's certainly not organizing absolutely positively  
598 yeah.

599

600 38:35 - Ezra Klein

601 *And that seems like a like a hard lesson for people to learn. How do people react when you tell them*  
602 *you got to shut down the Facebook page?*  
603

## 604 **38:41 - 42:42 [4 mins] - Credible Plan to Win**

605

606 38:41 - Jane McAlevey

607 You know. I think this gets to another key point about the work, which is when you have what we call a  
608 credible plan to win, like when you actually can connect the issue that the worker just said to you to  
609 what we call a credible plan to win. That's your ability to actually walk them through what it's going to  
610 take and it's oh, by the way, in a worker campaign this is true in general organizing right. If our theory is  
611 how do we manifest the 99 to one kind of rhetoric? I'm always explaining to people a whole bunch of  
612 hard work that they're about to have to do but also takes a bunch of risk in their work life. But if I can  
613 connect the issue that they just said to me - short staffing, if you're a nurse - to a plan, what we call plan  
614 to win, I think most people again, my life experience tells me, and a little bit reinforced in the sociology  
615 PhD, but, like my life experience tells me, that most people and it's probably true for you and I we could  
616 listen to someone rap down a plan to win, a theory of a campaign, whether it's Sanders, Biden, Trump,  
617 whoever it is. Rap down a theory to win and what's your plan to win and then is it credible or not? We  
618 can hear pretty quickly that's not going to work. You're making a human reaction like that's not.

619

620 39:52

621 That may be a plan that someone just said to you, but there's no credibility to that plan whatsoever. The  
622 theory that tons of young voters are going to come out in America in primaries that's just not based on  
623 any reality. It's just based not in reality. There is no reality to like tons of young people coming out in the  
624 precursor, especially like in primaries, which are so specific and so like the hardened party voters kind  
625 of thing. So you can just dismiss certain things right, and workers are doing the same thing in every  
626 campaign and someone's doing on the doors to you too. So if you can connect the issue that mattered  
627 to you and then you can articulate what I call not a plan to win, but a credible plan to win, that's crucial  
628 to people deciding that they're going to take all sorts of actions in a campaign.

629

630 40:38 - Ezra Klein

631 But that's where the hard assessment gets hard right, because a lot of people hear a plan that fits with  
632 their beliefs about how the world should work and it sounds credible.

633

634 40:47

635 [I guess. Maybe] I mean I talked to a lot of people who run these campaigns and they always believe  
636 their plan is credible and their plan always.... I almost never hear people say to me - and I think about  
637 this all the time - that this is what I value in the world, this is how I think the world should work, but  
638 because it doesn't work that way, we have to do this completely other plan. My colleague Matt Yglesias  
639 has this thing called the pundit's fallacy. Like I believe this would be good and thus this is good politics,  
640 and I just hear that all the time, and so the question a bit is how do you get better at assessing that  
641 credibility? How do you get better at making that hard assessment where what you said earlier is true?  
642 As far as we know, nobody has ever managed to flood primaries with young voters at the level you  
643 would need to totally upend American politics, but every four years somebody believes they are going  
644 to do it.

645

646 41:36 - Jane McAlevey

647 Yeah. Well, I mean again, this part of why experience matters... because experience actually matters,  
648 right. I mean reading things actually matters, reading history matters. Like there's far too little reading of  
649 actual history that goes on, quite frankly, in this country too, and we know that right. But I mean  
650 experience is just a learned form of history, right? So the more experience I have as an organizer, the  
651 better I'm getting at it. It is a craft. The more experience I have, the more experience I have, the more I  
652 can you know we have....

653

654 42:05

655 I always say to people workers have a built-in bullshit meter, like they just have it. And that's why I  
656 always say when I'm testing new staff in the theory of hiring, I got to the point where I don't hire unless  
657 someone can do at least a one-week sort of apprenticeship for a week before they have to make any  
658 decision. Because the people who are best going to help us understand if they're going to make it are  
659 actual workers that we send them to talk to. Because workers can smell really quickly if that person is  
660 taking them seriously or not. And taking someone seriously matters a hell of a lot if you're trying to help  
661 change their views.

662 -----

663

664 44:27 - Ezra Klein

665 *Are presidential campaigns a place for organizing or to have the kind of presidential campaign that a lot  
666 of people want to see? Do you need to have had organizing happening through structures and  
667 institutions for a long time before, such that there is a base on which to stand?*

668

669 44:43 - Jane McAlevey

670 *Yes. Sorry, the latter. It was a question, but I'm just jumping to the yes, that's good.*

671

672 44:49

673 *Yeah, I mean, of course and that goes back to the thing I was mentioning earlier, which is sort of  
674 watching the cycle of every four years, having tons of money get thrown into states where people are  
675 very transactionally trying to just get one vote out of someone and then put them back to sleep. There's  
676 an analogy to it in the trade union movement as well, which is, by the way, not all that different. I mean,  
677 there's a practice in the work of people like spending an inordinate amount of time with workers up until  
678 they vote yes to unionize. And then you know, at least in the case of one big union, if not several big  
679 unions in the last two decades who shifted from organizing to mobilizing - wrong direction - you then  
680 pack up the bag of that entire team of organizers and move them away and send in a second team to  
681 help them try and fight for their first contract, what we call the governing period. So that doesn't work  
682 very well. So there's parallels between what's going on.*

683

684 45:41 - Ezra Klein

685 *The weaknesses that are emerging in our national politics are parallel to weaknesses in the trade union  
686 movement and do you think they're just I mean, how much do you think they are just reflection of  
687 weaknesses in the trade union movement, because the trade union movement was such an important,  
688 such an important zone of power?*

689

690 45:57 - Jane McAlevey

691 *Yeah, I think I mean I do look. The whole point of No Shortcuts was to explain that there is this thing  
692 called mobilizing, that it's very different than this thing called organizing and that, sadly, it used to be*

693 that the trade union movement did very deep organizing, really meaningful, really deep and serious  
694 organizing. And in the early 1970s - I put a pinpoint on it - in the early 1970s we begin to shift to more of  
695 a mobilizing approach and away from organizing approach and at the same time, by the way, the  
696 national Rifle Association, the Christian Coalition, the evangelical right, Phyllis Schlafly's organization  
697 reacting to the Equal Rights Amendment, like a whole deep set of organizations on the radical right  
698 begins to realize oh, it's about organizing. And so this pivot happens, where the forces that traditionally  
699 did really good organizing work in this country shift to more of a mobilizing approach, which I call  
700 shortcuts, and not engaging in the really hard work of really rolling up your sleeves and having really  
701 hard conversations with people, and the right begins to understand the value of organizing and of trying  
702 to reach people where they're at and not screaming out them and actually building institutions that are  
703 the institutions that I argue the pundits missed in 2016 that I also think they missed in the recent super  
704 Tuesday with Biden.

705

706 47:13

707 So there are pre-existing institutions. They exist, they're all over America. I know there's a theory  
708 there's a lot less of them and people are going into their homes and looking at their TVs and their  
709 phones. But, by the way, while that's true, it's simultaneously true that there are a hell a lot of people in  
710 this country who are still attending a house of faith. There are still 15 million people who are in trade  
711 unions. There are still a gazillion people going out on the weekend and watching their kid, if they're  
712 young, hit the soccer ball in the wrong direction and clapping and whatever we do when we're watching  
713 the kids at the sports games, right, but it's like there still are a lot of social structures and institutions in  
714 this country and Trump, when people were opining by September of 2016, a point at which I was  
715 absolutely dead sure that Trump was winning.

716

717 47:56

718 I mean, from June I had been because I was in England during Brexit and that was a radical shift for my  
719 thinking. So doing a training with some British unions, so by September you would hear - I won't name  
720 all the names - you hear basically every pundit say, "Hillary's got this because she's got the best ground  
721 staff. She has the best ground operation. She's got X number of staff in this state. The Trump operation  
722 has none." And for organizers like me, I'd be screaming, you know, into the radio listening to it saying  
723 there's a whole set of institutions on the ground that are not his staff but that are working full-time to get  
724 him elected.

725

726 48:31 - Ezra Klein

727 And you're missing what the base is right now, the most important of those institutions is the evangelical  
728 church for sure.

729

730 48:39 - Jane McAlevey

731 National Rifle Association not a bad second one. And then I think, Americans for Prosperity, but I think  
732 a lot of the Koch the more recent kind of Koch brothers operations, tea party stuff is newer and I think  
733 it's real, but I think the basis of the faith community and the basis of sort of the NRA's gun toting  
734 community were very key on the ground and, by the way, with full-time staff operations that were driving  
735 the Trump vote in 2016 that pundits simply missed. And I think this is true about what happened on  
736 Super Tuesday too. I think when people say Biden didn't even campaign, he didn't have an operation  
737 on the ground in Alabama or Philadelphia or South Carolina, who does have an operation in South  
738 Carolina?

