

## The Union for Democratic Communications announces its 2023 Conference

The Union for Democratic Communications Steering Committee is thrilled to announce that our 2023 conference will be held in Philadelphia from October 12 - 15, 2023. The conference will be hosted by the Media, Inequality, and Change (MIC) Center, a collaboration between the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication and Rutgers University's School of Communication and Information.

UDC, now entering its fourth decade, seeks to bring together media producers, researchers, policy makers, and grassroots communications activists to promote and develop critical approaches to communications and media and to advocate and agitate for the creation of structures to foster a more democratic and just communications system. It is an organization that has always centered the study of power from a radical perspective. We welcome abstracts from communication researchers, journalists, media producers, policy analysts, academics and activists alike. Please see the call below.

You can find the conference announcement, conference theme, and Call for Papers on our website at <https://www.democraticcomm.org>. Submissions will open in early February and close on April 7. Please feel free to distribute this call widely and we look forward to reviewing your submissions. Further information and conference logistics will be announced as they become available. In the meantime, please save the date and we are hoping to see all of you in Philadelphia!

### Conference Theme

#### ***Left Undone***

The Union for Democratic Communications, now entering its fourth decade, is excited to announce the Call for Papers for its 2023 conference to be held in-person at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, in partnership with the Media, Inequality and Change Center and the Annenberg School for Communication.

The possibilities and perils of leftist organizing and media scholarship assume greater urgency in the face of "backsliding democracy." *'Undone'* reflects numerous senses: as a temporary

disunity; as an important task unfinished; as a representation of disarray; but all senses of the word hold hope for its reversal. The UDC has always stood as a site of collaboration between activists, scholars, and practitioners—an organization rooted in critical scholarship and practice about the structures of communication themselves, not just in the US, but worldwide. The 2023 conference will see us look back at the first 40 years of the UDC, but we will also look ahead to consider the role of critical communication scholarship and activism in organizing, engaging, and energizing leftist alternatives to authoritarian politics.

Our world has been reshaped by a powerful neoliberal vision made material through deliberate organizing, politicking, and institution-building; as economic historians such as Philip Mirowski have noted, the political left's response has not been sufficient to meet this challenge. A global climate crisis is joined by new wars, inflation, supply chain crises, and algorithmic governance across private and public spheres. Democratic institutions—and even the notion of democracy itself—are under attacks on multiple fronts, as right-wing movements globally have been energized. Media platforms and discourses are fertile ground for anti-democratic groups which have garnered funding and media attention that has seen formerly-fringe beliefs move toward the mainstream.

This year's Union for Democratic Communications conference asks what role critical scholarship, media-making, and activism can play in organizing resistance to minority rule and authoritarian movements both in the U.S. and abroad. Left Undone thus proposes a two-part call for clarity. For one, as we enter the next 40 years of UDC, it is time to engage challenging conversations among critical scholars across political economy, critical and cultural studies, science and technology studies, critical sociology, and their complementary fields to ask if a different foundation can be reshaped and built. What role can critical communication scholarship and activism play in organizing resistance to authoritarian movements both in the U.S. and abroad? What new theorization might be necessary to guide activism in the decades ahead?

For the other, the work of the UDC and all scholar/activist organizations has always been one of struggle and persistence. Advocacy for equal justice, fair representation, and radical democracy is always an incomplete project. Both material and discursive attacks on the left have sought to undo what progress has been made and forestall the momentum of progressive and radical movements. What strategies, from micropolitics to international social movements, are required to combat widespread shifts towards authoritarian and anti-democratic regimes? Critical media-makers, scholars, and activists are invited to reimagine, reinvent, and reclaim communication for democracy—for the people—through the inherent optimism of criticality.

We invite scholars, practitioners, media makers, and activists to join us in Philadelphia in October. The organization welcomes submissions on topics pertaining to any of the above issues. These include, but are *not* limited to:

- Political economy of communications, communications policy, and media production
- Digital capitalism, neoliberalism, “mutant neoliberalism”, and labor
- International media content, structure, policy, and (in)equality
- Algorithmic governance, discrimination, surveillance, privacy, and policy
- Platform governance, cooperativism, and commons
- Democratic theory and new critical theory
- Critical law and policy studies; law and political economy
- The crisis in journalism, fake news, and disinformation
- Science and technology studies, cultural studies
- Racisms, patriarchies, and other forms of algorithmically-intensified power formations
- Power, marginalization, inequality, and justice
- Activism, social justice, resistance, and media/tech activism
- Communication, labor, working class, and activist history
- Advertising and consumer culture
- Pedagogy, academic freedom, and academic labor
- Conflict, war, rising authoritarianism/fascism and structures of communication

We welcome proposals for paper presentations, workshops, theme panels, film screenings, artistic interventions, and other formats.

The proposal portal will open on **February 6, 2023** and will close **April 7, 2023** at <https://www.democraticcomm.org>.

### **About the Union for Democratic Communications**

UDC is an organization of communication researchers, journalists, media producers, policy analysts, academics and activists dedicated to:

- Critical study of the communications establishment;
- Production and distribution of democratically controlled and produced media;
- Fostering alternative, oppositional, independent and experimental production;
- Development of democratic communications systems locally, regionally and internationally.

Through its conferences, activism, scholarship, and other activities, UDC seeks to:

- Bring together media producers, researchers, policy makers, and grassroots
- communications activists;

- Promote varied critical approaches to communications and media;
- Advocate for the creation of structures to promote democratic communications;
- Work with other progressive organizations to facilitate the production and distribution of democratic communications.