



# REPRESENTATION AND VOICE IN THE GIG ECONOMY

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# BACKGROUND



- Technological change in the world of work - not new;
- Divisive – seen as “natural phenomenon”, with supporters and detractors;
- Key element of labour market regulation is agency;
- “NSFE – higher incidence of decent work deficits – workers may face barriers to collectively addressing them.” (2015 MOE)

# KEY QUESTIONS



- What forms / processes do efforts to organize, represent and negotiate take?
- What outcomes?
- “New” forms of organizing? Novel or innovative approaches to organizing and representation?
- Typology of strategies?
- Do differences in developing agency for gig economy workers come from variations in strategies? Actors? Other circumstances?

# WHY?



“balance (unequal) employment relations between employers and workers, allowing workers voices to be heard and improving working conditions.”

- Securing regular employment
- Regulating work organization
- Negotiating equal pay
- Addressing scheduling / hours
- Extending maternity protection
- Making the workplace safe

# BARRIERS



- Lack coverage by basic legal and regulatory frameworks;
- Classification – independent contractor status
- Defining characteristics of “gig” work
  - Independence
  - Isolation
  - Geographically expansive
  - Direct competition
  - Task-based

**« Le salariat laisse la place,  
doucement mais sûrement,  
au retour du travail à la tâche »**  
*Denis Pennel, WEC (ex EuroCIETT)*

# TYPOLOGIES



- While debate on employment classification plays out in courts, parliaments worldwide, workers engaged in struggle to (re)shape their jobs, represent their interests.
- Some typologies emerge:
  - Union renewal
  - New union formation
  - Cooperatives
  - Online forums
  - Worker centres
- Not mutually exclusive, used to explore mechanisms through which worker power and voice originates and evolves.
- Typologies vs. Tools

# UNION RENEWAL



- “Organizing turn” documented at length over decades;
- Different approaches based on political climate, combining organizing with: Political, legal, PR, action
  - Parallels: “Fight for \$15”, NYC airport workers, adjunct faculty;
  - NY Taxi Workers’ Alliance – workers compensation
  - IAM – Recognition of a “guild” by Uber, with conditions
  - Teamsters – extending CB rights
  - Italy – federation for atypical workers, labor law reform
  - Sweden - Unionen

# NEW UNION FORMATION



- Reviving an existing framework, expanding beyond (occurring outside of) “traditional” union structures;
- Ground-up, “rank-and-file” organizing
- Specific entities organizing non-traditional, low-wage, immigrant workers;
- Minority unionism model
  - mandate
- Gains through PR, direct action
- “Community is the backbone of the union.”





# COOPERATIVES



- Worker-owners
  - Argentina UNI vs. Coopify
  - ESOP vs. one worker one vote
    - Means of Production
  - Traditional Coops, Platform Coops
- Place specific labor as well as virtual labor
  - Services and goods
  - Market needs (Alliance Taxi Co-op, Smart Belgium)
- Development support
- Unionized co-ops

# ONLINE FORUMS



- Technology used to control work, “turn customers into middle managers”
- Technology also being used by gig workers
  - To rate experience with platforms, requestors
  - Seen as crucial in successfully navigating “career”
  - Does it address the actual power differential?
  - Promise in campaigning (“We are Dynamo”)
  - Risk of retribution
- Particularly useful among crowdworkers, less among on-demand platform-based workers
- Potential entry point for further collective action, organizing

# ONLINE FORUMS



- Re-Appropriating worker rating systems; rate your boss, your requestor, your platform
- Online communities for skill sharing
  - Script sharing
  - Best practices
  - Problem solving
- Benefits and challenges of fully online communities
- Difficulties bridging individual benefit to collective voice (“We are Dynamo”)

# WORKER CENTERS

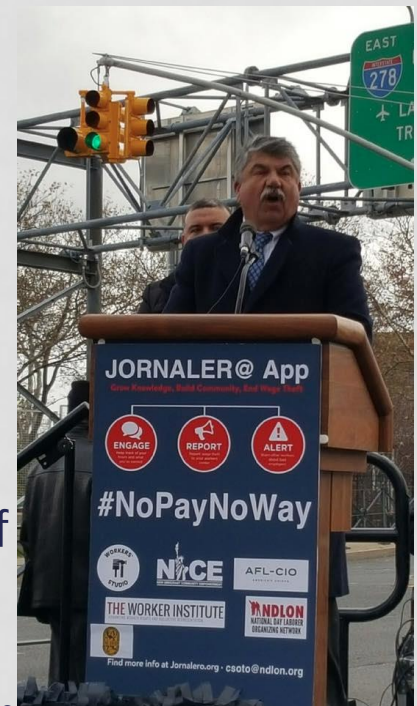


- Community based organizations, most common within the North American Context (though not exclusively)
- Focus on ‘unorganizable’ workers: excluded workers, immigrants, otherwise marginalized → gig/platform impact
- Intersection of Labor Organizing and Social Services
- Labor Movement Integration, Union, CLC Partnerships
- Recent turn toward enforceability
  - Tech (Jornaler@, NDWA)
  - Creation of ‘fair work’ programs (Better builder, AFM, NDWA)
  - Brokering multi-party agreements (Immokalee, Better builder, Clean Carwash Campaign)
  - Funding challenges and solutions
- Hiring Halls

# WORKER CENTER TOOLS



- Elective participation in “Fair Work”
  - Multiparty bargaining
  - Enforcement participation
  - Work Monitoring/ Tech
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- Potential use in gig and platform based work
    - Transportation → multi-party bargaining in municipalities where FHV are increasingly part of transport infrastructure
    - Virtual “punch card” for hourly based work
      - Tracking work experience to identify rights violations, examine trends, etc.
    - Hiring Halls (see also platform co-ops)
    - Benefit administration (NYTWA, Freelancers)



# EMPLOYER EFFORTS



- Focus on employer groups: associations, etc.
  - Represent their members, brick and mortar establishments
  - This could change (Denmark)
- Continued focus on “fair playing field” (Europe vs. East Africa)
- Tripartite Agreements
- Helping employers to adjust to new digital opportunities, marketplaces, and labor markets (IOE)
- Limited participation in voluntary certification programs (scale dependent)
  - Stronger incentives for partnerships between smaller platform developers, employers, and labor (IRU & ITF)
  - Multiple partners leads to an ability to scale up localized solutions (UpTop Taxi App)

# CHALLENGES



- Establishing the location of the work;
  - “The place of work is where the worker is...”
  - Not only based on platform / app (employer), but geographically bounded areas;
- Anti-trust laws – especially viz. labour price stabilization;
- Establishing outside of “traditional” structures – questions of sustainability;
- Particularly suited to on-demand work via apps.

# CLOSING THOUGHTS



- Gig work = work; Work happens where the worker is – virtual work is not “placeless”;
- Broad-based, effective, adapted strategies
  - Larger, established unions well-suited to provide institutional power, resources, political connections
  - Worker centres, new / minority unions, coops more familiar with local issues, industries; Good connections with workers, their communities
- Gig work in highly-regulated industries may result in quicker “wins”, esp where governance structures exist
- Sectoral bargaining may be particularly suited
  - Need strong representative worker structures
- Categorization, anti-trust continue as problems.