739

740 49:19

741 *The black church, and last I looked, it's a pretty serious organization. Despite the fact that there are less*  
742 *people sort of owning faith in modern America, the black church is an extraordinarily powerful*  
743 *organization. So if someone decides we're gonna go for Biden the day before the vote, they have a*  
744 *really powerful relationship between the rank and file and most churches and the church leadership.*  
745 *Yes, a massive mobilization operation that's already in place and ready to go, and I think we saw it on*  
746 *super Tuesday.*

747

748 49:47 - Ezra Klein

749 *You call this in the book structure-based organizing and you talk about it as the the foundation of most*  
750 *of the great organizing victories in American history. How do you do structure-based organizing? So, if*  
751 *the way to think about organizing for a campaign or anything else is not, you just put people out into the*  
752 *field and get them to go knock on doors. It is to begin by identifying what are the structures already in*  
753 *their lives and hooking into them.*

754

755 50:07 - Jane McAlevey

756 *Yeah, definitely. I mean that's why I was doing a political campaign, so let me just stick with a political*  
757 *campaign approach. But I mean I basically say, particularly when I'm talking to activist groups right, for*  
758 *whom this is a very tricky concept, like so much misunderstanding right now going on in this country*  
759 *about how change happens. I'm laughing because I was in a meeting last week where I said something*  
760 *about structure-based organizing and someone from a very activist oriented group explained to me that*  
761 *actually the group that they are part of which was linked to Momentum and it was some new theory of*  
762 *change. It was linked to the Sunrise folks. This young activists in the room said oh no, Jane, there's a*  
763 *lot of structure, there's a lot of - I mean, people don't think, but there's like a lot of structure in our*  
764 *organization which was literally two ships passing in the night.*

765

766 50:54

767 *Like structure in your organization has nothing to do with structure-based organizing. I just want to start*  
768 *there - that you have structure, which young people today hear as hierarchy or something, has nothing*  
769 *to do with structure-based organizing. So structure-based organizing means you are operating inside of*  
770 *an existing structure. So that could be a church, a mosque, a temple, a synagogue. It could be a*  
771 *workplace if the workplace still has sort of walls and a structure, like a hospital does, versus you know,*  
772 *an Amazon delivery driver or something. It could be parent- teacher associations - I don't mean if you're*  
773 *a teachers union, I mean if you're any union, right. Like all the...I spent a lot of my life analyzing every*  
774 *single sub-institution that every worker is connected to in their lives and then trying to figure out how do*  
775 *you build what we call super majority support inside of a structure, and part of why I'm a big believer in*  
776 *the approach of structure-based organizing. I don't think it's all we need. I think it's important that we*  
777 *have what I call single issue groups that are just like driving on an issue, sometimes to like force us to*  
778 *deal with an issue, that's fine, right. Like we need Black Lives Matter. Like we need organizations that*  
779 *are not structure-based, that are just driving a core important crisis going on, like at us all the time, but*  
780 *for actually making real change, like for actually expanding the base of people from whom you can later*  
781 *mobilize, structure-based organizing to me is a gift in several ways.*

782

783 52:18

784 *As an organizer who likes to win and teach people how to win, one is it allows me to assess every*  
785 *single day whether or not we're winning or losing in the campaign. If I've got a thousand nurses in a*  
786 *hospital and we call a meeting one week and 50 come, and we call a meeting the next week and 20*

787 come, we know there's a problem. If we call a meeting and there's 50 one week and the next week 200  
788 come, that's giving us an indication something is going right. On the other hand, by the way, if you're a  
789 real organizer, it matters who those 50 were, who the 200 are and who got them there. Like every sub  
790 question also matters in the analysis of whether or not we're winning or losing.

791

792 52:59

793 But so structure-based organizing in the workplace, right in the workplace setting, is the one that allows  
794 us to test. Can we rebuild solidarity, can we rebuild human compassion? Can we build the kind of  
795 solidarity that can withstand union busting that's as strong as what Steve Bannon, Steve Miller and sort  
796 of the White House team is doing to people when they try and rip you apart, right, intentionally. So  
797 structure-based organizing is important for a couple reasons. One is it usually gets you a bunch of  
798 people who are in the structure that they're in not because they have a shared political value. That's  
799 most clear in the workplace.

800

801 53:36

802 But secondly and most importantly, it lets you figure out if what you're doing is winning or losing. And I  
803 think that we don't spend nearly enough time thinking about that in the progressive movement in the  
804 United States of America like is what we're doing actually working? Is it actually winning or are we  
805 constantly losing? Because if we're constantly losing, we ought to be taking a deep examination of  
806 what's wrong. So structure-based organizing allows you to enable people to deepen the relationships  
807 they already have within a given structure. It allows you to understand the power structure analysis -  
808 keywords - among and between everyone in the same structure, whether that's a synagogue, a  
809 mosque or a workplace, and it allows you to then test whether or not the messages you're using and  
810 the actions you're taking are actually adding up to success or failure.

811

812 54:36 - Ezra Klein

813 You talk in the book about how the core of organizing is raising people's expectations.

814 Can you talk about why that is?

815

816 54:37 - Jane McAlevey

817 Yeah, I mean this is, you know, on the flip side of some of the weaknesses in the Sanders campaign,  
818 this is something I think that the candidate himself does quite well. So the first thing, it was called  
819 Raising Expectations and Raising Hell - I just wanted to call it Raising Expectations because the very  
820 first thing I think a good organizer learns is how to raise workers expectations that they deserve more.  
821 Let's get to what that means in a minute, but like that they actually deserve more and that they can  
822 actually have more, which are two different things. So most workers in the United States of America, if  
823 not the world - I'm just gonna stick to the US for this - most workers, when they go to work in this  
824 country on a pretty regular basis, are told they're stupid.

825

826 55:18

827 They are. They're told it or it's messaged to them, right? Like you've either got one manager who walks  
828 in and never gets the opinion of the frontline staff who actually do all the work and know how the  
829 systems work and could actually make them better if someone just asked them. Maybe the person asks  
830 them once in a while and then throws the survey down a drain. Or you've got a manager who doesn't  
831 even bother to ask and is just out there making a ton of decisions that are really bad, based on no  
832 evidence and nothing, and so people just experience, I must not be smart enough.

833

834 55:45

835 *I don't occupy the corner office, I'm not making a lot of money, like everything about American cultural*  
836 *norms tells ordinary people that they're pretty stupid, because we place value on rich people, right. Why*  
837 *they voted for Trump, why they vote for these people, like in this country, the cultural norm is like if you*  
838 *are rich, it means you're smart and you made it, and if you're not rich, it means you're dumb. I mean,*  
839 *that's, that's what every messaging tells you in this country. So why raising expectations matters so*  
840 *much as a concept is because most people are taught to believe that they're stupid and they're not, and*  
841 *that's why you can't do real organizing if you actually believe they are stupid, right.*

842

843 56:25 - Ezra Klein

844 *So raising expectations here isn't just for what they should get, but how they should be listened to, how*  
845 *they should be involved. Absolutely they should have dignity.*

846

847 56:32 - Jane McAlevey

848 *I mean, the thing that I've said to most people who misunderstand union organizing is they think it's*  
849 *about material gain and it almost never is. It's about identity and it's about respect at the deepest level. I*  
850 *mean, I've run campaigns that led to contracts where workers won very little in the way of material gain,*  
851 *but won a hell of a lot in terms of reshaping who the employer had to listen to and why, and the respect*  
852 *that they felt both from their team and their managers, and that could people could be just as happy*  
853 *with that kind of contract as a contract where they won 30% raises over the first two years because*  
854 *they were so badly behind in a newly formed wage scale. So, so raising expectations is really*  
855 *fundamental to the work. If someone doesn't think that they deserve more, they're obviously not going*  
856 *to fight for more. So you have to start by having them understand that they actually don't deserve to*  
857 *never get any time with their grandkids, to work two full-time jobs and still not be able to pay the rent*  
858 *and watch their family sinking into an opioid crisis. Like people have to believe that they deserve more*  
859 *to then imagine how to fight for more.*

860

861 57:44

862 *In the six-step conversation I was describing to you earlier, in the second step where I've gotten the*  
863 *worker's issues, the expectation raising happens in that second step as we're agitating with them about*  
864 *why do you think it is the way it is. Like, why do you think you work short when your employer makes so*  
865 *much money? And then we start to, as we shift into step three, which is the credible plan to win, and*  
866 *linking how that person can fix that issue if they get together with a majority of their co-workers and*  
867 *form an unbreakable solidarity and build a really tight, effective workplace structure. That's all about*  
868 *raising their expectations and you've got to do that before you're about to ask them to do something,*  
869 *because someone who doesn't believe in their own worth or doesn't believe that there's any possibility*  
870 *of changing their current worth is going to be inactive. They're not gonna be a voter, they're not gonna*  
871 *be engaged, they're not. They're gonna sit home and not be engaged.*

872 **58:27 - 01:06:09 [7 mins] - "Voting Against Self-interest", Dignity**

873

874 58:27 - Ezra Klein

875 **Tell me about this distinction you made a minute ago between material self-interest and people's**  
876 **identity, their dignity. I think one of the most toxic debates on the left is why do people vote against their**  
877 **self-interest? Because every time I hear that line, what I hear is you telling somebody that they don't**  
878 **understand their own self-interest. Like if you've ever said that, what it means is you don't understand**

879 how people are conceptualizing their self-interest, but I think that [by the way, I completely agree]. It  
880 actually makes me crazy.

881

882 58:55 - Jane McAlevey

883 There's several things that make me crazy. That's one of them. Go on but?

884

885 58:57 - Ezra Klein

886 But well, talk a bit about that, because I think that there is a view on the left that if you can just show  
887 people the arithmetic of how they all benefit from the policies, they're gonna vote for you. And my sense  
888 of it and this is very much in my book and other things is that you have to connect this all to people's  
889 identity. People don't want to be told they're gonna get free stuff. What they want to be, that has to be  
890 connected to a narrative of their own dignity and purpose and agency and worth and so on. And so how  
891 do you stay on the right side of that? How do you run a campaign that maybe has the same end goals  
892 in terms of policies and higher wages and so on, but how do you know when you're running a campaign  
893 again on this sort of like reductive, material self-interest versus identity, dignity, etc.

894

895 59:38 - Jane McAlevey

896 Yeah. So first of all, again, I completely agree with this. Secondly, I'd come to the conclusion sometime  
897 ago and I think it's still true. So if you're looking for a different job someday, I think you'd actually be a  
898 good organizer. That's my general feeling. [I'm glad I passed the job interview!]. Yeah, job security on  
899 the spot here, just in case this goes wrong, you know? Yeah, there's union organizing is a very exciting  
900 potential future.

901

902 59:58 - Ezra Klein

903 I wanted to be an organizer when I was younger. I made the mistake of working on campaigns and I  
904 hated it and went into journalism, and I do love journalism, but the thing I like about journalism is  
905 listening to people's problems and trying to find solutions.

906

907 01:00:11 - Jane McAlevey

908 All right that's, that's and that's right. People who are good journalists spend a lot of time listening.  
909 People are good organizers spend a lot of time listening, like way more time listening. I say it's 70-30.  
910 Some people say it's 80-20. I think it's about 70-30 is really the right percent, like 70 percent of the time  
911 I'm listening in a conversation and 30 percent of the time I'm talking in the average sort of good  
912 one-to-one conversation.

913

914 01:00:31

915 But let me just say two things. One is I'm a little worried about making just the broad generalizations  
916 about the left, because my, the left that I identify with does not make these mistakes, right. But I come  
917 from a trade union left. We define ourselves as sort of a tribe and there are a lot of us and we've almost  
918 never lost elections, no matter who the boss is, no matter who they hire, no matter where they are. Like  
919 we are a set of organizers who come from a tradition that I think is rooted in understanding that it's  
920 non-material needs that actually help people move more than material needs. So there's at least two  
921 different broad swaths out there and like - people are always like, you don't even call yourself a  
922 socialist, you know you call yourself a leftist, like people are constantly trying to pin me when I'm in  
923 certain left-ish environments, I'm always like that's the problem with you guys.

924

925 01:01:21

926 It's just, it's not interesting to me. Like what's interesting to me is is the work you're doing actually  
927 adding up to something really meaningful and are people's lives being changed? That's what's  
928 interesting to me. So to stick to this point, when I got to grad school, it really hit me like being about  
929 around a bunch of professors with degrees in economics and fill in the blank, who would try to tell me  
930 about how, of course, materialism is what drives campaigns, and I'd be like that's only because you've  
931 never knocked on enough doors to understand that that's not what motivated most of the hundreds of  
932 thousands of workers I've been engaged with to take action. It's dignity, it's their feelings, it's not just  
933 in-group, out-group stuff. It's like literally being told that you're an idiot every day and the shift from  
934 being told that you're an idiot or your ideas aren't very good every day, to shifting to believing that you  
935 actually have....

936

937 01:02:15

938 I've watched workers, I'm doing it - you can't see it, so I'm gonna say it - like I literally watch workers go  
939 from being slumped over in a conversation with me, to sitting up straight in a conversation. And if I can  
940 get a worker who's slumped over or distracted by their phone to focus on me and actually start sitting  
941 up in the conversation, I actually know right away that they're beginning to feel more a sense of self  
942 like, more a sense of dignity, more I'm gonna help dignify that person every conversation I'm in,  
943 because that's what the step to agitation is about. When and again, just to - I mean, I could do any  
944 number of examples - like if a worker says to me they don't have enough nurses to take care of their  
945 patients, and I'm gonna start driving a whole series of steps of like - right, so how does that make you  
946 feel at the end of the day?

947

948 01:02:56

949 How does it make you feel? How does it make you *feel* that word *feel* matters a lot when you leave  
950 work and punch the clock at the end of the day. How does working short make you feel? And let that  
951 nurse go on and on for a good ten minutes about how it makes her feel horrible and that she didn't give  
952 the kind of care she wanted to give to her patient, and then I'm gonna keep driving questions about  
953 why, if you know exactly what that patient and their family needed at that moment, did your employer  
954 make the decision to prevent you from doing that? That's sticking to her feelings and her sense of right  
955 and wrong and her sense of dignity, and I'm connecting it to an economic and political system that's not  
956 doing very well by health care in this country.

957

958 01:03:33 - Ezra Klein

959 There's something a political organizer once told me is that a lot of people they don't feel they know that  
960 much about policy, but they know exactly who they are.

961

962 01:03:43

963 Yeah and so you have to stick to who they are, not assume that they're gonna be motivated. People get  
964 very confused every time when I talk to voters. The thing I hear most often when I'm doing my reporting  
965 is I don't know who to trust if I'm asking them. I was actually just - I'm doing a piece right now that is  
966 breaking my heart, about the social recession that is gonna be caused by coronavirus - and I'm talking  
967 to elderly people who are going to be inside a lot, and one thing that I just keep hearing is I don't know  
968 who to trust, so I don't know what to do, so I'm just staying inside, right, I don't know who to trust. I don't  
969 know, I don't.

970

971 01:04:14

972 There's so much conflicting information, but what they all know is what is happening to them and they  
973 all know who they are and what their lives need. And a mistake, I think, that happens in politics and, to  
974 be very clear, I've been a policy reporter for a lot of my life. I write about policy, I care about these  
975 things, but I know it doesn't motivate on that level, because the reason identity matters is people are all  
976 experts on their own identities. But they're not, they don't feel like they're experts on policy, so you  
977 have to stay in the place where they are the expert, not where they feel overmatched.

978

979 01:04:43 - Jane McAlevey

980 Yeah, absolutely positively, in fact. That's why, going back to the question of if there were three things  
981 you could change at work what would they be, like when people ask much deeper questions like what  
982 would you want in your contract? If you could write your contract, what would it be like even with that  
983 you're beginning to get out of the realm of what the person knows. If I say to a nurse, so tell me what it  
984 would feel like if this shift was properly staffed. What would you be able to do with your patients? So  
985 first I start with just her describing for me what she would do with her patient or patient's family if she  
986 had the kind of time she wanted, and then I say so draw that for me, like, map it out. What's that look  
987 like? Right, because actually a nurse can draw what should happen in her unit. She actually has a  
988 sense of how many patients and families, like what that ratio should be. So she can actually draw that.  
989 And that's great, because all I need her to do is tell me how she feels and then draw it out for me, like  
990 how many people she thinks they need on that floor, how many assistants, how many certified nursing  
991 aides, how many nurses, how many techs. Just just do a little map for me in your department on the  
992 day shift. And if I ask her to do that, that's all she has to do, because when she comes to the next  
993 meeting, every other nurse in every other department's gonna have drawn that same map. And actually  
994 it turns out they could write hospital policy really, really well. And then they come, they sort of realize  
995 when they come together in the big meeting, wow, like they're actually really smart about hospital policy  
996 when they put their minds together across shifts in departments. So that's, that's part of getting people  
997 to start standing up straight and realizing they actually do have a lot of intelligence, not just a lot of good  
998 feelings, right, so that's one thing.

## 999 **01:06:09 - 01:12:51 [7 mins] - Organic Leaders**

1000 01:06:09

1001 But second, I want to come back to what you said about trust. There's several concepts that I've been  
1002 banging away at in all three of the books, and I'm just gonna keep banging away with them until the day  
1003 I die whenever that happens, because they're just not well understood. And trust is an enormous one.  
1004 So when I'm trying to teach people who want to learn to do organizing work the way I was taught, I say  
1005 if you want the difference between winning and losing, most hard union campaigns and, by the way, I  
1006 should almost take out like "most" or "hard" or something, because union campaigns in the current legal  
1007 environment and the social political environment we're in have been very hard my whole lifetime.  
1008 They're just hard. Like if you're actually trying to help workers in the union unionize, it's hard as hell. So  
1009 the first concept I have to try and get across to people is that in every workplace there are a  
1010 pre-existing set of what I called in *No Shortcuts* organic leaders.

1011

1012 01:07:09

1013 Some people use the word natural leaders, but I have to attach organic or natural or informal or some  
1014 word that goes before the word leader, because leader means a bunch of things in our brains already.  
1015 Right, if you say leader, people think telegenic, articulate, speaks well, blah, blah, blah. And that's  
1016 actually not what I mean at all. What I mean by the organic leader on every shift, in every unit, is simply

1017 the person who's the most trusted worker on that unit. Trust is the single most important value to  
1018 understand and measure in a hard campaign.

1019

1020 01:07:40

1021 So people all make the same mistakes all the time. They're like, "That one, Jane." I'll be at a meeting  
1022 with someone and they'll be like some worker gets up and makes a great speech in a meeting and  
1023 someone who doesn't actually understand the work will be like, wow, Jesus, that obviously she's the  
1024 leader, and I'm like, really, how do you know? Because giving a great speech has nothing to do with  
1025 whether or not the majority of her coworkers trust her, and you're only going to know if she's actually a  
1026 leader in the way that I mean, which is that her coworkers trust her, if you've spoken to a majority for  
1027 coworkers and if, when you ask the following question, they have the same name for you, which is:  
1028 when your manager comes to ask you to do something and you're not sure how to get the procedure  
1029 done, what nurse do you turn to to ask for help? The answer to that question is like the \$60 bazillion  
1030 question and the answer to it that most people in the progressive movement, because they're born into  
1031 a mobilizing approach, have no idea how to even get to, and so the main reason, I think, why union  
1032 campaigns fail or succeed is do you understand how to identify the worker, the informal worker, leader,  
1033 the organic leader that most coworkers trust, because most people - to your point in interviews you're  
1034 doing right now - most people if they're watching social media or regular media, have no idea who to  
1035 trust.

1036

1037 01:09:06

1038 And in a structure based environment, in a workplace where you see each other, in a big housing  
1039 development, if you live in the same, if you're a tenant in a big building, if you go to mosque, temple,  
1040 synagogue, church, faith, any place that you routinely come in contact with people for some reason,  
1041 where you live, where you work, where you practice your faith, you start to develop trust in certain  
1042 people based on actions that you see them take. And coming to understand who's the most trusted  
1043 person is like the single biggest difference between winning and losing every hard fought campaign I've  
1044 ever run. And when you do what's called like false I.D., when you pick the wrong person because  
1045 someone showed up and volunteered a lot. And this mismatch happens in 9-, I'm going to put it at, I'm  
1046 going to throw out like 90% of the progressive movement doesn't understand this concept. And I'm not  
1047 kidding, because what most of the progressive movement uses - and I was trained initially by Saul  
1048 Alinsky-originated organizers when I was young doing community organizing work, and then I went into  
1049 the environmental movement and I had a different set of mentors, but like community based organizing  
1050 until I came back home to trade union work, which is sort of my family roots.

1051

1052 01:10:15

1053 But like in all of those theories of social change, people get called leaders based on what I call the  
1054 commitment theory. So they showed up at four meetings. You call them a leader, literally that's the  
1055 leadership ladder of almost every community based organization in the United States of America and  
1056 think you know, fill in the blank, that can mean environmental justice, it can mean racial, whatever it is -  
1057 like people who want to be a leader, not necessarily who is a leader, not even who wants to. They don't  
1058 want to be. They just show up at a bunch of things.

1059

1060 01:10:44

1061 It just means all you're measuring is their commitment, their commitment to the cause, which is  
1062 radically different than who somebody trusts. Like we have a really hard definition of what a leader is  
1063 and it's not - a worker could have come to a meeting, 12 out of 12 in forming a union. They could have

1064 come in 12 times. All that says to me is that they're an activist, they believe in the cause. That's all it is.  
1065 And they're committed to believing in the cause they believe in. But I have no idea, if I don't talk to that  
1066 worker's, coworkers, whether or not their coworkers actually trust that person. But the whole theory of  
1067 the campaign is that we're going to set up a series of tests to teach us that right quick in the campaign,  
1068 because if we have that part wrong we're going to lose and if we have that part right we're going to win.  
1069 So trust is like along with feelings, but like when it comes to who do people, who do people listen to,  
1070 who moves them in a conversation, it's who do they trust? And so coming to understand that we have  
1071 methods called organic leader identification, like for how you learn to quickly assess who's the most  
1072 trusted person in any given workplace and any shift in any unit, then it's can you recruit that person.

1073

1074 01:11:48

1075 And, by the way, in the typical US workplace the most trusted worker is almost never coming to a union  
1076 meeting. Almost never, ever in my life showing up at union meetings.

1077

1078 01:12:01

1079 Why? They have a sense of their own power in the workplace. They've got a good relationship to their  
1080 manager already because they tend to be very good workers and very responsible workers. So there's  
1081 a whole set of reasons why there's this mismatch between the people, the union organizer and needs.  
1082 The person that the workers, frankly not the union organizer, but the person that the workers  
1083 themselves need most to show up at meetings are the people who actually aren't showing up at the  
1084 meetings. And so how you find them? Like there's all these different, like Rubik's cubes parts of the  
1085 puzzle of how you can do this all very, very quickly right, in order to build the kind of organization that  
1086 can sustain the kind of blows that the employer is going to take to the workers in the course of that  
1087 campaign. But literally, understanding who workers trust is the most important thing you can do in a  
1088 highly polarized environment.

1089 -----

1090 [Ad]

1091

1092 01:15:08 - Ezra Klein

1093 *So one of the things I've seen at the political level and I don't know how much it's true at the union level*  
1094 *too, is it the great difficulty of organizing based on raising expectations is that the structures are so built*  
1095 *against you that you often disappoint. So presidential campaigns are a good example of this. That*  
1096 *Barack Obama say runs on changing American politics and there are a number of legislative successes*  
1097 *over his presidency, but it is fundamentally demobilizing to see so many things fail. The Bernie Sanders*  
1098 *movement I worry this is going to happen to right now that over two election cycles there is a real*  
1099 *increase in expectations in what kind of candidate was possible in American politics and for him the*  
1100 *primary is not over yet. But if he loses now twice, that is very demobilizing. So what do you do when*  
1101 *you've raised people's expectations and then the structures they're trying to change have not yet been*  
1102 *changed and so they are disappointed, I think it's such a good point.*

1103

1104 01:16:05 - Jane McAlevey

1105 *I feel like there's 10,000 important points that we could discuss, but it's such an important one. So again*  
1106 *back to structure-based organizing and what we call structure tests and why all these things matter and*  
1107 *why I love trading and organizing, despite many reasons to be frustrated on a daily basis with labor.*  
1108 *Leadership is in our work. Let me just explain what's different about it and then come back to the*  
1109 *broader point that, the broader question you're asking In a trade union campaign. Well, workers are*

1110 *trying to change the terms and conditions of the workplace, including how does their manager treat*  
1111 *them, fundamentally on the feeling dignity side, let alone a raise or health care, whatever it is they want.*

## 1112 **01:16:47 - 01:24:26 [8 mins] - Counting and Structure Testing**

1113 01:16:47

1114 So what's so beautiful about doing, in particular doing unionization campaigns, which is most of what  
1115 I've done? Right, help workers form, a new union, I like it for so many reasons it'd be hard to list,  
1116 including that they have no bad practice yet. Right, because they're new at it. So there's no cultural  
1117 practice that you're trying to undo, right, from a place where there's been a union for 30 years and it's  
1118 not been very good and you've got to sort of like rejigger the whole place. But that's later. So part of  
1119 what I love about doing unionization campaigns and then first contracts is - and this is different than  
1120 politics, but it's one of many reasons why I think political systems and political practices should learn  
1121 from union practices. So we don't have a choice but to teach the workers that voting in the union is step  
1122 one and it's only step one, and you get nothing. The day you win the union you get nothing. Step two is  
1123 building the organization that you built to win a hard fought election into an even stronger organization.  
1124 That's going to be the 90% or above unity to win what's going to become an even harder to win good  
1125 first contract.

1126

1127 01:17:56

1128 So in the trade union work, when we do our work right, every worker learns from the very first campaign  
1129 voting in the union, as scary as it might be by election day and, believe me, dogs, armed guards,  
1130 security fill in the blank of the gauntlet that workers have to walk through in this country just to cast a  
1131 ballot in a National Labor Relations Board election - most people have no idea. That's part of why I  
1132 keep writing books too. Most Americans have no idea what workers are put through in this country  
1133 when they try and do this simple act of forming a union. But so because if you're a good organizer,  
1134 you're conveying from the very first conversation with the worker nothing is going to happen. Nothing is  
1135 going to change that you and your coworkers don't lead, including winning the kind of changes that you  
1136 want to win, because in fact, there is no other way it's going to happen except by you manifesting  
1137 supermajority, unity and supermajority numbers and being ready to have a credible strike threat in this  
1138 workplace, like, literally, if what the employer understands is power, you've got one source of it. My job  
1139 is to help you understand how to build it to maximum power, strength and only when you and your  
1140 coworkers take the steps needed to yourselves build an organization that's going to become structurally  
1141 strong enough to make radical change in the first collective agreement or the first contract.

1142

1143 01:19:23

1144 That messaging from the first part of the campaign, from the first conversation with the worker, is so  
1145 radically different than when a politician is raising expectations and people are taught in this country,  
1146 politics and policy is like you can show up and vote every four years, right? That's the sad, unfortunate  
1147 thing that most people, if they learn that at all, are taught about politics in America In a union campaign.  
1148 If you're a good organizer who has every intention of teaching the workers to build the kind of  
1149 workplace that's strong enough to sustain the blows and make radical changes at work. Then you're  
1150 saying to them from day one hey, we've got Jane McAlevey, like you might think, and now that I've  
1151 written all these books and stuff, like people are like oh, we got Jane in the campaign.

1152

1153 01:20:03

1154 Like disabuse yourself of the fact that this matters at all when it comes to contract talks, because  
1155 nothing I say across that bargaining table is going to mean squat. All that is going to matter, frankly, is  
1156 whether or not the employer sees 95% of your signatures and your photos on a giant poster that's 12  
1157 feet by 12 feet that says we're prepared to strike. Like nothing. Nothing is going to matter to your  
1158 employer, that happens in this cute little negotiations contract room, more than what you and your  
1159 coworkers are willing to do. So the lesson that workers learn in a hard fought union campaign is that  
1160 one change only happens when they make it happen. They themselves have to make it happen. And  
1161 two, voting for the union means nothing, because nothing actually changes. You have to actually win  
1162 the first contract.

1163

1164 01:20:50 - Ezra Klein

1165 Is there anything in politics analogous to the strike?

1166

1167 01:20:54 - Jane McAlevey

1168 I mean if you can get 100%, if you can get 95% or more of your coworkers to vote together at the exact  
1169 same time. I mean, by the way, part of what I learned about doing get out the vote in political elections  
1170 which comes from like my...I started running political campaigns, by the way, I'm the daughter of a  
1171 politician, so I like understanding how to count, that counting matters, that's controversial but, nothing  
1172 really matters unless you actually win the election, right that matters, like counting actually matters.

1173

1174 01:21:21 - Ezra Klein

1175 So what parent was a politician and what were they?

1176

1177 01:21:24 - Jane McAlevey

1178 My father was a politician by the time I was born, very successful in New York state. Initially, you know  
1179 whatever like town council, I don't know, and then mayor, then supervisor, and then there wasn't an  
1180 executive structure yet but county executive in, you know, one of the largest counties in the United  
1181 States of America, just outside of New York City. So my whole childhood was shaped by one having  
1182 fairly high expectations that politicians are good people. Two, that I think I didn't appreciate until much  
1183 later in my life what it meant for me to understand that our house, several times a year, was covered in  
1184 maps with names and checklists.

1185

1186 01:21:59 - Ezra Klein

1187 And that's really in your blood. [It's really in my blood]. Like maps with names and checklists Like that.

1188 Yeah, a lot of things you say yeah. You can draw the line there.

1189

1190 01:22:08 - Jane McAlevey

1191 Yeah, but, and you know the funny thing is, as most youth do, boy, are we arrogant. When we're young,  
1192 I'm so glad I'm not any more to some degree. But like I just remember, like literally saying to people  
1193 when I was in my twenties, just because I'm the daughter of a politician that has nothing to do with you  
1194 know why I have a better shot at winning or losing. It's like, oh, then you grow up and you know, you  
1195 start realizing like I literally was dragged from campaign event to campaign event, picket line to picket  
1196 line. I mean he was a trade unionist turned politician, put in by the brothers in the building trades  
1197 initially. My family on that side is four generations in the building construction trade unions, and so  
1198 politics was always like just deeply in the house. He was also a World War II fighter pilot, went down to  
1199 the ace in the German theater. So he also has like a huge high risk gene. Pretty sure I got that.

1200

1201 01:22:49

1202 But so counting and risk taking were like really super important values, like in my childhood. So you  
1203 know, when people say, ah, I'm already seeing it right now, you can imagine why in social media and  
1204 stuff, like you know, well, it was a good fight anyway and sometimes it's better to....I don't, like that is  
1205 such a bunch of crap. I'm really sorry. Like people learn to strike, for example, by watching other  
1206 workers strike and win. People don't learn to go on strike because they watch workers strike and lose,  
1207 like. So back to the strike analogy, like counting really matters. So I started understanding that even  
1208 things like election day voting, the only way to effectively do a really serious structure test and to build  
1209 the kind of solidarity that we wanted to build when I was in Nevada running a campaign for a county  
1210 commissioner - very, very crucial race for us in Clark County, Nevada, some years back - we actually  
1211 asked every single worker, by shift, to show up together and march to the polling place and vote. Like  
1212 that's an example of solidarity building and a structure test so that we actually knew which workers  
1213 weren't showing up to vote before waiting to even figure out on the cross tabs. If we had early voting in  
1214 Nevada, which we did, you know who voted that day, when they told you they were going to or not.  
1215 When you look at the tabs at night, right, like you don't know how they voted, but if they voted yes or  
1216 no. There's another way to do it, which is solidarity building, which is like let's all go vote together, let's  
1217 all walk out of here together, let's all drive in vans to our various political precincts, let's build a precinct  
1218 organization and ask everyone to meet at 8 o'clock in the morning on the election day in your  
1219 neighborhood and walk together to the polling station and vote. So I don't think there is anything quite  
1220 like a strike.

1221

1222 01:24:26

1223 Going back to your original question, but I think that we can use what I'm trying to encourage in the  
1224 three books I've now written, and in that one big opinion piece I wrote in the New York Times a couple  
1225 years ago is like there's a lot of lessons from trade union organizing that we in the political class would  
1226 be very smart to learn about. How do we build solidarity? How do we understand who the most trusted  
1227 worker is? How do we get people to understand that nothing's changing unless they themselves are  
1228 actually taking the action to make it happen, and that the vote is the first act you take, not the last. Like,  
1229 literally, the election day is one in a series of actions that you as a human being will have to take in  
1230 order to make the change in your life that you want to see happen. Like our conversations start and end  
1231 with that, and that's completely different than a transactional, we want your vote once in four years  
1232 political conversation.

1233 -----

1234

1235 01:25:13 - Ezra Klein

1236 *So I've obviously been asking you to apply a lot of union lessons to politics, but I want to talk about*  
1237 *unions specifically for a bit, and here's the question I want to ask, which is, let's say, we're talking in*  
1238 *2050, looking at a revitalized, much larger labor movement. What happened?*

1239

1240 01:25:28 - Jane McAlevey

1241 *A lot of people learn the methods and disciplines of winning.*

1242

1243 01:25:31 - Ezra Klein

1244 *Do you need...Can you do it without legislative change? Do you need to...?*

1245

1246 01:25:34 - Jane McAlevey

1247 *Pass card check, no.*

1248

1249 01:25:34 - Ezra Klein

1250 *Because you have a story in the book that's about - you tell at some length. The laws that got passed to*  
1251 *make organizing harder and globalization - those are big structural things. Do you need big structural*  
1252 *change? You can do it without that?*

1253

1254 01:25:46 - Jane McAlevey

1255 *Yes and no. First thing is like the laws are structures right? You say, like you're just asking, do you need*  
1256 *structural change? By the way, it's incredibly helpful. Like legal change. That helps a lot.*

1257

1258 01:25:58

1259 *On the other hand, if you look at who the United States Supreme Court is right now and if you look at*  
1260 *the entire federal judiciary and all the appointments that McConnell and Trump have made right now,*  
1261 *I'm trying to fast forward to 2050 based on the legal, what's happening with the laws of the country as*  
1262 *we move towards 2050. And we're going to have decades of incredibly conservative judiciaries going*  
1263 *forward. There just isn't going to be a way to change many laws. So, given that the campaign finance*  
1264 *system is, people say to me oh well, if I'm giving a book talk or something, they'll say, oh right, well, we*  
1265 *just need to overturn Citizens United and then make politics fair and then people can vote again fairly*  
1266 *and I'm like great. So rap down for me how this is going to happen. Just explain to me how you're going*  
1267 *to overturn Citizens United so that we can then have a better election system with today's Supreme*  
1268 *Court. I like to just ask that question in the audience a lot.*

1269

1270 01:26:49

1271 *So the beautiful thing is there is one thing that we get to do between now and 2050, no matter what,*  
1272 *which is workers can have massive strikes and create the kind of crisis in the economy that forces a*  
1273 *crisis in the political economy. That leads to change, and last I took a casual look at the last 100 years*  
1274 *of change in the United States, whether it was the civil rights movement or the trade union movement in*  
1275 *the 20s, 30s and 40s and 50s, which bled into the civil rights movement in the 40s, 50s, 60s, right.*  
1276 *Every time that we have forced the kind of legal structural changes that you're raising, that everyone*  
1277 *wants right now, like we want changed laws, it took a hell of a lot of sacrifice and a lot of very serious,*  
1278 *unbreakable solidarity with effective structures, workplace, faith-based, community-based to create*  
1279 *crises which enabled the political class to then have a change kind of forced on them, right. Whether it*  
1280 *was FDR dealing with unions who were holding massive strikes in '33 and '34 that allowed the change*  
1281 *in labor law in 1935 to create the National Labor Relations Act, or whether it was the tapes we now*  
1282 *have of Johnson talking to Martin Luther King and saying you're going to have to do something big*  
1283 *down there - I don't want to imitate his Southern accent - but you're going to have to do something*  
1284 *really big down there to make it so that I can get these guys to change their mind, right. So, and that*  
1285 *movie Selma was maybe the first time I ever saw like a Hollywood film that actually showed strategy for*  
1286 *the first time.*

1287

1288 01:28:19

1289 *But so as a strategist I mean, I think more than anything, I consider myself at this point as someone*  
1290 *who does a lot and thinks a lot about strategy, both at the small level and at a very big level. And in*  
1291 *order to do strategy well, you have to understand power structure analysis really well. You have to*  
1292 *understand power, how it moves, where it moves, if able to measure how much their side has. How*  
1293 *much do we have? If they do that, do they get more or less? If we do this, do we get more or less? And*  
1294 *from there you can sort of put together like serious strategy.*

1295

1296 01:28:49

1297 *But so I think it's going to happen because in the last two years in this country more workers have*  
1298 *walked off the job in illegal and legal strikes than has happened in my sort of adult lifetime. I mean,*  
1299 *technically we did more when I was a little girl, but I can't say - I didn't understand that, I don't*  
1300 *remember them. So in my adult lifetime more workers have walked off the job in the last two years in*  
1301 *more unpredictable places than in my entire lifetime. And I think it matters a lot to watch what's*  
1302 *happening with strike activity right now, and part of why learning the methods and being very disciplined*  
1303 *at them matter so very much is a difference between winning and losing and the thing I said a few*  
1304 *minutes ago, which is workers aren't going to learn to sort of take the risk to walk off the job and go on*  
1305 *strike unless and until they see other workers walking off the job and winning. And a lot of what we've*  
1306 *seen in the last two years - not entirely, but a lot of it - is workers walking off the job and winning and*  
1307 *not getting punished and not being murdered and not being jailed. Not yet.*

1308

1309 01:29:51

1310 *And, believe me, I think the more strikes that happen, the more we're going to return to some... that the*  
1311 *risk factor is going to get higher. Right, it always has been the case that if you're a black worker in the*  
1312 *south and you walk off the job, you have a different risk factor than if you're a white nurse walking off*  
1313 *the job in New York City, obviously right? So it's like it's going to depend a little bit on space, sector*  
1314 *where you are, geography, etc. But the lesson that we're teaching people in trade union work, the core*  
1315 *concept, going back to the theory of power, is that when 90% or more of you take this action together,*  
1316 *they can't punish all of you because they need you to come in the next day and get the job done. Now*  
1317 *that also points to a question of strategy in terms of what workplace is, what sector is, etc.*

1318

1319 01:30:31

1320 *But if we go back to the 1930s and what led to the passage of the National Labor Relations Act in 1935,*  
1321 *and then the Fair Labor Standards Act, and then Social Security and a whole wave of things that most*  
1322 *people have never even like cracked a book to try and figure out, how do we win that stuff that we sort*  
1323 *of took for granted for years?*

1324

1325 01:30:50

1326 *What had to happen before any of those laws changed was massive crises being created by workers*  
1327 *walking off the job in very large numbers, and I want to put a pinpoint on this I don't think all actions are*  
1328 *created equally, so like massive direct action randomly done in let's say, Zuccotti Park and Occupy Wall*  
1329 *Street has a completely different effect than all of the airline pilots in the United States deciding that*  
1330 *they're not going to fly the planes, or flight attendants deciding they're not going to board the planes*  
1331 *and grounding the airline industry until their needs are met.*

1332

1333 01:31:29

1334 *Like there are strategic sectors, there are strategic workers under capitalism at any period of time, for*  
1335 *whom those workers have more structural and strategic power than others. In the 1930s, we certainly*  
1336 *knew that, and I think some of us know it today too, and we're embedded in what we consider to be the*  
1337 *high priority sort of sectors of the economy where workers in the United States can still exercise the*  
1338 *kind of power that's going to lead to a stronger labor movement and, I hope, a safer planet and a*  
1339 *cleaner, healthier planet. Because if it's 2050 and the place hasn't blown up yet, it's because we did*  
1340 *walk off the job in large numbers in this country and create a crisis for capitalism that's going to force*  
1341 *huge structural change in the laws.*

1342

1343 01:32:12 - Ezra Klein

1344 *In terms of what it achieved, what has been the most impressive strike campaign to you in the last*  
1345 *couple of years?*

1346

1347 01:32:19 - Jane McAlevey

1348 *There's a lot of ways to answer it, but I would say, just off the cuff, it's definitely the Los Angeles*  
1349 *teachers in the strike that they led, and yeah, I mean the Chicago teachers, also very, very good. I*  
1350 *mean, every time workers walk off the job in huge numbers, it's a big deal. I mean even if you have - as*  
1351 *I write about in the new book - I start off by talking about a handful of smaller strikes. Most of my life in*  
1352 *the healthcare field I have not been part of huge strikes. I've been part of like can we get this thousand?*  
1353 *Can we get this 800, can we get these 3,000, maybe can we get these 30,000 who work for one of the*  
1354 *big healthcare companies. You know.*

1355

1356 01:32:54

1357 *But a lot of it's been a lot of small strikes where, by the way, I watch workers learn the same lesson,*  
1358 *they win. Like you can get 90% and you know they walk off the job in a strategic sector where the*  
1359 *employer can't just easily get rid of them because they actually need them to shop and make money*  
1360 *the next day. Like you're going to win. Like the most basic lesson I was taught when I came into the*  
1361 *trade union movement was McAlevey, and it's always, like last names in our work, very gendered, very*  
1362 *male, still, McAlevey. If you can create a crisis for the employer, meaning if the workers can create a*  
1363 *crisis for the employer, they're going to win and if they can't, they're going to lose. Like that's a very*  
1364 *straightforward proposition that my life experience tells me is true.*

1365

1366 01:33:32

1367 *So the Los Angeles strike was so extraordinary for so many reasons, so many reasons both, that it was*  
1368 *100% out, like 100% of 900 different schools with a workforce that's been told, not only were they*  
1369 *stupid, but they were the blame of the failure of public education in America.*

1370

1371 01:33:51

1372 *Like it's been 20 years of messaging, from Waiting for Superman to fill in the blank that you know that*  
1373 *schools were failing because of teachers and teachers union specifically right.*

1374

1375 01:34:01

1376 *So to like build the kind of huge public solidarity and support that they built. Where there were, the ratio*  
1377 *was at least one for one. Like every day there was at least one you know, parent walking on picket lines*  
1378 *with those teachers, because there were 65 to 70,000 people, by police estimates, every day in*  
1379 *downtown Los Angeles during this strike and there's only 33,000 of the teachers. And this was in*  
1380 *pouring rain. As someone who, I think, is from Southern California, you know what that means, right,*  
1381 *like I keep trying to have a fantasy in my mind about, like what if they had had LA weather for the six*  
1382 *days of that strike? What it would have looked like, right - but they had pouring, teeming down some of*  
1383 *the heaviest rain I've ever seen in California, and still they had 65 to 70,000 people every day on the*  
1384 *streets supporting a call for dignity and fairness and better public schools for kids.*

1385

1386 01:34:52 - Ezra Klein

1387 *And what did they win?*

1388

1389 01:34:53 - Jane McAlevey

1390 *They won so many things. You know, starting with, the single most important fight for every educator*  
1391 *going into that campaign was on class sizes and was the ratios - not very different than nurses I've*  
1392 *spent my life working with, right - was the ratio of how many students there are to the classroom and*  
1393 *breaking something called section 1.5. It's very nebulous but really it was about the question of you*  
1394 *know, almost every long time teacher can tell you that they used to have about one to 17, you know*  
1395 *one of them to about 17 kids, one of them to about 20 kids. And in Los Angeles, in a grotesquely*  
1396 *underfunded public education system, the fine state of California, where we are 47th in the nation*  
1397 *compared to the rest of the country, you've typically got one teacher to 45 kids with no assistant. So the*  
1398 *single biggest issue was they won structural reductions in the number of students per teacher. No one's*  
1399 *won that in a very long time, like in a very, very long time. That's just like winning nurse to patient ratios.*  
1400 *It's a very, very hard thing to win. So first of all they did that. They set out to make public education*  
1401 *better by creating the idea that students deserve a better learning environment and it starts with how*  
1402 *many students are in the room. Then they made victories on mandatory testing, greatly reducing the*  
1403 *number of mandatory tests they have to do versus actually teaching. Then they won an extraordinary*  
1404 *set of victories that were not sort of traditional contract claims. They negotiated for a fund in the district*  
1405 *that the district is administering and has to help pay for to keep ICE agents off campus and to create a*  
1406 *legal defense fund to get parents right. So parents are actually being separated from their children in*  
1407 *this country in this moment when they drop their kids off at school. So they won. There's like, no history*  
1408 *of like winning an ICE defense fund defending immigrant rights on the part of a bunch of you know, a*  
1409 *teachers union won the right to create an immigrant defense fund as part of their contract. They won*  
1410 *something like a mini green new deal that says - they did an analysis that they're actually doing more of*  
1411 *now in phase two of it, analyzing every single public school kid in Los Angeles who has no green space*  
1412 *to play on and or no place outdoors to go play when the bell rings and it's time for their break. And first*  
1413 *of all, it's getting them to have breaks as part of it, but then it's actually getting it, making it so that they*  
1414 *have green, literally green.*

1415

1416 01:37:12

1417 *I mean, I could just go on and on and on, but there were, there were more victories produced in that*  
1418 *one strike and I've, you know, I'm still, I'm still running campaigns, but now I'm like, now I alternate*  
1419 *between running a big campaign and then writing about it and running a big campaign and then writing*  
1420 *about it. And I've been because I've been, because of the PhD and because of like, finally slowing*  
1421 *down enough to like, look at other people's work. I can analyze a lot of strike victories in the last - I can*  
1422 *probably analyze almost all of them in the last two years, but I can analyze a lot over time and I can tell*  
1423 *you that what the Los Angeles teachers achieved by being super intensely relational, connected to the*  
1424 *parents in the broader community, paid off in a very big way for parents themselves, for the students*  
1425 *and for the teachers and, I think, for all of Los Angeles.*

## 1426 **01:37:57 - 01:44:17 [6 mins] - Concern for Short-term Impact on People** 1427 **Served, Inoculation, Focus on Power**

1428

1429 01:37:57 - Ezra Klein

1430 **Can you focus on that relational dimension, because one of the very effective ways strikes get stopped**  
1431 **or broken, particularly in strategic sectors of the kind you're talking about, is: If you do this, you'll be**  
1432 **hurting the people you care about, right? These kids will not go to school, you're a pilot, people will not**  
1433 **be able to fly, and so, on the one hand, these are strategic sectors where they have a lot of power, but,**

1434 on the other hand, precisely because they're good people, they don't want to hurt the very people  
1435 they're trying to help, and that's always a very powerful lever and way of breaking solidarity around a  
1436 strike. So how are they able to build those relationships such that the public didn't get turned against  
1437 them and they didn't feel like what they were going to do was going to be at odds with the people they  
1438 cared about?

1439

1440 01:38:38 - Jane McAlevey

1441 So a few things. Almost my entire life in the trade union movement I've been working with what I call  
1442 mission driven workers, which means they are particularly vulnerable, right? When the employer says  
1443 you're going to hurt your patients, you're going to hurt your students, you're going to hurt the single  
1444 parent, you're going to hurt the parent, you're going to, on and on and on. But the immediate workers,  
1445 people are stretched so thin at this point in this country that it's not that far a leap to say to them  
1446 nothing's ever going to change unless you and your co-workers stand up for yourselves right now.

1447 01:39:04

1448 So are you prepared to work for the next 30 years short staffed and feeling like you've left a war zone  
1449 every single time you punch out of the emergency room from your hospital?

1450

1451 01:39:12

1452 Or do you want to, for a few days, take the kind of action that's going to actually change the kind of care  
1453 that's being delivered to your patients for the rest of your life?

1454

1455 01:39:20

1456 Like and, by the way, framing the hard choice is a method, a sub method, but then a conversation. Like  
1457 literally, how do you frame a hard choice to a worker when the boss is saying, when the employer is  
1458 saying to them, usually with the skillful aid of a professional union busting consultant, you're going to  
1459 hurt your patients, right? So knowing how to actually do what's called framing the hard choice for a  
1460 worker and saying I hear you, Sally, it is definitely not going to be like... I started doing work with the  
1461 nursing home workers years ago and that's really where the relationship's really intense, because when  
1462 they walk out you know, different than a hospital, right, I mean, different people come into a hospital in  
1463 that every day. In a nursing home the relationship is particularly incredible between the certified nurses  
1464 aides and between the patients that they care for and they will actually suffer a little bit when a scab or  
1465 a strike breaking person's brought into that facility because you know, especially if you're older, if you  
1466 have dementia, whatever you are, like your caregiver really matters to you right.

1467

1468 01:40:16

1469 So it's really hard for them. But I think that the simple choice is it's not going to change. Tell me how  
1470 else it's going to change. Tell me how it's going to change so that you can give the kind of care to the  
1471 patients that you have if you don't actually walk off the job, right now and fix it. And going back to the  
1472 credible plan to win, by the way, you're only going to be able to fix it if it's 90% or more of you. So, like  
1473 all of these things actually matter, if 60% of the workers walk off the job, they're not going to win.

1474

1475 01:40:45

1476 So teaching power to people is like part of the conversation. So one is you do a lot of what's called  
1477 inoculation, which I mentioned earlier. Like when I say, Sally, when your manager sees your name on  
1478 that petition demanding better staffing ratios, what do you think that manager is going to say to you? Or  
1479 when she sees, more importantly, later on in the campaign, when she sees your signature and your  
1480 face on what we call a majority photo poster with thousands of pictures on it saying I'm ready to strike if

1481 I have to. I don't want to, but I'm ready to. That's very important messaging in striking in the mission  
1482 driven sectors, right. Like, no one wants to strike. No one does want - okay, I lied, five sectarians want  
1483 to strike endlessly or something. But, like, most workers have no interest in going on strike. None. For  
1484 any number of reasons. It's a hard thing to do. Whether or not they're walking away from patients or  
1485 not, if they're a driver, they're not going to hurt their car. But you know, whatever, like so you got the  
1486 idea. So one is we do a lot of inoculation, we do a lot of like, what do you think management's going to  
1487 say to you when they see your face on the poster that says I'm ready to strike if I have to, even though I  
1488 don't want to? And talking them through it, you know the first thing the employer is going to say to you  
1489 is you're going to be hurting your patients. Yeah, they are going to say that right, and then you work it  
1490 through, like you actually have to spend time to work through that conversation with them, and then you  
1491 say the truth is it might be, but actually what you've told me for the last three months in this campaign is  
1492 that every single day at work you're hurting a patient because they're not getting the attention they  
1493 need. So do you want to fix that or not? Right, that's framing the hard choice and inoculation at once.

1494

1495 01:42:10

1496 But then the second thing that really matters in terms of Los Angeles is that they did something that a  
1497 lot of unions can't imagine, let alone actually do, which is that when they were preparing for the contract  
1498 talks that led to that extraordinary strike and that extraordinary contract settlement, they did regional,  
1499 area-based geographic meetings inside of the Los Angeles Unified School District and invited all  
1500 parents, by district, to come and have a say in what they thought the workers should try and fight for in  
1501 the contract. And they actually got several of the ideas that I listed to you as victories directly from the  
1502 parents. So the idea of winning an ICE and Immigrant Defense Fund, the idea of bargaining for what  
1503 we call a sort of mini-green new deal Like these ideas, and then one I should say because it's  
1504 extraordinary victory that again there's a lot of them was banning random searches, which we know are  
1505 not random in public schools. Like there's nothing random about public searches. Look at any statistics  
1506 it's like 90% black kids or brown, depending on your school, and it's sure as hell not the white kids.

1507

1508 01:43:10

1509 So they won a ban on so-called random searches, which then they won it in a pilot number of schools  
1510 and within weeks the whole community had their expectations raised that they could actually end it  
1511 everywhere right away and forced and jammed the victory riding off the strike with the teachers union  
1512 helping them into a schoolwide meeting and just banned random searches in all of LA schools. Like  
1513 that is going to itself slow down the school to prison pipeline in measurable ways. So that idea came  
1514 from the teacher's union doing something as unconventional as holding open contract discussions with  
1515 parents and actually driving parents to come to meetings to both learn about what the issues were that  
1516 the teachers were gonna fight for so education, sharing information and then actually asking them if  
1517 they could get something in the contract what would it be, and then actually taking it serious enough to  
1518 put it into the contract fight and then hold on to it through the strike to actually win on the issues that the  
1519 parents wanted in that contract. And they did that and that's part of why it's such a magnificent strike.

1520 -----

1521

1522 01:44:17 - Ezra Klein

1523 *Before we end here, I wanna ask you about two legislative changes which I know you said are not*  
1524 *necessary but could potentially be helpful. So in 08 the Democrats used to talk a lot about card check.*  
1525 *Then Obama got elected and Democrats had majorities and they didn't actually push it. But there's card*  
1526 *check out there. And then the idea that has been in a lot of plans this year has been moving to sectoral*

1527 *bargaining. Can you talk a bit about what those two ideas are and if you think either of them would be a*  
1528 *really big deal if passed?*

1529

1530 *01:44:44 - Jane McAlevey*

1531 *Yes, I can talk about both of them.*

1532

1533 *01:44:48 - Ezra Klein*

1534 *People can't see, but there's a real cat-eating-the-canary grin happening here on this somewhat boring*  
1535 *question. [Two of my favorite topics besides method and discipline and leader identification and*  
1536 *structure test].*

1537

1538 *01:45:00 - Jane McAlevey*

1539 *Yeah, so card check, what we call card check was the illuminating idea of the 2007, 2008 cycle and, as*  
1540 *someone who was the head of a statewide very large union in one of our unions called the Service*  
1541 *Employees International Union, I was a leader in a swing state called Nevada in a very important year,*  
1542 *which was the first year that Nevada had an early state caucus to bring the Latino vote in. By the way, if*  
1543 *people haven't noticed this, just another good reason why every liberal who thinks that they don't like*  
1544 *union should support them, as Nevada is the only state that's trending completely opposite of every*  
1545 *other state and went from red to a little bit blue, to mixed blue, to purple, to blue, blue, blue, blue blue,*  
1546 *because we built a lot of strong unions in that state in the last two decades. Just to put a point on how*  
1547 *change happens, in this country.*

1548

1549 *01:45:43 - Ezra Klein*

1550 *Yeah, the demographics of Nevada and Texas are not that different, but their politics have been, and*  
1551 *it's a big reason why.*

1552

1553 *01:45:49 - Jane McAlevey*

1554 *Right and that's a very I mean what we know. We know historically that two institutions historically*  
1555 *influence working class votes that's the church and that's unions. So, without any unions, look who*  
1556 *people are voting for. I'm just saying so. Back to Nevada and back to that moment. So there I am. I'm*  
1557 *the leader of the union in the state of Nevada.*

1558

1559 *01:46:08*

1560 *It's very intense political climate in an early state swing state, and the leadership of the union I work for*  
1561 *and the whole labor movement, to be honest, the AFL CIO, everybody what's the National Labor*  
1562 *Federation in this country is making one demand on whatever candidate as we're going through the*  
1563 *endorsement process Like one central thing everyone across the country has to ask is what's your*  
1564 *position on something called what they say is AFCA, which is the Employee Free Choice Act, of which*  
1565 *this thing called card check is a crucial concept, and card check means that when a majority of workers*  
1566 *sign a union membership authorizing a union 50% plus one of them they could just have an union with*  
1567 *no election. That's the nut of what card check means. But it was always talked about as AFCA, which I*  
1568 *always said sounded more like a sort of bad virulent social disease or something, or some kind of*  
1569 *disease you might get in your body than any kind of public policy that someone would stand up and be*  
1570 *clapping for. But even what it was made little sense to me as an organizer versus a mobilizer or an*  
1571 *activist, to articulate why American workers need something called card check means you have to*  
1572 *spend an incredible amount of time explaining why elections don't work. Now, on its face, that's*  
1573 *complicated. I mean, people in 2020 are becoming skeptical about the sort of validity of elections right*

1574 now. I think that's a really bad thing and I think the evidence is that elections are mostly very sound. So  
1575 the people who are driving doubt about whether or not elections work in the civil arena tend to be  
1576 people who are right wing and fear mongering and trying to get people to not have faith in the one thing  
1577 that equates to democracy in people's minds, which is pulling a lever on election day and a voting  
1578 booth.

1579

1580 01:47:58

1581 So the first thing that was wrong with card check, and just because it was being elevated in 2007 and  
1582 2008 in that electoral cycle, for those of us in this work, card check has been something we've been  
1583 demanding forever, but you don't need a law for it. Like as it is right now, card check is the law of the  
1584 land. I mean, if I could convince an employer to like you can get a union certified today, right now, since  
1585 1935. You can do what's called certifying a union by the employer counting 50% plus one of the cards, I  
1586 certify the union. Now, do they do that? How the hell? No, right. They hire union busters, they terrorize  
1587 the workers, they create, polarized many United States and every work United States in February 2020  
1588 in every workplace, right, but so?

1589

1590 01:48:39

1591 Card check has existed for a long time, but the idea that it would become the number one political  
1592 priority of the American labor movement in 2007, an idea that runs sort of a foul of what most people  
1593 think of as the basic right of democracy, which is that people get to go into a voting booth and  
1594 anonymously make their selection, made zero sense to me. As an organizer, it still does. I wanna say  
1595 that it makes no sense to me. Like the point is to make the election process fair and then let people  
1596 vote by secret ballot, right. The basic idea of a secret ballot election is like baked into the cultural norms  
1597 in this country, and so trying to argue for something that isn't a secret ballot election process and trying  
1598 to make that case to the 98% of America who has no idea what goes on in the election was just bad  
1599 strategy. So that's what I think about card check - still bad strategy.

1600

1601 01:49:36

1602 Sectorial bargaining, which is the sort of ice cream flavor of the year or the ice cream flavor idea of the  
1603 year right now, to me is similar and different in the sense. So let's say what it means. First of all.  
1604 Sectorial bargaining means essentially, if you were a nurse I'll just stick to the topic I've been talking  
1605 about If you're a nurse and you have a union right now, you go to the bargaining table either against  
1606 your local hospital or if you're in a big system which many of them are, and if you're smart, like us,  
1607 you're organizing people in the big systems. You might go to the table with a bunch of nurses from the  
1608 same hospital employer across a bunch of states, but when you go you're gonna be bargaining for what  
1609 wages a nurse deserves. We hope how many patients there are on the floor, given the kind of floor it is,  
1610 whatever it is, but the only people being affected are the nurses who actually have the union, who are  
1611 gonna live under the contract that you're gonna pass.

1612

1613 01:50:24

1614 So the idea of sectoral bargaining means that whoever goes to the negotiating table is actually making  
1615 an agreement. For every single nurse in the United States of America you could think of that as like a  
1616 contract extender. And we have contract extenders already in this country, just like we already have the  
1617 right to card check. It's that it's very hard to implement them because power is skewed so badly right  
1618 now against ordinary people and in favor of corporations. But that's just like we're in our 1929, 1930, 31  
1619 level of income inequality because we're at the same level of power, inequality between the super rich  
1620 and workers. So sectoral bargaining is sort of the hot idea of this election cycle. Every candidate was

1621 asked by most unions will you support sectoral bargaining? And it isn't just sectoral bargaining, it's like  
1622 the idea of the German model. It's sort of what people think of in shorthand in the trade union  
1623 movement as the German model, which means Elizabeth Warren famously had the accountability act  
1624 for capitalism....

1625

1626 01:51:21 - Ezra Klein

1627 The accountable capitalist act. I think it was.

1628

1629 01:51:23 - Jane McAlevey

1630 Thank you, that was a good mouthful, yeah if I can't remember it, that's not good but anyway that which  
1631 sort of codified what we think of as the German model. Sanders has something similar right, but all the  
1632 candidates were asked when you sort of support sectoral bargaining and again it's a fine idea it's like  
1633 it's less culturally complicated to understand than why workers shouldn't have a secret ballot election,  
1634 which to me is just a loser. It's just a loser idea, but sectoral bargaining is a fine idea. There's two  
1635 problems. It's like saying you want Citizens United to be overturned. One how in today's climate, are  
1636 you gonna win sectoral bargaining? That's just one question. And two, my experience, since I've been  
1637 doing a lot of work in Europe, which is very helpful for this particular discussion basically all European  
1638 workers have some form of sectoral bargaining already and what's happening throughout Europe is that  
1639 workers are also going backwards very, very fast For the same reason they are in the United States of  
1640 America, which is that unless and until workers in very large numbers have built the kind of solidarity  
1641 and unity that can create the kind of crisis a strike creates, nothing matters about the structure of the  
1642 law you have. So just to hammer this one home with one example I've particularly been doing a lot of  
1643 work in Germany for the last year.

1644

1645 01:52:41

1646 My second book, *No Shortcuts*, was translated into German. It was translated in time to be released to  
1647 a mass audience for a 3,000 worker cross-union strike conference about rebuilding the strike muscle in  
1648 Germany. Turns out they haven't been doing a lot of strikes either, just like in the United States, and  
1649 what I learned in a short version of what could be a long, long discussion just about what's going on in  
1650 Germany, where the Nazis are actually entering the plants and contesting for a works council elections.  
1651 That's part of the German model is... and Works Councils. So careful what you're asking for. But what  
1652 I've learned by spending a lot of time in Germany is just because you have a sectoral bargaining  
1653 doesn't mean things are better. Like you actually have to do the hard work, and what I hear in the  
1654 demands by the national labor leadership sometimes are shortcuts, and you might know that I wrote a  
1655 book called *No Shortcuts*. So I think sectoral bargaining is like a, it's a fine idea, but if you're not  
1656 actually doing the hard work of helping workers build strong organizations, city by city, employer by  
1657 employer, strategic geography by strategic geography across this country, it isn't gonna matter in the  
1658 end, because in Germany it's not.

1659

1660 01:53:43

1661 When the wall fell in 1989, I've now come to learn through all of my intense work on the Polish-German  
1662 border where the AFD, which is the semi-Nazi-like party. What I've learned after a lot of time on the  
1663 Polish-German border for last year with trade union organizers, is that, despite the myth of the German  
1664 model that everyone here just thinks is this great, perfect kind of model, since 1989, the German unions  
1665 have never yet been able to close the 30 to 40% wage differential of what workers in the former East  
1666 made to workers in the former West. And so you said to yourself well huh, let's talk more about sectoral

1667 *bargaining. How is it that they've been going to sectoral bargaining tables? For what are we up to now?*

1668 *I'm bad at math. You're better at math, aren't you? Do you have a math in your family? 30 years?*

1669

1670 *01:54:36 - Ezra Klein*

1671 *or 40 years. [I do have a math in my family actually] 30 years or 40 years, anyway, 1990, I can't...*

1672

1673 *01:54:41 - Jane McAlevey*

1674 *That's how bad I'm at math. I hire contract consultants when I'm at the negotiating table, by the way.*

1675

1676 *01:54:44*

1677 *I would never want any worker to trust my math except I can do percentages really well but so from*

1678 *waiting tables. But so the fact that they have a re-rise of the Nazi right wing happening in Germany and*

1679 *that the message that the Nazis are running in the plants is the unions have failed you, the state has*

1680 *failed you. We're the only people who can actually fix what the wages for Germans should be.*

1681 *Germans, very key language in there for Germans, and who their idea of who a German is, of course,*

1682 *but you know I grew up in a Jewish family. It's a little complicated, but like the idea of even being in*

1683 *Germany was sort of terrifying for me.*

1684

1685 *01:55:21*

1686 *And now being on the Polish German border and spending a lot of time there is super intense. But like,*

1687 *sectoral bargaining hasn't solved that problem. Neither have works councils, neither have any of the*

1688 *pre-existing structures that exist in Europe, because the workers are too weak, they actually don't have*

1689 *enough power because they haven't showed that they can go on strike in Germany, and mass numbers*

1690 *in cripple the economy for so long that they are begging at the sectoral bargaining table, which is no*

1691 *different than the begging that we do here. And to stop begging means you better get better at the*

1692 *method and the discipline of learning, how to teach workers, how to build unbreakable human solidarity*

1693 *and a very tight, effective structure and use that power so that we might stand the chance of having a*

1694 *2050 that looks good in the United States of America.*

1695

1696 *01:56:08 - Ezra Klein*

1697 *Is there anything I should have asked you that I didn't?*

1698

1699 *01:56:10 - Jane McAlevey*

1700 *Oh my God, we have so many topics to cover still but none that are More of a part two. No, none that*

1701 *are short. I mean I want to have a really deep. I have to go read your book and then read, and we have*

1702 *to come back and have a really deep discussion about the methods and disciplines around identity*

1703 *creation that we engage in.*

1704 **01:56:24 - 1:58:48 [3 mins] - Book Recommendations, I've Got the Light of**

1705 **Freedom**

1706

1707 *01:56:24 - Ezra Klein*

1708 *I would love. Let's do that, I would love to do that. So then, let me ask you the question, while this is to*

1709 *end, which is what are the three books you've read that influenced you that you would recommend?*

1710

1711 *01:56:33 - Jane McAlevey*

1712 Oh yeah, that's right, I was warned about that. Let's see, I think the one I came away from my grad  
1713 school years with that's the most reading I ever did really was grad school. Running campaigns, I'd just  
1714 pass out and fall asleep on the bed after 20 hours a day. But one of the books that really blew my mind  
1715 was Charles Payne's *I've Got the Light of Freedom*. If you don't know it, it's an extraordinary book.

1716

1717 01:56:54

1718 *I've Got the Light of Freedom*. It's a deep dive into the civil rights movement. It's a different kind of deep  
1719 dive and it goes into the...essentially it's organizing versus mobilizing in the deep South. It's like a  
1720 different, long, slow version of how we won the civil rights that we think we won in a couple of laws and  
1721 a couple of marches in the Pettus Bridge. So it's an extraordinary book that begins with a whole chapter  
1722 - that's nothing - but they took the, NAACP, I learned more of the history of the NAACP by reading this  
1723 book too. So it's a thick book but it's so worth the read.

1724

1725 01:57:26

1726 And the whole beginning of the book is a methodical listing of the lynchings, state by state, that were  
1727 going on parallel to the deeper work that sort of began the civil rights movement. Like when people say,  
1728 say oh, things are so hard out there, I'm like grow up, Jesus, you know people were being killed  
1729 routinely in the early trade union days, and I mean less than a hundred years ago out in the civil rights  
1730 movement. So that's one book I mean I am a sucker for Snyder's *The Rules Against Tyranny*, a book  
1731 that I quote in the beginning of my new book, right when he actually says you know, pick an institution,  
1732 they fall. Institutions fall unless they are defended. Pick an institution, a court, a newspaper, a union,  
1733 like the fact that that guy put union in there made me love him for the rest of my life, because most  
1734 liberals just write the word union out of the entire storyline. Like, yes, unions matter as much as a free  
1735 press and a free judiciary.

1736

1737 01:58:15

1738 By the way, last I looked because we level power in economic arena, which under capitalism is  
1739 fundamental, and that's the conversation I wanna have, like with your political science head on and the  
1740 literature that people look at in political science which is divorced from the capitalist economy, like to me  
1741 that's like a major future conversation too, potentially. And then the third book is one I just read and  
1742 totally enjoyed, which was Astra Taylor's new book, also a title that's hard, but the title's so great, even  
1743 the way they designed it in the cover, right, it's like this may not be democracy, we may not have  
1744 democracy, but you'll miss it when it's gone.

1745

1746 01:58:48

1747 I think *Democracy May Not Exist, but We'll Miss It When It's Gone*

1748 -----

1749

1750 01:58:52 - Ezra Klein

1751 *We'll miss it when it's gone. She's been on the show and we had a great conversation. She's wonderful.*

1752

1753 01:58:56 - Jane McAlevey

1754 *She hosted my first book talk, the launch of the new book at the Strand, which made me read the book,*  
1755 *and I almost had time to be forced to read your book, but not quite, but I'm gonna. But so I read it over*  
1756 *the course of like one week during the holidays, when you could get a human break for five seconds in*  
1757 *this country and this current cycle, and I just I loved. It turns out that when I asked her to, she dinged*  
1758 *me. Someone handed her a draft of my the book that just came out of a collective bargain, I don't. She*

1759 was not on any list of ours, right, any early list it would give it to and I. Just a good reason for social  
1760 media, which I otherwise hate. Like I got dm'd -now I know what that means, direct message on Twitter,  
1761 the only thing I do - by Astra Taylor saying someone handed me hey, I don't know you, someone  
1762 handed me a copy of DRET, whatever the galleys of your book that's coming out, and I just want you to  
1763 know. I think it's really, really good. And I was like, wow, what a nice message to get, as opposed to go  
1764 screw, you know all the things that you can get.

1765

1766 01:59:50

1767 So and then, like a week later I was trying to figure out, like, who could like interview me on stage at the  
1768 Strand bookstore in New York for the book opening. And I thought I don't know her. But she's wicked  
1769 cool, cause I've already heard her, you know, several times on places, sent her a note and I said do you  
1770 happen to be free on January, whatever it was 8th to like interview me on stage at the Strand and show  
1771 it back instantly? Hell yes. And then, of course, I went off and read that book.

1772

1773 02:00:15

1774 I'd already seen the film, I'd often read the book and she intuitively understands so funny, we didn't use  
1775 this word the whole time. She intuitively understood from reading the book that everything I write about  
1776 and everything democracy is about is about participation and that what I'm teaching people to do is to  
1777 participate in effective large numbers, because that's the only way change is gonna happen. And so  
1778 she and I didn't even meet until 10 minutes before the book talk began at the Strand and basically like  
1779 had a love fest on stage. So I'm digging that book and now I'm talking to them about Strike Dead and  
1780 the things that they're doing but like, how do you actually make it meaningful? But so that's another.  
1781 That's a third book, but I've Got The Light of Freedom by Charles Payne is so worth reading.

1782

1783 02:01:00 - Ezra Klein

1784 Jane McAlevy. This has been such a pleasure. Thank you.

1785

1786 02:01:02 - Jane McAlevey

1787 Thank you very much.

1788

1789 02:01:05 - Ezra Klein

1790 Thank you to Jane McAlevy. I love that. I hope you did as much as I did. Her new book is A Collective  
1791 Bargain: Unions, Organizing and the Fight for Democracy. She's also the author of Raising  
1792 Expectations and Raising Hell. And then I think of particular centrality, this conversation, her book, No  
1793 Shortcuts: Organizing for Power in the New Gilded Age. They are all very much worth reading.

1794